

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Community, Spirit, and Soul in the Lower Ninth Ward

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Five years ago, New Orleans was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Since then, the city has almost made a full recovery; except for the Lower Ninth Ward. Limited efforts to rebuild housing and no consideration for social and community infrastructure made it nearly impossible for former residents to come home. However, the spirit of the Lower Ninth Ward stays alive in the festive Second Line parade culture of the people who continue to come back every weekend to dance down the streets and celebrate with one another, making the public street the symbol of community life.

This thesis explores the cultural and social fabric of the Lower Ninth Ward in order to propose an appropriate architectural intervention to function as an epicenter for community life and serve as a catalyst for rebuilding. The design proposition includes an intervention along the neutral ground on Claiborne Avenue with market, bar, performance, and festival spaces across the intersection of Claiborne and Forstall Street. Urban farming plots for the community are allocated along the rest of the neutral ground. To supplement these community spaces, design guidelines are provided for live/work commercial units along part of Claiborne, and housing guidelines are assigned for the remaining blocks along Claiborne and the rest of the Lower Ninth Ward.

COMMUNITY, SPIRIT, AND SOUL IN THE LOWER NINTH WARD

By

Erin Elizabeth Waskom

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Background

On the early morning of August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall. Days before, the strength of the storm was projected to be one of the strongest in recent history and a mandatory evacuation of New Orleans and many of the surrounding coastal areas was instituted. Residents unable to leave the city or with nowhere to go were directed to go to the Superdome, but finding the conditions unfavorable, many decided to stay in their homes and wait out the storm. New Orleans had experienced hurricanes before; so many residents were certain Katrina would be just like the rest. The question on everyone's mind was whether or not the levees would hold. Officials knew it was only a matter of time before a storm powerful enough to surge through the flood walls and drown the city developed, yet over recent years not enough was done to ensure the levees were strong enough. It was a waiting game.

As early as 4:30 am rising water in the Industrial Canal (linking Lake Ponchartrain and the Mississippi River) leaked through damaged gates into neighborhoods in the northern part of the city. Shortly thereafter Katrina's storm surge began pounding the levees on the east side of New Orleans. The surge forced sections of the levee to succumb to its force and the waters from Lake Borgne began to make its way through the wetlands and into the city, putting eastern New Orleans under water. Simultaneously, the levee walls on the 17<sup>th</sup>

Street canal on the west side of the city began leaning toward the city. Water began leaking through the cracks, flooding the neighborhood.<sup>1</sup>

Within two hours, the storm surge reached the Industrial canal and water began flowing into the Upper and Lower Ninth Wards overtop the flood walls. Eventually the pressure caused the levee walls to breach, allowing water to flow freely into the city on both sides of the Industrial canal.<sup>2</sup> When the flood wall on the east side of the canal fell just before 8 am, water rushed in to the Lower Ninth Ward, tossing homes and cars around as if they were weightless.

These surges continued throughout the morning, forcing 80% of greater New Orleans under water. The flooding continued after the eye of the hurricane was north of the city, as Lake Ponchartrain continued to spill water into the city until the lake level equalized with the flood waters. The flooding finally stopped on September 1, a full four days after the first levee breach. (fig.1)

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Swenson, "Flash Flood: Hurricane Katrina's Inundation of New Orleans, August 29, 2005" Times-Picayune Online <http://www.nola.com/katrina/graphics/index.ssf?flashflood> 11 March 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

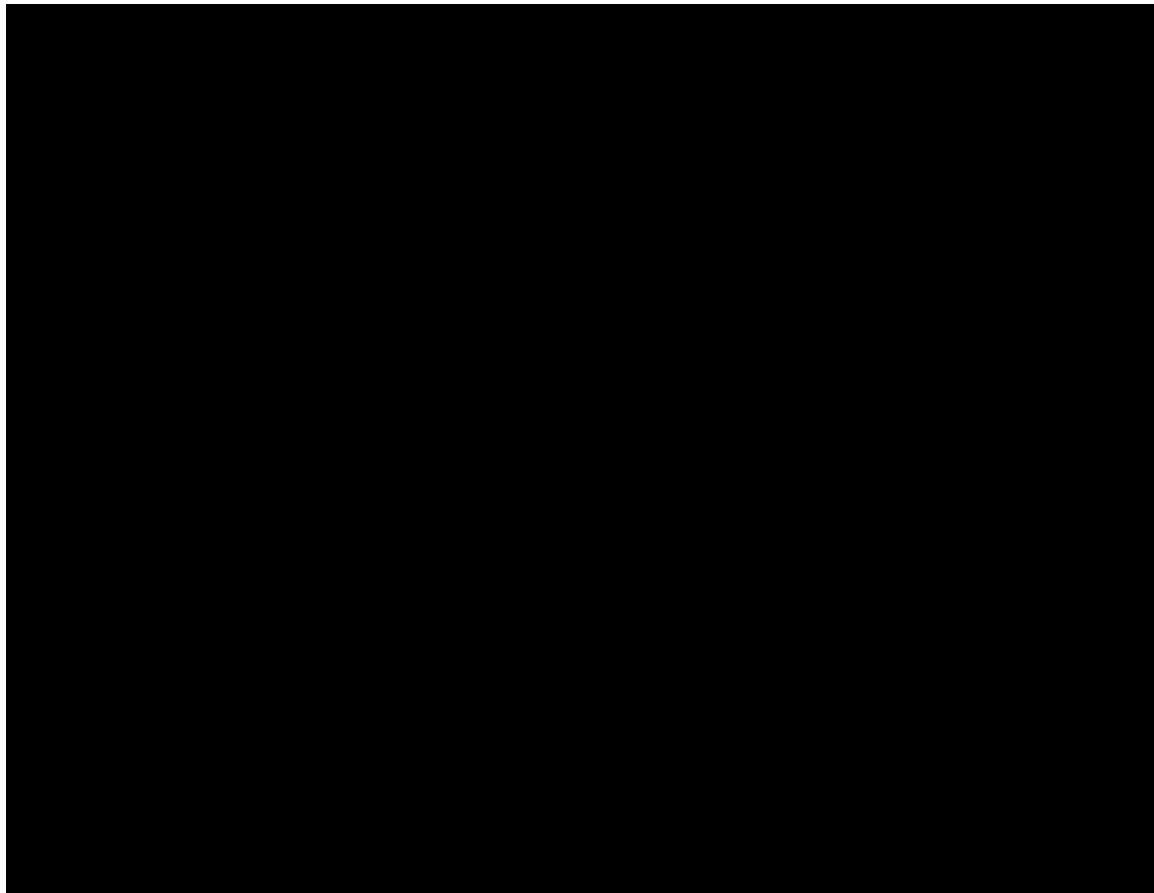
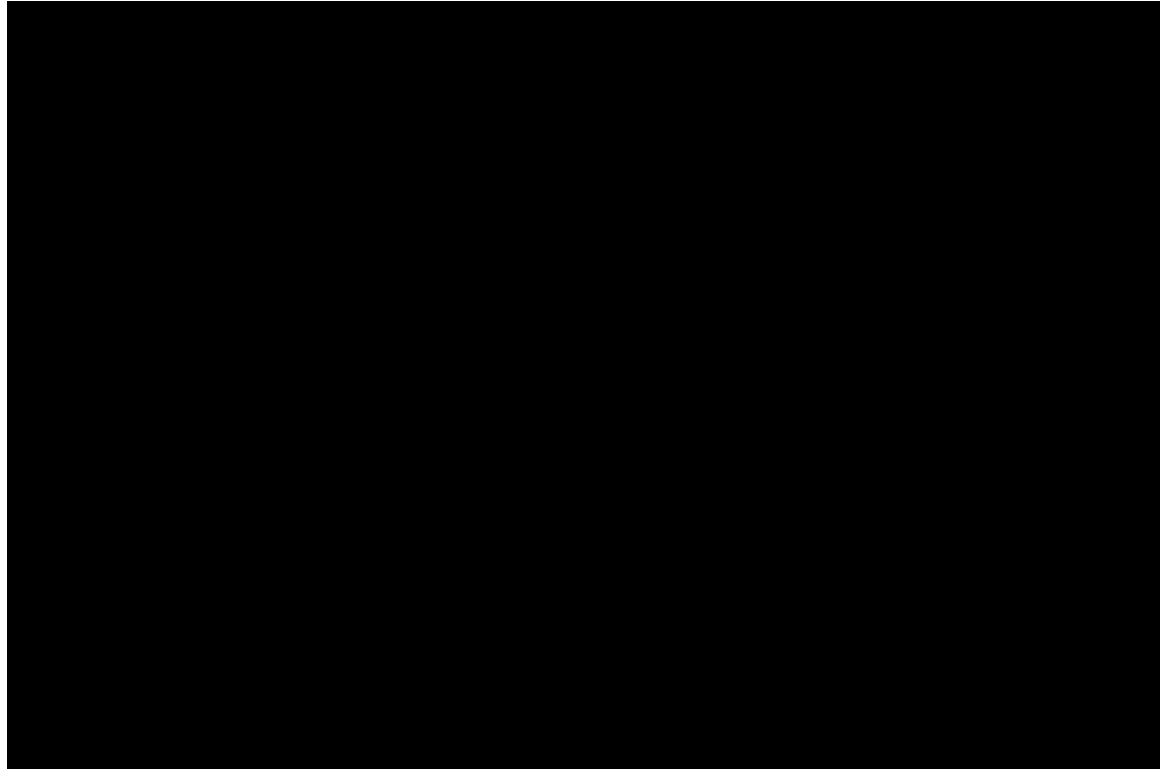


Figure 1 Maximum Flood Depth, US Army Corps of Engineers and Task Force Hope, 10 October 2005

With the aftermath of the storm the American people quickly realized the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina was the worst in recent history. Imagery on the nightly news showed flood waters almost completely covering houses, individuals being rescued from their rooftops, and swarms of people in the Superdome, where the conditions seemed to be dire at best.



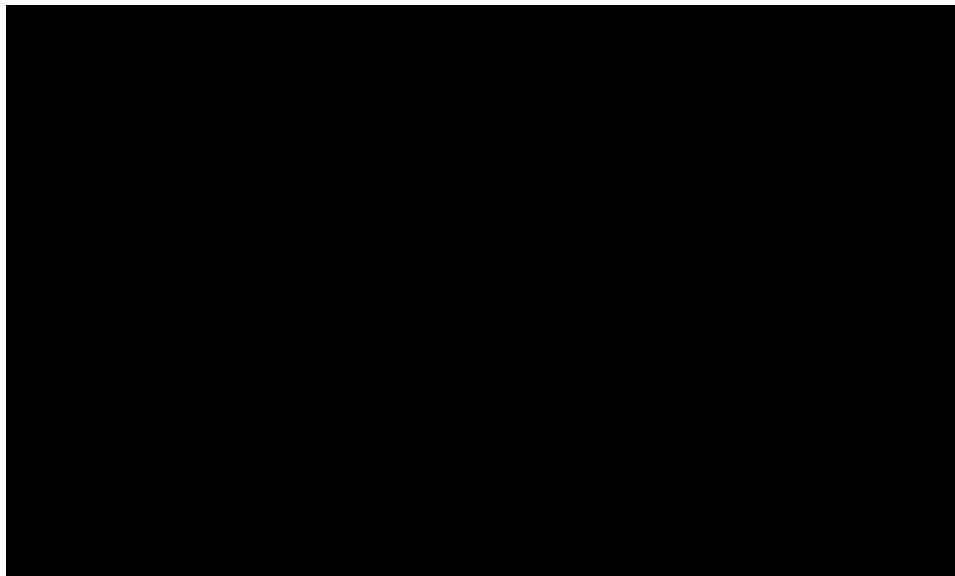
**Figure 2 View of Flooding in Lower Ninth Ward, Kristin Feireiss, ed., Architecture in Times of Need: Make it Right Rebuilding New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward (Munich: Prestel, 2009), 23**

In the end, Katrina caused about 1,800 deaths and more than 4 feet of water in half of the houses in New Orleans.<sup>3</sup> (fig. 2) In the Lower Ninth Ward, on the eastern side of the city, over 1,000 of the total 1,800 deaths occurred and the devastation was some of the worst in the region. Here, houses were torn off foundations, thrown on top of cars, and entire blocks were completely wiped away. In this neighborhood, many residents stayed in their houses to wait out the storm, causing many to swim to their rooftops during the days of flooding. There they stayed for days, in temperatures in excess of 100 degrees, 100% humidity, without water, waiting for someone to rescue them.

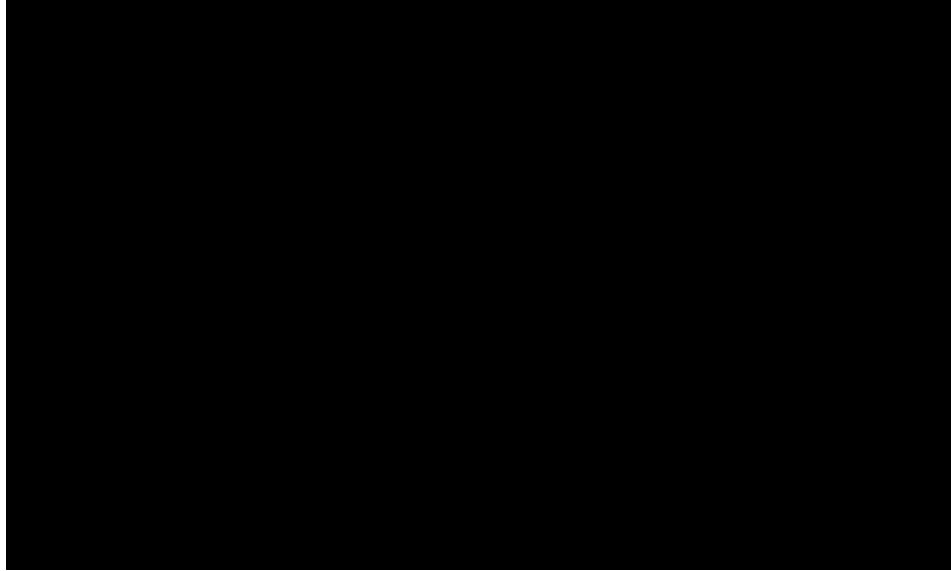
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<sup>3</sup> Kristin Feireiss, ed., Architecture in Times of Need: Make it Right Rebuilding New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward (Munich: Prestel, 2009),

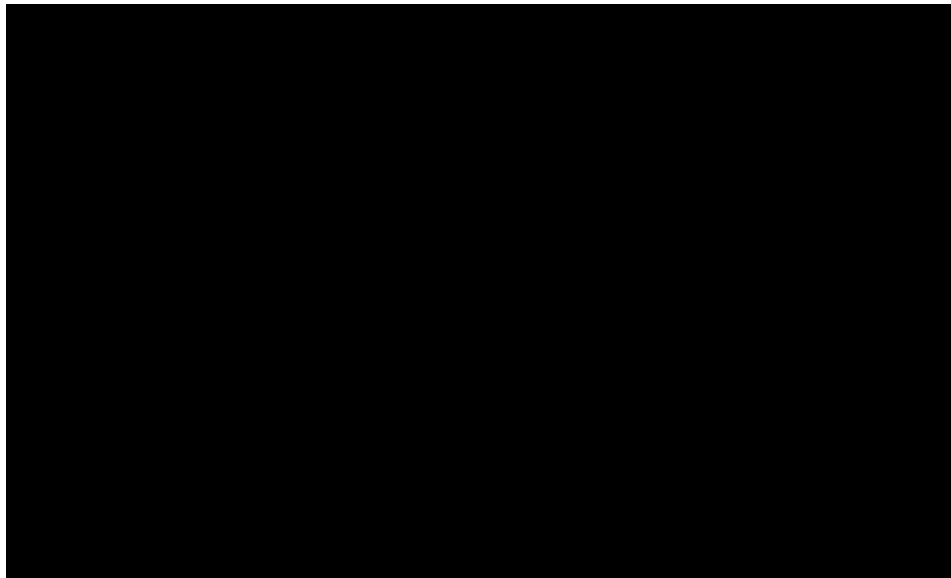
Almost all of the buildings in the Lower Ninth were rendered completely unusable and a significant portion of the neighborhood was demolished after the storm, causing most residents to find themselves newly homeless. (figs. 3-5) This new state of homelessness was particularly difficult for members of the community to come to terms with as most of them owned their land and their houses had been passed down through their families over time.



**Figure 3 Aerial View of Lower Ninth Ward after Demolition Robert Polidori, After the Flood, (Gottingen: Steidl, 2006), 185.**



**Figure 4 Street View of Devastation in Lower Ninth Ward, Polidori, 192.**



**Figure 5 Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in Lower Ninth Ward, Polidori, 190.**

However, five years later, the Lower Ninth is still far behind the rest of New Orleans in the recovery effort. While roughly 2/3 of New Orleans' pre-Katrina population returned to the city, only 1/3 of the Lower Ninth's population has been able to rebuild and return.<sup>4</sup> Shortly

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald W. Lewis, personal interview, 16 March 2010.

after the storm, questions abounded about whether or not to rebuild New Orleans, and if so, should it be put back together in the same way? After all, a significant portion of the city is under sea-level, so rebuilding the city may be unsustainable and unethical; it's just going to flood again.

Just because an area of land is not considered to be environmentally sustainable, right now, with traditional building methods, does not mean it is not worth saving and rebuilding. The culture and lifestyle of the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood means something to the people who live and lived there. It means something to their family and cultural history. It means something to New Orleans. It is their *home*. This is a neighborhood full of people who refused to leave their homes regardless of mandatory evacuation. The tenacity of the people of the Lower Ninth Ward shows that they believe their community and their lives are something worth rebuilding.

### **The Lower Ninth Ward: Pre-Katrina**

Before the devastation of Hurricane Katrina brought the Lower Ninth Ward into the national spotlight, few knew or understood anything about the history and culture of the neighborhood. A brief description of the evolution of the Lower Ninth Ward throughout time and the way of life there in the most recent years before Katrina will bring an understanding of the spirit and tenacity of the people.

The ward system in New Orleans originated in the nineteenth century as a way to delineate political voting precincts. Every area in New Orleans is actually part of a



numbered ward, but most neighborhoods are known by different names. The Ninth Ward was established in 1852 as a way to settle the eastern most part of New Orleans.<sup>5</sup> A division between the ward took place, into an Upper and Lower portion. The Upper Ninth Ward, to the west, is named so because it is up-river of the eastern part of the Ninth Ward. After its establishment, the Upper Ninth Ward neighborhoods of Bywater and St. Claude, and the section of the Lower Ninth Ward, now referred to as Holy Cross, were the first to develop. These neighborhoods were closest to the river in the ward, and also, on the highest ground.

In 1918, the distinction between Upper and Lower in the Ninth Ward was made complete with the construction of the Industrial Canal, physically dividing the two portions.<sup>6</sup> With this construction, the Lower Ninth Ward became even more distantly separated from the rest of the city. Only connected to the main part of the city by the St. Claude bridge, the Lower Ninth Ward was now not only divided north/south by the distinction of the Holy Cross neighborhood below St. Claude Ave and the rest of the community, but now it was in a way annexed from the rest of the city, pushed away by an engineered waterway.

Within the Lower Ninth Ward, a separation occurred between the Holy Cross neighborhood and the rest of the community. The two areas were divided north/south by St. Claude Ave and were distinct in their level of development. Holy Cross, to the south, was fairly densely developed with many late nineteenth and early twentieth century homes. The northern part of the Lower Ninth Ward was more sparsely populated and was largely

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<sup>5</sup> Feireiss, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 40.

agricultural until industrial development to the north spurred more residential development.<sup>7</sup>

By the mid-twentieth century the northern portion of the Lower Ninth Ward grew immensely as a working class neighborhood. Residents found jobs in the nearby industrial areas of the Ninth Ward and found the land in the Lower Ninth Ward to be relatively cheap for purchase.<sup>8</sup> The cost of the land can be attributed to several factors, including the significant dip in elevation between the northern and southern points which were above sea level, making the area prone to flooding. Also, the construction of the canal caused the Lower Ninth Ward to be almost completely disconnected from the rest of the city. With only two bridges (St. Claude Ave and Claiborne Ave) connecting the Lower Ninth to New Orleans proper, traffic congestion became a problem and the neighborhood did not seem to be a part of the rest of the city. However, this isolation and the propensity for the land to be bought by people of similar income allowed a more cohesive neighborhood to develop.

The tendency of racial segregation geographically in New Orleans continued with the development of the Lower Ninth Ward. Over the course of New Orleans' development, western New Orleans was seen as predominately white, while the eastern part of the city was predominately black.<sup>9</sup> Historically in U.S. cities in the south, and New Orleans, racial dispersion was more mixed as slaves would live closer to their owners throughout the entire city. However, after the Civil War Reconstruction the population of free blacks in the city greatly increased and it became more common for blacks to purchase land near each

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 42.

other, creating predominantly black neighborhoods on the east side of New Orleans, where land was available for purchase.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to these natural patterns of development, Jim Crow laws encouraged racial segregation in city settlement up until the 1960s when they were overturned. The lower-level and cheaper land in the Lower Ninth Ward was seen by the government as opportunity to delineate African American urban development. In the 1940s the Municipal government in New Orleans created two residential sections for blacks in the Ninth Ward and expanded the inhabitation of a predominately black neighborhood.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the government implemented urban development for working class whites in the Upper Ninth Ward. These developments, mainly the Desire and Florida Housing Projects were vacated by whites during the Civil Rights movement and became occupied by black residents, maintaining the notion that east New Orleans was the black side of town. (fig. 6)

In addition to these developments, Mayor Chep Morrison (1946-61) instituted urban renewal programs for the central business district, where most of the population was black and poor.<sup>12</sup> He proposed a new train station and large civic center, forcing residents to vacate their neighborhoods. The undeveloped Lower Ninth Ward was a more attractive selling point for the displaced people than the older neighborhoods of the Tremé and the Seventh Ward. In the Lower Ninth Ward, people could rebuild their lives, and their

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 43.

community, even though over half of the residents still found themselves living under twice the poverty level. (fig. 7) In these newly developed African American neighborhoods, a strong community spirit evolved. Home ownership was extremely high, and property titles were passed down generation to generation, often without physical record. (fig. 8)

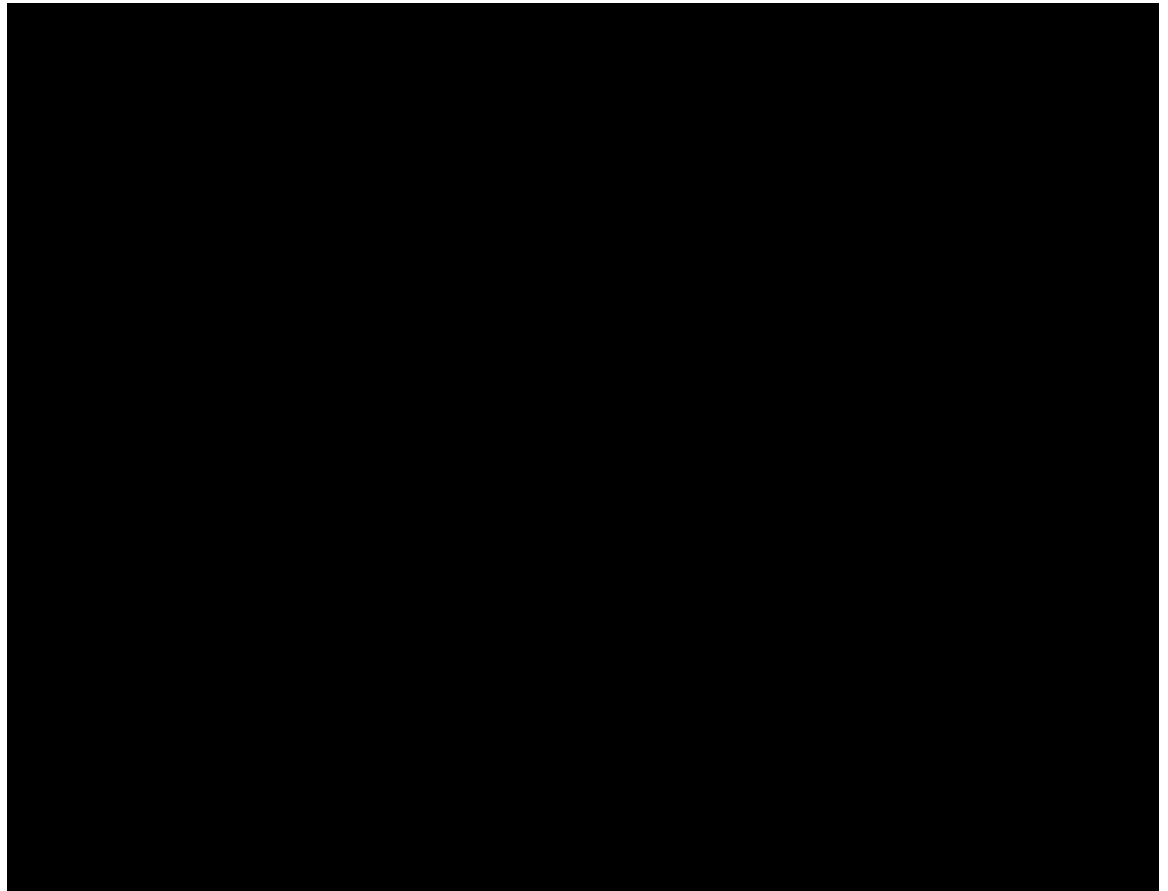


Figure 6 2000 Census of Percent African American by Census block group in Orleans Parish, U.S. Census Bureau

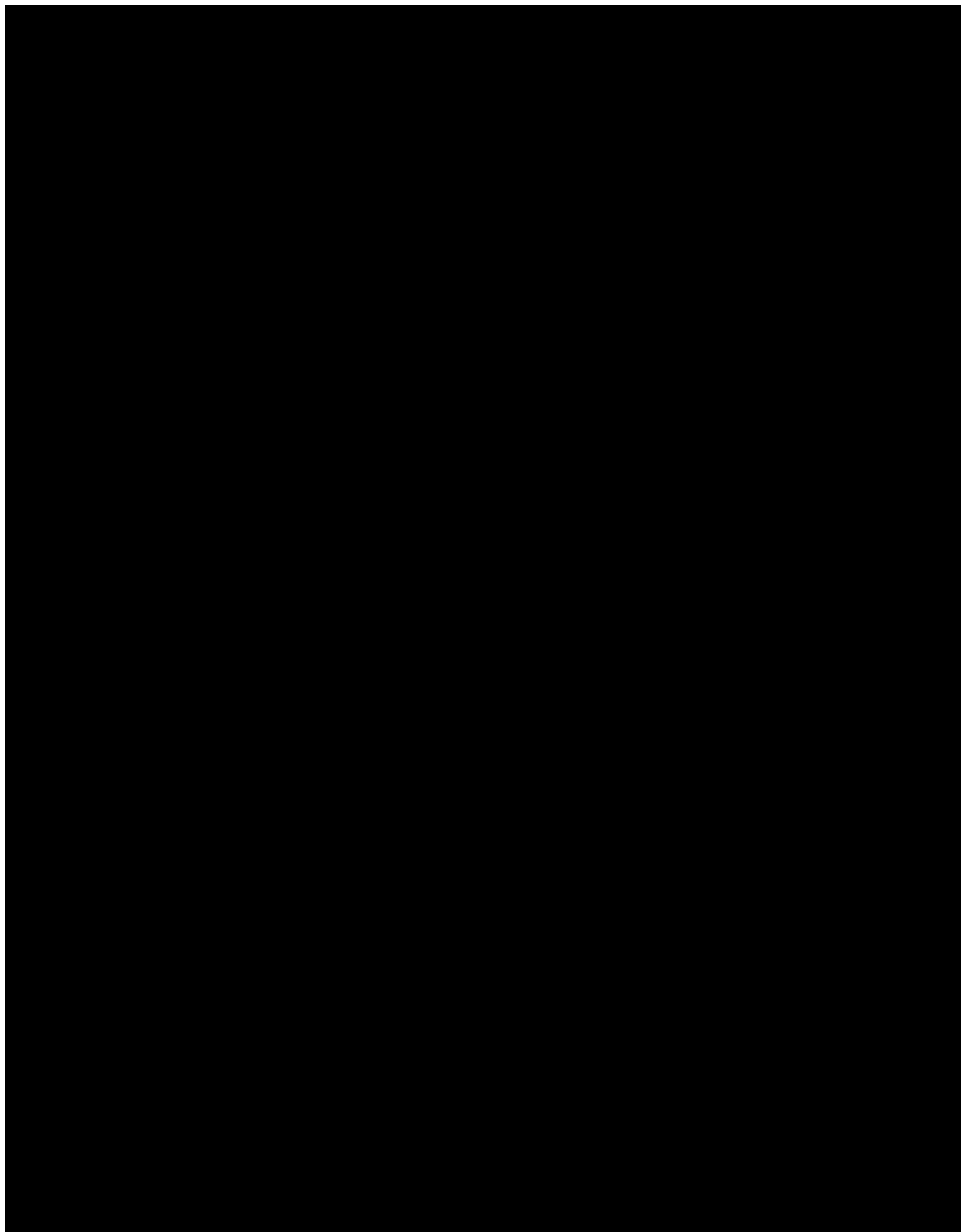


Figure 7 Map of Percentage of Residents Living Under Twice the Poverty Threshold, U.S. Census Bureau

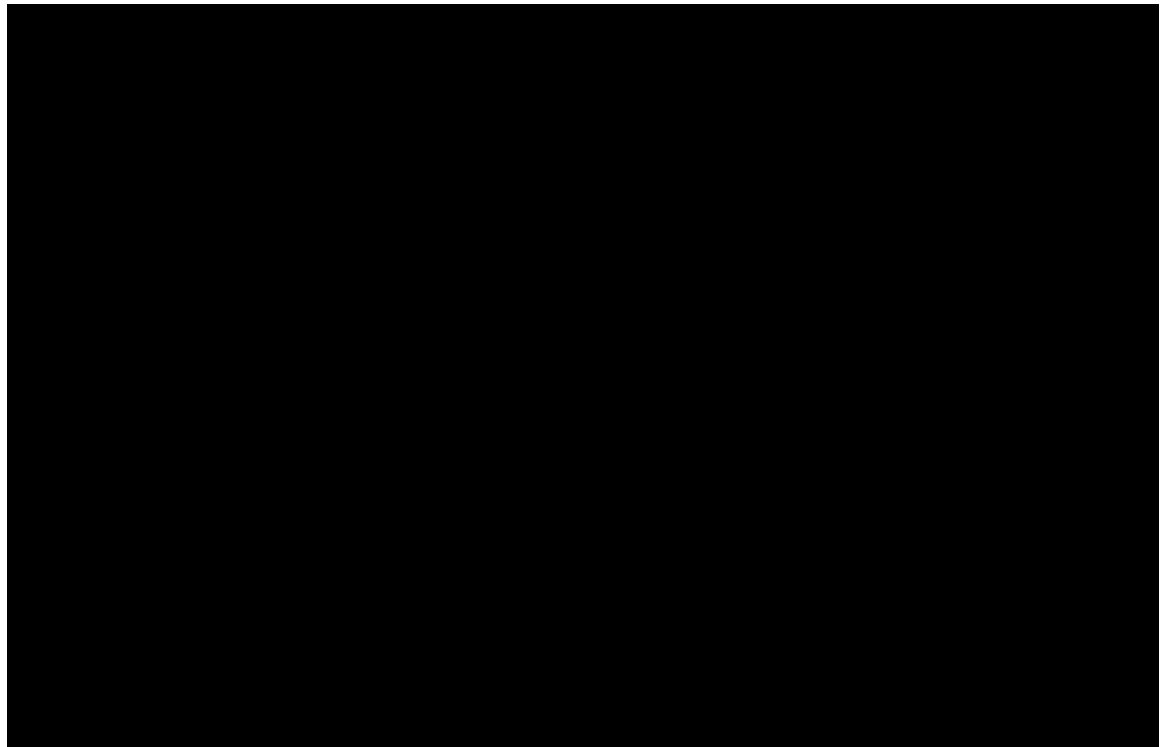


Figure 8 Home Ownership in New Orleans Shown by Red Dots, Regional Planning Commission for Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard and St. Tammany Parishes

A combination of this family and community lineage, combined with the low-income and impoverished conditions of the neighborhood fabric encouraged the organization of several “social aid and pleasure clubs” in the African American neighborhoods. These organizations functioned as a way for people in the community to do charitable work for the neighborhood and bring a spirit of community to the place. In addition to the good works, such as collecting school supplies for the local schools, the clubs also existed to provide a social atmosphere and interaction between all the members of the community.

One of the best known manifestations of the Social Aid and Pleasure clubs are the parades. Each Sunday from Labor Day to Memorial Day, each club dresses in costume and parades throughout their neighborhood. Along the way there is music, dance, and

food. These parades last from 12 pm to 4 pm and it is a time for the entire neighborhood to come together in a festive atmosphere and celebrate their community. (fig. 9)

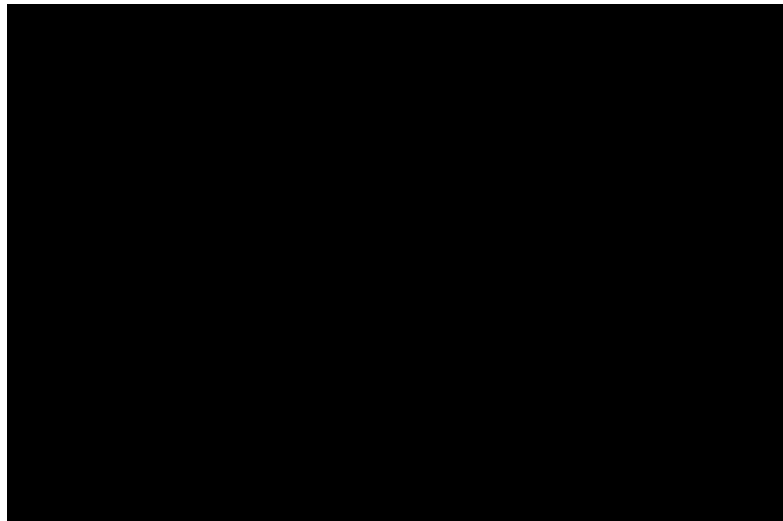


Figure 9 Big Nine Social Aid and Pleasure Club Parade, Rachel Breunlin and Ronald W. Lewis, The House of Dance and Feathers: A Museum by Ronald W. Lewis (New Orleans: Uno Press, 2005), 161.

It is these community organizations which continue to bring the spirit and character back to the Lower Ninth Ward that was known pre-Katrina. Although the Lower Ninth has barely been rebuilt, the Social Aid and Pleasure clubs still thrive. Lower Ninth residents who have not been able to move back yet still come for the parades each Sunday, and it is on these days the community and sense of place known before the storm truly comes alive.

### **The Lower Ninth Ward: Post-Katrina Rebuilding Efforts**

Since Katrina, several non-profits and the city of New Orleans focused on rebuilding efforts primarily outside the Lower Ninth Ward. Brad Pitt's Make it Right project is still the only major rebuilding effort in the community. However, there is currently a master plan for the whole city that allocates residential and commercial districts in the neighborhood, as well

as individuals such as lifetime resident Ronald Lewis, who encourage natives to move back home.

### Make it Right

The only current housing rebuilding effort located in the Lower Ninth Ward is Make it Right, a non-profit organization started by Brad Pitt and three architects: Neiel Norheim, Wolfram Putz (both from GRAFT), and Tom Darden. Make it Right's mission is to build energy sufficient single family homes for former residents of the Lower Ninth Ward on the property those residents own. Designs for homes come from solicitations from global architecture firms to design contemporary housing that will withstand flood waters up to 12 feet, give electricity back to the grid, appear contemporary in aesthetic, and have a total construction cost of \$150,000 or less.(fig. 10) While this is an admirable endeavor, Make it Right has several drawbacks. First and foremost, most designs greatly exceed their budget, preventing many families from benefiting from the program and delaying their return to their home. Currently, there are 14 families living in Make it Right houses, with 19 under construction.<sup>13</sup> In a neighborhood with a pre-Katrina population of 25,000, this is a miniscule number.

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<sup>13</sup> Make it Right, <http://www.makeitrightnola.org/> (15 December 2010).





Figure 10 Image of Make it Right houses, author

Another major issue with Make it Right is that it distinguishes itself from the whole of the Lower Ninth Ward in a negative way. Ronald Lewis, curator of the House of Dance and Feathers and lifetime Lower Ninth Ward resident, refers to the Make it Right area along Tennessee Street as the “un-gated, gated community.”<sup>14</sup> While it is ultimately good that some residents are moving back into homes and the Lower Ninth Ward is becoming livable again, with Make it Right, that exists at a price.

Perhaps the largest issue with Make it Right is with its design philosophy. These houses do not at all resemble the local vernacular of pre-Katrina, and in that resides the problem. While a replica of the Lower Ninth Ward pre-Katrina housing is not what is necessarily what the community needs, an understanding of it is. The homes in the Lower Ninth Ward

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Ronald Lewis.

were owned and built by the families who lived there. They were modest houses that functioned for the needs of the family, not towering icons in the landscape like the Make it Right houses. Make it Right seeks an iconic imagery to make a name for itself. It is a place for architects to flaunt aesthetics, not to create unpronounced, efficient homes for people who lost everything in a flood.

### Tulane City Center

Tulane City Center functions as the venue for Tulane University School of Architecture's outreach programs in New Orleans.<sup>15</sup> They focus on a broad sense of outreach in the city as a whole and design and implement several different types of projects for the city's social and community infrastructure. Projects designed to encourage participation in the community and to bring the city back to life. Projects range from very minimal intervention, such as "How High?: Thoughts about Elevating your Home," a small publication that functions as a reference guide for residents rebuilding their homes, to large scale building interventions like the Viet Village Urban Farm, a 28 acre urban farm and farmers market in New Orleans East. (fig.11)

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<sup>15</sup> Tulane City Center Exhibition Catalog. (New Orleans: Tulane University, 2010), back cover.

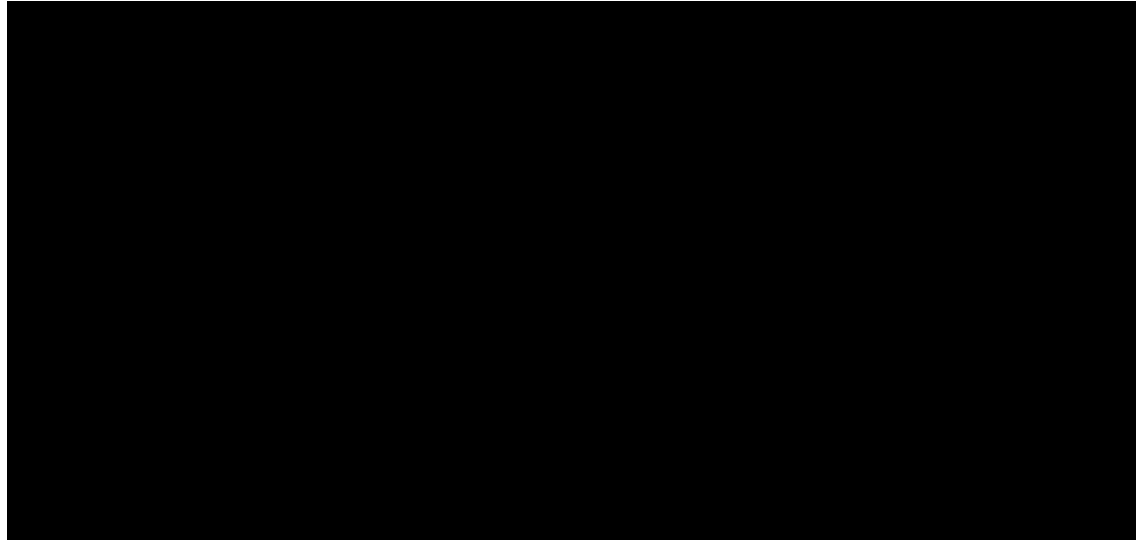


Figure 11 Viet Village Urban Farm, Tulane City Center, exhibition catalog, New Orleans: Tulane University, 2010

Unlike Make it Right, most of TCC's programs are about community rebuilding and infrastructure in New Orleans as opposed to strictly individual housing. However, there is one program, entitled URBANbuild through design studio at Tulane. Here students design a single family home designed for the way a New Orleans family lives today. Although the contemporary designs stands out in the landscape, what makes these projects different from Make it Right houses is that they are placed in an infill environment so they do not all exist huddled together like a gated community in the manner of the Make it Right houses.

(fig. 12)



Figure 12 Image of URBANbuild Prototype 4, author

### House of Dance and Feathers

The only project by Tulane City Center located in the Lower Ninth Ward is the House of Dance and Feathers. Located in the backyard of Ronald Lewis' home on Tupelo Street, the House of Dance and Feathers is essentially a museum of Lower Ninth Ward culture. Lewis built the original museum in his backyard shed before Katrina, but after the storm destroyed his shed (and most of his house,) he rebuilt with the help of architecture students at Kansas State University and TCC. (fig.13) Today, visitors come to the museum on a daily basis where Lewis shares his and the Lower Ninth Ward's story. The museum is filled with countless artifacts such as picture albums, framed newspapers, and a plethora of Second Line parade and Mardi Gras Indian costumes hanging on the walls and from the ceiling. (fig.14) Lewis' chronicling of the Lower Ninth Ward has elevated him to celebrity

status within the Lower Ninth Ward, and an acknowledgement that he is the authority on the community's history and culture.



Figure 13 Exterior of House of Dance and Feathers, author



Figure 14 Interior of House of Dance and Feathers, author

### Current master plan

The city of New Orleans recently published the comprehensive master plan for the city.

The Lower Ninth Ward's plan includes rebuilding the commercial district along Claiborne as well as allocations for low and medium density mixed-use along all of St. Claude Ave and parts of Claiborne and Caffin Avenues. The rest of the neighborhood planning is kept residential, just as it was before Katrina.

### **The State of Culture in the Lower Ninth Ward**

Today, the Lower Ninth Ward continues to appear as though Katrina occurred only months before. In the past five years, little to no large scale recovery effort has ensued. In light of this seeming defeat, the presence of the people who call the Lower Ninth Ward home prevails.

### Second Line parades

Although the population of the Lower Ninth Ward is at best one-third of what it was pre-Katrina, members of the Social Aid and Pleasure clubs continue to parade in full force every Sunday. Even if members have not moved back to the neighborhood yet, they come out every weekend to celebrate with their neighbors and friends. The first Second Line after Katrina occurred in December 2006, just 3 months after the storm and just when residents were allowed back into New Orleans. Since then parades have occurred steadily each Sunday, regardless of residency status of the members of the club. This level of dedication shows the strong desire of current and former Lower Ninth Ward residents to maintain the spirit of community and togetherness known before Katrina.

### Lack of social infrastructure

Although a desire to move back home exists in most former Lower Ninth Ward residents, currently, there is not much for them to come back to. Commercially and institutionally, there is no rebuilding effort. Even residents who have rebuilt their homes have no grocery store to shop in, or bar to go to on a Friday night. There are almost no shops, doctors, or even schools; the entire public realm has gone ignored. In order for an intervention in the Lower Ninth Ward to succeed, the issue of social infrastructure cannot be ignored.

## Chapter Two: Site Analysis

### Climate

New Orleans is in a warm, tropical climate, with many days consisting of 100% humidity. There is a mean annual precipitation of 70.01--100.00 inches<sup>16</sup> (fig. 15) and 60.5--90.4 days of temperatures greater than 90 degrees Fahrenheit annually.<sup>17</sup> (fig. 16) The average dew point is 55.1—60 degrees Fahrenheit,<sup>18</sup> (fig. 17) and there are very few cool days, as the average low annually is 55—60 degrees Fahrenheit.<sup>19</sup> (fig. 18) With an average high temperature 75—80 degrees Fahrenheit,<sup>20</sup> (fig. 19) a warm, humid climate with plentiful precipitation, similar to a tropical island, is created.

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<sup>16</sup> “Mean precipitation” NOAA Satellite and Information Service, <http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climaps/prec0113.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> “Days above 90 degrees” NOAA Satellite and Information Service, <http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climaps/temp1013.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> “Dew point” NOAA Satellite and Information Service, <http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climaps/temp2113.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> “Mean daily minimum temperature” NOAA Satellite and Information Service, <http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climaps/tmp02b13.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> “Mean daily maximum temperature” NOAA Satellite and Information Service, <http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climaps/tmp02a13.pdf>



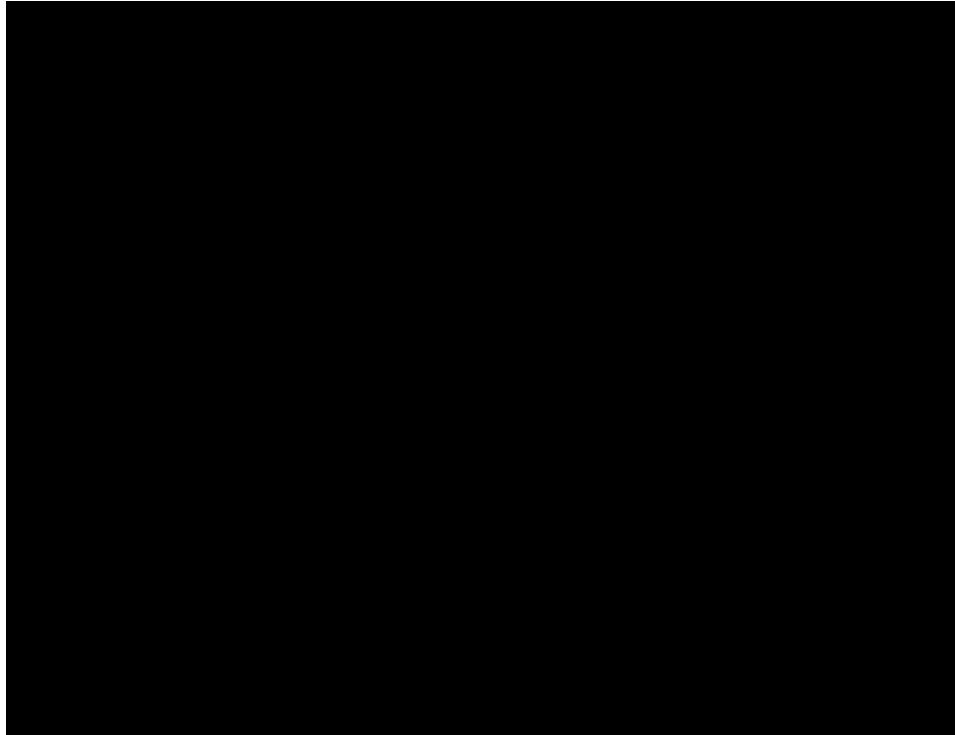


Figure 15 Mean Annual Precipitation, NOAA Satellite and Information Service, <http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climaps/prec0113.pdf>

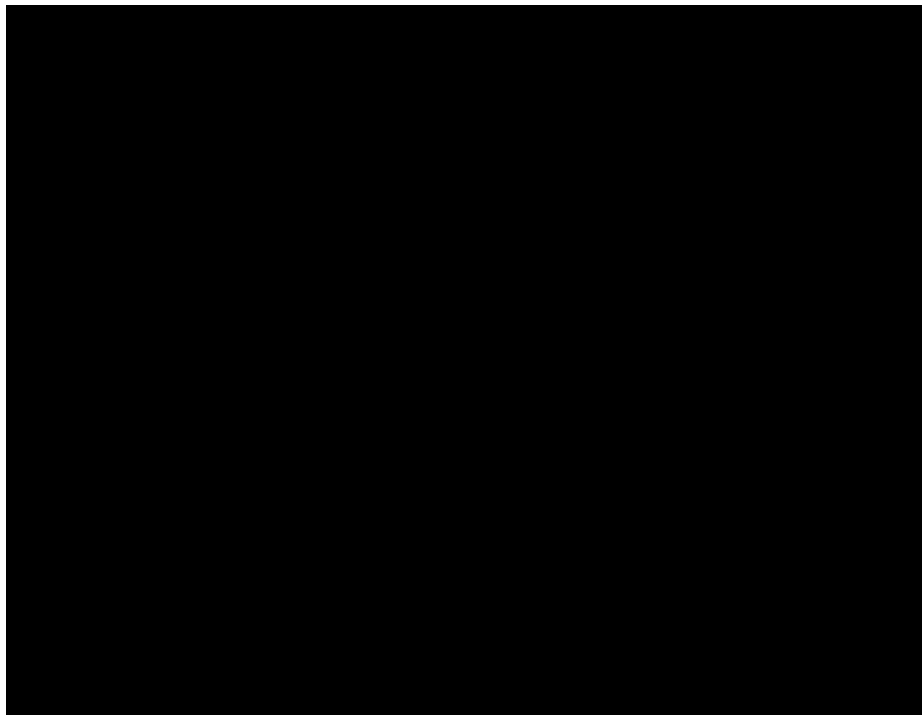


Figure 16 Mean Annual Temperature Greater than 90 Degrees F, NOAA Satellite and Information Service, <http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climaps/temp1013.pdf>

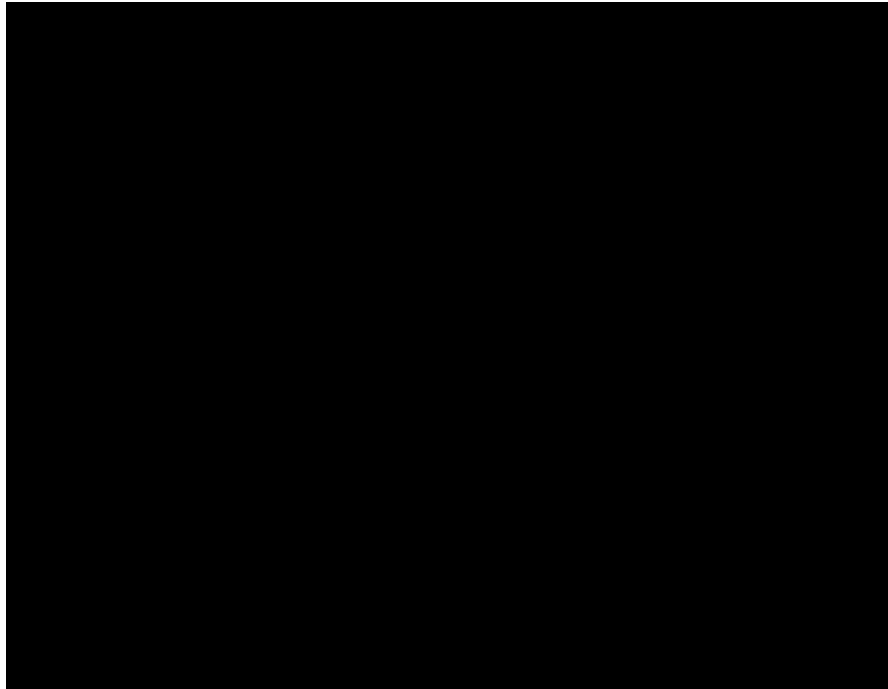


Figure 17 Mean Dew Point Temperature, "Dew point" NOAA Satellite and Information Service, <http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climaps/temp2113.pdf>

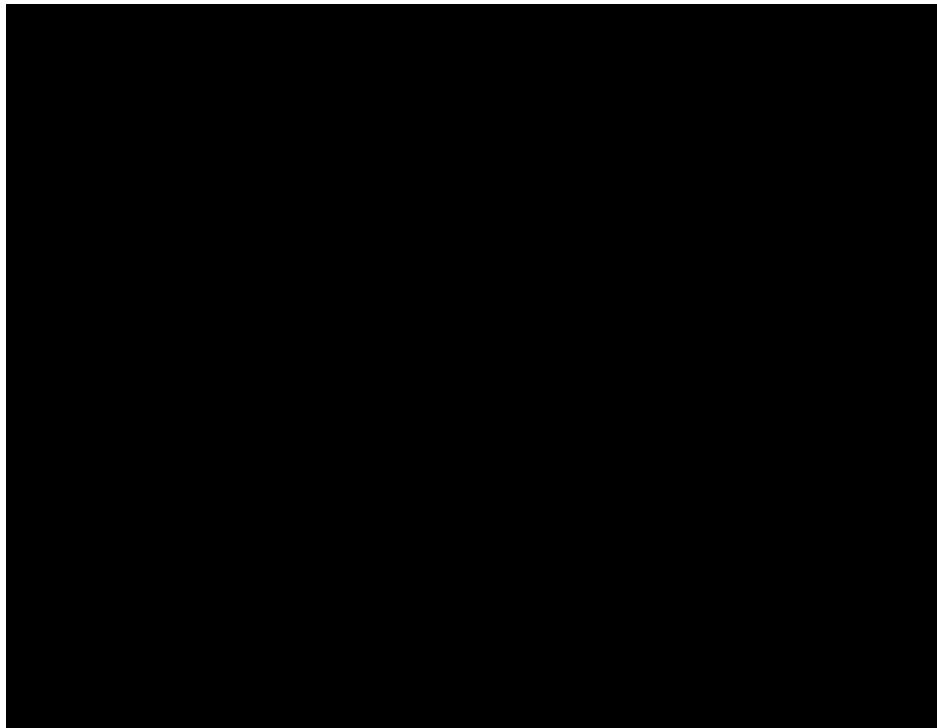


Figure 18 Mean Daily Minimum Temperature, "Mean daily minimum temperature" NOAA Satellite and Information Service, <http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climaps/tmp02b13.pdf>

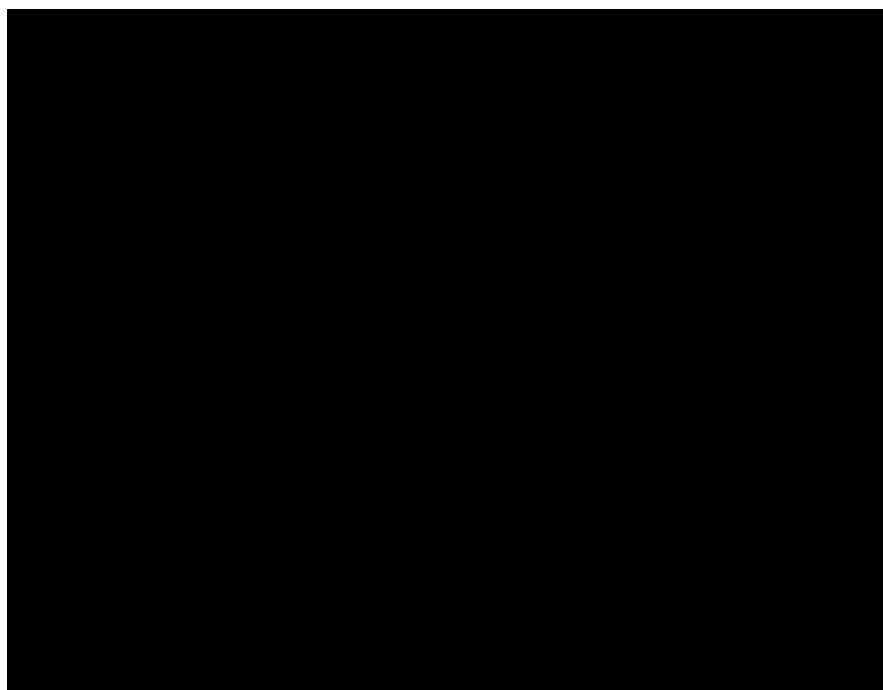


Figure 19 Mean Daily Maximum Temperature, “Mean daily maximum temperature” NOAA Satellite and Information Service, <http://cdo.ncdc.noaa.gov/climaps/tmp02a13.pdf>

### Topography and Flood Plains

A large portion of New Orleans is located below sea level, which is frequently used as an excuse in arguments not to rebuild the city. However, the extent and cause of the flooding in the days following Hurricane Katrina are not are not the result of the city being below sea level, but because the engineering of the levees and flood walls was faulty. With the Lower Ninth Ward, the northernmost portion totally above Claiborne Avenue is about 1.5 feet below sea level. (fig. 20) The remainder of the neighborhood is not in the flood plain, thus should not be at risk for flooding. FEMA regulates that houses in these areas still must be built at minimum three feet above grade as a precaution.

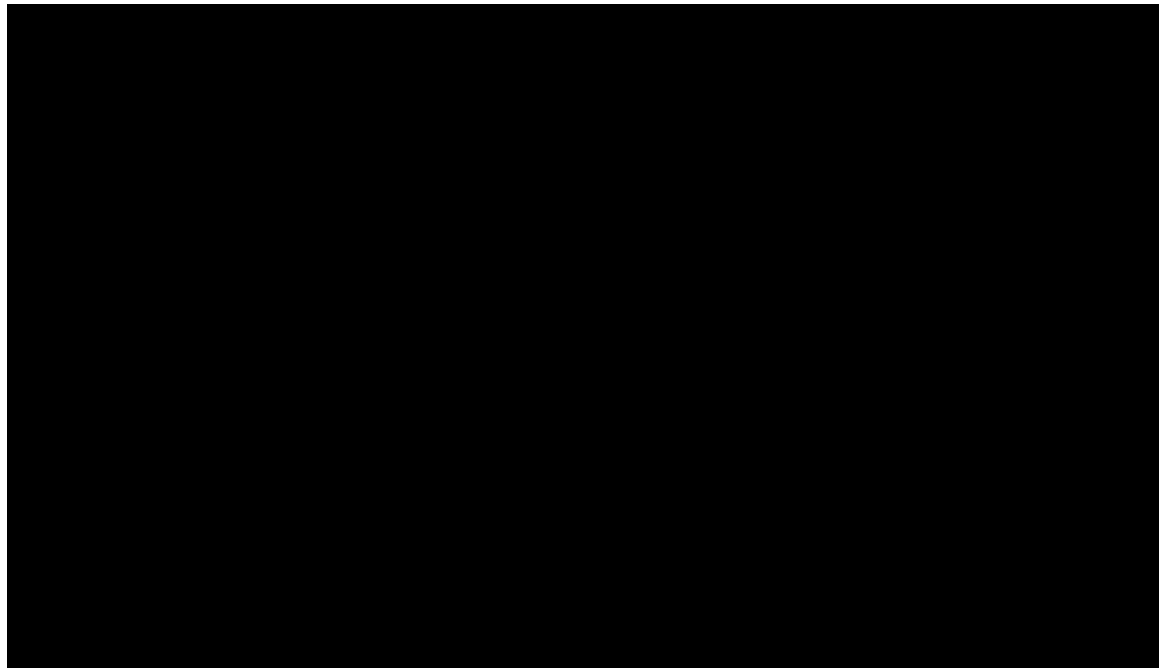
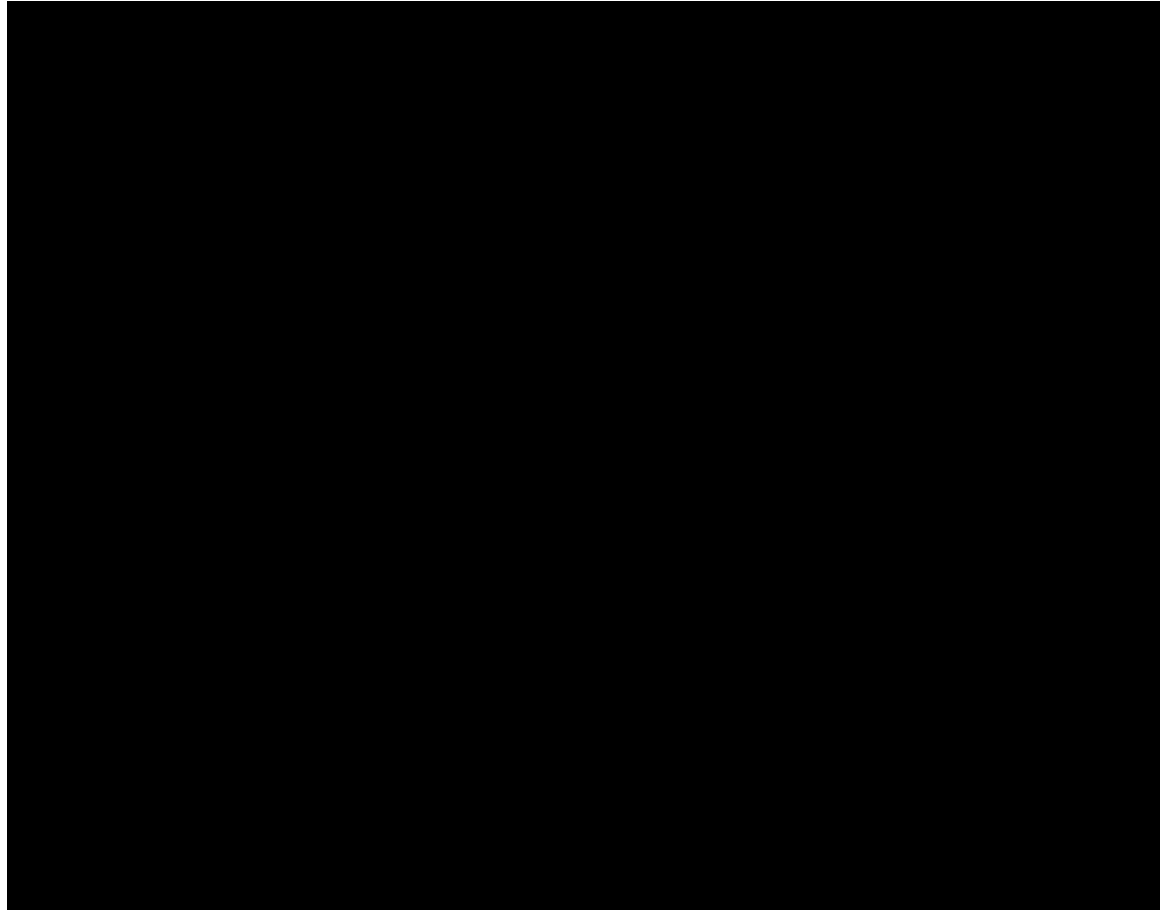


Figure 20 Topography of New Orleans, Federal Emergency Management Agency

The extent of the flooding in the Lower Ninth Ward occurred from the northernmost point, Florida Avenue, where the flood walls were breached, to St. Claude Avenue. The Holy Cross area was not flooded, which is why so much of the neighborhood fabric is still intact in the south. (fig. 21) The maximum flood depth was 12 feet and that occurred in the northern part of the neighborhood. Moving south towards Claiborne Avenue, the flooding was not as deep, reaching between 8 and 10 feet in depth. The main pumping station for the Lower Ninth Ward is located in the northwest corner, near the intersection of the Industrial Canal, and the wetlands. According to FEMA the flood depths of standing water on September 2, 2005 between St. Claude and Claiborne Avenues was between 0—5 feet depending on the area. (fig. 22) The worst flooding occurred north of Johnson Street, where the elevation changes to below sea level, and those depths were approximately 6—

10 feet. A more micro analysis of topography with regard to flooding can be seen in a diagram (fig. 23)



**Figure 21 Flood Extents, Federal Emergency Management Agency**

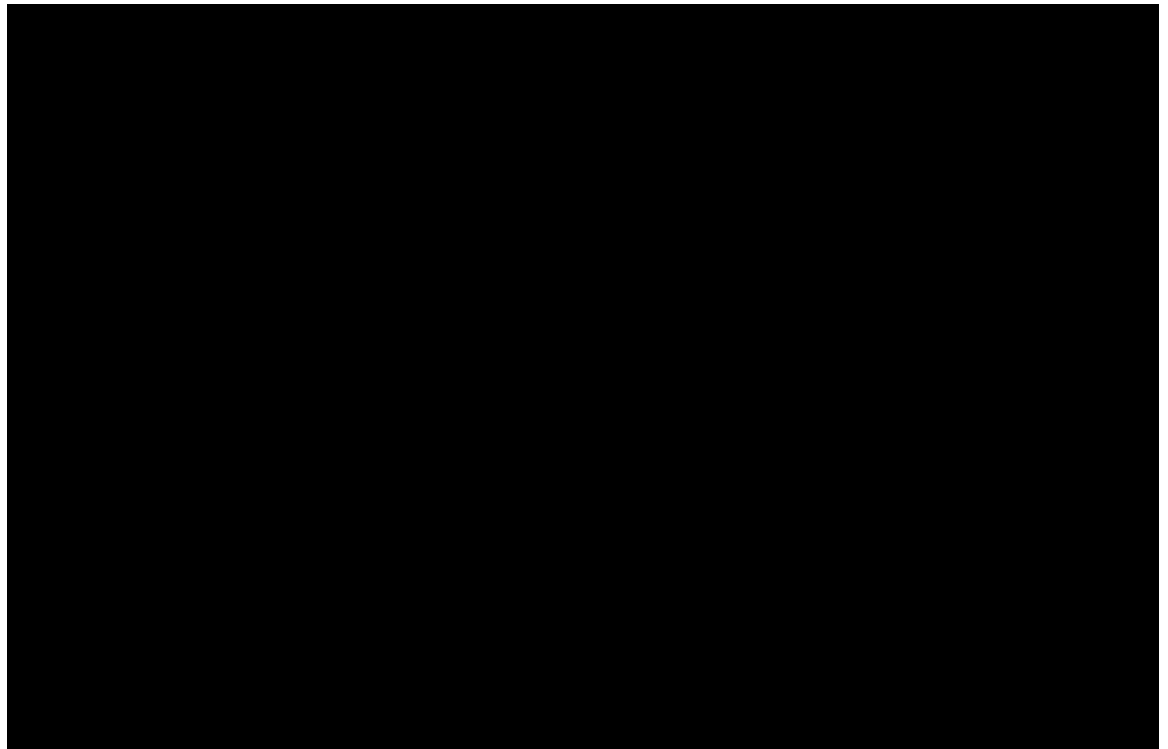


Figure 22 Flood Depths September 2, 2005, Federal Emergency Management Agency



Figure 23 Boundary of Flood Zone and Areas above and Below Sea Level in Lower Ninth Ward, author

## Overall Neighborhood

### Existing Use

The Lower Ninth Ward is typical of a small town in layout and hierarchy of space. (fig.24)

There are two major boulevards that are mostly made up of commercial businesses and the secondary and tertiary streets are usually residential. Open space is scattered throughout the neighborhood and the density of housing is low. All housing is single-family home with a small setback from the street, and larger backyard.

Currently there is only one open school in the neighborhood, located at Claiborne and Caffin Avenues, but pre-Katrina there were seven functioning schools. (fig. 25) There are no open food stops, and residents must cross the canal bridges into the Upper Ninth Ward to go grocery shopping. A very limited number of carry-out restaurants have opened after the storm, but before there were several bars and restaurants residents would socialize at. (fig. 26) One of the major aspects of the neighborhood that seems on its way to recovery are the churches. (fig. 27) Since the storm, many churches have been able to come back to the neighborhood, even though their facilities were destroyed.



Figure 24 Social Map of the Lower Ninth Ward, author





Figure 25 Schools Pre and Post-Katrina, author



Figure 26 Grocery/Food Stops in the Lower Ninth Ward, author



Figure 27 Churches Currently in the Lower Ninth Ward, author

Street Hierarchy

The Lower Ninth Ward is designed on a grid system of blocks approximately 250 feet east/west by 300 feet north/south. The two primary arterial roadways run east/west and bridge the neighborhood to New Orleans proper, across the Industrial Canal. They are Claiborne Avenue and St. Claude Avenue. (fig. 28) These boulevards are two lanes wide in each direction and are both divided by a green median. St. Claude's median is roughly 30 feet wide and is the former site of the trolley line, as the trolley tracks are still in place, albeit, overgrown. Claiborne's median is much more expansive, 80 feet wide and used to

serve as a prime location for community activities. These roads were mostly fronted by businesses, such as restaurants, groceries, and bars, schools, and shops for the community.

The two secondary streets run north south and are Caffin Avenue and Tupelo Street. (fig. 28) Both of these streets also have medians running down the center but are only one lane in each direction. While there is mostly residential along these roads, shops, churches, and corner-stores were also frequently located along these two thoroughfares. Both roads intersect with Claiborne and St. Claude, and run from the flood wall along the Mississippi in the south to the flood wall along the north side of the neighborhood. On the south side, both streets lead to the industrial part of the Lower Ninth Ward, near Jackson Barracks and the wharf. The intersection of Caffin Ave and Claiborne Ave is the location of the only school currently open in the Lower Ninth—the Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School.

All other streets are tertiary and primarily residential. They run on the same north/south and east/west grid set up by the primary and secondary roadways.

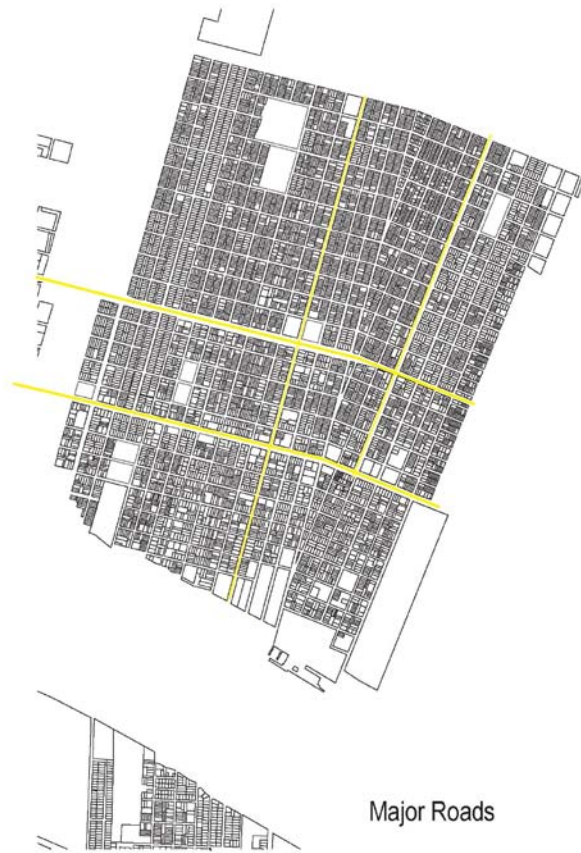


Figure 28 Major Roads Through the Lower Ninth Ward, author

### Transit

A trolley line used to run down St. Claude Avenue but today the only trolley line still in operation in the city is along St. Charles Avenue, from downtown to uptown. The tracks still remain in the median strip of the avenue, (fig. 29) so it is fitting that the bus line runs along St. Claude. (fig. 30) NORTA, or New Orleans Regional Transit Authority runs a bus system throughout the city. The #88 St. Claude-Jackson Barracks line runs seven days a week from roughly 5 am to 2 am. The line starts at the east end of the Lower Ninth Ward, at the edge of Orleans parish, and across the Industrial Canal to the west edge of downtown, Canal Street. This is the only form of public transportation running through the

Lower Ninth Ward, but there are signs for bus stops to the north on Claiborne Avenue. Whether any plans for a future bus line is in the works along Claiborne still remains unclear.



Figure 29 Trolley Track along St. Claude Avenue, author



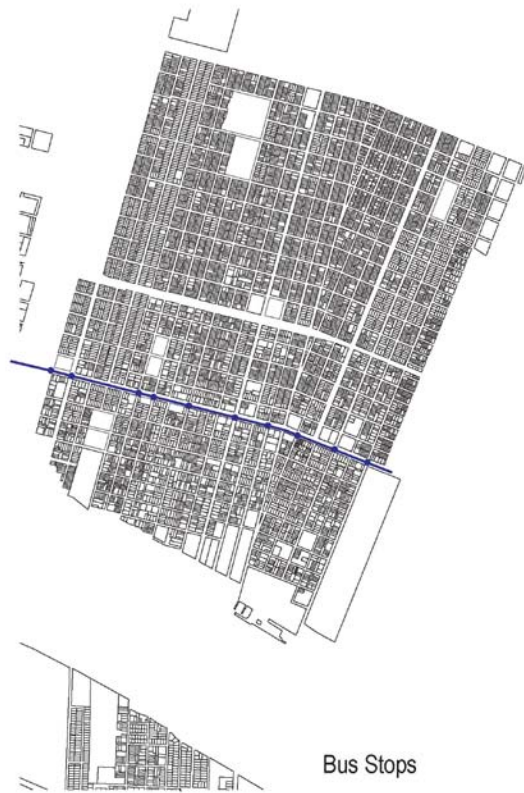


Figure 30 Bus Stops along St. Claude Avenue, author

### Current Population Dispersion

While the population of the Lower Ninth Ward was evenly distributed throughout the neighborhood before the storm, today, the recovery effort has been stronger in some parts more than others. The recovered population is estimated at about one-third that of the pre-Katrina population and the southern-most part of the neighborhood, below St. Claude Ave is the most consistently recovered area. This area, commonly referred to as the Holy Cross area, sits on higher ground than the northern part of the neighborhood, so these houses were not flooded to the point where demolition was the only solution.

Almost all of the structures north of Claiborne Ave have either been demolished, or are beyond repair. This was the most destroyed part of the neighborhood is since it is on the lowest ground and is closest to where the levee breached and the flood wall cracked. The Make it Right rebuilding effort has plans to construct 150 homes along the most damaged corridor—mainly on Tennessee and Deslondes Streets near the western flood wall.

Because of the concentration of current population in Holy Cross and the area north of Claiborne being much less recovered, most activity currently takes place along the St. Claude Ave corridor instead of Claiborne. However, the only school currently open in the Lower Ninth Ward is located on Claiborne Ave, as are a couple of food stops that have come back to the neighborhood.

### Open Space

Although the Lower Ninth Ward was a more rural part of the city before the storm, the amount of open park space was limited. (fig. 31) The main park spaces were located around the schools, mainly the former site of Lee High School in the northwest part of the neighborhood, and another former school in the southwest below St. Claude Ave. These schools have not been rebuilt so currently these sites are completely open grass park space. There are basketball pavilions on both sites, but the Lee High School pavilion and playground is seems structurally unsound and has not been repaired since the storm. The pavilion and playground at the other school site is in good condition and since the population below St. Claude Ave is currently higher than above Claiborne where Lee High School is, this makes sense. Also, with the Make it Right rebuilding effort, volunteers are installing small playgrounds in an infill manner between houses.



The medians along Claiborne and St. Claude Avenues can also be considered open spaces. The trolley line ran along St. Claude Ave in the median, and the tracks still exist. The median on Claiborne Ave is eighty feet wide, and was a major spot for community activity in the mid-twentieth century before the road became a more heavily traversed thoroughway from the east into downtown New Orleans.

The lack of community open space in the Lower Ninth is countered by the lower density of housing. The neighborhood consists of all single family homes with no apartment buildings or even attached housing. This allowed every family to have their outdoor space for gardening and leisure.



Figure 31 Green Space in the Lower Ninth Ward, author

### Industry

The major points of industry in the Lower Ninth Ward were located along the southern edge by the Mississippi River flood wall. (fig. 32) Trolley line tracks steer off St. Claude at Alabo Street down to the wharf. These areas were mainly wharfs that served as ports for shipments into the city and they are located all along the river throughout New Orleans. A sugar-cane storage facility exists at Rampart and Alabo Streets. Today, this building is being turned into a community center for neighborhood children.

It is unclear to what extent the wharf is used for shipments today.



Figure 32 Industry in Lower Ninth Ward, author

### Edge Conditions

The north, west, and south edges of the Lower Ninth Ward are surrounded by levees and flood walls. (fig. 33) The east edge is also the edge of Orleans Parish, meaning this is the eastern boundary of New Orleans proper. Claiborne and St. Claude Avenues continue past the boundary of Orleans Parish into St. Bernard Parish, so they serve as major eastern points of entry into the city. The land areas around the flood walls are un-

landscaped potential park areas where the flood wall could engage the community instead of giving the feel of a fortress blocking the view of the water from the neighborhood. The fact that the neighborhood is completely visually blocked off from the rest of the city and the water is disconcerting, and furthers the argument that the Lower Ninth Ward was an undesirable place to purchase land historically because of this disconnect to the rest of the city.



Figure 33 Flood Wall Protecting Lower Ninth Ward, author

### Site Descriptions

Given a closer look at the neighborhood and its needs, several sites were analyzed for their potential to house some sort of intervention that would function as a catalyst for a

renaissance in the community. (fig. 34) These sites all have different levels of potential and various programs would be suitable for each of them.

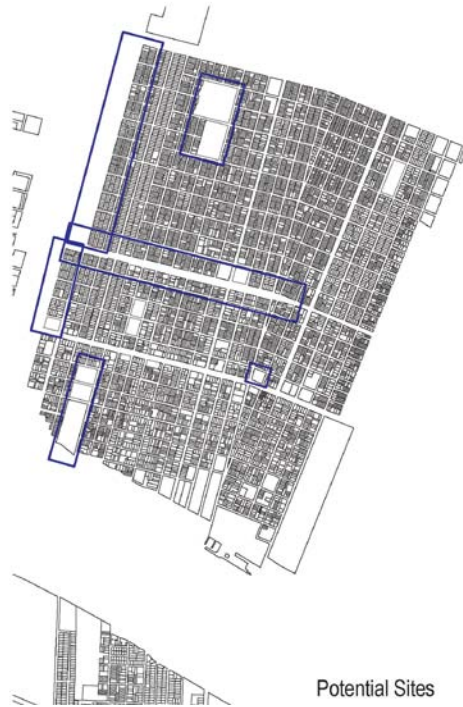


Figure 34 Potential Sites for Intervention, author

### Lee High School site

The site where Lee High School formally stood is the northernmost potential side in the Lower Ninth Ward. (fig. 35) It is located in the Northwest sector of the neighborhood, on some of the lowest ground. Its exact parameters are the area between Forstall and Andry Streets in the east—west direction and Law and Miro Streets in the north—south direction. The site consists of two large expanses of green park land where the high school used to stand. Currently there is a run-down basketball pavilion similar to other more well-kept pavilions around the city.

Programs for this site include a collective farm, outdoor pavilion, and community market. The reasoning for these programs is mainly driven by the low ground the site sits on and the likelihood of it flooding in the future. These programs would be affected minimally by flooding in the long run.

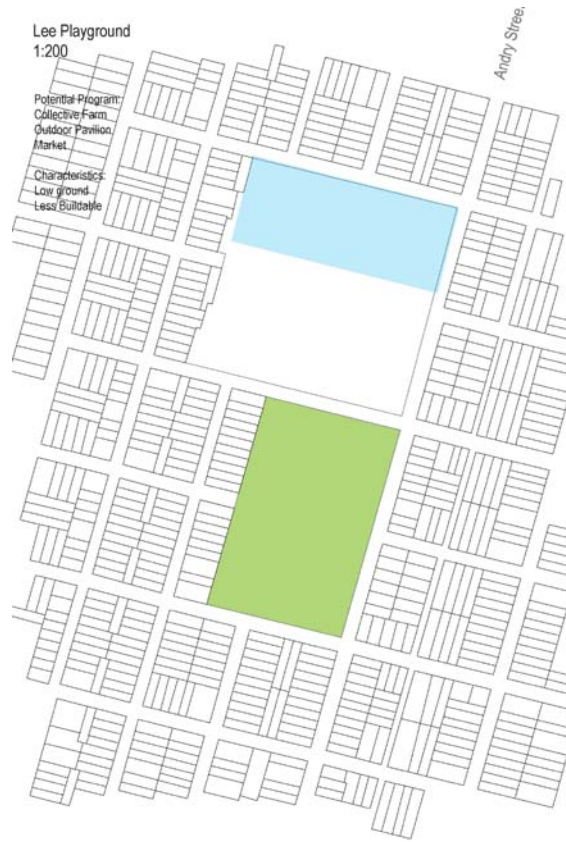


Figure 35 Lee High School, author

### Louis Armstrong Elementary

Louis Armstrong Elementary is located along St. Claude Avenue between Benton and Gordon Streets. (fig. 36) The school is currently not in use but has been nominated by the Make It Right Foundation to become a national historic landmark.<sup>21</sup> Another prominent

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<sup>21</sup> MIR, 47.



feature in this area is the presence of abandoned trolley tracks down the median of St. Claude Avenue. The corridor of St. Claude Avenue around Louis Armstrong Elementary provides an interesting site for intervention because St. Claude Avenue is one of the two major boulevards running through the community, and between St. Claude and Claiborne, St. Claude is more developed and a busier street.

Possible program along the St. Claude corridor is a renovation or adaptive reuse of Louis Armstrong Elementary, a music hall, bars, meeting hall, and housing along the secondary and tertiary streets. These program options coincide with the character and practice of the community and would work as catalysts for revitalization of the entire Lower Ninth Ward.



Figure 36 St. Claude Corridor, author

West Side along Canal Flood Wall

The entire west edge of the Lower Ninth Ward along the Industrial Canal is prime land for development. (fig. 37) About 70 feet wide from street to flood wall and 1.5 miles long, this area could provide ample outdoor useable space to the residents of the Lower Ninth Ward. A green space could be landscaped along the length of the flood wall, allowing residents to interact with the flood wall instead of viewing this austere barrier protecting them from flood. Collective farming projects could be implemented, bringing the farming culture of the residents, who frequently keep vegetable gardens and chickens in their own yards, together.



Figure 37 Edge along Canal Wall, author



Southwest edge along Mississippi River

Similar to the west side flood wall, the southwest edge of the Lower Ninth Ward along the Mississippi River could be transformed into a usable green space for the community. (fig. 38) The site fronts the river for one-half of a mile and is 180 feet wide. Similar to the site above, this land could be used for collective farming and outdoor space, but the frontage on the river could engage the site more, similar to the riverfront in the French Quarter. Also, programmed buildings could engage and surround the site such as market or festival space.



Figure 38 Southwest Corner Along Flood Wall, author

### Claiborne Avenue

The business corridor along Claiborne Avenue is the final site analyzed. (fig. 39) Claiborne is the other major boulevard running through the Lower Ninth Ward, north of St. Claude Avenue. Claiborne Avenue poses interesting potential as the focused site for intervention because of its history and connection with the culture of the neighborhood and its current state, which is discussed in the succeeding section.

Claiborne Avenue is 175 feet wide with an 80 foot wide median for over half a mile down the boulevard. The wide median is unprecedented in the city and provides ample opportunity for program that engages the street. Also, the only open school currently in the Lower Ninth Ward: Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School. Before Katrina, restaurants, bars, and groceries were located along Claiborne Avenue. Currently, Claiborne is less developed than St. Claude Avenue. This is most likely because the northern part of the Lower Ninth Ward was more severely damaged during the aftermath of the storm, and much fewer families have come back to rebuild. (fig.40) However, the location of the school and the history of the site show sufficient reason to believe that Claiborne Avenue will make a full recovery and once again function as a bustling thoroughfare and gathering place for the community.

Potential program for the site along Claiborne Avenue is plentiful. A market space, bars, groceries, places for performance, and places for festivals are all viable programmatic elements to spur development in the areas around the corridor. Because of abundance of opportunity and the history of the site, the Claiborne Avenue corridor is the primary site chosen for design intervention.



Figure 39 Claiborne Avenue Corridor, author



Figure 40 Figure Ground of the Lower Ninth Ward before and after Hurricane Katrina, author

## **Site History**

Claiborne Avenue has a long history associated with the evolving culture of the Lower Ninth Ward. It was and still is frequently used as a major leg of parade routes for Second Lines and its wide median was often utilized for celebratory festivities, bringing the community together. In the 1960's, the city decided it needed an expressway system through the city, and unfortunately, Claiborne Ave and St. Claude Ave were targeted as sites to allow higher speed access directly to downtown from St. Bernard Parish. Because of this, most vehicular traffic travels along Claiborne Avenue at a higher speed now, making these festive occasions more dangerous for pedestrians. However, before this change was made, the pedestrian interaction and street life along Claiborne was extremely vibrant. The median was tree-lined on both sides, shading the grassy area, and encouraging gatherings. By promoting parades and a festival atmosphere along Claiborne, this culture of celebration can illuminate this major boulevard once again.

## **Site Selection**

The selection of the corridor along Claiborne Avenue as a site for a major intervention in the Lower Ninth Ward came about for multiple reasons. The fact that Claiborne Avenue is currently less developed than St. Claude Avenue, and that pre-Katrina both thoroughfares were vibrant, central organizing elements to the neighborhood is crucial. By countering St. Claude's development with an intervention on Claiborne, the rest of the Lower Ninth Ward that has struggled to come back to life will catch up to the areas that are on their way to thriving. (fig.41)



Figure 41 Existing Conditions on North Side of Claiborne Avenue, author

Also, there is opportunity for development to occur in multiple ways and with multiple programs. Interventions could be placed in a cluster in one area, or dispersed along the entire length of the street, and on both sides. In addition to the location and dispersion of program, the possibility to engage the street and take advantage of the wide median affords a great opportunity to design in a way that would create a place for the community to gather, just as they had in previous years. The potential for indoor and outdoor program is vast and the wide median is a great opportunity to work with the Social Aid and Pleasure clubs to create spaces for them to engage and interact with places along the boulevard during parades.

### **Existing Use**

Currently Claiborne Avenue is zoned for business and commercial districts, with some residential. Before the storm, there were many businesses located along the boulevard, including several popular bars, such as the Blue Gardenia, and Wagner's Meat Market. Currently only a couple of businesses have re-opened, including a gas station and one small carry-out restaurant. However, the location of Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School at Claiborne and Caffin Avenues is promising and gives much promise for the revitalization of the boulevard.

## Chapter Three: Program Objectives

### Macro Scale: Rationale for Program Selection

A macro scale master plan comprised of several program pieces will establish an overall scope for intervention in the Lower Ninth Ward. Through allocating space for the eventual design of social infrastructure in the neighborhood, former residents will be able to come back and rebuild in a neighborhood with a clear plan for renewal. Several program pieces will be utilized in order to inspire the culture and people to thrive in the Lower Ninth Ward just as they did before Katrina.

Allocating space to re-establish the schools that existed before the storm is the first step in the proposed master plan. Six schools still have not been rebuilt and currently only having one option for children in the neighborhood is not sufficient.

In addition to schools, park space, housing, and elements of social infrastructure are addressed. Collective open park space will provide outdoor gathering places for members of the community to congregate and socialize. Because of the warm climate, the outdoors can be and are utilized for most the year in a comfortable manner. Also, allowing outdoor park space along Second Line parade routes will inspire stops along the route for gathering and festivities.

Housing presents a sensitive issue in the neighborhood. Because most people owned their homes but many without actual paper title, rebuilding of housing proves difficult. Minimal guidelines are suggested to allocate for character of the neighborhood and flood risk, but

other than that, minimal restrictions and guidelines are provided. The rationale for this is that people who still own their land but have not been able to rebuild yet should have the right to rebuild on their own land in the manner they choose.

Several elements of the social infrastructure must be replaced in order for the community to be viable in the long term. Bars, corner stores, small businesses, and general places for social gatherings are allocated along St. Claude and Claiborne Avenues, the major thoroughfares through the neighborhoods. The occasional corner store should be employed at various points throughout the residential portions of the community, similar to the pattern that existed pre-Katrina. The micro scale design project focuses on the design and implementation of these pieces of social infrastructure along the Claiborne Avenue corridor.

### **Micro Scale: Rationale for Program Selection**

Implementation of a more detailed intervention along the commercially zoned blocks of Claiborne Avenue strives to incorporate programmatic elements specific to the Lower Ninth Ward's sense of community and community center. Lower Ninth Ward culture, and more broadly, New Orleans culture is one of leisure and festival. The tropical climate hinders people from moving quickly in the hot months and much time is spent sitting on porches having conversations with neighbors and passers-by. This attitude of leisure is complemented by the festive culture amplified by weekly Second Line parades. People in elaborate costumes literally dancing down the street, anyone along the side-lines invited to

join in and dance to the brass band. This spontaneous party offers valuable insight into the way of life in the Lower Ninth Ward that must be understood and encouraged when designing for the community. The dichotomy between the leisurely ways of residents on hot days with these transient festivals illustrates the idea that the public realm: the street, storefront, and porch function as the “community center” for the Lower Ninth Ward residents. These locations are where social exchange and interaction take place, and these three elements must be treated that way in any proposed intervention for community space.

Bars and performance venues traditionally supplemented the leisure-filled yet festive atmosphere of the Lower Ninth Ward. New Orleans has more bars than any other city in the United States, with 55.3 bars per 100,000 residents.<sup>22</sup> According to Ronald Lewis, two of the most important community places in the Lower Ninth Ward were bars: the Blue Gardenia on Claiborne Avenue, and the Hot Spot on St. Claude Avenue. Locals would congregate here frequently to relax and socialize with one another. In addition to these activities, bars provided space for musicians to showcase their music. Fats Domino is from the Lower Ninth Ward, as well as many jazz performers in New Orleans. Space for these artists to perform is crucial to continue the tradition of jazz performers in New Orleans and the Lower Ninth Ward.

Another important aspect of way of life specific to the Lower Ninth Ward more than the city as a whole, is the history of farming and gardening. Although the neighborhood is located

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Campanella. Geographies of New Orleans: Urban Fabrics Before the Storm. Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 2006, 169.



approximately two miles from the French Quarter, the center of New Orleans, the Lower Ninth Ward is an extremely rural community. Housing lots are large enough to allow for large backyards and residents typically take advantage of that space to grow their own food and raise their own chickens. The tradition of growing one's own produce and providing for one's family is a part of life in the Lower Ninth Ward. Even today, with most of the neighborhood unoccupied, the sound of chickens carries through the silence.

In addition to these individual farming endeavors, urban farming and farmers markets are on the rise in New Orleans. Two major urban farms are the Hollygrove Grower's Market and Farm (figs. 42-43) and the Viet Village Urban Farm. (fig. 11) Both of these models promote community involvement in the growing of various types of produce to sell at a public, on-site farmers market on weekends. In the Lower Ninth Ward, the only farming model of this type exists at a small independent school named Our School at Blair Grocery. (figs. 44-45) Here, eight students and their teachers grow various crops and raise chickens in order to sell these products to local restaurants. The proceeds help to fund the school. In addition to selling to restaurants, the students hold a weekly farmers market in the summer for the current residents of the Lower Ninth Ward. This farmers market symbolizes the priority residents place on community involvement in the neighborhood. The success of Blair Grocery illustrates the beginning of transitioning the farming/farmers market model into the public realm. Through this, the idea of community center in the Lower Ninth Ward can be expanded to not only include the leisure and festive parts of the culture, but also to incorporate the desire to provide and create through shared public farms.

Understanding the nature of community and cultural space in the Lower Ninth Ward is paramount to creating a social intervention along Claiborne Avenue. Recognizing how the community functions in public spaces permits the allocation of an appropriate and informed program the residents of the Lower Ninth Ward will understand and utilize.



Figure 42 Hollygrove Growers Market and Farm, author



Figure 43 Hollygrove Growers Market and Farm, author



Figure 44 Our School at Blair Grocery, author





Figure 45 Our School at Blair Grocery, author

## Program Summary

The program proposed for the Claiborne Avenue corridor can be described as a new kind of community center, or the types of places that take on the role of the typical community center in the Lower Ninth Ward. These elements are not necessarily individual buildings, but activities that are designed to occur in specified places along Claiborne Avenue.

Because of the parading nature of the neighborhood, a progressive program of event spaces for specific use is proposed with four main functions or activities. Inspiration for these program aspects came from research on the Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans on the whole. (fig.46)

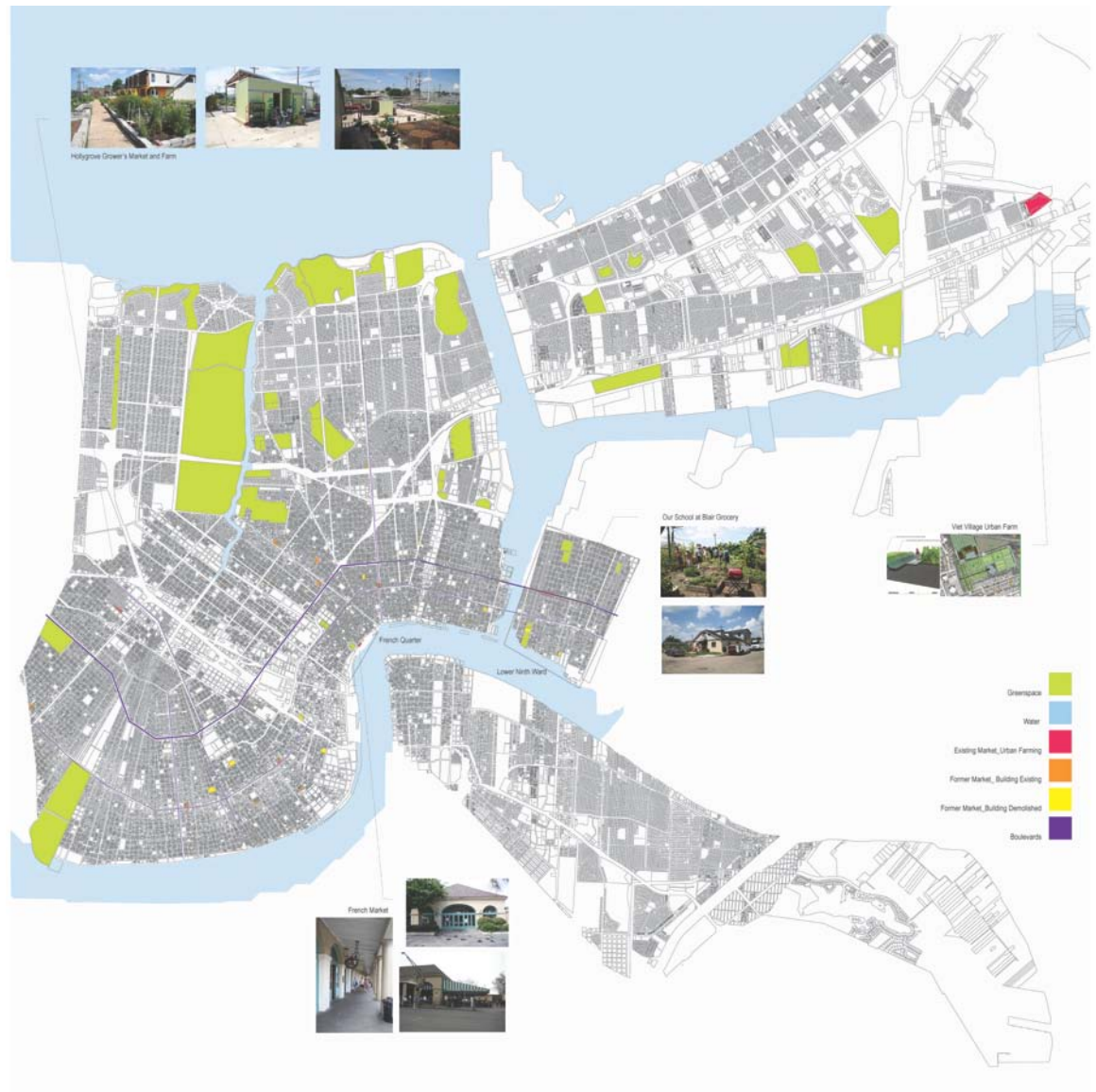


Figure 46 Social Map of New Orleans, author

### Market

Market spaces have a strong history in New Orleans, which will be discussed in the Chapter Four: Precedent Analysis. The rural nature of the Lower Ninth Ward and the tendency for people to have chicken coops and vegetable gardens provides great opportunity for market space in the neighborhood. There is ample precedent for market space with the St. Roch Market in the Upper Ninth Ward as well as the French Market and

a variety of Farmer's Market initiatives to inspire growth in specific neighborhoods all over the city. This market space can be a combination of conditioned space and open air space to allow for a variety of interactions between people in the neighborhood.

### Bar

One of the most significant types of meeting place in New Orleans and Lower Ninth Ward culture is the bar. Several culturally significant bars in the Lower Ninth Ward were devastated in the storm with no plans for them to return.

The Blue Gardenia, formerly located at Claiborne Avenue and Reynes Street still stands but is ravaged with flood damage. (figs. 47-49) Still, a closer look at the ruins of the Blue Gardenia gives insight to the importance of this social culture in the neighborhood. An expressive mural with imagery of musicians is painted on the wall and a hand crafted solid wood bar runs the entire length of the long, narrow room. The Blue Gardenia is the image of the typical New Orleans Bar and even looking at its ruined state, one can imagine the festive and celebratory events that took place in the space. Bars in New Orleans function as the main gathering places and community centers for much of the city. By employing the design of at least one bar along Claiborne Avenue, the ceremonial gathering of neighborhood residents at the local bar will be restored in the neighborhood.



Figure 47 Exterior of Blue Gardenia Bar, author





Figure 48 Mural Wall of Blue Gardenia,



Figure 49 Bar of Blue Gardenia, author



### Performance

Performance space is another aspect of New Orleans life that is vital to the neighborhood.

The legendary Fats Domino grew up and still lives in the Lower Ninth Ward, as well as several other famous musicians. Jazz music and performance is a key element to the Lower Ninth Ward so providing performance space, indoor and outdoor is a necessary element to revitalizing the community. These spaces can occur in a variety of ways: in bars, in the street, in parks, anywhere really, and they can be utilized by the people in the neighborhood in a planned fashion or spontaneously.

### Festival

The notion of festival and celebration is another central element to the culture in the Lower Ninth Ward. Social Aid and Pleasure clubs as well as Mardi Gras Indians are both celebratory outlets that gather to parade, perform, and eat as a community. Providing space along Claiborne Avenue, a boulevard frequently used as part of parade routes will allow for these groups to congregate how they wish while at the same time activating the street life. Like the notion of performance, these spaces can manifest in various ways, indoor and outdoor and can be used spontaneously or in a premeditated manner.

## Chapter Four: Precedent Analysis

Several types of precedents are examined, in particular the market type as well as different types of project proposals for interventions in the Lower Ninth Ward.

### Market System in New Orleans

The market system has a long history in New Orleans. (fig. 50) When the French settled the city initially, they started a French Market in 1791,<sup>23</sup> which was a place to purchase goods, much like a traditional farmer's market today. These markets became a prominent piece in each neighborhood throughout the city during several different periods of occupation; the Spanish, Americans, Confederates, and post-Civil War Americans all employed the market system as a viable community tool unique to New Orleans.<sup>24</sup> For immigrants to New Orleans, these markets provided a place to start their business in the food industry, as well as share and partake in other cultures through their food. A wide variety of foodstuffs were sold at these markets, and often, business was conducted in multiple languages. The types of interactions and products often included, but not limited to were Sicilian farmers who brought Creole artichokes and tomatoes, fisherman from the Canary Islands and China who brought oysters, shrimp, and crawfish, and hunters who brought anything from raccoons to bears.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> French Market, [www.frenchmarket.org](http://www.frenchmarket.org) 20 May 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Crescent City Farmers Market <http://www.crescentcityfarmersmarket.org/index.php?page=new-orleans-market-history> 20 May 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Overtime many of these markets became neglected and fell into ruin and what was left turned into major tourist attractions. However, in recent years with trends and interest in locally grown produce and fresh ingredients, the market system in New Orleans is in the midst of a renaissance. The French Market and Crescent City Farmers Market are two successful examples of this resurgence of market space in New Orleans.

The French Market still exists today, and is self-described as “America’s Oldest City Market.”<sup>26</sup> (fig.51) In addition to food and craft vendors, the French Market today hosts special events such as food festivals and concerts. It is located along the Mississippi River at the base of the French Quarter and Jackson Square. The world famous Café du Monde restaurant is a part of the complex and although it functions as a major tourist destination, the events and vendors still thrive in the spirit of the traditional market in New Orleans.

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<sup>26</sup>French Market [www.frenchmarket.org](http://www.frenchmarket.org)

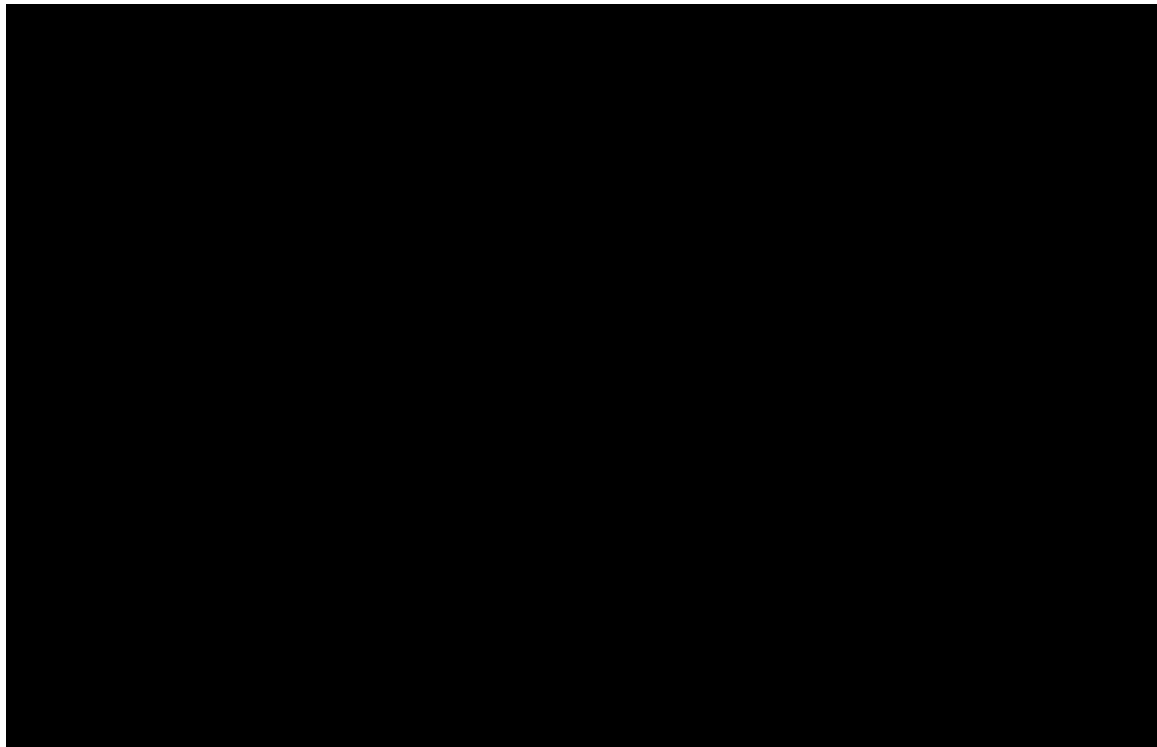


Figure 50 Markets of New Orleans, <http://www.crescentcityfarmersmarket.org/index.php?page=new-orleans-market-history>



Figure 51 Exterior of French Market, author

The Crescent City Farmers Market tries to renew the feeling of diverse cultural experience of markets past by hosting market exchanges all over the city. The farmer's market occurs three times a week in different locations throughout the city. It prides itself on reflecting the diverse nature of New Orleans with the unique fusion of cultures that comprise the city.

### St. Roch Market, New Orleans

St. Roch Market is located in the Upper Ninth Ward in New Orleans. (fig. 52) It is an example of a market constructed under the Works Progress Administration in the 1930's. As a long, narrow conditioned space, St. Roch Market was prevalent in the Upper Ninth Ward community as a place to purchase fresh and prepared foods such as po' boys from different vendors. The market was ravaged during Hurricane Katrina, but recently a group of Cornell University students studied the market and drew up plans and a proposal to restore the market. (fig.53)



Figure 52 St. Roch Market, author

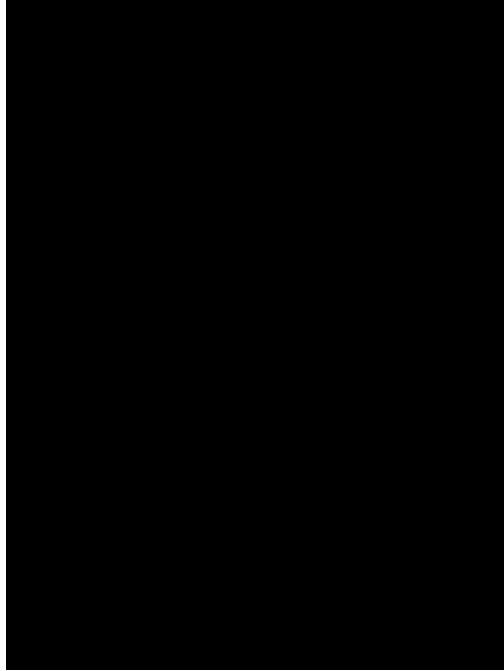


Figure 53 St. Roch Market, Project New Orleans, <http://www.project-neworleans.org/urbananalysis/strochmarket1.html>

#### Jazz+Food+Art: For All Ages

This project is a thesis project by Elizabeth Richey in Spring 2006 for Harvard University. (fig. 54) It proposes focusing on rebuilding the high ground in the Lower Ninth Ward, (primarily south of Claiborne Avenue) and the design of a flexible community center for jazz, food, and art. The site selected is at St. Claude Avenue and Forstall Street and the proposed the design of a community center with moveable partition walls in order to accommodate the various programs that would take place in the space.<sup>27</sup>

The notion of constructing a new type of community center with multiple specific foci is a viable proposal for the Lower Ninth Ward so the people of the community would be able to use the building for their needs and interests, as well as allowing for spontaneous

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<sup>27</sup> "Jazz + Food + Art" Project New Orleans <http://www.project-neworleans.org/publicbuilding/jazzfoodart1.html>

occurrences. The use of moveable walls helps this scheme and plans to place it on the high ground and along a major boulevard, near park space is intelligent.

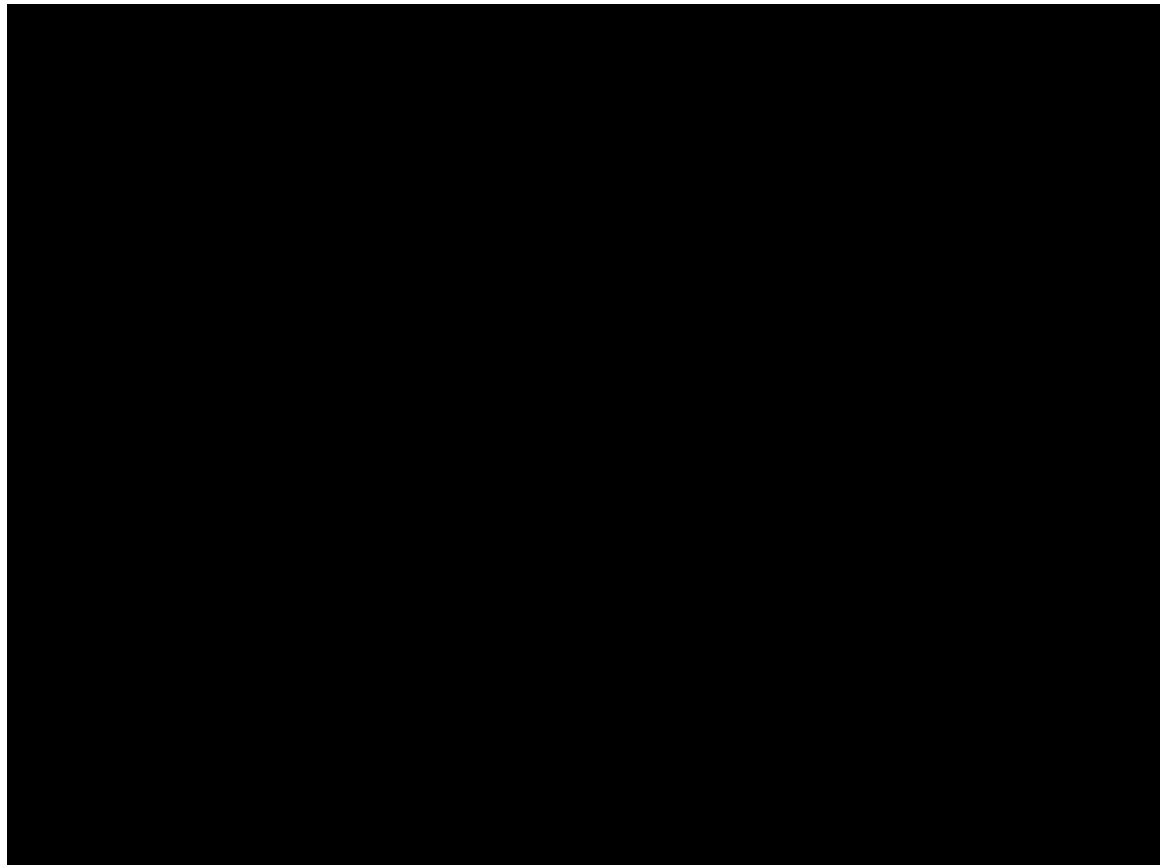


Figure 54 Jazz+Food+Art, Project New Orleans, <http://www.project-neworleans.org/publicbuilding/jazzfoodart1.html>

#### Commercial/Community/Connectivity/Celebration

This project is a thesis project by Moon Joon Lee in Spring 2006 at the University of Michigan. (fig. 55) It deals with the transit system through the Ninth Ward and proposes an elevated station and commercial center at the intersection of the Industrial Canal and North St. Claude Avenue, just over the bridge from the Lower Ninth Ward.<sup>28</sup> While this project is sensitive to the need for public transit in this neighborhood, the design and level

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<sup>28</sup> "Celebration" Project New Orleans <http://www.project-neworleans.org/publicbuilding/celebration1.html>



of elevation is out of scale for the neighborhood and does not seem to work with the culture of the community.

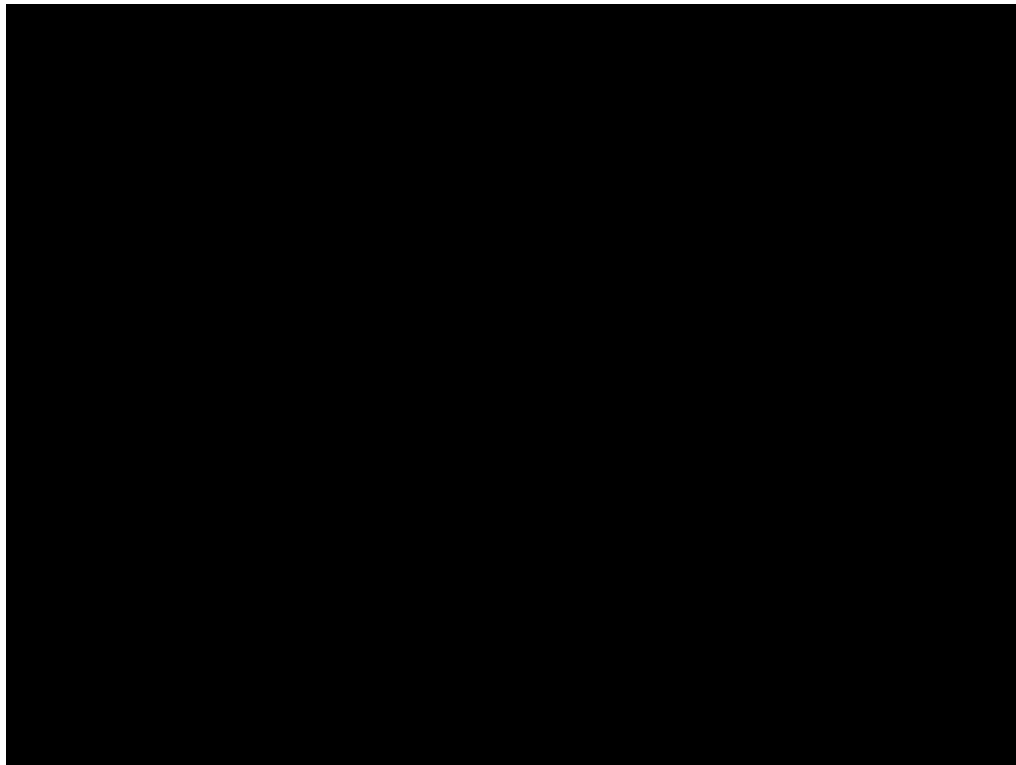


Figure 55 Proposed Elevated Transit, Project New Orleans, <http://www.project-neworleans.org/publicbuilding/celebration1.html>

### Activating the Levee

This project proposal was done by Miguel Lasala in Spring 2006 at University of Louisiana at Lafayette. (fig. 56) It proposes a community center and educational facility at the point of breach of the levee in the Lower Ninth Ward. Lasala proposes that by allowing the community to engage with the levee system, a greater understanding of how they are protected and how to prevent severe flooding in the future will occur. He proposed several workshops for hands-on design as well as a library, classrooms, and lecture spaces for the

community.<sup>29</sup> This project is interesting in that it attempts to engage a utilitarian mechanism that is supposed to protect the city with the people. It also makes excellent use of the area along the flood wall.

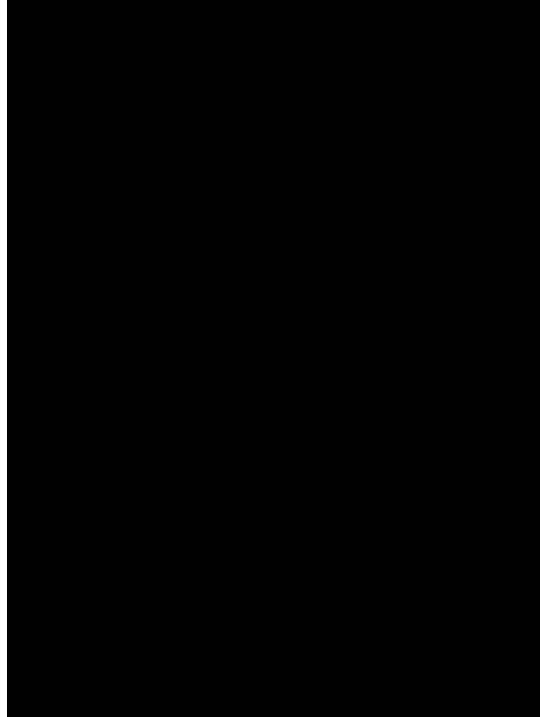


Figure 56 Activating the Levee, Project New Orleans <http://www.project-neworleans.org/floodinfrastructure/activatingthelevee1.html>

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<sup>29</sup> "Activating the Levee" Project New Orleans <http://www.project-neworleans.org/publicbuilding/activatingthelevee1.html>

## Chapter Five: Design Approach

The design approach initially taken is with the manner in which program can be implemented along the Claiborne Avenue corridor. Three schemes are proposed.

### Scheme One

Scheme One clusters all four programmatic elements in one area along and across Claiborne Avenue. (fig. 57) Located about halfway between the Claiborne Bridge and MLK Charter School, this cluster of market, bar, performance, and festival will engage the street in one concentrated area, allowing large gatherings in one place on the boulevard. The median in this part of the street will be heavily engaged and utilized, particularly for outdoor performances and celebrations. With such a strong concentration of program in one area, it may be difficult for future developments along Claiborne to take place, but the initial boom in activity on Claiborne will be beneficial to the renewal of the community.

### Scheme Two

Scheme Two stretches out the clusters of Scheme One into a progression of clustered program all along Claiborne Avenue. (fig. 58) This will allow pockets of concentration and speaks to the progressive nature of parade culture down the street. It also allows for multiple places with more than one programmatic element, so there is no space that is completely underdeveloped and isolated.

### Scheme Three

Scheme Three is the most dispersed allocation of programmatic elements along Claiborne Avenue. (fig. 59) Each element stands alone and there is an even distribution of interventions that will encourage more development along the entire corridor. The disadvantage of this scheme is that there is no concentration of public event since every element is scattered, but it will inspire more development later on.



Figure 57 Scheme One, author



Figure 58 Scheme Two, author

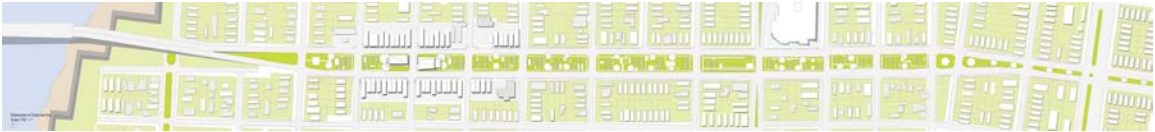




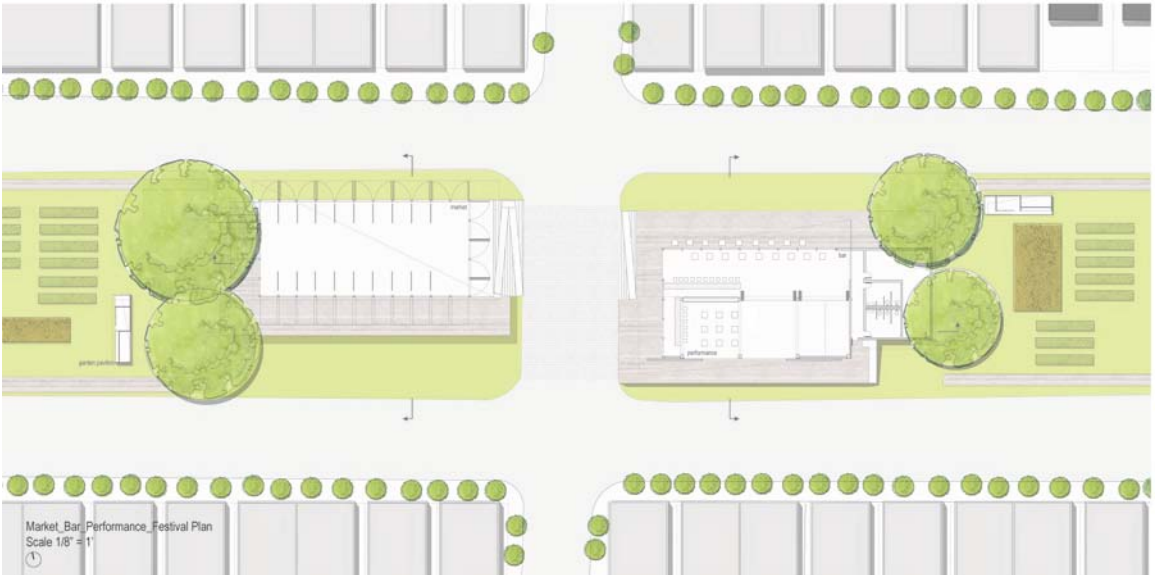
Figure 59 Scheme Three, author

**Chapter Six: Final Design Proposal**

The final design proposal concentrates on the neutral ground and the six block commercially zoned district along Claiborne Avenue. (fig. 60) The main design intervention, that of the market, bar, performance, and festival space is cited on the neutral ground, split into two facing structures across Forstall Street. The program is split: the market space is located on the western edge of Forstall, with the bar and performance space combined in the facing structure. Festival space can occur throughout both structures, but the two buildings create a more privatized and pedestrian street zone between them that can be shut off to vehicular traffic. (figs. 61-64)



**Figure 60 Master plan of Claiborne Avenue, author**



**Figure 61 Plan of Market Bar Performance Festival, author**



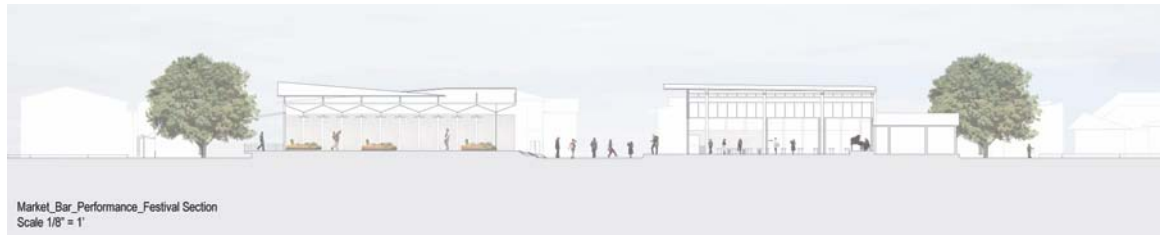


Figure 62 Longitudinal Section Through Market Bar Performance Festival, author



Figure 63 Aerial Perspective of Market Bar Performance Festival and Urban Farms, author



Festival Street

Figure 64 Exterior Perspective of Festival Street flanked by Market (right) and Bar/Performance (Left), author

### Market Bar Performance Festival

The market building and the bar/performance space have the same basic structural system of concrete slab with light frame steel structure, as well as a similar proportional system akin to New Orleans vernacular. They are long and narrow buildings (40 feet by 100'), raised slightly off of the ground with porch-like spaces wrapping around the sides for leisure. The market building is raised 3 feet in order to allow trucks to pull right up to the market stalls and essentially sell produce right off their truck. (fig. 65) The bar/performance space is raised 18 inches to complement the market building but also to work with drainage issues in the neutral ground. Also, both structures function like pavilions in that they can totally open to the elements and blur the boundary between them and the street.

This allows for a fluidity of place and an animation of street life when these businesses are open. (fig. 66)



Figure 65 Section Through Market Building, author

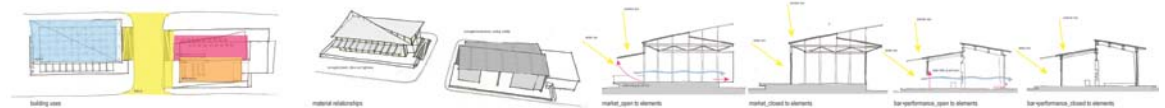


Figure 66 Diagrams of Market Bar Performance Festival, author

While both buildings have a similar language, these two buildings are very different. The market building has a space frame structural support to allow for a dynamic fabric room sliced diagonally across the roofline. This split roof allows for rainwater to be dispersed on both sides of the building, hot air to escape, and northern light to seep into the space. The fabric roof functions well in the tropical climate and it can be removed in the event of another disastrous hurricane; allowing minimal damage to occur since the building's concrete and steel structure would most likely be able to withstand a heavy storm. Corrugated plastic doors encase the structure on all sides, either swinging out or up to open. The dimension of these doors also defines the space of the market stalls, which are organized on the north and south sides, creating an indoor street common in most

marketplaces. Lighting exists between the space frame and the fabric roof, illuminating the space on the interior and exterior, creating a beacon in the landscape of the neighborhood.

Fans to keep air moving also hang off of the space frame. (fig.67)



Figure 67 Interior of Market, author

The exterior porch of the market can function as an auxiliary marketplace on the south side, but the walkway also brings visitors around to the back side of the building, where a small outdoor café can function during market hours. This space is shaded by the doors of the marketplace that swing up to form awnings, but also by two huge trees already existing in the neutral ground.

The bar/performance space has a less ephemeral quality than the market because of a need for a more secure space. The steel structure is complemented by a corrugated metal roof and panel system that slides up and to the side. Along the north side, these metal panels slide in a vertical fashion similar to a pocket door or double-hung window. (fig. 68) This allows for the entire bar space to open up and create a seamlessness between the interior space and the outdoor porch. The west and south facing elevations have larger doors that slide side to side on exterior tracks, allowing for some privacy in the performance space.



Figure 68 Section through Bar/Performance, author

The building is divided into two spaces that can totally open or close to each other. The main bar space is located along the north side. Upon entry from Forstall Street, directly across from the market entry, visitors are greeted by a 30 foot long bar along the right side constructed of bricks from the Blue Gardenia bar, formally located just down the street. (fig.69) The brick masonry bar provides insulation for drinks stored inside the unconditioned building, as well as provides a symbol and memory of the former Lower Ninth Ward Institution in a new form. Beyond the bar, accordion doors can open or close to



allow access to the performance space. Inside the performance space, another bar is located closer to the west side, and a stage at the east end allows for plenty of room for dancing and socializing in between. (fig. 70) The performance space can also open up to the west and south side porches so people along the street can partake in the festivities.



Bar

Figure 69 Interior of Bar, author



Figure 70 Interior of Performance, author

Both the market and bar/performance spaces are designed to work with one another and encourage activity and festival activities inside their structures as well as the surrounding streets. Both buildings can be used for different events at any time of day, including parade stops, Social Aid and Pleasure Club meetings, and general leisure and social engagement. These spaces are intended to serve as a centralized place for community life in the Lower Ninth Ward that encourages residents and former residents to come together and celebrate in the same spirit that existed before Hurricane Katrina.

### Neutral Ground Urban Farming

To complement the market and bar/performance structures, urban farming plots are allocated down the entire length of the neutral ground. (fig. 71) These spaces are designed for members of the community to farm together in a public setting. The plots are organized into smaller clusters throughout, each with a storage structure that can provide some shade and relief from the sun, as well as house a water cistern for rain water collection, and a place to compost.

To supplement these farm spaces, walkways stagger down the length of the neutral ground. Currently, the neutral ground is all grass with some large trees placed sporadically throughout. These trees provide wonderful shade and create a place that is generally pleasant to be, except for the lack of places to walk and sit. These walkways and seating areas would invite members of the community to occupy and activate the neutral ground down the full length of Claiborne Avenue.





Figure 71 Urban Farming and Walkways, author

### Live/Work Guidelines

This major design intervention along the neutral ground is complemented by two sets of guidelines for rebuilding in the Lower Ninth Ward. The first deals with the 6 blocks of commercial zoning on Claiborne. Guidelines are provided for two story live/work units to bring back the commercial infrastructure presently lacking in the neighborhood. (fig.72)

These guidelines focus on keeping with the tradition of New Orleans vernacular without prescribing a specific aesthetic. Each parcel is 30 feet by 120 feet with a 10 foot alley in the back for vehicular access. Units should be 24 feet wide and 70-85 feet long. Corner units may extend as far as 100 feet. A double unit is allowed at 48 feet wide, but all

building edges must be 3 feet from the property line in order to create a 6 foot building separation. This is in keeping with the New Orleans tendency to have detached commercial units but with minimal spacing. Units should be no taller than 30 feet and the ground floor must have at least a 12 foot floor to floor height.

In terms of program, at least 50% of the ground floor must be for the work element. The live unit can use the remainder of the ground floor, but there must be livable space on the second floor in order to avoid the risk of flooding in the whole dwelling unit. In order to keep the tradition of an active street life, the ground floor must be able to open to the street in some way. This can encourage a blending of interior and exterior, as well as a more vibrant and active neighborhood. This also works well with cross ventilation strategies.

These units are meant to be designed by several different architects and a variety of aesthetic is encouraged in order to create a dynamic, but relatable architecture.



Live\_Work Prototype Guidelines  
 Scale 1/32" = 1'

Figure 72 Live/Work Guidelines, author

## Housing Guidelines

Housing is a sensitive issue in the Lower Ninth Ward because 85% of residents own their home. To keep with the idea that this intervention deals primarily in the public realm and residents should be allowed to build what they want on their land the most minimal guidelines are proposed. (fig.73)



Figure 73 Housing Guidelines, author

In order to work with housing that is already rebuilt, a setback of 15 feet is allocated. This will minimize the chance of arbitrary block setbacks and help streets appear more cohesive. Similarly, houses should be spaced evenly as well. Parcel size is already set since most of the land is owned by families, so the close spacing should occur on its own.

Homes should also have front porches that are close to street level. That said, if someone chooses to raise their home to avoid flooding, they should have a porch structure closer to the ground plane so social engagement with the street can still occur. Finally, houses should be proportional in height in terms of raising them from the ground plane. If a house is raised 10 feet, it should not have two levels. This will cause illegibility in the neighborhood and a lack of cohesion. In contrast, suggest houses should be raised at least 3 to 5 feet.

These guidelines are purposefully minimal in order to allow the owner to build the home they would like to live in and are not meant to impose a particular aesthetic in the private realm.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The public presentation of the thesis raised many valuable comments from the jury and faculty, but many important questions were avoided. Most of the discussion seemed to center around the farming plots to the point where it seemed to overshadow the real meaning behind the project. There was little to no discussion of the main focus of the project—the market and bar/performance buildings. However, there was a theoretical discussion about the importance of the progression down the boulevard and questions were raised as to whether more pavilions or more ample seating was needed further down Claiborne.

The discussion may have steered itself in a different direction with the presence of two other drawings: a night rendering of the market and bar space at Forstall Street, and diagrams that display use of these spaces at different times of day. The idea of the market building as a glowing beacon in the landscape did not manifest itself visually, and the idea of flexibility in the spaces may have been lost on the jury. Given more time, more work would be put into the live/work guidelines, and a design charrette with several architects and students to design as many of these prototypes as possible would be ideal.

In light of comments received throughout the past year and with the jury at the public defense, the theoretical problem underlying the thesis is still a relevant and important one. How we rebuild our cities in the wake of disaster or destruction is a problem grappled with all over the world. An architecture that is culturally relevant to the local vernacular, yet not necessarily a direct replica of historic aesthetic proves to be an appropriate solution in

these situations. Also, the case of the Lower Ninth Ward has shown that the will of the people is the most important aspect of community building. Housing cannot create a neighborhood on its own, but ample resources and response are necessary to even begin the process. Although a new master plan for the entire city of New Orleans was released in November that allocates a commercial district for the specific site selected on Claiborne, no specificity as to what kind of intervention will reside there. The process of researching the culture and way of life in the Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans yielded a program for a different kind of community center; one that is specific to the neighborhood and the people who call it home.

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