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**The Charging of the Flood:**

**A Cultural Analysis of the Impact and Recovery from Hurricane Ike in Galveston, Texas**

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**The Charging of the Flood:**  
**A Cultural Analysis of the Impact and Recovery from Hurricane Ike in**  
**Galveston, Texas**

By:

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**Dissertation**

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This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and father,  
Carol Getek Lord and Jerry Lord, Sr.

The completion of this project would not have been possible without them.

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## Chapter One:

### **The Gathering Tides: an introduction to Hurricane Ike & Galveston Island**

*“All neighborhoods and possibly entire coastal communities will be inundated during the period of peak storm tide. Persons not heeding evacuation orders in single-family one or two-story homes may face certain death.” –National Weather Service, 9/11/08*

*“You’re not coming in today.”—Carrie.*

She didn’t have to tell me. I heard the night before that the mayor would make the formal announcement in the morning. I was fortunate for that head start to begin packing the more valued contents of my spartan, one-story apartment near the eastern tip of Galveston Island for an unexpected and indefinite return to Austin. As I hustled through my belongings, family members called on the telephone and friends texted with unanimity of message: get out. A dissertation study regarding coastal real estate development and the cultural parameters of risk assessment due to natural disaster was about to change dramatically into a far more educational experience of risk and disaster. Even if I hadn’t heard by that Thursday morning, I could tell by the look in Carrie’s eyes—innervated but composed, scared and sincere—that Mayor Lyda Ann Thomas had just ordered the mandatory evacuation most Galvestonians hoped to avoid. After Hurricane Ike had incubated for several days in the bath-warm, late-summer waters of the Gulf of Mexico, the National Weather Service forecasted that the storm’s most likely path led it directly to Galveston.

Meteorological authorities were now indicating with increasing assurance that Ike would track north of Freeport, where they had thought it would go earlier in the week, and directly towards Galveston Island. They also forewarned of a particularly ominous storm due to the sheer size that belied the moderate intensity of its winds. As it churned

in the gulf, Hurricane Ike spanned 700 miles with a 115-mile bandwidth of hurricane-force winds spreading out from the eye<sup>1</sup>. Ike literally filled the Gulf of Mexico after it passed just north of Haiti—killing scores—and thrashed directly across Cuba. On September 4, the storm registered as a Category-4 storm<sup>2</sup> on the Saffir-Simpson scale, before weakening to a strong Category-2 at landfall with wind gusts of 110mph. The size of the storm combined with the shallow, gentle continental shelf below the water caused this Category-2 windstorm to produce a nearly Category-5 storm surge of floodwaters. It would also spawn a local back-talking t-shirt: “Category-2, my hiney!” Hurricane Ike was a very peculiar storm. And it was about to smash into a very idiosyncratic place that has bore the brunt of tropical destruction man times over.

This was the second mandatory evacuation in three years that Mayor Thomas ordered for the approximately 57,000 residents of this barrier island forty miles south of Houston. More people heeded the evacuation order for Rita, for better and for worse. The circumstances were much different last time. Three weeks after Hurricane Katrina drowned New Orleans, Galveston had expected to take a direct hit from Hurricane Rita. The storm eventually made landfall as a Category-3 windstorm after it had charged erratically through the gulf as a “Cat-5” leviathan. Instead of hitting the island, Rita weakened as it turned east to strike the Beaumont-Port Arthur industrial metroplex along the Texas-Louisiana border. While Galveston received ancillary weather damage from Rita’s wind and heavy rain, the evacuation off of the island was much more horrendous. City officials and the *Galveston County Daily News* corroborated an estimate that 90% of Galveston’s residents complied with the order; a rather staggering proportion given the

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<sup>1</sup> Upon landfall, the diameter of Hurricane Katrina measured approximately 415m, although packing much stronger sustained winds.

<sup>2</sup> Ike’s sustained winds peaked at approximately 145mph on September 4<sup>th</sup>.

city's hurricane past and the stubborn disposition with which than many of the residents—particularly the BOIs<sup>3</sup>—engage with such storms.

The prospect of another mass evacuation passing through the fourth-largest American city was of course disconcerting for city officials, emergency response personnel, and everyday residents. In 2005, the evacuation of some 3.5 million people through the Houston metroplex caused traffic jams of over 24 hours for drives that usually were only one or two hours in duration. More people died as a result of complications during the Rita evacuation than during the storm<sup>4</sup>. The specters of Rita kept many more people on the island in September 2008 despite the dire hyperbole of public officials. Michael Chertoff, then the head of the Department of Homeland Security, urged residents in the large impact zone along the Gulf to not succumb to “hurricane fatigue,” adding, “Unless you are fatigued with living, I suggest you take seriously a storm of this size and scale.”<sup>5</sup> Then-Houston Mayor Bill White said in regards to those who had planned to ride out the storm in mandatory evacuation zones: “If you’re thinking you want to ride something out, and people are talking about a 20 foot wall of water coming at you, then you better think again.” However, as of Wednesday, September 9, only the lower-lying areas of Harris County<sup>6</sup> that were vulnerable to the surge of floodwater from Galveston Bay were subject to a mandatory evacuation. All

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<sup>3</sup> “BOI” stands for “Born on Island,” it is a ubiquitous signifier that at once stakes claim to cultural indigenouness, authenticity, and authority. I will articulate its role in the social process of recovery throughout the text.

<sup>4</sup> The National Hurricane Center reported seven “direct” deaths attributed the storm, while 55 people died in Texas due to automobile accidents, carbon-monoxide poisonings, and heat-related conditions. [http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/pdf/TCR-AL182005\\_Rita.pdf](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/pdf/TCR-AL182005_Rita.pdf), p.8.

<sup>5</sup> From remarks made on 9/11/08 at FEMA headquarters: [http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr\\_1221176047638.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr_1221176047638.shtm)

<sup>6</sup> Harris County is comprised almost entirely by the City of Houston and its exurban jurisdictions.

other residents were urged to remain in place to help alleviate the expected traffic congestion.

Early in the week it seemed like Galveston might dodge another major hurricane. The demeanors of people with whom I spoke reflected as such. There was the gentleman from Alberta, Canada who had recently arrived in Galveston for several months of consulting work. On the Tuesday before the storm, as a few of us speculated on the projected path of the storm while standing around the cash register at the Mod coffee house, he interjected with an earnest Canadian droll, “I think it’s going south, but isn’t this *exciting*?!” “I don’t know, man. Maybe,” I replied with a hint of consternation. I never saw him again after the storm. Just two months before Ike, Tropical Storm Eduardo brought several inches of rain and 50mph winds to the island, but it was much less severe than had initially been predicted<sup>7</sup>. The day before Eduardo landed I had been required by Texas A&M-Galveston to sign a waiver in the event of my demise declaring I had made the decision to stay. I had considered staying to ride out this impending storm. It seemed to me a proper response at the time. I reasoned that the storm was still *only* a Category-2 and, surely, a modicum of intrepid foolishness was appropriate while anticipating an immanent ethnographic rite of passage. However, the visceral tinge of wearing the “dangerous looseness of doom” that the poet, E.E. Cummings found so becoming didn’t last long. The situation changed on Wednesday afternoon as the storm suddenly turned northward. The decision was now out of my control. I started to get nervous.

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<sup>7</sup> Despite the sporadic loss of power and localized flooding that accompanies heavy rain anyhow, the effects of Eduardo were underwhelming. It was later described before Ike as a “dress rehearsal” for emergency response standby.

On Wednesday afternoon, John Sealy Hospital at the University of Texas Medical Branch began evacuating its most critical patients to Austin. By that point my landlords who owned and operated the row of four concrete block apartments adjacent to UTMB were taking this storm seriously. When I signed my lease the previous month, Jay and his octogenarian mother, two B.O.I.s who lived together on the same premises, stated their rationalist assessment that they did not evacuate for storms “less than a Category 3.” As he spoke with me about the threat of a hurricane, his eyes beamed with a reservoir of pride stored up from previous hurricane experiences. Jay told me how he and his father built the front house and the back apartments soon after Carla. It survived Hurricane Alicia in 1983 with little structural damage. It could easily handle 135mph winds, he told me with a tone of prideful assurance. My apartment was located in proximity to UTMB in an area built-out in the post-war years with one-story ranch homes and cottages; ostensibly workforce housing for the City and Galveston County’s largest employer. Because he worked at the hospital, Jay had heard that the mandatory evacuation was forthcoming. He anticipated a powerful storm despite the category-two designation. So they decided on Wednesday to board up their front house and the four apartments in back and evacuate to Austin.

I was supposed to continue the following morning with my job training as a part-time barista at Mod Coffeehouse, a popular establishment in “historic downtown” that was housed inside the Pix Building on the corner of Post Office and 23<sup>rd</sup>. It was one of scores of buildings in Galveston commemorated with a placard for withstanding the Great 1900 Storm. The “1900 Storm” remains the deadliest natural disaster in American history after it killed approximately 10,000 people and irrevocably halted the growth of a

port-city once referred to as “Wall Street of the Southwest.” It also prompted the construction of the city seawall on the gulf-side of the island. On Wednesday night, I had packed the belongings that I valued the most into the rafters of my walk-in closet—mostly books, a bike, and a TV—and took my clothes, my computer, and guitar with me. I drove down just to check-in at Mod on Thursday morning. When I got there, Carrie and Angela were busy moving all the tables and chairs to the upstairs portion where the office and additional customer seating were located. I hung around for several minutes asking questions about where our mutual acquaintances were going while helping to move the heavier tables. Carrie didn’t know if she and her then-boyfriend were going to be able to leave in time. There was too much to do with too little time. Fortunately, the house they rented was located behind the seawall, which was advantageous because the island slopes downward from Seawall Boulevard. Though at the time that wasn’t much solace. She downplayed the on-coming threat but she looked palpably nervous. People were moving quickly, inside and out in the street. The threat to the island didn’t intensify into collective attention until at least Wednesday. The street scenes reflected that change in Galvestonian’s demeanors. After a few minutes, Angela started to clean out the display cooler that stored beer and bistro food. Customary of her good will and the practical need to get rid of food that was likely to spoil, she put together a wicker-basket of food for me to take for my drive to Austin: summer sausage, pasta salad, and a few bottles of beer for later.<sup>8</sup> I just had to promise to bring back the basket, which I did the next May when Mod finally reopened after taking-in several feet of floodwater.

The signs of an impending emergency were ubiquitous that morning. The scenes were kinetic wherever I drove. There was the sound of dispatching helicopters off of the

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UTMB helipad and the deployment of armored military vehicles onto the streets; the frenetic pace of men and women boarding up windows of their downtown businesses. There were librarians and staff leaving quickly from the ground-floor exit of Rosenberg Library<sup>9</sup>. There were the gathering lines of cars two-three-four-deep at the gas stations—some were already out of fuel—as anxious, though orderly drivers filled up their tanks to venture into an uncertain future. I listened to anxious commentary on the radio concerning the latest projected path of this mammoth storm. On the local Houston public radio station, the deejay talked about the potentially catastrophic effects if the metroplex ended up on the “dirty side of the storm”<sup>10</sup> where the strongest winds could shoot a massive surge of water up the Houston Ship Channel to the petrochemical industries surrounding Galveston Bay. Signals of ominous excitement seemed everywhere and the levity of gallows humor somewhere. As the proprietors of Club 21 boarded up their windows outside of the “historic,” magisterial St. Germaine building on Post Office St., they recited lines to one another from the film *Back to the Future*. I completed one of the lines from the movie that was eluding their collective recollection as I got in my truck to leave<sup>11</sup>. This generated a quick laugh that we all seemed to need. I yelled out of my truck, “good luck!” (It took them a full year to reopen). My intended gesture of goodwill seemed to throw them off. After a couple seconds of silence, one of guys uttered back with much less enthusiasm, “Be safe.” Although I didn’t realize it at the time, this fleeting moment of ambiguous commonality portended much greater ones after the storm. With that, I was on the road about to begin a—fortunately uneventful— 7½-hour drive to

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<sup>9</sup> The basement level of Rosenberg Library that housed the children’s collection has still not reopened after taking in seven feet of floodwater.

<sup>10</sup> “Dirty side of the storm” refers to the NE quadrant of a hurricane where the winds and rain are strongest

<sup>11</sup> “Chuck! Chuck! It’s your cousin, Marvin. Marvin *Berry*. Yeah, you know that new sound you been lookin’ for? Well, listen to this!”

Austin that normally would take less than four hours. I gained momentum on TX-71 but drove with a steering wheel that began shaking at 68mph due to a loose front tire axle and a burgeoning awareness of how the storm exacerbates pre-existing vulnerabilities.

At 2am, Saturday, September 12, 2008, I watched local Houston television coverage safely in the living room of Ken and Rachel's apartment in Austin as Hurricane Ike passed over the east end of Galveston. Nascent multi-sited field research on risk perception and real estate development along the upper Texas Coast had just irreparably changed, as the hurricane proceeded to inundate 75% of the island with over 13ft of storm surge that surged backward from Galveston Bay. Without inflation adjustments, Hurricane Ike qualified as the third-costliest natural disaster in American history, behind only Hurricanes Andrew and Katrina. Less than a week later, Lehman Brothers collapsed, thus setting off the stock market and soon the national economy into an anxious, delirious freefall. At that point, most evacuated Galvestonians still couldn't return to a devastated island. While the mold festered.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This is a multi-sited ethnography that uses a selection of keywords (Williams 1976) as conceptual threads to articulate the social, economic, and historical dynamics of "disaster culture" (Moore 1963, 1964) and long-term recovery after Hurricane Ike in Galveston, Texas. The research findings that I present are based on 20 months of fieldwork conducted between August 2008 and March 2010. The qualitative data I collected are further supplemented by relevant information gleaned as I remained on the island for the writing process. I returned to Galveston two weeks after the storm and garnered IRB approval for a reconstituted project in November. Prior to the storm, I

worked under the IRB protocol of a summer 2008 research project concerning economic development and the state of commercial fisheries in Galveston and several other locales along the western edge of Galveston Bay. This was undertaken through the Houston Advanced Research Center as part of a summer-long internship that was extended post-Ike through the end of 2008. I have received permission from the primary investigators to use the data for this study. I collected my data through participant observation at over 100 public meetings. These venues included but were not limited to the Galveston City Council; the Galveston Long Term Recovery Committee; Galveston County Restore and Rebuild (“GCRR”), the Galveston Housing Authority (“GHA”), the Galveston Housing Outreach Committee, as well as assortment of other town hall meetings and public forums. More limited attendance at the meetings of the East End Historical District, the Northside Galveston Taskforce, and the Galveston County Coalition for Justice also yielded perspective on cultural frames of reference that underpinned post-storm advocacy and informed residents’ political engagements over a variety of recovery topics.

I conducted formal and semi-structured interviewing with both institutional actors and Galveston residents whom I solicited through a guest column in the *Galveston County Daily News* and through snowball sampling. I also engaged in numerous informal conversations that were converted into field notes after the fact. I utilized local news media sources such as news video clips from television and the Internet, newspaper reports, blogs, and official organizational websites. Websites for entities such as the National Weather Service, the City of Galveston government, the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) and the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) provided me with statistical information and technical reports on the distribution of

storm damages. I also conducted archival research at the Center for Texas History at Rosenberg Library, which yielded a particularly rich collection of local historical sources on past hurricanes and an anthropological dissertation completed by Dr. Terri Castaneda in 1993 on the growth of Galveston's historical preservation industry.

While this is an explicitly multi-sited ethnography situated in relation to a growing body of comparable anthropological literature, I note that it is primarily focused on this spatially circumscribed island-city that is located due south of a greater Houston metroplex also affected by the hurricane. An initial lack of funding in the context of a national financial crisis limited the ability to conduct sustained fieldwork throughout affected areas of Galveston, Harris, and Chambers counties around Galveston Bay. However, research work with the Houston Advanced Research Center was temporarily extended from late September through December 2008 and this allowed for several trips along the eastern shore of Galveston Bay to the badly damaged commercial finishing enclave of San Leon, as well as two adjacent enclaves of Kemah and Seabrook that also sustained pervasive storm damage due to their bayside location. Further, attendance at meetings of Galveston County Restore and Rebuild in La Marque, TX provided insight into the on-the-ground disaster responses occurring in the Galveston County. This provided a generalized frame of comparative reference to how the storm damaged the Houston-Galveston metroplex along Galveston Bay, which in turn provides ancillary assistance for comprehending the scope of Hurricane Ike's damage. I did not conduct any field research in the devastated Bolivar Peninsula, just to the northeast of Galveston.

Galveston Island is 32-miles long and approximately two-miles wide. Its urban core is consolidated roughly between 6<sup>th</sup> and 103<sup>rd</sup> streets. I conducted limited research

in the affluent, often second-home subdivisions throughout the “West End” beyond 103<sup>rd</sup> street<sup>12</sup>. This research occurred mostly in form of damage surveying and attendance at several recovery meetings. My perspective on West End socio-political engagements to a broader municipal recovery was aided by attendance at City Council meetings, where a recurring contingent of West End residents attended regularly. West End attendance increased exponentially in relation to issues such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s “Hazard Mitigation Buyout Program,” beach renourishment, and post-storm setback easements that mark the distinction between public beach and private property.

### *Theoretical framework*

The theoretical framework builds off the multi-sited epistemology developed by George Marcus (1986, 1995; Marcus and Holmes 2005). Marcus’s methodology of “tracking” an object or phenomenon to apprehend the dynamics of emergent “world systems” has been both directly and indirectly supported through Michael Fischer (1999, 2003) as well as their respective doctoral students (Fortun 2001, Rajan 2006) and fellow colleagues in American anthropology. These scholars all contribute perspective to an unanticipated study that necessitated peripatetic movement between many locales to comprehend the profound social effects of the storm. For example, the decision to invoke “keywords” was influenced by Marcus’ suggestion of “tracking the concept.” I will briefly survey this body of literature below. I will then introduce my “keywords,” while also introducing the late University of Texas sociologist H.E. Moore and his study of

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<sup>12</sup> The “West End” is a fluid concept that has changed over time as human development has expanded westward during the past 50 years. The “Near West End” typically refers to the area between 61<sup>st</sup> and 103<sup>rd</sup> St, which was built out from the 1970s through the contemporary moment. The “West End” proper now typically connotes space beyond 103<sup>rd</sup> St, where Seawall Boulevard becomes state highway 3005, beyond the protection of seawall. The West End encompasses the wealthiest of the six census tracts on Galveston and also includes the incorporated enclave of Jamaica Beach.

disaster sociology along the upper Texas Coast—including Galveston—following Hurricane Carla in 1961. It was to Dr. Moore’s archives in the UT Center for American History that I first turned after the evacuation as I struggled to make sense of a suddenly inchoate research project. His archives remain instructive to understand both Galveston and human responses to disaster more generally.

Marcus & Fischer both emphasized a need for an ethnographic reorientation that focused on the systemic continuities that asymmetrically link dispersed sites and domains of everyday practice. As Marcus proposed that ethnographers focus on understanding relationships, translations, and associations that link disparate sites, Fisher suggested multi-sited textual strategies that include the generation of narrative based on witnessed effects of “simultaneity; multiple, blindly, interconnected locales that are linked by intended and unintended consequences of actions” (1999: 92). The goal is to identify a feature of a macro-system or institution and to provide an ethnographic account of it to show the local forms of life that the “system” encompasses and then translate them into “more fully human terms” (*Ibid*). I attempt to do as much throughout this ethnography by rendering recovery dynamics in “more fully human terms,” with the aid of keywords. Fischer’s recent work (2009), also frames this ethnography insofar as I was influenced by his “Geertzian,” post-Katrina assessment of the “deep play” attendant to catastrophic events in which “associated political contestations” become sites where “dynamically an increasing number of meaning structures implode or intersect and where society dramatizes to itself the meaning of its own representations about the moral order” (119). In particular, public planning for Galveston’s long-term redevelopment produced sites of ethical and pragmatic deliberation in which the demographic foundation of its social

order was explicitly discussed, interpreted, and considered viable for strategic manipulation through recovery projects.

Speaking with actors in recovery-oriented institutions demonstrated the importance of what Marcus called a “para-ethnographic” framework (Marcus and Holmes 2005). “Para-ethnography” is understood as an analytical bridge between “thick” and “thin” data (35) that involves studying the culture work that actors invest in numerical or anecdotal data to endow meaningful social relevance. It might also reflect the crossing of meaning structures to which Fischer referred since my ethnographic knowledge crossed and sometimes conflicted with the social assessments of my interlocutors. More broadly, para-ethnographic frames are said to “open up the way for realigning the relationship between ethnography and political economy” (35) by forming an interpretive space for engaging the culturally mediated ‘personal’ logics that animate heretofore objective policy decisions (36). Marcus and Holmes (2005) argue for the relevancy of para-ethnography not “merely as an aspect of expert practice” that one studies, but also because it is “inlaid in the architecture of a future-oriented contemporary” (38). Para-ethnographic frames of reference helped reveal cultural dimensions to supposedly impersonal decisions on post-storm resource distribution, as well as the specific practices of advocacy imbricated in the distribution.

Other examples of multi-sited ethnography that reaffirmed my ethnographic purview include Rajan’s (2006) *Biocapital: the Constitution of Post-genomic Life*, which explicitly extended the Marcus-Fischer methodology between the United States and India to track the rise of “biocapital” as an ascendant sector of a global political-economic system following the successful mapping of the human genome. Rajan adopted Marcus’s

disposition towards a multi-sited ethnographic framework to follow peripatetically moving objects through culturally mediated governmental, corporate, and research networks. Tsing (2005) used broad metaphors of “prosperity,” “knowledge,” and “freedom” to interrogate the “frictions” caused by “interconnections across differences,” in Kalimantan, Indonesia; i.e., the universalizing aspirations of global capital and market rationality, on the one hand, and the local, historically specific social conditions, on the other. She traced these frictions to elaborate the disastrous effects of practices of economic liberalization on local peoples and an increasingly deforested landscape despite the discourses of progress that often accompanied expropriating practices of natural resources. Hartigan (1999) and Jackson (2003) both used multi-sited approaches to track their informants through inner-city neighborhoods of Detroit and Harlem to demonstrate the contingent relationships of class—and the nuance of personal experiences—that inform the social purviews used in everyday negotiations of racialized urban space. Weismantle (2001) tracked the social lives of *cholas* and *pishtacos* across Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador to show how these “unreal figures hover over [Andean] social life, distorting actual social relations between people” (xxii) in the context of capital accumulation, market exchange, and interpersonal estrangement. Bestor (2001) moved between the U.S. and Japan to follow the systemic, “provisioning relationships” that forge the production and trade networks that bring North Atlantic tuna to Japanese consumers. Moreover, Petryna (2003) conducted fieldwork in hospitals, clinics, and governmental offices in post-Communist Ukraine to track how biology, scientific knowledge, and suffering have become “cultural resources through which citizens stake their claim for social equity in a harsh market transition” (4), thereby providing an “historical and

ethnographic account of rational-technical administrations of Chernobyl's aftermath" (5). Each of these ethnographies provide models for using concepts, objects, and/or figures for elaborating systemic forces that inform and exceed the social field under study.

Kim Fortun's (2001) innovative multi-sited ethnography, *Advocacy after Bhopal*, about the 1984 Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, India and its transnational aftermath provided a comparable model for studying post-Ike Galveston. Several concepts recurred in her narrative that are especially relevant to study post-Ike Galveston. Galvestonian advocates also grappled with "double binds," and "ethical plateaus" that complicated the supposed post-storm "unity" that politicians and boosters exhorted of fellow residents as "shifting world order" was drawn into view due to the hurricane and the onset of the financial crisis. Moreover, in discussing post-Bhopal advocacy, Fortun distinguished "enunciatory communities" from "stakeholders" to draw attention to the differentiations within collectivities that were enjoined in related debates over remediation and victim (sic) restitution. Fortun decided that "stakeholders" implied fixed interests and perceptions that belied what her field research impressed upon her: that stakeholder groups may often share the same interests but they do not necessarily think of those common interests in the same way, nor agree on the ends or means of advocacy practices. Thus she sought an alternative descriptor. This has resonance for a Galveston study because it draws one's attention to the provisional alliances of mutual interest that specifically emerged with post-disaster advocates while not losing focus of the internal differentiations of social values, tactics, and desired ends within supposed collectivities.

*Raymond Williams and “Keywords”*

The practice of post-disaster advocacy is only one aspect of “disaster culture” and post-storm recovery that are conceptualized and elaborated through the four major keywords that recur throughout the text: vulnerability, resilience, dreamworld, and catastrophe. I chose them based on data collected during fieldwork. The inchoate character of my initial data collection necessitated concepts that could efficiently render diverse recovery dynamics intelligible in a common idiom. Additionally, informants, advocates, and testimonial deliverers often utilized several other terms during workshops and public forums that were laden with cultural interpretation. For example, “sustainability,” “affordability,” “middle-class,” “green building,” were concepts whose meanings and applicability were deliberated upon on their own, but which can also be applied under main aegis of the four keywords. Different keywords factor more prominently in different chapters for explicating issues that were central to community-level debate concerning particular issues. Additionally, the chapter on the rebuilding of public housing takes its analytical cues from the work of Stanford-based anthropologists George and Marie Spindler on the “American Culture Dialogue.” I will explain that concept and its referential terms in more detail.

Williams maintained an emphasis on identifying interconnections of his keywords for the purpose of cultural analysis. Despite the alphabetical, dictionary-style presentation, Williams was much more concerned with the internal polyphony within keywords as an index of social and historical processes:

“The most active problems of meaning are always primarily embedded in actual relationships...and both the meanings and the relationships are typically diverse and variable, within the structures of particular social orders and the processes of social and historical change” (1976: 22).

It was useful for this ethnographic endeavor to pick out certain words of “an especially problematic kind, and to consider...their particular and relational meanings” (Ibid). The keywords aided an analysis that foregrounds the social and historical processes operating coterminous in the post-disaster scene that I witnessed. However, I proceed with an understanding that a haphazard rhetorical attempt to link domains of practice through an arbitrary assemblage of keywords could quickly reduce the scale of a myriad host of complex practical dilemmas to a blithe semantic problem.

*Keywords: Vulnerability and Resilience*

Vulnerability and resilience have a research genealogy in multiple disciplines. The analysis of vulnerability as a social phenomenon has a long tradition within cultural geography, especially when pertaining to questions of food security and famine (Adger 2000, Watts and Bohle, 1993). Social vulnerability is defined in that case as a “critical exposure of groups of people or individuals to stress as a result of the impacts of environmental change” (Adger 2000). However, I make a necessary rejoinder to this definition that the “critical exposure of groups” is the result of a man-made historical processes that should not be disassociated from social power, entrenched legacies of discrimination, and the political economy of resource acquisition. Such processes were implicated in Galveston though not totally determinant. Resilience has been adapted from engineering science and applied to social and ecological research (Gunderson and Holling 2002; Gunderson and Pritchard 2002). It has been defined and deployed through a trope of homeostasis to signify the capacity of a system to return to an original state following the perturbations from external or internal stressors (Adger 2000). The concept has been extended theoretically and methodologically to socio-ecological and social

systems (Adger 2000; Gallopin 2006; and Holling 2001). Applications have also been made to the resiliency of coastal areas following disasters (Adger *et al* 2005). In cultural anthropology, Oliver-Smith and Hoffman have contributed to anthropological disaster studies literature while explicitly using the two concepts.

Vulnerability and resilience are ethnographic objects of study that have immediate meanings and functions, but also operate as key concepts that index broader aspects of disaster culture in Galveston. For example, “resiliency” indicates the means by which individual or household members have either returned to a state of “customary relative satisfaction of individual or social needs” that they were accustomed to prior to the storm (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2001:4), or that they feel they now have necessary resources available to meet the continuing everyday challenges of survival posed by the storm’s destruction. As a corollary, the study of resilience drew my attention to how particularly situated individuals related to the institutional authorities leading the recovery process, such as the Galveston city and county governments, FEMA, and non-profit/faith-based charitable organizations. Moreover, within local institutions, those entrusted with aiding the resilience of fellow Galvestonians were themselves coping with their storm-induced vulnerability. I focus more on elaborating some of the myriad processes of aiding resilience—interpersonal and institutional—rather than engaging in a social audit of who is, or is not, resilient after the storm. This focus is due in part to the inchoate conditions into which I inserted myself ethnographically. My inductive understandings accrued through long-term cultural immersion rather than through pre-planned standardized surveys and structured interviewing.

## *Dreamworlds and Catastrophe*

“Dreamworld” and “catastrophe” appeared together throughout Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* (2002). He also famously elucidated the latter term as the catastrophe of accumulated historical wreckage in, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940). Susan Buck-Morss further extrapolated these concepts (1991, 2000). In her book, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, she described her use of the concept not as a “poetic expression of a collective mental state” (2000: x) but as an analytic that tracks the “dreamworlds of modernity”—political, cultural, economic—that emerge as an expression of a utopian desire for social arrangements that transcend existing forms (*Ibid*). I invoke Benjamin sparingly throughout when elaborating on the social imaginaries animating long-term planning for Galveston; i.e., “dreamworlds” of recovery wherein enunciatory communities of Galvestonians initially evinced optimism for transcendent infrastructural change to create socio-urban arrangements that were more desirable than pre-Ike Galveston, and more robust in the face of future storms. I use the concluding chapter as a space to explicitly frame “dreamworlds” and “catastrophes” in relation to the ethnographic material.

Studies of Benjamin’s work proliferated following Buck-Morss’s seminal re-introduction (1991) of the *Passagenwerk* to English-speaking audiences. However, applications of his unfinished, allegorical, and often internally inconsistent theorizations of history and modernity have precluded many direct applications to ethnographic studies. However, there are several notable exceptions. M. Taussig has been a consistent invoker of Benjamin, directly and indirectly, through his ethnographic storytelling. I have read particular Benjaminian salience in his studies of sense faculties

(1991, 1992, 1993) that factor mimesis and alterity, as well tactility, distraction, and shock into his considerations of human optical (un) conscious<sup>13</sup>. K. Stewart (1997) invoked the specter of Benjamin through her empathetic identification with a “melancholic epistemology of loss” (93) that was allegorized through the encounters of history’s detritus that remained embedded in the physical landscape of West Virginia hollars. One recalls Benjamin’s “dialectics at a standstill,” as she showed how a particular place or object provoked lamentations of grief in moments of profane illumination when one connected these signifiers of a storied past with a present pain of loss in a “world got down.” Such Benjaminian invocations helped to demonstrate a broader local “cultural poetic” of “life in the hills” slowly abandoned with the loss of people and coal-mining industries (90-96). Klima (2003) charted the political effects of Thai Buddhist meditation practices that incorporated graphic images of corpses in a dialectic that linked deathly atrocities of the past to an empowering potential of contemporary vision. Moreover, a Benjaminian-influenced historical materialism informed Yoneyama’s (1999) *Hiroshima Traces*, wherein she sought to dislodge historical narratives of the nuclear bombing from a universalizing historicism that posits the necessity of nuclear carnage within a linear narrative of liberal-democratic triumphalism over fascist imperialisms (26-31).

Dreamworlds and catastrophe are conceptually deployed to frame an array of historical and contemporary socio-cultural arrangements that came to a standstill during a moment of danger: i.e., Hurricane Ike, and which informed the “critical moments” of

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<sup>13</sup> Moreover, his (2006) collection of essays traversed through Benjamin’s idiosyncratic life, tragic death, and ambiguous gravesite. Although I read this work as less of a direct application of Benjamin to a structured ethnographic scene than as an invocation of a kindred academic purview that has consistently transgressed conceptual boundaries and representational forms, dwelling more in the resonant moments of sensuous illumination experienced or witnessed, than in pondering the conceptual whole of a culture.

redevelopment decision-making that ensued. One can traverse back to before the 1900 storm to trace dialectics of dreamworlds and catastrophes. For example, although Galveston's landscape is shaped by inherently unstable environment conditions, it tempted the imaginations of late 19th century speculators and engineers who sought to establish it as a world-class "global city" due to its natural deep-water port (Barnett 2007, Cartwright 1998, Hardwick 2002); despite the risk of destruction from hurricanes and the promise of harsh sunlight, liling humidity, poor soil drainage and insatiable mosquitoes. Yet, politicians, developers, boosters, and immigrants' letters sustained images of the island's abundant sunshine and highly temperate weather over time to hype the city's promise of fortune and desirable opportunity. The deep-water port and proximity to the emerging railway systems of southeast Texas buttressed the island's robust cotton trade and rendered the city as an entrance point for Euro-Russo in-migrations. The in-migrations were first characterized largely by German and English settlers, and then followed by Russian Jews and Italians around the turn-of-the century (Hardwick 2002). Through the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Galveston was the largest city in Texas and rivaled New Orleans in size and national stature (Barnett 2007).

A series of poor management decisions by members of the wharves board (Cartwright 1991) who controlled port operations afforded more economic and political leverage to the growing city of Houston in the decade prior to the catastrophic hurricane. Houston thus began to rival the "natural port city" as an industrializing railroad junction and both cities sought congressional funding for the dredging of a shipping channel. The 1900 hurricane and the discovery of oil at Spindletop in east Texas in 1901 provided the leverage that municipal leaders in Houston needed to successfully secure the federal

funds. The Houston Shipping Channel opened in 1912 and led to its ascendant economic dominance over the Galveston Bay region. Galveston would never reclaim its stature in relation to Houston. This reached an apogee between the 1950s-70s as Houston grew exponentially on the back of skyrocketing demand for gasoline and petrochemical products after WWII. As municipal boosters attempted to shift Galveston's deserved reputation as a "sin city" of the Gulf Coast, a niche role as the quaint "island getaway" of beach-going and "historic" tourism was consequently embraced and was further supported by continued industrial port activity and the University of Texas Medical Branch (Barnett 2007).

In a contemporary Galveston, "dreamworlds" still referred to the lurid, utopian fantasies of urban development hyped by developers, boosters, real estate agents, and government officials before Ike. This was particularly true on eastern and western ends of the island where new construction had flourished, and in the historical districts that manifest "history as a locus of desire" (Hartigan 1999) in the built environment. In that relational frame, the catastrophe could be represented by the utter failure of several high-profile developments due to a lack of sales in a glutted local housing market that was highly active between 2002-2006; in property damages to the West End that was beyond the seawall and further accentuated the city's economic crisis due to a sharp property-tax revenue decrease; and in the floodwaters that inundated the blocks of gracefully rehabilitated historical properties. Post-Ike, "dreamworlds" is not an entirely negative term synonymous with desirous, if foolish, dream of luxury island living. Following the storm—particularly during public meetings of the Galveston Long-Term Recovery—citizens on a range of sub-committees spent innumerable hours "imagineering" recovery

projects intended to bolster the sustainability of life and lifeways on Galveston so as to transcend the island's coastal vulnerabilities to natural disaster and to redeem previously missed opportunities to instigate "smart growth" forms of development. As I will discuss in more detail in chapter five, the catastrophes continued after the storm as even the most vital visions for a more "resilient" or "sustainable" Galveston become bogged in a quagmire of bureaucratic stasis and shifting municipal priorities.

### *The facticity of the flood*

The particularities of the flood patterns on Galveston were caused by at least four primary determinants: the island's topography, its geographic location, the shallow water depths of Galveston Bay, and the easterly location of the storm's landfall. The elliptical 17ft seawall provided excellent protection against the front surge of water from the Gulf of Mexico. When the city's grade was raised to facilitate its initial construction 109 years ago it created a downward slope from the Seawall to Galveston Bay. This protection and the increase in elevation accounts for why the 15% of island landmasses not located in a federal 100-year floodplain exist directly behind the seawall. As the storm made landfall on the east end of the island, it funneled approximately 12 feet of wind-driven surge through the "Bolivar Roads" strait that separates Galveston and Bolivar and up through the Galveston shipping channel on the eastern side. Meanwhile, an approximately 15' storm surge flooded over the west end of the island that is beyond the seawall and flowed around the San Luis Pass that separates Galveston and Follets Island. As the storm passed the island, the counter-clockwise winds pushed that surge water back over the shallow waters of Galveston Bay and into the lower-lying, north side of Galveston. The backsurge of floodwater was also exacerbated by 6.65" of Ike rainfall. This

overwhelmed a storm-sewer drainage system that the City and its residents readily acknowledged as antiquated and inefficient prior to the storm.<sup>14</sup>

Some Galvestonians suggested that the Texas City levee system and the protruding dike that protects the city's petrochemical complexes intensified the violent backsurge over Galveston. This suggestion did not frequently enter public discourse nor was it cited in any post-storm technical reports that I read. A marine scientist formally affiliated with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association stated emphatically that amount of water that would have been "saved" from Galveston in the absence of the dike or levee would have been "miniscule" in relation to the sheer volume of the 11 ft of storm surge that inundated Galveston Bay and that was consequently pushed back by the Category-2 winds. Hurricane Ike produced the highest storm surge ever recorded with a Category-2 windstorm. Prior to the storm, the Texas City Dike was a popular local destination for commercial and sport fisherman that provided docks for shrimp boats, bait stands, and fish houses. While storm damage in Texas City was relatively minor, the storm surge washed over the dike and literally cleared it of nearly every physical structure. It did however provide flood control into the Houston shipping channel and the Texas City port.

Socio-spatial patterns in Galveston show a general trend towards new home construction the further one travels west on the island, while the East End and its historic districts have gradually gentrified through "historic" home rehabilitation over the past thirty years. Immediately following Ike, the average homesteaded property in the city

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<sup>14</sup> Moderate rain events normally cause flooding of several inches or even more throughout downtown and the UTMB corridor. A three-day deluge of rain in early April 09 caused the build-up of over one foot of flooding in areas of the city, no doubt exacerbated by heavy sediments deposited within the sewer system because of Ike.

was valued at \$135,084. The City produced damage assessments for homestead properties based on its six voting districts. Homesteads for District 1, which includes the racially impoverished “North Broadway” area had an average value of \$66,224. Thirty-nine percent of all the substantially damaged or destroyed properties were located in District 1. In contradistinction, the average homestead value within District 6, or the West End, was \$189,621. While the second highest percentage (28%) of all substantially damaged or destroyed properties were located in District 6, these were mainly confined to the older neighborhood developments of Terra Mar and Bermuda Beach, older bayfront homes, and along Teichman Road that fronts Offats Bayou. Moreover, only nine percent of all District 6 substantially damaged or destroyed properties were located west of 99<sup>th</sup> and Cove View Blvd, where the seawall ends and the “West End” is customarily established in social imaginaries. Generally across the island homes that were built and elevated in accordance to the International Build Codes fared well against wind and surge, in distinction to those built to the old Southern Building Codes. Percentages of substantially damaged<sup>15</sup> or destroyed properties, as well as property values are as follows:

	Average Value	Avg.Val SD/Des.	% of SD/Destroy
District 1	\$66,224.87	\$44,560.71	39
District 2	\$92,414.84	\$59,358.57	1
District 3	\$130,906.44	\$60,220.00	2
District 4	\$87,110.78	\$56,846.51	18
District 5	\$163,613.11	\$77,979.45	12
District 6	\$189,621.03	\$86,764.00	28

The metric of “substantially damaged” is an imprecise gauge of the scope of flood damage that affected houses and commercial structures, lives and livelihoods. However it does provide a frame of reference for both the patterned distribution of significant

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<sup>15</sup> “Substantially damaged” refers to damage in excess of 50% of the pre-storm value of the property.

storm damage, while also suggesting that higher valued property was not necessarily immune from Ike.

District 1 contains the least valuable property on the island, the highest percentage of low-income households, and experienced some of the highest storm surge on the island. Property west of UTMB and North of Broadway—which also includes “historical downtown,” averaged between 10-14” of surge along the bayfront according to an inundation map produced by the UT Center for Space Research<sup>16</sup>. The downtown commercial district on “The Strand” and through several blocks were devastated by the flood. Comparable surge levels also affected all points surrounding Offats Bayou, an area that includes significant variation in the age, size, and type of housing stock. A significant proportion of slab foundation ranch-style housing stock was significantly affected by flooding, but so was City Manager Steve Leblanc’s two-story home in the relatively affluent “Havre Lafitte” subdivision, forcing him into temporary displacement for several months. For areas south of Broadway, there was a direct correlation between surge levels and closer proximity to the seawall. Flooding was minimal along the seawall while the area fronting Broadway Ave from 10<sup>th</sup> to 45<sup>th</sup> street took upwards of seven feet of surge. However, nearly all the homesteaded properties in this area were deemed “green,” or had an historic exemption that allowed homeowners to obtain building permits for repairs. West of 45<sup>th</sup> St. towards 61<sup>st</sup> St, as one neared the Bayou, flood damage was more pronounced, particularly in the Bayou Shores neighborhood where slab foundations and low-elevated pier-and-beam homes are abundant. Inspection maps from October 2008 show a majority of this area deemed either “yellow” or “red” according to

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<sup>16</sup> Wells, G.L (2008). “Hurricane Ike: Estimated Depth of Inundation.” University of Texas Center for Space Research. Online map accessed at [csr.magic.utexas.edu](http://csr.magic.utexas.edu).

FEMA's tri-colored designation. This was also an area with the largest concentration of Hispanic Galvestonians.

*Emergent life, old histories, and the hauntings of disaster on Galveston Island*

A credible interpretation of the cultural dynamics of disaster recovery requires expository knowledge that situates Galveston in contemporarily national and historically local contexts. I found that American cultural ideologies and recent national events influenced the localized interpretive repertoires and rhetorical strategies embedded in deliberations over long-term planning. For example, several local correspondences existed between dominant discourses that animated recent national-level political commentary over public-sector service provision in an emergent age of economic scarcity in America—i.e., universal health care, federally subsidized homeowner assistance, and municipal budgeting crises— and deliberation that pertained to the redevelopment of the island; i.e., the restoration of UTMB, the rebuilding of the island's public housing, and the specific municipal targets of post-storm capital investment. National anxieties of scarcity and long-term uncertainty imbricate locally with urgent considerations of practical strategies for maximizing the scope of sustainable redevelopment, intensified doubly by considerations of the wisdom and utility of committing further public investment in a coastal zone that is continually at risk of natural disaster. I will address these themes in the chapters ahead.

Based upon recurring statements in public meetings, media, interviews, and conversation, many residents seem to fear a continued trend of local urban decay that has been punctuated since the storm by poor decision-making of government leaders<sup>17</sup> and

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<sup>17</sup> I will discuss that this runs the gamut from the slow distribution of homeowner permits immediate after the storm, the later decision to hire a Massachusetts-based program manager for the federal CDBG-funded

the feudal self-interest of the island's dynastic families; two of which, often contended in casual conversations, would rather that Galveston remain an insular economic zone since it allowed their kin networks greater control over finite capital resources and power. The effects of protracted economic stagnation have supposedly catalyzed the middle-class exodus towards the fast growing Houston exurbs of Friendswood, League City, and Dickenson. Galveston's population peaked at 73,000 in the 1970 census. Prior to the storm, the population was approximately 57,000. 2010 census data estimated approximately 48,000. Further, as I will discuss in a forthcoming chapter, the University of Texas Board of Regents announced a plan soon after the storm to layoff 3,800 workers from UTMB as a result of \$700m in uninsured storm damage and the precipitous effects of the financial crisis. As such, the future existence of the island's largest and most sustainable employer was fundamentally in doubt. So too, people solemnly wondered aloud about Galveston's viability as a residential community that was not entirely reliant on tourism and a middling industrial port.

*Galveston's Urban Fortunes: Sin City, Historical Preservation and Coastal Real Estate*

It was impressed upon me that Galveston has never been short on three things: opinions, potential, and studies. Prior to the storm, local political discourse concerning economic development was often about strategies for aiding a tenuous post-Fordist transition that had been morphing the island economy slowly and unevenly since the late 1960s. Roughly from the time of Prohibition through the mid-1950s, Galveston acquired

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homeowner assistance program, the City Council's decision to allocate \$25m of CDBG money to the Galveston Housing Authority, the initial passage of a no-smoking ordinance, as well as the Council's consent to participate in the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Buyout Program that solely benefited relatively high-income residents of the West End. All of these issues, as well as several others described later, were described as veritable death knells for "the city," "the middle class," "small business," and/or the remaining vestiges of justice on the island.

a reputation as the “sin city” of the Gulf Coast wherein rum running, illegal gambling, and prostitution ingratiated into the social fabric under the relatively benign eyes of local authorities. A Mafioso-style network of social and political arrangements largely orchestrated by the Maceo-Firtitta kinship clans enforced a modicum of social order—along with coercive violence—around these widespread practices of vice. (Castaneda 1993, Cartwright 1998). In 1957, the Attorney General ordered the Texas Rangers to effectively close the illegal gambling racket through a series highly publicized raids and subsequent prosecutions. With the dissolution of an organized illicit economy, the economic vertebrae of this industrialized port city was supported by the presence of the largest teaching hospital in Texas (UTMB), manufacturing entities such as Lipton Tea and Falstaff Brewery (which would both ultimately leave the island), and an ancillary coastal economy of commercial fishing and beach-going.

During the 1970s, 80s, and early 90s, a host of actors worked to establish historical preservation as a growth industry in Galveston. These efforts were intended to rehabilitate the island’s impressive, if also degraded architectural stock in the service of tourism and real estate development. These initial efforts were initially subsidized through the patronage of the Kempner’s and Moody’s. In 1967, the president of Galveston Chamber of Commerce argued for such measures because Galveston was going to become increasingly visitor oriented and historical activities should take advantage of that new development (Castaneda 1993). These measures were eventually undertaken through the efforts of the newly consolidated Galveston Historical Foundation in 1973 that was funded through dynastic patronage. The GHF today remains the body primarily responsible for the formal interpretation and circulation of select aspects of the

island's history; however, its fundamental role at the time was dedicated to the rehabilitation of derelict properties (Castaneda 1993). That same year a revolving fund was established to catalyze the reclamation of "The Strand," which was added to the National Register of Historic Places and is now a streetscape of rehabilitated Victorian architecture that serves as the spatial anchor of "Historic Downtown Galveston" (*Ibid*). The following year, the East End Historic District was created in the corridor between downtown and UTMB. It is now one of four historical districts<sup>18</sup> on an island where 32% of its housing stock was built before 1950<sup>19</sup>.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, the preservation industry in downtown Galveston was generously subsidized through the self-interested investment and community philanthropy of George Mitchell, a Greek-born immigrant who initially made his fortune wildcatting for oil in Texas alongside his brother<sup>20</sup>. Mitchell subsequently led the creation of the master-planned exopolis of Houston, "The Woodlands." He acquired a score of properties on the Strand and throughout downtown, which also included the Tremont House Hotel, whose renovation he funded in the mid 1980s<sup>21</sup>. He cited the "higher caliber of tourist," that visits downtown in lieu of the beaches when he would frequently urge the City to create a more hospitable climate for Houstonian capital investment and tourist visitation. His desire to continue development of consumption industries downtown and along Harborside Drive in the midst of the Port of Galveston

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<sup>18</sup> The EEHD is the largest historical district, addition to San Jacinto, Silk Stocking, and Lost Bayous

<sup>19</sup> From the 2006-2008 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau. Incidentally, years of stagnation on Galveston had helped the nascent preservation industry by discouraging new home construction in urban core, and the housing stock was never demolished en masse through federal urban renewal initiatives (Barnett 2007, Castaneda 1993).

<sup>20</sup> In addition to insurance settlements, it was reported that Mitchell reinvested approximately \$13m of his own money into his downtown properties after Ike.

<sup>21</sup> The elegant downtown hotel is located on Mechanic Street, between the Strand and Post Office Street. That block was renamed "Ship's Mechanic Row" at the behest of Mr. Mitchell in order to aid the coastal ambience of "historical downtown."

has consistently manifested tension between these two interests. Their conflict is in turn representative of an intractable dispute between factions who support historical preservation and those who support the reindustrialization of the port as a primary economic development strategy.

Preservation efforts have consistently had to overcome an exogamous reputation that Galveston is a seedy and dirty island city downriver from the petrochemical capital of the country. That reputation persists today. A 1977 *New York Times* article profiled the state of the island and asked rhetorically: “Island paradise or crime-ridden, tourist death trap?” I was told repeatedly that until recent years, both the seawall and Strand were considered unsafe at night. The sister of a BOI who I interviewed after the storm corroborated this assertion of danger when he noted that his sister was murdered during a random robbery approximately thirty years ago. In the late 1980s, the Galveston Park Board of Trustees commissioned a \$250,000 study on image campaign to improve the perception, according to one Board member, that Galvestonians do not all refer to tourists by their first name: which is, “Damn!” (*Galveston County Daily News*, 11/18/89). To this day, it is not uncommon for Galvestonians to forewarn of the danger of walking the seawall at night.

Mr. Mitchell contributed amply to the revolving fund that spurred the rehabilitation of Post Office St. in the early 1990s. Post Office runs parallel to the Strand, four blocks to the south, within “historic downtown.” Today, in addition to the Mod Coffeehouse, businesses on this street now cater to the “higher caliber of tourist” that Mr. Mitchell desired for Galveston through the 1894 Grand Opera House, several art galleries, a handful of bars, and a host of restaurants. During the spring and summer

months, a monthly “Art walk” occurs along Post Office, during which gallery owners welcome the public to view their work along with free libations, while a score of younger artists set up temporary displays along the street as tourists and residents commingle throughout. The reopening of Mod and the reestablishment of “Art Walk” the following spring provided symbolic assurance of a return to normality, as well as a chance for people to reestablish social relations with those whom they hadn’t seen since the storm. I will discuss the competing factions of downtown interest groups later in the text, particularly in light of the recent completion of a \$600,000 master-plan study for historic downtown that recommended an initial public investment of \$70m to leverage private investment for a holistic reconfiguration of its infrastructure and streetscapes.

Between 2002 and 2006, Galveston’s real estate market surged and eventually ballooned to bubble status with the proliferation of new mid-to-high income housing units<sup>22</sup> on the western and eastern ends of the island. Coterminous with increased building activity, the city formed a public-private Redevelopment Authority (“RDA”). The RDA was a controversial subject before and after the hurricane. The RDA’s primary mandate included the management of the island’s four Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones (TIRZs). The purpose of a TIRZ is to incentivize large-scale real estate by reimbursing developers for costs that are deemed a “public good,” such as the installation of roads and utility infrastructure. TIRZ are considered mutually beneficial by their supporters because they encourage infrastructure improvements that municipal entities would have great difficulty providing at their own expense, in addition to increasing property valuations and thus property tax revenues for municipal governments.

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<sup>22</sup> This includes detached single-family homes for primary and seasonal use, condos, and luxury townhomes; as well as mid-income and luxury apartments.

Developers obtain reimbursements through the monies generated by higher city tax revenue collected from the property. TIRZs facilitated the building of three luxury residential real estate projects and the redevelopment of acreage near the Causeway bridge entrance that now includes a Target and Home Depot on the former sight of the former, and reportedly blighted, Galvez Mall. They have proven controversial to some for facilitating “corporate welfare,” in the words of City Councilperson Elizabeth Beeton, often supporting dubious requests for reimbursement such as “decorative palm trees” and “public” bocce ball courts.

The increased productivity of “growth machine” dynamics<sup>23</sup> (Molotch 1976, Logan and Molotch 1988, Jonas and Wilson 1999) related to municipal property revenue heralded an unsustainable renaissance in Galveston that temporarily provided much-needed capital benefits for the City’s general operating fund, but yet had little positive effect on the livelihoods of the significant class of impoverished rentiers on Galveston. During the 1990s, the island’s economy slumped badly to near-bankrupt status that in turn diminished its municipal bond rating and precluded the ability of the city to acquire capital for much need infrastructure improvements, particularly its antiquated sewer

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<sup>23</sup> Molotch’s seminal 1976 article first articulated the deceptively simple thesis of the “growth machine” in that, “Coalitions of land-based elites, tied to economic possibilities of places, drive urban politics in their quest to expand the local economy and accumulate wealth” (Jonas and Wilson 1999). In *Urban Fortunes*, Logan and Molotch (1988) further advanced the thesis by analyzing social relations that emerged from “growth machine” dynamics as part of a more fundamental conflict between use and exchange values of city-space. The “City as Growth Machine” is indistinguishable from the processes of gentrification and .

According to their ideal-typical dynamics, residents of various economic levels in turn strive to protect their non-commoditized “use values” of urban space and counter pro-growth fiscal priorities. These residents search for ways to protect their place based daily rounds and the relationships with neighbors, local businesses and social services that are critical to their survival. However, through the aid of municipal politicians, developers and other interests within pro-“growth” coalitions often succeed in intensifying privatized land use, often through a savvy fostering of ‘we feelings’ amongst growth-receptive citizenry. These tensions have partially manifested in Galveston, particularly in relation to the possible gentrification of “North Broadway,” the reclamation of the East End Historical District, “paid parking” on Seawall Boulevard, and the controversy over rebuilding public housing.

system, bumpy roads, and constantly eroding sand beaches. As building activity increased exponentially in 2002, its role as an economic growth engine was a fundamental source of political contestation during those years. Specific real estate projects during those years invited conflict over developer tax incentives, alternation of height and density statutes to allow structures over eight stories, and the further destruction of the island's remaining estuary wetlands on the West End. The social formations of political engagement were often roughly divided into "pro" and "anti" real-estate development, or industrial "development" versus "quality of life" factions. In contradistinction to real estate as an ascendant growth engine, there was a vocal contingent who argued for the feasibility of incubating a biotechnology research sector because of UTMB's presence, the immanent opening of a National Biodefense Research Laboratory on its campus, and the medical branch's vicinity to the 700 acres of the East End Flats.<sup>24</sup> These divergences of interests and developmental visions for Galveston would reemerge during public deliberations of long-term redevelopment planning; inevitably belying the assertions of post-Ike "unity" in Galveston.

People often refer to Galveston as a haunted place: haunted by the ghosts of 1900; haunted by its own "potential;" and perhaps haunted by the specters of its history that confound its boosters' attempts to imagineer and transcend its perpetual stagnation. Next door to the Mod Coffeehouse, *The Witchery* traffics in merchandise concerning the occult. Edna Ferber, the author of the famed Texan novel, *Giant*, once said of Galveston,

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<sup>24</sup> The East End Flats is the largest contiguous parcel of land available for development on the island. It's located behind Seawall Boulevard near the eastern tip of the island, adjacent both to UTMB and the U.S. Coast Guard base. It is constituted by dredged spoils from the Galveston Shipping Channel and is under the remit of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Because it is cordoned off by a sloping concrete wall, it was relatively undisturbed by the hurricane. The Flats will be un-developable for the foreseeable future, but it is considered by boosters to be laden with economic potential.

“The city had a ghostly charm...a remnant of haunted beauty—gray, shrouded, crumbling” (Barnett 2007: 187). The local historian, Gary Cartwright notes, “I never return to the island without seeing the ghosts” (1998: 1). The haunted southern port city contains features strikingly similar to New Orleans: not just the periodic devastation of a hurricane, nor the annual celebration of Mardi Gras. Before thousands were poisoned by storm surge, one could witness the mangled beauty of oak limbs in moonlight, embracing each other across streets lined with 19<sup>th</sup> century homes. There are reminders of the proximity of death such as the cemeteries lining the main streetscapes of Broadway Ave. and 61<sup>st</sup> Streets, respectively, which turned up caskets of the dead as Ike’s flood waters poured unmercifully across the island, reminding one both of the crushing weight and uplifting force of water. There were the ghost stories told to me by erstwhile “credible” people with sincere eyes and measured tones: a deceased father’s desk that was given from sister to brother for storage underneath a house in Jamaica beach, only to inexplicably reappear in a neighbor’s yard just down the street. A young woman dashes to her car to move it to higher ground on Friday afternoon before the storm. While she is running she senses the image out the corner of her eye of a human figure running beside her, only to turn towards “it” and see there is nothing there but the bedeviled wind and rain. There is the popular folktale of the face, like an apparition embedded in the side of the Moody ANICO building that is visible only on certain nights. There is the story of the lost orphan girls from the Ursuline covenant who died together in the 1900 Storm along with a sister of the order so that if they perished, they would meet their God together. Even as they offered up their ghosts to their maker, their souls are said to still visibly linger.

These stories of haunting and unrealized urban potential reverberate with the dreamworlds and catastrophes that characterize Galveston's history after the 1900 Storm and its future-oriented contemporary after Hurricane Ike. Yet, as one maintains an analytic eye on the allegories of dreamworlds and catastrophes, the island remains populated by living, vulnerable people struggling still with the daily practicalities of surviving after the storm; in a political economy whose scale of resources are affected by intensely local and nationally encompassing forces and distributed through wounded bureaucracies and networks of power and dynastic patronage that resist radical change. Yet many Galvestonians committed themselves to participating in public planning of recovery projects and inserted themselves as advocates to help facilitate the efficient implementations. The remainder of this dissertation provides a narrative testament to these tensions between destruction and restoration.

## Chapter Two:

### **A Peculiar Backsurge: Vulnerability, Resilience and Galvestonian Disaster Culture.**

*“Welcome to the love-fest. You know, the only thing tougher I’ve seen than the Japanese during World War II, is FEMA today.”*

*“40 days. That’s the number of days that I’ve been sleeping in my car!”*

Vitriolic comments like these emerged as a pattern that evening. These were two of nearly 30 utterances delivered by a tired, frazzled, and frustrated line of Galvestonians who rose to speak behind a single microphone in the Grand Ballroom of the San Luis Convention Center on October 23, 2008. It was forty days after the storm and four weeks since residents were officially welcomed back to an island in varying states of ruin. People came to obtain information and to address an assembled contingent of organizational leaders from the City, the State of Texas, and FEMA. Many people may have attended as much for the opportunity to socialize. With downtown still closed, homes still not fully mucked-out, insurance adjusters to meet, friends displaced, and six-foot high mounds of debris still lining Broadway Avenue and side streets, opportunities to congregate had been rare during the past several weeks<sup>25</sup>. That night some residents waited in line for over an hour for their five-minute opportunity to speak and question the representative authorities: the city manager, mayor, police chief, the city utilities director, FEMA, the executive director of the Galveston Housing Authority. And so on. However, most of their comments directed ire at FEMA. Galvestonians registered their anger, fear, or perplexity as to why they were denied assistance upon filing their claim.

This meeting seemed necessary. Two weeks earlier, City Councilperson Elizabeth

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<sup>25</sup> When the 1894 Grand Opera House on Post Office Ave re-opened the following January, the item on a list of “You May Know You’re an Ike Survivor If...” that received the loudest laughter and applause: “You went to Kroger to socialize.” I laughed too that day. It was true. Kroger provided a forum to run into acquaintances while the Verizon tent in the parking lot temporarily provided free Internet access and wireless charging stations.

Beeton suggested in session that the City should host a town hall meeting for residents to obtain facts pertaining to urgent topics such as home-repair permitting, recovery-program enrollment, the status of debris removal, and remaining infrastructural damage to water, sewer, and electrical systems. When the City Council reconvened in their normal chambers at City Hall on October 3, the public comment period was dominated by exasperated Galvestonians who at times lectured and questioned council members regarding their thwarted attempts to obtain building permits or discern their application status from FEMA.

This was the first officially island-wide meeting held since Ike. There had been a smaller scaled town hall meeting for the West Galveston Island Property Owners Association (WGIPOA) the previous Saturday morning, as well as several news conferences held by the city manager and the mayor. Similar questions were asked at the WGIPOA townhall concerning the perceived inefficiencies of the city's planning department to allocate building permits. Planning department staff had been displaced as well. They were operating out of temporary quarters after parts of the City Hall's roof had been gnashed and peeled away during the storm. This meeting was much larger. Approximately 700 people attended this evening to create a standing-room only atmosphere. The room buzzed with tense, ambient chatter to such loud effect that it required City Manager Steve Leblanc several minutes to call the room to order, "I know that many of you are frustrated and some of you are impatient. The point tonight is not to hear all those frustrations, but to answer your questions to the best of our ability. We would like to maintain order."<sup>26</sup> He later raised the ire of the remaining group of, mainly,

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<sup>26</sup> All quotations from this meeting were based on personal notes taken during personal attendance at this meeting on October 23, 2008.

black Galvestonians when he attempted to close the proceedings without allowing them the chance to address the forum. His attempted decree to end the meeting prompted repeated shouts of “No!” that were mixed with, “What about us, Steve?!” He ultimately relented; though not before he had challenged the protesting audience, “We’re hear to help you tonight, but we can’t do that if you aren’t quiet,” and then asked two police officers to “help me out here.” They approached cautiously.

It had been a contentious night. The newly installed police chief, Charles Wiley, who had just assumed the job prior to Ike, spoke first after Leblanc. “Speak louder!” “Use the microphone!” The chorus of murmured voices ensued again around calls for the chief to speak up. He finally delivered a brief report that congratulated his officers for their continual 12-hour shifts that were necessary in light of a doubling in calls for service to the police department. Because downtown was still without electricity, a dusk-to-dawn curfew remained in place. A citywide curfew had been cancelled ten days before. The city utility director followed Chief Wiley to update the audience on the status of his department’s charge to “untangle spaghetti” as crews still struggled to reach and repair breaches in the sewer system. Basic water, sewer, and electrical service had been restored to the core neighborhoods behind the seawall. Those who hadn’t had their breaker boxes flooded, electrical wires corroded, or air conditioning units damaged by the surge were returning to a semblance of normalcy<sup>27</sup>. Many of the non-beachfront properties on the West End were coming back online; although the restoration of service beyond the seawall was complicated by the proportion of individual septic tanks that

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<sup>27</sup> I was fortunate to live in the vicinity of UTMB. My electrical power was restored upon return. Natural gas was restored on October 13. I was, however, not as fortunate when I failed at one point to heed the water-boil directives for consuming tap water that were in effect through October 11. This led to the acquisition of *giardiasis* parasitic infection of my small intestine.

largely service an area characterized by non-homesteaded second-homes and vacation bungalows. Eric Wilson stated that 900,000 cubic yards had thus far been collected, ostensibly to demonstrate the scale and efficient pace of debris removal. However, the massive heap of debris—over 100ft high— still growing on a 13-acre site directly off of Broadway Avenue in front of the Galveston County Justice Center was a far more potent reminder of the damage Hurricane Ike visited on Galveston than that abstract statistic.<sup>28</sup>

The updates continued. AmeriCorp had arrived in Galveston to assist the coordination of the volunteer efforts of approximately 40 faith-based groups tasked with mucking-out municipal buildings and private residences of elderly and/or disabled Galvestonians. The United Way had begun collecting and distributing donated goods through a newly created organization called Help4Galveston, which would later incorporate into a broader consortium of faith-based assistance called Galveston County Restore & Rebuild (GCRR). The Galveston Independent School District (GISD) re-opened most of their schools on October 7. Superintendent Lynn Cleveland estimated that 70% of students had returned to the re-opened schools. This was framed as good news since officials had expected only 50% of students to return. However, significant flood damage impacted several of their buildings. Burnet Elementary, located at 55<sup>th</sup> Street and Stewart Road took in approximately three feet of water throughout the building. Scott Elementary at 42<sup>nd</sup> and Avenue N ½ Street received a comparable

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<sup>28</sup> Protestations emerged from web reports filed by the *Daily Kos* and the *Journal for Southern Studies* soon after the storm when it became known that over 1,000 County inmates hadn't been evacuated from the island. Inmates and a skeleton staff had ridden out the storm in the holding units of the Justice Center. County Judge Jim Yarborough credited divine intervention for their safe holding: "The good Lord took care of those 1,050 inmates. There was no rising water, but some wind-driven rain did make it into the law building." The *Journal for Southern Studies* notes comments of inmates who been incarcerated at the time, and who noted the lack of preparation in the form of adequate supplies of food and water. Uncorroborated reports from inmates suggest that staff on duty were "half-assing" their jobs during storm and in the several days following ("Ike Coverage: Updated on 1000 inmates in Galveston County Jail" (<http://southernstudies.org/2008/09/ike-coverage-update-on-1000-inmates-of.html>)).

amount of water and would remain closed indefinitely. Central Middle School, which is located “North of Broadway,” and formerly the campus of the once-segregated Central High School, took in approximately six feet of storm water. It too would remain closed. However, Superintendent Lynn Cleveland received applause—in particular abundance from black Galvestonians present at the meeting—when she set a target goal of Christmas break for reopening.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, whereas approximately two-thirds of GISD students had qualified for free or reduced-rate lunches prior to the storm, all students would be able to received free lunch for the first two weeks, and for the remainder of the school year if their family had been displaced from home because of the storm.<sup>30</sup>

The head of the maligned planning department, Wendy O’Donahoe then took the floor to talk about permitting. She appeared to implicitly counter anticipated criticisms of time delays when she began by stating,

“I want to start with a few numbers compared to what we normally give out. We have a temporary site at the Justice Center. Yes, the lines are long. We appreciate your continued patience. Keep in mind we average 500 permits per month. As of today since September 22, we’ve issued 2900 permits: 1600 for electrical; 80 for commercial, 863 for residential repair” (Personal notes, Town Hall Meeting, October 23, 2008)

The perception of incompetence within the planning department, mired in a general sense of post-Ike frustration, was one of the most recurring criticisms levied by residents following the storm. The planning department had indeed battled perception nearly as

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<sup>29</sup> Central Middle School eventually reopened for the 2010-11 school year. I will address this issue in more detail in chapter four since the renovations and facility-use plans were implicated in racialized cultural politics. Scott Elementary reopened in September 2010 as an “Early College High School” that enrolled students in grades 6-12 and would allow graduating seniors to depart with a maximum of 60 college credits. At the time of writing, Burnet Elementary remained closed, pending the decision of GISD to devote a portion of \$10m in FEMA reimbursement funds to rehabilitate the fifty-year-old campus that had enrolled 600 children pre-Ike, many of whom were enrolled in the bilingual program.

<sup>30</sup> While enrollment did not decrease as sharply as the superintendent had initially feared, the net decrease and loss of three schools impacted teachers and staff. In March 2009, the GISD Board of Trustees voted to cut 163 positions, including 99 teaching positions in help curtail a \$17m budget deficit that had spiked due to the loss of population and anticipated tax revenue following the storm. Approximately 40% of these positions were reportedly vacant (Galveston Daily News. “GISD cuts 99 teachers, 163 total.” *Galveston County Daily News*. March 5, 2009).

much as natural elements. Angry residents retold stories of waiting in line for several hours while observing staff leaving in aggregate for a lunch break, or told at the end of a long day that they would have to return the following day because it was close-of-business.

Then there was the field representative from FEMA, perhaps the one agency that elicited more criticism than the planning department for its service delivery. Carl Watts took the microphone and addressed the audience with a tone that registered with impatience and condescension. He elaborated on Ms. O'Donahoe's introduction of the "Residential Substantial Damage Estimator" ("RSDE") software program introduced by FEMA following the City's initial damage survey to deduce what houses were eligible to obtain permits. I include an abridged segment of his presentation below, while capitalizing words and phrases to mimic the added emphasis of the speaker.

We've heard all kinds of rumors and misinformation, so I'd like to just verify—well, not verify—but give you some additional information concerning "substantially damaged" and ICC<sup>31</sup>. "Substantially damaged" is damage where the cost of repair will exceed 50% of what it was worth before the storm. Damage from fire, vandalism, tornados, anything. What is pre-event value? The City is using CAD {Central Appraisal District} amount plus five percent. If you have a problem with that assessment because you think it's too low, that's a fluid amount. You can hire an appraiser. Please IF YOU GET A NOTICE, don't take the substantial assessment on face value, go talk to the City. Ask why, and see what options you have to change that assessment. The other thing we're hearing is that FEMA is deciding that we're substantially damaged or not. As you heard, the only thing that FEMA is providing is EXPERIENCED INDIVIDUALS and we're using a standard program to gather info on each structure's damage. We then give it to the City. Only the City can decide if it's structurally damaged. It's the city's responsibility. We can't tell them that.

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<sup>31</sup> "ICC" refers to "Increased Cost of Compliance," which is available grant money offered through FEMA to bring housing structures into compliance with federal Base Flood Elevations, a pre-requisite for participation in the National Flood Insurance Program. Base flood elevations fluctuate across the island, however the BSE for structures located behind the seawall, the elevation requirement was 11 ft above sea level. It is anticipated that updated flood maps issued in 2012 will raise BFEs on Galveston by at least one foot. Elevating structures already built as "pier and beam" structures is technically easier and less expensive than for homeowners with slab foundations, which are disproportionately located in the vicinity of Offats Bayou. This stock of single-family ranch homes that was built-out during the 1960s and 70s, is largely disqualified from these funds because the expense of removing slab foundations negatively affects FEMA's cost-benefit calculations. The general area around the bayou received heavy storm surge from Galveston Bay.

The applause was noticeably subdued.

Then came the audience questions. First, a resident from the “Fish Village” subdivision on the far eastern end of the island where approximately half the post-WWII subdivision of one-story, single-family homes was impacted by storm surge; particularly the houses closest to the Galveston bayfront. The middle-aged white gentleman seemed determined to ask his question with performative gusto. “*Why* is it taking so long to get back into our homes!?” he asked with a tone of demanding defiance. His home was stuck within a liminal designation of “yellow” within the tri-colored RSDE system for inspections to which the FEMA representative and planning director had alluded. He didn’t understand the rationale for this categorization because his initial private damage assessment was estimated at approximately one-quarter the pre-storm value of his home. He received a loud round of applause when he concluded that he and his neighbors, “We just want to get back on with our lives.” The City’s initial assessment had conjoined the entire block into the “yellow” category that was neither “green,” (cleared for permitting) nor “red,” (i.e., “substantially damaged”)<sup>32</sup>. Mr. Watts told him that residents would need a follow-up assessment from FEMA since the initial determination was based upon a rapid drive-by survey of the neighborhoods. This would prove to be a considerably frustrating obstacle for homeowners to make repairs, which had already been delayed for those who had evacuated. Most Ike evacuees had already waited the minimum of 12 days before they were officially allowed to return to the island. There were often

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32 The City of Galveston and FEMA released the following indicators to generally determine status. Definitions of “substantially damaged” are per the National Flood Insurance Program, but were generally correlated with a “red” designation:

**Red:** leaning; unsafe; completely destroyed; significant flood; collapsed; structurally unsound.

**Yellow:** general interior flooding; wind damage; or significantly damaged, but repairable. Assessment evaluation pending

**Green:** no damage or only minor damage; or missing siding; shingles; handrails; breakaway walls.

discrepancies between the assessments rendered by either private insurance carriers or public assessors against the informal calculations of damage made by homeowners, which often challenged the official assessments with claims to “common sense” when they felt their damages had been under or overvalued. Further, these assessments had to be factored against the initial rapid assessments of “red,” “yellow,” or “green,” that been conducted by city staff. Such conflicting assessments created delays for homeowners because of the necessities of further city inspections and certifications before rebuilding could commence. The presentations from FEMA and the planning department suggested as much, as representatives from each agency shifted the final burden of responsibility for determining colored status on to the other entity. Moreover, while FEMA was providing “EXPERIENCED INDIVIDUALS,”<sup>33</sup> they were ultimately subservient to the dictates of a standardized computer model to assess a designation as “substantially damaged.” In public forums such as meetings, guest newspaper columns and letters to the editor, many exasperated residents sounded their frustrations over the criterion applied by a cavalcade of private insurance adjusters, TWIA, FEMA, and the city planning department to provide assessments, obtain permits, and to adjudicate their insurance settlements. In those days, uncertainty and anger circulated widely throughout Galveston.

Subsequent speakers echoed the sentiment of the first gentleman, while also asking pointed questions about the fate of temporary shelters and the immanent implementation of FEMA’s Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) that would provide rental vouchers to Ike victims; albeit in an extremely limited rental housing market in which rates were expected to—and eventually did—substantially increase. The

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<sup>33</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests that at least some of these “experienced individuals” readily admitted their callousness to the protestations of property owners since they had conducted numerous post-disaster assessments of damaged property.

aforementioned woman who noted that she had spent 40 days sleeping in her car made recourse to popular sentiment when she turned to the crowd and asked, “Has anyone else had a problem with FEMA?” A raucous, syncopated “YES!” erupted from the audience. After demonstrably holding up a small placard with the number “40” written on it to the audience—which would also become the lead photo in the next day’s newspaper— she continued, “We need an independent investigation of these goofball inspectors!” *{Loud audience applause}*. According to her testimony, a FEMA inspector she never met erroneously withdrew her application, and therefore she had to reapply for assistance. “Thank god for god, it got me through it *{Muted applause}*”. One sympathized with her. This was indeed a time it seemed one of the only certainties of life at that point, post-Ike, were long waits and short denials. I had also been denied assistance from FEMA.

The “Tent City” emergency shelter that the Red Cross had established was slated to close in four days. People varyingly called-out, cried, and demanded certainties of reliable information regarding what would happen to these displacees. An African-American woman addressed this issue during her five-minute allotment, her tone increasing in sound and aggression as she asked the city manager, “What are we supposed to do when Tent City closes? I lost everything in the storm. My kids and I don’t got a place to go. Are we supposed to wander around the streets of Galveston?! What’s supposed to happen to us?” A young African-American man who appeared to be in his mid-to-late-20s approached immediately after this speaker. He adopted a voice of conciliating frustration,

“I’m here to speak about my disappointment with the city government. Our mayor has not shown any passion about rebuilding. I’m a businessman. I’m not looking for anything. But, why was there no plan? In the end of the day, it’s the City taking care of the city. It’s a crying shame. Steve, you know I like you. Mayor, you know I

don't...eh...{loud audience laughter}. Mayor, I'm telling you, they're looking at you. It's a crying shame. Where are we supposed to go?"

Leblanc then took the microphone to announce that a new temporary shelter near Scholes Airport would open under the remit of the State of Texas upon the closing of "Tent City." The newly created "United Shelter" ultimately remained open for several more weeks under the joint administration of the State and the Baptist and Child Family Services as displaced residents transitioned into rental units with a DHAP voucher. An unknown number transitioned into periods of homelessness or exodus to other cities.

### *On "Disaster Culture"*

I summarize the events that transpired during this first citywide town hall meeting because they indexed many of the vulnerabilities, uncertainties, concerns, and dilemmas that Galvestonians experienced in the aftermath of the storm and the subsequent return to a city that was then only fragilely inhabitable. As such, this expositional episode segues into the remainder of this chapter that provides a cultural analysis of a distended collective of disaster experiences on Galveston Island that resulted from Hurricane Ike. I use "vulnerability" and "resilience" as rejoinders to the study of Galvestonian "disaster culture" that first appeared in the studies conducted by the late University of Texas sociologist, Harry Estill Moore, following Hurricane Carla. The experiential correspondences between natural disaster and the culture concept have since been elaborated within a growing literature on the anthropology of disaster. I begin with an introduction of Moore's pioneering work and then segue into a brief literature review of the anthropology of disaster to put this cultural analysis in dialogue with other disaster studies that use culture as a heuristic device for understanding disaster experience and subsequent bureaucratized recovery dynamics.

In 1962, H.E. Moore's research team conducted a multi-sited study of several Texas coastal communities, including Galveston, following Hurricane Carla in 1961. Carla was a category-4 storm that made landfall over Freeport, TX, but which caught Galveston with the "dirty side" of storm, thus causing widespread tornado outbreaks as well as considerable flooding. Moore published two monographs following Hurricane Carla that provide instructive models for studying the evacuation and social reorganization of Galveston following Hurricane Ike because they provide an historicizing perspective regarding culturally mediated responses to a major hurricane in Galveston. *Before the Winds* (1963) compared the dynamics of several mass-evacuations that took place in four locales between Corpus Christi, TX and Cameron Parish, LA. Moore was particularly interested in mass evacuations as adaptive processes of individuals staying or fleeing the storm, with a corresponding interest in how the institutional authorities charged with establishing shelters cooperated and conflicted with one another; i.e., "civil defense, the Red Cross, state and local police, and the armed forces" (1963: 6) as they facilitated a mass evacuation, "on a scale unprecedented in American history" (4). *And the Winds Blew* (1964) provided a chronology of the weather event as it neared the Texas coast; a series of case studies concerning the emergency response at UTMB, a discourse analysis of news media coverage; an interrogation of insurance as a resource for rehabilitation; and a broader extrapolation of the concept of "disaster culture." It is the latter that most directly influences the methodology and analytical purview of the study of Hurricane Ike.

Dr. Moore situated the "core" of disaster culture within the community of interests that grow out of the common aspects of the disaster experience, "but that are

unknown to the larger society” (1964: 201). Moore compared this “feeling” to inclusion in a “secret society,” or common participation in a “military campaign.” His theorizations on disaster culture were admittedly underdeveloped, calling it a topic that “cried out for more intensive study” (*Ibid*). Moore’s research interests were oriented towards standardizing questions about disaster experience across the population and deducing social-scientific formulations based on form answers; however, he also evinced interest in the experiential marrow of disaster culture by documenting the symbolic renderings of Carla as an anthropomorphized being—“i.e., a wretched bitch”—as “one prominent female Galvestonian” called her; one who “played dirty, underhanded tricks” by bringing more significant damage from its side-winding tornadoes than from a direct frontal assault (1964: 200). Moore reflected a parochial disposition over the words of his informants through his notes and writings. At one point he curiously details the experience of one woman who would not admit to finding existential meaning in losing her bait camp the year after her husband had passed away: “She simply couldn’t, due to the trauma of the disaster face the total monetary loss caused by the storm.” He then spent considerable space asserting possible psychological diagnostics to account for her reticence to find meaning in the disaster. Nonetheless, several of Moore’s postulates regarding disaster culture corresponded to post-Ike research. I will return to these points of discussion after presenting interview data. I situate Moore’s work within the thrust of disaster sociology that emerged following WWII and into the Cold-War era due to the primacy it places on civil defense preparation and the parallel attention paid to group behavior following disaster and individual psychological resilience (Lakoff 2007, Oliver-Smith & Hoffman 2002). While Moore admitted an underdeveloped understanding of

“disaster culture,” as a mediating dynamic that both informs and exceeds individual responses to disaster, anthropological researchers have expanded a comparable literature slowly over the past three decades, and with increasing proliferation over the past 15 years.

*Anthropologies of Disaster:*

Explicit research proscriptions for a formal “anthropology of disaster” emerged during the late 1970s as researchers began to foreground the human influence on ‘natural’ disasters with particular recourse to Marxian political economy and the emerging study of cultural ecology (Oliver-Smith 2002). Anthropological studies of natural disasters have since coalesced around inquiries into how socially produced vulnerabilities influence and intensify the material and psychological effects of disastrous occurrences (Bankoff 2003, Blaikie *et al* 1994, Button 2010, Hewitt 1997, Fjord & Manderson 2009), Oliver-Smith & Hoffman 2004, Kosek 2006<sup>34</sup>). Researchers now differ primarily over methodology, purview, and the representational forms used to articulate the experiential dimensions of disaster. Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman have established themselves as two of the leading theorists in the discipline regarding the interrelations between culture and disaster experience. Their introduction to the co-edited volume *Catastrophe and Culture: the anthropology of disaster* (2004) summarized the historical trajectories of disaster research within American anthropology and cited the common identification of “disaster” as a “process leading to an event that involves a combination of a potentially

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<sup>34</sup> Jake Kosek’s (2006) *Understories: the political life of forests in Northern New Mexico* provides another model for producing disaster ethnography even though it is not specifically about a singular natural catastrophe. Kosek effectively traces of the social frictions between place-based attachments of Chicano residents and environmental activists; local, bureaucratic, and scientific rationalities; and then relates them to racially influenced forms of exclusionary forest management that developed in the context of the burgeoning Los Alamos National Laboratory facilities and the consequent destruction of large swaths of old growth forest in the broader region.

destructive agent from the natural or technological sphere and a population in a socially produced condition of vulnerability” (4). In other words they establish the human production of natural disasters as a social fact. Their volume resulted in a methodological move towards a “disaster anthropology” suited to amalgamate cultural, ecological, and political-economic investigations—along with historical, demographic, and medical concerns—in a common purview rooted in qualitatively detailing the experiences and cultural frameworks of disaster victims.

Hoffman’s contribution is especially applicable given her American fieldsite and our mutual experience as ethnographers personally, and unexpectedly, affected by disaster.<sup>35</sup> Her ethnological consideration of the social role of “monster” across disaster contexts is underdeveloped in the comparative sense; however, it is usefully presented to show how fire victims framed their understanding of the cause and actions of encroaching blaze. She identifies several behavioral patterns that are germane to Ike symbolisms in Galveston, particularly the gestures made to “culturize” (123) the disaster through the anthropomorphizing of the storm, ritual narration, and the commemoration of anniversary time for cathartic purposes.<sup>36</sup> Hoffman (2005) subsequently published a short piece in *Anthropology News* soon after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita that is instructive for framing several post-disaster social dynamics that one could expect disaster that were evident following Ike:

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<sup>35</sup> Her essay contribution, “The Monster and the Mother: The Symbolism of Disaster” is based on fieldwork conducted in the aftermath of the 1991 Oakland-Berkeley firestorm that destroyed her home, office, and all her possessions; thus forcing her into an admittedly “difficult” and “perplexing” role as both researcher and disaster victim. This was a highly ambivalent research role with which I empathized.

<sup>36</sup> Personifications of Hurricane Ike were particularly evident prior to the storm when plywood window protectors often back-talked the impending arrival of the storm with references to Dwight Eisenhower—i.e., “I don’t like Ike”—and Ike Turner, i.e., “Go away Ike, Tina’s not here.” My concluding chapter on memory and commemoration further highlights the symbolic uses of the storm within narratives of recovery in lead-up to the one-year anniversary.

With the physical layout fractured so too, is the social structure, never to be rebuilt in the same form again. The economy of a community dissolves, with no workplaces, no transport, no clients left... Survivors now find they share concerns only with other survivors, and so they segregate themselves. Animosity develops towards those unharmed. A specific enemy also always arises. In the case of Katrina and Rita, its name is FEMA, though the insurance companies are running a close second. Moreover, a phenomenon called “convergence” is happening in numbers previously unheard of. The aftermath of disaster brings all sorts of outsiders to the scene: engineers, builders, agents and agencies, peddlers, experts and exploiters. Their ideas, rules and ways cannot help but wiggle into locals’ lives. In the wake of the wind and water, already a committee of architects is talking about how they will redesign a “new” New Orleans. Nary a one of them is a prior resident.

Hoffman gestures towards several material and cultural considerations that result from disaster, and to which disaster ethnographers could profitably attend: assessing the simultaneous fracture of physical and social infrastructures while also calling our analytical attention to cultural dynamics such the myriad forms of *boundary work* (Hartigan 2005, Bashkow 2004) that disaster survivors enact to police social lines of belonging and difference as outside capitalist agents descend on the scene. I too found that lines of belonging and distinction were affected by the sudden influx of technical experts, relief workers, and unscrupulous disaster capitalists desiring to engage Galvestonians for profit. However, I would argue that the “dissolved community” to which she alludes also provided opportunities for new solidarities for “victims” and “survivors” as a means of maintaining resilience in the trauma of the aftermath. I will return this point in more substance later in the chapter.

Gregory Button (2010) recently provided a capstone text to nearly three decades of disaster research he undertook in dual roles as both a trained ethnographer and news producer for public media outlets<sup>37</sup>. He also contributed to Oliver-Smith and Hoffman’s (2002) volume on culture and catastrophe and co-published another on disaster culture with the former (2008). This latest volume announces itself an ethnographic comparison of disaster sites over time and place. His research extends back to the protracted toxic

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<sup>37</sup> *Disaster Culture: Knowledge and Uncertainty in the Wake of Human and Environmental Catastrophe.*

tragedy at Love Canal in the 1970 and deals most in-depth with the 1989 Exxon-Valdez oil spill, which was the source of his doctoral dissertation research. Its other case studies rely mainly on secondary source material to frame his recurring interest in how post-disaster “uncertainty” is mediated, circulated, and politically manipulated within affected social settings. His work does challenge students of disaster studies to unveil the political, social, and cultural meanings through which collective modes of “uncertainty” are produced, received, and re-communicated.<sup>38</sup> He documents a “familiar pattern” over three decades of research in which social uncertainties revolve around three primary areas of concern: one, the effectiveness of remedial cleanup of contaminated areas; two, the immediate and long-term impact of the disaster on both the environment and public health; and, three, the just compensation for loss to both the environment and community residents (169). These were most certainly topics of considerable public discourse following Ike. Moreover, he rightly homes in on the contestations between lay and expert communities (173), which were particularly true in Galveston with regards to the friction between the supposed expertise of FEMA damage assessors and insurance claim adjusters against the vitriolic assertions of residents who were angered over egregiously undervalued damages to their homes and property.

In the immediate days and weeks following the storm, there was a tremendous sense of uncertainty that circulated amongst residents because of a lack of accurate information regarding, first, the scope of damage and the dynamics of community re-entry; and later, regarding the implementation of public and private recovery programs. Such dynamics are not unique to the island; however, they are acutely manifested here.

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<sup>38</sup> He distinguishes uncertainty from “risk,” because of the nebulous quality the former retains in contradistinction to the quantifiable condition of the latter; particularly in regards to its manifestation in risk-management practices of insurance carriers, corporate entities, and government service providers (15).

Whereas some Galvestonians refer to the island as a “city of {urban planning} studies,” it is also described as a “city of rumor.”<sup>39</sup> People would refer to the “Galveston rumor mill” as social fact that existed before and after the storm. As I will show later in this chapter, people who stayed during the storm often referenced the “rumors” that circulated during the first days post-Ike, especially before the newspaper resumed limited publication the following week.

Several anthropologists situated in New Orleans before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina have also contributed to a growing corpus of academic literature on the dynamics of the city’s initial federal neglect and subsequent stalled redevelopment from the dual perspective of researcher and survivor (Breunlin & Regis 2006, Colten 2006, Etheridge 2006, Masquelier 2006, Peña 2006).<sup>40</sup> The anthropology of Hurricane Katrina also included several researchers who traveled to New Orleans to conduct research focused primarily on the racialized and gendered iniquities lived by displaced or resettled black residents that were compounded by a stalled and corrupted recovery effort that exploited or neglected the region’s most vulnerable (Adams *et al* 2009, Jackson 2006, Jackson 2011, Queely 2011<sup>41</sup>). Adams *et al* (2009) described the contours of “chronic

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<sup>39</sup> For example, one former City Councilperson who helped lead the Northside Galveston Taskforce would often refer to the “Galveston Rumor-mill,” as a something that required neutralization with “facts.” Thus meetings were often spent sharing information with one another, while others reported on official meetings they had attended, or listened guest representatives from organizations such as FEMA or the City’s housing and grants department.

<sup>40</sup> Although not an anthropologist, Naomi Klein’s (2007) jeremiad *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* includes an assessment of how New Orleans became a festering zone for the proliferation of nefarious corporate profiteering. Her assessments are corroborated as truth through the second half of Adams *et al* NSF-funded study on the protracted effects of what they term “chronic disaster syndrome.”

<sup>41</sup> These studies are noteworthy by striving to elucidate clear structures of endemic, racialized poverty that were exacerbated into protracted displacement. However, they are often frustratingly limited by evincing a narrow focus lodging assertions of righteousness, malignant neglect, and justice at the expense of tracking the multitude of contradictions to be found within public bureaucracies and corporate bodies, as well as

disaster syndrome,” to connote an assemblage of traumatic and post-traumatic phenomena related to the storm that are expressed in states of depression, anxiety, and a host of physiological conditions. Several of these components are germane to a discussion of disaster culture in Galveston. For example, the “Katrina cough” and “Ike cough” seem particularly comparable. Moreover, a recurring though not ubiquitous signifier called “P.I.S.S” for “Post Ike Stress Syndrome” circulated in casual conversations.

A review of the anthropology of disaster read against Hurricane Ike in Galveston necessarily merges into a consideration of the biopolitics of “humanitarian” interventions into disaster situations. This was particularly salient in the context of the national historical moment of economic recession, which eventually influenced community discourse concerning the necessity and limitations of “care for the self” (Novas & Rose 2005). Recent scholars such as Fassin (2007) and Redfield (2005) have adapted readings of Foucault (1976) and Agamben (1998) to critique the premise of political neutrality attached to humanitarian interventions. They have both cited Doctors without Borders as a prime example of how biopolitical calculations are inherent to decisions regarding where and for whom to intervene. They each take a different tact in arguing that the altruistic mantra of NGO “humanitarianism” is not without the realities of political calculi or ethical conundrums that compromise the scope of intervention. Robbins evinces more optimism in extending Redfield’s critique to investigate how his

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within and between the numerous people—acting with varying levels of competencies and compassion—who make these recovery programs function in a ravaged city compromised by historical legacies and political economic realities. One of the enduring lessons I personally learned from this disaster experience is that contradiction often trumps clarity with respect to the utility of bureaucratized relief programs and the personal motivations of those who function within them.

ethnographic subjects, the Transfrontier Conservation Movement (TAC) in South Africa, in his estimation, successfully negotiated NGO intervention and substantive local participation.

Contributors to Sarat and Lazaun's (2009) edited volume<sup>42</sup> further elaborated on legal and political responses to natural disaster vis-à-vis a claim to humanitarianism, "at a time when the sudden, discontinuous, and disastrous event has become a structural component in political debate and the social imaginary" (3). Dauber historicized the establishment of direct federal assistance to victims of disaster, which she traced back to the first direct expenditures of the federal treasury to "sufferers" victimized by agitators during the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion (64). Her points are germane to this study because she shows the necessity, over time, for petitioners to fit their claims within past precedent while deploying a particular narrative form that shows them as "innocent victims of fate" rather than irresponsibly complicit in their own misery. For Dauber, disaster can temporarily enable "even disadvantaged groups to successfully claim large-scale resources while leaving undisturbed their inability to receive help for their chronic condition" (76). Thus, the route back to the bottom for poor disaster victims runs through extended disaster relief, since "only compensation can quickly restore judgment that the poor are responsible for their own deprivation" (77).

Susan Sterrit's drew from the work of Adi Ophir who distinguished between "catastrophic" and "providential" states of governance<sup>43</sup> to draw attention to several dynamics regarding post-Katrina housing policy. Ophir characterized a "catastrophic

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<sup>42</sup> See *Catastrophe: Law, Politics, and the Humanitarian Impulse*. New York: Beacon Press.

<sup>43</sup> From *The Two-State Solution: Providence and Catastrophe* (2007). Ophir works with Agamben's "bare life" thesis as he elucidates a view of a "new role states play as generators and facilitators of disasters, on the one hand, and as authors — or at least facilitators, sponsors, and coordinators — of survival and relief operations, on the other hand" through sovereign acts of exemption.

state” by the disaggregated assemblage of declarations, exemptions, and court orders that loosely link interrelated levels of federal, state, and local post-disaster governance. Like Dauber, Sterrit warns of a “tricky situation of enacting policies based on a distinction between endemic poverty and disaster victimization” (88), noting further, when the “catastrophic state becomes a version of the so-called welfare state, it is bound to raise questions about why certain groups of individuals receive extended benefits.” In other words, these works speak to the intractable matter of clearly distinguishing between “deserving” and “undeserving” impoverished disaster victims. Those unclear distinctions thus became topics of considerable public discourse in the subsequent months and years following the storm.

### ***Hunkering Down or Heading Out***

“Preparedness marks out a limited but agreed-upon terrain for the management of collective life” (Lakoff 2007: 249).

Local weather forecasters had begun preparing the coastal population for an immanent catastrophe approximately three days before the storm. By Tuesday, September 9, Houston-based meteorologist Frank Billingsly—who is also a second-home owner on Galveston Island—began warning viewers that the exceptionally large size of this storm system would create conditions for a surge that could far surpass the proportions of wind and water for a category-2 hurricane. Such warnings existed against a large “cone of uncertainty” for predicting areas of potential landfall. Weather models projected virtually the entire Texas coast from Beaumont to Brownsville as potential sites of impact. By Wednesday, and particularly Thursday, official leaders, including Houston Mayor Bill White began appearing on television to communicate the potentially dire effects of this massive storm system. On Tuesday it seemed like the storm would traffic

south of the Houston-Galveston region towards Freeport. The projected path changed suddenly on Wednesday. Mayor Lyda Ann Thomas and City Manager Leblanc convened a press conference that morning conveying cautious optimism that the storm was trafficking south and that an island-wide evacuation would likely not be necessary. Both of them implored Galvestonians to prepare and remain vigilant in case the storm shifted direction again. Later that afternoon, it did. As Ike shifted decisively northward towards the island, Thomas hastily ordered a mandatory evacuation for the West End. Yet she continued to reiterate that after the debacle of the Rita evacuation, she would not declare the order for the entire island unless deemed absolutely necessary. However, a consensus of forecasts predicted the storm would turn directly towards Galveston through the evening. Lyda Ann Thomas acquiesced and ordered the mandatory island-wide evacuation. The omnipresent, rhetorical question posted on the marquee outside of Aramco Storm Protection on Broadway<sup>44</sup> now conjured an angst-laden revelation of new hindsight: “Hurricane Season: Are You Prepared?”

By the time I evacuated to Austin on Friday, September 11, local and national media had converged on Galveston to capture many of familiar scenes that were documented by the *Galveston Daily News* in 1983 prior to Hurricane Alicia, e.g., bar patrons festively drinking alcohol and mugging gleefully for reporters and photographers from bar decks overlooking the Gulf, while they also beared witness to the odd assemblage of nervousness, amusement, and apathy emoted by fellow—if also fleeing--residents. A local reporter for the local NBC affiliate expressed dismayed shock as he briefly interviewed an approximately 25-year-old Hispanic mother overseeing her

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<sup>44</sup> Aramco primarily sells storm shutters. It is prominently located at the corner of 51<sup>st</sup> and Broadway Avenue and is visible soon after exiting the causeway bridge from the mainland.

children playing on the beach as turbulent Gulf waves signified Ike's impending arrival. When asked by the reporter why she was not evacuating, she confidently professed her faith, "We know that this storm is not coming. We're just faithful believers that God will just let it push by" (KPRC-2 newscast, 9/11/08). Television reports on Friday afternoon from the Kroger's supermarket at 57<sup>th</sup> and Seawall Boulevard showed a kinetic atmosphere where numerous Galvestonians appeared willing and, if slightly unprepared, to remain on the island. A reporter from the CBS affiliate noted the late preparations when he stopped a young white woman to investigate the contents of her purchase, "Let's see...we have some water {two 1-gallon jugs}, some food, and....ah...some adult beverages {two 1.5L bottles of red wine}. Looking sheepishly into the camera, she responded, "You want adult beverages you can drink warm" (KHOU-11 newscast, 9/11/08). One woman who had evacuated and whom I interviewed after the storm told me she couldn't believe how many essential storm items remained on the shelf at the island's Walmart supercenter on Wednesday night, stating, "I was struck by how people were buying normal stuff! They weren't buying water, and peanut butter and tuna, and all that! It was all still available."

Ike disaster culture on Galveston is an assemblage of both similar and conflicting patterns of experience. The most cursory distinctions that I aggregate together include evacuees and those who stayed. However, within these distinctions existed many situations and social predicaments; some of which are structurally similar, others that were divergent based on the social, affective, and material circumstances of the storm experience. Generalized forms of sociality accompanied storm encounters and its protracted aftermath. As did common problems individuals and households faced

afterward. These included comparable scopes of damage to a home and their effect on prolonged periods of displacement; financial dilemmas due to the demands of home repair and/or loss of employment; similar experiences with bureaucratic recovery agencies such as FEMA, TWIA, insurance, and mortgage holders; and comparable affective states of trauma, stress, relief, and/or future-oriented commitment to recovery volunteerism. The geographic proximities of housing and commercial structures relative to island topography broadly patterned the physical damage effects. However when proceeding to geographic levels of particular streets and blocks, anomalies existed. This became particularly evident during public comments at City Council—and as described above at the town hall meeting—when residents complained of their inability to obtain various rebuilding permits from the planning department due to a neighborhood’s collective designation as “yellow” or “red.” Disaster culture is also about the idiosyncratic and inassimilable that resist inclusion into collectivizing description, but rather, held up and discussed by people afterwards because of their profound singularities, some of which I detail below.

*Storm Stories: calamity and a compromised carnivalesque*

I rendered a distinction above between the “catastrophic” and “providential” states of governance. One way of charting “recovery” involves tracing the uneven transition from the catastrophic to the providential as the adjudication of emergency governance slowly returned to normal functioning. This extended beyond formal politics. Various socio-cultural arrangements attended with an uneven transition between conditions of abject disaster to the banal routines that oriented everyday lives prior to the storm. For many Galvestonians, particularly those who stayed on the island, the storm

provided temporary recourse to conditions of life that approximated a Bahktinian carnivalesque due to temporary cessation of routine lifeways of employment and a lack of normalizing civic services such as power, water, and natural gas. Granted, such initial opportunities for temporary revelry and socialization occurred in a context of impinging or imminent stresses, traumas, dilemmas associated with cleaning-out one's home, finding alternative lodging, registering with FEMA or contacting insurance representatives. It did not equate directly to Bahktin's (1965) depiction of the temporary suspension and inversion of power structures noted in Rabelais' literature. It did not define nor characterize life in Galveston, and existed in a dense assemblage of other's experiences marked more by trauma, uncertainty, and boredom. Yet, for some, carnivalesque forms of sociality amidst the grotesque realism of disaster helped mitigate the vulnerabilities of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty that attended with having ridden out a hurricane that was immensely more powerful and destructive than generally anticipated. One could regard several stories through an essentializing sensibility of "typical Galveston deals" because of the explicit awareness of their peculiar idiosyncrasy.

Mark is a real estate broker and former city council member who I interviewed. He is openly gay and lives with his partner in a large Victorian home off of historic downtown furnished with handsome antique decor. In the context of his broader storm narrative, he described the scene at Lafitte's, a customarily gay bar located at 25<sup>th</sup> and Q Street. Lafitte's had been highlighted on CNN and in a Reuters news report before landfall, generally depicting a scene of foolhardy revelry amongst Galvestonians who had chosen not to evacuate. The bar's fortunate location close to the seawall spared the building from structural damage, save only for the loss of power, water, and sewer that

affected the entire island. Thus, Lafitte's became the first business to reopen the next day. Weary Galvestonians welcomed the libations.

They had hardly closed at all for the hurricane. In fact it probably gave them an excuse to stay open almost all night. {Later in afternoon on Saturday} we went down there and everyone was congregating there—straight and gay people—and they had jacked up the price on cocktails a little bit but everyone had a plastic cup that they kept. It was their plastic cup and you better not lose it because you weren't going to get another one. You could walk out the bar with your cocktail. You could basically do whatever you wanted to. They said you can take a piss, but you CAN'T take a shit because the sewers are down. And every thirtieth person—but who was counting—you had to take a bucket of water from the pool and throw it in the toilet. I think there about 300 people at the bar at one point. We had fantastic weather after the hurricane for quite a long time. It was nice and cool. They still had ice. They had a generator going every hour or so.

People were telling rumors that there was going to be a forced evacuation. There were rumors that there would be a curfew at 6pm. There were rumors that this was the only place open whatsoever, and wasn't it so cool that so many straight people were coming to a gay bar. We hadn't heard anything from people who were in flooded out houses because, again, it was pretty tough to get anywhere on the island because you were still on foot at the time.

I took a group guys, I said, "Hey guys. let's grab a cocktail and go up the seawall and see what's going on." We went up there and it was UNBELIEVABLE how Murdoch's and the Balinese Room had been all but taken off their pilings and were on top of the seawall. Everyone wanted to get some Balinese paraphernalia as a souvenir. What was amazing was that all the debris on the seawall seemed to be so neatly deposited and piled between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. And on top of this huge pile of storm rubble was the grand piano from the Balinese that was sitting on top of it! No one could have put that there any more neatly than Mother Nature. It was just so strange. It was right-side up. Elton John could have sat right there and played on it.

The first foray to Lafitte's followed an intense and at times frightening experience during the previous night. He and his partner decided against evacuating since he had been at a realtors conference in San Antonio. Like many Galvestonians, he had believed the storm would hit near Corpus Christi up until Wednesday. He and the other Houstonian and Galvestonian realtors left that day and raced back to the area to board up and prepare. By Friday:

I could drive through the intersection, but I could see there was a lot of water downtown. I didn't give it that much more thought. I thought that would basically be the extent of the water. If it had been then that's probably as much water as Hurricane Carla in 1961. Around 6:00 I noticed just two blocks down at 25<sup>th</sup> and Sealy. I thought it looked like a whole bunch of trash, or white paper in the middle of the intersection. My partner says, "That's not trash, those are white caps!" So at that time I realized that wow it is flooding more. I just didn't think it would precede that much further.

He would be mistaken. The rains picked up through the early evening and by 7:00 every window not boarded-up began to leak, requiring him to mop-up in-coming water every thirty minutes until the eye passed around 1:30am. Around midnight, his partner, a smoker, had gone outside and saw four feet of standing water. They began moving everything from the basement before the eye passed. He echoed the recurring theme I heard from those who stayed: the eerily beautiful serenity outside, which would belie the ferociousness of storm's impending backend.

We were able to go out to the back porch. It was a BEAUTIFUL full moon. Crystal-clear sky. I could read star constellations. That was amazing. I felt like it was beautiful, something really keen to see. It just illuminated the neighborhood. It was brighter than if the alley lights were on. You could see little currents wiggling around. For the most part it was quiet. There wasn't even a sloshing at that point. It had risen up so gently. It seemed like everything was in place as it was rising.

Using a flashlight signal, he came into contact with a fellow neighbor. She had heard a report, supposedly from the Weather Channel, to expect upwards of another 20ft of surge on top of what was already on the ground. Skeptical, but now feeling more urgency, he and his partner went inside and began moving everything from the spacious first floor of their historical home upstairs. The backend arrived as quickly as the first half had ceased. The wind blew even harder this time.

It was hitting a corner of the house ferociously. It would zip around the wood that I nailed up. Every single window. It sounded like a kazoo. Each board had its own off-key kazoo sound. Really shrill and long. I couldn't tell if I wanted to laugh or cry. It was so funny, but so scary. That's when we lost a window on the stairwell. It was literally sucked out. It sounded like the tornados I heard before in Kansas. That's when I went around to the ones that were covered up and tried to open them up to equalize the pressure on the house. This was just before trying to go to sleep. This noise kept on bothering me. My partner asked, "How will we know when the house starts to fall apart?" And I said, "Well when you hear breaking glass." We both went to sleep. I told him to fall asleep with his shoes on because you don't want to look for your shoes if you have get out and run or climb out a window. Twenty minutes later we heard lots of glass break.

The house didn't fall apart. They even managed to get a few hours of sleep. However, the surrounding city appeared mightily torn up when they awoke with the daylight. He

went outside with his dog. He was astonished by the sight of more than 10 wild birds one does not customarily see in neighborhood yards, “egrets, herons, and ibises, all barely standing up. Each one of them was leaning against something. I let them dry out and they eventually flew away.”

Galvestonians recounted the unexpected intensity of the experience time and again. The BOIs like to convey a sense of seasoned indignity against the threat of a hurricane, having experienced the major storms: particularly Carla (1961) and Alicia (1983), and a host of lesser tropical storms like, Jerry (1989), Josephine (1996), Francis (1998) and Allison (2001). Moreover, locating oneself in kinship relation to the 1900 Storm is a customary practice to establish the credentials of indigenous authenticity. Although the looming specter of Katrina grudgingly forced the hand of nearly all Galvestonians to evacuate ahead of Rita, a customary code was that one did not evacuate for a storm less than a category-3. Galvestonians chose to ride out the storm for these reasons, but also because time ran out. For example, a family of three spent the night of the storm in their 40-foot-long “dream boat” that they had recently purchased upon moving to the island from Colorado. They left the majority of their possessions in storage on the mainland in San Leon, although much of this was subsequently destroyed. They took a family vote to remain on the boat for the storm after spending Friday securing it to a pier off of 61<sup>st</sup> Street in the Offats Bayou, “Up to this point we had been busy and didn’t know the new line that Ike was taking.” They spent their time adjusting lines as the water got higher and higher in the marina,

We hunkered down and waited. There were other boats too and we were all keeping an eye on each other. The eye came through and it was like nothing we had ever seen in our lives. We were not prepared for the second half even though we went during the calm to readjust all the lines and bumpers. “Bam!” Within minutes we go from calm to total hell. We looked out the pilothouse

windows and there are three boats that snapped their lines and appeared to be heading right for us. Oh this is really bad. Ok everyone is now ready to abandon ship including the poor kitty.

They made it through the night, as did the boat. Other boats in the marina were not as fortunate.

The boat next to us ended up in our slip and we were one over. Now this is just the small things. We are almost up on land and there are boats in piles, in the parking lot and on top of piles. We sit pretty as you please with just an area on the side hull where she rubbed; it was mainly cosmetic damage. One person's boat had sunk and he had just barely escaped with his life. At this point we can't get out of the boat, so we sit and wait for the surge to go out. Another boat is sitting on one of their lines and they had to cut it loose or risk it taking their boat down with them.

The family estimated that 75% of the boats in the marina were lost, but theirs nevertheless, "sat pretty as you please," even after they were displaced from the island for several weeks and looters had ransacked other boats. While their boat had been spared, the storm had flooded and thus effectively destroyed their diesel truck. They obtained a military transport to Ball High, where they took a bus to the shelter in San Antonio. This was story was received in emailed form without follow-up questioning available. Despite their uneven fortunes, the author nonetheless concluded, "People ask if we would do it again. If we had to do it again, we would do it in a heartbeat. I know most would call us crazy but hey we can't help it."

Paul and Kathy refused to evacuate their elevated rental house near the intersection of 30<sup>th</sup> and R ½ Street. Not for Ike, nor for Rita. They proudly noted of "closing down" The Poop Deck on Friday, which is popular seawall bar for locals that advertises, "Where Elite Meet in Bare Feet." Paul, a BOI in his 50s responded to me succinctly when I asked him when he and his wife began to consider the storm as a threat to their wellbeing, "I never did take Ike into consideration a threat. I probably should have given that I was here for Hurricane Carla. We were up on the seawall that Friday,

but it never entered my mind! To me, a hurricane is another hurricane.” Kathy elaborated further:

We heard category-two, and without out a doubt, we’d never leave for a category-two. We thought, yeah, it’s a big storm, but we didn’t have the tendencies to pack up and go. We just didn’t feel that way. There were a few of us around here in the neighborhood. There were nine of us in this neighborhood that stayed on this one block. It wasn’t something we really thought about.

They too were surprised when the eye passed and they could see that there was nearly two feet of water in the courtyard below, in a neighborhood that had never flooded.

The front end was nothing compared to the back end. This whole house shook. It scared me. You see that flag up there {she points to folded American flag on display in glass casing}. I sat up here looking at it and praying and saying “Dad, make it stop, Dad, make it stop.” It was...I mean this house, as sturdy as it is, was shaking. You could definitely feel it with the strength of the back end.

It finally did let up around 7:00am. Then they went to survey the damage on Seawall Boulevard. The views confirmed to Paul that, “Ike was definitely the worst storm I’ve ever seen. This took 1900’s place. Without a doubt, I’ll tell you that.” According to Kathy,

The furthest you could get was to 21<sup>st</sup> street. That’s when we saw Hooters, Murdochs, and the Balinese were completely gone except for the one piece of Murdochs. Now you have to understand our next-door neighbor was the manager of the Balinese. So Paul said, “We need to go get her.” We drove back and saw them on the seawall. We told them to get in the car. She asked where we were going. He just said, “Get in the car.” So we were driving going east and she said, “Oh okay, now we can go see how my Balinese is doing.” So we got there, she got out, and it was like...I mean the whole thing was gone. Just gone. So on Saturday to have that realization that the whole thing was completely gone...that was tough. Nobody was hungry. Nobody wanted anything. It was just...nerves.

Another husband-wife couple who described themselves as “rural folks” who prefer “quiet evenings and tending to livestock” over the tourist environment of Galveston were also surprised by the intensity of the storm. Before the storm they were planning to move over to Port Bolivar on the peninsula. This is their emailed story submitted from their new residence.

They had only been in Galveston for a few years. Upon getting married they intended to leave Galveston and anticipated buying a home in 2009. They had already begun moving supplies and equipment from her cleaning service business off island over to a cottage that had recently become available in Port Bolivar. One week before the storm. On September 12, friends awakened them with knock on their door to let them know that water was already entering their street near Offats Bayou. Thus began their efforts to raise all of their belongs to the second floor and moved their cars to an elevated parking garage. Then they waited, looking outside at a sky that was “deceivingly beautiful,” but which belied the encroaching water that was already submerging cars. It was deep enough to take their boat through the surrounding neighborhood. For a while they had been “smiling and laughing,” not anticipating the impending threat. Water began rising quickly. By nightfall three feet of floodwater filled their first floor. They moved onto the roof of the first floor and subsequently admitted their foolishness for waving away a Coast Guard helicopter.

As darkness fell, we moved inside to wait for the storm. The winds picked up, but we could not really hear its wrath as the trees were not able to shake like they would have had they not had so much water surrounding them. We began hearing a noise, only to realize it was our garage contents hitting the ceiling of the first floor. The water was coming! We had a radio that ran off a battery and heard reports of fires around town, which we could verify ourselves by looking out the window. Red illuminated the sky and smoke could be smelled. Our thought shifted back and forth between, “well if the storm doesn’t get us, the fires will.” Crazy thoughts!<sup>45</sup>

As the eye passed, Alice and Bob negotiated a precarious line between their existence as forms of *bare life* before the elements of the storm and as citizen-subjects. They inexplicably still had phone service during the eye. She contacted FEMA, who directed her to the Red Cross, which in turn told her that her application would be “dropped in a bucket” once President Bush rendered an executive disaster declaration. As the water seeped over the final

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<sup>45</sup> Narrative accessed in archives of Texas History Center of Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.

staircase and into the second floor, Alice scribbled her social security number on her arm so that she could be easily identified in case they did indeed face the “certain death” that the National Weather Service forewarned.

In a last ditch effort, we put garbage bags over us like a raincoat and put lifejackets on over that. Bobby wrapped duct tape around my jacket to make it tighter so it would not slip off in the swift waters of Ike. He tied our jackets together with a small rope then we sat on the sofa, waiting to see how much of our house Ike was going to consume.

The house held. Their account corroborates other assertions that the water receded nearly as quickly as it rose. They went downstairs and found a lifetime’s accumulation of possessions destroyed in the wake. Whereas her husband’s photo albums were spared, her photos were lost to the flood. Self-described as “numb and disbelieving,” they ventured into streets that “looked more like a third-world country experiencing war or natural disaster...not America...not Texas...not Galveston Island.”

Alice’s testimony of her experience after the storm exemplified to me a frantic desire to find order and grace amidst the catastrophe. The next day, she and her husband walked “wet, dirty, and smelly, but never once embarrassed” to their church expecting Sunday service. They found the doors chained shut.

No church today anywhere. In the days to come, we contacted all the insurance companies and stood in the long lines for information, food, water and ice. A routine I don’t ever want to get used to doing ever again. By the next Sunday, there was still no word from FEMA or insurance companies. We again went to church, but again, no one there. Still locked up tight. I was desperate to attend and Bobby searched the roads to find any church, any denomination, it didn’t matter, that was having service and we found none. Feeling lost and believing everyone had forgotten God in all this mess, we headed to the distribution site to get our daily newspaper (page or two long) and handouts. What a blessing this little newspaper had become in our lives. No other contact with the outside world at all except this thin little paper handed to us each morning. In it, we saw that Sacred Heart was having mass at Hotel Galvez in the ballroom at noon. We attend nine o’clock mass normally so we were slightly early. We felt sure everyone left on the island would be making their way to service, but this was not the case. We waited more than two hours for mass and only a handful of people showed up. It seemed there were more reporters than service goers. I was glad to be among the few.

Alice’s testimony ended there, amidst the protracted, unresolved liminality of a post-Ike existence unfolding against the myriad uncertainties of a new life. Their exacerbated

vulnerabilities due to the geographic location near the Bayou were rendered as a form of resilience through the reclamation of communal religious participation and federal aid provisioning. And perhaps also aided by the normalizing practice of reading the newspaper. She and her husband have left the island for good, one of the approximately 10,000 former Galvestonians who have voluntarily left and been involuntarily displaced.

During the storm, the conditions deteriorated to the extent that police and fire crews suspended service at approximately 9:00 on Friday night. I sat alone in a living room in Austin watching television reports showing houses burning throughout the city to which fire crews were unable to respond. Reconnaissance and relief operations began almost immediately on Saturday morning. By Sunday the National Guard established the Point of Delivery (POD) station in the parking lot of the Academy Outdoors store at 45<sup>th</sup> and Seawall Boulevard. Search and Rescue crews began going door-to-door to search for fatalities.<sup>46</sup> An amphibious naval battalion landed on the beach on September 18 to assist with debris removal and other ancillary support services. People reported hearing the constant sound of helicopters in the sky. Within days the Salvation Army and Red Cross had established mobile meal distribution service throughout all accessible parts of the island, and soon thereafter established several points-of-service locations. Ball High School served as the point of departure for evacuees to board buses for San Antonio and Austin. Three debris-removal companies that had been arranged under pre-existing contracts descended onto the island to begin clearing the main island thoroughfares that linked to each other and to the causeway

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<sup>46</sup> Whereas City Manager Leblanc had previously implored the press to not photograph bodies, perhaps anticipating a death toll comparable to the 1,836 killed by Katrina, Hurricane Ike claimed fewer than 100 lives on Galveston. However, while the storm itself killed far fewer than had been previously feared, it did also raise the dead, as reports emerged that the storm had exhumed coffins from cemeteries along Broadway and off of 61<sup>st</sup> street.

bridge—Broadway Avenue, Harborside Drive, Seawall Boulevard, 61<sup>st</sup> Street and FM 3005 to the West End. This immediate militarized aid response and the pace of debris removal was in my purview the least criticized aspect of Hurricane Ike recovery<sup>47</sup>.

For those able, and willing, to remain on an island despite the lack of functioning civil infrastructure, the establishment of the POD location provided two bags of ice, five gallons of water, and five MREs (“Meals Ready to Eat”). It also became the first clearinghouse of information on Monday when the *Galveston County Daily News* began printing a very limited edition. Moreover, for others it became the “adventure for the day,” as one informant put it, since it provided a destination to break the anxiety of clean-up and the monotony of waiting for services to be restored. The goods obtained at the POD could also serve as a source of currency within informal markets and reciprocal social exchanges. Patrons of the aforementioned Lafitte’s bar were promised four drink tickets per person upon successfully obtaining and delivering the ice, water, and MREs for use at the bar. Paul and Kathy often didn’t eat the MREs or Salvation Army meals themselves, but they would drive to the Academy for the newspaper, the water, and ice. They would then distribute the MREs to the other seven neighbors who banded together during the two weeks before power, water, and gas were restored. They also traded use of their vehicle to a friend who in turn kept them in stock of vodka and cigarettes.

Obtaining and distributing meals from the Salvation Army or Red Cross was a small courtesy in my own experience as well. My landlords and I participated in exchanges of balanced reciprocity that provided an outlet for socializing and sharing information. Once the meal service stopped approximately three weeks after we returned, we talked informally far

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<sup>47</sup> At least several times during fieldwork, I encountered visitors who conveyed surprise that there was not more visibly lingering storm carnage, such as they had expected in a post-Katrina media world.

less. The lines at the mobile meal trucks included a wide range of classes, races, and ethnicities. Utilizing the PODs, receiving the charitable meals of the Salvation Army and Red Cross, free cleaning supplies and applying to FEMA generally lacked any social stigmatization as a sign of personal weakness, parasitic greed, or class debasement. One prominent BOI who I interviewed conveyed an ironic sense of pleasure at this social dynamic as he recounted calling friends for suggestions on where to eat dinner, “Because we’re unsure of where to dine tonight. We can’t choose between the Red Cross or the Salvation Army.” Approximately two weeks after I returned to the island, and four weeks following the storm, I noted the emergence of a shift. The lines began to thin, particularly with demonstrably middle-classed bodies. The unfailingly kind and upbeat volunteers who serviced the mobile trucks began expressing hints of compassion fatigue through non-verbal cues. The day I received a slight eye-roll followed by an MRE filled with spam and unleavened bread—in lieu of the chicken and dumplings, barbequed chicken, or chili that had been customary as the dinner entree— I stopped utilizing the charitable meal service.

This is one example of several forms of federal and charitable aid provisioning that were susceptible to shifting attitudes of necessity and deservingness. During the later stages of fieldwork in 2010, residents increasingly began to demonstrate hostility towards homeowner applicants to the federally funded home repair assistance program—particularly when applicants began publicly voicing complaints against the maddeningly slow pace of aid distribution—and with particular vitriol against the public housing rebuilding plans of the Galveston Housing Authority. Whether motivated more by individuals themselves returning to a state of customary normalcy after the storm, or unassimilated stress-induced passions that had never been adequately processed

therapeutically, the increasing number of people voicing negative objections to prolonging the provisioning of aid through government and civil society seemed indicative of a collective return to relative normality. The latter term requires qualification. I use it to suggest a transition from the dominant discourses of collective affectedness and pervasive need that circulated more widely than any discourses of objection. Discourses of objection were replete with much more abstract politicized terms about deservingness, government inefficiency, and the malignant effect of public social service provisioning on individual initiative<sup>48</sup>. Such terms were generally deployed well before the storm in American political discourse to frame contemporary national political economic issues. They were used afterwards as well; typically linking

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<sup>48</sup> Examples included comments on news stories in the website of the *Galveston County Daily News*:

**\*Why aren't these homeowners out swinging a hammer to repair their own homes?** I would like for someone to build a nice house for me. I deserve it. I have worked all my life and paid maximum taxes the last 20 years. Oh, wait. I don't get money back for being successful. For being successful, you get the opportunity to pay for houses for others who drain the government.

**\*I say let's give these people the number to 1-800-WHINE.** They say they're tired of the fight. I'm tired of the fight, too. I'm tired of the overgrown grass, rats, and the neighborhoods that look like war zones because people don't clean up or fix up. **I'm tired of all the excuses. There are responsibilities with homeownership. If you can't handle it, then don't own one.** As soon as we were allowed in, we were cleaning up debris, lining up contractors and rebuilding. Yes, we all had to deal with insurance and it can be a hassle, but you live in a storm prone area, people. Be prepared. If you didn't have insurance or were underinsured, then shame on you...whose fault is that? Now, quit your whining, take our tax dollar and fix your house or leave. In that case, don't let the causeway hit you in the hinny on your way.

**\*Let's see, 1900 Hurricane destroyed vast parts of the city, 6,000 killed, people cleaned up the city, built back and put Galveston on a growth path for the next 70 years.** Fast forward to 2008, Hurricane Ike hits, lots of damage but nothing like 1900. People have the opportunity to buy insurance, the feds promise billions of dollars of aid to the area, Galveston is the largest recipient. Two-and-a-half years after the storm, Galveston still has a lot of non-hurricane related trash; a lot of energy is used promoting building and very expensive welfare-public-housing people. **Other taxpayers want in on this federal money to fix their damaged homes, but after more than two years, no money, people complaining** and others along with business establishments are the Galveston, home of the county seat. All of this is happening while the rest of the count is growing. Depending on government is not the answer. Not only is money wasted, the red tape and stipulations that goes with these grants works against the people it is intended to help. Federal grants is a way for government to shape society by social engineering, it most always leads to an unhappy public who usually points fingers at everyone except the ones who caused the problem in the first place.

continued federal assistance to Ike victims to “government bailouts” in a time of “debt crisis.” Again, this discursive assemblage existed in contradistinction to that which (initially) professed unity, mutual compassion, and an understanding of the pervasive—and in many instances, overwhelming—effect that the storm had on Galvestonian’s lives and livelihoods<sup>49</sup>.

In the subsequent months following the storm, informants who stayed during the storm expressed nostalgic sentiments for the time before other residents returned; though often juxtaposed against recollections of the fear, anxiety, and uncertainty that attends with surviving a natural disaster and plotting a personal future in a city of ruins situated within a precipitous national economic crisis. Claire, a 49-year-old co-operator of a bed and breakfast adjacent to the historical downtown district, welcomed me into her home in March 2009 to tell me her Ike narrative. Sitting amidst draped furniture, unhung paintings featuring catholic iconography, and a prominently displayed “Catholics for Obama” campaign placard in her living room, she held forth. She was one of the very few people I spoke with who did not have a rather nightmarish Rita evacuation story that

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<sup>49</sup> This called to mind Lauren Berlant’s (2004) deconstruction of “compassion.” Her work strived to dislodge its apparent simplicity as an unequivocally positive, humanistic emotion. She instead interrogated the concept as a fraught nexus of emotional affinities and public performances that presuppose a “good intention” to both acknowledge and ameliorate suffering, but which can be problematic given that “compassion” is enacted in social fields forged out of unstable, contradictory understandings of what is “good” or “ethical.” A facile example would be gifting candy to a child with poor teeth. Her work drew my attention to various ways that people and corporate bodies enacted compassionate gestures and caused me to question the uneven social distances that Galvestonians—and those off the island—circulated “compassion” as a fleeting act of generosity, an emotional affinity, or a sustained ethical commitment. By that I mean, people varyingly expressed compassion from the level of immediate household or family unit, to peer groups, work colleagues, all the way to “Galveston” as a generalized social field of mutual suffering. And even then, such claims existed alongside exclusionary distinctions made against “looters” and “scavengers” of discarded debris. Moreover, stories became common about displaced residents “wearing out their welcome” with family and friends. As more time elapsed following the storm, the greater the public displays of antagonism against continued performances of lasting suffering or victimhood.

influenced their decision to not evacuate. She cited an ineffable intuition as her reason for staying.

It's really weird, I don't know what made me not evacuate for Ike. Maybe it's just intuitive, who knows, but I knew that this was going to be the one that was going to come to Galveston. Even when it was supposed to go south. Then it hitched north, and I thought, it's going to hitch north just enough to come onto the island. But something told me to stay. The bed and breakfast is a big ol' place. People are going to need a place to stay. That house survived the 1900 Storm, and so did this one. People are going to need help. I thought about Rita a little bit, and thought what would happen if we couldn't get back to the island for a long time.

She described her experience of the storm and the subsequent time before the rest of Galveston returned as “the best of times, worst of times sort of thing.” She rode out the storm at the bed and breakfast with her common-law husband, daughter, two parrots, dog, cat, and another recently adopted pregnant cat that gave birth to a litter the morning after the storm. It was a long night.

About 10 or 10:30 at night we opened the door to the basement and we saw the water. My partner was like, “Oh my God, the storm surge is here.” We didn't know how deep it was going to get. They told us the surge would be 15 feet. The elevation in our kitchen was 15 feet. That started to get a little scary. So we occupied ourselves for a while taking stuff upstairs. It never did come into the main area. But it smelled horrible. It had a chemical smell because all the water was just greasy and oily looking. And it had all the gasoline from lawnmowers and those types of things, paints, and turpentine. It was horrid. Gross. I remember at one point while going upstairs that Jeff had an axe. I thought we should have it handy. We're not going up in the attic to drown. I mean it's a tall house, but that's just how we were thinking.

During the eye they ventured onto the porch and stared under moonlight at the silent tide of the flood. The water was approximately four-feet deep. Clair, like other informants, was amazed at how quickly the water rose and then retreated with the back end of the storm, “It kind of got sucked out like a vacuum cleaner when the eye passed. It was just gone.”

The entire family—dog and cat included—slept together in a king-sized bed. The ferocity of the wind that wailed like a banshee during the backend scared them all, but they eventually dozed off. They awoke to the cat giving birth to a new litter. Later that

morning they went outside and encountered several dead dogs amidst the fallen trees and dazed residents walking down the street with plastic bags filled with what remained of their possessions.

I could smell a house on fire and there were lots of downed trees. I saw people—the coast guard helicopters were flying overhead. That’s when it really hit me and I started thinking, wow, what’s really going on? I expected to see some houses turned over, but then I started seeing people who must have been from The Projects, walking down Broadway with all they had. Maybe a grocery sack. I don’t know where they came from, but they were wading down Broadway. And I don’t know where they were going, I guess a pick-up point to go to Ball High. I saw little kids and I thought, “Man, that’s all they have left.” It was killing me already, it was so sad.

Clair was one of the fortunate Galvestonians who experienced comparatively little damage to their home. A gaping hole at the main house would require a new roof and keep them living at the bed and breakfast for several months. They toured the city the next day and settled into a routine that was oddly enjoyable for her and family.

It was a weird contrast of being super sad, but yet peaceful. At Academy we’d go get ice and MREs. We were really excited about the MREs. It was like a little routine. Everyday we’d go get some ice and then we’d sit out on the porch till nighttime. It was really nice. The neighbors across the street eventually left, but we talked to them more in those first weeks than we ever had. We talk to our neighbors a lot more since the storm.

Like her evacuation decision, she claims ineffable intuition for why she desired to go to Mass at St. Patrick’s cathedral on Broadway Avenue. At the first Mass she learned that the first floor of the rectory had been completely destroyed and displaced the clergymen to points off the island. She offered a room at the inn to “Father John,” who graciously accepted under the condition that he would offer prayers on her behalf night and day for the rest of his life. She told me this part of her story with a constant smile as she recounted how much she unexpectedly enjoyed that time between September and November when Father John and another family friend lived with them at the inn.

We all bonded so great in that house. We went through the election together in that house. We were all big Democrats in that house, and we just...oh gosh, with Father John, we just had these cool political discussions that nobody has anymore. We watched it together. It was really nice. As long as I didn’t go many places to see what other people were going through.

Both she and her daughter experienced near-debilitating depression after her guests left in November. They both began taking Prozac. Her daughter would begin crying for reasons she couldn't articulate. Clair's relationship with her partner nearly collapsed as a result of the stress and subsequent arguments. The family's loss of income was compounded by the need to make home repairs amidst continued mortgage payments and glacially paced insurance settlements with Nationwide and TWIA. This created "terrifying" financial difficulties. She expressed a sense of good fortune because her common in-laws were in a position to help monetarily. They also had family members who assisted with house repairs and electrical work. She compared this time in her life to the death of a close family member wherein social support from family and friends might intensify to help the grieving, but then will ultimately wane as those people return to the normal routines of life.

For the first couple of days you have all this energy, and you're like "Let's get this done." We're schlepping stuff, and we're crying, and big trucks were coming, and we're breaking up our antique bedroom set to throw in it, and I'm crying again, but you know you have to do it so you press on. And you're sleeping at night because you're so tired. I don't know when it happens, but all the sudden you realize that this isn't just going to be a couple of weeks.

You start to feel like you're floundering in some ways because life is more normal, but I don't have my extended family around and my little network at night. We kept each other sane. The further you go along the more you feel like you're floundering, but then in some ways, you think that things are looking better. It's the most interesting contrast I've ever experienced. Nothing makes sense and everything makes sense. I want my life pace to be slower, but then why aren't we making that happen? So I have mixed emotions about re-opening the inn and moving back in here. I love my house, but it's a step back to that frantic pace and step further from the things that I liked after the storm.

I mean, we're in good shape, but we're still going through all of this. And then look at all the other people. Everywhere you looked everybody you know...it was overwhelming. For a while I didn't really know how bad I was feeling. My partner was complaining about it. It was a double load before and it will be again. It's just SO many things. The (catholic) school might close; at the very least the school has changed. There just isn't anything in our lives that hasn't been impacted in some way. UTMB closes, our friends lose their jobs, and that means they can't go to O'Connell. How are people supposed to cope? You don't know if you have a job or a school? How do you take the next step?

Usually when you have a problem, one thing moves and that helps you figure some plan out. When everything is broken, you get stuck. You don't do anything. I just never felt anything like that sadness. But then it's always contrasted by something amazing. People are nicer. The island is nicer. It's more peaceful. Life is better but life is terrible. All my friends are having a horrible time, but here we are every night sitting down to dinner with people laughing and talking. We're closer than ever with our friends. It's all kinds of things.

Many Galvestonians made similar comments about the mutual aid of family, friends and even strangers following the storm. A pet-owning woman who had ridden out the storm with her mother in their home on Avenue O made a point of noting the “lighter moments” with strangers that emerged in the midst of a “war zone,”

We ran out of dog and cat food, and there were not yet any stores open. I put a sign out on the street corner asking for help. Within an hour a police officer stopped by, then he drove thirty blocks to a makeshift animal shelter and brought back cans of pet food.

A husband-wife BOI couple in their mid-70s who lived near the 4400 block on a cross-street south of Broadway decided against evacuating because the wife was concerned about leaving unattended a large quantity of pecans that were stored in a freezer in the garage. Those pecans were ultimately lost when a surge of water quickly entered the garage and sent the freezer crashing through the garage door. When they frantically attempted to get in their pick-up truck and leave for a family member's house, the man dropped his keys in the storm water. He was forced to carry his wife up a flight of stairs to the apartment above their garage and wait out the storm until morning. There was, however, some good news that emerged. The other content in the freezer, a large frozen turkey won at a charity raffle, and thought lost with the pecans was found by a random Galvestonian who saw the prize-winner's phone number written on the packaging. He phoned the rightful owner: “I've got your turkey, if you still want it.” The man declined the return of the turkey, but was thankful for this good-neighborly gesture.

Like Clair, Kathy evinced an internal conflict during our interview between personal anxiety and nostalgia for a lost time of communal strength. For her and their fellow neighbors who remained, Paul's smoker pit and their garage became an everyday meeting place. They both talked with gusto about the large cooking parties that occurred nearly every night, often fueled into the late night with copious amounts of bartered vodka and juice they could obtain from Kroger. Neighbors emptied their meat freezers. Paul utilized fortuitous encounters of his extended social networks. They pooled "every kind of meat you can imagine. Steaks. Ham. Deer sausage. Chicken. Everyone was bringing stuff. You name it, it was on the pit." A manager at the popular Dibella's Italian restaurant needed to get rid of its frozen foods before it spoiled, so he gifted Paul with 20lbs of shrimp for a festive shrimp boil that helped keep this neighborly group fed for over a week. Ice obtained at the PODs allowed them to store the leftovers. This became a favorite story of the group, particularly after Paul returned from a bicycle ride to invite the manager over to enjoy the shrimp. Galveston police officers stopped him because he was outside after the citywide 6pm curfew. In part because he hadn't shaved in weeks and thus left with a disheveled appearance, he was interpellated as a potential looter. He was let go but forewarned by the officer not to them catch Paul outside after curfew again, "or else!" This story elicited howls of laughter because of the spotty enforcement of the curfew—which Kathy called "a joke,"—Paul's own sense of vigilance against potential looters, and perhaps, they suspected, because of the officer's perception of Paul's surly and scruffy disposition that intensified from not having showered or shaven in days.

When electricity returned to the neighborhood block 11 days after the storm, the everyday conviviality amongst the group waned as well. People returned to their separate lives. The environmental stresses began taking an affecting toll. While Kathy admitted to being a “very emotional person who can cry at the drop of a hat,” Paul “keeps everything bottled inside.” She contended that the stresses of with living in a post-storm environment led to an outbreak of the shingles across his body the following month. Despite the nostalgic reminiscences of unprecedented sociality between neighbors, she noted that she became “an emotional wreck” a few days after the storm, adding that, “meanwhile our next door neighbors have gotten into a big argument. The couple down the street has gotten into a big argument. People were just at each other.” This juxtaposition of affects evidenced in my interview transcripts demonstrated to me the particularities of how vulnerability and resilience manifested and competed both within individuals and between people. When vulnerability was stronger than resilience, relationships frayed, depression overrode vivacity and threatened everyday functioning. Materially, when economic vulnerability was stronger than the informal and institutional sources of resilience, displacement ensued interminably; financial situations become more tenuous; late bill payments and compromised credit ratings fester.

A salient example of the interplay of vulnerability and resilience manifested in an institutional group setting was conveyed to me during an evacuation interview in the second-floor office of Mod Coffeehouse with its two new proprietors in June 2009. Mod had only recently reopened under new management following a several-month period when it seemed unlikely that it would ever open again. In January, around 25 persons who had worked for or frequently visited the shop stood together within the empty shell

of the brick building. We socialized and reminisced. A few days earlier Angela had published a guest column in the newspaper that Mod would not be reopening. The place had been completely gutted, save the for the 2"x4" beams that bared the trace of former walls. Several months later its grand reopening coincided with a visit from ABC television news anchor Robin Roberts, who came to both Galveston and Bolivar Peninsula to conduct interviews on hurricane recovery for a feature on "Good Morning America." Local television outlets from Houston also came to document customer reactions to the reopening, "It finally feels like we're back," said one young woman, nearly tearing up during the brief interview. Mod's closing was sad for so many because it took away a comfortable meeting place to socialize and study in the middle of historic downtown, but also because it was yet another reminder of how the storm had changed both life and lives. The fortuitousness of its reopening was as satisfying as their americanos. Ken and Holly made it happen when they approached Angela, the owner of both the pre-1900 building and the business. They were themselves transitioning towards a new life after the storm.

The married couple had only recently moved to Galveston from Austin prior to Ike to work with the Children's Center, a youth homelessness prevention organization. At the time the storm, both had worked on different assignments at the Center. Holly was preparing to launch a mobile outreach program in conjunction with the opening of a "one-stop" drop-in center that would provide basic essentials like a hot shower, food, and emergency counseling; as well as future-oriented services such as a mailing address, phone number, ID procurement, and job-placement assistance. They had just obtained the building to host the drop-in center. Ken worked to provide foster care placement for

internationally homeless youth, predominantly from Honduras and Guatemala, and who had been under the remit of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement. On Thursday morning before the storm they were on the road together ahead of a caravan of approximately 80 homeless youth and 15 staff members. The evacuation narrative that Ken and Holly told me that night was particularly striking because it starkly exemplified how the storm compounded pre-existing vulnerabilities and effectively challenged the staff who were entrusted daily with the role of aiding the resiliency of the children in a context of profound uncertainty and their own personal losses.

Ken and Holly began to take the storm threat seriously on Tuesday. That's when Holly saw their next-door neighbor and "third-generation BOI" began boarding up his house. They had previously taken their cues from him on how to confront a hurricane, "For {Tropical Storm} Eduardo and {Hurricane} Gustav, we were like, 'What do we do!?' And he's like, 'You can do what you want, I'm going to go party.'" Their neighbor's decisiveness in evacuating increased their anxiety. A four-hour meeting with the Center's management team the following day produced a semblance of an evacuation plan that necessitated sub-groups of evacuees remain apart from one another per federal regulations. Of the 80 youth who evacuated, 42 spoke only Spanish and were technically in custody of ICE. Several children had special needs such as schizophrenia, Asperger syndrome, and diabetes. The group was bound for St. Stephens Episcopal School in Austin where they had a pre-existing contract for up to 14 days of emergency lodging in the school gymnasium. They all had enough clothing and medication for three days. The evacuation would become, in Ken's words, "The best run chaos we could have hoped

for.” But it took effort, personal toll, and the consistent generosity of strangers to pull it off.

The maintaining of orderliness and quality-of-life during the exodus was aided by personal contacts Ken and Holly were able to marshal in Austin. St. Stephens provided air mattresses and three meals per day. But nerves soon began to fray amidst uncertainty of what was happening in Galveston. Ken and Holly ignored it all until late Friday evening when they obtained Internet access at Spider House cafe. There were no televisions, radios, nor Internet access at St. Stephens. Cell phone use was discouraged. During the day, Ken often took a group of adult juveniles around town to test particular outings for other evacuee sub-groups and to seek charitable contributions from local businesses. This helped facilitate the necessary division of groups, which was difficult to do in one open-space of a gymnasium. Despite an irregular line of communication with members of the upper-management who were in Galveston and Houston, they learned on the following Monday that the emergency shelter on the island had taken eight feet of water. All of the Children’s Centers facilities and transitional apartments had sustained at least minor damage. They could be facing multiple months of displacement. While staff had been purposely withholding information regarding the severity of damage, by mid-week they knew they needed to debrief the children, who had begun asking many questions about Galveston. Staff anxieties increased after one staff member obtained an Internet air card, and the visuals and news stories started coming in. Then on the fifth day, staff members were told unexpectedly they would be going to the Young Judea day camp in Wimberley, Texas. They remained there for the next five weeks.

Uncertainty reigned in one's mind as one watched or heard of events unfolding without the ability to get back to the island to see firsthand what had happened to the island and personal property. Like other people with whom I spoke about their evacuation, and my own experience included, Holly described the extended time at Young Judea as "blur," as she struggled to chronicle their time there. She reiterated her amazement at the generosity of unknown donors several times. Her group received copious donations of material goods from Young Judea's network of synagogues, as well as from several Mason's lodges; goods such as sundries, toiletries, clothing, coloring books, and board games. Holly's mother contacted a faith-based group in College Station that typically provided international charitable contributions such as clothing and personal hygiene products. The displaced group received so many donations that one of the cabins was turned into "the store," where children, staff, and staff's family could obtain needed items. Through a personal contact at "Shoes for Austin," they solicited a corporate charitable contribution from Nike. Teachers from the Wimberley public school system volunteered to teach classes for several days before some of the children were temporarily enrolled. Holly coordinated with FEMA to send bilingual staff members to the camp so that they could begin registering Children's Center staff for aid assistance. An ad hoc daycare center for their children was established in one of the cabins.

Ken previously described the staff-child interactions as "Swan Theory," which is comparable to a rough translation of Erving Goffman's (1959) distinction of a dramaturgical "front stage" of public self-presentation against a personal "backstage" of being, in the absence of an audience. The nature of their work mandated that they maintain a stoic disposition in the front stage before the children, despite the personal

crises looming for many of them back on the island. At least three staff members suffered a total loss of house and possessions back in Galveston. As Ken noted, “the feathers of the swan really started falling off at this point.” Holly arranged for crisis counselors to come cabin-to-cabin to talk informally with other displaced staff members and their families. Tensions compounded because a majority of the staff were hourly employees who worked under the implicit understanding that they had to remain with the evacuated group or they would lose their job upon return to Galveston. Several staff did lose their jobs because their personal or family situations absolutely necessitated that they leave the group.

Meanwhile, events in Galveston continued to create new vulnerabilities and logistical problems. The family shelter, which was different from the emergency shelter, was inhabitable soon after the storm. However, because the mothers and children who have been staying there before the storm were now evacuated and dispersed throughout the state, FEMA entered into agreement with the Children’s Center to use the space to transition people who had been living in the aforementioned “Tent City” in Galveston. This created a new dilemma for displaced homeless mothers and their children.

If you’re living in a homeless shelter then FEMA considers you homeless. So the deal with FEMA is that they will help you get shelter if you lost your housing. If you’re considered without housing, then there is no need to *find you* housing. So they just got dispersed all over the place.

The family shelter suffered very minimal damage. The catch is that once the island was coming back, the agency was approached to help move people out of the tents. What happened was that those who previously lived there were told they could no longer come back. Folks that had a house and were displaced with small children were moved into the family shelter.

The evacuation group gradually decreased in number through October. One of the core groups of displaced children was able to return to facilities in Brazoria County. The adult juvenile evacuees who ranged in ages from 18-22 returned to their transitional

apartments. A group of 12-to-18-year-olds were moved back in staggered succession as the facilities came back online. This group included many of the Honduran and Guatemalan children who were cleared by ICE to transition into foster care arrangements. However, because the emergency shelter had been destroyed on the island, a substantial number of homeless youth were transitioned to alternative shelters throughout the state. At the time of our interview, the children's emergency shelter had not reopened. Holly retroactively marveled at the resiliency of the children. She theorized that the generally good behavior the children displayed under exceptional circumstances owed to life histories of persistent vulnerability and trauma. Given the aid response, the evacuation conditions were secure and a structured relative to the chaotic liminality that other displaced Galveston residents were experiencing from afar.

Eventually Ken and Holly learned from a friend on-island that their house was structurally sound. He returned on October 3 to continue his work with foster youth in Texas City and League City. The house was without electricity for another three weeks due to a flooded breaker box; however, their house and possessions inside were just as they left them. Holly joined him in Galveston in mid-October to begin outreach work with residents of Tent City in need of transitional housing. He too commented on the serenity of the nights on the island before electricity was restored.

By the time across you drove across the causeway with boats still scattered about there were basically no lights. You could hear the waves, the stars were out, and it was GREAT! It was beautiful! The weather was perfect! This is what the island would be like if no one lived here. After work I would sit out on the porch with my dinner-in-a-box, take a cold shower and go to bed. I didn't shave for three weeks. It was this surreal dual-reality. You could go into the Kroger on Seawall and get all the stuff that you needed or wanted and everything seemed normal. But then you'd go back into the neighborhoods behind Kroger and every single home is destroyed. But then I would also go to the POD at Academy in the morning for the newspaper, ice, and water, and then go to work in League City or Texas City where it was normal for the most part and you could go to Starbucks or Kroger. Then I drive back home to a disaster scene. It was just so surreal.

The destruction both to the emergency children's shelter and the building that was intended to house the drop-in center put Holly in a liminal position at the Children's Center. She eventually decided to accept a crisis counseling position with the Family and Youth Services Bureau, the organization that initially provided the grant money for the drop-in center. And like so many others who I met on Galveston, they hungered for new opportunity after the intensity of the storm experience subsided. Having established a relationship with Angela Brown before the storm, they negotiated a partnership with her to bring the Mod Coffeehouse back. When it did return, the inside was virtually identical as it had been before, save for a different color of paint on the walls. Its restoration was indicative of a different sort of resilience than the one they worked 14-hours a day to maintain at St. Stephens and Young Judea. Ancillary as it was to the daily necessities of life, the reopening nonetheless served a vital function for the restoration of social networks that had been disrupted with the storm and its closing.

The interviews detailed above show the desirability, if not necessity, of social relationships to facilitate resiliency as a process. But, people also rode out the storm in solitude, to varying susceptibilities of vulnerability. Those who did experience the storm singularly were more often than not elderly and/or shut-in residents. Seventy-two-year-old George Helmod, a Scottish Rite mason, died during Ike after he unsuccessfully attempted to flee the rapidly rising water in his near West End home in the pick-up truck in which ultimately he drowned. A week after the storm, 75-year-old Robert Dork was found dead in his island home due to a heart attack. He had moved to Galveston three years earlier. His daughter reportedly said that he wanted to stay on the island to experience a hurricane. The 49-year-old Vietnamese manager of the Sandpiper motel

that is located directly along the Galveston beachfront died during Ike. He was found several days later and identified through his fingerprints. Kathy recounted finding a neighbor suffering from cancer of the liver and colon three days after the storm. He had been without food or water. While they notified passing authorities of his presence, he remained on the island for a full week. He remained alone in his apartment, save for neighbors who began checking on him daily to bring food and water. On one occasion a neighbor reportedly delivered him a marijuana cigarette. He died a month later.

A 70-year-old Vietnam veteran in the army infantry who no longer drives an automobile was registered to be picked-up for evacuation. He was told on Friday to be ready to depart. No one arrived. At 5:00 he phoned the center inquiring when he would be picked up. He was told, as he described it, “Tough shit, old man. Hunker down.” He rode out the storm in his 69<sup>th</sup> Street apartment. There was moderate to severe wind and flood damage to his and the surrounding complexes, but was fortunate that his apartment was spared any significant damage<sup>50</sup>.

I’m an asthmatic and because I was without power I couldn’t use my nebulizer for my asthma medication. It was also time for my medications from the Houston VA, but no there was mail delivery, so I ran out of my meds. It was a week later when a policeman found me and took me to the emergency team of homeland security from Florida. I was diagnosed with lung and kidney failure. I was treated with an IV and transported by medics who were from Pennsylvania by ambulance to the regional hospital in Webster. The hospital didn’t want to admit me because the VA wouldn’t reimburse them for my care. I was left in the triage for 10 hours before I was seen by a doctor and admitted to a room for treatment.

After five days I was released with no transportation. It cost me \$100 for a taxi back to my apartment that was still without power or water for another two weeks. There was no mail service to deliver my medications, as they were returned back to the VA. I didn’t have transportation to the Texas City VA clinic or a telephone to call the VA for medication. When I was in the hospital, on TV, the Mayor called all island residents that didn’t evacuate “idiots.” While she was staying in the plush San Luis {hotel} with power and food. Her administration failed the residents that were not evacuated. FEMA did not help at all. I have still not received any compensation for my taxi fare. I am being billed for the hospital treatments that VA & Medicare will not cover me. So much for compassion for an old man on Galveston Island.

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<sup>50</sup> Narrative accessed in the archives of the Texas History Center of Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.

He remains in Galveston in his apartment, and at the time was receiving his medications again regularly but the financial difficulties compromised his ability to pay monthly bills such as his Comcast bundled package, energy, and water bills. Like other Galvestonians he was still required to pay a minimum monthly charge for both water and electric while service was out. His was a story not of personal recovery and reckoning, but of a life carrying-on precariously, and alone.

James, a 66-year-old man had only recently moved into a Central City Boulevard apartment off of 61<sup>st</sup> Street; approximately a half-mile from the seawall. He wrote his narrative of spending the night of the storm alone in the apartment. The building began to shake around 7pm as the wind escalated. He had lost contact with his son in Pennsylvania at 5:15pm when his T-Mobile service went out. The pole from a window awning that crashed through a window, thus requiring vigilant observation throughout the night, his apartment was spared. However, he is a previous triple-bypass recipient who was experiencing severe dehydration. He feared for his life by Sunday morning. He described going outside on Saturday and nearly becoming nauseous from the smell of the remaining floodwater: “It was like month old coffee with discarded cigarette butts floating on top. Mixed with yellow paint.” He struggled to walk to the nearby Walmart. The floodwater had risen into his car and ruined it. James was fortunate to meet an empathetic national guardsman who provided him with emergency transport to UTMB where doctors representing FEMA provided him with an IV and discharged him<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Narrative accessed through the Texas History Center of Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.

The story of Fletcher Harris warrants telling<sup>52</sup>. Mr. Harris, 85, was well known around town for being an incorruptible and irrepressible city council “watchdog” for over five decades. He was formerly a second lieutenant in an army infantry unit that stormed Omaha beach during D-Day of World War II. He subsequently won a Purple Heart and two Bronze Stars for valor. He fought for the liberation of St. Lo. The month following D-Day he lost his right hand to a German grenade. Those who knew him described Mr. Harris in terms such as “indominatable,” “opinionated,” “a lovable enigma, “particular,” and “cranky,” but I always heard descriptions in tones of respect or bemusement. People described him as if a synecdoche for a cultural self-definition that Galvestonians—particularly B.O.I.s—tell about island life and its indigenous islanders. He drove too fast in an old Cadillac that he covered with stickers and that seemed to always require repairs; however, he refused to buy a new car. Despite his proclivities for driving fast, often with his knee, he was instrumental in installing traffic signals in the vicinity of Ball High school in order to slow down traffic. When neighbors noticed that he had begun a pattern of egregious illegal parking throughout town, someone proceeded to make bumper stickers that read, “Fletcher Harris Told Me I Could Park Here.” He was said to consistently “read the Council the riot act.” According to his son he was a member of “Clean Up Galveston” in the 1950s. This was a civic drive to eliminate casino gambling operations from the island and its associated graft at City Hall. He was convinced by friends and family to run for City Council himself, but he didn’t campaign on his own behalf. When he learned he had won election over the radio in his old Cadillac, he spilled the ice cream cone he was enjoying into his lap. He served one-term on the city

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<sup>52</sup> Information on Mr. Harris was corroborated through personal anecdotes and through remembrances published respectively in the *Galveston County Daily News*, 6/22/09 and 7/02/09.

council, but didn't seek re-election so as to reclaim his former role as principled agitator. Virtually everyone within city government, or who paid regular attention to governmental proceedings, knew Fletcher Harris.

His death was attributed to second-hand effect of injuries he sustained during the storm while outside his home located on Stewart Road near Offats Bayou. He wasn't one to evacuate for hurricanes. His grandfather had ridden-out and survived the 1900 Storm. As was customary for him, he had refused to evacuate for Ike. Just like he refused to evacuate for Rita. He made an appearance on Fox News Channel with host Greta Van Susteren to talk about emergency preparedness and to chastise Galveston city leaders for dictating a mandatory evacuation for Rita. His preferred method of "evacuation," was a "vertical evacuation," of placing people in high-rise buildings that were protected by the seawall. He was an avid HAM radio operator and often advocated City Council for more robust emergency preparation. Yet, he scoffed at the notion that the water driven by Hurricane Ike would get high enough to threaten him or his house. He was wrong this time. The advocate of preparedness was thoroughly unprepared for Ike.

Mr. Harris was the only person who didn't evacuate his town home complex. When the waters began rising too high, he attempted to break into a neighbor's second-floor apartment unit using a crowbar that had been given to him by the County's 911 director. It was engraved, "Fletcher Harris' Hurricane Tool." He couldn't get in to the apartment. He was discovered the next day, outside, caked in blood and mud, and taken to Ball High School. He had spent the night in four feet of storm surge. At one point he tied himself to a stop sign, but the pole eventually snapped. He was later said to call Ike "God's storm" and a "wake-up call." Yet it still took two days to convince him to leave

the island. An emergency responder reportedly found him sitting in his lounge chair in front of his flooded-out town home in the same clothes he wore the night of the storm. He had refused evacuation after he was taken to Ball High. Family members eventually took him to an assisted-living center in Carrollton where he passed away on Father's Day, 2009.

Mr. Harris' death was a noteworthy of topic of conversation around the Mod coffee shop for several days after his death. City Council acknowledged his passing with a brief memorial of appreciation and a moment of silence. When Mr. Harris succumbed to Hurricane Ike, some read it as an allegory for the incomparable and undiscerning wrath this particular storm wrought across the entire island. Within such a reading, his fate symbolized the undoing of the stubborn defiance that indigenous B.O.I. Galvestonians assert about themselves regarding their capacity to encounter hurricanes. His own acknowledgement of personal foolishness for not heeding the warnings of this particular storm could itself be read as an acknowledgement of the local historical magnitude of Ike. Although not every B.O.I. was as broken and bowed. One thinks back to Kathy's talk about the anxiety that nearly overwhelmed her several days after the storm. One day she encountered a neighbor:

I will tell you the other side of this. At the end of the alley is a woman who is 97 and stayed through the whole thing. She had every possible person doing a well-being check on her like every thirty minutes. She said to me, "I wish they'd just leave me alone." She had not water, electricity, or gas just like everyone else. And she's 97! It just blows your mind. We were very, very fortunate for things to turn out the way they did for us. And then to look at her: Nomie Willis. And we tried to bring her some shrimp and she told us to please stop bringing her food because everyone was bringing her food! She had too much. When we told her about the shrimp boil, she agreed to that, so I brought her some. And I figured, if she can make it I can make it.

The variability of factors that account for the level of physical storm damage were much more clearly definable than those that account for either the complexities of vulnerability

embedded on institutional, group, and individual levels, or the factors that affected the processes aiding resiliency as a form of “recovery.” I have shown the linkages between the specific size and trajectory of Ike as a weather event relative to the specific topographies and attendant man-made factors such as the age, type, and quality of building stock within such topographies. This corroborated the received truth that there is no such thing as a “natural” disaster (Hartman & Squires 2006), however, the chaotic nature of storm activity also created conditions for happenstance to occur, i.e., debris from other damaged structures colliding against other houses or buildings that might otherwise have withstood the storm’s essential elements; or the consequent destruction of the civic infrastructure impeding prompt return to forestall the proliferation of mold in sheetrock, baseboards, and personal possessions. In addition to geographical distributions of storm damage, factors such social support networks, preparedness, and levels of economic security clearly informed the resiliency process by affecting the ease with which one could return to customary forms of pre-storm life and livelihood. The explanatory veracity of individualized psychological diagnostics such as “perseverance,” “fortitude,” or “inner strength,” provide intriguing suggestions for how individuals coped and adapted to what Ike wrought onto their lives. However, identifying the genetic, socially produced, or metaphysical substances that contribute to these supposedly intrinsic individual qualities is beyond the scope of this study<sup>53</sup>.

The myriad experiences of tens of thousands of Galvestonian residents, ranging from newborns to centurions—and across racial, class and ethnic boundaries—makes an invocation of “disaster culture” analytically trepidatious because it might easily obscure

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<sup>53</sup> Such debate will likely continue indefinitely in fields of politics, medicine, art, literature, philosophy, social science, and dinner parties.

the scores of divergent situations, dilemmas, perspectives, and affective relationships that people forged both to “Galveston” and “Ike.” I invoke it here in a qualified sense to establish the structural continuities that extended across much of the island population, albeit situated in differing ways. Hence I have invoked keywords such as vulnerability, resilience, and uncertainty to elucidate some of the experiential commonalities and distinctions related to the storm. The particularities of Ike’s damage distribution exacerbated vulnerabilities acutely in impoverished areas of the city as one would presuppose. But the geographies and housing type created pre-exposure vulnerabilities amongst residents who would self-ascribe as “middle class.” The particularities of flood damage dramatically influenced patterns of protracted displacement in areas such as impoverished “North Broadway,” but it did so in areas of the island where middle-class subdivisions such as Harve Lafitte—that were replete with slab-foundation, single-family homes—exist across Heards Lane from areas older, high-renter concentrated areas such as Hollywood Heights that were also significantly. Moreover, immediate beachfront construction on the West End, particularly in the relatively older subdivisions that were built-out through the 1970s and 80s such as Bermuda Beach and Terra Mar, were exposed to substantial damage. Additionally, the rows of ranch-style middle-income homes in “Fish Village” near UTMB and the bayfront received significant flooding.

Because the damages did extend across varying demographics and class-based geographies, it thus influenced personal opinions that justified or invalidated the perceived necessity and scope of various forms of aid provisioning, as well as particular forms of long-term socio-spatial redevelopment. This point was brought home to me while listening to a self-described “elderly” white male articulate his opinions regarding

the rebuilding of public housing one evening in October 2009. He was attempting to posit a nuanced, “moderate” position that reconciled the anti-public housing group, GOP, and the contingent of mostly black Galveston advocates from the Northside Galveston Taskforce who had argued an ethical imperative to ensure the return of public housing residents. After noting he was “for” public housing for elderly, disabled, or as temporary assistance “to help people get back on their feet,” he asserted that he was opposed to “advertising” for an in-migration of new public housing residents, and opposed to building any more public housing than was needed to accommodate the 569 displaced households.

I’d like to tell you a personal story from the storm. We knew a young couple with a baby less than a year old who lost everything to the flooding in Fish Village. They stayed in our downstairs for months after the storm while they were trying to restore their home. He was a PhD research scientist at UTMB and she was a pharmacist at the Shriner’s Burn hospital. He was a Big Brother and active in his church and community. After months of being reassured that Shriners would reopen, she found out through the newspaper that it would close and her job would be gone. In no time they both found positions at Texas A&M in College Station and left our city. If we’re going to advertise for people to move to Galveston, I’d like to get *them* back. These are my people, and I would like to get *my* people back.

In the next two chapters I will further show these permutations of victimhood and their relation to the advocacy work that went into planning for the island’s longer-term recovery.

Interview data corroborate several of H.E. Moore’s precepts that organized his specific use of “disaster culture.” I agree with his assertions that there will exist fluctuating, culturally informed, perceptual scales wherein a decision not to evacuate based on prideful defiance is given over to individualized fear before the elements of the storm. This was most emphatically revealed in the narratives of evacuation decisions in which informal “B.O.I” standards of evacuating for category-3 storms, which were influenced further by memories of Hurricane Rita, caused such a larger proportion of

residents to remain on the island. Yet, that defiance gave way to fear due to the unexpected power of Hurricane Ike. My interviews with Paul & Kathy and my narrative of Fletcher Harris were especially salient examples of a broader sub-cultural dynamic.

I agree with the general thrust of Moore's assertion that a "community of interests" grows out of the common aspects of disaster culture. I identified several specific material interests that were pervasive across the island, as well as several perceptual standpoints that were recurrently performed in public venues or discussed privately. These were related to the various common "uncertainties of acquisition" that affected Galvestonians across class, ethnic, and racial distinctions. However these manifested at the group level in differing ways. Further, vulnerability due to economic insecurity made a resiliency process more tenuous than those who could rely upon professional employment, insurance settlements, or who were spared costly damages to their home and possessions. However, I reiterate that economic vulnerability did not solely affect the poor, the underinsured, or the unprepared. Substantial physical damages, income/investment loss, underinsurance, and compromised insurance settlements extended across social strata. Uncertainties of the acquisition included goods and services such as temporary housing (including nursing homes for displaced elderly residents), building permits, a credible contractor, replacement vehicles, and child-care provisioning.<sup>54</sup> A host of public, faith-based/non-profit, and private sources contributed varyingly to help alleviate the unmet needs of individuals and households. In the following chapter I will detail the work of Galveston County Restore & Rebuild. They

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<sup>54</sup> At least 68% of child care facilities were damaged by the storm, and because parent tuition largely subsidized their operations, the economic insecurities that were exacerbated amongst families created difficulties for providers to fund repairs and pay staff (Hurricane Ike Impact Report, State of Texas Division of Emergency Management, pg. 18)

were arguable the most effective organization at providing multiple forms of aid to households throughout Galveston County, particularly the elderly and disabled; but also households who might otherwise “fall through the cracks” due to a mix of underinsurance combined with non-qualifying federal income levels, as well as Vietnamese and Hispanic households reticent to engage federal disaster assistance programs. Whereas GCRR constitutive organizations were staffed with committed, “compassionate,” and competent individuals—many of who had worked in disaster areas before under the aegis of faith-based volunteerism—the scope of aid dispersal was limited by funding availability. And whereas public governmental entities administered several hundred million dollars in relief programs, they were limited by bureaucratic red tape that impeded the timely and effective delivery monetary compensation and home repair assistance.

Despite the deep conflicts over rebuilding visions that fractured the assertions of “One Galveston,” common standpoints emerged from structures of feeling. The t-shirt alluded to in the introduction that read, “Category-2, my hinny!” is one example because it indexes both an acknowledgement of the storm’s strength relative to its minor classification on the Saffir-Simpson scale, as well as backtalk to “outsiders” who understated the significance of the storm’s impact on Galveston because of that classification. Antagonistic perceptions of FEMA, private insurance carriers as well as the public-private Texas Windstorm Insurance Agency, and the city planning department responsible for permitting were pervasive, albeit the affective level of antagonism varied greatly from mild annoyances regarding processing delays to distraught rage over substantial undervaluation of losses from insurance. Whereas some residents were fortunate to work with competent and forthright FEMA representatives, complaints about

consistency, thoroughness, and effectiveness of this form of disaster aid provisioning were rampant; particularly because of the admittedly high percentage of Galvestonians who were denied, sometimes multiple times, for loss compensation and/or evacuation reimbursement. Evacuees were much more likely in my experience to criticize the judgment and performance of the city leadership than those who remained on the island, yet vitriolic criticisms of the permitting process were abundant amongst homeowners and property owners generally. Because evacuees were living with the uncertainty of what had become of their property, they were much more likely to criticize the city government for the delayed reentry.<sup>55</sup>

In conclusion, while weather forecasters had predicted several days in advance the potential for a destructively disproportionate storm surge to accompany Hurricane Ike's category-2 winds, the strength of the sustained winds and the volume of water that overran shocked and surprised even the most hurricane-tested BOIs. It was unequivocally cited as the most destructive Galveston hurricane in living memory. However, the capacity to provide rapid-response of goods such as water, ice, and emergency food rations for the tens of thousands who remained on-island, and in the first several weeks after island-wide return, did lessen the experiential misery of the immediate post-disaster relative to Hurricanes Carla (1961) and Alicia (1983). What emerged in the wake of the storm was a battered population that during my fieldwork had returned 48,000 residents from a pre-storm population of 57,000. For those able to return they confronted a host of common problems that manifested with individualized intensity: underinsured losses, financial difficulties, health concerns, compromised

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<sup>55</sup> However, rumors abounded that a preferential treatment was afforded to prominent acquaintances of the Mayor and her extended Kempner clan.

mental health, and myriad of uncertainties for the future, all of which affected broad swaths of the population and its businesses, but also the very same people who worked within those, businesses, agencies and institutions that were entrusted with providing services and relief. Despite a federal commitment of several hundred million dollars in supplemental CDBG funding, FEMA reimbursements, SSBG funds, and state resources for Galveston, the shift in national media attention towards the financial crisis and presidential election heightened a somewhat collective existentialism that Galveston was indeed an island onto itself. An island where after dark streets and blocks would go dark, where one could walk downtown Galveston on a Friday night and not encounter anyone for blocks, and yet was home to tens of thousands struggling to piece together their material lives and social networks in the context of protracted economic recession and under the threat that island might lose its largest employer and healthcare provider.

I argue that “disaster culture” in Galveston could be identified and elaborated upon, without recourse to obfuscating assertions of coherence and non-contested social orders<sup>56</sup> (Hartigan 2005: 175). This recalls Herve Varenne’s identification of the base tenants of American culture out the polygot of American experiences in “whatever one cannot escape in the United States” (1986: 6). I will return to that point in more substance regarding public housing<sup>57</sup>. I invoke his point here to suggest that Galvestonian disaster culture is a coherent entity insofar as there are “certain things” one could not avoid in the aftermath of the storm, given the pervasiveness of the flood and

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<sup>56</sup> I agree with Hartigan in that a reconstituted use of culture necessitates self-reflexive attention to issues of representation, however, “No other concept as effectively systematically links attention to the disparate dynamics of social relations and spatial practices in one overarching perspective as does culture” (2005: 276).

<sup>57</sup> Varenne was making a point in his work regarding the institutional pressures that structure facets of American life, leading in turn to their unavoidability.

conditions of governance and recovery that emerged in response. To live under the auspice of post-Ike disaster culture means experiencing compounding vulnerabilities of varying types and intensities. Their resolvability depended largely but perhaps not exclusively on one's pre-exposure to storm damage and quality of preparedness. This was based on factors such as geographic location, preparedness, insurance coverage, and economic (in)security. Moreover, "uncertainty" was perhaps the most encompassing vulnerability given that it was manifested in so many ways across social strata: uncertainties of acquisition, uncertainty of adjudication with regards to insurance settlements and the receipt of public aid provisioning, financial uncertainties, as well as existential uncertainty regarding one's future prospects, as well as the island's collective urban fortunes. It was those long-term collective fortunes that enunciatory communities of Galvestonians that began engaging in 2009 while thousands of other remained mired in a struggle of household recuperation. Those engagements are topic of the following chapter on advocacy.

**Chapter Three:**  
**“Sustainable Futures”:**  
**the cultural politics of advocacy and long-term redevelopment**

In this chapter, I identify several forms of advocacy that were instrumental to the planning and tenuous enactment of urban revitalization activities in Galveston following Hurricane Ike. In doing so I elaborate on several of the more prominent topics of public discourse that attended with the long-term redevelopment of Galveston. Building from Kim Fortun’s definition of advocacy as the “performance of ethics in anticipation of the future (2001:16), I deploy “advocacy” as a technique of political engagement that mediates between pervasive conditions of vulnerability to enhance individual and collective resiliencies. Advocacy circulated both ethics and future-oriented desires through public forums to further particular forms of long-term redevelopment. Throughout the chapter, I elaborate on the specific networks of advocates and the issues that animated their collective efforts. I then trace how they affected specific public policies and the distribution of recovery funds. Post-Ike advocacy was almost exclusively state-centered in the context of recovery assistance and long-term planning<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> These included institutional bodies such as the U.S. Congress, the State of Texas—particularly the Governor’s office, the State Legislature, and General Land Office—the Galveston City Council, the University of Texas Board of Regents, and the Houston-Galveston Area Council were the primary bodies to whom enunciatory communities of advocates addressed their recommendations, concerns, and grievances. American scholars such as Lauren Berlant (1997, 2004), Jodi Dean (2000), Anne Norton (1993), Bruce Robbins et al (1993), Thomas Dumm (1994, 1999) explicitly—and quite usefully—wrote to bridge cultural studies and political theory in order to accentuate the non-formalized spheres of political contestation in American life not oriented towards state-level politics.

The interpretive repertoires that animated advocacy emerged both from pre-existing social and political commitments, as well as from reactive engagements to policy proposals and emergences of redevelopment initiatives tendered following the storm. Moreover, fieldwork data suggest that one must account for the effects of disaster experience and broader American cultural influences on the interpretative repertoires embedded in the public expression of socio-political reasoning. Advocacy was often, but not exclusively entwined in a politics of distributive justice pertaining to the expenditure of funding from federal, state, and local branches of government, as well as local dynastic patronage such as the Moody and Kempner Foundations. It is largely distinctive, but not exclusive from the unmitigated pursuit of profiteering through the state and federally funded local economy of “disaster capitalism” (Klein 2007). Further, advocacy was ensconced in social acts of “deliberation,” taken here to mean the “the sharing of ethical or evaluative speech” in public forums (Dolan, unpublished paper).<sup>59</sup>

Fieldwork data supports Rozario’s contention that over the long durée of American history, “Disasters would continue to be sites where the meaning of America was debated and contested, where modern American values and social arrangements were articulated and assembled” (2007: 142). Michael Fisher seconds this contention in stating his conviction that natural disasters emerge as scenes where “a number of meaning structures implode or intersect and where society dramatizes to itself the meaning of its own representations of its social order” (2009: 118). These contentions

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<sup>59</sup> “Evaluative speech” consisted of the sharing of rational ideations amongst residents; however, it was not simply a local marketplace of ideas, nor a manifestation of a 19<sup>th</sup>c. Viennese salon championed by Habermas. Evaluative speech was replete with the performance of visceral emotion, antagonistic assertions regarding the credibility or desirability of perceived social formations, and utopian wish imaging on Galveston’s future-oriented form and appearance. I consider such speech acts as culturally “evaluative” because speakers based their legitimacy and credibility on their local knowledge of Galveston and/or claims to professional or technical expertise.

help frame a localized setting wherein Galvestonians talked and planned for the city's future; but, in the process of doing so, the "cultural forms" of broader American cultural assertions about the fairness, justice, and propriety of individual responsibilities and institutional responses to the hurricane emerged<sup>60</sup>.

In this chapter I focus on four advocacy issues that I argue most tightly imbricate within competing visions for Galveston's long-term recovery. The deliberations oriented around culturally fraught sub-keywords such as "sustainability"<sup>61</sup> and "affordability" and life and lifeways in Galveston. I bracket the topic of public housing for the following chapter since it evinced the most viscerally contentious social antagonisms and requires extended space for elaboration. Therefore I concentrate this analysis on the cultural politics and performances of advocacy located within the practices of the Galveston County Restore & Rebuild consortium ("GCRR"), the enunciatory community that fought for restoration of the University of Texas Medical Branch ("UTMB"), the 300-member Galveston Long-Term Recovery Committee ("LTRC"), and the supporters and opponents of the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Buyout Program. Each of these enunciatory confederations worked to affect an issue—or an assemblage of issues—directly related Galveston's long-term "urban fortunes" (Logan & Molotch 1988).

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<sup>60</sup> I will discuss more directly in the next chapter how the debate on rebuilding public housing was articulated largely through discursive features of a more pervasive "American cultural dialogue."

<sup>61</sup> Discussions about the meaning and function of "sustainability" were not uncommon, particularly during meetings of the housing subcommittee of the Long Term Recovery Committee. Dolph Tillotson, the publisher of Galveston County Daily News, explicitly noted the ambiguity of definition when stating in a March 2010 editorial snippet that the leader of the LTRC & Comprehensive Plan committees could not offer him a concise definition of the term when asked; even though "sustainability" was explicitly mentioned in the Comprehensive plan vision statement multiple times. Social science literature supports that terminological ambiguity over "sustainability" is pervasive across cultural sites (Bernard 2009, Campanella and Vale 2005, Lizarralde et al 2010, Miller & Rivera 2010).

The creation of GCRR was a distinctive moment during the uneven transition from immediate emergency response to housing rehabilitation at the level of households and the broader community. The largely faith-based consortium of social service groups worked in the immediately sense to serve the “unmet needs” of vulnerable populations throughout Galveston County. This ranged from housing repair assistance to direct cash transactions for needs such as unpaid bills that accumulated with acute income loss and disaster recovery costs. GCRR functioned also as a highly effective advocacy consortium backed by representatives from “Gulf Coast Interfaith.” Its members were instrumental in securing over \$300m in federal housing repair dollars through two supplemental rounds of federal Community Development Block Grant (“CDBG”). I argue that their efforts in regards to CDBG were particularly noteworthy because their efforts helped ensure Round I to the a “60-40” percent split between housing and infrastructure within the City of Galveston, thus maximizing the federal funding distribution of housing rehabilitation assistance for “under-insured” low-income homeowners. Moreover, their advocacy efforts following the initial release of the State of Texas’ plan to distribute Round II funding helped to reverse the implementation of the so-called “weather model” that would have shifted a much greater percentage of CDBG funding away from Houston-Galveston to the less-densely populated rural and peri-urban jurisdictions where infrastructure expenditures would have been a much more likely spending priority in lieu of housing assistance. The advocacy efforts of GCRR were oriented to the sustainability of pervasively damaged housing stock throughout the Houston-Galveston metroplex; particularly for the extremely vulnerable such as the shut-in elderly and the impoverished, but also for those who on account of their modest, but

not impoverished, income levels might otherwise disqualify them from receiving charitable and governmental disaster assistance that is intended for low-to-moderate income victims. I will discuss this in further detail below.

UTMB is the largest employer in both the City and County of Galveston. Its continued viability on Galveston Island was fundamentally in doubt after the hurricane. Advocacy was therefore organized around the principle of maintaining consolidated facilities on Galveston Island, particularly following the layoff of one-quarter of the entire workforce. The loss of UTMB to the mainland had been a latent, ambient threat before the storm. Recent UTMB facility expansions in the wealthier and expanding Houston exurb of League City—now the largest municipality in Galveston County—and a distinctive shift in business model to minimize indigent care in favor of an expanding insured patient base had already suggested an inevitable loss of Galveston’s most sustainable employer and its primary source of intellectual capital. The socio-economic implications of losing UTMB would be severe for Galveston’s long-term viability as a “sustainable” residential community capable of supporting a highly coveted “middle-class” population. \$600m in uninsured losses accelerated state and UT-system level discussions over moving the medical branch off island. Retaining UTMB on Galveston required both sustained public advocacy as well as closed-door political maneuvering by Texas House Representative Craig Eiland.

The Long-Term Recovery Committee (“LTRC”) was noteworthy because it provided opportunity for public input into the socio-spatial “imagineering” of Galveston’s long-term redevelopment. Analyzing proceedings and plans of the LTRC allows one to gauge the viability of substantive “public” participation to affect a post-

disaster urban planning process. The LTRC straddled the boundary between deliberative democracy and potemkin charade with little ambiguous relation to the delivery of practical recovery projects. The plans put forward by the “LTRC” were complicit in the sometimes-utopian “dreamworld” visions of Galvestonians but were susceptible to Benjaminian catastrophe of missed opportunities of a critical moment.

The deliberations over the Galveston city government’s participation in a FEMA Hazard Mitigation Buyout program was in effect a debate about fairness and, like public housing, it tested the social limits of acceptable vulnerability and federal subsidization. In short, the debates concerned whether relatively high-income property owners on the West End, many of whom bought their properties as investment properties beyond the seawall, should be able to receive federal buyouts of their property at a 75% pre-Ike valuation per the program’s specifications. For reasons that I will discuss in more detail, the program was not extended to homeowners “behind the seawall.” While the debate was not nearly as vitriolic as public housing, it re-opened pre-existing schisms between West End interests and the concerns of residents living in the “core” neighborhoods between 6<sup>th</sup> and 103<sup>rd</sup> Sts.

*Galveston County Restore & Rebuild: “We are serious people of compassion”*

Those were the words Joe Compian used to characterize GCRR during a meeting before the Galveston County Commissioner’s Court in July 2009. County commissioners and an enunciatory community of activists were deliberating the altered distribution formula recommended for the second round of CDBG funding. His words were more than political hyperbole. I would argue that it was a sufficiently accurate representation of the consortium of faith-based charities social service groups whose staff

and volunteers worked to address the “unmet needs” of underinsured and/or destitute Ike victims. Their members included a local church in San Leon headed by a white Vietnam veteran who worked in tandem with the Vietnamese advocates of their local shrimping community; it included Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, Quakers, and the Islamic Center of North American Relief (ICNA) that each contributed to a consortium of charitable aid led by a Jewish former mayor of Galveston. As of September 2009, they had directly contributed to the rehabilitation or rebuilding of over 100 homes and provided over \$600,000 in financial assistance through their case management network. In contradistinction, CDM Associates, with an initial operating budget of \$16m and \$144m in Round I CDGB funding to distribute, had completed work on five houses by 2011. Because of the pan-religious, ethnic, and racial interests of the consortium groups, claims to “compassion” and “social justice,” rather than religious proselytizing or a specifically religious mission animated their advocacy practices. While individual members certainly professed their faith through references to a pan-theistic “God,” and/or wore elements of religious regalia such as crucifixes or kufi caps, neither their meetings nor their advocacy practices evinced a dominant religious affiliation.

GCRR convened in October 2008 following the creation of a steering committee constituted by Barbara Crews, Bob Flemming, Eddie Hilliard, Jeffery Stys, and Mark Davis. This group was led by Ms. Crews, a Kempner, whereas the other four gentlemen had were experienced in disaster relief in Houston following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Former Houston mayor, Bill White, was mounting a senatorial campaign at the time. He authorized a donation of \$1m from the City of Houston Ike Fund to GCRR as seed funds for the purchase of building materials. The Galveston County Recovery Fund provided

additional operating capital. GCRR functioned to provide immediate housing repair assistance of up to \$15,000 and up to \$1,500 in unmet needs assistance for hurricane victims. GCRR distributed home repair and unmet needs assistance based on the an examination of in-take forms and through an “unmet needs” hearing of the GCRR “unmet needs board,” which distributed funds based in part on the contingencies of available pro bono labor to match the applicant’s specific repair our unmet needs, as well as through a determination—open to deliberation—of the intensity of urgency and vulnerability that the case presented. Public advocacy led by an individual named Joe Higgs of the affiliated Gulf Coast Interfaith was the other functioning half of the collaborative. Because many of the steering members of GCRR as well as Mr. Higgs accrued previous experience working in the administration of recovery efforts they were familiar with many of practical dilemmas that arise when distributing federal funding, as well as with identifying vulnerable populations who were likely to fall between the proverbial cracks of governmental and private charitable assistance.

Following an interview with Ms. Crews that introduced me to the existence of GCRR, I attended their meeting on February 10, 2009 in the cafeteria of the Knights of Columbus building in La Marque. It was approximately 10 miles north of the island. I continued to attend their meetings twice per month through September 2009. My attendance became more periodic as their meetings moved to a once-monthly schedule as their services merged under the case management of the Lutheran Social Service Network, which had been awarded federal funding. This case management component experienced significant growing pains. It required bureaucratic expansion as it transitioned from GCRR’s small but efficient operations that were staffed locally but

faced with capacity shortages to the scaled-up relief operations of the IKE-RISE case management system. Although this increased the amount of resources distributed through its networks, this transition to IKE-RISE hampered the previously efficient operations with a larger scale bureaucracy staffed by case managers who did not have the same “local knowledge” to flexibly leverage the various human capital resources within GCRR in order to problem-solve the unmet needs of their clients.

GCRR’s initial advocacy went before the Houston-Galveston Area Council, which was the entity responsible for creating a method of distributing \$814.1m in supplemental CDBG funding to a 13-county area affected by Ike. GCRR leadership strongly supported the recommendation of the Governor’s office to allocate 60% of the funding for housing purposes. He had expressed concern over municipal and peri-urban advocates in the region that prefer to alter the distribution formula to serve infrastructure repair needs as the expense of assisting low-income homeowners. He walked into the Knights of Columbus cafeteria late that first February morning the day before the H-GAC meeting. He just arrived from another meeting with their representatives. He was sweating and the back of his collared shirt had come un-tucked. His large blue eyes and earnest disposition belied the graying hair and dogged perseverance that he consistently displayed at recovery meetings to advocate on behalf of the underinsured of Galveston County. My initial reaction was that he had just arrived from the Bailey Building and Loan. He began speaking on the necessity of poised, succinct, and synchronized testimonies the following day before the H-GAC board: “One critical issue we’ve pushed is that there has to be more money to repair houses. No one county is going to get enough money to get whole, but we’ve been able to make sure that Galveston County

gets about 40% {of the entire \$814m}.” He sounded a note of caution that in east Texas after Hurricane Rita, the local Council of Governments received over \$200m for homeowner repairs, and four years later less than 40 homes have been repaired or rebuilt, “We learned after Rita that having money isn’t enough. That can’t happen again.” as he encouraged continued vigilance over the distribution and contractor procurement processes that the City and County develop going forward. He assured the gathered contingent that a 60-40% split in favor of housing had been secured; “There is no rest for the righteous, so don’t rest on this success. Still, nothing comes from up high. So celebrate, you all, because you’ve made this {distribution} happen.” It was necessary that they continue to forward their agenda before the board to highlight the unmet needs and unified front of advocates throughout Galveston County.

Higgs and another committee member, Mark Davis, huddled with representatives from the GRACE Services organization. GRACE services emerged in Houston as the first explicitly African-American case management service provider in the United States.<sup>62</sup> The group strategized how to most effectively present themselves the following morning before assembled members of H-GAC for a public hearing. Higgs asserted that synchronized discourse of speakers and in conjunction with a performative moment in which all GCRR advocates rose together wearing similar white and black “professional” attire would be the most effective demonstration of unified interests. They questioned each other about how to mediate the dilemmas of assistance created by federal regulations. One person in the group noted the problem of “non-compliant” housing structures that were in states of disrepair or low-elevation and thus wouldn’t qualify for

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<sup>62</sup> A fact one was reminded of frequently during meetings of the Northside Galveston Taskforce. A web clip that featured the organization on the local FOX television affiliate was played at more than one meeting that I attended.

federal assistance. Higgs added, “If you’re in a flood zone, with no insurance, and can’t get governmental assistance, how do we help them?” Mr. Davis forewarned the group to “Be careful not to muddy the water. They’ll take the advocacy of others who don’t make waves.”<sup>63</sup> Higgs shrugged in general agreement at Davis’ conciliatory point before recruiting several group members to speak as advocates the following morning. He suggested that should reiterate at least three points: one, “speed matters;” two, “flexibility matters” with regards to navigating CDBG compliance guidelines; and three, “We can be helpful to you to develop distribution guidelines based on our experiences with disaster.” Prescient knowledge easily falls on deaf ears, however.

The public meeting the following morning was held in the Showboat Pavilion in Texas City in front of a near capacity crowd that included mayors, city and count staff members, non-profit representatives, and the general public (*sic*). I arrived as Mayor Lyda Ann Thomas presented why Galveston County, and by proxy the City, should retain the \$814m that H-GAC provisionally allocated,

“When myself and city staff were in Austin recently, we met with people who would just assume that Galveston remain a sandbar and tourist destination. But, I ask you to think regionally. Not just Galveston, but Houston—Galveston—Beaumont. Coastal living is the most desirous in all the country. Pre-Ike, there was \$13b in investment in the pipeline for Galveston; they’re coming back, they are calling my office. We have a national biohazard defense lab that is about to open. We have a port and a tourist industry coming back. We have the East End Flats. We are going to rebuild our infrastructure and create new middle-income housing so that children who are returning have better hope for the future.

Regional meetings such as these were particularly interesting forums for observing the competing claims of victimhood that circulated before a centralized body entrusted with

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<sup>63</sup> This was not necessarily indicative of how Mr. Davis—who also worked as executive director of a non-profit charity, “Gleanings from the Harvest”—functioned in public forums. In November 2010, he delivered a barnstorming testimony before the Board of Directors at a meeting of the Galveston Housing Authority during which he noted a protracted history of white racism and suppression against black Americans as he advocated for the restoration of public housing as a moral principle based on valid historical grievance.

the task of distributing funding resources. Whereas Mayor Thomas used a regionalizing discourse to primarily aid the City of Galveston, a liaison from the office of Harris County executive Ed Emmett implored H-GAC, “Don’t forget the forgotten cities of Seabrook, Morgan’s Point, Webster, and a host of others,” where “LMI {Low-to-Moderate Income} numbers are not across the board, but do exist.”

The enunciatory community of GCRR advocates was the most well represented contingent to address the H-GAC board. This group included Galveston county advocates, particularly members of the V-Family (Vietnamese) organization and the San Leon Community Church, who lobbied on behalf of the local Vietnamese fishing communities in which an estimated 85% lost their homes and/or shrimp boats. Several black clergy members from Galveston delivered testimony in succession. Two male pastors from the respective New Hope Baptist Church and Mount Calvary Baptist Church, as well as a female minister from the God’s Kingdom Restoration Ministries voiced support for the proposed allocation of 60% to housing assistance. One recommended up to 70% of funding for housing, arguing a pervasive need experienced “all families, but I have particular concern for senior citizens. Also, we have an area of Galveston that all cities have: a ‘Project’ area. So please help the hurting people, but *ALL* the people as well—black, white, or Hispanic.” Another stated, “We stand as advocates on behalf of senior citizens, renters, and public housing. We say, “Yes!” to 60%.” The cavalcade of voices advocating a maximum allocation of housing assistance was broken with the testimony of Galveston’s city manager, Steve Leblanc, a former director of utilities and city engineer, who argued that Galveston truly needed a “one dollar to one dollar” split between housing and infrastructure. He then awkwardly invoked the African

proverb popularized by Hillary Clinton in the 1990s that “It takes a village,” as a metaphor that, “it will take a village of people and funding to rebuild this {Galveston} village.”

The following week, H-GAC approved an alteration to their distribution model to allocate an additional \$87m to the city of Galveston, while decreasing the county’s proportion by approximately \$70m. One can account for this shift due to the advocacy that had consistently asserting the more pervasive damage, and the attendant higher proportions of uninsured and underinsured households in Galveston that necessitated federal assistance. While FEMA damage assessments show a higher proportion of both destroyed homes and homes damaged in excess of \$28,000 in Galveston County (minus the City), this category is slanted heavily to damage accrued on Bolivar Peninsula. Sixty-four percent of FEMA’s County assessments were categorized between \$0-8,000, compared to 48% in the City. However, damages between \$8,000-\$28,000 were significantly higher in the City, as is it’s proportion of low-to-moderate income residents.<sup>64</sup>

I noted earlier that FEMA damage assessments were at once ambiguous and definitive signifiers of storm damage. Galveston residents voiced considerable dismay over damage estimates that FEMA produced; often for undervaluing the storm damage based on incomplete or haphazard inspections. However property owners, particularly in the West End, complained that under-valuations disqualified a “red” (substantially damaged) designation that precluded their ability to participate in the FEMA buyout program. Whereas many residents pointed to the haphazard assessments conducted by

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<sup>64</sup> \$8-\$15,000: 24% (City) to 7% (County), \$15-\$28,000: 20% (City) to 9% (County)

callous FEMA inspectors, the often-dubious assessments of damage produced lasting implications for eligibility in federal programs, negotiations of payouts with private insurance companies, and collective awards from the federal government to municipalities struggling to rebuild their physical and human infrastructures. However, when it was useful for the desired ends of advocacy, people would rely on FEMA damage as a source of authority. Sometimes its authority was invoked ironically, as Joe Higgs said during a public hearing before representatives of the Texas Department of Community Affairs (“TDHCA”) and H-GAC regarding the second round of CDBG funding, “FEMA tends to underestimate damage. Why *not* use FEMA damage {instead of weather data}”

GCRR members engaged in public advocacy again later in 2009. As the one-year anniversary of the storm neared, the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (“TDHCA”) released its recommended plan for distribution of Round II of CDBG funding for the Houston-Galveston area. It was a plan that soon garnered the deriding term, “The Weather Model.” Joe Higgs and Barbara Crews would invariably sneer as they said the moniker. They would draw the words out with slow, deliberate incredulity, a subtle show of hostility to what they otherwise strenuously argued was a misguided formula. The second round plan was referred to as such because of the change in distributional priorities inverted the first-round formula by basing its scoring criteria not on the geographic distribution of physical damage caused by the storm, but on the geographical distribution of the severity of the weather event. In other words, the second-round monies were allocated largely based on recorded readings of sustained winds, storm surge, and rainfall. This was supposedly done to equitably offset the greater

proportion of first-round funding that went to larger municipal entities; in particular, the city of Galveston. The second-round model had correlated with a far greater distribution of funds to rural and peri-urban locales along Galveston Bay, in lieu of municipalities throughout the Houston-Galveston area, respectively. Because a greater proportion of funding was proposed for less densely populated areas than round one, it also lowered the proportion of funds that must be expended for housing purposes.

During an August 18, 2009 public meeting to solicit feedback, members of GCRR and various officials from the City and County provided a unified discursive front to the gathered assembly. While some veered into particular tangents, virtually all the speakers spoke about the ongoing human vulnerabilities afflicting broad swaths of the population and physical infrastructure area. Barbara Crews derided the plan for “giving the same weight for the impact on a pasture as on densely populated areas,” adding that it would be “the right and fair thing to do” to give more allocation to Houston-Galveston. A representative from H-GAC himself criticized the plan for equating a category-2 wind event with a category-4 surge in their scoring model without consideration of their specific impacts. Joe Higgs criticized the use of a “simple math formula to set public policy,” while buttressing GCRR’s credibility, “Faith-based knows how to get people back in their homes cheaply. After Rita we put 2000 households back in their homes, the State of Texas has put about 300 or 400. This will be a Rita-Redux if we don’t move quickly.” Others argued that the State of Texas should also remodel application for rehabilitate assistance and allow for the reimbursement of costs that eligible households had already personally expended to do repairs, as was the case in Iowa.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> HUD allows individual states to design their applications for individual household assistance. The application used by the State of Texas was particularly cumbersome because of the level of personal

GCRR members engaged in public comment during city council and county commissioners meetings, wrote guest columns in the *Galveston County Daily News*, and conducted a (sparsely attended) press conference on September 9 to publicize their criticisms of the distribution formula. Members circulated emails imploring Galvestonians to write against the plan during the TDHCA public comment phase. The City Council voted unanimously on August 27 to draft a letter to Governor Rick Perry's office to express their disapproval of the proposed allocation. In September, HUD formally declined to accept the State of Texas action plan. Eventually, a greater allocation was awarded to the Houston-Galveston area. Between the first and second round, the city of Galveston has been awarded in excess of \$230m in CDBG housing recovery funds. Yet, Joe Higgs words have thus far been prescient regarding the fear of a "Rita Redux" since the expenditure of these funds to the homeowner rehabilitation has been painstakingly slow, leading the Council to nearly void the contract of CDM Associates in early 2011. Further, as I will show in the following chapter, complicit in a divisive community conflict over the rebuilding of public housing. Indeed, as Mr. Higgs suggested, strong recovery takes more than a pile of money. I will discuss the implementation of the CDBG-funded homeowner repair program in chapter five.

GCRR was the pre-eminent consortium of social service providers and advocacy groups to advance an ethical commitment to social justice on the part of impoverished, elderly, disabled, and "underinsured" Galvestonians. Representatives such as Ms. Crews as well as Mr. Higgs and Mr. Compian continually advocated for the greater distribution

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information that it required from applicants. This included requirements such as a six-year history of tax returns and payroll stubs, clear title to property, and proof of both flood insurance and non-delinquent property taxes. By comparison, the Iowa's application was much easier to fill-out, its documentation requirements far less stringent, and it allowed households to seek reimbursement for monies already spent towards rehabilitation.

of second-round funding for rental property rehabilitation in the city of Galveston and also proved to be effective allies with the Galveston Housing Authority to secure the release of \$25m from CDBG-1 for the rebuilding of public housing. While I was not privy to the minutia of internal frictions between consortium groups, nor interpersonal rivalries, part of GCRR's effectiveness was in heeding to a unified public message of social justice within a generally liberal purview of providing the most good, for the most people. More intensive field research solely with GCRR and greater internal access would likely provide the basis of a more nuanced and complicated analysis of its successes, internal struggles, and practical missteps. However, I detail their public advocacy work here to portray a group that most clearly articulated an agenda to specifically service low-income and underinsured Galvestonians. Moreover, when compared to the implementation of the federal homeowner relief program, the accomplishments of GCRR come into stark relief.

*UTMB: Here for the health of Texas?*

"Hurricane Ike brought this island to its knees. The University of Texas Board of Regents kicked it to the ground." Mayor Lyda Ann Thomas, addressing the State and House select subcommittee of the Texas Legislature on Hurricane Ike destruction to the Texas Gulf Coast, League City, December 3, 2008

A kick. A gut-punch. A death-knell. These were some of the terms used to describe the collective effect of the UT Board of Regents vote on November 12, 2008 that approved the termination of 3,800 jobs from the University of Texas Medical Branch. This amounted to one-third of the entire workforce for the largest employer in the both the city and county. The layoffs affected virtually all levels of the largest teaching hospital in the State of Texas: from support-staff to tenured faculty. As noted in the previous chapter, UTMB sustained an estimated \$710m in storm-related damage. Only \$100m was privately insured. This inventory of loss included \$270 to its buildings

and infrastructure, approximately \$80m in clinical, research, and IT equipment, and \$67m just to clean up the mess caused by the onrush of several feet of storm surge that inundated the East End campus. The emergency evacuations of critical patients cost an additional \$4m. The costliest expense to the institution was the protracted loss of operations revenue that accrued to an estimate of \$267m; the 500-bed John Sealy hospital was effectively closed through 2008. Interim UT Chancellor Kenneth Shine maintained that the layoffs were regrettable, but fiscally unavoidable, noting after the unanimous vote, “We simply cannot allow this institution to go bankrupt. I believe the regents have no choice but to make a painful decision.” This was indeed a critical moment, not only for the future of the institution; but also for the long-term prognosis of Galveston’s social and economic recovery.

Since its establishment on Galveston in 1891, the University of Texas Medical Branch has operated under the mandate as the state hospital of Texas, particularly for the “indigent” and underserved. While UTMB receives operating subsidies through the Sealy Smith Foundation it also receives biennium appropriation of \$154m from the State of Texas. However, the continuance of an annual appropriation has, and continues to be, a contentious issue in a Republican-dominated legislature. Prior to the storm, approximately 85% of its patients were subsidized through Medicare, Medicaid, or Texas Department of Corrections; or incoming patients received emergency “indigent”<sup>66</sup> care. Like the issue of public housing, which I will discuss in more detail in the following

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<sup>66</sup> Usage of the term, “indigent,” is ambiguously contentious. Although it is still officially used at UTMB as standard nomenclature for calculating a subsidized cost of care, I often heard it used in a tone of derision as a signifier of poverty and dependency, which was sometimes extended to a general critique of Galveston’s demographics and the hospitable treatment supposedly shown to this population stratum. During a State of Recovery meeting in December 2008, State Senator Craig Eiland noted the charged connotations and implored UTMB President, Dr. David Callender, to opt for neutral signifiers such as “under-insured” after the latter had used the term multiple times during his proceeding testimony.

chapter, the fate of UTMB is entwined with a more pervasive contestation over the scope of public service provision in an American context characterized by projected budget deficits and entitlement program anxieties. This is also refracted through a Texan context in which social welfare spending through the state government has historically lagged (Pindus *et al* 1998).

In March 2009, two competing studies were publicized the day before a large public meeting at Moody Gardens to discuss the future of UTMB. The fate of the institution literally seemed to hang in the balance per the enactment of the respective recommendations. The Atlanta-based, Kurt Salmon Associates recommended that UTMB gradually shift all of its general hospital beds to the wealthier and expanding Houston exurban municipality of League City in order to increase the proportion of insured and Medicaid-sponsored patients. The Board of Regents commissioned KSA to prepare the report at the recommendation of Gov. Rick Perry for \$285,000. A 110,000 square foot specialty care center has already recently opened in the vicinity of the planned “Victory Lakes” subdivision off of Interstate 45 in League City. The \$61 million center offers advanced imaging, pediatric and adult clinics, outpatient surgery and pediatric urgent care. In 2008, UTMB acquired 29 acres of land adjacent to the specialty care center as a likely spot for a future hospital. KSA recommended retaining the prison patients of the Texas Department of Corrections on Galveston. The “League City” plan was one of several options laid out by KSA. However, the firm explicitly criticized alternative options of constructing a new hospital in League City while maintaining a 64-bed community hospital in Galveston, as well as another plan for restoring the beds in

Galveston including the nationally renowned Level-1<sup>67</sup> trauma center that existed at UTMB, pre-Ike. These options were deemed fiscally unsustainable.

Advocates who supported the restoration of UTMB on Galveston questioned the calculus of the cost-benefit analysis provided by KSA, even if most participants in this enunciatory community acknowledged the necessity of reforming aspects of its operations model. Several advocates cited the recommendation of the State House select committee that noted the unsustainable strain put upon not only on Galveston's residents, but the regional health care facilities that serve the Houston metroplex and surrounding jurisdictions in the absence of a comparable trauma center on the island.<sup>68</sup> In the words of several speakers whom I highlight below, the KSA report was varyingly referred to as "political," "bought," and "short-sighted." The KSA report did not factor in the historical legacy and the practical benefits associated with operating a teaching hospital that consistently produces capable, if not also outstanding, physicians who have acquired enhanced skill sets caring for an impoverished patient base. Several medical students with whom I spoke, and who testified publicly about the historical mandate of the John Sealy hospital, frankly noted that a largely impoverished patient base provides physicians-in-training opportunities to observe a range of medical conditions associated with lifestyle choices that are exacerbated by conditions of persistent poverty<sup>69</sup>. One medical student confessed to me that the composition of patients who utilize UTMB

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<sup>67</sup> This is the highest designation of emergency trauma care in the United States. It has a full range of specialists and equipment available 24 hours a day and maintains a reputable program of research. UTMB had been one of 77 level-1 trauma centers certified by the American College of Surgeons.

<sup>68</sup> With the loss of Galveston's facilities, Herman Memorial and Ben Taub hospitals were the only Level-1 trauma centers for all of southeast Texas. Those two Houston-based hospitals were reportedly operating near full capacity prior to the storm.

<sup>69</sup> This includes, though is not limited, to diminished access to means of preventative wellness, compromised dietary habits, engagement in unprotected or high-risk sexual activities, drug and alcohol abuse.

provide a range of bodies that serve as effective heuristic tools for building hands-on medical knowledge. This range of illness and injury would likely be substantively different than a patient base drawn from more affluent regions of the metroplex.

### *A Moody Garden Party*

One-by-one, a community of speakers unified by the treat of a second-order catastrophe to Galveston approached the microphone in the middle of the cavernous, dimly lit convention center to testify before the assembled UT Board of Regents. Virtually every seat in the audience was filled on this Monday morning in March 2009. I stood in the back along with approximately 100 other audience members. Dignitaries spoke first: State Senators Craig Eiland and Mike Jackson, and Mayor Lyda Ann Thomas. Several representatives of the Sealy and Smith Foundation—UTMB’s largest historical benefactor—then addressed the Board. After that, a cavalcade of physicians, students, and Galvestonians used their allotted five minutes to implore the Board to restore and retain UTMB on Galveston. Mark, the former city council person whose “Ike story” I documented in chapter two quipped to me that “I have never seen so many Galvestonians say so many smart things in one setting.” Rep. Eiland—who would later garner a moniker as “St. Craig”—quickly performed the math for the UT Board. According to him, FEMA acknowledged \$667m in damage that is reduced down to \$567 with the insurance payout. He iterated that UTMB could draw upwards of \$500m in hazard mitigation funds from FEMA to restore and harden its facilities:

To do the exact same thing as the Houston Medical Center after Hurricane, eh, Tropical Storm Allison<sup>70</sup>. They hardened the campus so that first thing you have is Starbucks and

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<sup>70</sup> Tropical Storm Allison was a peculiarly damaging rain event that deluged Houston with over 20 inches over the course of 48 hours in June 2001. Some outlying jurisdictions measured upwards of 40 inches of rain. Houston is notoriously flood-prone due to geography and soil composition; these vulnerabilities were exacerbated by tropical system that remained stationary over the metroplex for two days. The Texas

couches so that you go up on escalator to the second floor and the real stuff is up there. We know that works because we have one already with the National Bio-Containment Lab. The only thing that got damaged there was the “welcome” mat.

Eiland outlined a recovery plan that leveraged re-commitment of funding from the Texas Legislature, FEMA modernization funds, and the philanthropy of the Sealy and Smith Foundation to restore the John Sealy Hospital to 214 “hardened” beds. Moreover, Jenny Sealy hospital could support 214 beds if construction proceeded on two new surgical towers that were planned before Ike. With the continued servicing of 100 prisoner beds contracted through the Texas Department of Corrections, Eiland showed that the return of 528 beds on Galveston Island was “the best and most realistic approach using financing that is available and that could become available.” He concluded by exhorting the Texas Legislature to “change the formula” to allow UTMB to retain \$14m of federal funding through the Disproportionate Share Hospital Program: “The State takes that, not the {UTMB} campus” which was grossly unfair because it was the public hospital itself that “disproportionately serves Medicaid and indigent care.” In other words, the State of Texas was retaining the federal funding provided because of the proportion of indigent patients it sees. That line got a loud applause, which grew to a standing ovation as he concluded.

Mike Jackson’s support for retaining UTMB on Galveston was notably muted. In contradistinction to Rep. Eiland (D-Galveston) who has lived and served from Galveston Island, State Senator Jackson (R-La Porte) draws his electoral support from the heavily Republican voting districts on the mainland of Galveston and Harris counties. The Texas Association of Business has deemed him a “Champion of Free Enterprise.”

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Medical Center was severely damaged by the consequent flooding. Allison is the only Atlantic storm to have its name retired without ever reaching hurricane status.

His brief comments seemed oriented more towards allaying fears of drastic relocation with neutral language: “There is no interest in building a whole new hospital somewhere else,” while he admitted that that Galveston County has been “criticized in the past, and looked down upon by budget directors for not having established a medical district.” A medical district would allocate percentage of personal property taxes to hospital operations. He addressed Mayor Thomas personally to note that the Legislature was working on a plan to let the City retain its state sales tax revenue “for its coffers” before concluding that he was “proud” to work with Sen. Eiland, “and all those around the state who want to see UTMB back to where it needs to be.” The crowd applause was polite, but restrained.

Lyda Ann Thomas delivered her testimony with comparable earnestness and urgency that characterized her statement noted above to the state subcommittee on Hurricane Ike recovery. Popular criticism of the Mayor’s leadership following the storm was widespread, pervasive, and sometimes damning in tone; particularly for her perceived lack of transparent and energetic leadership. However, I never witnessed a public issue during my fieldwork that elicited the same clarity of vision, voice, and purpose as her advocacy for the restoration of UTMB. Her craggily, lilting voice that so often indicated a worn and weary body after the storm rose on this occasion with a steady force of elocution.

I welcome you to our recovering city. Each day brings renewed hope as businesses reopen and our citizens return to their homes. Galveston is on the mend. And with your help and the legislature’s, Galveston’s acclaimed and indispensable UTMB will also be on the mend. As overseers of the outstanding institution that I claim as my alma mater, and its hospital which was established by popular vote in 1881, and opened here in 1891, you have the opportunity to carry on the grand tradition of medical education, research, and most importantly, care for citizens rich or poor, insured or uninsured. It is an integral part of our city and county as its main employer. Please do not take that away.

A proud tradition of philanthropy has nourished UTMB over the years. The Moody, Mitchell, and Kempner Foundations, and hundreds of other benefactors have helped finance one of the very best university teaching hospitals and research institutions in the entire country. Its Level-1 trauma center was ranked number-one in the nation. What a grand tradition to toss aside, when help is so desperately needed, yet so readily at-hand. Please let us not forget UTMB's charitable mission. Thanks to the largess of the Sealy family and Sealy Smith Foundation, UTMB's hospital—especially John Sealy—were dedicated to the health needs of Galvestonians and all others: “Here for the health of Texas.”

Thomas might have been wise to choose a different noun than, “overseer,” to describe the stewards of indigent charity care. As the child of dynastic elite—Thomas is a Kempner on her paternal line—it was not uncommon to hear Galvestonians refer to her bloodline with cynicism that her political calculations were invariably elitist and self-serving. Indeed her comments on UTMB read as both populist and paternalistic. However, they did effectively communicate a vision of a resilient, but still vulnerable city, that's sustainable recovery was thoroughly contingent on the restoration of UTMB. She explicitly stated this point to conclude her testimony: “As a city, Galveston has needed and counted on UTMB for 118 years. Our physical, mental, and cultural health is still dependent on University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. Give us time.”

Nearly 50 individuals testified before the Board of Regents that morning. Every speaker, with the possible exception of State Senator Jackson, urged the Board of Regents to retain and restore the UTMB campus on Galveston Island. Faculty members and current medical students tended to focus their testimonies on the quality of education and training that the University provides. The first faculty member who spoke asked all medical students to stand up, which they did, as the rest of the audience and the students themselves began clapping in demonstration of collective enthusiasm. He asked the students to do so as a show “moral support” before proceeding with a testimony that highlighted the “diversity” and “excellence” in the faculty and student body composition:

UTMB has provided over 28,000 healthcare providers since its inception. People chose UTMB for a variety of reasons. 99% of students pass their board exams, yet even though average MCAT scores are below Southwestern and Baylor School of Medicine. That speaks volumes for type of education that students receive. Nursing students pass with 98%. UTMB ranked 5<sup>th</sup> nationally amongst university medical schools for number of minority students, and ranked #1 nationally for Hispanic students (applause). These are graduates who will be well equipped to meeting the changing demographics and demands with supreme medical education, bilingual skills, and cultural awareness. UTMB students have been able to experience the very essence of the medical professions by providing services to those most in need, UTMB's indigent patients.

A male second-year medical student, and self-ascribed "BOI," followed next. He reiterated that the largely indigent patient base at UTMB provides its students with human resources necessary to achieve medical excellence:

Truly great teaching hospitals serve diverse populations that expose students to a vastly different array of clinical scenarios and conditions; and also teach us how to be empathetic and humanistic caregivers (applause). Various configurations of clinical enterprises on mainland, with educational enterprises on the island would essentially create two campuses and this would dismantle the synergistic 1:1 model that has been key to our success: the seamless transition between learning and practicing. Our institution was never a typical business. It was a place of caring, learning, and excellence. I implore not to dismantle a system that has worked so well for so many years, "Here, for the health of Texas." {Approximately half the audience provides standing ovation}

Not every UTMB medical student holds such compassionate esteem for the "indigent" patients to whom they attend in clinical settings. One colleague of this medical student latter rolled his eyes and referred to the speaker as "Mr. Galveston," who didn't necessarily represent the totality of opinions of the medical students. During fieldwork, one of the all-male medical fraternities hosted a "white trash party" wherein attendees donned the costumes that lampooned the supposed daily attire of an imagined white underclass whilst consuming moderate to heavy doses of alcohol. Casual conversations sometimes elicited derision or mockery of the presumed lack of intelligence embedded in the lifestyle choices of patients who sought subsidized medical treatment. For these advocacy purposes, speakers delivered a discourse of excellence in public service time and again.

While many advocates noted the historical legacy of medical care for the underserved and uninsured, others noted the increasing population of elderly residents and second-home owners; particularly the strata of retirees who have in-migrated to Galveston during the last ten years who would be particularly disserved by the loss of UTMB to the mainland. One gentleman who is also on the leadership of the East End Historical District said

Seven years ago I brought my business and my family down to Galveston. I planned to retire from Atlanta to the Island. It has excellent geriatric facilities and I can roll down to see my doctor! Well, we got about as much water as UTMB; we got right back and started cleaning up. We didn't miss an order. We didn't lay anyone off. That's what most businesses have done in Galveston to survive. I'm originally from Atlanta and like KSA (Kurt Salmon Associates) I'm constantly reminded this ain't Atlanta. They should have sent someone down here to assess the conditions. This was not quantified in the report. UTMB is not a private institution; the report should take into account its relation to the surrounding community.

The chair of the Galveston Republican Women also noted the “tenuous position of middle-class retirees” and thus her own “self-interest” in advocating for the full restoration of UTMB on Galveston Island. She supported Rep. Eiland’s “roadmap” as the most realistic plan for restoring UTMB to pre-storm service levels. She was followed by several other speakers who identified as retirees or senior citizens and who advocated that the loss of UTMB would lead them to rethink their residency on the island while also causing further irreparable damage to the island’s middle-class population.

Rep. Eiland eventually succeeded in brokering support for legislative funding of UTMB’s restoration and expansion on Galveston. Rep. Larry Taylor (R-Friendswood) was also instrumental in corralling Republican support for the initiative. With over 200 supporters on-hand at the Capitol in Austin on April 16, 2009, each donning buttons reading “UTMB: We Stop for No Storm,” the Texas State House passed House Bill 4586 by overwhelming margin of 141-5. The bill appropriated over \$300m in general revenue

to harden existing campus structures against flooding and wind-damage to match federal funding, and to construct a new hospital that would eventually return the hospital's bed capacity to pre-Ike levels. Support for the bill was also contingent on the County, the City, and UTMB pursuing the establishment of a county-wide hospital district to guarantee an additional revenue stream for the hospital going forward. While a hospital district never materialized, the Galveston County Commissioners Court did approve a countywide property tax increase of 5.5 cents per \$100 valuation to fund "indigent care" at UTMB. The tax increase was particularly unpopular in mainland Galveston County and contributed to the substantial election defeat of incumbent County Judge Jim Yarborough. However, the volume of indigent patients has decreased sharply with the resumption of regular emergency room service in August 2009. As a matter of fiscal policy, UTMB now provides only emergency service care for uninsured indigent patients while attempting to transport patients to community managed care clinics throughout the county in lieu of hospitalization.

The continuation of direct monetary subsidies through the state government for UTMB's expansion remained precarious and has required continued advocacy on the part of students and Rep. Eiland. The legislature had initially earmarked approximately \$150m for the construction of a new surgical tower to match \$170m from the Sealy Smith Foundation; however, the purported \$18b state budget deficit has thus far stalled the appropriation. Additional funds committed by the Sealy Smith Foundation are currently being used to enlarge hospital rooms in excess of the national average of 250 square feet. This will eventually decrease the number of general public beds by the time renovations are complete in 2015. These renovations are intended to lure more "paying"

patients to UTMB as well as to demonstrate that the University is modernizing its facilities to prospective students and faculty.

UTMB's restoration is central to the long-term viability of a particular urban vision of Galveston that would support a "middle class" residential base and senior citizen retirees. UTMB is foundational to the viability of a "knowledge economy" capable of supporting a sustainable "middle-class" that a tourism-based economy will not. Thus the possibility of the hospital's demise on Galveston was entwined with anxieties that the city would perpetuate a demographic trend of increasing poverty rates at the expense of an out-migrating "middle class. It would also discourage the in-migration of second-home owners and retirees whose property taxes would precariously support a bloated municipal government. In other words, the absence of emergency and critical care facilities would further disincentivize property ownership in a city where the current ownership rate is approximately 43%. Moreover, one of the prominent public issues before the hurricane was the future development of the East End Flats; the 600 acres of land mass adjacent to UTMB that is currently under the remit of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Request for Information that was produced in 2007 for potential developers called for proposals of an initial 74 acres that would conjoin long-term convalescence facilities with the building of "middle-income" single-family homes. The presence of UTMB is vital to the development of the "Flats," the largest remaining tract of undeveloped land in Galveston. It is directly adjacent to UTMB's campus.

While the restoration of UTMB remains a master symbol for middle-class sustainability, the continued practicality of fulfilling an historical mission to "serve the underserved" of Texas was open to competing evaluations that correspond with broader

interests in manipulating the base of Galveston's demographics post-Ike. As one prominent guest columnist noted in the *Galveston Daily News*, "UTMBs 'problem' is actually its solution." Ken Shelton, a notable multi-generation BOI argued that the indigent patient is ultimately beneficial to UTMB, if not desirable within a particular urban vision for Galveston. This is because UTMB could never reasonably compete for insured patients with the Texas Medical Center, which is arguably one of the finest medical centers in the country. Subsequent commentators back-talked his argument in suggesting, "Indigent equals housing projects and prisoners...ah, the flower of humanity visits here!" Another commentator asked that someone wake him "once the Obamacare nightmare is over," adding that his opinion that "once they leave the UTMB facilities, the indigent can go live in the abandoned million dollar beach houses all along the west end of the island." Therein lay the source of internal conflict in Galveston. The poor and uninsured provide the basis for maintaining a first rate teaching hospital that was large enough to retain "cutting edge medical technology and world-class researchers," which also provides competent hospital facilities for seniors, retirees, and potentially immigrating families who are coveted by many Galveston advocates. However, it was not uncommon for Galvestonians to equate the indigent patient base with a more pervasive demographic of impoverished residents who are said to unduly benefit from free medical care, inhabit public housing, and generally withhold Galveston from realizing its municipal potential as both a coastal destination, and a sustainable, livable city due to a perceived lack of productivity to the gross domestic product.

Advocacy efforts did not begin nor end with the large public meeting at Moody Gardens. Saving UTMB required much backstage negotiation to which I did not

participate. Further, my descriptions do not adequately account for the multiple bus trips undertaken by medical students and concerned citizens to lobby legislative representatives in Austin. I have used these particular proceedings to frame the urgent importance of this issue to Galveston's post-hurricane recovery and its long-term future as a residential island-city. While advocates rightly pointed towards the historic mandate and moral foundation of maintaining a public teaching hospital on a barrier island, its continued operation in the years to come will no doubt have to structurally adapt to changing political, economic, legal, and social forces will require considerable adaptation on the part of its administration. The advocacy practices for restoring UTMB in Galveston were animated not only by the self-interest of those who rely on its medical service. It was also complicit in visions of city leaders and residents over *visions of place* that Galveston could and/or should develop into. At roughly the same time as advocacy proceeded to save UTMB, a contingent of over 300 residents entered into an eight-week quorum to guide strategic planning for the long-term recovery.

*The Long-Term Recovery Committee: Deliberative Democracy for a New Galveston?*

"This is *your* committee." He reiterated this statement several times to our assembled ad hoc group of perhaps 20 residents who huddled together in the corner of the Grand Ballroom of the San Luis Convention Center on Seawall Boulevard; the building that had been the command center of the city's immediate post-storm response and the scene of the first townhall meeting. His repeated iterations weren't any more helpful than the last. Most of us sat there looking at one another quizzically as we haltingly struggled to organize ourselves into some semblance of a working group. This rotund bespectacled white man with a bellowing voice had spent his professional career with HUD. He had

recently emerged from retirement to work as a consultant with FEMA for their community long-term recovery committees that are a legal mandate following federal declarations of disaster. He and several other technical advisors came to Galveston after last working on a recovery committee in Gay Mills, WI in 2007. Several others who had been apart of the Gay Mills team and were now in Galveston along with a dozen Galvestonians who would be come part of the “Housing Recovery Subcommittee” out of the so-called “Group of 300.” Approximately 330 Galvestonians nominated themselves for inclusion on the Long Term Recovery Committee to deliberate with one another as they brainstormed, imagineered, and lobbied for their desired redevelopment projects. The only stipulation for inclusion was a year of previous residency in Galveston and informal pact of commitment to attend 10 consecutive meetings each Monday night.

In addition to the weekly meetings, the LTRC facilitated a series of public “open houses” throughout the island to encourage community input. At each meeting, an attendee was given a sheet that asked, “What does the future look like to YOU?” One was asked to fill-out the form and then proceed to a main area where committee members stood by easels awaiting the fixture of ideas to the blank sheet. Attendance at the open houses varied considerably. Whereas over 200 people attended a January 24, 2009 open house in the West End, later that day, approximately eight individuals visited the Mainland Preparatory School in La Marque—approximately 10 miles off of the island—to register their opinions for the restoration of Galveston. Individuals were given stick-um sheets of paper and encouraged to write down their ideas and affix them to a respective easel that connoted topics of “economic development,” “environment,” “housing and historic preservation,” “transportation and infrastructure,” and “human

services.” The FEMA representatives attempted to enhance the precision of their auditing process that rudimentarily gauged the social desirability of particular projects by providing miniature adhesive dots to register agreement with stated ideas. The results were then tallied and forwarded to each subcommittee’s “team leader” for use as ancillary input during “leadership meetings” that were closed-off to general members.

The survey results reiterated several oft-contested political issues that have appeared in public discourse over the past twenty years. Casino gambling was the most-often listed topic under “economic development.” For example, proponents stated their desire for “Casino gambling done right as a black-tie niche...European-style casino-only establishments,” which sometime appeared with caveats such as “Yes, to gambling—but only one exclusive and well-designed casino,” the latter of which received eleven dots of support during one open house at Ball High School. The other suggestion that received comparable “support” during the open houses was the plain call for “middle-income jobs.” This auditing activity on economic development is of course a very imprecise metric on public opinion. However, the variety of responses aligned with conflicting visions of land-use that have appeared as formally political topics both before and after the hurricane. For example, an assemblage of residents expressed desires for quality-of-life enhancements downtown and along the beach and bayfront, which were iterated through attendant support for paid parking on Seawall Boulevard and seawall enhancements. However, a counter-assemblage also suggested in varying intensities the need to enhance the industrial port facilities as the source of “middle-class jobs.” The port has precariously co-existed in operative tension with the arrival of cruise ships and investment capital of George Mitchell and Tillman Firittta in hospitality sector that caters

to cruisers and tourists adjacent to downtown between Piers 21 and 23 of the port. Representatives of the Wharves Board and the Longshoreman's union were particularly vociferous in opposition to the development of a consumable bayfront streetscape.

Between mid-January and March 2009, approximately 15 Galvestonians attended the housing subgroup on a weekly basis. It included a city councilmember, a board member of the Galveston Housing Authority, an architect who eventually lost a close Council election for the West End seat, an anthropologist, several retirees, three former employees of UTMB, and a former actor who had starred in the Hollywood feature film, "*Airborne*," (1994) and who now sold real estate on the West End. We spent the better part of our first official meeting coming to agreement on the vision statement. The initial debate that occurred and the statement we collectively produced that evening revealed several issues that we discussed recurrently over the next several weeks. These including but were not limited to, defining "affordable" and "sustainable" with respect to the city housing stock, discussing the merits of rehabbing existing housing units versus demolishing and building newer stock, and strategizing ideas for increasing homeownership on the island—discussions that were often conjoined with anxious talk of "re-growing the middle class." The vision statement was a discursive assemblage that held together several competing interests and priorities:

Building on what we have, Galveston will have the economic, aesthetic, educational and medical infrastructure that would allow it to be both home and destination with clean, livable, safe, and affordable neighborhoods, that will house a broad socio-economic spectrum of responsible citizens and families, responsible and supportive government, who will take pride in their city and help to preserve our historic architecture, artistic significance, and quality of life.

Councilmember Elizabeth Beeton was the most ardent advocate for housing rehabilitation in lieu of constructing broad swaths of new housing. She currently represents the district

that encompasses the East End Historical District. Her position during the Long Term Recovery Committee overlapped during proceedings over the fate of public housing, during which she tenaciously encouraged the maximized rehabilitated use of vacant units for scattered-site public housing in lieu of a rebuild on the existing properties<sup>71</sup>. Later in our deliberations as we constructed a final statement for inclusion in the Long Term Recovery Plan, she insisted on the inclusion of “Infill in *Existing* Neighborhoods” alongside “Housing Rehabilitation,” to which she added that the goal of housing recovery should be “To save existing neighborhoods” in lieu of constructing new housing stock. Ms. Beeton’s assertions went relatively unchallenged, although a small bloc of members repeatedly asserted the need to maintain “diverse” and “affordable” neighborhoods, which might require the construction of new homes at a variety of price-points. These two aspirations were not necessarily divergent, nor were they the source of disagreeable contestation between committee members. However they proved irresolvable into a conceptual synthesis guiding coherent future action during our meetings in the absence of precise information regarding the status of occupancy and vacancy, post-Ike. This uncertainty of information led to the proposal for a comprehensive housing needs study that would inventory the current levels of vacant parcels, abandoned properties, government-owned lots, and houses in code-violation on the island. The City eventually budgeted \$160,000 of CDBG funding for this endeavor.

During a meeting on February 9, 2009, the housing sub-committee struggled to adequately define the term, “affordable.” Several members argued that the term connoted more than a statistical metric as one group member attempted to breakdown a potential

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<sup>71</sup> Counter-discourse to her rehabilitative aspirations suggested that Ms. Beeton favored the restoration of “historical” homes in her district over the mediation of housing vulnerabilities of a broader Galveston electorate.

scale of affordability in Galveston. The pre-Ike median income for Galveston was approximately \$38,000. At that income level, one gentleman asserted that “affordable” homeownership for an ideal typical Galveston resident would thus be approximately \$150,000. He based his assertion on a hypothetical mortgage payment of \$1,200, which would include a 5.5% interest rate. Some members expressed doubt of how such developments could be facilitated on Galveston given the finite area of land available for new construction and the specific demographics of the island. Moreover, questions begat questions: “That’s affordable for whom?” one African-American committee member asked. “Yeah, do we want a Galveston that is this spectrum, or this spectrum?” another black female Galvestonian asked on top of that question, positioned her hands to show broad and short socio-economic residential. “We need more families. I’d say about 40-45% of Galvestonians are single,” retorted another members before adding, “So, how do we do that? Galveston is not an easy place to live. Try getting a building permit.” The chain of vague questioning veered towards income limits for federal grants, such as CDBG funding, for possible use of increasing homeownership rates vis-à-vis rent-to-own programs and down-payment assistance that the Galveston Housing Authority has been attempting to enhance in recent years. This conversation led to a proposal for what became the “Sally Abston Housing Program” that would have assisted families with housing rehabilitation monies and coordinated a lease-to-own apparatus that went in tandem with new CDBG-financed home construction.

Two black Galvestonian women championed the Sally Abston “Rent-to-Own” program: Ms. Patricia Toliver and Ms. Lillian McGrew. These two retired registered nurses from UTMB committed themselves, tirelessly, to sustained volunteerism on behalf

of an unspoken principle of social justice on the LTRC and Northside Galveston Taskforce. The program was named for a deceased former nurse at UTMB and prominent Northside advocate. This homeownership program did not materialize as proposed, due in part that it was developed with inadequate understanding of practical implementation within existing city departments and corresponding initiatives. However, its principles were incorporated within the current draft of the city Comprehensive Plan that is undergoing revision at the time of writing. It also led to an endearing if short-lived team-formation. One of the Sally Abston program's most vocal supporters within the committee was a rotund, white male who affected a peri-urban cultural disposition. He worked maintenance at Moody Gardens and often attended meetings donning the same mesh baseball cap, spectacles, blue jeans, and suspenders. He was respectful and articulate during our meetings. He eventually worked alongside the two other project champions to formulate the outline of the program after he spoke before the group about the need to grow a middle-class internally: "I'm middle class," he asserted several times in a nasally, southeast Texan twang; adding, "But, I wasn't always middle-class. I worked hard to get where I'm at, but sometimes people need some help to get them there." I was saddened, along with several other housing committee members, to read in August that year that he and his wife decided to leave Galveston for South Dakota. Before they left, he wrote a guest column in the *Galveston Daily News* as a self-described parting shot that echoed a recurring local trope of public discourse:

My wife and I moved here two-and-a-half years ago because we used to vacation here and thought it would be a nice place to live. We were both gainfully employed while we were here and fit into that much-talked-about "middle class."

**I have never lived in a place that I thought had more potential than Galveston.** You rose up after Ike and started to become active in the way your city was being run; now, battle complacency and insist the city leaders treat you with respect.

Although I didn't know this gentleman outside of the context of the recovery committee, his exodus from the island saddened me and several other colleagues who knew of his departure. It signified a broader social dynamic of diminished expectations for affecting transcendental change to Galveston's infrastructure and urban fortunes. Three housing recovery projects were ultimately formed during the course of the Long Term Recovery Committee: the Housing Rehabilitation and Infill Project, the housing market study, the Sally Abston Rent-to-Own program. Following a public display of the LTRC projects during a reception at Ball High School they were presented to the City Council in April.

During two consecutive city council meetings on April 17 and 23, 2009, members of the LTRC presented a total of 42 projects. On April 9, Chip Gerlock, the ranking FEMA liaison to the LTRC, and Chairperson Betty Massey, delivered introductory statements to the City Council during which they asserted a unity of purpose and clarity of vision embedded in the formulation of the proposed projects. The purpose of the meeting was for council members to vote to "accept" the LTRC plan into official municipal record. However, the Galveston City Council often lacked such a unified vision. Gerlock spoke first. He framed the committee procedures and their end result of a timely delivered recovery plan as unexpected successes that he would have personally "bet against," and in some places, "doubled down" against. He noted that others have called him "jaded" in the past. He performed his testimony as if a public revelation of a heretofore internalized, cynical backtalk to the initial list of procedural mandates that the LTRC steering committed desired; i.e., an "open," "active," and "transparent," set of practices that would encourage broad citizen participation. Mr. Gerlock had thought such principles noble in the name of democratic inclusiveness, but confessed that he had been

more concerned of the potential obstacle to efficient committee production given the limited timeframe and what he perceived as an inherently volatile commingling of federal authorities and independence-cherishing Texans:

First off, if someone had said to me that, “You’re going to go to a Texas community as a representative of the federal government and this Texas community is going to actually want you to assist them with the planning effort,” I’d bet against that one. I happened to live and work in the Houston-area for five or six years. And I came learn how the Texans cherish their independence. So I thought, “This group of federal representatives from all around the country is actually going to go in and help them?” Well, you had the courage and the wisdom to ask for our assistance, with the caveat that you had to have local leadership. But I still would have bet against that.

Second, I thought you must be a very courageous {city} council because you opened up this committee to basically anyone who was a citizen of Galveston. And it kept growing to where there were 332 members at one point. Then **I really started to wonder if this wasn’t “courage and wisdom” on the part of the Council, but really, some subtle form of sabotage so that it will become unwieldy and disintegrate.** And then Betty {Massey} said that we were going to finish and present projects on April 9. I would have double-downed on that bet. Not that I’m a betting person! Geez, then they go and tell us that all of the citizens of **Galveston are going to have input and are afforded the availability of coming to multiple open houses.** And we want them in multiple locations; in churches, schools, fire stations, and a couple off of the island in case there are some displaced citizens. I thought, “Ok, I don’t think that’s going to work.” But, it did.

Mr. Gerlock’s council testimony referenced a pervasive self-definition of Galvestonians as resilient and idiosyncratic, which he claimed to *de facto* recognize in personified form<sup>72</sup>. He noted that citizens frequently reminded him, “Galveston was different,” in a manner of parochial self-definition of community that he had heard many times before and “never quite believed.” But in this case, he conceded, “It was true!” He concluded his remarks by noting, “This {plan} is for the future of the community, for all the BOIs and IBCs that I’ve been told about, and who are not born yet. When you take the time to look at it, the most important section was not one of the projects; it was the community engagement process...this was a transparent process.”

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<sup>72</sup> Castaneda (1993) referred to this social fact as a broader condition of “islandness” to be found in other island locales.

Ms. Massey focused her comments on establishing the procedural consensus and participatory inclusiveness as social facts:

Really early on we figured out we are One Island. One community. Not about East and West End. Not about people who live behind the seawall versus those who don't. Not about "Green Galveston," or those "historical people," versus the business community. Not about the people "North of Broadway" vs...uh, uh, some other geographical location. {Massey then moves to quote a statement from the Galveston Northside Taskforce, a predominantly black Galvestonian advocacy group}

"The Galveston Northside Taskforce applauds the labor and efforts of the Galveston Community Recovery Committee. As fellow citizens, we are grateful for their volunteer hours dedicated to the recovery of the island. We share the same passion and concern for the recovery of our beloved city. We are one city, one community, and we are not divided."

{Massey continues her testimony} We learned that it wasn't going to be good enough to just take our community to where we were on September 12 of last year. **We needed to plan to be stronger, more sustainable, and more resilient.** We knew this plan needed to take Galveston to a better place. What we heard loud and clear from the hundreds of Galvestonians who talked to us was that our citizens want a community that behaves in an environmentally sensitive manner that protects its people, its infrastructure, and its natural resources.

This is when divisiveness manifested. A meeting that began as a rather mundane ceremonial proceeding unexpectedly morphed into a rancorous affair. This was ironic given that Mr. Gerlock stated that during the entire committee proceedings, "People certainly disagreed, but nobody was disagreeable." After the motion for approval of the plan's official acceptance into record was entered and seconded, councilmember Susan Fennewald garnered the floor. She quickly objected to having her name affiliated with the acceptance of a document that she believed implicitly supported two projects whose premises she vehemently disagreed: the Casino Gambling Feasibility Study and the Ike Dike. Her tone sounded almost scornful as she repeatedly jabbed her finger downward and explained her distaste for an "Ike Dike" that would be prohibitively expensive and environmentally damaging<sup>73</sup>. She then noted that she would not be so apparently upset

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<sup>73</sup> The Ike Dike was championed by Bill Merrell, professor of marine sciences at Texas A&M-Galveston. The project involves the extension of the seawall along the gulf-side perimeter of Galveston Island and the

about a casino gambling study if the Texas State Legislature were not in session, adding that ‘I’m so unhappy because I want to be more enthusiastic. And I really don’t want to get stuck with casino gambling because someone in Austin thought the Galveston City Council wanted gambling.’ Councilmember Elizabeth Beeton agreed that the unilateral acceptance of the study could send a symbolic message to pro-gambling lobbyists who were prepared to descend on Austin.

The proceedings grew tenser as other council members such as Danny Weber and Linda Colbert spoke against Beeton and Fennwald. They agreed with Betty Massey that this motion amounted to a ceremonial acceptance of the recovery plan, and by proxy, the volunteer work that the recovery committee donated at the initial behest of the Council in November 2008. The tone of the proceedings bewildered Massey. Council members, along with City Attorney Suzie Green, began deliberating the semantics and legal implications of the verb, “accept.” Massey then interjected with exasperation:

This was a *deliberately* grassroots, bottom-up process! That’s what I’m talking about: one island! We deliberately had people from the East End going out to that firehouse in Sea Isle {on the West End}. We didn’t censure what we heard. We listened. We built a vision, goals, and projects around what we heard Galveston saying. Individually we could disagree with 35 of 42 projects but we brought them all to you because they ALL deserve the next step, and they DON’T deserve to be shredded at this step. If the next step on casino gambling is actually finding out the facts on whether it’s a fit for Galveston—we all have opinions—but let’s get some data. Let’s not KILL IT tonight or in workshop in a week or ten days. Let’s let these projects move forward {Audience applause}.

Mayor Thomas attempted to move the proceedings forward by making an analogy to the aftermath of the 1900 Storm as a plea for contemporary Galvestonian unity:

I want to point out that Galveston is pretty much in the same place as it was after the 1900 Storm. If the people of Galveston at that time hadn’t come together from all walks of life, all religions, and decided to look at the future of Galveston at that time—the

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Bolivar Peninsula, and the installation of floodgates at the ends of the island; such as those used in the Netherlands. Dr. Merrell admitted that its feasibility was unknown; although when an audience member who attended a pre-LTRC presentation at the Texas A&M campus he said that the other option was “surrender.” The project proposed a feasibility study as a first action step. It has not proceeded

results of which are evident on the seawall, the results of which had to do with a monumental grade raising and very serious financial situations—we would not be here today. I’m not talking about an Ike Dike or anything. I’m simply saying that this community, 108 years later, came together in the face of a severely damaged city, has spent thousands of hours at our request, and is now asking us to accept what we asked of them to do. It is very important to future of Galveston that these meetings continue into the future because if the community does not stay together, especially those who have been working hard, we’ll do what we’ve done many times before, “Thanks a lot, but we don’t give a damn.”

Councilmember Fennewald moved to enter an amended motion that would explicitly stipulate that the Council did not endorse any singular project contained in the plan.

Councilmember Beeton seconded. There had not even been a vote on the original motion. Jeering and groaning from the packed pews of the council chambers increased in volume. Councilmember Karen Mahoney, the District-6 West End representative, offered a corporate analogy that the motion was akin to the procedural acceptance of a financial report at a board meeting and did not reflect any disagreement or opinion of the unknown contents. She spoke directly to Fennewald with a conciliatory tone to suggest that an amended motion would impact the credibility of the recovery plan. While she spoke, Fennewald abruptly interrupted to agree to rescind the request for an amended motion. The Council then voted unanimously for the original motion to accept the document into record. The sound of audible sighs, mocking claps, and exasperated snorts of laughter filled the room. Finally, as the Council attempted to schedule a special workshop to hear project presentations, Mr. Gerlock approached the podium and said to the Council, “I think you should go forward and do them all in one day. Tell me when that is a week in advance, and I won’t be available.” Laughter echoed from the walls of council chamber. Those subsequent proceedings eventually consumed nearly nine hours of deliberation spread out over two meetings.

The first special meeting for the consideration of the LTRC projects lasted for the full five-hour allotment on Friday, April 17. Twenty-eight of the 42 projects were vetted. This was yet another marathon session in a season of intolerably long council meetings<sup>74</sup>. In several instances during the proceedings, presenters acknowledged the symbiotic “linkages” that they saw across projects that spanned housing, infrastructure, economic development, transportation, human services, and environment. One could also identify antithetical elements and competing interests. Betty Massey noted that the LTRC sought to develop projects that would render Galveston’s urban ecology as “stronger, more sustainable, and more resilient.” Resiliency and sustainability were common tropes used in the written project descriptions and spoken presentations, often intermingling with the desire for “green” initiatives in relation to environmental conservation, building standards (i.e., LEED certification), and “progressive” urban ordinances.

I will discuss several of the projects in more detail. I identified at least three broad headings under which one could amass different projects irrespective of their organization within the LTRC plan: projects oriented in some manner to “sustainability and/or resiliency;” biopower initiatives intended to enhance or reproduce particular demographic sectors or characteristics; and projects that reflected recurrent and politically charged “development” initiatives. Projects under the first category often espoused a “green” component as a call sign of enhanced “sustainability” or “resilience.” Examples included, “Green Galveston: Clean and Smart,” “Ecosystem Restoration: from the Gulf to the Bay,” “The Trees Project,” “Conserving Island Resources,” “Stroll & Roll”

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<sup>74</sup> Following the hurricane, at the request of Elizabeth Beeton, the Council voted to halt the workshop sessions held in private chambers prior to public Council meetings to ensure that the post-storm deliberations and proceedings would be open to greater public viewing. It was not uncommon for meetings that began at 4pm to last until near midnight.

(i.e., hike & bike), “East End Lagoon Enhancement,” and the West Galveston Island Conservation project, respectively<sup>75</sup>. The second “biopolitical” group could be constituted by projects such as a LEED-certified “Vocational Technical Training Center” for workforce development, the implementation of both “The Galveston Promise”<sup>76</sup> and multi-used high athletics complex—both explicitly intended to “lure young families back to the island”—the creation of “Neighborhood Learning Centers” presented by two socially elite white women to serve “the most needy” populations on the island for after-school tutoring and life-long learning programs, as well as UTMB-affiliated public health needs assessment.

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<sup>75</sup> “Galveston: Clean, Green, and Smart,” “The Trees Project,” and “East End Lagoon” have materialized most completely at the time of writing. The first project led to the addition code enforcement staff to monitor and attend to abandoned, derelict properties while creating a centralized response system for residents to access and report potential code violations such as overgrown vegetation, stray animals, and hazardous physical conditions.

A former city councilmember and personal friend of Mayor Thomas championed the “Trees Project.” This relationship may have provided direct access to the Kempner Foundation, who in turn provided funds to plant mature oak trees to begin restoring the devastated oak canopy on Broadway. She and several other residents teamed with the Texas Forest Service to provide arborists to gauge the viability of Galveston’s trees in a collective urban canopy badly damaged by the brackish storm surge. This led to the removal of nearly 40,000 trees. To date the “Tree Conservancy” has facilitated the replanting of approximately 7,000 trees and in 2011 it was awarded a \$50,000 grant to plant approximately 1,000 more.

The East End Lagoon project is one that had gone through a Request for Qualifications process during the summer before Ike. It intends to develop a “world-class, sustainable” nature park on the 685 acres of land and lagoon water located between Seawall Boulevard and beach. A master plan has been completed for the area and remains in a fund-raising stage for the approximately \$16m cost. The City Council pledged “support” for the project in early 2011 without committing public funds to the project.

<sup>76</sup> “Galveston Promise” was modeled after the “The Kalamazoo Promise” in Michigan, which began with the creation of a private endowment to proportionately fund graduates of Kalamazoo’s high schools up to 100% of college tuition at a public Michigan university for up to four years. In Galveston this would have built off a pre-existing program that provides tuition scholarships for any graduate of Ball High School for attendance at the two-year Galveston College. The goal of the program to incentivize the inward migration of “young families” by promising 100% of tuition for those who complete K-12 in the Galveston school district, and up to 60% for those who complete high school in the GISD. The prohibitive annual costs of up to \$1m and weak philanthropic economy have stalled the program’s implementation.

The athletics complex project was championed by one prominent resident and restaurateur, Johnny Smecca, who shepherded the project to inclusion on the May 8, 2009 city-wide election ballot vis-à-vis the GISD Board of Trustees vote to approve obtainment of a \$35m bond to fund the facility. He was central to the formation of the “People Advocating Success for Students” political action committee that supported the bond deal. On May 8, voters defeated the deal convincingly, 67%-33%. The most common premise against the stadium that I heard was that, while a new or upgraded facility was needed for the high school after receiving five feet of floodwater, the proposed design was simply too expensive at a moment when the city and its residents still struggled economically post-Ike.

Emerging in the 1920s and ending in 1957, gambling was a prominent feature of an openly illicit economy in the so-called “Free State of Galveston.” Hurricane Ike swept away one of its master symbols, the Balinese Room, which has been immortalized in local historical lore as well as ZZ Top song of the same name. Obituaries for the lost establishment that extended from the seawall into the Gulf noted the many legendary acts that had played the venue run by the Maceo family who controlled the gambling industry along with the Firtitta clan: Frank Sinatra, Duke Ellington, Bob Hope, The Marx Brothers, and Peggy Lee. Popular stories abound of the periodic necessity quickly hiding slot machines or other gaming accoutrement when a police raid was imminent. Since its *de facto* abolishment from the island with the Texas Rangers raids of 1957, it has retained a place in cultural representations of the island’s past, and a possible place in its future. During the open houses of the LTRC, suggestions for and against the return of casino gambling were ubiquitous, as were the attendant sticky colored dots used to express support for a particular idea. Many islanders thought that this issue had been decided. In the 1980s, Galvestonians went to the polls four times over gambling matters. Three of those votes were simply non-binding referendums put on ballot following successful petition drives with goal of introducing legislation to the Texas Legislature to approve casino gaming on a local basis. In 1988, a supposedly definitive measure passed in a citywide vote prohibiting such non-binding referendums until a casino gaming concession passes the Texas state legislature. Yet, one frequent rumor that persists in Galveston is that Tillman Firtitta has already wired the San Luis Resort on Seawall Boulevard for slot machines in anticipation of a legislative concession. Mr. Firtitta has long denied these rumors. After the hurricane, with long-term future of UTMB still at

risk, the gambling question once again entered public deliberation. To date, a feasibility study has not been undertaken nor has a concession received serious vetting during the previous legislative sessions since the storm.

Paid parking on the seawall co-existed along with casino gambling as two of the most prominent, long-unresolved source of political contestation in Galveston. Both issues were present, at least indirectly, in the LTRC plan. The chairperson of the Park Board of Trustees, Jeri Kinnear, championed the “Seawall Enhancement” project. She represents the interests of this agency body that is responsible for the maintenance and promotion of Galveston’s beaches. This was the latest of five enhancement plans commissioned between 1983 and 2009 intended to facilitate installation of amenities such as street lighting, benches, a visitor’s center, and public restrooms that “will create an environment that enhances the quality of life of residents and will attract families and business travelers to the area.” The implementation of seawall enhancements has been compromised by a persistent inability to affordably raise the required capital in the absence of paid parking as a devoted funding source. There were concerted pushes in 1998, 2004, and 2009 to lobby Council to put the issue up to a citywide vote. Galvestonians did eventually approve a paid seawall parking referendum by a 2:1 margin in May 2011 over the objections of those who criticized the commodification of public beach access amidst accusations that day-trippers from the mainland would now eschew the use of Galveston’s prized asset.

Other project groupings included “hard” infrastructure, which had already been considered for public works prior to Ike. These represent a group of projects that weren’t “sexy,” as one presenter put it, but “absolutely vital” to the island’s long-term restoration

and hazard mitigation; e.g., sewer system enhancements, the enhancement and hardening of drinking water systems that extend from the mainland to the island, and storm-water drainage improvements; as well as more ambitious projects that such as the proposed raising of thoroughfares such as FM 3005 and Harborside Drive and the creation of a desalination water plant to decrease dependency on mainland reserves. Further, several projects were rather innocuously grouped under “historical preservation.” These received little questioning or criticism since they were supported through the Galveston Historic Foundation<sup>77</sup> and oriented towards the production of best-practice guidelines for elevating historical homes and rehabilitating cast-iron façades that are ubiquitous on buildings in historic downtown and the East End Historic District.

The thematic juxtaposition of projects—and their underpinning interests and desires of place—correspond to the spatial and cultural juxtapositions of Galveston. The so-called “city of potential” welcomes its visitors down Harborside Drive after getting off of Interstate 45. One witnesses the industrialized port on one side, and the northern boundaries of “Historic Downtown” on the other. Social formations of residents—particularly on the far eastern and west ends— especially covet the “natural” aspect of the island as a source of environmental, place-based attachment to Galveston. Yet, where one can contemplate the subtle brilliance of the island’s diverse ecosystem in a LEED-certified nature center, they can turn their head and glimpse several offshore oil platforms in the distance as cargo ships enter the ship channel. Where members of the Wharves Board and the International Longshoreman’s Union contend that a recapitalized port remains the foundation for job opportunities to support a blue-collared middle-class,

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<sup>77</sup> The GHF was established in 1973 to facilitate historical preservation and support historical tourism in Galveston. It is the largest historic preservation institution on the island and receives philanthropic subsidy from both the Moody and Kempner Foundations.

others, such city manager Steve Leblanc point to the immanent opening of a biotechnology research incubator as the future middle-class base for Galveston. Meanwhile, the former mayor advocated the Council for public funds to facilitate the master plan study of historical downtown. The chair of the Parks Board advocated for the implementation of a Seawall Enhancement project, yet Galvestonians were divided over the possible niche role of casino gaming in those themed landscapes of consumption<sup>78</sup>. Meanwhile, the Landry's Hospitality Corporation has significant economic interests along Seawall Boulevard. Its CEO is Tillman Firtitta. Despite the conflicts of interest, nearly all the projects, to varying degrees, ascribed themselves as foundational to welcoming tourists, "families," and/or "the middle class" back to Galveston.

The proceedings of the LTRC were described as "deliberately ground-up" to welcome a broad swath of participation and input; however, the participatory dynamics that I witnessed showed a stark divide between a small but committed population stratum

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<sup>78</sup> The downtown master plan study was eventually granted the remaining funds necessary to commission a consulting team led by the Virginia-based urban planning firm CMMS Architects and Dr. Stephen Fuller, from the George Mason Center for Regional Analyses. The findings of the master plan study were presented to Council in November 2010. During that time, former-Mayor Crews—a Kempner—requested financial support of up to \$74m from the City through CDBG funds to finance the implementation of the master plan. In addition to a myriad of streetscape enhancements and retail recommendations, Crews stated that the "connective corridor" between downtown Galveston, the East End Historic District and UTMB would be renamed "West University." As I discuss in the next chapter, the former site of the Magnolia Homes public housing complex is slated for rebuild in middle of "West University," directly across from the biotechnology incubator set to re-open in the renovated Customs House.

Dr. Fuller testified that while the Houston region should anticipate a population increase of approximately 2.3m over the next 20 years, neither the City nor the County currently stood poised reap the population in-migration or the attendant "economic growth" without a significant infrastructural intervention in the historic downtown, so as to "demonstrate to investors that this is a great place in which to put their money. **There's enormous potential here.** After the lead urban planner, Burrell Saunders showed slides of a beautified Harborside Drive along the boundary of historic downtown, city councilmember Steve Greenberg wryly replied, "**I don't see the 20-wheel trucks**" from the port. As of yet, no decision has been made regarding the commitment of second-round CDBG funds to the project.

engaged in the planning process, and a vast majority of Galvestonians who were not<sup>79</sup>. Of the approximately 20 black Galvestonians who participated on the Long Term Committee, I recognized that many tended to serve doubly on the Northside Galveston Taskforce. Hispanic and Vietnamese Galvestonians were significantly under-represented on the LTRC. Vietnamese interests were represented on a region-wide basis through Boat People SOS—also a member of the Galveston County Restore and Rebuild—and they operated more actively in San Leon and “Goat Island” off Bolivar Peninsula. There were no formal public advocacy organizations lobbying for Hispanic recovery interests, despite the fact that the 2010 Census revealed that the Hispanics now account for 31% of the population. Catholic Charities and the Jessie Tree offered bilingual assistance for social service provisioning; however, these organizations did not undertake public advocacy during my fieldwork. Only several Galvestonians under 35 years of age participated.

Participation on the LTRC was overwhelmingly an extension of a broader “culture of participation” in the public matters that existed prior to the storm. I invoke “culture” to posit a disparate collective of citizens across race, class and gender who consistently engaged in formalized political discourse and participation; and who also to differing extents considered the politics, policies, and performances of institutional actors—as well as the rumors and gossip that emanated from everyday proceedings—as topics of interest and casual talk. Moreover, habits of sociality, self-interest, and/or

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<sup>79</sup> Or as one informant recounted: “The Galveston social strata is roughly divided into two parts of the upstairs/downstairs variety, with a few twists. There are the ultra-rich, the rich, those who work for the ultra rich/rich, a smattering of students, those on the hustle and those who are not. Marx would be proud. It is impossible to tell who’s who by what people wear or where they live. After all, the wealthiest woman in town used to live next door to the Dairy Queen.”

educational & professional backgrounds increased the likelihood of formal participation. Faces and names became familiar as city council “regulars,” committee members, or recurrent commentators. At several open houses, the number of committee members in attendance far exceeded “the general public.” However, this does not suggest a coherent body of residents committing full attention to the issues of the day. Attrition rates escalated sharply during the last several weeks of the LTRC. While 330 residents joined the LTRC, approximately half that number maintained consistent attendance throughout the proceedings. Several members of the housing subcommittee complained of a perceived impotence of the group’s endeavor to effect substantive housing redevelopment before they stopped attending meetings.

The proceedings of the Long Term Recovery Committee challenge one to consider the extent to which the hurricane created an assemblage of conditions that opened a space for a robust forum of deliberative democracy to inform the strategic planning of Galveston’s long-term redevelopment. Conversely, it requires one’s attention to the inherent limitations that compromise the ideals of Habermasian public body engaging free and spirited conversation towards rational ends of collective decision making. It is tempting to summarily dismiss the proceedings as a federally sponsored machination and the consequent project presentations before Council as conjoined acts of symbolic display of participatory democracy lacking tangible material effects on “resiliency” or “sustainability.” Despite the invocations of Galvestonian unity for a common good during the LTRC in which “people disagreed but no one was disagreeable,” an analysis of the LTRC must inevitably confront its inherent limits as a manifestation of a liberal public sphere while not losing sight of particular achievements

of participatory inclusiveness that will vary across sites. I agree with Bruce Robbins' concession that, "after a certain point, the subject of the public sphere must become a matter of local investigations into particular collectivities and practical politics" (1993: xxiii).

Gauging the success of the LTRC is contingent upon the specific criteria to which one pays analytical attention. The relative openness of the participatory process of the Long Term Recovery Committee may ultimately be its most significant achievement, in spite of the impossibility of a Habermasian ideal of full access and the discursive limitations to explicitly orient substantive deliberations to the perpetuations of lasting forms of social and economic inequality. Participatory exclusions occurred *de facto* due to personal interest, time availability, and awareness of the proceedings rather than through formal boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. This nearly happened in October 2008 when Councilperson Beeton publicly accused Mayor Thomas in session of assembling a select committee of prominent citizens to secretly guide long-term redevelopment. However, Nancy Frasier rightly pointed out in her contribution to the seminal edited volume, *The Phantom Public Sphere* (1993), the absence of formal exclusions does not preclude informal exclusions within the discursive interactions of formally inclusive arenas; (10-11) e.g., the hegemony of polite decorum and (de)valuations of certain participant's rhetorical styles. Within the proceedings of the housing workgroup, elucidating the presence or absence of participatory equality produces contradictory findings.

The structural constitution of the LTRC appeared to emulate what Tocqueville identified as an American protestant political culture that fostered "a politics that was

unpredictable and full of contention yet not in chaos” (Cruikshank 2000: 62). Mr. Gerlock typified this through his comment that “people disagreed but no one was disagreeable.” However, politeness should not in itself be construed as a desirable end; though perhaps as a valued by-product of respectful but substantive deliberations that grappled with underlying ideals of belonging and difference, productivity and inequality, that are easily euphemized or ignored in public arenas. The housing workgroup did not lack boorish male voices willing to interrupt and assert; however, the two behavioral sources left the group within the first four weeks. The partnership that produced the Sally Abston program was a notable accomplishment for individuals finding commonalities of interest that were more robust and consequential than inevitable remainders of social differences predicated on race, class, or gender. Moreover, deliberations on the social relevance of “affordability” provided the most open discursive space to articulate concerns about belonging and exclusion that might imbricate within a long-term “recovery.”

While it was possible to temporarily bracket social status in order for LTRC participants to deliberate as equals in tones of respect, devaluations of certain participant’s input inevitably emerged. These were evinced by non-verbal cues such as collective silence following an overwrought truth-claim, interruption or eye-rolling; particularly when someone would advocate for interests considered by certain members as too overtly particular. Unacknowledged but explicitly apparent forms of power manifested—either as potency of individual will; as predicated on social or institutional position, or as technical expertise informed (Wolf 1999). These assertions of power of course affected one’s ability to guide deliberations and shape the project’s contours. In

the end I would accentuate the comprised accomplishments of the Long Term Recovery Committee despite its inherent limitation to affect radically transformative change due to realities of bureaucratic process, entrenched local power structures and their accompanying material interests, and the distractions of Galvestonian's time and attention due to competing demands such as work, family, and personal restoration. I do so because the LTRC did produce numerous well-crafted project ideas brimming with potential for enhanced qualities of life and infrastructural mitigation against future storms.

Ultimately, however, the LTRC projects that have advanced from planning to implementation have been those that were either already proposed before the storm; dovetailed with a pressing infrastructural mitigation needs; and/or were aided by the socio-political position of the individuals or institution that championed the project. However, progressive projects such as the Houston-Galveston commuter rail and the "Stroll-n-Roll" hike-and-bike project may come to fruition in the next several years, while others such as "green" building guidelines have been incorporated in principle into the draft of the latest Comprehensive Plan City. Moreover, the drafted plan calls for the City to "support" LTRC projects such as the "Galveston Promise," "Center for Technology and Workforce Development," a UTMB public information campaign entitled, "Here for the Health of Texas," and a "Port Improvement" project that called for infrastructural capitalization. The biotechnology incubator is set to open in 2012. It remains unknown the extent to which the Long Term Recovery Plan will affect tangible change in the social and physical landscape of the island. As Betty Massey said in an August 12, 2010 guest column in the Galveston County Daily News, "We {Galveston}

have studied and been studied, planned and been the subject of plans...many of us are at a point of planning burnout.” During the course of 2011, the City Council will again convene to consider adopting yet another planning document based on “public participation,” that will detail development priorities across the island. By then, another hurricane may well alter this comprehensive planning process. Like Ike did in 2008.

#### *FEMA Hazard Mitigation Buyout Program*

On October 23, 2008, a property owner in the Pirates Beach subdivision of the West End addressed the Galveston City Council about the availability of the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Buyout Program for post-disaster assistance. Bill Clinton signed this federal program into law in 2000 for the expressed purpose of decreasing long-term federal costs that had been accruing with allotments post-disaster assistance to affected property owners. It emerged from the spate of Midwestern river floods in the 1990s and was intended as a long-term mitigation strategy since disaster declarations had increased at an exponential rate under the Clinton administration relative his executive predecessors (Platt 1999). Between the fiscal years 1996-98, Clinton had ordered 189 federal disaster declarations (*Ibid*). Per the program’s mandate, FEMA will compensate property owners on the West End for their substantially damaged or destroyed properties at 75% of the pre-storm fair-market valuation, minus any insurance proceeds already paid out. The City assumes responsibility for the remaining 25%, although that cost is likely to pass down to the homeowner. The property will then be demolished and is required by federal law to remain vacant forever. Thus no physical structure may be built on that plat for all time.

The City’s participation in the program was the subject of identifiable, but

relatively muted<sup>80</sup> public criticism on the grounds that it unduly rewarded middle-to-upper income residents who voluntarily chose to own beach or bayfront properties without seawall protection<sup>81</sup>. West End residents began coming forth by the time of the October 23, 2008 city council meeting to advocate for the City's State-level application to the FEMA program. Substantive public deliberation concerning the program didn't occur until December 11, when council members discussed the feasibility of pursuing application to the program, and whether to award a \$30,000 contract to a consultant named Jeff Ward to assist with the tedious and time-consuming application process.

The program caveat that galvanized opposition most intensely was the clause that a lack of state homestead exemption did not disqualify federal eligibility. Because a vast majority of properties on the West End are not homesteaded properties, it increased the likelihood that those who would take advantage of the program would not be year-round Galveston residents. Thus the program's implementation played into often class-based boundary issues of belonging and difference, and as a corollary, into fraught assertions of "fairness" and the limits of claimed victimhood. Moreover, FEMA representatives constantly reiterated that their role was not "to make people whole" financially; however, the generous federal commitment to 75% of pre-Ike value, with the possibility of other external sources contributing the remaining 25%, nearly belied that policy assertion relative to other federal assistance available to Galvestonians. Moreover, there were no limits to the number of properties an individual could submit for application to the State. One pro-buyout advocate who resides full-time in San Antonio was said to have

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<sup>80</sup> In other words, relative to the vitriol that emerged over the Galveston Housing Authority's initial public housing rebuilding plan.

<sup>81</sup> Per the 1959 Texas Open Beaches Act that is supposed to ensure public access to all beaches on the Gulf of Mexico.

submitted four of his properties for application. Brandon Wade, who was then the assistant city manager of Galveston, acknowledged despite his recommendation to pursue an application, this was not a “perfect program.”

Pro-buyout advocates deployed a repertoire of rhetorical and symbolic forms to advantageously identify themselves; both individually and the West End, collectively, as just-recipients of federal assistance. In doing so, pro-buyout advocates often engaged in forms of rhetorical legitimizations to counter the received criticisms that the program unfairly, and disproportionately, favored mid-to-high income property owners who were predominantly not full-time residents of Galveston. Recurrent forms of legitimization enacted by advocates relied on their status as revenue generators for the city vis-à-vis their payment of relatively higher property taxes, their personal consumption of goods and services on-island that provided local business patronage while contributing to city sales tax revenue, and their role as facilitators of the city’s hospitality industry in offering rental vacation homes. Other speakers posited claims to common victimhood, place-based attachments to Galveston, and pleas for equality of opportunity to pursue federal assistance.

The following testimonial excerpts were largely taken from two Council meetings in January 2009. Advocates testified in the months before and after these particular meetings; however, these meetings produced the largest coordinated turnout. I’ve selected testimonies that are synechdotal to pervasive forms of argumentation for and against the buyouts.

I live in Austin and own two houses on the beach in the West End. Thank you for approving the Hazard Mitigation Buyout, but I understand there is some controversy whether you’re actually going to do buyouts. I’m concerned about editorials that paint the buyout seekers as “rich people”, and I’d like to counter that argument. **I don’t consider myself a rich person, I consider myself an investor and small-business**

**owner who is trying to make a little bit of money**, trying to build a little bit of equity. I bought one house last year and I've contributed to the tourism industry here. **I think I provide a service that they can't get from hotels** and, uh, normal-type accommodations, and would cost probably three times as much if you paid for rooms for four families. I attract 16, 17 people at a time; I attract large family groups. **I can't count how many 80<sup>th</sup> birthdays we've had, how many weddings, how many 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries.** I think you should encourage small investors who provide those kinds of diverse services to the community. One of the houses I just bought in July, and I never even rented it out. I spent ALOT of money, \$50-60k just making improvements to get it ready. And it was gorgeous, it was just about ready to rent. Now it's in limbo, it had lots of damage. It had beach erosion. I'm technically on the wrong side of provision line of vegetation. Insurance would probably pay to repair it. But I don't know if I can repair it once the permanent line of vegetation is in there. I urge you, don't let this "east end—west end, rich people-poor people" thing get in your way. Make a decision that is best for everybody. **Certainly if I feel like I'm being treated fairly, and I get a buyout, every penny of that is likely to go back into a similar project.** I didn't just buy something to try and flip it. I buy things and I try to make it better so that people want to come.

This speaker was a white male, roughly middle-aged, with a long ponytail. He was particularly tactical as he identified himself in negation to stereotypes of West End property owners as wealthy, profiteering, absentee vacation homeowners with no intrinsic connection to Galveston. He located the value of his presence in both a material and symbolic economy to which he contributes. Because of his specific rental practices and through substantial monetary investment in his property he has contributed to Galveston's economy and facilitated kinship rituals that strengthen the social bonds of Galvestonians; i.e., the innumerable anniversaries, "80<sup>th</sup> birthday parties," and weddings. The following speaker made comparable assertions about deservingness and victimhood:

I have owned property in Galveston since 2004, a small house on Sunny Beach. We've loved it, **been paying taxes on it ever since and contributing to your tax base**, renting it out when we could. It's a very small house. And I invested in another property in August. **Ike saw fit to take that.** Now I understand **there is an opportunity to forever give that property to the State, and not hurt my family's finances.** I hope you understand that as an individual investor, I don't expect the City of Galveston to help subsidize that transaction. In fact, if that were the case, I wouldn't accept it. But if we contribute a portion of the proceeds to the mitigation process, I don't understand why the city should be concerned about someone taking that property and putting that it into permanent reserve; that would take a lot of coastline property forever not to be in development; and there have been a number of issues about preserving, you know, the coastline, for ecological—and I'm a scientist so I appreciate this issue—to give them the opportunity, you know, to grow and build-out our beaches and our coastline. **So basically my principles are you have to support the investor—and I'm not a big guy,**

**I'm a little guy**, and taking a positive investment position that makes it conducive for people like me to invest in the island.

The testimony of this speaker similarly locates him in negation to stereotype of West End wealth, while establishing himself as an economic contributor to the island through his investment in two rental properties. The self-ascribed family man reveals himself as vulnerable as other Galvestonians to personal economic calamity brought upon by Hurricane Ike. The discourse of victimhood seems a necessarily populist rejoinder to assertions of deservingness based solely on identifications as “investor,” or “tax-payer.”

Assertions of place-based attachments and pleas to island-wide unity were also marshaled as sources of legitimization. During the January 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting, one husband-and-wife couple walked to the podium in “IBC” t-shirts and buttons to show they considered themselves “Islanders by Choice.” The husband spoke that they were “native Texans” who “vacationed in Galveston all our lives...we plan to return here to retire.” They had “followed the rules” by building “to the strictest codes,” bought “maximum insurance,” and diligently paid their property taxes and utilities. Their home was relatively undamaged structurally; but it was now on the wrong side of the line of vegetation. This meant that it was now provisionally located on public land under the remit of the Texas General Land Office. Like others, they claimed they were “not wealthy,” but “hard-working IBCs” who would be sent to bankruptcy without a buyout.

Perhaps the most visceral display of victimhood and place-based attachment occurred at a previous Council meeting in November 2008. During public comment, a white female West End resident opened her testimony with the statement, “I wasn’t lucky enough to be a B.O.I., but my Grandpa was, and he survived the 1900 storm. I grew up poor. My family used to come down from Houston to catch crabs. So that we *could*

*eat.*” She then noted that her first marriage brought her considerable wealth; but, upon divorce, she signed away “every one-million dollars” that she had acquired in order to “pursue my love of Galveston” by obtaining a place on the Laguna Beach and bringing her daughters to Galveston. The council chambers were eerily silent, save for the sound of welling tears and half-suppressed sobs as she named herself a “rags-to-riches” story that allowed her to “pursue a dream...{crying growing more audible}...but now I fear that I’m going to lose my dream with the threat of personal bankruptcy looming {crying continues}.” The city attorney thought to bring her a Kleenex. Her walk towards the woman was the only kinesic breaking the awkward juxtaposition of her singular sobbing and collective silence in the audience.

During the January 22<sup>nd</sup> proceedings, another white female speaker chastised the Council for their inaction to support the City’s application for the federal buyout, and then pleaded for island-wide unity and mutual empathy, “I don’t think there are two Galveston’s. I think there should be one Galveston that we’re all a part of. Not the East End, not the West End, but *Galveston*.” She added, “How would you feel if it were your mother’s home, your brother’s home, your friend’s home, and you had the opportunity to throw them a line that might save their life and you didn’t take that opportunity?” Speakers also chastised Council for what they perceived as exclusionary practices. As one white male speaker put it, “This program does not discriminate. It doesn’t single out by location by east, west, north, south; river, lake, beach, or forest; owned by rich or poor. So to deny me is to discriminate against me.” He was followed by the San Antonio resident who first researched the existence of the program in October 2008, and who eventually submitted four properties for inclusion in the City’s application:

Ike harmed us; now you all have harmed us...We just had a special and historic inauguration. I'm a Republican, and I was really proud. But, I'm here today to tell you. I don't see that in Galveston. I don't see any of the emphasis that was put on at the inauguration that we're supposed to help each other, and support each other, and change. I don't see change here."

Following him, another white male, and board member of the West Galveston Island

Property Owners Association stated:

If the City approved the plats and permits, how can we now be punished for building close to the water? You have a moral and legal issue to treat all citizens fairly. We have a problem understanding the issue you have: the City does not have to pay anything.

Another statement corroborates other testimonies that attempted to counter the criticism that West-Enders foolishly built too close to the water, and thus should take personal liability for their losses: "About living so close to the water. I guess UTMB has the same problem. This is Galveston *Island*."

Proponents of the buyout offered a diverse repertoire of legitimizations to support their desired participation. Arguments against the buyout rested on fewer basic principles. Anti-buyout advocates tended to express dissatisfaction towards the generous disaster assistance guaranteed to property owners who willfully built in an area of the island that exposed them to the risks of wind damage, flooding, and the loss of property to state control<sup>82</sup> in the event of a storm. While the federal program is applicable to all of Galveston Island for uses such as housing elevation, the policy of the Texas Department of Emergency Management prioritizes buyouts. On the recommendation of the assistant city manager and an independent program consultant, buyouts in neighborhoods 'behind the seawall' risked further neighborhood diminishment due to a "Swiss cheese" effect that would create scattered plots of vacant land that would affect property values and

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<sup>82</sup> Particularly since this is not a novel risk that was exacerbated for the first time by Hurricane Ike. In 1983, Hurricane Alicia altered the beach so that several homes were lost due to their new location on public land.

perpetuate nuisances of maintenance. Further, applicants whose houses were now located on the public beach could “fast-track” their application to the state without a stringent cost-benefit analysis attached to other forms of mitigation, such as elevations. Thus, the West End homes became the logical target-recipients of this program. Furthermore, at the time of the deliberations, the details of the homeowner rehabilitation program and the eligibility standards had not yet been addressed. That further fueled opposition claims of distributional unfairness, particularly from those Galvestonians who remained in stalled, liminal states of rebuilding the houses they inhabited as their homestead.

One white female resident spoke to these concerns in voicing her opposition. Her testimony also conjoins another broader principle of opposition that a “buyout” amounted to a federal “bailout,” which has circulated in a more pervasive American lexicon since the implementation of the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP):

It is a waste of city time and resources to figure out how to buyout those front row beach houses. The bottom line is that I moved here and decided where to live based on *the law of the State*. {Councilman} Tarris {Woods}, you will appreciate this: when I bought my first home, my annual income was \$19,000. No one wanted to give me a loan. That year, I saved \$10,000 and got a mortgage with 30 percent down. And when I sold that house in Dallas I took my happy \$80,000 to *Galveston*. And at the time, **I could buy a home behind the seawall or on the West End. When I looked at the West End, I thought, “If I end up on the beach, that’s it. Game over. That’s the law. It’s public property.”** So I will be very disappointed in my city if you seek out money to help these beach-owners that knew when they bought, whether they’re investors or whatever, what the risks were. We all have investments in this city. **I’m currently living in a travel trailer.** I did not ask my tenant to leave my garage apartment because his apartment was one of the few places in tact and he’s a schoolteacher. **So if you want sob stories, you’ll get them.** And you’ll make exemption after exemption to please every citizen in every circumstance. I have 6 neighbors out of 125 houses. Going west, it’s a ghost town. I’m near English Bayou<sup>83</sup>. It’s a mess. Five blocks from my house is the “Northside of Broadway.” My house is worth \$55,000. If you asked me if I wanted a grant for your pre-Ike value, would you take it? Heck yeah! I’d leave that empty block; I need my money. But really, you need citizens. And really, this is the General Land Office’s problem. It’s not ours. Also, what if a year from now, Palisade Palms ends up in the

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<sup>83</sup> Her stated home location is in the vicinity of some of the most destructive flooding caused by the backsurge of water into shallow bayous roughly between 57<sup>th</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> street, which inundated the low-lying area that had been built out with many pier-on-beam cottages and slab-on-grade foundation ranch homes

Gulf? Are you going to buyout every condo in Palisade Palms? When you buy on the beach, you know the risk. **I'm really offended that people are comin' and askin' for federal dollars, just like I was offended when people asked the federal government to the tune of \$600 billion to bail them out for bad investments.** Are we just going to be a society of exemptions? Where when you take a risk and it doesn't work out, somebody's going to come around and pay it off for you? When it comes down it, it's not fair. I didn't intend to be mad until I got here and kept hearing people talking about how much they do for Galveston. **Everyone who lives here does something for Galveston. But the law about the beaches is the law. And I don't think you should make exemptions for this one storm.**

Another frequent contributor to the public comment echoed the concerns over fairness and deservingness that the previous speaker raised to Council. A is a retired firefighter with a slender frame, a southern smoker's voice, and grizzled facial features who sauntered gingerly to the podium in blue jeans and worn-out mesh baseball cap. His exceedingly plain spokenness, "independent" self-presentation, thoughtful statements, and sense of humor injected levity into otherwise tense or dull proceedings.<sup>84</sup> He often addressed the council with several thoughts on current affairs in the city of which he had an opinion, the buyout included:

The whole world ain't messed up, just Galveston. We got a lot of damage that we need to get over, but the world has kind of forgotten us. Maybe need a big historical festival to remind the world that Galveston is torn-up again. Also, I'm all for helping people who got their houses torn up by the hurricane. **These people who have summer homes, and who have investments, I think the proper term is, "Go Fish."** If we're interested in helping people, my stock market is (arms up, thumbs down, whistling like dropping bomb). Anybody want to by some CarBadge stock? You're gonna feel sorry for me, my retirement's ruined. But that's alright...I diversified. Anyway, that's it. **I'm just against this buyout of a SUMMER HOME. Or an investment.** That don't turn me on.

Of the 180 parcels deemed "substantially damaged" west of Cove View Blvd, i.e., "beyond the seawall," only 44 were homesteads. Those 180 parcels represent only 15% of the total number of substantially damaged parcels on the entire island. The storm had a disproportionate impact as far as the gross number of affected properties. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the hurricane nonetheless caused localized but

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<sup>84</sup> Some referred to him as something of a figurative equivalent to the late Fletcher Harris, an irascible, fiery WWII veteran who had lost half of an arm during D-Day who was said to read "the riot act" to City Council. Mr. Harris rode-out the storm on the island, but passed away shortly after Hurricane Ike.

intensive damage to houses and infrastructure throughout the West End. Moreover, although property values are on average substantially higher than the rest of the island, they are certainly not uniformly “luxury” or “beachfront” properties.

The spatial geography of the “West End” has expanded considerably during the past 25 years. Beginning in the mid-1960s and 80s, developers increasingly built-out the area between 61<sup>st</sup> and 81<sup>st</sup> in the vicinity of Seawall Boulevard, a process fuelled in latter years with capital provided through the savings-and-loan privatization that in turn produced an excess of new condos and apartments that significantly diminished the island’s occupancy rates and precipitated a fallout in the island’s housing market. This area is often referred to now as the “near West End,” while the area that extends beyond the seawall, where Seawall Boulevard becomes FM 3005, is typically considered the “West End,” proper. Small bayside fish houses, retreats and cottages had peppered the west end of the island for decades. “Bermuda Beach” became the first platted subdivision of the West End in 1963. Other subdivisions such as “Terramar,” “Sea Isle,” and “Spanish Grant” grew through the 1970s. Construction surged in the 80s with the increased build-out of upper-scale developments such as “Pirates Beach West” and “Pirates Cove.” Following the S&L fallout of the late-1980s and the consequent recession, the build-out of the West End slowed considerably, reviving slowly in the late-1990s with luxury beachfront developments such as the “Sands of Kahala.” New luxury construction surged in the West End between 2003 and 2006. This caused considerable public contestation over the rapid speculative pace of platting and building; particularly amongst full-time West End residents who articulated serious concern over the

implications for once pristine estuarine wetlands and attendant ecosystems that drew vacationers, retirees, and residents in the first place<sup>85</sup>.

A review of the distribution of substantially damaged parcels shows clustering amongst the older subdivisions of Bermuda Beach, Terramar, Pirates Beach, and Spanish Grant; as well as the bay-side row of small fishing houses and vacation homes. A review of the City Council minutes also shows that a majority of advocates list addresses located within these older developments. Of course more recently constructed houses are materially more resilient and thus were far less affected by both the sweeping force of floodwaters and wind damage.<sup>86</sup> Whereas pro-buyout advocates could often personalize their specific situations of financial vulnerability—particularly property-owners of the older and less affluent subdivisions—those who opposed the buyout used discursively leveling signifiers to render potential program applicants as wealthy, foolhardy out-of-towners. Further, whereas oppositional advocates conflated “buyout” with “bailout,” few sectors of Galveston’s housing stock and infrastructure will remain untouched by some form of “bailout” from federal or state-level entities.

The City Council ultimately passed a motion by a vote of 5-2 on January 22 that authorized the City Manager to pursue an application to FEMA, vis-à-vis the State of Texas, for participation in the grant program. Councilmembers Elizabeth Beeton and Susan Fennewald opposed after the latter’s amended motion to disqualify “beachfront”

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<sup>85</sup> At least four developments had commenced building during the five years previous to Ike. According to the president of the WGIPOA, sales at these new developments had been “slow” (Personal communication, 8/22/08). Plans had been announced for several other developments prior to the storm, though construction had not started: Anchor Bay (bay), Marquette (beach and bay), Sweetwater Estates (bay), Spoonbill Bay (bay); and the Reserve at Bay Harbor (bay). Public contestation was most vitriolic in regards to the Marquette development.

<sup>86</sup> The developer of the Sands of Kahala subsequently challenged the legitimacy of four applications from this development, stating that they showed very little structural damage and should not have qualified as “substantially damaged.”

properties was struck down. These council members represent districts located in the eastern half of the island. Ms. Beeton offered a nuanced voice of opposition, as she often does, that critiqued the structure of the federal program itself and indicated greater concern for her own constituents:

When we ask the state for help, I would like us to begin to ask the state to reconsider how this program is set up. It developed over time because of river flooding. That's why the priority for waterfront buyout in a flood zone. This is the biggest disaster for the state in 100 years. It was a different kind of event, and all these FEMA dollars are available because of THIS disaster. To shoehorn into a set of priorities based on other disasters, in mind, is a travesty. We need to be asking the state for changes so that people who live in these old houses {behind the sea wall}, who desperately need the assistance to elevate their homes would be eligible for these dollars—these HUGE dollars—and not go begging for other types of funding that these dollars should be used for.

Ms. Fennwald, per her interpersonal tendency, was more forthcoming with disapproval:

I think we should be applying for the grant. But we need restrictions set up front. Acquisition of properties inside a neighborhood is not something we should do unless it abuts a park. But I'm not keen on acquisition of beachfront properties until we hear from the GLO about legal consequence. We almost got stuck with House Bill 2816 that would have made us liable for future problems with beachfront homeowners. So the only thing we can do is discourage from building so close to the beach; the best thing we can do to discourage is MAKE THEM PAY, I mean not BAIL THEM OUT! They expect the city and state and Feds to BAIL THEM out. I don't think we should approach the beachfront...we can't prevent them from building there, but we shouldn't be rewarding them...{Groans from the audience}...It doesn't keep them from building right on the beach.

Fennwald later contended that city participation in the buyout program should correspond with a concerted attempt by the City to mandate an increased setback-distance to govern new beachfront construction. I will discuss this in more detail in chapter five. The buyout of beachfront properties likely precludes the ability to install hard mitigation structures such as a seawall extension along Galveston Island or the implementation sloped stone revetments that interface with sand dunes behind the beachfront. In addition to the execution of a clear mitigation and maintenance plan for the bought out properties, the success of the buyout program for Galveston's collective long-term resiliency is

perhaps dependent on proportion of buyout participants who reinvest their funds back into the local housing market and broader island economy.

The correlation of these four sites of post-Ike public advocacy into a common purview of long-term redevelopment reveals an assemblage of ethical commitments, material interests, and dreamworld visions that clashed and coalesced; and continue to do so approximately three years after the storm. Advocate practices showed the competing visions of place that indexed differing valuations of Galveston's past and potential social order, its built and natural environments, and the economic principles and practices that would support those visions. The advocacy work of GCRR most closely evinced Fortun's definition as "the performance of ethics in anticipation of the future" because of their stated commitments to social justice for "underserved," "underinsured," and endemically vulnerable residents of the city and county of Galveston. Discursive elements in pro-UTMB advocacy practices also iterated a comparable commitment, particularly to "indigent" care under an historical mandate of public service. The Long Term Recovery Committee also revealed ethical commitments as an animator of participation, particularly around projects that espoused a form of "good stewardship" towards the island's "sustainability" and "resiliency," as well as "affordability." However, both UTMB and LTRC were germane to the articulation of particular *desires of place*. The most apparent articulation with regard to UTMB was that the "middle class" was dependent on its restoration, as was the future of a biotechnological component of the local economy. Whereas the LTRC brought into focus the competing, and long-standing, desires for a particular version of Galveston; e.g. "historical" Galveston, "industrial" Galveston, "green" Galveston, "beachside" Galveston and so

forth. I would argue that these competing visions will never be fully resolved, despite the myriad of studies and comprehensive plans that continually call for concerted action towards targeted geographic, economic, and population sectors. Rather, Galveston will likely continue to develop as a disaggregated assemblage of social and economic formations mediated through dynastic arrangements of interest and power, as well as finite availability of capital in an emerging age of scarcity. The “city of potential” will likely remain as such. While its residents’ lives carry on.

Competing ethical assertions also underlay the debate over the inherent justice embedded in the implementation of the FEMA buyout program. This site of public advocacy was particular because the ethical assertions of pro-buyout Galvestonians were the most clearly tactical and performative advocacy practices that I witnessed in the service of applicants’ material self-interest. It was therefore difficult to assess how truly “vulnerable” their personal financials were or were not, or how sincere their vows to reinvest in Galveston were or were not. It was clear that their rhetorical styles were tactical to enhance their credibility as “victims.” As I discussed, anti-buyout advocates rendered correspondences between the federal corporate bailouts of 2008 and the “bailout of the West End” to highlight an assertion of undue preferential treatment afforded to property owners in a geographic space customarily associated with both exogamous wealth and/or relative financial security of its full-time residents. One can empathize with this line of argumentation after witnessing the dire vulnerabilities of Galvestonians “behind the seawall.” Such lines of argument were inadvertently complicit in a broader contestation that was too often *implicit* within public discourse: the fundamental ethics and efficacy of extending federal relief benefits for long-term household recovery across

the spectrum of residents on a hurricane-prone barrier island. That extends from the FEMA buyout program, to the CDBG-funded homeowner rehabilitation program, and to the topic I will discuss in the following chapter: the rebuilding of public housing.

## Chapter Four:

### **Rebuilding Public Housing: a localized American cultural dialogue about place and race.**

I waited for him in front of an oasis of hope, peering through blinding February sunlight at a surrounding streetscape where damage, decay, and protracted displacement seemed to signify hope's negation. Mr. M had agreed to meet me in front of St. Vincent's House for an informal interview. I was at the intersection of 27<sup>th</sup> and Market—"North of Broadway." For several minutes, I sat on a metal bench serenaded by the elegiac, uplifting strains of contemporary Christian music pouring down onto the gated courtyard from the mounted second-floor speakers above. St. Vincent's is a mural-walled community center that doubles as a free medical clinic for low-income residents that is staffed primarily through the volunteerism of UTMB medical students. Its first floor facilities were significantly damaged after taking several feet of water from the storm. It had since reopened to continue its self-proclaimed mission as an "oasis of hope" in a locally infamous neighborhood physically beaten down by history and recent disaster. The social services it provides, such as after-school daycare, tend to serve low-income blacks and Hispanics, while the free medical clinic attracts whites as well. Unlike the 4-Cs clinic that is located in the same building as the Galveston Housing Authority, St. Vincent's provides medical services to undocumented immigrants. The demand for its *pro bono* medical service remains strong due to elimination of indigent chronic care at UTMB.

I caught sight of his approach after a few minutes spent looking at blue-tarped houses, shotgun shacks, dilapidated apartments, and vacant lots inhabited by overgrowing weeds and felled tree branches in the shadow of an industrialized port and the long-

deserted Falstaff Brewery. He was 82-years-old but walking with a gait that still evinced the swagger of the pool-hall hustler he claimed to have been in the past. The two of us had grown familiar in sight with each other over the past year as we attended many of the same recovery meetings, but had spoken very little to each other. It took a while to get to know Mr. M., who was still president of the local chapter of the NAACP, formerly the first Black director of Galveston's Housing and Grants department, and an all-around surly curmudgeon whose deep care for the social body would evince itself when asking questions such as, "Do you know what you're doing?" in the direction of city functionaries. He regularly offered caustic quips during his public comments about the absurdly slow pace of both initiating the federal homeowner recovery programs and the rebuilding of public housing. I liked Mr. M. Though his curt directness was certainly off-putting to some, particularly when speaking with white officials about matters that concerned "other people who look like me," which often led to small gestures of annoyance such as eye rolling or sighing. He acted as an advocate for black Galvestonians, who were also at times the collective recipient of his social critiques when talking about poor lifestyle choices of local black youths in response to white discrimination and racism. After months of being in the same round of recovery meetings, we had finally begun to exchange small courtesies of greeting. We talked more in-depth after I had emailed him clippings I gathered from a newspaper archive concerning the 1960 sit-ins at McCrory's Drug Store.

McCrory's was among the first lunch counters in the State of Texas to racially integrate following two weeks of sit-ins there and several other local downtown

drugstores<sup>87</sup>. With the blessing of black clergy, several prominent white pastors and rabbis, as well as the public support of the Kempner's, local black high-school students—many of the young men wearing their Central High<sup>88</sup> letterman jackets--filled the counters in silent presence to demand their seats at the counter. They continued to do so reportedly in groups between 30 and 50, staying for several minutes at a time. *The Galveston Daily News* reported that a deal was brokered between the students, and both white and black clergy members to end the sit-ins and integrate the downtown lunch counters following a two-week probationary period, “to give the adult negro community an opportunity to demonstrate the privilege will not be abused in any manner (GDN, 4/6/60).” There were no violent confrontations.<sup>89</sup> While some white customers phoned McCrory's to complain after the alliance announced the integration agreement, the lunch counters were soon integrated for full-service.

Although he was too old to have participated in the sit-ins amongst high school students, Mr. M. recalled an occasion of going to a Putt-Putt golf course on 6<sup>th</sup> and Seawall before the sit-ins occurred. The attendant at first refused to take his money, so he and his party proceeded to play anyway. Eventually the attendant caught up with the group and asked them to pay the fee, which he says they did. Despite several instances of glaring from other white patrons, they continued to play unmolested. “Integration,” he said, “was not like what you saw last week,” referring to a vitriolic public meeting held the previous week at GHA regarding the proposed redevelopment plan for public

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<sup>87</sup> Lunch counters in San Antonio had integrated previous to Galveston (*Galveston Daily News*, 4/6/60).

<sup>88</sup> Central High was the black high school that was later converted to a middle school. It suffered significant Ike damage and its rehabilitation and reopening became a key part of a political agenda for the Northside Galveston Taskforce.

<sup>89</sup> In contradistinction to more volatile protests in Marshal, TX, where fire hoses were used to disperse crowds.

housing. Critics and supporters of the rebuild argued over each other in view of television cameras from the major network affiliates in Houston who descended on what had become an increasingly hostile public discourse; not only over whether federal disaster recovery funds should go to the GHA, but whether public housing should return to the island at all. The vast majority of GHA supporters were black Galvestonians. Virtually all of the anti-public housing advocates were white. The notable exceptions to the demographic of GHA support included prominent citizens such as Harris “Shrub” Kempner and Rabbi Jimmy Kessler of Congregation B’nai Israel, faith-based advocates from GCRR & Gulf Coast Interfaith, and a small enunciatory community of white allies who were in support of the rebuild due to material interest and/or ethical commitment; and who evinced varying intensities of support<sup>90</sup>.

Today, McCrory’s sign remains affixed to a vacated brick structure directly across from Mod coffee house at Post Office and 23<sup>rd</sup> St in “historic downtown.” It is literally a boarded-up shell of its former self as its absentee owner allegedly sits on the property for speculative purposes. In an abstract sense, the past integration of McCrory’s corresponds to the lasting mission of St. Vincent’s—to be an “oasis of hope” where black Galveston claim and maintain a space of self-empowerment that could transcend the segregation and neglect that had long festered. We walked slowly through the adjacent blocs of St. Vincent’s as he pointed out the now-vacated structures that in his youth housed brothels, pool houses, and loan sharks. He pointed out sites of “black bingo” and discussed “Mister Buster,” a notorious black police officer whose imposing physique and

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<sup>90</sup> Several leading members of island’s largest neighborhood association, the Galveston Alliance of Independent Neighborhoods (GAIN), attempted to mediate as self-consciously “moderate” entity between the two delineable sides by advocating a greater percentage of “scattered site” units in lieu of rebuilding all “569” on the “original footprints.” GAIN later took a formal position against the holistic building of mixed-income, mixed-use developments.

demeanor rendered him an apostle of order in a neighborhood replete with pan-racial vices. According to Mr. M, he was allegedly one of the only black officers who could arrest whites without serious repercussion. Mr. M alternated between references to me as an individual and as an avatar for whites. We stopped at an intersection and told me about his early career working for the City while cars periodically stopped or slowed down as black drivers shouted out greetings to Mr. M. He and his young family lived in a nearby public housing facility demolished long ago before he obtained a job with the City and eventually worked his way up through the ranks of the Department of Grants and Housing, which is responsible for administering annual federal allocations from the Department of HUD. Like much public housing built in the United States during the 1930s and 40s (Vale 2000), he recalled good quality of the facilities that served as workforce housing for families and the working poor. He had lived in the Bayview Homes, a complex of 100 apartments for black workers that were quickly constructed in 1944 to meet the demands of wartime housing in Galveston.<sup>91</sup>

“What you people have to understand, is that you put us here in the first place!” He was referring the mix of *de jure* and *de facto* historical processes that had created a predominantly black space of “North Broadway,” while at the same time indexing an incredulous reaction to the anti-public housing advocates who criticized the “density” of public housing units located on the original properties. Mr. M. couldn’t fathom the

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<sup>91</sup> The two original housing projects, Oleander and Palm Terrace apartments, were planned in conjunction with the establishment of the Galveston Housing Authority in 1940 as “safe and sanitary” low-rent housing to help alleviate pervasive slum conditions throughout the city. They were converted to defense housing under a federal mandate. Whereas Oleander was built upon already vacant lots fronting Broadway Avenue, Palm Terrace was created after 38 parcels of “some of the worst slums in the City” were obtained and cleared by the city. Originally upon completion in 1943, the housing authority had difficulty filling the Palm Terrace units since they were to be reserved for in-migrating black defense workers. Authorities soon found that vast majority of defense workers were native Galvestonians, not migrants, and they were accepted into Palm Terrace.

legitimacy of oppositional arguments that it was unwise for the GHA to locate public housing residents together in groups. He bristled at paternalistic claims of whites who argued that high-density public housing created the segregated “tombs”<sup>92</sup> that were the previous projects, and was angered by directly racial assertion that high densities of public housing residents contributed to a culture of poverty oriented towards criminality, laziness, and vice. “Why,” he asked rhetorically, “don’t they have a problem with all those people living in the expensive high-rise apartments that the City let build on the beach?” I didn’t have a good answer.

### *A Founding Father of Dissent*

“Galveston has been trapped in an identity crisis for many years. It can’t decide whether it wants to be an authentic and functional city; some kind of “colony” for artists, eccentrics, panhandlers, and vagrants; or a beach town.”—David Stanowski, announcing the creation of Galveston Founders Party, Guest Column, *Galveston County Daily News*, 5/1/08

“The GOP will focus on greater public access to government records, accountability in public spending, ending selective treatment and favoritism in such areas such as code enforcement and business development, and will document and publicize conflicts of interest and misuse of public funds by elected and appointed officials.” David Stanowski, on the formation of the Galveston Open Government Project 8/27/09

The Galveston Alliance for Responsible Development is an organization dedicated to responsible and equitable development. All development on Galveston Island must meet criteria for sustainability, effectiveness, and efficiency and be measured against its impact on the entire city. GARD believes that the most pressing issue facing Galveston today is GHA’s proposal for the rebuilding and expansion of public housing.” David Stanowski, as part a presentation to the City Planning Commission on GARD and its support of regionalizing public housing, 12/08/09

He invited me for an interview into the historic home in the San Jacinto Historic District that he and his wife rented. It was two months before the storm. I was conducting research at the time through the Houston Advanced Research Center on macroeconomic development trends in Galveston and municipalities along the eastern shore of Galveston Bay. Councilmember Beeton recommended I contact Mr. Stanowski

during an interview the previous week when I asked her about other knowledgeable persons with whom I should speak. The home was decorated to keep with a generally historical aesthetic: black & white photos in antiquated frames, antique furniture, and tastefully dated upholstery. We sat down at his living room table and talked for approximately an hour and a half about several topics that ranged from the inhospitable business climate the city government fosters to the ethos of corporate welfare materialized in the Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones; from the feasibility of a biotechnology funded by venture capital in lieu of public sponsorship to the politics of master planning historical downtown. This is not how Galveston's "founding fathers" would govern, he noted. His answers to my questions revealed amongst other things, general skepticism of governmental oversight, the desirability of free markets, leering of master urban plans for economic development that did not directly facilitate jobs and commerce, and looming catastrophe for a municipal economy built around real estate and property tax revenue.

Mr. Stanowski is not a BOI. He moved to Galveston from Arizona in 2002, although he had been a semi-regular visitor since 1991. He was attracted to the "history" on the island more so than the beaches, particularly the canon of books published on the 1900 Storm and the aftermath. In recent years, he had achieved a modicum of infamy amongst the political class of Galveston after he became a vocal critic of the city government's support of residential real estate as a primary tool of economic growth. He also published a list on his website of the purported salaries of every city employee, fueled the ire of city leadership. His explicitly libertarian political disposition revealed itself in his particular mode of engaging with the city government. Like Thomas Payne imploring the urgency of 'common sense' rebellion against forces of tyranny, or Patrick

Henry claiming the vital necessity of individual liberty, Mr. Stanowski inserted himself as vigilant watchman of cronyism and the complacency of social power in Galveston; one who speaks truth to the powers that inhibit Galveston's ability to reclaim its past successes that were predicated on prudent economics and a governing ethos that privileged local self-help against the meddling intervention of the federal government. He is also an avid fan of the Rolling Stones.

After Ike, he became the most vocal and prominent critic of the GHA intent to rebuild public housing. His dissent first emerged as ideological arguments that proclaimed public housing an utter historical failure to promote the social uplift the poor. He supported these contentions with the research of black libertarian professor and author, Thomas Sowell, and the Manhattan Institute's Howard Husock. These criticisms later morphed into a sustained legalistic argument that public housing in Galveston must be regionalized throughout Galveston County per the mandate of the Fair Housing Act. He and a group of supporters began to attract a broader public. The Galveston Open Government Project that Mr. Stanowski founded became the most prominent and vocal critic of the GHA. He ascribed to GOGP the role of a veritable "watchdog" over the municipal business. He visually demonstrated this mission with a cigar-chomping bulldog that served as the group's avatar at the bottom of its near-daily email updates. Additionally, he used the GOGP as a platform to circulate libertarian intellectualizing on economic topics unrelated to the GHA. While Mr. Stanowski was the most prolific voice for the GOGP and their political agenda, he was joined in recurrent participation in public discourse by a handful of fellow advocates.

The remainder of this chapter further explores the cultural interpretations that animated community discourse and political engagements over rebuilding 569 units of

federally subsidized public housing that were substantially damaged by Hurricane Ike and subsequently demolished. These units were distributed over four properties owned and operated by the Galveston Housing Authority. Three of the sites—Cedar Terrace (b. 1953), Oleander Homes (b. 1943), and Palm Terrace (b. 1943)—were located “North of Broadway,” which is local code for a socio-spatial zone of predominantly black segregation set north of Broadway avenue and extending westerly between 25<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> streets. “North Broadway” is largely comprised by census tract 7246, which extends between 30<sup>th</sup> and 46<sup>th</sup> Street, north of Broadway Avenue. In 2000, 82% of residents in this tract identified as “Black alone.”<sup>93</sup> 53% of households made less than \$10,000. 73% made less than \$20,000. The rebuild of the fourth property—Magnolia Homes (b. 1953)—proved to be the most controversial since it is located in the so-called “connective corridor” between “historical” downtown, the East End Historic District, and UTMB. Due its prime speculative location, Magnolia’s two constitutive parcels are among the most economically valuable parcels of land on the island and thus factor significantly in the urban visions of long-term revitalization espoused by a cadre of residents, boosters, and municipal leaders. The storm did not destroy all of Galveston’s public housing units. The Gulf Breeze (b. 1969) high-rise tower located at 22<sup>nd</sup> and P St.—just south of Broadway Ave and downtown— and Holland House on 61<sup>st</sup> St. (b. 1976) both house low-income elderly and disabled residents. They were both operational by late October 2008. Pre-Ike, the Galveston Housing Authority’s 973 units provided approximately 88% of all on-site public housing units in Galveston County.<sup>94</sup> The remaining units located in Texas City were demolished following the storm and will not

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<sup>93</sup> Census data shows 2,507 total residents. 2,047 identified as Black or African-American; 247 identified as White; 170 “Some other Race;” 22 as “Two or More Races.”

<sup>94</sup> The GHA also administered 1,213 Housing Choice Vouchers. HCVs are portable, meaning that recipients can use them in any jurisdiction that will accept them. Pre-Ike, 697 voucher holders resided in Galveston; 516 found housing throughout the mainland, mostly in Galveston County.

be rebuilt; instead the Texas City Housing Authority will convert them to Housing Choice Vouchers (i.e, “Section-8”). Thus once the rebuild is complete, virtually 100% of public housing units located throughout Galveston County will be located on Galveston Island.

The vitriolic deliberations over rebuilding the 569 units imbricated within a cultural politics of place that has both historical duration and racial significance. I argue that the pervasive effects of storm damages that extended across class and racial boundaries intensified the effects of the racialized contestation concerning the GHA and its operations during the past several decades. These deliberations occurred as residents reckoned with the storm’s effects on an already long-term population exodus to the greater Houston-Galveston region. The populations decline has exacerbated the disproportionate share of public housing units located on-island relative to Galveston County. Thus the cultural, legal and political economic forces attendant with historical exodus and post-disaster recovery affected the interpretive repertoires and discursive forms through which Galvestonians articulated their situated positions. I will describe this through recourse to an “American cultural dialogue” (Spindler and Spindler 1962) that engaged actors often used to transfigured their arguments into debates over more abstract American values such as “fairness,” “self reliance,” “personal responsibility,” “justice,” “equality,” and the proper role of government and its constitutive “taxpayers” to help ameliorate poverty in an emerging age of scarcity in the United States.

The prevalence of race as animator of political advocacy was profoundly ambiguous. The social drama that arose in response to the demolition and planned replacement of the four public housing projects invoked the specters of Galveston’s racial history even as white residents and political actors attempted to contain the presence of

“race” into deliberations through utilitarian assessments of fiduciary irresponsibility and paternalistic assertions that critiqued the idea of rebuilding additional housing units in a floodplain. To situate this discussion, I briefly describe a series of occurrences that led to the eventual demolition of the four projects between September 2008 and March 2009. At this juncture of my fieldwork, I was not yet attuned to the place of public housing within the local historical process, nor was it yet a prominent topic of discussion. Using media reports and knowledge accrued through my sustained fieldwork, I present these occurrences to outline when the GHA board decided to rebuild instead of renovate the units, how a vocal contingent of residents emerged who strongly opposed the rebuilding of public housing, and how race and low-income based advocacy also emerged as social pillar of support for the housing authority.

#### *From Evacuation to Demolition*

Immediately following the Mayor’s mandatory evacuation order issued on September 10, public housing residents who registered for evacuation began boarding buses outside of the GHA headquarters at the Island Community Center at 47<sup>th</sup> and Broadway. They were destined for emergency shelters in Austin. The scene could be aptly described as organized chaos due to the pervasiveness of anxiety, uncertainty and hastened bureaucratic procedure. It was a time-consuming process of registering and loading residents who are elderly, disabled, or with children. Elderly residents, particularly those with heart conditions and/or diabetes waited for several hours in the hot, late-summer sun. Evacuees were assigned bus numbers, but because they were not called out sequentially, some feared that they had missed their bus, which added additional stress. The *Galveston County Daily News* reported that rumors began spreading amongst evacuees that the storm had re-gathered significant strength and that

there would not be enough buses to evacuate all the residents to Austin. The GHA was still registering residents for evacuation at 3:00, as a surge of nervousness and family prodding brought late arrivals for the bus ride, “People kept telling me not to put my children through this,” said one mother of five children. In the rush to evacuate, she noted that she forgot to pack formula for her two-month old.<sup>95</sup> Like thousands of other islanders, they boarded transportation unsure of where exactly they were going or for how long. Like thousands of other islanders, most of the residents of Palm and Cedar Terraces, Oleander and Magnolia, were astonished, dismayed, or broken (literally and metaphorically), by what they found when they eventually returned to four condemned, fenced-off housing projects where they no longer lived.

During the next several months, public housing residents were thrown into comparable situations of loss and uncertainty characteristic of Galveston “disaster culture” described in chapter two. As noted, Ike damaged or destroyed approximately three-quarters of the island’s housing units. The senior facilities at Gulf Breeze and Holland House flooded minimally on the ground floors, knocking out all but one elevator at Gulf Breeze; however, they were able to reopen to by the end of October. The residents of the four projects returned to the island of their own accord to check out their former domiciles. The scenes were familiar: the grime and slime covering the floors; the thick black mold caked on the walls; refrigerators and other appliances strewn around the ground; the wet, mildewed clothes left behind by people who thought they would be gone only for a few days. GHA maintenance staff, some of whom had lost their own homes, were left with the task of prying open doors of destruction and answering questions they did not know the answer: Where was the GHA or FEMA? Was the GHA going to

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<sup>95</sup> “Hundreds Wait for Ride to Safety,” *Galveston County Daily News*, 9/10/08

reopen the facilities? Where would they live? Before Gulf Breeze and Holland House re-opened, all 1,875 residents at GHA properties—including Section 8—were, in effect, homeless.

Residents of the condemned projects who had returned to the island from their respective points of evacuation found temporary shelter at “Tent City,” virtually the only viable option for those who could not find temporary accommodations with family or amongst others in their social networks. Once all Galvestonians were allowed back on the island on September 26, an automated message on the main GHA phone line notified that residents had two weeks to enter their housing unit--at their own risk--to collect whatever belongings they could salvage. After two weeks, all remaining items would be discarded. The message relayed to residents was that GHA would notify residents when they could return to their units. However, the GHA could not offer temporary housing at that time. This was still prior to the implementation of the FEMA-DHAP program. Although FEMA was administering an emergency hotel-motel program, this did not easily serve the needs of an extremely low-income population stratum. This was an exacerbated form of vulnerability described in chapter two, wherein public housing residents lacked the capital or credit to finance an extended hotel-motel stay prior to monetary reimbursement from FEMA. This was a moot point anyway. There were virtually no available rooms within a 100-mile radius of the island by late September.

During November 2008, the GHA became the lead agency to administer the FEMA-DHAP that eventually enrolled 5,000 households throughout Galveston County to provide rental vouchers for households expecting displacement from their homes upwards of one year. As discussed in chapter two, a caveat to this influx of aid is that approximately half of these eligible households did not locate available units, did not

meet landlord's willing to accept the vouchers, or were turned away indirectly by screening devices such as credit checks and income requirements. This left many with little option but to remain with friends or family as long as possible, or in some cases return to houses that were barely inhabitable. Some advocates later argued at meetings of the Northside Galveston Taskforce that such landlord screening evinced latent forms of racism towards minority displacees who were doubly stigmatized due to anecdotal stories that emerged in regards to the destructive behaviors of Katrina evacuees in the Houston-area. In Galveston, where an acute housing shortage persisted for several months following the storm in tandem with fast-rising rents, several apartment complexes—particularly located towards the West End—did not accept DHAP. Moreover, FEMA reserved the use of emergency trailers solely for displaced homeowners. In a city in which 57% of its residents rented housing. In an effort to transition households from temporary shelters and hotels as quickly as possible, the GHA ceased performing in-depth inspections of rental units and instead began instituting “drive-by” inspections to survey for egregious forms of structural damage such as gas leaks and holes. Meanwhile, inspectors contracted through the Department of HUD began inspecting the four condemned projects in October to assess the damage estimates. On November 15, Harish Krishnarao announced a provisional total damage estimate of \$14.5m, pending more thorough unit-by-unit inspections.

The damage assessments were implicated within broader sets of dilemmas about the city's long-term redevelopment—and as discussed in the previous chapter—in the conflicting visions of how to rebuild Galveston as a more “sustainable” city that could increase its “middle-class” population base in subsequent post-disaster years. Between December 2008 and March 2009, the fate of the four condemned projects became a

salient public topic as members of the GHA Board of Directors and the Executive Director began contingency planning for the possibility of either rehabilitating two of the projects or embarking on a holistic demolition and rebuild of all the antiquated properties. The choice between renovating and rebuilding was at once the source of public health and economic concerns because of the permeation of mold throughout the buildings and their locations within a federal floodplain. It was also influenced by a racialized politics of displacement and “right of return.” Northside advocates such as Leon Phillips, a black Galvestonian often seen in a black mesh baseball cap with a presidential button of Barack Obama fastened to the back, and who also served as president of the Galveston County Coalition for Justice, opined during an ad hoc “townhall” meeting in the parking lot of the Mount Calvary Baptist church that the demolition of the three Northside projects could dilute the political enfranchisement of black Galveston in District 1<sup>96</sup>. While he maintained that, “all options should be on the table,” with respect to rebuilding and repairing public housing, he cited that inevitable displacement that would occur as the new units were developed, especially if not all 569 units were built on their original properties.

Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee accepted an invitation extended by a consortium of black pastors to attend this town town-hall meeting. Per her suggestion, this meeting heralded the creation of the Northside Galveston Taskforce in order to sustain attention to the specific vulnerabilities of “northside” displacees. She later advocated publicly for the renovation of Cedar and Palm Terrace projects, which were the least damaged by the storm. This recommendation followed a meeting with Krishnarao during which he

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<sup>96</sup> During the past several City Council elections, the boundaries of District 1 essentially guaranteed a race between a “Northside” and “downtown” candidates. In 2007, Tarris Woods won re-election by a vote of 83-68 over the late Deborah Conrad, a Post Office St. business owner. He subsequently lost the seat in 2010 by a vote of 209-200 to Rusty Legg, a white downtown business owner. Linda Colbert, PhD, an African-American resident of District 2, subsequently won her re-election bid after first elected in 2007.

proposed four different scenarios for development. Only one option included renovations of existing facilities. The other three options provided the basis of three initial rebuilding plans that simply divided varying proportions of on-site and scattered site units. On November 19, the *Galveston County Daily News* published a guest column written by Krishnarao entitled, “GHA Puts People First.” He detailed the work of the housing authority since the storm to assist not only displaced public housing residents but also displaced households in Galveston County through the Disaster Housing Assistance Program. However, he also hinted a preference toward rebuilding in lieu of renovating:

Within two weeks of the storm, GHA began to assemble a team of national experts to assist with rebuilding its sites. We have contracted with the Local Initiatives Support Corp., which has extensive experience rebuilding hurricane-damaged affordable housing, and also met with and sought advice from the Biloxi Housing Authority in Mississippi about its success in rebuilding its damaged units. The Biloxi authority has rebuilt in the past three years more than the number of units it lost to Hurricane Katrina. We intend to have “landmark revitalization,” as BHA has, in revitalizing our housing units with quality, safe and affordable homes, and serving as many families as we did before the storm.

On January 27, 2009, the GHA board voted to demolish Palm Terrace and Oleander Homes, while committing to rehabilitate Magnolia and Cedar Terrace for use as temporary housing. On February 27, the GHA submitted its intentions to demolish the two projects to the Department of HUD. Several days later, the Lone Star Legal Aid of Houston—stating that it was acting on behalf of public housing residents—filed an Administrative Complaint with HUD to suspend the planned demolition.

Lone Star’s complaint and the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two parties on March 13 produced chattering speculation that their “conflict” was essentially a secret cabalistic agreement between two previously allied parties to provide political cover for the GHA against adversaries in order to pursue a rebuilding agenda.

Such assertions are thus far unfounded. The “MOU” stipulated that in exchange for Lone Star withdrawing its complaint that argued for the necessity of GHA to obtain permission to demolish the units from HUD, the GHA agreed to replace any or all of the 569 units it demolished on a 1:1 basis and in accordance with the same bedroom-unit proportions that existed pre-Ike. The MOU did not produce a legal mandate for GHA to rebuild all the units it demolished. It did, however, produce a desirable effect for Krishnarao as he managed a delicate political stagecraft before often-skeptical audiences whilst advocating for an ambitious redevelopment plan partially subsidized through a city allocation of \$25m of federal CDBG recovery funds.

In late March, after the GHA Board of Directors voted to demolish all four condemned projects, Mr. Krishnarao delivered what would become an infamous presentation before City Council. The vague rebuilding plan that he proposed galvanized anti-public housing sentiments and elevated the issue to one of the most prominent and controversial political issues that attended with long-term recovery planning during the remainder of my fieldwork. In addition to the “569,” Krishnarao voiced support for the possible construction of up to 1,500 additional in-fill cottages as a long-term solution for sustaining an “affordable” housing market in a post-hurricane Galveston while creating housing stock for DHAP enrollees who would eventually transition out of the program, yet remain in need of housing assistance. While based in the material realities of endemic housing needs after storm and costs of rehabilitation over rebuilding, this expansion may have been a miscalculation of how residents perceive of “need” in relation to government subsidies; particularly given the number of vacant housing structures on the island. Further, despite his iteration that public expenditures

would provide only a fraction of the necessary funds to rebuild the units, the high-end estimate of \$247m certainly initiated a certain degree of “sticker-shock.”

Although the median-income in Galveston is lower than the State of Texas; although a third of its residents live below the federal poverty line; and although nearly 60% of Galveston households would qualify for federal housing assistance based on income alone, it is also an island with a body politic that has helped elect the libertarian Rep. Ron Paul to the United States Congress since 1996<sup>97</sup>. This libertarian tendency seemed to expose a friction between the sentiments of distrust towards the municipal government that existed prevalently before the storm and divergent criteria Galvestonians used to judge the wisdom and fairness of governmental interventions post-Ike. A colloquialism that emerged in casual conversation indexed acute anxieties of overreach by the Galveston Housing Authority. Specifically, that it was going to be “The Biggest Developer on the Island” and that the GHA was “empire building” on the backs of “taxpayers.” For supporters of the GHA, particularly displaced residents and advocates of low-income advocates, the more pressing issue than fear of a GHA takeover of real estate development, was the “just” “right of return” that should be extended to “all” Galvestonians who lived on the island before the storm.

#### *The American Cultural Dialogue and its Transmissions*

The politicized conflicts over rebuilding public housing in Galveston revealed how accommodation and dissent over public service provisioning are framed within generally American discourses that are inflected by local historical purviews of the social actors involved. Moreover, the twin forms of acute shock that deeply affected

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<sup>97</sup> Rep. Paul represents TX-14 District. It was created as a result of Congressional redistricting in 1995. It extends roughly from Chambers County on the east side of the Bay, through Galveston County and extends southwest along the Gulf coast to Corpus Christi.

Galvestonians in the space of a week—Hurricane Ike and financial collapse that precipitated the so-called Great Recession— animated political engagement over public housing with added passion. The conflict over this issue has historical antecedents that have played out over the years, but it is now relevant to emergent national political fights over the scope of public entitlements in a 21<sup>st</sup> century American context where federal and state capacities to maintain of customary levels of service provision will face serious constraints in years ahead. One also sensed residents making correspondences between the supposed “overreaching” of the Obama administration to implement domestic policy initiatives such as health care reform, and the initial plan forwarded by the GHA to build up to 1,500 additional in-fill units. I argue that the visceral reactions were more clearly influenced by a perceived breach of what constituted “fair” government aid for “worthy” or “unworthy” recipients, in an interpretive context wherein the persistence and expansion of federal aid to low-income populations threatened a post-storm critical moment to engineer demographic change, i.e., “grow the middle class.” The varied articulations of “pro,” “anti” and “middle-ground” advocates of the rebuild expressed facets of what anthropologists George & Louis Spindler first called the “American cultural dialogue,” and what Varenne has referred to as a national cultural dynamic of “living in terms of America” (1986).

Spindler & Spindler (1962, 1990) and Herve Varenne (1978, 1982, 1986) appropriated Structuralist purviews to their observations of the American institutional organization of cultural conflict and change, which were oriented to the general persistence of dominant values articulated through linguistic structures reproduced through schools and continually reenacted in venues of political and civic life. For

example, George and Marie Spindler locate the “American Cultural Dialogue” in constellations of “culturally phrased expressions of meaning” that frame pivotal concerns of national life in relation to abstract values such as “freedom,” “equality,” individuality,” self-reliance,” “meritocracy,” and “social mobility.” The operation of the cultural dialogues are seen most explicitly in mediums such as public speech & behavior, newspaper editorials, campaign speeches, classrooms, advertising, in churches and religious ideology, and within symbolic displays of wealth, power, poverty and dissent. The Spindlers’ used the American Cultural Dialogue as a heuristic tool to frame the relational processes of cultural continuity and change.

Herve Varenne’s analytical proscriptions for an “Anthropology of America” (1986) required attention to the institutional pressures that affect individual behavior in social and political settings, as well as the linguistic constraints that integrates social difference into civic settings. Varenne acknowledged the impossibility of rendering “American culture” as a coherent object of study across time and place. Thus he argued that researchers frame the problem of objectifying national cultural dynamics as a matter of individuals and groups living “in terms” of America in specific settings. In lieu of defining a unified state of how people live “in” America or act as “being American” (1986), the “inescapability” of certain “over-values” that the Spindlers identified within “mainstream” political institutions provides a dynamic of continuity that is applicable for cultural interrogation across the country. Public housing advocates as well as residents who responded in the comments of local media, recurrently argued their standpoint through a cultural dialogue structured “in terms of America.” These articulations of course reflected a modicum of etiquette that, only partially, neutralized visceral—and

sometimes quite ugly—opinions about class, race, and desirability of particular social formations in Galveston.

The American Cultural Dialogue brings a linguistic purview to bear on the cultural orientations that animated political discourse; pointing one to what Phyllis Chock called the “constitutive, world-building powers of tropes in talk” (347). Her work on the ironical appropriation of symbolic forms in the identity practices of Greek-Americans suggested that cultural analyses might be enriched through attention to the “mutually constitutive relations of speaking and the cultural logics in which tropes work”, which are accessible through “fundamentally social tasks of fitting the categorical around the situational” (348). Indeed, one particular contestation over rebuilding involved the clashing of signifying forms that characterized the ideal-typical public housing resident. Their deployment involved at times the use of clichéd stereotypes and figurations (Hartigan 2005) that clearly served a purpose to show the authenticity and/or authority of the enunciating subject.

Cultural orientations consist also in the feedback people receive from their actions. Invoking an American cultural dialogue to frame this debate requires analytical attention to how symbolic structuring is a social, interactive process wherein people appropriate original words and textual documents “in other words” in ways that confirm what is *really* being said without being said about a particular subject. In other words, advocates deployed terms of an American cultural dialogue while oppositional advocates posited ulterior motives that belied these terms. These social dramas between factions played out at several GHA meetings during the summer and fall of 2009, during meetings of City Council, and in comments on GHA news stories. For example, members of the

East End Historical District articulated profound distrust towards Mr. Krishnarao during a meeting I attended in April 2009. Many in group regarded him as a rhetorical shape-shifter who duplicitously manipulated his words to offer a semblance of compromise to their concerns about rebuilding Magnolia, but who did so only to deliver his real agenda of a rebuilding the original units by any means necessary. Advocates for Northside and/or low-income residents of Galveston framed the claims of objective critique by individuals such Stanowski as cloaked forms of either racist or anti-poor sentiment. In subsequent presentations, members of the GOP attempted to explicitly counter this suggestion in claiming that they were not “trying to kick poor people off the island,” but simply forwarding a counter proposal for rebuilding public housing that they believe best served former and future residents with enhanced opportunities.

### *The Petition*

“The Galveston Housing Authority (GHA) has agreed to rebuild four housing projects in Galveston as a result of a deal with Lone Star Legal Aid, which is a total of 582 units.

The citizens of Galveston and the City Council did not have a voice in this decision.

*Now the GHA is proposing an additional 1,500 units as well as 1,000 cottages of public housing scattered throughout our already struggling neighborhoods of abandoned properties and decaying homes. That is 5 times the amount we already had. All of this on a barrier island, whose existence seems more and more fragile with each passing storm. And with our tax dollars no less.”*

The petition drive started soon after the March 25<sup>th</sup> City Council meeting and soon gained notoriety. While the “Stop the GHA” petition was never associated with any one group or individual, this introduction was reprinted in a local online news source, Guidry News, under the name of a GOP member.<sup>98</sup> The petition remains online to this day for individuals to sign and leave comments. There are currently 2,127 signatures

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<sup>98</sup> She is among a handful of individuals who serve as an intelligentsia for a broader ant-GHA public and who typically forward procedural arguments meant to demonstrate that the housing authority was acting in error, while sometimes also interweaving criticisms of public housing more generally in terms of diminished “personal responsibility” and work ethic.

affixed, although an unreported number have been removed because of egregiously racist and/or disparaging comments associated with false names. After, omitting comments that simply said “No!,” I aggregated 590 statements that signatories provided and standardized the responses into broader codes.<sup>99</sup> Some responses were simple—“Stop the GHA”—while others were upwards of a paragraph in length and thus contained multiple tropes that stated their rationale of opposition to the rebuild. The frequency of trait tells one very little about the veracity or relevance of it within a social process (Varenne 1986). However, standardizing the responses provides a very useful sample because it indexes a range of oppositional standpoints that I also identified while witnessing the social drama of competing testimonies during several GHA meetings and that engaged in conversations and written texts.

I deduced 29 statements of reason for why respondents did not support the GHA’s rebuilding plans. These oriented to several broad themes that trended as concerns over **Unfairness** (e.g., provides “free rides” at expense of taxpayers, homeowners, middle-class, and/or workers), **Vulnerability** (e.g. it is foolish if not unethical to house elderly and/or disabled in a floodplain with the risk of another hurricane), **Economic rationality** (e.g., public housing depreciates surrounding home values, does not catalyze an already weak economy, impacts tourism, and does not “grow” a productive middle-class), **Crime and Safety** (e.g., public housing invites and retains undesirable population strata who wantonly engage in crime and vice). Respondents also cited a more pervasive assessment

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<sup>99</sup> 280 (47%) comments were associated with discernibly female names. 285 “males” (48%); 12 male-female couples, and 13 unidentifiable. One ventures to say that the vast majority of the names indicated they were white, non-Hispanic. Deducing racial and ethnic affiliations based solely on reported surnames places one on a precarious slope to glib profiling. Hispanic surnames were clearly present within the survey—i.e., Garza, Gutierrez, Martinez, however, they represented less than 10% of respondents. There were no responses wherein a signatory claimed a black identity in voicing opposition to the GHA’s rebuilding plan.

that the Galveston Housing Authority was the lead agency of the so-called “Poverty Industry” that acts on the basis of self-interested survival or naiveté, and in effect helps to perpetuate cycles of endemic poverty vis-à-vis misguided interventions into private lives and private housing markets. This produces another paired thematic cited in the survey: public housing encourages governmental dependence—often extending across generations--at the expense of **Self-reliance** and **Social mobility** that is achieved on the merit of hard work. The comments presented below exemplify several recurring responses in the survey and in public record more generally:

Male: Do not place people who cannot take care of themselves in harms way. You just create a burden on those of us who contribute financially to the city, county and federal government. These people contribute nothing, leave them in their new residences, out of danger where the taxpayer does not have to pay to move them.

Female: Read in the daily news {Galveston Daily News} "I'm a 5th generation resident and we have memories there" 5 generations in public housing! come on people quit sucking off everyone else and learn to become independent. Public Housing only for the elderly and dissabled. Get rid of the freeloaders.

Male: As a sixth generation Galvestonian, I am hoping our city leaders will have the fortitude and vision of those after The Great Storm. I fully support assistance for those truly in need but this proposal is extreme, to say the least, and is counterproductive in bringing our great Island to a place that it can be, and once was.

Male: To provide subsidies for the elderly and disabled is incumbent upon a government with humanistic ideals; to do so for generation upon generation of non-contributors to the civil fabric is injurious to that fabric. Now - post-Ike - more than ever, Galveston needs winners, not the losers with which it had already teemed for years pre-September 13, 2008. Please, City Council, be strong enough to sieze this golden opportunity to reverse a status quo that has long needed reversal.

Male: Galveston must look to the future and build an infrastructure that is conducive to families and professionals. It is well documented the problems, crime, filth and general disregard of property maintentance in the low income housing areas. These areas are a fright to residents and visitors alike. We need sustainable residential areas that are an asset, not a blight, to the island.

Female: Having owned the apartments directly across the street from the Palm Terrace public housing, I can attest to the fact that there were too many units in one place and the entire area was riddled with crime. It would be a terrible mistake to rebuild them in those numbers again when Ike took care of the blight at 42nd and Sealy.

Female: I would much prefer Galveston to be viewed as a middle class to upscale living environment that draws friendly families and savvy shoppers to its beaches and establishments. We have the potential to be SO much more than we are right now. Kemah is lovely but doesn't have the beaches, the abundant historical richness, that Galveston has and we could easily blow other destinations out of the water if a large community effort was made. Now's the time for Galveston to rebuild and do it right, and have others see in our city what we islanders and BOI's have known all along.

Female: Public housing is a "mindset" for the poor and should be done away with.

Male: Do NOT build any additional subsidized housing. Fix the ones we have and sell them to anyone who can afford to pay the payments. Every house here is 'affordable' to someone!

Female: There are PLENTY of nice places in the League City --) Houston area for this housing. Galveston already appears disproportionate on paper. Please -- let's focus on improving our school systems and encouraging middle-income (INCOME PRODUCING) families to move to this wonderful Island!

Female: This is such a slap in the face to those of us hard working galvestonians who have fought to rebuild our homes, our business' and our lives. Say NO to GHA!!!!

When did affordable housing at the beach become a right? People strive to better themselves so they can afford nicer things, live in better places. Galveston is a beautiful barrier island. Many people love living near the ocean which naturally drives up the price of real estate at the beach. It's simple economics. So even if you declare yourself a champion for the huddled masses, explain to me why a more affordable locale wouldn't be more suitable. Land is cheaper. Building codes less stringent. 1500 units of Galveston could be 2500 units on the mainland. It makes my knees weak just thinking about how many more people we could help (teach to become cyclically dependent)

These comments reveal differing modes of conceptualizing public housing residents and different rationales for opposing the GHA. Some distinguish between the deserving poor—i.e., “elderly” or “disabled” in contradistinction to the “freeloaders” and “losers” who “don’t contribute anything financially to the city,” besides “crime, filth, and general disregard of property maintenance,” and yet who claim “affordable housing at the beach” as an entitled demand. The legitimizing of the deserving poor is neutralized by paternalistic claims that the housing authority is willingly putting vulnerable people in harm’s way of another hurricane by rebuilding on Galveston. Moreover, the relatively higher municipal wealth and employment opportunity in northern Galveston County

should be reason enough to transfer public housing to entities across the Causeway. It is, after all, “simple economics” (sic).

One comment noted the “slap in the face” delivered by the GHA to those who had struggled to rebuild their lives and livelihood after the storm. This claim to egregious unfairness presumes that one has acted solely on their own personal resources to pull one’s self up by the proverbial boot straps. This person may be an exception to a dominant trend, since no one who I spoke with during the course of fieldwork who either had remained during the storm or returned quickly to the island had not completely eschewed at least some form of institutionalized assistance: be it FEMA, SBA, or the meals provided by the Salvation Army and Red Cross. One particular informant who is an entrenched political libertarian who had gone so far to distinguish his individuality as to legally change his surname to a numerical digit, and who I engaged in debate quite frequently, applied to FEMA for reimbursement of hotel expenses. Arguments over the “unfairness” of subsidized housing provision neglect to account for a host of government benefits provided to storm victims, college students and homeowners, alike. One particularly noteworthy strand of dissent against the GHA was that housing assistance was particularly unfair to “taxpayers.” This common figuration was presented during public housing deliberations, and generally during public comment at city council meetings. Its manifestation tended to personalize negligible individual contributions towards a rebuild as a source of authority; i.e., “my” tax dollars.

Several people noted explicitly that their dissent was unrelated to race, wherein other commentators make cryptic allusions to racial significance. One commenter seemed to mimic a stereotype of black English vernacular “overheard” on one occasion at

a grocery store: “my babies is my paycheck,” seemingly to conjure the image of the stock image of the so-called “welfare queen.” One respondent noted, gleefully, “Yeah, stick it to those darkies,” while another comment may have been relating his comment to the historical autobiography, when he maintained, “too many ROOTS on the island. hope for the best.” Another sarcastically made reference to an alleged comment by Congresswoman Lee in “Essence Magazine,” “Ownership gives a sense of power and permanence; you are the ruler of your castle and not the pawn of a landlord.’ So much for that...” One should note the GHA’s commitment to expanding its homeowner assistance program to aid those with acceptable credit ratings with down payments, as well as enrollment in a rent-to-own program that puts their monthly rent in an escrow account for seven years to eventually help finance a mortgage note.

Public housing has previously been a contentious issue in Galveston that has because its existence on the island was enmeshed in a dynamic of persistent, endemic poverty and parochial political rivalries over the scope and function of the GHA; in which race often an implicit subtext. In that context there has long been a visible subset of elite and self-described “middle-class” residents who believe Galveston’s landscape aesthetics and civil infrastructure could be substantively enhanced. The high proportion of public housing units on the island has long been a source of resident frustrations over perceptions of rampant crime, blight, and the inability of the city to transcend decades of persistent social and economic decline. According to GHA documents, the pre-Ike racial composition was 88% African-American and 12% Hispanic. Whereas in 1961, 7% of Galveston’s population inhabited public housing (McComb 1991), upon a full rebuild, approximately 9% of a post-Ike population of 47,700 would live in a public unit. This

would put on par with coastal resort cities such as Atlantic City and Biloxi with the highest per capital rates of public housing in the United States<sup>100</sup>. Contestations over the relevance, causes, and consequences of this high proportion of public housing units certainly did not emerge only after Hurricane Ike.

*“Magnolia for Sale?” a historical politics of place and race*

In 1982, George Mitchell attempted to purchase the Magnolia Homes property from the GHA. He had intended to raze the units to make space for “mid-income,” single-family houses in anticipation of an employment expansion at UTMB.<sup>101</sup> The rationale was comparable to the contemporary discourse that frames the property as a connective corridor between downtown and UTMB. Mitchell noted the development would provide a better socio-spatial transition between the Medical Branch and the refurbished Strand Historical District. Proponents of the sale also cited the increase in property tax revenue that would accompany the privatization of land and the increase of middle-income housing that was “sorely needed” in Galveston. The possible sale of the property led advocates to protest that the sale would have catalyze the emerging gentrification of the surrounding East End Historic District and irrevocably displace residents of the “Mags” who relied on its proximity to medical services and the place-based social networks of friends and family. These protests occurred in a context of anxiety that was heightened over insecurities that the Reagan administration intended to eliminate the Section-8 housing program.<sup>102</sup> The GHA board initially approved of a sale; however, after weeks of protests by residents and community activists such as Tarris

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<sup>100</sup> Atlantic City has the highest proportion at 11%, whereas Biloxi is approximately 8%

<sup>101</sup> Galveston Daily News, 2/7/82

<sup>102</sup> Galveston Daily News, 7/17/82

Woods<sup>103</sup>, then-Mayor Gus Manual halted the sale. He personally appointed three new board members that summer who reversed the prevision decision. The sale never materialized, although it returned as a possibility in 1988.

In 1995, the former executive director of the GHA, an African-American named Walter Norris, filed a federal lawsuit charging a racially motivated breach of contract over his termination for the supposed gross mismanagement of GHA affairs. The factual summary of the district court ruling stated first that, “This is a hotly contested case arising from the unsightly quagmire of Galveston public-housing politics.” Norris previously sought to implement a scattered-site housing plan to decrease the density of on-site public housing units. “Scattered-site” redevelopment that based on New Urbanist principles of mixed-income, mixed use,” has emerged as a dominant paradigm at HUD over the past 15 years. According to the district court summary of the case, this allegedly hasty move to institute a scattered-site plan and the consequent NIMBY backlash by a segment of city residents, alarmed then-Mayor Barbara Crews and other council members. Norris had clashed previously with the City Council over GHA administrative decisions. A consequent third-party management review of GHA executive leadership instituted at the behest of the Council described a pattern of fiduciary mismanagement, lack of adequate long-term planning, and political cronyism connected with its material support of a “Minority Leadership Council” that intervened in broader municipal and educational appointments. Norris allegedly allowed use of GHA facilities to prepare form letters soliciting support for a recall of Galveston’s mayor and a city council member. Mr. Norris’ complaint was summarily dismissed with prejudice by the district

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<sup>103</sup> Former Councilman Woods proclaimed his historical solidarity with public housing residents during City Council deliberation on public housing on, when he stated “I was there on footsteps of Magnolia 25 years ago when the City tried to sell out residents.”

court. This did not quell support for a GHA initiative to modernize and extend its housing facilities into census areas less concentrated by low-income minorities. During my interview with Mr. M, he likened the situation to Norris being unfairly “run out of town.”

In 1997, a group of public housing tenants filed a lawsuit citing the GHA’s failure to take adequate steps to ameliorate previously instilled patterns of minority segregation. This eventually led to the construction of the “Cornerstone” development, and later to the adjacent “Oaks” development. These single-family units and duplexes mix subsidized home-ownership opportunities with rentals are located North of Broadway, partially on the site of Palm Terrace units. Their southern architectural vernacular and the design layout garnered praise from tepid supporters and moderate critics throughout the community for serving as, and I paraphrase a common saying, “public housing that doesn’t look like the projects” while decreasing the former density of on-site units. During early City Council debate over the future of public housing, now-former Council members Danny Weber (term-limited) and Susan Fennwald (did not run for re-election), as well as current Councilmember Elizabeth Beeton voiced support for a rebuild that’s design layout essentially matched the newer development. This is one recent historical example of spatial redevelopment undertaken in the name of “Fair Housing.”

#### *Fair Housing in Communities of Opportunity*

As a federal “entitlement city”<sup>104</sup> that is also the recipient of nearly \$1b in federal disaster recovery assistance for housing and infrastructure, the City of Galveston is

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<sup>104</sup> Since its pre-storm population was above 50,000, the City of Galveston was eligible for annual grants from HUD. The latest census data project a post-storm population of 47,800, which adds urgency on the part of city leaders and boosters to strategize ways of “growing” the population to ensure the continuation of its entitlement status.

charged with the federal commitment to “affirmatively further fair housing” per the 1968 Fair Housing Act. However, adapting this national policy to the local context creates more an ethical dilemma than a ready-made solution to remediate past racial inequities. This is true both because the policy itself is open to competing interpretations of whether to prioritize integrative or non-discriminatory readings of the Act (Tein 1992, Browne-Dianis and Sinha 2008) and because its invocation by the members of GOGP might simply serve as legal cover to further an agenda that’s aim is to reduce the number of low-income—and as a corollary—black Galvestonians. Two recent U.S. district court decisions provide the basis for the GOGP’s adoption of Fair Housing law as the basis of its legal argument against the Galveston Housing Authority. The rulings in *Thompson v. HUD*<sup>105</sup> in Baltimore (2005) and *Anti-Discrimination Center of Metro New York v. Westchester County* (2009)<sup>106</sup> have been appropriated to legitimate their proposal to regionalize public housing units throughout Galveston County. Both court decisions mandated local housing authorities to take affirmative steps to regionalize their subsidized housing units from areas of concentrated minority poverty within inner-city zones towards “areas of opportunity” in the surrounding suburbs of metropolitan centers. HUD has cited both cases as precedent for a broader enforcement under the Obama

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<sup>105</sup> Litigation was brought on behalf of class of 14,000 African-American residents of public housing in response to history of racial segregation of public housing and concentration in poor, distressed neighborhoods in Baltimore. One particular line from Judge Marvin Garvis’s opinion has been highlighted repeatedly by the GOGP: **“Baltimore City should not be viewed as an island reservation for use as a container for all of the poor of a contiguous region.”**

<sup>106</sup> A federal judge ruled that Westchester County had failed to “affirmatively further fair housing” because it had clearly failed to consider racial segregation when deciding locations for planned subsidized housing units. Per the court ruling, Westchester County is required to spend \$52m to develop at least 750 units of affordable housing for low-to-moderate income households; place at least 84% of these units in census tracts with an African-American population of less than 4% and a Latino population of less than 7%, and adopt a policy to eliminate de facto residential segregation in the County.

Administration of the 1968 Fair Housing Act to “affirmatively furthering fair housing.” This may require housing authorities and other entities receiving federal housing funds to align their operating policies so as to proactively remedy patterns of entrenched racialized poverty, in lieu of defensive operations that ensures non-discrimination of protected classes.

“Integrative” readings of Fair Housing mandate rely on the premise that desegregation is a desirable end because it is not only an embedded value in the national social and political landscape, but because racially integrated neighborhoods are said to be conduits of stable “communities of economic opportunity” that maximize the potential of low-income residents to grow capital and achieve social mobility. Legal theorists are not in agreement with this notion. Tein (140 U. Pa. L. Rev. 1463, 1467 (1992)) writes: “The ‘anti-discrimination’ goal is explicit in the Act; the ‘integration’ goal has been read into it, largely through reference to the legislative history... if the subsidized housing stage is to be shared by both ‘anti-discrimination’ and ‘integration,’ the second goal must yield the spotlight to the first should they conflict.” Judith Browne-Dianis, co-director and Anita Sinha, staff attorney at Advancement Project cited this contention in their legal brief published in the Howard Law Journal (2008). They are two members of counsel for the plaintiffs in *Anderson v. Jackson*, a lawsuit brought by New Orleans public housing residents who were displaced after Hurricane Katrina. New Orleans’ redevelopment plan called for a significant reduction in on-site public housing units that would emulate a “mixed-income, mixed-use” model.<sup>107</sup> This may likely have the attendant effect of

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<sup>107</sup> In September 2007, HUD approved the demolition of approximately 70% of New Orleans' public housing. According to the redevelopment plan, the St. Bernard development, which consisted of 1,400 public housing units, will be replaced with 595 total units. Only 160 (11%) of the original number of

displacing low-income African-Americans due because of post-storm rental market conditions that place significant obstacles in the way of former public housing residents who have received housing vouchers in lieu of return to the demolished housing projects. They argue that cases such as *Thompson v. HUD* that mandate desegregation as a court-ordered remedy has profound limitations when it does not consider a race-conscious impact on minority communities. Such rulings do not account for the importance of community relationships "solidified by ties providing a feeling of collective identity, self-awareness, and affiliation."<sup>108</sup> In fact, "it is usually at the expense of community that Blacks improve their housing package in integrated settings dominated by Whites" (*Ibid*). Browne-Dianis and Sinha also argue that the focus on desegregation/limited integration, "Ignores the option of non-segregation, which confers the right of people to remain in their neighborhood. Non-segregation interprets fair housing not as forced relocation but as neighborhood enrichment so as to create spatial equality." These considerations were heretofore unspoken in the Galveston deliberations.

The increased reliance on Housing Choice Vouchers, scattered-site developments, and the HOPE VI program<sup>109</sup> are testaments to shifting HUD priorities

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units will be public housing units. At the C.J. Peete development, 723 public housing units will be replaced with 410 total units, of which 154 (21%) of the original number of units, will be public housing units; and at the B.W. Cooper development, 1,546 public housing units will be replaced by 410 total units, of which only 154 (10%) of the original number of units, will be public housing units. As a result, a total of 3,201 units of housing available to very low-income families will be lost.

<sup>108</sup> John O. Calmore (1993), *The Urban Crisis: The Kerner Commission Report Revisted, Spatial Equality and the Kerner Commission Report: A Back-To-The-Future Essay*.

<sup>109</sup> HUD initiated HOPE VI in 1996 to encourage the public-private re-development of former public housing facilities and their adjacent slums into mixed-income, mixed-use properties. While the effects of HOPE VI for spurring infrastructural revitalization in low-income neighborhoods are noteworthy, its effectiveness for ameliorating conditions of persistent poverty amongst residents within its targeted zones have been negligible in many cases. Fraser and Kick (2007) cite the examples of Durham, NC (HOPE VI) and Chattanooga, TN (private) to show the non-correspondence between "place-based" and "people-based" revitalization efforts in zones of concentrated poverty. Urban studies scholars such as Popkin *et al* (2005) have also expressed skepticism based on longitudinal studies that mixed-income, mixed-use developments,

over the past 15 years that encourage the deconcentration of racialized poverty. Thus, the GOGP references to the regionalization of public housing to “areas of opportunity” in the Galveston context. Integrative “scattered-site” development is also a point of debate within “enunciatory communities” such as the Northside Galveston Taskforce; however, there was more significant internal discussion concerning rehabilitation versus rebuilding. While preferences vary within an enunciatory community of pro-rebuilding advocates, the allocation of funding to facilitate the rebuilding of 569 according to best practice standards was of more prominent concern.

For those who are decidedly “for” or “against” public housing in Galveston, these discursive tactics were part of broader attempts to outflank the opposition by absorbing the respective pragmatic and ethical dimensions of the rebuild into their arguments. For example, as the housing authority transitioned enrollees in the countywide Disaster Housing Assistance Program to long-term housing solutions, it opened a satellite operations facility in League City. Krishnarao noted that its presence was meant both a practical and symbolic function because it demonstrated that the Galveston Housing Authority already serves as the de fact housing authority for all of Galveston County. Thus while it rebuilds 569 public housing units throughout Galveston Island, the housing authority can then argue that it is nonetheless regionalizing through its expanding administration of housing choice vouchers throughout the mainland county. Some GOGP advocates argued in turn that the City of Galveston, and its taxpaying citizens, had done their “fair share” of historically supporting indigent populations that inhabited on-site public housing facilities. Because of demographic dynamics that had precipitated the

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particularly HOPE VI, substantively affect the life opportunities of previous residents; particularly the “hard-to-house” stratum of residents.

decline of Galveston's population prior to Ike, Galveston County—and in particular—its wealthier exurbs in the shadow of Houston should absorb more of the area's poor.

Further, adherence to fair housing law demanded such regionalization.

The Fair Housing arguments forwarded by two Austin-based legal advocacy groups, Texas Appleseed and the Texas Low Income Housing Information Service, countered the GOP's legalistic tact about Fair Housing and the ethical claim to regional "fairness". Both of these groups are located in Austin. After the release of the controversial State action plan for the second round of CDBG funding in November 2009<sup>110</sup>, a staff attorney with Texas Appleseed named M. Madison Sloan filed an administrative complaint with HUD that alleged a violation of fair housing statute because the "weather model" distribution formula for Round II-CDBG grossly underfunded housing activities that would benefit low-to-moderate income disaster victims. Moreover, such an inadequate plan devised by the State of Texas did little to guarantee that municipalities such as Galveston would spend funds to further Fair Housing practices. As a corollary, Ms. Sloan contended a lack of oversight had led to the problems regarding public housing in Galveston, where an "egregious example" of race-based housing discrimination had been perpetrated by anti-public housing advocates and signatories to the "Stop the GHA" petition because they, in effect, halted the GHA's potential rebuilding plan that could have included the additional 1,500 in-fill units of subsidized housing.

Although the ultimate goals of the GOP may be more insidious and self-serving than the apparent righteousness of their integrative calls for the regionalization of public

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<sup>110</sup> I noted in the previous chapter that scoring criteria for Round II changed significantly from Round I insofar as greater funding priority was related to the intensity of storm conditions that affected municipalities, such as storm surge; in lieu of the actual damage to densely populated urban locales.

housing, the apparent righteousness of Texas Appleseed's goal to ensure maximum fair-housing opportunities while considering race in effect over-determined the significance of race and explicit racial discrimination. Nevertheless, the administrative complaint buttressed the advocacy of groups such as GCRR and Gulf Coast Interfaith, thus leading to a 22% increase in the allocation of CDBG funding for the Houston-Galveston region than had originally been recommended. Moreover, Texas Appleseed and the Low-Income Information Service entered into what became known as the "Conciliation Agreement" with several governmental entities ranging from HUD to the City of Galveston. The Conciliation Agreement thus seemed to secure the rebuilding of 569 units of public housing on Galveston Island. The GOP adapted to the situation by shifting its argument that scattered site housing should be rebuilt on the West End of the island, or in other words, towards "areas of opportunity" since it contained the only viable census tracts to adhere to fair housing. This argument kept them present in public discourse while their leadership, i.e., Mr. Stanowski, searched for a lawyer who would take their case while raising money for a protracted legal challenge.

Tension remains between maintaining the historical authenticity of Northside Galveston as predominantly black space and "revitalizing" the neighborhood with investment capital and claims to the production of "opportunity." For example, in early 2010, a contingent of mainly black advocates fought the Board of Trustees of the Galveston Independent School District to reverse an initial decision to convert the facilities of the reopened Central Middle School into space for an expanding KIPP "Coastal Village"<sup>111</sup> program that has been established in Galveston at the site of

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<sup>111</sup> The "Knowledge Is Power Program" has received national attention and acclaim in recent years as a free college preparatory program first initiated in Houston to especially serve low-income and minority

Rosenberg Elementary. The latter site is located in the East End, in the vicinity of the former Magnolia project. In 2013, KIPP will expand as a K-8<sup>th</sup> grade program. Under the Trustees original plan, KIPP would have moved to Central Middle, which just reopened for the 2010-11 school year after receiving over \$7m in renovations following its closure after the hurricane. For months after the storm, the fate of Central was unknown despite former superintendent Lynn Cleveland's initial statements that it would reopen.

The historic racial significance of the school was explicitly raised by supporters who claimed that black students not accepted into a "charter school" would be sent across the island to Weiss Middle School, where black parents feared stigmatization and disenfranchisement of black students at a majority-white campus; moreover, the six new science labs at the refurbished Central Middle School would remain underutilized by mostly black middle school students for whom the rehabilitation was intended. In a split-vote following several confrontation Board meetings, the Trustees voted to retain Central solely under the remit of GISD. They subsequently amended this decision the following month to send all 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade students to Weis while all 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade students not enrolled in a special program such as KIPP or the Austin Magnet School will attend Central. The extent to which this development, along with mixed-income public housing, ensures "black enfranchisement" in a historically black neighborhood is not known. However, the decision not to lease the school to KIPP allayed fears of advocates, Northside parents, and former Central students who apparently feared that this

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students. Students enrolled in the elementary program attend school between 7:30-5:00 and mandates a parental commitment to attend school with their child on a Saturday four times per school year. Approximately 45% of current "KIPPsters" are Black, 28% are Hispanic, and 25% White.

particularly historical campus would be lost to “somebody who had been in this community less than a year...it was like somebody stabbing you in the heart”<sup>112</sup>.

This is just one part of intractable friction of Galveston’s 20<sup>th</sup> century history since the 1900 Storm: a friction between forces of social and infrastructural decline set against the best laid plans for renewal that are never unanimously agreed upon. The Galveston Housing Authority has long conceived of itself as a source of revitalization for providing affordable housing, while also serving as a local administrator for over a half century of shifting federal policies that test the capacity of the architectural environments to affect social behavior and moral development (Vale 2000). Interestingly, while Stanowski has often reiterated that public housing in all its morphing forms has been an utter failure, he recently cited support for the holistic revitalization model forwarded by the “East Lake model,” but expressed deep skepticism that Galveston possessed the land parcels and infrastructural capacity to enact and sustain such a program. In January 2011, the GHA was poised to hire a development consultant after engaging in ancillary *pro bono* consultation with Purpose Built Communities<sup>113</sup> to begin drawing plans for developing three of the former properties as mixed use, mixed-income sites that would roughly divide the remaining 529 between on-site and scattered-site units<sup>114</sup>.

Construction is underway at the former Palm Terrace site, which will be an extension of

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<sup>112</sup> “2 years after Ike, Galveston cheers re-opening of historic school,” Houston Chronicle, 8/27/10. The quote was taken from a 65-year-old former student of Central High School. Central was a black high school until 1968.

<sup>113</sup> Purpose Built Communities has garnered notoriety within the affordable housing industry for advancing a model of “holistic community revitalization” that has been adapted former site of the Atlanta Housing Authority (East Lakes Village) as well as the former St. Bernard housing project in New Orleans.

<sup>114</sup> A redeveloped Magnolia project would consist of 72 elderly units on the original sites and 48 mixed-income units in the adjacent area (down from 133 pre-Ike); Cedar Terrace would include 66 mixed-income units (down from 133 pre-Ike), and Oleander not more than 96 units (down from 196). The GHA will contract three developers to build 247 scattered-site and scattered clusters. Prior to the storm there were 34 scattered units.

“The Oaks” subsidized single-family development adjacent to the GHA offices at the Island Community Center at 4700 Broadway. The new “Oaks IV” will house 40 senior units from 20 duplexes that continue the aesthetic vernacular that the GHA has utilized in recent years to change the construction of public housing units away from the “barracks-style” “warehouses” associated with the post-war designs of the former sites. In January 2011, the GHA board approved a contract with the island’s largest real estate agent, Joe Tramonte, to begin identifying and acquiring parcels for 249 units of scattered-site and “scattered-cluster” public housing units.

Assuming that the GHA does indeed rebuild its units in a “mixed-income” model, it will face daunting challenges to replicate the East Lakes version since it currently lacks comparable continuous acreage. Redeveloping the former Cedar Terrace and Oleander Homes on their former sites will make it difficult to lease at unsubsidized market rates, which is necessary to achieve the income mixing that is comparable to East Lakes. The latter also had the luxury of revitalizing in the vicinity of a once-prominent golf course that is now been incorporated into the development project for use as a junior academy for low-income youths and an incentive for attracting moderate and middle-income renters. However, growing a strong partnership between the GHA and an expanding KIPP Coastal Village program, as well as with Galveston College bodes well for stimulating investment in human capital for public housing residents. Due to the original Memo of Understanding with Lone Star Legal Aid, the GHA pledges to maintain a residential preference for former residents or former wait-listed applicants. This increases the likelihood that rebuilt units will serve those who have previously lived, worked, and spent their modest incomes on the island.

Suffice to say, this social contestation over place, race, belonging, and progress will only ever be provisionally “resolved,” as it has for many years on this island. In 1946, reporter Virginia Forbes penned a series of articles for the *Galveston Daily News* that detailed the pervasive housing blight that existed throughout Galveston Island, despite the recent progress that the Galveston Housing Authority achieved in building the Oleander and Palm Terrace complexes. After referring to Galveston as home to some of the “worst slums in the State of Texas,” which were “dangerous from the standpoint of health, crime, immorality, and general degradation,” she argued for sustained public-private investment in providing “modern,” “sanitary” housing to replace the blighted conditions. While a proposal to develop and subsidize 600 units of “low-rent Negro apartments” and 800 units for “whites” would only alleviate less than one-fifth of “poorly housed Galvestonians,” it would be a promising start for progress:

Imagine driving into Galveston on Broadway without seeing the gray, unpainted shacks along either side of the beautiful esplanades. Think of going through the residential districts without the shock of seeing block after block of ramshackle, deteriorating houses. Consider the pride in showing a visitor around *without* apologizing for the clusters of slums that pockmark the city and vaguely murmuring something about storms or conditions and adding, “It’s this way all over town.” Visionary pipe dreams? Maybe, but organized community action could make it reality.

Forbes could have been talking about the present-future of public housing in Galveston as she envisioned new housing throughout the city, “not grouped together in semi-isolated fashion like the present units” officials who hope the buildings would lack the “institution-like sameness of Oleander and Palm Terrace.” In contradistinction they would be built along an open city grid in differing colors and styles “wherever possible on slum sites that now disfigure the city.”<sup>115</sup> It remains to be seen whose historical dreams the housing authority ultimately delivers into a “new” Galveston; or for that

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<sup>115</sup> Several of Forbes articles were collated together in a manual prepared by the Housing Authority later that year entitled, “What’s Wrong with Galveston” to document the “slum” housing conditions present throughout the city.

matter, whether they remain dreams deferred that sag with the heavy load of  
contradicting desires wrapped in layers of legal compromise and bureaucratic procedure.

## Conclusion:

### Dreamworlds, Catastrophe, and the Limits of Collective Revitalization

*Catastrophe—to have missed the opportunity;*

*Critical moment—the status quo threatens to be preserved;*

*Progress—the first revolutionary measure taken...the concept of progress must be grounded in catastrophe—Walter Benjamin, *Convolute N, The Arcades Project*.*

I noted in the introduction that Susan Buck-Morss conceptualized Walter Benjamin's motif of "dreamworlds" not as a "poetic expression of a collective mental state" (2000: x) but as an analytic that tracks the "dreamworlds of modernity"—political, cultural, economic—that emerge as an expression of a utopian desire for social arrangements that transcend existing forms.<sup>116</sup> This more multifaceted application of Benjamin provides the basis for a concluding analysis of the potentialities, stases, and failures of several long-term recovery projects that co-existed alongside attempts of a stratum of Galvestonians to symbolically transcend the liminal experiences of immediate disaster culture, particularly during the several days leading to the one-year anniversary of the storm. This analysis is intended to demonstrate the coterminous existence of ongoing storm-induced vulnerabilities and the tentative re-ascension of banal normality in an island-city. At the conclusion of my fieldwork, the mantras and promises of substantive "progress" that emerged from the "creative destruction" of the hurricane were increasingly absent in publicly circulating social imaginaries and political deliberations.

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<sup>116</sup> "Dreamworlds" connotes Benjamin's contradictory analytic relationship to the notion of "progress," which he explicitly criticized as an impossible bourgeois project, but which was in another sense, central to his messianic, historical-literary ambitions in the *Arcades Project* to shock "dreaming collectives" into politicized, revolutionary wakefulness in moments of illumination as they encountered the accumulated catastrophes of barbarism, repression, and destitution masked by the emergence of consumer capitalism as a way of life.

To posit the pre-Ike population of Galveston as a “dreaming collective” unaware of the potentialities for hurricane disaster would be inaccurate and obfuscating; although the motif of the “shock of recognition” retains salience for ethnographic articulation. While many Galvestonians were unprepared for the strength Hurricane Ike and the depths of the flood, the specter of latent threat was evident prior to the storm. In August 2008, Tropical Storm Eduardo provided what some called the City’s “dress rehearsal” for preparing an emergency response. During a city council meeting in August 2008, the late councilmember Danny Weber announced during deliberations over beach renourishment that the buffering effects of sand deposits guard against the encroachment of storm surge from the next major hurricane to hit Galveston, “not if, but when.” This elicited affirmative nods and murmurs of agreement from some in the audience. Inside of Mod Coffeehouse, Angela and her husband Craig kept a chart on display that showed the track of every hurricane that has impacted the lower-48 states. As I noted previously, common meme that I heard uttered during the week prior to the storm was “we’re due.”

The catastrophe of Hurricane Ike produced a collective “shock” of realizing nature’s profound effects on the built environment, and the tenuousness of everyday routine on a barrier island in an active hurricane corridor. I knew this from personal experience. During the first weeks of return, I felt like an approximation of a dazed and unkempt flâneur. Unsure of how or where to proceed, I wandered the streets peering distractedly at scenes of destruction with a tactile eye that was drawn to street scenes that were scarcely imaginable two weeks previous. Arresting images of wreckage would displace contemplation with the “insistent, jerky nearness” of their unexpected, macabre, or sometimes delighting appearance that hit one between the eyes. A confounded thought

on the sheer force of water would pass to a momentary delight at the image of a returning brown pelican; a rumination on dreamworlds and catastrophes, interrupted by the flailing pages of “Lost Horizons,” laying on the ground; a lulling temporary return to the banality of email at the Verizon tent at Kroger broken by the shrill cry of a young woman yelling to her mother that she no longer *had* a phone. A sorrowful lamentation for the thousands of dead or dying trees brought into startling focus upon encountering an oak tree trunk with a two-foot diameter laying on its side; it’s massive root system now fully exposed after it was brought up through pavement by wind and surge. Such scenes of acute, pervasive disaster temporarily, and jarringly, dismantled the optical unconsciousness that attended with the everyday encounters of place. As such the devastated landscape emanated with a new capacity to shock the senses because of the grotesque dissimilarities between what had just existed and what now lay before the witness. I noted in chapter two, the reaction of Paul, Cathy and their friend who had managed the Balinese Room upon seeing the nothingness that was left, the “just nerves,” of seeing tangible proof of unequivocal disaster. The effects of such “jolts” that result from witnessing unmitigated catastrophe were heterogeneous, within and between Galvestonians.

Hurricane Ike, like Benjamnian “catastrophes,” temporarily blasted History out of a linear continuum of everyday procession (Fischer 2009: 118). Its pervasive damage instigated “shocks of recognition” of the tenuousness of everyday normality on a barrier island in the Gulf of Mexico. However, a question remains open: did such “shocks” translate substantively to “illuminations” progressive social possibility that fostered material effect? The politicization of the shock was evident insofar as it galvanized certain residents—many of whom, *but not all*, were already invested in formal political

discourse prior to the storm—to contribute to strategic long-term planning during the Long-Term Recovery Committee. As I’ve shown, participatory strategic planning oriented around contested notions such as “resiliency,” “sustainability,” “affordability,” and “development” to ambiguous results. I argue that it matters less whether tactile images of destruction were the catalyst of a personal awakening that forced political action, and more that the storm produced conditions of destruction so powerful that a distended enunciatory community of Galvestonians responded through formal participation. Granted, that participation was replete with contest notions of place and the social orders. Yet, one sensed a prolonged moment of opportunity during the first year after the storm for Galvestonians to contribute substantively to its redevelopment. However conflicted these visions were, discourses of optimism and opportunity were evident. Of course, so too the dread of defeat felt by some in the face of personal devastation.

As I discussed in chapter three, some Galvestonians, while not “Angels of History” per se, did cast their purview backward from the ineludible wreckage that Ike wrought on the island to study the past missed opportunities to strengthen Galveston’s infrastructural resilience against potential damage. This evinced most clearly in forums such as the Long Term Recovery Committee, and was particularly manifested in projects such as the bayside levee system, the Ike Dike, drainage and water supply upgrades, and the marshland restoration project on the West End. In forums such as city council and the local newspaper, Galvestonians rhetorically gestured backwards through local history, however cursorily, to invoke the seawall construction initiative following the 1900 Storm as a master symbol of communal participation in the city’s restoration; participation that

was sorely needed following Ike, and for a time, did exist in unprecedented form. Moreover, I noted that technical representatives from FEMA who moderated the proceedings of the Long Term Recovery Committee routinely cited Galveston as the most intensely participatory LTRC with which they had worked. However, what if any tangible effects can one trace from the strategic planning for long-term planning, or from the sustained advocacy of groups such as GCRR, the Northside Taskforce, and Gulf Coast Interfaith to help secure and efficiently implement federal funds for Galveston? Were the visions of restorative progress that were imagineered and deliberated into tangible project after Ike fated to the catastrophe of missed opportunity due to the intractability of contested interests and desires for Galveston's future; parochial political rivalries; and/or misguided calculations regarding the limits of public expenditures to affect the collective urban fortunes of Galveston? The answers are thus far disconcerting. I discussed in chapter three that many of the 42 projects presented by the Long Term Recovery Committee remained unimplemented. Further, the hope embedded in well-financed, if also rigidly controlled federal recovery initiatives had increasingly given way to cynicism and resignation of a second-order catastrophe that attended with bureaucratic stasis.

There was no overarching timeframe within which an extended "critical moment" emerged and disappeared into the ashcan of missed opportunity in Galveston. Some moments remained unsettled at the conclusion of fieldwork as the City awaited the release of second-round CDBG funds for housing and infrastructure, while departments struggled to reach performance benchmarks that may compromise the release of these remaining funds. However, throughout 2009, a series of critical moments occurred that

were oriented around important endogamous and exogamous decision-makings pertaining to long-term disaster recovery occurred. These initially included such deliberations before Council as the suspension of permit acquisition for sheetrock installation because it was feared Galveston was running out of time before frustrated residents would give up on Galveston and its municipal government. And I discussed in chapter three, it also included the restoration of UTMB when the decisions of the UT Board of Regents and the Texas State Legislature had potentially dire repercussions for Galveston's urban fortunes. Such critical moments were also defined by their dilemmas. The Council did temporarily suspend the need for permit acquisition to help facilitate homeowner repair, but in doing so it removed a layer of inspection that could identify the presence of mold in the joints of 2"x4"s, which could create long-term problems in years ahead. Moreover, the restoration of UTMB occurred on the condition that it continues to alter its business model away from its historical mandate of providing uninsured healthcare.

The rebuilding of public housing, the FEMA West End Buyout program, and the CDBG-funded homeowner repair program were particularly salient examples of post-Ike "dreamworlds" juxtaposed against a myriad of potential second-order catastrophes. Catastrophe as defined by Benjamin in *Convolute N* of the *Arcades Project* signifies when a collective has "missed the opportunity" for radical social change during a critical moment. Buck-Morss (2000) focused on the 20<sup>th</sup> century dreamworlds and catastrophes of Soviet state socialism; particularly, the "catastrophes" that felled utopian dreams of mass-sovereignty when the libratory impulses of the 1917 October Revolution eventually dissipated into the totalitarian institutionalization of the Five-Year command economy

and attendant population purges enacted under Stalin. An application of the motif here predicates on a subjective assessment of what constitutes comparably momentous, tragic events to which Benjamin alluded. My applications are grounded in the fears espoused by Galvestonians over the implementation or non-implementation of certain initiatives. Moreover, the “catastrophe” of unresolved or unjustly decided critical moments should be understood in their particular historical contexts.

I have discussed how the social conflict over rebuilding public housing was significantly influenced by class-based anxieties of perceived undue public benefits magnified by racial dimensions that were simultaneously subliminal and overt; and sometimes crassly racist. White opponents of public housing—who constituted nearly all of the public opposition—often attempted to diminish the place of race while black advocates accentuated a perception of racial antagonism submerged underneath procedural legal arguments, claims to objective assessments of public housing’s economic implications for Galveston, and assertions that regional housing produced better opportunities for gainful employment. Supporters of the GHA rebuilding plan who were mostly but not exclusively black Galvestonians advocated on behalf of displaced residents—of which 88% are Black—that a “right of return” be extended to “all” Galvestonians.

Following the election of Mayor Joe Jaworski in May 2010 and the consequent overhaul of the GHA Board of Directors, the newly appointed Board chair and Jaworski’s campaign manager, Paula Neff, publicly stated the GHA’s intent to develop “*really* amazing public housing” within a holistic, mixed-income schemata linked to social service provisioning that together might facilitate greater fluidity of upward mobility. The

utterance soon began circulating as a lampooning meme amongst opponents of the GHA rebuilding plan<sup>117</sup>. Even former board member and prominent GHA supporter Raymond Lewis sarcastically referenced that quote in a guest column in the local newspaper in which he critiqued both the current GHA Board and public housing opponents for the misguided visions of both regionalization and holistic mixed-income development that had hampered the creation and implementation of a coherent rebuilding plan. Several new GHA board members as well as Jaworski advocated for a holistic rebuilding plan comparable to the East Lake Foundation in Atlanta, sans the adjacent 18-hole golf course and a contiguous parcel of land. Ms. Neff in particular described a veritable “dreamworld” in reiterating a desire to “end inter-generational poverty on Galveston.” As noted, opponents, particularly David Stanowski and his followers, criticized the ambitions of the GHA’s nebulous rebuilding plans as a reckless government-subsidized folly that would effectively over-saturate a local housing market already hampered with an abundance of vacant housing stock while maintaining governmental “dependence” of (black) low-income Galvestonians in areas of concentrated racial poverty. His competing “dreamworld” vision of socio-economic development elaborated, upon in his “manifesto” for the Galveston Founders Party cited in chapter four, was instead predicated on libertarian principles of minimal governmental infrastructure facilitating maximum free-market commerce on an island-city populated by a self-sufficient resident base of middle-class families and affluent retirees.

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<sup>117</sup> GHA opponents may have denigrated Ms. Neff’s idealistic statement in part because of her relative youth and present side-occupation as a Pilates instructor; thus a belief in a concomitant naiveté of developing and administering public housing that complemented their generalized antipathies towards the GHA.

These discourses and dreamworld visions remained irresolvable as sides continued to contest arguments over the fundamental efficacy of public housing for enhancing individual biopower and its desirability of any public housing for enhancing collective urban fortunes. Amidst the stasis, 40 “elderly” units out of 569 have been constructed. The executive director was forced to resign in June 2011 before he was able to implement what he called his “legacy project.” The stated reason for Mr. Krishnarao’s resignation was irreconcilable “philosophical” differences over a rebuilding model. The GHA still awaits a rebuilding plan from St. Louis-based, McCormack, Barron, & Salazar, who has spent the past two months organizing community engagement through “charette” planning” with “stakeholders.” This replicates the same process already undertaken when Civic Design Associates worked on a conceptual plan in 2009, suggesting the “hellish cyclical repetition” of history (Buck-Morss 1991: 337).

One could construe catastrophe from any of the possible outcomes, depending on one’s interests and commitments<sup>118</sup>. The looming catastrophes of public housing involve the passing of critical moments of opportunity: whether it be missed opportunity to essentially reinvent the local aesthetics and function of public housing according to best practice standards, or the missed opportunity to eliminate public subsidization of housing on government-owned property in order to facilitate socio-spatial engineering more amenable to property taxation and a phantasmal middle-class resident base with the vicarious benefit of decreasing a parasitic population stratum. Still another purview upon catastrophe is the impossibility of substantive compromise between the contentious sides and the hardening apathy of those who construed themselves as mediating voices seeking

conciliation. The self-ascribed “moderate” group, the Galveston Alliance of Independent Neighborhoods released a group statement opposing the mixed-income community proposed by the GHA and McCormack, Barron, and Salazar. Upon release of the MBS/GHA plan, the GOGP has announced it will file a lawsuit seeking an injunction to halt any further development of public housing pending a review of the Fair Housing implications.

*Buyout: Rethinking Coastal Living?*

As discussed in chapter three, Brandon Wade, who was then assistant city manager before leaving for another position in Pflugerville, represented the City during the implementation of the FEMA hazard mitigation buyout program. After mildly contentious deliberations, the City Council acquiesced to participation in the buyout that would benefit West End residents solely. Council endorsed Mr. Wade’s recommendations that the buyout program would be most easily and advantageously applied to West End beachfront communities because of cost-benefit considerations and the negative impact buyouts would have on residential neighborhoods behind the seawall, i.e., the “Swiss cheese” effect produced by vacant lots lying empty for perpetuity. This decision produced vocal opposition, but not nearly as sustained or vitriolic as public housing. As noted, Galvestonians who opposed the buyout tended to argue over the unfairness and inequity of such favorable—if not generous—buyout terms extended to residents and second-home owners who had assumed an inordinate degree of risk for willfully occupying inherently vulnerable portions of the island beyond the seawall to satiate their desire for secluded coastal living<sup>119</sup>. The class-influenced dynamics were

evident in both oppositional discourses and the defensive assertions made by potential buyout recipients who self-ascribed their non-wealthy, “middle-class” status that would be imperiled without the benefit of the buyout. Their immanent personal catastrophes negated the initial beach and bayfront dreamworlds of their social imaginaries that influenced their decision to invest in property on the island’s picturesque West End. As I showed in chapter three, applicants to the buyout program often testified to having purchased a “dream home” prior to Ike that was irrevocably damaged to the extent that they faced catastrophic financial ruin if they could not participate in the program.

I locate a Benjaminian application of catastrophe to the effects of buyout in the seemingly missed opportunity to use the destruction on the West End as an object lesson for rethinking coastal living and beachfront development in an area of the island that is eroding between 5-10ft per year in conjunction with rising sea levels. When FEMA authorized the dispersal of \$20m to buyout 64 properties, their statement hailed the move as a sound policy measure that eliminated, “flood-prone structures from future damages and health and safety risks for those homeowners and any potential rescuers,” as well as “the need to provide emergency response services, subsidized flood insurance and federal disaster assistance to the residents,” while also reducing the costs for the National Flood Insurance Program through fewer flood insurance claims<sup>120</sup>. While this may be true, the buyout program was, arguably, more effective as a catalyst for finalizing a new setback ordinance.

Since 2006, an enunciatory community of residents, council members, city staff, and the Texas General Land Office had deliberated and then drafted a new setback that

would best accommodate the interests of West End property owners, conservationists, “Galveston,” the State of Texas, and the Federal government. In April 2010, following scores of public meetings, 26 deliberations amongst the city Planning Commission, and six times before City Council, the latter considered a setback ordinance written in consultation with the Texas General Land Office and unanimously approved by the Planning Commission. Current regulations had mandated an absolute setback of 25’ from the northern side of the dunes and an additional 50’ boundary that required approval from the Planning Commission. As such, first-row houses enjoyed true beachfront access. The proposed ordinance brought before Council mandated an absolute setback of 75’ from the dunes, or 350’ from mean high tide if that is further landward than the absolute setback. This would have affected new construction in areas that now encompass homes from first-row beachfront to the fifth row. A contingent of West End property owners opposed the ordinance with discourses of “government waste” they argued would attend with enforcement and permitting, specious arguments of diminished property values, and concerns over the ambiguity of whether the ordinance would “grandfather” already platted properties in accordance with the previous ordinance. The ordinance generally commanded support from an enunciatory community of residents, council members, and representatives from the Texas GLO who supported more stringent setback requirements than had existed pre-Ike. Some residents, as well as two city council members, desired a further setback even as they acknowledged the ordinance as a “good first step.”

The ordinance easily passed, 6-1, with late councilmember Danny Weber opposed on a principle that it infringed upon development, and thus, Galveston’s property tax

base. The stricter setback ordinance would thus be forwarded to the Texas GLO, who had helped draft the document, for final approval. Two months later, a newly constituted City Council that returned only two previous members—Elizabeth Beeton and Linda Colbert—voted 5-1, with Beeton opposed and Colbert absent to withdraw the ordinance. Newly elected West End representative Diana Puccetti entered the motion to withdraw. She had previously served on Council but was voted out in 2007 in a veritable protest vote for her championing of the highly controversial Marquette development. She was infamously booed during her final Council meeting when she said those who voted her out of office had “shot themselves on the foot.” In 2010, Puccetti defeated former Planning Commission member, landscape architect, progressive conservationist, and setback ordinance supporter Chula Ross Sanchez by less than 100 votes. Ms. Puccetti endorsed minority West End opposition when she stated that new setback was “unreasonable” and the grandfather language unacceptably ambiguous. To date, Council has not considered a new setback ordinance. The line remains the same as it was before September 12, 2008, when the force of moving water swept unimpeded without the protection of the seawall.

*The Disaster Recovery Housing Program: Advocacy, Fraught Faith, and Frustrations*

The \$103m Galveston homeowner repair program was the least socially contentious and most highly funded federal housing recovery program enacted after the storm. However, its stalled implementation also manifested dynamics of dreamworld and catastrophe, and to date, profound missed opportunity. I apply the motifs because they cogently frame the establishment of a dichotomy between the initially hopeful expectations of activists, applicants, and city functionaries to assist a broad swath of the

estimated 38% of uninsured Galveston homeowners—on the one hand—and the frustrations and malaise that developed in reaction to the bureaucratic inefficiencies of Massachusetts-based management firm, Camp, Dresser and McKay (“CDM”), on the other. The City Council approved the selection of CDM as program manager in October 2009. As of April 3, 2011 it had facilitated the reconstruction or rehabilitation of five (5) homes in the City of Galveston, with another 20 in construction. CDM initially expected to assist over 1,000 homeowners. In March 2011, CDM narrowly avoided contract termination following a 4-3 City Council.

Of the \$160m allocated to the City through the first supplemental round of CDBG-funding for housing, Council earmarked \$103m for the homeowner repair program. The second largest expenditure of this allocation was the \$16m management fee due to CDM per federal regulations<sup>121</sup>. Advocates from Gulf Coast Interfaith and the Northside Taskforce voiced concern that the \$7m allocated for rental units was far too low, especially given that 57% of Galvestonians rented their housing pre-Ike. However, since a second round of CDBG funding held promise of rental rehabilitation funds, criticism of the allocation was relatively muted. Other funds were committed for sub-programs such as a home acquisition and rehab program to facilitate low-to-moderate income home sales, LMI down-payment assistance, a master plan for in-fill development standards, and \$160,000 for a housing market assessment study. The latter was originally conceived in the LTRC housing committee and had been incorporated into the LTRC

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<sup>121</sup> Federal regulation necessitates that funding recipients budget 10% of the allocation for program management expenses. Criticisms of this expenditure intensified in early 2011 as knowledge of the stalled program implementation was increasingly publicized. Following the near termination of their contract, CDM agreed to a performance-based reimbursement model.

long-term recovery plan. While it was the least funded initiative, the knowledge produced it was highly coveted by multiple actors.<sup>122</sup>

Advocates focused on the potential of the program to facilitate housing recovery for underinsured, low-to-moderate income homeowners, and to do so in innovative, cost-effective ways. For example, in chapter three, I spoke of the initiative undertaken by housing committee members to establish between one and three neighborhood “drop-in” for application assistance, design standards, and “green” building guidelines. This unfortunately never materialized. Program participants were offered a limited range of building materials with the option to pay out-of-pocket for various upgrades. Moreover, we thought the efficient expenditure of these recovery dollars could substantively enhance resiliencies at household, neighborhood, and municipal levels. Funds would have the immediate effect of facilitating recovery for individual home and rental property owners, which could in turn stabilize property values and social fabrics of neighborhoods, and thus help stabilize property tax revenue and facilitate the return of Galveston’s lost population; particularly the phantasmagoric “middle class,” whose exodus was feared to perpetuate without prospects for a viable residential community.

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<sup>122</sup> City staff, housing subcommittee members, and council members, evinced eager expectation for the anticipated market knowledge. I heard Galvestonians use adjectives of precision—e.g., “intelligent” decision-making, “strategic” investment, and “surgical” intervention—to describe value-added benefit of the market study. However, the document that was eventually released by CDM in June 2010 was an underwhelming assemblage of 2010 demographic census data, an inventory of vacant and distressed properties, recent historical-geographic sales data, a cursory review of rental market conditions such as median rent compared to area “fair market rents,” and survey data collected from employees of the six largest island employers.

The recommendations forwarded at the end of the document largely corroborated customary knowledge of city staff and the recommendations of the Urban Land Institute, which had already completed a rapid-assessment study of Galveston in 2009. This included “leveraging strengths” of the historical urban core, develop, i.e., gentrify, “North of Broadway” to expand “middle-class” and “workforce homeowner opportunities, and to engage in aggressive marketing campaign to alter perceptions of Galveston all while developing in “environmentally sensitive” manners. In other words, the eagerly awaited housing market study was not the veritable Rosetta stone to guide housing development; but rather, yet another study of an island that politically engaged Galvestonians understand as “over studied.”

Despite the paltry funds committed to rental properties, advocates from GCRR, Gulf Coast Interfaith, Northside Galveston Taskforce, and the housing outreach committee spoke favorably of recommendations for dividing the first round of CDBG funds that were brought before City Council on May 28, 2009. It was eight months after the storm. Familiar advocates rose to address Council to both voice support and suggest that this was a “critical moment” for Galveston, and that time was of the veritable essence to implement the recovery program. The urgency of time had become a familiar trope of post-storm public discourse, particularly in relation to the efficacy of the City government to facilitate the return of its displaced and home-damaged residents. Other rhetorical variations included assertions that, “People are going to get fed up, throw their hammers in the Bay, and leave for the Mainland.”<sup>123</sup> Prominent advocates such as former mayor and director of GCRR, Barbara Crews noted, “It’s imperative that the City gets this program up and running. It has to prioritize non and under-insured homeowners who wouldn’t be able to recover on their own,” and whose scope of damage was beyond the capacity of assistance through GCRR faith-based volunteer networks. Joe Compian also noted to me that, “Time is of the essence. We need to get on with the business of restoring and rebuilding this community,” adding that, “The Galveston Ministerial Alliance, churches and synagogues, they’re all 100% behind City’s recommendations {for allocation}. Any time you have Catholics, Jews, Muslims, white churches, black churches, and Hispanic churches behind the recommendations, I think it’s a good sign.”

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<sup>123</sup> Late councilman Danny Weber delivered this particular statement when supporting a resolution to waive the permit necessity for sheetrock installation, so as to expedite home repairs. His statement addressed the recurrent public comments of Galvestonians during Council meetings, particularly the meetings immediately after the storm between October and December 2008.

The housing recovery program initially had a disconcertingly small applicant pool. At meetings of the ad hoc “housing outreach” committee that emerged from the housing subgroup of the Long Term Recovery Committee as well as the Northside Galveston Taskforce, committee members consistently stated these concerns to one another and to City and CDM staff members. Several members of the Taskforce, as well as advocates such as Joe Compian, often iterated that the 10-page program application used a template provided by the State of Texas that was dauntingly tedious and discouraging to potential applicants. Their anecdotal experiences consolidated into a collective purview that many homeowners who would income-qualify for the program fundamentally distrusted its intentions. As Mr. M noted at a Taskforce meeting in December 2009, “there are some folks who you just aren’t going to be able to reach,” adding that “my own auntie wouldn’t divulge to me that information that the City asks on that application.” Mr. Compian stated further during one Taskforce meeting in December 2009, “People are beginning to give up hope. They’re willing to accept that hole in their roof. And people are just so sick and tired at the thought of filling out another application.”<sup>124</sup> Other Northside Taskforce members shared anecdotes from acquaintances who believed that the City had an ulterior motive to re-possess and demolish their home.

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<sup>124</sup> The sentiment of distrust I witnessed most frequently from participating in door-to-door outreach with the housing recovery group related to whether or not this was a FEMA program. One notably hostile encounter happened when I knocked on the door of a middle-aged white male who lived east of Offats Bayou. He was wearing a baseball cap signifying Vietnam-veteran status. After I explained the reason for my solicitation, he stared me directly in the eyes for several seconds. His anger swelled with each one passing. Finally he said to me slowly, softly, and purposely, “I didn’t get one god damned thing from FEMA or the government after the storm. I almost lost my house and everything in it. You can take that flier and shove it.” I stared back for a few seconds, nodded, and said “fair enough.” I left the flier in his mailbox once he closed the door on me.

On December 8, outreach committee members met with Deborah Siefert, a public relations liaison with the housing program's managing firm, CDM, to discuss a partnership of outreach efforts. CDM was not a local firm and therefore its employees lacked knowledge of Galveston's social and historical contexts. As she stated in regards to establishing their operations on the island, "We are literally building the bridge as we walk across it." This meeting was indicative of the inconsistent coordination between CDM, relevant City functionaries, and networks of grassroots activists and volunteers who constantly reiterated their desire to provide outreach and application assistance. These offers were only tepidly accepted. Representatives from CDM, as well as City's Grants and Housing Department, periodically attended weekly meetings of the outreach committee. However, this did not produce a coherent public outreach campaign that coordinated with the multiple advocacy groups that contained clear cross-membership, such as the outreach committee, Northside Taskforce, and Gulf Coast Interfaith. The outreach committee thus undertook ad hoc means of publicizing the existence of the recovery program with minimal material support.

During an approximately eight-week period in winter and spring of 2010, several members of the outreach committee initiated a door-to-door canvassing outreach on weekends. This endeavor manifested solidarities amongst the recurring canvassers, however, its informality relative to a formalized institutional outreach created a sense of stymied frustration. Per an informal agreement with the Grants and Housing Department we were asked to direct all questions and inquiries for further information to the City. They at times provided us means to circulate limited information such as program fliers, applications and postage. Additionally, I arranged for the Galveston Housing Authority

to place robocalls to the approximately 4,000 households that had initially registered for the Disaster Housing Assistance Program and arranged for 40 high school volunteers from League City to come to Galveston to assist with production and mailing of informational flyers to DHAP. We set up booths at local supermarkets over the course of two weekends in July 2009. I received only several queries for further information while I staffed a table outside of the Arlan's supermarket on the East End. Our endeavors lacked the capacity to estimate its effectiveness for increasing the applicant pool. At the conclusion of fieldwork, approximately 2,100 homeowners applied for funds. Of that number, 800 satisfied the initial eligibility criteria: 1) Clear title to the property established proving ownership prior to Hurricane Ike, 2) Household income certified to be not in excess 80% of the AMI vis-à-vis several years worth of payroll records and income tax returns, 3) Certification of non-delinquent property taxes, 4) Proof of flood insurance.

Establishing compliance with these eligibility criteria proved difficult due to the extensiveness of records required. This difficulty was compounded by the loss of vital records such as tax returns and income stubs in the storm surge. Moreover, advocates complained that establishing "clear title" to properties was particularly difficult in Galveston due to the preponderance of inherited properties within families. Members of the Northside Taskforce, as well Joe Higgs and Joe Compian from Gulf Coast Interfaith, expressed particular frustration over this particular issue that had caused significant delays in east Texas following Hurricane Rita<sup>125</sup>. Moreover the advanced age of much of

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<sup>125</sup> Higgs and Compian expressed frustration both because it threatened to minimize the pool of otherwise eligible applicants and because it connoted an monological top-down opposite of what Michael Fisher would call "reflexive social institutions," that are flexible and animated by a "rich interchange of

Galveston's housing stock and the mandates of the four historical districts established on the island necessitated another layer of bureaucracy by requiring registration with the State of Texas Historical Commission and compliance with the aesthetic and structural requirements of the city historical districts.

In early 2011, members of the Galveston City Council evinced sentiments of alarm and surprise to witness the community turnout at two specially called public meetings. The meetings were called in response to increasingly noted turmoil surrounding the slow program delivery. The council chambers and the adjacent "overflow" room were completely filled. Approximately 50 residents stood five rows deep outside the chamber doors, straining necks and heads in attempts to hear the proceedings that included testimony of the senior project manager. Speaker after speaker recounted their exasperations with CDM due to what they perceived as a fundamental lack of clear communication concerning their respective application status. Their testimonies further revealed the dilemmas they faced as they awaited approval for repair or reconstruction of their Ike-damaged homes. A single white woman who lives within the East End Historical District applied for program assistance only after she had been under-compensated through flood and homeowners insurance. She encountered problems with her bank that held the mortgage note on her historical home that was also subject to rehabilitation standards due to that designation:

When I did get checks, Chase refused to counter-sign the checks until the house was 90% done. My funds are still sitting in the bank. I have been living without a kitchen, with holes in the floor, and feral cats getting inside. I was approved for this program, but the delay is that the papers are being reviewed by the "Hysterical" Commission in Austin; I'm also getting letters from the "Hysterical" Commission here telling me that I need to fix my porch. I've talked to two attorneys and can't get Chase to move on this. I think it's pathetic that I have to ask the government for money when I did my bit. I'm still

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communications and dialogue (122). In other words, the State of Texas was not learning from mistakes made after Hurricane Rita that impeded the efficient delivery of federal restitution to homeowners.

paying my taxes on the house, I'm paying insurance. How much longer do I have to wait to figure something out?

An elderly Hispanic homeowner on the near West End echoed the tenor of many other homeowners when he stated that he had been approved and had submitted paperwork but was now in limbo because he was receiving conflicting information from CDM over whether he needed to elevate his home further. He succinctly added, "It's been a good long while without nothing and I'm still living in my upstairs." He is one of possibly thousands of Galvestonians who continue to live in states of disrepair, even as much of Galveston's environment appears "normal" again.

Another Hispanic male testified that he had been living in Houston but was now essentially homeless. Repairs to his home were "80% complete" but was unable to move back in without the threat of a monetary fine if he did not obtain a certificate of completion. His caseworker was unable to direct him to someone specific who would assist him. His city councilperson had been unresponsive to his repeated inquiries for assistance. Following his testimony he was directed to a case manager. During the meetings that were held on January 24 and 31, Galvestonians praised their caseworkers for their responsiveness. Galvestonians criticized their caseworkers for their perceived lack of initiative to answer questions or to help problem-solve applicants' dilemmas and "double binds" (Fortun 2001). Several speakers commended their "excellent" caseworkers and stated that the workers themselves expressed frustrations within the lack of clear communication within CDM's operations. One white female speaking on behalf of she and her husband articulated this dilemma succinctly:

I really don't have any questions. I just have some statements for you that have been brewing. We've been approved. If I had to pinpoint one thing in this process, it's the **lack of information**. Your website is for internal use only. It's frustrating to look for your case and find "Work in Progress." Our caseworker has been great. Sterling Patrick has been great, but it's been so frustrating to find out things like our caseworker needed

information that her supervisor already had. Why do we have to beg for information? No one wants to hear, “Go downstairs and see a caseworker. We’ve already gone to our caseworkers, and the poor things don’t have any information. Not because they don’t want to help us, because they JUST DON’T!” A lot of people just don’t have a clue. **I’m angry, and I’ve been trying to be grateful since the storm but it’s getting REALLY hard!** I got a call from someone at CDM, I won’t say who, but not our contractor, asking us how many stories our house was! After two years and a file THIS thick! I understand it’s easier to call than look in a file, but that’s just stupid business. That’s so basic and I’m appalled.

Per guidelines of the federal Stafford Act that governs supplemental disaster recovery aid, certifying that applicants are not receiving a duplication of benefits already received through alternative sources such as private insurance became a time consuming task for a staff of 20 caseworkers who were administering nearly 800 eligible applications. When City Councilperson Elizabeth Beeton suggested the possibility that CDM hire additional caseworkers, the firm’s liaison demurred that they were comfortable with current staffing levels. The contract terms that City Council entered into with CDM also had the effect of creating “double binds” that further exacerbated applicants housing vulnerabilities because they were not able to garner relocation expenses. These contract terms were enacted under the rationale that more homeowners would be served through the program; however, Council did not adequately consider the consequences of that decision. Thus while applicants were receiving deferred-payment forgivable loans to rehab or reconstruct their homes, they continued to make mortgage and insurance payments on the house they were not inhabiting while now also having to find and maintain alternative housing accommodations as an out-of-pocket expense. This created pressing hardships because applicants already federally qualified as low-to-moderate income and were applying to the program in the first place because of limited economic means exacerbated by the hurricane. Further, an ancillary double bind emerged because CDM was forced to turn-away applicants whose income level qualified for the program but the applicant

sought reimbursement for repairs they had already made to their home. Such proactive attempts to complete housing repairs often caused financial stress because property owners had acquired funds for those repairs through private bank loans or from family or friends.<sup>126</sup> However the State of Texas did not allow reimbursements for personal expenses accrued during rehabilitation.

CDM's representatives provided procedural, yet vague, reasons to account for the slow pace of processing applications from initial eligibility-certification to final construction. They cited a litany of federal Stafford regulations that govern disaster assistance and their unprecedented number of historical-home applicants that added to the considerable time delays. Representatives noted that one worker in the Texas State Historical Commission was responsible for processing state designations of historical status. While bureaucratic delays and inefficiencies could have been more realistically anticipated, the exceedingly slow implementation frustrated CDM's own representatives. The increasingly publicity of program delays attracted the attention of the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, whose executive staff warned that CDM and the City risked the withdrawal of program funds if performance benchmarks were not reached by September 2011. CDM did not meet their benchmark that month, but were given an extension on the premise that the firm had shown considerable increase in the number of eligibility certifications and construction starts. It therefore remains an open question of whether the homeowner repair program will ultimately descend into a state of unmitigated catastrophe of missed opportunities to assist vulnerable households who

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<sup>126</sup> Joe Compian from GCRR and Gulf Coast Interfaith repeatedly asserted this problem of Texas's state statute inflexibility, noting in contradistinction that the State of Iowa had allowed for comparable reimbursements to homeowners who made repairs to their homes in the wake of the 2008 Mississippi River flooding.

remain in liminal housing arrangements three years after the storm. However, witnessing the cavalcade of speakers testify to their unresolved housing situations and the inability to adequately resolve them with the assistance of CDM this long after the hurricane suggested that our own “dreamworld” visions of pervasive housing stock restoration that fellow members of the LTRC housing committee will likely go unrealized. Instead, applicants and the management firm will continue forward with the slow process of mediating housing vulnerabilities in the face of bureaucratic realities and inconsistent competencies.

*Conclusions: Liminality and thwarted community transcendence*

Hurricane Ike, as Benjamin suggested about catastrophes like the Lisbon earthquake and the Mississippi River flood of 1929, knocked historical time out of a continuum in Galveston (Fischer 2009: 115). At its most benign, the storm altered the banalities of everyday routine, requiring individuals households to adapted to conditions of protracted displacement and housing damage that become a veritable “new normal.” The immensity of its damage to the human and physical infrastructures irrevocably altered lives. Thousands of former residents continued their lives in exile or through willful relocation to less vulnerable places. As I’ve attempted to show throughout, while Hurricane Ike wrought great damage, but it also elicited gracious acts. Pleas and assertions that proclaimed an unprecedented island-wide unity through the parlance of “One Galveston” over-determined the numerous small and committed acts; whether as mutual altruism, “compassionate” commitment to selfless help of neighbors, family, friends, or strangers. Emergency response personnel tendered acts of heroism both unnoticed and commended. Staff and volunteers from organizations under Galveston

County Restore and Rebuild provided consistent and utterly necessary assistance through direct cash and pro bono labor.

As the one-year anniversary approached, a contingent of residents led by long-term recovery chairperson, and future mayoral candidate, Betty Massey worked with the Galveston Historical Foundation and other local organizations to produce several days of commemorative events designed for “Revival and Reflections.” If the storm knocked everyday time from its continuum, then the intended function of these events was to symbolically realign time into its continuum. Commemorative activities included a six-week long display of the “Ofrenda to the Gulf,” which was ceremonially opened on September 8, 2009. The ofrenda, modeled after the ritualistic “offerings” of *Dia de los Muertos*, was a circular ritual space constructed from metal pegboard fencing that surrounded the permanent 1900 Storm memorial. According to the designer, a local artist named Karla Kay, the ofrenda was intended to serve as a space for Galvestonians to post their commemorative “offerings” to the Gulf so as to foster symbolic catharsis. As such it provided an opportunity to further one’s affective transition from remembrance to restoration in a moment of reckoning what the Gulf of Mexico “gives” and what it “takes away.” People posted all matters of detritus from the storm: mementoes and messages, poetry and pictures. A chain of beer bottle caps was strung around various other mementos along with a note commemorating the manner in which this gentleman and his family experienced Ike. There were pictures of storm ravaged home interiors, a picture of mountain lion found on Bolivar Peninsula; teddy bears and leis; boxes of MREs as well as “thank you” notes to the Salvation Army and Red Cross. One person left a collage of images that juxtaposed a visual from the National Weather Service showing

Ike's likely path across Galveston. In the middle was a jagged circular shape containing an image of an interior scene of destruction. I thought it signified the storm tearing a life asunder. The surrounding images showed comparable destruction to a home, a life, and perhaps a sense of place. From the whimsical, to the redemptive, to the deadly serious, the mementoes remained for the next six weeks. During my several visits to the ofrenda I noted the silence. Despite the temporary vendors selling glow-wands and snow cones adjacent to the space, and the children playing alongside, individuals and small groups sat together in silence as they stared at the various offerings or fixed their gaze to the Gulf. Amateur photographers milled around the offerings and periodically took pictures of the sacramental detritus. An anthropologist shared in the silence, his weighted and overwrought thoughts on all that was lost and tenuously held in his own life during the past year eluding a cathartic synthesis of reckoning and restoration.

After the ceremonial dedication of the ofrenda, the "Ike Anniversary Choir" tendered a hymn of grace and supplication that connected Hurricane Ike to the Great 1900 Storm. They sang a rendition of "Queen of the Waves," which is said to have been sung by the nuns of the Ursuline covenant during the night of the 1900 Storm. At the time, I was downtown on the Strand with a colleague awaiting the entrance of the "Torch of Life" that was traveling in relay from the ofrenda. She and I joked that instead of "Remembrance and Revival," the anniversary would be more aptly titled, "The Don't F\*\*\*ing Talk to Me about Ike" anniversary. We noted an intensifying sentiment of Galvestonians who were loath to discuss Ike and their storm stories. As we joked about the seeming over-determination of collective redemption in the anniversary proceedings, the torch arrived. The mayor and city manager each held it aloft, side-by-side, leading a

procession of Galvestonians behind it as the gathered crowd began cheering. Like an Olympic flame, the Mayor lit commemorative fire that would last the week before offering what had become standard remarks about community unity and resiliency:

We have indeed come a very long way in one year. We have a very long way to go. But in my 12-year tenure as mayor, it is the first time that I've seen this community come together as it never has come together before. And I believe this community will stay together to bring it back ... for the future of our children and grandchildren.

I hope that people take time to pat themselves on the back and celebrate how far we have come. I hope that they reconnect with neighbors and friends that they maybe have been separated from because of the storm. I hope they take time to heal. This was a hurtful experience for all of us, and I hope it helps along that path of healing. I hope that this communicates to everyone in the outside world that we're not back, we're not 100 percent, but we're on our way.

Fittingly, the rains started the following day. It barely let up for the next four days. The deluge of water forced the cancellation of most of the outdoor events, including the sunrise service, and forced the closing ceremonies of "Revival and Remembrance" inside the 1894 Grand Opera house.

I discussed Galvestonian "disaster culture" as a space of heterogeneous responses oriented around ineludible constraints caused by pervasive infrastructural damage and common recovery problems such as fraught adjudications of insurance settlements and public assistance claims. Upon the conclusion of formal fieldwork in 2011, the collective status of Galveston's recovery was also heterogeneous, containing antithetical elements of on-going displacement, financial difficulties, and emotional stresses, which co-existed against the return of banal routines for thousands of other Galvestonians who gradually "put the storm behind them," insofar as it no longer affected the performance of everyday life. With each passing year, less attention was paid to commemorating the anniversary of the storm. This past year, there was virtually no anniversary mention of Hurricane Ike in the *Galveston County Daily News*. Even if exacerbated vulnerabilities are less visibly

glaring and less acutely experienced within households, the long-term effects linger. No comprehensive data is available at this time to gauge the continued unmet housing, financial, and mental health needs of Galvestonians; however, the urban fortunes of the municipal government and the economic infrastructure remain in a precarious state as a result of the decrease in tax and civil service revenue, as well as unfavorable national economic conditions. The recently passed FY2012 city budget contained no supplemental disaster recovery operating assistance for the first time since the storm. A hiring freeze has been enacted. City Manager Steve Leblanc was unceremoniously fired in April 2011. This a controversial decision supported by Mayor Jaworski that was predicated less on publicly stated performance issues than on closed-door political rivalries that are remarked upon as commonplace in Galveston. The mayor has himself come under a maelstrom of public complaints due to his support for the development of master planned, mixed income public housing. Meanwhile organizations such as Galveston County Restore and Rebuild have since disbanded, while related agencies such as Gulf Coast Interfaith and the Northside Galveston Taskforce have turned their efforts away from disaster recovery advocacy towards issues such as the proposed redistricting of City Council boundaries. In that set of political and economic arrangements, lives carry on in Galveston. Prominent residents such as City Councilman Danny Weber and Dr. Malcolm Broderick, distinguished professor of neuroscience, student of Japanese culture, and noteworthy poet and filmmaker, died suddenly during the past year. Incoming classes of medical students at UTMB enter their training unaffected and unknowing of what nearly became of this institution that was flooded with six feet of water one September night three years ago. Galvestonians increasingly remember to

forget the night that an uninvited storm kicked a city to its collective knees and laid thousands of individual lives to the ground.

One's view of a collective rise to resilient functioning depends on their social location and personal purview. This anthropologist witnessed a fall, a half-rise, and an on-going stagger upon a municipal foundation vulnerable to population loss, economic stagnation, and the diminishment of will on the part of residents to participate in formal participatory politics comparable to post-Ike, 2009. Vulnerability and resilience, dreamworlds and catastrophes, each inter-relating keyword indexing uncertainty and wherewithal, hope and loss, ensconced in the efforts to devise and build more sustainable formations of life on a barrier island in the Gulf of Mexico. Unfortunately, these hopes have largely given way to the realities of bureaucracy, parochial politics, and an inherited set of national anxieties that attends with the Great Recession. As such, the only certainty on Galveston is the periodicity of the tides and the knowledge that one day another storm will rise.

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