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Beyond Disaster Exceptionalism: Social Movement Developments in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina

Rachel E. Luft

In New Orleans, in late summer 2008, commemoration of the third anniversary of Hurricane Katrina was punctuated by preparations for Hurricane Gustav. While groups were launching their memorial events, radios and televisions droned steadily as the countdown to Gustav intensified. City, state, and federal officials bridged the three-year span by contextualizing their announcements about the first significant hurricane threat to the city since Katrina, in Katrina itself: Gustav-related city-assisted evacuation plans, status of levee protections, National Guard activation, and shelter availability were framed and assessed with regard to the hurricane events of 2005.¹ R. David Paulison, FEMA Administrator, exemplified these tendencies on September 1, 2008, the day Gustav made landfall, and three days after the Katrina anniversary of August 29:

It's unprecedented cooperation among all the federal agencies. . . . And what it allows us to do is share information with what's going on so we don't end up with what happened in Katrina. . . . During Katrina you noticed that buses didn't come in until after the storm hit landfall; urban search and rescue teams didn't come until after landfall; ambulances didn't come until after landfall. All of these things are put in place ahead of the storm this time.²

As the region braced for Gustav, Katrina was remade as a staging ground for what officials promised would be a better coordinated, more humane, and more efficient storm management operation. Whether or not the government *was* as prepared as its self-congratulatory discourse implied—and early assessments were clearly mixed—there was no mistaking the attempt to show that lessons had been learned, systems overhauled, and communications improved. State framing of Gustav was as much about Katrina as it was about the impending storm.

Government officials were not the only actors to have studied the Katrina events and learned some lessons. Grassroots social justice organizers in New

Orleans and their allies demonstrated during Gustav the cultivation of a new disaster action repertoire based on their experience of Katrina. Although composed of fewer pronouncements (but equally influenced by Katrina's aftermath), this repertoire functioned as a parallel and interacting universe to official hurricane operations. Before, during, and after Gustav, social movement organizers both anticipated and responded to State actions.³ Their efforts operationalized key strategic and tactical insights developed in the years since Katrina. These insights have guided social movement activity since the hurricanes of 2005, and come together to form post-Katrina emergent movement orientations.

This article examines leading New Orleans-based, grassroots movement orientations in what I describe as the second generation of Katrina social movements. I characterize the development of these orientations and provide some examples of their articulation and utilization during and after Hurricane Gustav. As the first meaningful disaster threat to the region since Katrina, Hurricane Gustav provides an opportunity to examine strategic and tactical movement lessons as they cycle back to inform disaster preparedness and response. The orientations are still unfolding and are neither unitary nor shared across all movement groups. Nevertheless, it is still possible to characterize their primary features.

The first post-Katrina emergent movement orientation rejects disaster exceptionalism and seeks to recontextualize threat, hazard, and trauma in the daily conditions faced by disenfranchised groups. It understands "disaster" to be different in degree, not in kind, from the ongoing experience of social inequality for many in the United States. The second orientation is a strategic, integrated model of service provision and grassroots organizing. Whereas most first-generation post-Katrina groups privileged either service provision or resistance activity, second-generation groups lean toward a strategic synthesis of the two, offering specific services as a base-building tactic. The third orientation is a human rights approach to disaster response. It draws from three disparate human rights traditions—the Black Liberation Movement (BLM), the United Nations (UN), and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—that have converged in post-Katrina New Orleans. The human rights framework rejects the Robert T. Stafford Act as master disaster policy in the United States, and looks to international covenants and guiding principles to govern disaster response.

As a sociologist at the University of New Orleans with research interests in race, gender, and social movements, and a white woman activist in local struggles for racial and gender justice, I build my discussion out of participant

observation in post-Katrina New Orleans–based movements for a just reconstruction. Over the three and a half years since Katrina, I have attended hundreds of community and organizational meetings and shared many informal conversations with movement leaders and their constituents. Additionally, I have conducted a dozen formal interviews with local and regional movement leaders and forty-nine interviews with displaced New Orleans residents who participated in movement activity.⁴ I have also drawn from news accounts, organizational Web sites and Listservs, internal movement documents, and e-mail messages to supplement this experience, as well as from scholarly literatures in disaster, social movements, human rights, race, and gender.

The first section that follows describes the social movement landscape in New Orleans after Katrina, and identifies two stages of post-Katrina movement activity: a first generation characterized by large groups oriented to hurricane response and agenda setting for the recovery; and a second generation of smaller groups addressing specific areas of chronic social problems that interact with disaster. The second section introduces the emergent movement orientations, whose seeds were planted during the first generation, and bloomed in the second. I end the discussion of each orientation with examples of its application during or after Hurricane Gustav.

Post-Katrina Social Movement Organization in New Orleans: Two Generations

Just as Katrina is still in the process of remaking much of New Orleans's physical, demographic, policy, and cultural landscape, so is it adjusting the city's progressive social movement organization. I focus here on grassroots social movement organizations, or SMOs. By "grassroots" I mean "grounded in a local community,"⁵ where the constituency is composed of people without access to many resources (in this case, low-income people of color), the leadership comes out of the constituency, and the group operates with minimal infrastructure. By "SMO" I mean a formal "organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement these goals."⁶

In the three and a half years since Katrina, scholarship on the hurricane events has exploded. Eighteen academic journals from various disciplines have produced special Katrina volumes. The Social Science Research Council's "Hurricane Katrina Research Bibliography," updated monthly, is nearly seventy pages, and grouped by area of study, such as culture and tradition, evacuation, and housing. Eminent disaster scholar Kai Erikson predicts Katrina will be

the most studied disaster in history. Yet academic documentation of social movement activity is almost nonexistent.⁷ The SSRC's bibliography has no area entry for social movements. A review of its titles suggests that perhaps six articles include social movements as a primary focus. But some have implied that Katrina-related grievances are among the most compelling of our time.⁸ Immediately after the hurricane, some movement leaders expected that Katrina would rekindle a mass movement in the United States. Chokwe Lumumba, for example, founder of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and a significant contributor to the People's Hurricane Relief Fund, called Katrina "the Emmett Till of our generation." Although there was no national uprising, the amount of movement activity on the Gulf Coast has been remarkable, especially in light of the fact that much of the population remains displaced and poor people have notoriously low levels of movement participation.⁹ The relatively scant literature on disaster and social movements suggests that, although disaster can be a galvanizing force, new "na-tech" disasters—part natural, part human-made—can have corrosive effects on community solidarity.¹⁰ This article is a response to both the amount of movement activity in New Orleans since Katrina and the dearth of attention it has received in scholarly research.

The First Generation

Hurricane Katrina reorganized the social movement terrain of New Orleans, washing away some groups and providing the conditions for the emergence of new ones. Directly after the disaster and for the next two years, the movement landscape was characterized by crisis organizing. I use the term *crisis organizing* literally here because, for many in the city, the period of disaster, disruption, and trauma has been extensive. Some preexisting movement groups, such as the national Association for Community Organizing and Reform Now (ACORN), immediately launched new campaigns. Founded in 1970 by Wade Rathke, headquartered in New Orleans, and directed locally by Stephen Bradberry, ACORN began an early effort to defend Black land rights and prevent widespread demolition of damaged property. New grassroots relief and reconstruction groups also sprang up rapidly out of preexisting movement networks. The Common Ground Collective (CG), founded by former Black Panther and Green Party local candidate Malik Rahim, mobilized an estimated thirteen thousand activists and college students to provide services, distribute supplies, gut flood-devastated houses, and conduct bioremediation. Its motto was "Solidarity, Not Charity." The People's Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF) emerged as a large coalition cofounded by Curtis Muhammad out

of a loose local network called “Community Labor United,” together with local and national Black Liberation leaders and other progressives. Its goal was to build a reconstruction movement that would organize Black, low-income New Orleanians to challenge a looming State- and corporate-driven recovery. When Muhammad left PHRF in spring 2006, Kali Akuno, a thirty-four-year-old organizer from the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement became executive director. Meanwhile Muhammad founded the People’s Organizing Committee (POC), and both PHRF and POC pursued community organizing and political education among those most severely affected by Katrina. Each strove to establish a reconstruction agenda based on principles of participatory democracy, self-determination, and accountability. These four groups dominated the local movement landscape in the first two years after Katrina, as they sought, to varying degrees, to make resistance to State recovery policy central to the reconstruction. All were cofounded by baby boomer men and run by Black men who had the local and national movement capital to convene groups, garner a national progressive audience, and raise resources. In this way, the early post-Katrina configurations, built by New Orleanians out of enduring local and national ties, responded to the immediate aftermath of the disaster. I call this period the first generation of post-Katrina movement activity.

In 2006, the large movement response organizations were still receiving national attention and support in the form of donations, progressive press, and volunteers, whom the groups folded into their respective relief and reconstruction projects. ACORN, Common Ground, the People’s Hurricane Relief Fund, and the People’s Organizing Committee mobilized volunteer work groups composed of activists and college students from around the country, paralleling the many faith-based and nonprofit volunteer efforts. The four organizations focused primarily on the Ninth Ward, which had rapidly become the symbol of postdisaster land contestation. PHRF and POC led local and regional Survivor Councils composed of low-income Black displaced New Orleanians. As bottom-up structures of participation, self-determination, and accountability, Survivor Councils were designed for people excluded from many of the formal planning and recovery channels. ACORN created a similar structure, called the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association. Additionally, PHRF convened a work group to pursue tenants’ rights, and launched a human rights campaign. POC focused on reconstruction activity in the lower Ninth Ward with the intent to create construction work training programs, and organized displaced residents in FEMA trailer parks in and around New Orleans and Baton Rouge. ACORN supported low income home owners

with counseling on mortgage and foreclosure relief. The groups also organized protest activity directed at FEMA, HUD, the Louisiana Recovery Association, the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, and the Red Cross.

The Second Generation

Within the first generation of movement groups, the seeds of the second were germinating. By 2006, a different set of leaders had founded new organizations. Most were younger (in their late twenties and early thirties), more than half were women, and they were more racially diverse, including Latinos and Asians as well as Blacks. The new organizations were a response to the first generation of movement groups as much as they were to Hurricane Katrina. Though built from pre-Katrina political visions, three of the leading groups of the second generation had begun as PHRF work groups; their organizers left the first-generation groups and founded independent organizations. The three groups are paradigmatic of the second generation because of the nature of their ties to the first generation, their movement-building leadership after the waning of first generation groups, and certain shared political and tactical orientations.

The first of the second-generation groups is composed of sister projects: the New Orleans Women's Health Clinic (NOWHC) and the New Orleans Women's Health and Justice Initiative (NOWHJI). Founded by women who were active members of the local chapter of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence before Katrina, they had also been important contributors to PHRF in the early post-Katrina months, but left because of concerns about gender issues and sexism within the organization. The clinic, located in the Tremé, a historic neighborhood and one of the oldest communities of free people of color in the United States, provides reproductive and sexual health care to low-income women of color, while broadly interpreting reproductive freedom in the context of other struggles for racial, economic, and gender justice. It works closely with the Initiative, a community-organizing project that links race-, gender-, and sexuality-based issues of health and violence. Together the two projects provide political education and seek to strengthen a community of women in the area, while meeting some of its health care needs.

The mission of the second group, Safe Streets, Strong Communities (SSSC), is to reform the criminal justice system and "build a world where all communities are safe and strong. This means putting resources into our children and families by funding schools, housing, and services instead of jails and prisons. To do this, we must build power in our communities by standing

together and demanding changes.”¹¹ Founded in December 2005 by Norris Henderson and Xochitl Bervera, SSSC made its first priority “to help those individuals who had been in Orleans Parish Prison prior to Katrina, many of whom were being held illegally for minor, nonviolent offenses. In the early days, right after the storm, Safe Streets was basically performing triage for a broken system.”¹² Henderson, a Black formerly incarcerated person, was joined a year later by Latina codirector Rosana Cruz, and soon they were directing their attention to the criminal justice system itself, as part of what local independent journalist Jordan Flaherty called “the long-term catastrophe that the city is still in.”¹³ SSSC focuses on three areas of reform: indigent defense, Orleans Parish Prison, and police. Its tactics include community organizing, leadership development, protest, and local advocacy.

The third group, the New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice (NOWCRJ), works with the large population of day laborers who have come to the city since Katrina. Directed by Saket Soni, an Indian-American labor organizer from Chicago, NOWCRJ organizes for labor and immigrant justice. It has undertaken several significant lawsuits against employer labor abuse, worked to reform guest labor policy, and advocated and protested locally and in Washington, D.C. Recently, NOWCRJ formed STAND, “a grassroots group of elders, farmers, skilled workers, and fathers who have formerly experienced or are experiencing homelessness in New Orleans. . . . STAND seeks to create affordable housing and safe public spaces for our displaced families and communities. STAND believes unity and self-determination are the most viable solutions for devastated communities in New Orleans.”¹⁴ STAND took a leadership role in documenting and challenging state evacuation procedure during Hurricane Gustav.

The second generation of grassroots Katrina movement groups understands its work to be part of the Katrina recovery, but directed toward ongoing social problems. Social justice movement activity has become more decentralized, moving away from overarching reconstruction work and agenda setting by large coalition organizations. The second-generation groups locate their mission in the broader context of racial, gender, economic, immigrant, and environmental justice. They tie service provision to community organizing and perceive New Orleans’s hurricane experience to be a concentrated, accelerated version of trends around the country, including a shrinking welfare state and infrastructure, privatization, and militarism.¹⁵

By December 2007, both PHRF and POC had dissolved.¹⁶ CG had shrunk considerably, and ACORN had returned to its national focus on home foreclosures. The independent groups of the second generation formed a loose,

decentralized social justice network that came together to work on certain issues, such as the defense of public housing in late 2007, and the third anniversary Katrina commemoration. By the time Hurricane Gustav made landfall in September 2008, New Orleans was beginning its fourth year after Katrina and was well into the second generation of post-Katrina movement activity.

Second-Generation Katrina Movement Orientations

The second generation of Katrina social movement activity is reflected in the three organizations introduced above: the New Orleans Women's Health Clinic and the New Orleans Women's Health and Justice Initiative; Safe Streets, Strong Communities; and the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice. In this section I identify three of the second generation leading emergent movement orientations. The first two—moving beyond disaster exceptionalism and integrating service provision and grassroots organizing—are reflected across the three groups. The third orientation—a human rights framework—has a more tenuous relationship to second-generation groups, but has a noticeable presence in the greater post-Katrina social movement culture.

Beyond Disaster Exceptionalism

Traditionally, scholars have distinguished disasters from other kinds of harmful events by characterizing them as “sudden” or “explosive,” discrete or “unique,” and “acute.”¹⁷ These designations have sought to render exceptional both the disasters themselves and the experience of the people who encounter them. In the 1980s, a new, constructionist school of disaster scholarship began to emphasize the preexisting social conditions that contribute to and exacerbate disaster, pointing to the social origins of disaster and calling into question the notion of their suddenness and discreteness. It emphasized the ongoing conditions of “social vulnerability”—poverty, racism, sexism—that construct and interact with disaster.¹⁸ Understanding these enduring social problems as disastrous in their own right has further challenged the narrow assessment of natural disasters and other emergencies as exceptionally acute. From this perspective, “the line separating the chronic from the acute becomes even more blurred.”¹⁹

Social vulnerability scholarship has helped to identify how “the challenges of life are a ‘permanent disaster’” for people already oppressed by class, race, gender, sexuality, disability, age, and other forces of systemic oppression.²⁰ It moves to displace “natural” disasters as the greatest risk to human well-being and to replace them with an understanding of the social and ongoing condi-

tions that produce daily risk, suffering, and trauma. It also helps to explain the behavior of people who already experience daily hazards because they live at the intersection of poverty, racism, and/or sexism when they face what appears to be a discrete disaster.²¹

Within weeks of Hurricane Katrina's landfall, social scientists were publishing analyses of the disaster from social constructionist and social vulnerability perspectives.²² They noted that years of human and infrastructural neglect—the racialized poverty that had 27 percent of New Orleans's inhabitants living below the poverty line; the poorly designed and maintained levees; and the federal government's inadequately managed and funded emergency management operations agency, to cite only the most obvious examples—had produced the devastating outcomes of the storm. At the same time, grassroots movement leaders were also pointing to the social construction of the disaster. In addition to identifying the particular race, class, and gender determinants of Katrina's outcomes, they also contextualized them in the long history of U.S. imperialism, the "national oppression" of Blacks, and the disenfranchisement of women and children.²³ Instead of emphasizing the exceptional elements of Hurricane Katrina, these grassroots leaders saw in the policy decisions that helped produce its outcomes, the standard operating procedure of the U.S. government; they likened the displacement, impoverishment, and service deprivation of hurricane survivors to the chronic conditions of racialized poverty. Additionally they predicted that the reconstruction would turn the Gulf Coast, and in particular New Orleans, into a laboratory for privatization as part of what Naomi Klein calls "disaster capitalism."²⁴ They further anticipated that the reconstruction of New Orleans would become a bellwether for incursions into domestic infrastructure in other parts of the country, calling it the canary in the mines of U.S. homeland policy. As movement lawyer Bill Quigley put it more recently, responding to the federal bailout of financial institutions in late 2008, "Welcome to Katrina world."²⁵

Social constructionist and social vulnerability perspectives were apparent at the grassroots in the narrative devices first-generation movement organizers used to link pre- and postdisaster New Orleans to sites around the country. As they spoke to a steady stream of volunteers, movement leaders urged visitors to "make the connections" between their own communities and New Orleans. They insisted that "the storm began a long time before Katrina." When they asked visitors if they were "preparing for the Katrina in your own backyard," they were not referring to the threat of natural disaster elsewhere (though they reminded them of such a threat when nonlocals wondered whether New Orleans should be rebuilt), but rather to every community's

structures of disenfranchisement. These refrains were picked up by solidarity activists nationwide, who helped to make the linkages. In an early article, San Francisco-based Catalyst Project organizer Molly McClure tied disaster exceptionalism to a charitable—as opposed to political and systemic—response to the storm: “With charity, I don’t have to connect the dots between sudden catastrophes like Katrina, and the perhaps slower but very similar economic devastation happening in poor communities and communities of color, every day, right here, in my city.”²⁶

First-generation Katrina movement groups de-exceptionalized disaster in order to reframe the recovery and reconstruction process in the broader context of ongoing U.S. social problems. Second-generation groups did so in order to move beyond Katrina to the ongoing social problems themselves. Although Safe Streets began with Katrina triage, for example, it proceeded to tackle the New Orleans criminal justice system. “The criminal justice and public safety system in New Orleans was in crisis long before Katrina devastated our city,” explained an SSSC brochure in 2007.

From the tragic waters of Katrina, we have been given an opportunity for a fresh start. As we rebuild our homes, schools, parks and levees, let us rebuild a criminal justice system that provides safety from all forms of violence and crime, and is democratic, fair and accountable.²⁷

Similarly, The New Orleans Workers’ Center first targeted day laborer rights abuses, and then sought to reform the H2B (temporary guest worker) visa itself. Second-generation SMOs produced an anti-exceptionalist discourse of the disaster by targeting the systemic conditions that helped to create it.

Like Safe Streets and the New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice, the New Orleans Women’s Health Clinic was birthed by a poststorm crisis, specifically in affordable health care. Organizers on the ground perceived the federal, state, and local governments to be using Katrina as an opportunity to remake both public policy and New Orleans itself, especially through the drastic curtailment of public infrastructure such as public housing, public education, and public health care.²⁸ In the wake of the impending health-care disaster due more to post-Katrina policy than to the hurricane itself, the women of INCITE! founded the clinic to meet women’s reproductive and sexual health needs. After observing the interlocking effects of the State’s response to Katrina on low-income women of color, cofounder and interim director Shana Griffin began to understand the way in which disaster was being used as a vehicle for limiting reproductive freedom in a larger program of population

control. From this perspective, the attending conditions of natural disaster, such as evacuation and reentry, are decentered; they are then reinterpreted as *opportunities*, either for social control *or* for resistance, where in this case resistance means reproductive justice. Griffin explained, “I’m less interested in talking now about hurricanes, and more about disasters. The disaster is the government response. It has to do with government policy and population control; with disenfranchisement, forced assimilation, reproduction.”

Griffin’s comments came seven days after Hurricane Gustav and five days before Hurricane Ike. Her recontextualization was striking in an environment in which the social and physical impact of the latest round of major storms was literally all around us. Despite the upheaval, Griffin was already moving from hurricanes to reproductive justice, and then back again, as she sought to apply her developing model to emergency preparedness:

We’ve thought deeply about this for the last few days. Okay, [the clinic] raised some money [for Gustav efforts]. What would a more proactive response be? . . . What is justice in the context of sexual health and reproduction? What does preparing a disaster kit look like in the context of reproductive justice? Having safer sex supplies, having resources in the cities where women are likely to go, information on WIC, free formula, diapers, battered women’s shelter information in the cities, because the shelters are not safe.²⁹

Since Katrina, movement organizers who live at ground zero for hurricane threats understand that a narrow approach to disaster will ensure neither well-being nor justice.

Service Provision and Grassroots Organizing: A Strategic Synthesis

In recent history, the paradigmatic strategic synthesis of service provision and movement building was the “survival programs” of the Black Panther Party (BPP).³⁰ These programs, explained BPP Chief of Staff David Hilliard, were for “survival pending revolution—not something to replace revolution or challenge the power relations demanding radical action, but an activity that strengthens us for the coming fight, a lifeboat or raft leading us safely to shore.”³¹ In addition to free breakfasts for schoolchildren, the Panthers provided an array of services, such as free health care, busing to prisons, pest control, and shoes.³² The programs were designed to “satisfy the immediate needs of the people while simultaneously raising their level of consciousness.”³³ They functioned to improve the daily lives of BPP constituents, as well as to build solidarity, political analysis, self-determination, and loyalty.

Although Black radicals debated the risks and costs of providing services at the time, by the 1970s and 1980s, many more social movement leaders who had similarly sought to link service provision to movement building and structural change were observing that their resistance efforts were increasingly swallowed by demands for services.³⁴ The State had also responded to the social movements of the 1960s with a host of community programs, and after a generation of nonprofit professionalism dependent on State and foundation funding, there was a sense among movement leaders that these State-sponsored programs had usurped the forces of radical social transformation. More recently, the revival of localism and anarchism has sparked renewed social movement interest in the creation of a parallel infrastructure that meets people's needs independently of corporate and State sponsorship.

In New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, movement organizations of the first generation differed in their approaches to service provision. Among them, Common Ground was the most closely identified with relief. Founder Malik Rahim, with his background in both the BPP and Green Party environmentalism, and other CG leaders with strong anarchist and do-it-yourself orientations sought to “fill the void created by federal, state, and city governments’ unprecedented and catastrophic failure. . . . The work itself has often been to fill the shoes of a government gone AWOL—providing such basic services as potable water, medical services, and garbage pickup—proactively addressing needs normally assigned to our government by way of the social contract.”³⁵ The goal was that residents would eventually replace outside volunteers.³⁶ Although many of the large-scale relief activities were curtailed by 2007, several CG-founded organizations with specific service missions remain active as of this writing, most notably, the Common Ground Health Clinic on the west bank of the Mississippi River, and the Women's Shelter of the lower Ninth Ward, now an independent nonprofit.

At the other end of the first generation spectrum, the People's Hurricane Relief Fund defined its agenda as building a resistance movement and took a public stand against directly providing services to those affected by Katrina. A mission statement announced:

Political power is the only guarantee of relief. . . . We organize to build strong political coalitions locally, nationally, and internationally to win the demands of the Survivors. . . . We support and network service providers of housing, health care, case management and legal services to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and residents. We do not provide direct services.³⁷

PHRF organizers debated the line between base building and meeting people's basic needs.³⁸ With the exception of some early reconstruction work in the lower Ninth Ward, and its Katrina on the Ground program, which mobilized Black college students in 2006, some PHRF leaders eschewed the relief activities CG was known for. For them, service provision was shorthand for a wide swath of liberal reforms that mediate the system without offering fundamental change. Their position was rooted in a variety of political arguments, building on those of early Black Liberation leaders who condemned "the pacification of radical dissent"³⁹ achieved through "discourses, programs and other tactics . . . for governing the very subjects whose problems they seek to redress."⁴⁰ PHRF leaders invoked the poverty programs of the 1960s and the misappropriation of Black need, agreeing with Black Liberationists that "insurgent demands for Black indigenous control converged with liberal reform initiatives to produce a moderate Black political regime and incorporate radical dissent into conventional political channels."⁴¹ They saw this pattern extend to the present time through the expansion of what critics have called the "nonprofit industrial complex" (NPIC). Dylan Rodriguez defines the NPIC as a "set of symbiotic relationships that link political and financial technologies of state and owning class control with surveillance over public political ideology" in processes that turn potential movement activists into "clients" in need of services.⁴²

PHRF leaders defined organizing for a just reconstruction in terms of political resistance; they saw Katrina as an opportunity to regitalize a broader mass movement for radical social change in the United States. On the ground, this looked like building political consciousness, furthering self-determination and state accountability, and fomenting specific actions such as protesting the Louisiana Recovery Authority's "Road Home" federal funds distribution program, organizing a tenants' rights working group, and presenting an international human rights tribunal.

The leaders of the second generation of Katrina SMOs had a different vision of the possibilities attending the strategic provision of services. They saw them as a base-building strategy that could strengthen community, increase consciousness, and link needs to action. They designed hybrid SMOs in a tradition that serves "those who have been disadvantaged in a way that is intended to encourage and build capacity for their self-advocacy."⁴³ The leaders of the second generation were more likely to be younger, female, and multiracial (across communities of color). The demographic differences suggest that generational, political, and identity factors contribute to differences in political vision, strategy, and tactics.

Second-generation leaders operationalize service provision as a base-building strategy in a variety of ways. The leaders of Safe Streets, Strong Communities focus on criminal justice system reform through political action. Periodically, they also initiate specific campaigns in the service of these reforms, intended to directly assist community members. In March 2008, for example, together with other local prison reform and abolition groups, SSSC put on “Expungement Day: Road to Public Safety,” which they publicized as follows:

Have you been turned down for jobs, housing or other opportunities because of your criminal or arrest record? Do you want to get your record expunged but can't afford it? Then you should come to the Expungement, Jobs and Services Fair at the Treme Community Center on Saturday March 29. There will be free attorneys, judges, job and housing advocates who can help address the challenges you and your family face and put you on a path to success.⁴⁴

The event was deemed a success. Over four hundred people came to seek expungement for qualifying nonviolent arrests. There were sixteen lawyers available, and a crew of volunteer law students from the Student Hurricane Network, a national law student association organized by Tulane University law students after Katrina.

The New Orleans Women's Health Clinic and the Women's Health and Justice Initiative provide a second example of the relationship between service provision and political organizing. The organizers intentionally created sister organizations with different legal standings. Whereas the clinic is a nonprofit, the Initiative is an independent collective. As such, it can conduct overtly political and autonomous work, such as a popular education campaign about the links between domestic violence against women, street and police violence against transgendered people, and State violence against people of color and immigrant communities.

On Wednesday, August 27, 2008, five days before Hurricane Gustav made landfall, clinic interim director Shana Griffin sent an e-mail message asking the staff, board, and volunteers of the two groups to gather the following day at the clinic to think through how to support their constituency. At that point, she believed she had little to offer, but was driven by a strong sense of accountability: “At the clinic we feel like there is a community we are accountable to. It is marginalized low-income women and women of color in this community. [NOWHC and NOWHJI] don't have money, but we have people power, we can reach out, make calls, interpret, conduct Internet research.” She had already begun phoning the city's 311 disaster information line, introduced that week as the cornerstone of the post-Katrina City-Assisted

Evacuation Plan (CAEP), and designed to provide information about the free evacuation buses and shuttle times and locations: “If we were telling them to call that number,” she explained, “I had to know what we were referring people to.” After repeated attempts that ended in busy signals, she finally got through and was placed on hold for twenty-six minutes, only to reach a recording that the system was experiencing technical difficulties. Over the course of the following day, she and other staff and volunteers called the 311 line hundreds of times to no avail.

By Thursday morning, August 28, 2008, NOWHC and NOWHJI members and volunteers had prepared packets with evacuation maps, some shelter resources around the state, and lists of what to take for evacuation and what to have on hand for sheltering in place. Between Thursday morning and Friday night, twenty-two NOWHC and NOWHJI organizers made between seven and eight hundred phone calls, trying to make contact with every woman who had ever received services at the clinic. Spanish interpreters were available to assist Spanish-speaking clients. Griffin asked the organizers to start the conversation by saying, “We’re making a courtesy call to see if you have an evacuation plan, or if you’re preparing to stay.” She also directed them to pull charts for follow-up when asked by former patients about gas cards or infant formula, and to call back should they receive information about either. They bought a handful of flashlights and gallon water jugs, and retrieved some Wal-Mart gift cards left over from a prior event, offering them to people who were planning to stay and had no supplies. Middle-class supporters raised some quick funds through their own networks. Griffin also asked volunteers to phone a variety of mainstream disaster service providers, such as the Red Cross and Catholic Charities, to create a list of distribution centers. Late Friday afternoon, Griffin and other NOWHC and WHJI volunteers went home so that they could make their own evacuation preparations. The next day, she posted a statement to the national INCITE! Listserv, and raised \$7,000 in the first twenty-four hours to support the work of the clinic. A week later, INCITE! had gathered \$16,000 from 287 donors, with contributions ranging from \$3 to \$2,500.

NOWHC organizers established the clinic to fill a hole in local health-care services that was significantly deepened by Louisiana’s closure of Charity Hospital after Katrina. Although directly providing such services contributes to building a quasi-autonomous and politicized infrastructure that local organizers can control, it depends on external funding and relieves government of its responsibility to provide public services. Other second-generation groups responded to the State’s abdication of responsibility differently, by demanding

greater accountability and protections. After Hurricane Gustav, for example, NOWCRJ's answer to the failure of Louisiana's evacuation services was to mount a grassroots political campaign directed at the Louisiana Department of Social Services (DSS).

After the humanitarian crisis and public relations debacle at the New Orleans Superdome and Convention Center during Hurricane Katrina, city and state policy ended the Orleans Parish provision of shelters of last resort. The city's new post-Katrina City-Assisted Evacuation Plan was administered by the DSS. The centerpiece was a collection of transportation and shelter contracts that would take the city's poorest and neediest residents to shelters in northern Louisiana and out of state. Buses, trains, and airplanes were deployed to move 18,000 residents out of the hurricane zone. Four major shelters in Louisiana were used for the general population (two in Shreveport, one in Bastrop, and one in Monroe), five additional sites were prepared for residents with medical needs, and others were established out of state in Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, and Arkansas. Residents were encouraged to phone in to the city's newly implemented 311 disaster hotline to preregister for the buses and to determine the locations of the seventeen shuttle stops where local Regional Transit Authority buses would pick them up and take them to the Union Passenger Terminal (UPT). Shuttles ran all day Saturday and Sunday before Gustav's Monday landfall, and the last outbound bus left UPT on Sunday evening.

By Wednesday, August 27, 2008, the 311 hotline was overloaded and many, like the staff at the New Orleans Women's Health Clinic, could not get through, even though local radio and television stations continued to refer people to the line. By Friday, Governor Bobby Jindal acknowledged a major failure with the bus subcontractor, Landstar of Florida: hundreds of passenger buses had not arrived, and the state had replaced them with school buses—which had neither air conditioning nor bathrooms. By Saturday, the time-consuming registration system was finally abandoned, but not before long lines of residents had been forced to wait in the sun in the UPT parking lot. Evacuees were then allowed directly onto buses and later registered either on the road or at their shelter destinations. As with the buses that drove people out of the Superdome in 2005, residents were again not told where they were headed. Some reported driving to more than three shelters in different states before finding one that had space.

Concerned about rights violations during this process, several grassroots groups worked together, independently of the state, to monitor the evacuation and shelter programs. Members of STAND boarded the buses along with

other homeless and poor residents. By the end of the week, STAND members and organizers had documented the conditions at three of Louisiana's large warehouse shelters, and nine additional shelters in three states. From data collected from "hundreds of interviews with evacuated residents," NOWCRJ and STAND released a report, "Never Again: Lessons from Louisiana's Gustav Evacuation," on September 16, 2008, just over a week after the buses returned residents to the city.⁴⁵

As of this writing, "Never Again" is still the most substantive unofficial account of Hurricane Gustav shelter conditions. Although lacking a detailed description of its methods, the report chronicles the dearth of adequate toilets, showers, sanitation, food, protection from environmental hazards, and information. STAND's primary grievance, however, is what it calls "the state's differential sheltering policy," which houses city-assisted evacuees separately from self-evacuating (i.e., whiter and higher income) residents. STAND and NOWCRJ demanded that the policy be retracted and that new evacuation guidelines be issued based on principles of "inclusion, access, and equity." Within just over a week after the return of Gustav evacuees, they held a press conference on the steps of City Hall, presented city leaders with a petition signed by 1,500 shelter evacuees, and embarked on a series of meetings with city and state officials regarding changes to the evacuation and sheltering programs. Six months later, the Louisiana Department of Social Services released a report in response to suggestions made by STAND and others, and announcing the first wave of policy changes.⁴⁶ STAND's membership-based efforts provided immediate documentation of the City-Assisted Evacuation Plan and shelter services. Notwithstanding the larger context of systemic inequality, STAND and NOWCRJ organizers believe their demands to be an important contribution to securing better treatment for their constituents and to building their groups' organizing power.

Both the clinic's effort to provide services on its own terms and STAND's campaign to demand that the state provide them appear to have improved conditions and strengthened community political consciousness and solidarity. The groups' attention to service provision is ultimately a tactic in a larger strategy of structural transformation. Indeed, Griffin takes pains to distinguish NOWHC/NOWHJI's post-Gustav efforts from relief work. Instead, she understands them to be accountability practices and a base-building tactic. "This clinic is more than about service provision. It's about building the capacity of our community by integrating social justice in the provision of care itself. We are a *part* of the community. How do you flip the script on service provision and *organize*? Service provision can be dangerous if you don't build

leadership.” Similarly, STAND organizers are quite clear that state reform, even when accomplished successfully, is distinct from a structural redistribution of power and resources, which is their ultimate aim.

Human Rights

Within the first days of Katrina’s landfall, local and national Black Liberation Movement leaders were already calling for the “right of return” of Gulf Coast residents to their homes. With floodwaters still high in New Orleans and hundreds of thousands of displaced people not yet arrived at stable evacuation sites, organizers recognized that the ability of the displaced to return home would be at the heart of the struggles ahead.⁴⁷ Within the network that would eventually become the People’s Hurricane Relief Fund, organizers carefully chose the term *right of return*. They used it to expose return as a contested process and to assert that it was the government’s responsibility to ensure it. The host of obstacles to return—which still keep many of the approximately one hundred twenty-five thousand absent New Orleanians from home at the time of this writing in early 2009—include having neither an affordable home to return to nor transportation back, employment, health care, flood protection or basic infrastructure. Though PHRF organizers understood that it might jeopardize some allegiances, they evoked the Palestinian national struggle, seeing the Katrina response as the latest assault by “the U.S. capitalist system and . . . the system of African American national oppression . . . [which] is in violation of human rights” and a “crime against humanity.”⁴⁸ In a critical post-Katrina manifesto published by Saladin Muhammad on September 15, 2005, the first-generation language of “right of return” became the slogan of PHRF and the motto of the reconstruction movement, used widely within and beyond movement circles. I include among the emergent orientations the broader human rights framework from which it comes because the framework spans first- and second-generation approaches and has been a noteworthy component of post-Katrina movement strategy.

Though “right of return” is the most popular sign of the human rights discourse that appeared immediately after Katrina, the orientation has expressed itself in a variety of ways. Arguably, its post-Katrina emergence is part of a current wave of U.S. interest in human rights generally, and the rarer but burgeoning application of human rights models to domestic contexts in particular.⁴⁹ It also occurs at the convergence of several longer-standing human rights lineages: the Black Liberation Movement’s political nationalism, the United Nations’ universal rights claims, and nongovernmental organizations’ orientation to specific rights, such as housing or health care.⁵⁰ Before

addressing how they came together to inform post-Katrina movement efforts, I will briefly introduce the historical background of the first and least widely known of these—the Black Liberation human rights tradition.

According to scholars and participants of the BLM, there is a long African-American tradition of human rights claims making, going back at least as far the eighteenth century.⁵¹ Dr. Kwame-Osagyefo Kalimara explains the origins of the distinction between civil and human rights for American Blacks: “In the sense [that] Africans came and didn’t recognize colonial or U.S. jurisdiction, [they were under their] own rule, and that intrinsically puts [them] in the context of [the] international.”⁵² As national challenges to slavery and to what Grady-Wallis calls “U.S. apartheid,” the claims are called “human rights” in the broad sense of supporting humanitarian self-determination.⁵³

By the mid-twentieth century, Black Nationalist movements, such as those led by Marcus Garvey and Queen Mother Audley Moore, questioned the notion of American citizenship for Blacks, arguing that African Americans constituted a nation within a nation. The New Afrikan Independence Movement (NAIM) proclaimed that civil rights and citizenship strategies were not only ineffectual for African Americans but the very tools of national oppression, or what Cruikshank calls “technologies of citizenship.”⁵⁴ NAIM’s position was that the Fourteenth Amendment was an illegal imposition of citizenship on a people who, by international law, should have been given a plebiscite, the right to choose their own government.⁵⁵

After Katrina, a range of different actors called for the application of a human rights framework to the disaster aftermath. They came from different sectors and represented different human rights traditions. These traditions converge discursively in rights language, though they differ somewhat with regard to political orientation, tactics, and goals. The Black Liberation Movement approach to human rights came to New Orleans through People’s Hurricane Relief Fund leaders, men with roots in the BLM tradition: Curtis Muhammad, Ishmael Muhammad, Malcolm Suber, Chokwe Lumumba, and Kali Akuno. Akuno became executive director of PHRF in spring 2006. Although he recognizes that the BLM human rights tradition has never been the dominant narrative in the Black community, “someone like me brings that history and that legacy of struggle.” In Akuno’s opinion, however, it was the U.S. government’s egregious betrayal of Black Americans after Katrina that created the real possibility of demythologizing the civil rights promise:

We have to recognize the broader reality, that part of this conversation is because, to the extent [that] we were abandoned and saw [it] . . . Like, going to the courts, the U.S. courts,

what sense did that make? . . . What [Katrina] further showed was the meaning of Black life ain't worth shit in this country. Black people are expendable.⁵⁶

Although Black Liberationists and Critical Legal Studies scholars have long questioned the effectiveness of civil rights law for achieving racial justice, movement leaders believed that, finally, after Katrina, the human rights perspective might be more widely attractive to racial justice seekers.

By December 2005, at the height of PHRF's role as the New Orleans post-Katrina justice movement coalition, the human rights orientation was already central to its articulation of grievances and its reconstruction agenda. It organized a demonstration, "From Outrage to Action: The March for Human Rights and the Right to Return" in New Orleans. Almost two years later, at the second Katrina anniversary in 2007, PHRF's last significant action was to convene an International Tribunal on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.⁵⁷ Organized around ten charges of human rights violations, the tribunal lasted five days, during which survivors testified to human rights abuses by State officials and State policy during and after the hurricane. Drawing on the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the tribunal had a prosecution team of seventeen lawyers from rights organizations across the country, and sixteen judges from around the world.⁵⁸ In 2007 and 2008, PHRF Survivor Councils in Atlanta and Jackson also put on smaller tribunals for displaced residents.

Consistent with BLM pan-Africanist and postcolonial internationalism, the People's Hurricane Relief Fund adopted a human rights orientation after Katrina as part of a strategy to build global resistance to U.S. policy and hegemony. Using human rights claims to expose U.S. policy and practice before, during, and after Katrina was designed to garner international support for Katrina survivors, to build international pressure on the United States, to cultivate an internationalist orientation among U.S. citizens, and to reframe their grievances in the context of global struggle. The post-Katrina human rights orientation was thus a tactic of long-term domestic and global movement building, consistent with the recent turn to human rights by a variety of disenfranchised domestic groups.⁵⁹

The second human rights tradition that was applied after Katrina is rooted in UN declarations, covenants, treaties, and principles. It came to New Orleans from local advocates on the ground, regional allies, and UN officials. In 2006, Monique Harden of Advocates for Environmental Human Rights (AEHR), a New Orleans public interest law firm focusing on environmental justice and community organizing, began to promulgate the United Nations'

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. She asserted the Principles' superiority to U.S. disaster management policies under the Stafford Act and FEMA. Together with other advocates and movement leaders, she began a political education campaign to inform New Orleanians about the resource. Adopted by the United Nations in 1998, the Guiding Principles include dozens of protections in areas such as housing, medical care, and safety, for example, freedom from "gender-specific violence" and the right to family reunification.⁶⁰ They are far reaching, and provide more rights than those afforded under normal conditions under U.S. domestic law. They also differ dramatically from the approach to disaster taken by the Robert T. Stafford Act, which has guided U.S. disaster policy since 1988. The Stafford Act is not a rights-driven policy and instead focuses on disaster designations, financial assistance, and state reimbursement procedures.⁶¹ The UN Guiding Principles have often been supported by member nations of the United Nations, including the United States. U.S. support is articulated by the U.S. Agency for International Development, which claims that internally displaced people "should be granted the 'full security and protection provided under applicable norms of international human rights laws, international humanitarian law and national law.'"⁶² Although affirming and invoking the Guiding Principles in international contexts, the United States has not recognized them domestically and is not legally bound by them.

Other UN agreements to which the United States is more accountable, and which have also been applied to post-Katrina conditions, include the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which have been ratified by the United States. As part of ratification, the United States must submit periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Independent civil society organizations can attach shadow reports. In November 2007, Harden of Advocates for Environmental Human Rights and Akuno, formerly of PHRF and soon to join the U.S. Human Rights network, submitted a shadow report, "Racial Discrimination and Ethnic Cleansing in the United States in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina." The report charged the United States with denying the rights to protection from police brutality, to equal treatment before the law, and to housing, public health, and medical care after the hurricane.⁶³ At the heart of the report is a critique of the Stafford Act, which it compares to the Guiding Principles. The report identifies four fundamental flaws in the Act: the transfer of responsibility for recovery from the federal government to the states, the absence of a right to assistance and return, the refusal to recognize

disparate impact as an indication of racial discrimination, and the absence of rights to housing, education, and health care. CERD noted in its response to the shadow report that “it remains concerned about the disparate impact that this natural disaster continues to have on low-income African American residents.”⁶⁴ The Committee recommended that

the [United States] increase its efforts in order to facilitate the return of persons displaced by Hurricane Katrina to their homes, if feasible, or to guarantee access to adequate and affordable housing . . . In particular, the Committee calls on the [United States] to ensure that every effort is made to ensure genuine consultation and participation of persons displaced by Hurricane Katrina in the design and implementation of all decisions affecting them.

Other regional advocates have also argued for using UN agreements to ensure humanitarian protections and guide the recovery.⁶⁵ Founded in 2003, the Atlanta-based U.S. Human Rights Network (USHRN) works to increase human rights protections within the United States through cultivating the use of international human rights frameworks domestically. It seeks to foster human rights consciousness at the grassroots by providing human rights training and encouraging the use of human rights tools. In 2006, USHRN issued a report in response to the Third Periodic Report of the United States of America. Charging that the United States had violated Article 6 (right to life) and Article 26 (prohibition against discrimination) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the USHRN report argued that “a great many deaths were a direct result of the [United States]’s failure to provide adequate evacuation plans, evacuation assistance, and humanitarian aid” and that the State “violated the principle of nondiscrimination in the way it prepared for Hurricane Katrina.”⁶⁶

Two years later, the U.S. Human Rights Network, now with PHRF’s Akuno on staff, organized the Human Rights Documentation Project, in order to train people to conduct human rights monitoring. By September 2, 2008, the day after Gustav made landfall, USHRN was providing several conference call training sessions a day, in which organizers from the Gulf Coast received instruction in human rights monitoring and interviewing. Participants were sent packets of interview schedules overnight, and at least sixteen new monitors proceeded to shelters, where they began to conduct interviews. The interview schedule was comprehensive, including sections on housing, transportation, children’s education needs, information about evacuation procedures for incarcerated relatives, health care, and experiences with major disaster organizations. It was designed as a diagnostic for demands

for long-term service provision and organizing, as well as an assessment of human rights violations. Plans are currently under way to train local movement organizers in human rights monitoring throughout the Gulf Coast, so that it will be part of their tactical repertoires. Most recently, USHRN convened an ongoing Gulf Coast Human Rights Working Group, and has submitted a petition to the Obama administration, urging compliance with human rights covenants and principles in the recovery.

In addition to these advocate-led human rights initiatives, since October 2005, the United Nations has sent special rapporteurs to the region to assess human rights conditions. Local advocates have further solicited UN support to build their human rights political education campaigns. For example, in 2008, Advocates for Environmental Human Rights invited Walter Kalin, representative of the UN Secretary General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, to New Orleans to encourage residents and movement leaders to draw on the Guiding Principles.

In sum, certain local, regional, national, and international organizers, progressive advocates, and officials have embraced human rights frameworks for challenging the U.S. government's response to Katrina. Through a variety of tactics—shadow reports, public reports, tribunals, press releases, and popular political education—they exert pressure on the U.S. government, focus domestic and global attention on the Katrina response, bolster human rights claims, build human rights consciousness, and strengthen domestic and global movements for structural change.

There are three primary challenges facing the application of international human rights claims to the Katrina recovery. The first is that human rights frameworks are not binding; there are no real mechanisms for holding the United States accountable for complying with UN treaties, covenants, and principles, even the ones it has signed and ratified. As Walter Kalin, representative of the UN Secretary General on Internally Displaced Persons, acknowledged to a room full of dismayed New Orleans residents and organizers, the Guiding Principles he was advocating had no teeth. The vision of human rights as providing real protections and constituting an effective channel for achieving justice is a long-term one. For this reason, some second generation groups like STAND prefer to pursue other channels in order to win short-term demands.

The second challenge is that human rights are unfamiliar to many Americans, who are, in Akuno's words, steeped in "U.S. particularism and isolationism." The primarily Black constituency of the reconstruction movement is especially invested in civil rights frameworks, next to which human rights

often appear empty and vague. Akuno noted that although popular embrace of the “right of return” was a significant accomplishment, acceptance of other human rights frames and tactics has come more slowly. Efforts to educate hurricane survivors to understand human rights and their basis in international law have met with limited success, Akuno explained.⁶⁷ “Not because there hasn’t been attempt, but people’s . . . digestion of it, or comprehension of it has been mixed.”

Nevertheless, after several years of political education and organizing by PHRF, AEHR, and USHRN, there were some signs that the human rights framework was beginning to take root. Some evacuees, for example, began to refer to themselves as “IDPs” (internally displaced people) and to situate their experience in global terms. Gloria, a sixty-seven-year-old Black woman who evacuated to Atlanta after spending several nights on an overpass in New Orleans used human rights language to describe her experience:

I know my human rights was violated. According to the U.S human rights book, my body, my human rights had been violated. They have certain categories that the government is supposed to do. And for that reason I testified [at the PHRF Human Rights Tribunal], I testified because I don’t think that they did right. And I want the UN nation to know what they did us in New Orleans! And that they act on it in Washington DC, and don’t let it happen again! In other countries the people, in China [likely Cuba], they never lost a life when a storm comes. You can check that out. They never lost a life, why? Because they call the National Guard and they evacuate the people before the storm comes. Now they lost they houses, but they didn’t lose they life. And here I know people who lost five people out they family. They got drowned. Whole houses of people in the Ninth Ward got drowned.⁶⁸

Still, some second-generation local organizers resist human rights frameworks because they are alien to their constituency. Even though their post-Gustav report on evacuation and shelter conditions was essentially a human rights petition, STAND leaders would not use human rights language because it was not used by their membership.

The third challenge, in part a product of the first two, is that most domestic human rights movements suffer from what Akuno calls a “lack of political and programmatic clarity.” As a still relatively new and unfamiliar framework for most Americans, human rights strategies and tactics are relatively undefined. Thus, according to Akuno, a human rights approach without the Black Liberation Movement’s focus on national oppression and a holistic account of “Black Liberation struggle and history and claim, lose[s] some force.” Thus, too, a single-issue, “demands” orientation to human rights—for example, the

“Housing is a human right” buttons and signs displayed during the New Orleans movement to stop the demolition of public housing—needs to have

a much stronger *programmatic* thrust . . . around housing as a human right. Okay, well, what does that mean? It means low-income, affordable, deeply affordable housing has to be applied in a crisis area, housing has to be dealt with in a one year period to ensure the right to return, it has to come with certain things, not just “Oh we’re going to redevelop this when we redevelop that. It’s going to be mixed-income.” So we have to have a human rights fight that’s still based, still framed in a right of return.⁶⁹

Second generation movement groups differ in their regard for a human rights orientation. Some are generally open to it but do not use it, some borrow the language but not the methods, and some resist it for the reasons outlined above. Despite the organizational ambivalence, human rights frameworks are a distinct part of the larger movement culture in the post-Katrina Gulf Coast.

Conclusion

If the State found in Hurricane Katrina an opportunity to remake social policy, then grassroots organizers recognized in the ensuing social disasters the need to hone new strategies of grassroots resistance. The three orientations I have outlined here reflect some of these new strategies. Created in dynamic tension with the first generation of Katrina resistance orientations, the frameworks are still evolving. Organizers seek to turn them into both daily organizational agendas and long-term movement-building tactics. At the same time, the orientations function more broadly as disaster action repertoires among a population that understands the connection between daily hardships and ‘natural’ catastrophe. The social movement organizations I have chosen to highlight are deeply committed to structural transformation, which they believe consists of radical, substantive changes in the distribution of resources and freedoms. In many ways, they share a movement vision, rooted in an intersectional understanding of justice and the belief that only broad-based grassroots organizing can achieve it. At the same time, despite many similarities, their visions also differ, as do the strategies and tactics they deploy in the larger service of these visions.

Much can be learned from studying the work of social movement organizations in the context of disaster. Indeed, the Katrina events raise classic social movement questions that organizers appear to be asking about this particular catastrophe more frequently than social movement scholars: What

is the relationship between incremental improvement—or meeting people’s urgent needs—and long-term structural change? How can lessons learned from disaster mobilization strengthen ongoing movement development through enduring hard times, and what must movements do in order to become disaster-ready? There is still much work to be done.

Notes

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1. I include Hurricane Rita, the storm that struck Texas on September 24, 2008, because it also flooded New Orleans and caused damage to the region. For the rest of the article, however, I use the designation Katrina only, both because it had a greater impact on New Orleans and because it has become shorthand for the many social, technological, and natural problems it exposed and exacerbated.
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 6. John D. McCarthy and Mayer Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 82:1218 (1977) as quoted in Chetkovich and Kunreuther, *From the Ground Up*, 3.
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 9. See Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
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 11. Safe Streets, Strong Communities, Brochure from Second Annual Picnic, July 29, 2007, <http://www.cwsworkshop.org/katrinareader/node/511/> (accessed February 25, 2009).
 12. Norris Henderson, codirector of Safe Streets, as quoted in “Two Years Post Katrina: Racism and Criminal Justice in New Orleans,” by Jordan Flaherty, *ZNet*, 2007, 2. <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=13655/> (accessed February 2, 2009).

13. Jordan Flaherty, *ibid.*, 2.
14. STAND, "Never Again: Lessons from Louisiana's Gustav Evacuation," September 16, 2008, <http://www.neworleansworkerjustice.org/> (accessed September 20, 2008).
15. George Lipsitz, "Learning from New Orleans: The Social Warrant of Hostile Privatism and Competitive Consumer Citizenship," *Cultural Anthropology* 21.3 (2006): 451–68; Peter Dreier, "Katrina and Power in America," *Urban Affairs Review* 41.4 (2006): 528–49; Jamie Peck, "Liberating the City: Between New York and New Orleans," *Urban Geography* 27 (2006): 729–33; Kathleen Tierney and Christine Bevc, "Disaster as War: Militarism and the Social Construction of Disaster in New Orleans," in *The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe*, ed. David Overfelt, David L. Brunson, and J. Steven Picou, 35–49 (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).
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18. Wisner et al., *At Risk*; Shirley Laska and Betty Morrow, "Social Vulnerabilities and Hurricane Katrina: An Unnatural Disaster in New Orleans," *Marine Technology Society Journal* 40 (2006).
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26. Molly McClure, "Solidarity Not Charity: Racism in Katrina Relief Work," 2005, <http://www.infoshop.org/inews/article.php?story=20060319185418325/> (accessed December 1, 2005).
27. Safe Streets, Brochure.
28. HUD demolished four large public housing complexes between 2007-2009, significantly reducing the affordable housing stock in New Orleans. Only five public schools remain in Orleans Parish under local school board control; the Louisiana Recovery School District runs thirty-three public schools, and an additional forty-eight are chartered. Meanwhile, Louisiana shuttered Charity Hospital, New Orleans's public hospital, which for generations has been the primary source of low-income health care in the parish.
29. Shana Griffin, interview with author, September 8, 2008.
30. Charles E. Jones and Judson L. Jeffries, "'Don't Believe the Hype': Debunking the Panther Mythology," in *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 25–55.
31. *Ibid.*, 31.
32. *Ibid.*, 30.
33. *Ibid.*, 29.

34. Nancy A. Matthews, *Confronting Rape: The Feminist Anti-Rape Movement and the State* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
35. Sue Hilderbrand, Scott Crow, and Lisa Fithian, "Common Ground Relief," in *What Lies Beneath*, ed. South End Press Collective (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007), 80–98.
36. *Ibid.*, 96.
37. The People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Coalition, n.d., <http://www.cwsworkshop.org/katrinareader/node/2/>.
38. Rachel E. Luft, "The Gendered Politics of Organizing Displaced People."
39. Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders*, xxvi.
40. Barbara Cruikshank, as quoted in Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders*, xxvi.
41. Johnson in *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders*, xxiii.
42. Dylan Rodriguez, as quoted in Andrea Smith, "Introduction," in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, 8; see INCITE! Women of Color against Violence, eds., *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).
43. Chetkovich and Kunreuther, *From the Ground Up*, 6.
44. See http://neworleans.indymedia.org/calendar/event_display_detail.php?event_id=2154/ (accessed February 25, 2009).
45. STAND, "Never Again."
46. Louisiana Department of Social Services, "Louisiana Shelter Summit Report; Shelter Planning Recommendations and Feedback" 2009.
47. This focus was captured in early public statements written soon after Katrina, while PHRF was still called "The People's Hurricane Relief and Reconstruction Project." An early document references a September 8 meeting of organizers, during which "the attendees came to the general conclusion that the most fundamental demand must be the right of the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast to return to their homes and their communities and to participate in reconstruction." See http://www.peoplesorganizing.org/arch_demands.html/ (accessed February 2, 2009).
48. Muhammad, "Hurricane Katrina," 1.
49. Cynthia Soohoo, Catherine Albisa, and Martha F. Davis, eds., *Portraits of the Movement*, vol. 3 of *Bringing Human Rights Home*, 3 vols. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008).
50. Kali Akuno, interview with author, February 28, 2008.
51. Winston A. Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid: Atlanta and Black Struggles for Human Rights 1960–1977* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
52. Kwame Osagyefo Kalimara, interview with author, February 9, 2008.
53. Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid*.
54. Barbara Cruikshank quoted in Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders*, xxvi.
55. Ronald Takaki makes a similar case in regard to Native people, whom the U.S. sought to "reduce to citizenship." Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
56. Kali Akuno, interview with the author.
57. PHRF produced a short video recording of the tribunal proceedings.
58. Judges came from Brazil, France, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mexico, and Venezuela as well as from the United States.
59. Cynthia Soohoo, Catherine Albisa, and Martha F. Davis, eds., *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, vol. 2 of *Bringing Human Rights Home*, ed. Soohoo, Albisa, and Davis.
60. United Nations, "United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement," Section III, Principle 11, #2a; Section III, Principle 17, #3.
61. The bulk of post-Katrina criticism of the Stafford Act by disaster experts stays within the legislation's parameters. See Kenneth C. Topping, "Toward a National Disaster Recovery Act of 2009," *National Hazards Observer* 33.3 (2009), 1, 6–8; Mitchell L. Moss and Charles Shelhamer, "The Stafford Act: Priorities for Reform," (New York: Center for Catastrophe Preparedness and Response, 2007), 1–29. The other primary reform approach includes recent NGO principles of ethical humanitarian disaster response. See Anne Westbrook and Kimberley Lietz Lauten, "A Look at the Standards Gap: Comparing Child Protection Responses in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the Indian Ocean Tsunami," *Children, Youth and Environments* 18.1 (2008): 158–201.

62. Chris Kromm and Sue Sturgis, "Hurricane Katrina and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: A Global Human Rights Perspective on a National Disaster," in *Southern Exposure* XXXVI, 1 and 2 (Durham, NC: Institute for Southern Studies, 2008).
63. Monique Harden, Nathalie Walker, and Kali Akuno, "Racial Discrimination and Ethnic Cleansing in the United States in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: A Report to the United Nations' Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination" (New Orleans: Advocates for Environmental Human Rights and Peoples' Hurricane Relief Fund, 2007).
64. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, "Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 9 of the Convention" (Geneva: United Nations, 2008).
65. Kromm and Sturgis, "Hurricane Katrina and the Guiding Principles."
66. U.S. Human Rights Network, "Hurricane Katrina and Violation of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Article 6 and Article 26" (Atlanta: U.S. Human Rights Network, 2006).
67. Kali Akuno, interview with the author.
68. Gloria Jackson (pseudonym), interview with the author, January 28, 2008.
69. Kali Akuno, interview with the author.