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Chronic disaster syndrome:

Displacement, disaster capitalism, and the eviction of the poor from New Orleans

A B S T R A C T

Many New Orleans residents who were displaced in 2005 by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the subsequent levee failures and floods are still displaced. Living with long-term stress related to loss of family, community, jobs, and social security as well as the continuous struggle for a decent life in unsettled life circumstances, they manifest what we are calling "chronic disaster syndrome." The term refers not only to the physiological and psychological effects generated at the individual level by ongoing social disruption but also to the nexus of socioeconomic and political conditions that produce this situation as a long-term and intractable problem. Chronic disaster syndrome emerges from the convergence of three phenomena that create displacement: long-term effects of personal trauma (including near loss of life and loss of family members, homes, jobs, community, financial security, and well-being); the social arrangements that enable the smooth functioning of what Naomi Klein calls "disaster capitalism," in which "disaster" is prolonged as a way of life; and the permanent displacement of the most vulnerable populations from the social landscape as a perceived remedy that actually exacerbates the syndrome. [*disaster capitalism, Hurricane Katrina, chronic disorders, poverty, New Orleans*]

Katrina is not just something that happened in the past. Katrina is the future.
—Martha Ward (New Orleans resident, Katrina survivor, and anthropologist)

This article is dedicated to the loving memory of Gay Becker.

Hurricane Katrina, which struck the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005, and the subsequent levee failures in 50 different locations in the Greater New Orleans (GNO) area were responsible for flooding and damaging approximately 2.5 million residences in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama and for leaving 1.2 to 1.5 million people displaced (Gabe et al. 2005; McQuaid et al. 2005; Petterson et al. 2006). In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and Hurricane Rita following soon thereafter, nearly a million residents of Louisiana alone were forced to leave their homes, some 455,000 of whom were residents of the GNO area (Katz et al. 2005; U.S. Census Bureau 2000).[1] Some New Orleanians were able to leave in the days prior to the storm, when evacuation orders were initially put into effect. Others were unable to leave or remained by choice, predicting that the storm would eventually turn toward the east, avoiding their city. These people became stranded, living in attics and on rooftops for days, waiting for rescue, and trying to help rescue others. Hurricane Katrina affected over 90,000 square miles of the Gulf Coast, and the city of New Orleans was transformed into a lake in the tidal floodplain of the Gulf Atlantic for several weeks (Erikson 2007).

Most residents who owned homes or land were eventually able to return to a changed New Orleans, some a few months later and others over a year or two later, finding homes that had been destroyed by water, mold, and large debris (cars, barges, and trees) that had landed in them. Upon return, most of those who had been evacuated began living in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers, trying to sort out their insurance or federal and state assistance opportunities for rebuilding their homes. Many of these residents were still living in trailers three years later. Today, many

residents of New Orleans are still experiencing the deleterious effects of long-term displacement and disruption. By August 2008, only 72 percent of evacuated New Orleans residents had returned to the GNO area, although not necessarily to their rebuilt homes, and the area had reached 87 percent of its pre-Katrina population, although this population was not necessarily the same as the pre-Katrina one (Lui and Plyer 2008). Our research showed that in the most recovered of the impacted neighborhoods only 40–50 percent of the community had returned and rebuilt. Of residents who did come back, 52 percent had returned to the 20 percent of the city that saw the least flooding, overcrowding "dry" neighborhoods where, previously, only 39 percent of the city's residents had lived (Lui and Plyer 2008). By August 2008, building permits had been issued for approximately 113,000 homes in the GNO area, but over 65,000 homes remained blighted or had been demolished, and approximately 6,000 sat vacant (Lui and Plyer 2008). In March 2008, New Orleans officially took the title for having more blighted, vacant residential properties than any other metropolitan area in the United States, beating Detroit by 16 percent and Baltimore by 13 percent (Russell 2008).

New Orleanians who had lived in public housing, rented homes, or low-income trailers had an even harder time returning than property owners did. Placed into FEMA trailer parks far outside the city, many of these residents were ineligible for much of the aid that was available to homeowners. Because the number of available rental housing units had dropped to an all-time low and occupancy of available units had skyrocketed to 99 percent, rents quickly soared, putting housing out of reach for many previous low-income renters. Prior to Katrina, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in the GNO area was $578. It rose to $803 by July 2006. By summer 2008, rents were reportedly 46 percent higher than they had been pre-Katrina (Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch 2006; Liu and Plyer 2008). Public housing units that had been occupied by the lowest-income residents, most of whom formed the city's underclass of part-time and wage laborers and who cycled on and off public assistance, were made unavailable. Rather than seeing these units (many of them untouched by the floodwaters) as an important resource for housing former residents, the city instead moved quickly to implement plans to tear them down and build mixed-income condominium–rental units in their place. Families who had lived in them were still living in FEMA trailers years later, unable to move back into housing in New Orleans. They were told to vacate their trailers by no later than July of 2008.[2]

In this article, we use the term *displaced* to mean several things. It refers, first of all, to those people who were evacuated from New Orleans, who were literally displaced for months or sometimes several years before being able to return. All New Orleanians were originally displaced by the events of August 2005. Temporally speaking, displacement ended for a small number of people who were able to return to their undamaged or only slightly damaged homes and for those who returned to New Orleans to different or new homes or apartments. Even among these people, however, there was an ongoing sense of displacement from the community that they once called "home." *Displaced* also refers to the people who were able to return to New Orleans but who were not able to move back into their homes, who remained in FEMA trailers or rented spaces for several years or more, and who told us that they were experiencing ongoing "displacement" in the sense that their lives had not returned to normal, even though they were back in their "place of residence." They lived in trailers on their property, but they were not yet in their "homes." Finally, *displaced* refers to those people who were permanently displaced, first by the hurricane and floods and then, more significantly, by the political machinery that was subsequently set in motion, which resulted in the deliberate and permanent eviction of the poor from New Orleans.

In this article, we explore the contours of what we call "chronic disaster syndrome" as a confluence of three factors: (1) individual suffering (in the form of effects of chronic trauma and long-term displacement); (2) the workings of disaster capitalism (as revealed in the case of Katrina's aftermath) tied to the undermining of public infrastructures of social welfare and their replacement with private-sector service provision through contracts with for-profit corporations; and (3) the ways that displacement of the three types just described functions within disaster capitalism as an ongoing productive "way of life."

"Chronic disaster syndrome" thus refers in this analysis to the cluster of trauma- and posttrauma-related phenomena that are at once individual, social, and political and that are associated with disaster as simultaneously causative and experiential of a chronic condition of distress in relation to displacement. In other words, we propose that the nomenclature be used to refer not just to the individual diseases associated with the stress of disruption that manifest in individual bodies but also to the social conditions that produce distress, tied in nonspecific ways to larger political and economic arrangements that generate belief in, but ultimately prevent, recovery from disasters. In particular, the syndrome articulates the powerful way in which displacement is simultaneously recognized as a cause, symptom, and, ultimately, false cure for disasters. Chronic disaster syndrome represents the health outcome of life in an ongoing state of "disaster" or "emergency" (Agamben 1998; Fassin and Vasquez 2005) that, as in this case, is perpetuated by industries of "disaster" capitalism (Klein 2007; Klinenberg and Frank 2005). The total collapse of infrastructure and social services initiated by the storm and floods produced what Naomi Klein calls the perfect conditions of "shock"—a collapse so severe as to authorize a new government arrangement in which the state contracts

with private firms to provide services it previously provided. The ultimate failure on the part of these contractor organizations to produce recovery in New Orleans points not to the failure of a particular set of policies but, rather, to the success of these policies in achieving other goals pertaining to the growth of the private sector and debilitation of the public sector, the erasure and eradication of the poor, and the rendering invisible of the true recovery needs of communities postdisaster. In the wake of such successes, we witness the trauma of lost lives, families, and cities.

This article follows the lead of a special 2006 issue of *American Anthropologist* in assessing the extent of social impacts from Hurricane Katrina (Paredes 2006). That issue explored the contours of environmental, social, political, and cultural disaster during the first year after the storm and provides a template for understanding at least several of the analytical issues explored in this article. This work also joins others in tracing the contours of recovery in terms of the study of disasters, inequality and social justice, and the creation of new economies of intervention related to disasters (Allen 2007; Button and Oliver-Smith 2008; Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Fjord and Manderson 2009; Gunewardena and Schuller 2008; Klinenberg 2002, 2003; Lubiano 2008; Nicosia 2009; Reed 2008). The insights for this article were generated from the first two years of data collection of a four-year research project funded by the National Institutes of Health (National Institute on Aging) on the long-term health effects of displacement in post-Katrina New Orleans. Ethnographic data were collected by a team of researchers, including the article authors, using participant-observation and a series of interviews with 180 displaced residents. The larger study explores displacement in relation to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and age.

Syndromes, disasters, and recovery attempts

The medical language of "syndrome" is fairly specific. Distinct from "disease" and generally thought to have unknown etiology, a syndrome is a cluster or coincident pattern or series of associated symptoms and signs that are sometimes also associated with social or behavioral phenomena. Its name is often tied either to the person who identifies the syndromic pattern (e.g., Reye syndrome) or to the social condition with which it is associated (e.g., Stockholm syndrome), even if a specific cause is later identified. We use the term *syndrome* to capture the ways in which post-Katrina experiences do not manifest as specific diseases but as a cluster of etiologically ambiguous conditions that are at once individual, psychological, physiological, social, and political. We follow Byron Good's early theorizing of multiplicity in both experience and causality of suffering in the now-classic "The Heart of What's the Matter" (1977), as he traced Iranian complaints of "heart pain" to show that they were nested simultaneously in biological,

interpersonal, and larger sociocultural and socioeconomic domains. The causes of heart pain were in some sense indistinguishable from the symptoms: Gender inequality, household financial problems, and parasitic infections all came together in lay perceptions of "heart distress." Using an approach he called "semantic illness network" analysis, Good's research proposed a means of identifying disorder as simultaneously individual, social, and political and challenged medical communities to broaden their languages of diagnosis. This approach was born from conversations with the work of many medical anthropology scholars and has continued to inform much research since its inception.[3]

What we are calling "chronic disaster syndrome" can be correlated with other syndromelike disorders associated with trauma. Posttraumatic stress is often discussed as a problem for residents of post-Katrina New Orleans (DeSalvo et al. 2007). Whether they evacuated or were caught in the city during the flooding, most residents experienced trauma. This trauma continues to play an ongoing role in their experience of chronic distress. That is, the traumatic events of Katrina and the flooding are still present in New Orleanian lives, both as memories that haunt the present and as causative events that created situations of ongoing disorder and disruption that continue to define the present.

We offer an extended ethnographic portrayal from Sally, a 56-year-old woman from St. Bernard Parish who was still living in a FEMA trailer 50 miles from her original home when we interviewed her two and a half years after the storm. Many of her traumatic experiences during and after the storm were shared by other returning residents of New Orleans.

> Prior to Katrina I worked as a housekeeper in [a] nursing home down at St. Bernard, Louisiana and, I don't know what you want me to say, but we got all our people out of there Friday, but the staff stayed like me. We stayed Saturday and Sunday to board everything up thinking it was just going to be for a couple of days. You know, so we did our thing; we boarded up the nursing home, packed all the patients' stuff because we figured it was going to be a day or two. We did make it through the storm fine, but the next morning when we were home . . . I was home, and then my girlfriend said, "Let's go two miles down the street in [Chalmette] because it is higher," in case something would happen. I said, "OK," because we worked in the nursing home, so we went to her sister's house, and we made it through the storm fine. The only problem we had the night before is all the brick came off the side of the house, but that's no problem, you know. So, in fact, we were both going down our course and going back home. We both live on this street. And, we heard a big boom, and we said, "What was that?" And, we looked to the right. I don't know if you have ever seen that movie *The Poseidon Adventure,* but there was this wall of water coming at us . . . the wall of water was maybe, I'd say two city

blocks away, but of course you could see it because it was so large. Well, we didn't know it at the time, but the levee had just broke, so we had just two minutes to run up maybe. I would say two minutes because by the time we got to the second flight, the water was right here on us. . . . So we didn't know what to do. We just kind of went into shock when we seen the water, so we figured the first step wasn't going to be enough, so we made it to the second step, but the water just came so fast, but we made it into this apartment, and we got to stay in here a little while. But, we stayed like eight hours in the water, and we realized we didn't have any TV; everything was out then, you know. So, we didn't actually know that the levee had broken in three places. We knew it broke here, you know, we saw everything floating and everything, so it was pretty bad. Our cars floated off; got washed out.

Finally we saw flat boats and that coming around. We didn't see any police; I don't know about any of that stuff. We didn't see any of that, but finally the little, actually, the little boys in the neighborhood, they came around. They had stolen the flat boats and all, and they came around and started rescuing people. Well, the people I was with; it was maybe eight people in the apartment, they didn't want to go because to get in the boat you had to go back on to the water, you see, and you know, if you don't swim or nothing; you had to go onto the water, and then come back because when you hit that first row of steps you was in the water again. And, I didn't swim, but anyway, I did it, but you had to go back into the water, and then somebody had to pick you up, and put you in the flat boat. It was kind of upsetting, too, you know.

. . . So when they did rescue us (I use the term loosely), they took us to St. Bernard High School. OK? Well, we stayed there three days and three nights, and we had like a pack of crackers one day, like this, and a bottle of water, that had to last you all day 'til the next day. And, the next day, if they found something, then you got another pack of crackers. The third day we had to share a bottle of water with three people like that. No sewage, no water, no toilet, no nothing. OK. Well, by the third day the world finally caught on that there is something going on down here, so then they sent in the National Guard, whoever they sent in. So, that was after three days and three nights.

. . . It was like something you read about, you know . . . it was real, real bad; I am going to tell you, real, real bad. So, when the National Guard came in on the third day, they decided they was going to take us out of St. Bernard High School, which is right over there to the left, and they were going to ship us somewhere.

[Outside] it was flooded, everything, dead bodies tied to trees, you couldn't see the tops of the houses, I mean, it was something like out of a war movie, but nobody my age saw it before, and it was real bad, I am telling you, when I say real bad, real bad. [Others describe floating dead bodies, babies' bodies, animal carcasses,

etc.] In order to get down from the roof, the only thing you could get down on at that time was the flag pole.

. . . at that time everybody's nerves were gone; they were more stressed out than you because they lost their homes, and they are trying to help you too, and they are worried about their people. There were a lot of people dying and everything; they never found out what happened to them, or anything. So, they didn't want to hear, you know, that you couldn't do what you had to do at the time.

So, then we hear bang, bang, bang. I said, "Oh, Jesus." There was a sniper. He was shooting over us. So, everybody as much as they could, they hit the deck. . . . The National Guard made you get down on the ground. I went back to the same position. I was trying to tell them, "I cannot bend. I use a cane." I said, "I can't lay down." So he puts an M-16 to my head. I said, "Let me explain something to you." I mean, he couldn't have been more than 20 years old. You know they called them in, and I said I hurt my leg. What I did, I just lay down as well as I could, and then they . . . they threw a tarp over all my group that was there. And then we had to get on the trucks . . . we drove all the way out from [St. Bernard] to the interstate with M-16s in our heads, and all the guys looking out for snipers and all. So, finally we get to [the docks]; it's 99 degrees and I am going to starve.

I knew I was going to die right there in the truck. And, so we get to Metairie [a suburb that was less flood damaged]. OK, praise the lord, we get to Red Cross; get all the buses lined up. Well, thank God; I don't know if it was Red Cross, or Salvation Army, but as soon as you got off the truck everybody got a bottle of cold water. And, let me tell you, that tastes like champagne after three days. So, everybody got a bottle of that because it was cold, you know. So, now, what I did see? I thought I lose my mind in Metairie. They had the mammas, the daddies, the children, OK, in, like, four buses at a time. What I didn't understand, and to this day nobody will make me understand, is this: the mammas went on this bus, the daddies went on this bus, and the children went on this bus [i.e., they were put on separate buses]. I mean, these kids are screaming and howling. . . . And, I thought I'd lose my mind right there. They actually pulled, pulled the children out of . . . I mean, I can't understand that, and nobody is going to explain that to me. After I saw it on TV they said some of them children have never been reunited. That's horrible, and seeing the dead bodies, and the dead animals, and I am sorry, but it was. No disrespect to the dead, but, you know, so, we get on the bus. Nobody knows where they are going. You are just shoveled like cattle, you know. They just wanted to get us out for some reason. You couldn't ask questions; they tell you to shut up. So, I said, OK. I am going to sit down, I am going to the Third World, you know. But, I said, OK. And now, in the midst of all of this you don't know if any of your family is living or dead, or whatever, you know. . . . We go to Houston, and

that's a long ride. No food, no water, not while you're on this bus, anything, except the bottle of water they gave you.

Many of those who remained in New Orleans during the storm and flooding told us similar stories. But even families that were able to evacuate told stories of trauma. The drive out of New Orleans took days. Gas stations ran out of gas. Hotels, motels, and inns were filled up and had no vacancies. Many people found their way to churches or shelters in northern Louisiana and in Texas. The Red Cross arrived at shelters all over the southern states with blankets, food, and clothes, but many evacuating residents were turned away when the shelters reached capacity or if they arrived at the shelters with family pets. Communities rallied together to meet evacuees with food, clothes, money, and supplies. In the weeks following the storm, FEMA established services to help victims receive small amounts of money for temporary assistance ($2,000–$2,300 per person), and over 2.5 million people across the Gulf Coast filed individual assistance requests with FEMA to receive these funds (Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch 2006). Some found accommodations with friends or relatives as far away as California, Chicago, and New York City. Families sat huddled around public televisions, computer screens, and shared cell phones, trying to find out if their homes were gone, if their relatives who had not left were still alive. Then, after the scale of the disaster had sunk in and victims began to realize they were barred by the local and federal authorities from returning home, another kind of trauma set in. Families had to find a place to live, a way to replace lost income, a place for their children to go to school, a way to obtain their prescription medications and telephones, a way to pay mounting unpaid bills for homes they no longer inhabited. Without their personal documents, they had to try to track insurance policies, if they had them, bank accounts, and health records, to begin the slow process of accessing government or insurance funds to help pay for their displacement and their hoped-for recovery. The reality of how much had been destroyed, not just in personal physical property but in whole communities, whole ways of life, had just begun to be felt.

The events of 2005 were traumatic for those displaced by Katrina and the flooding, generating symptoms of posttraumatic stress among them in ways that were both visible and invisible in the years that followed. The death toll from the hurricane itself was high (estimates of 2,750; Petterson et al. 2006), and in the first years after the storm, mortality rates increased by 25 percent in some estimates (Stephens et al. 2007). Studies by the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine found that, post-Katrina, the number of people who died in New Orleans increased by 47 percent (Thomas 2008). Suicide rates rose immediately following the storm: The New Orleans coroner's office reported in the months following Katrina that the suicide rate had tripled, rising from a rate of 9 per 100,000 to 27 per 100,000 (Saulny 2006b; Walsh 2007). Those rates appear to have leveled off again. Most of the people we interviewed knew of someone in their family or on their neighborhood block who had died during or soon after the storm, especially elderly persons or those with chronic disorders.

Not surprisingly, residents reported increased health problems of their own, stress disorders, sleeplessness, and an increase in drinking and smoking to calm their nerves. Increases in cardiovascular problems, heart attacks, and hypertension were common. Health complications in the chronically ill increased, particularly in the case of those with preexisting cancer and HIV diagnoses, mental illnesses, cardiovascular conditions, substance abuse issues, and diabetes (Bergerren and Curial 2006; Wiesler et al. 2006). Onset of chronic conditions, including asthma and diabetes, was frequently seen. Psoriasis and skin rashes were common. The "Katrina cough" was shared by all, a result of the fine, often contaminated dust from the mud that covered everything for three weeks, dust that circulated pervasively throughout New Orleans and surrounding parishes even three years later.

Depression and anxiety disorders were pervasive. Many residents had regular nightmares of waking up in water. They talked about recurring "breakdowns" in which they became overcome with emotion and physically collapsed. A 2007 study showed that 20 percent of New Orleans residents were categorized as having a Katrina-related serious mental illness, and 19 percent showed signs of minimal to mild mental illness (Sastry and VanLandingham 2008; Thomas 2008). Even therapists and social workers who were able to serve in the recovery effort to help support the emotional recovery of others found themselves breaking down in tears on a regular basis. By April 2006, the Katrina Assistance Project, a volunteer-based mental health project funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, had conducted more than 90,000 counseling sessions and issued 13,000 further referrals for mental health and substance abuse–related issues (Thomas 2008). Despite the overwhelming need for mental health services, few residents were able to access mental health support for their symptoms, simply because health care facilities and health care personnel were so scarce. Most health personnel were themselves experiencing the trauma of displacement, and few clinical facilities survived the disaster. By April of 2006, only 23 percent of the GNO area's primary care physicians and 11 percent of its psychiatrists had returned to practice (Wiesler et al. 2006). Most efforts to rebuild health care facilities focused on emergency care, routine care, and surgical services rather than psychiatry. Much of the care was provided by grassroots nonprofit volunteer organizations and NGOs such as Common Ground and Save the Children.

It was hard enough to have lived through the disaster, but what was almost more unbearable for residents with whom we spoke was that two and, then, three years later, and despite over $17 billion in federal aid for rebuilding homes (and over $109 billion in federal aid for both emergency relief and long-term recovery projects; Katz et al. 2005), New Orleans was still a mess. Rachel Breunlin and Helen A. Regis (2006) and Joyce Marie Jackson (2006) reported a year after Katrina that displaced residents unable to return were suffering from the effects of collapsed social infrastructures, despite valiant efforts to re-create community through ritual and celebration. What had been reported on as a hopeful sense of recovery in 2006 was, by 2008, replaced by a sad recognition that things had not gotten significantly better, if at all, for most people. The ongoing failure to successfully rebuild New Orleans, for a variety of reasons, left 38,000 residents still living in trailers in February of 2008 (Williams 2008), wondering when and if they would ever "get their lives back."

As one might imagine, most of the chronic trauma postdisaster was associated with the problem of housing shortages. According to FEMA, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita left more then 362,000 people on the Gulf Coast in need of alternative housing. As of May 2008, FEMA reported that the number of Louisiana families residing in its trailer-park communities was 700, down from 4,200 at the end 2007 and from the 73,000 families initially residing in the trailers (FEMA 2008). Many FEMA group sites had been disbanded, and, of the initial 111 Louisiana trailer-park communities, only 13 remained. FEMA also reported at that time that approximately 18,000 families in Louisiana continued to live in FEMA trailers on property they owned. As of June 2008, FEMA and media sources reported that an estimated 100,000 people still lived in trailers throughout the Gulf Coast, encompassing 52,047 households (FEMA 2008; San Francisco Bay View 2008). In the years following the hurricane, FEMA was moving people out of trailers whether or not they had homes to return to.

The best efforts to rebuild in the NGO area as of June 2008 were still only marginally successful in re-creating truly functioning communities. Lakeview, a predominantly Caucasian upper-middle-class community, had perhaps made the most progress in rebuilding. Still, the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center (GNOCDC) estimated that, as of August 2008, it was only 40.6 percent recovered. The neighborhood had a pre-Katrina population of just less than 10,000, with 4,524 active households. By June of 2008, only 1,912 homes in the area were receiving mail, a key indicator used for repopulation data (GNOCDC 2008; U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

The Lower Ninth Ward, which received massive publicity as the worst off of all neighborhoods and one with predominantly African American long-term homeowners, had received aid from private NGOs (Brad Pitt's Make It Right project) as well as Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) funds, and yet, by 2008, only 140 of the ward's 4,820 houses were slated to be rebuilt (GNOCDC 2008). Only 11 percent of the Lower Ninth Ward's pre-Katrina household population of 14,008 had returned and of 5,363 homes receiving mail in 2005, fewer than 601 households were active in the area in 2008 (GNOCDC 2008).

Other neighborhoods and parts of the GNO area, including Gentilly, New Orleans East, and St. Bernard Parish, remained devastated, with ungutted homes still lining streets and businesses boarded up and abandoned even well into 2009. Although some neighborhoods had returned to functioning, areas like St. Bernard were still missing 59.8 percent of their pre-Katrina population, and the vacant streets and lack of infrastructure reflect this loss. Over 27,000 homes were flooded in the St. Bernard Parish suburb of Chalmette, and few buildings, including the parish government complex, have been rebuilt. In August 2008, 2,700 homes in this area were still awaiting demolition, and only one of ten fire stations destroyed had reopened (Rioux 2008). Except for the French Quarter, portions of the Garden District, and Uptown (which escaped flooding), many neighborhoods were still largely destroyed. These other neighborhoods were still vast wastelands of debris, foundations, partially collapsed homes, mud, and weeds. FEMA trailers remained on front lots, and street signs had yet to be replaced. Intersection traffic lights were finally replaced during the spring of 2008, but home-delivery mail service was still not available in many areas at that time.

Margot, an elderly woman still living in a FEMA trailer next to her destroyed and as yet unrebuilt home, described the problem: "I haven't had a mail box in three years, OK. I mean symbolically that's it right now. I don't even have a mailbox. You know, if you want to put it in one sentence. I am just tired of not having a mailbox, ya know, because I don't know where I live."

Neighborhood shops and gas stations remained boarded up, with storm and flood damage still visible. Roads were full of potholes and cracks that dented cars and broke axles. Residents who were able to find new jobs or return to their old jobs could not find time to rebuild their own homes, and many were still waiting for insurance payments or state assistance to pay for such efforts. By August of 2008, the work force of the metro area was down by 16 percent (Pope and Vanacore 2008). The city began to ticket owners of properties with weeds that were not cut. Liens accumulated against homes that appeared to be abandoned. Volunteer groups began to organize weed-cutting efforts, even for homes that had yet to be gutted or to be rebuilt. The degree of destruction and lack of recovery gave residents a collective sense of being "displaced," even when they were back in their old neighborhoods. "I don't know where I live," Margot told us, alluding to the fact that

even though she resided on her own property, it seemed unrecognizable to her as "home."

The stress-inducing factors that prevailed among New Orleans residents were multiple and layered, including physical, psychological, and social displacements around house and home, work, financial security, and family security. The loss of home and jobs and, in some cases, the cost of rebuilding produced huge financial worries for residents. Even those who received insurance and state or federal assistance, whether for homes they owned or for rental units, experienced setbacks that many felt they would never recover from. Mortgage payments were deferred for several months but were then built into the monthly payments owed thereafter, swelling mortgage debts. One year after the storm, 20 percent of all Louisiana mortgages were past due (Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch 2006).

Insurance rates were raised for homeowners after Katrina. Who would even offer them insurance now? As local citizens struggled on a daily basis to pay increased insurance premiums, insurance companies nationwide reported record profits in 2005 and 2007, despite what they paid out in hurricane damages (Hunter 2008). Homes in Louisiana are now required by law to have homeowners and flood insurance. People who cannot be covered by private companies are required to apply for a state-sponsored plan. Additionally, insurance companies have created huge hurricane deductibles, placed caps on reimbursement amounts, and created clauses such as the "anti-concurrent-causation" clause, which relieves companies of responsibility for reimbursing losses caused by a concurrent event, such as a flood after a hurricane (Hunter 2008).

Residents were full of anxiety because of the uncertainty of the future and the loss of community, and they feared that things would never be "normal" again. A woman who lived in St. Bernard Parish explained her financial worries:

It's a non-ending miasma, and that still continues to this day. My insurance has gone up; my homeowners' from $2,000 a year to $6,500 a year. I had to buy flood insurance; I was cancelled by my homeowners', and I now have the wonderful citizens' state plan who don't even send out notices for bills. I had to call 'em up since I thought it's been a while since I paid. People can't get other policies because there are people who nobody is underwriting, they've pulled out. State Farm only writes if you've had a policy with them before, which we did not have. And, now we've got our car insurance with them. They would not write homeowners' when we bought in 2002 because you just can't get it. Mostly there are no companies underwriting, very few.

Returning residents were very worried about the cost of living and, even with subsidies, were often unable to move back into homes. Muriel, a 49-year-old resident of Gentilly, told us,

FEMA is paying rent [to some people] right now because they [i.e., property owners] went up so high with the rent. For example, they have a house that's across the street from me, before the hurricane houses on section 8 and I think the rent might have been $350 or $400 for three bedrooms, one bathroom, kitchen. Around $400. Since the hurricane, the house is going to be $1,000. So you had houses that were $200, $300 and $400 going up to $1,050. Remember that the pay is not going up here, just the cost of living going up down here. Your pay is not really increasing enough to keep up with the cost of living. So a lot of people probably do come out better if they stay at other places . . . right now.

One of the recurring themes that we heard from those who were still displaced in trailers or temporary living situations (e.g., with relatives), but more so from those who had returned and were, in a few cases, back in their homes, was that, even if the neighborhoods were being rebuilt, people had lost so much that nothing would ever be the same. People talked about losing the "ingredients of life." Frances, who told us she had lost a 31-year-old daughter in the initial flood, refers here to the overall stress of life in an unrecovered New Orleans: "It takes a good deal of endurance and strength. But after three years with so little visible recovery, it wears down and erodes that strength. . . . Life as I knew it is gone."

Muriel, who spoke of her financial worries above, told us,

What I experienced was coming back to the devastation of the city. No grocery stores, no cell phone service, certainly no phone service, no regular phone service. We actually had to get other cell phones. You know, it was a ghost town. I think I, probably, maybe not now, but I was in shock, you know, because I couldn't take in the enormity of it. I wondered, knowing the politics of the city, and the state, and actually the federal government, how it was ever going to be fixed. And, if it was ever going to be fixed, it would never be the same way it was, you know. Mid-city is not going to be Mid-city like it was. Uptown didn't really have much damage, but the places where they had the flooding are not going to be the same. You know, the city is never going to be the same. The musicians are gone; the Neville Brothers don't even live here anymore. Now, did you ever think they were going to leave? They don't even live here. I think one of them did, but I don't think any of them do. The musicians are gone; the city that I knew and grew up in will never be back, they'll never be back. And, the fact that it's taken; that we've been shortchanged as far as the money that we are supposed to get from the federal government, you know, Mississippi got more than

they should have; we got less because we have a Democratic governor who apparently the Republicans don't like, you know. The Road Home [a program described in the text below] is a big ol' mess, the people fighting with the insurance companies. You now, people that didn't have insurance . . .

A 42-year-old carpenter named Ben, who had just recently moved back into his rebuilt home, told us about feeling "burned out" by the experience:

I've definitely been feeling more depressed recently. With just looking at the sheer volume of work that I've had to do. I've gotten tired of—I guess "burned out" is the way to put it—still "burned out." It might be the way I'm doing business, but I feel like . . . a lack of support. I don't know . . . I guess "the trapped feeling" might be applicable. Just kinda "hemmed in." I'd like to think that I could sell my house. I'd like to think that there was another opportunity somewhere else. I'd like to think that things are going to get better here, and I'm not sure about any of that stuff. There's a lot of uncertainty, insecurity. I feel insecure. Maybe that's how to put it. It's a very big sense of insecurity here. I don't—like—talking about the kids; a lot of that is feeling insecure. You don't know what they're gonna do.

A 47-year-old neighbor of Muriel's in Gentilly felt she was barely able to keep it together:

Oh after the storm, you know, it's like you say, "You can't let this beat you" that is part of what's going through you, I mean, you are going to survive. You go to therapy, and then you get strong. You do what needs to be done because you are not going to let this beat you. We have friends who have gotten divorced, gotten into drugs, into rehab, committed suicide, and it's like, "We are not going to. I am not going to let that happen to me." I don't have to do that, you know. I can beat this. Whatever it's going to take I am going to do so that I don't go over.

For many of the displaced people we interviewed, the trauma was just something that never went away. A 47-year-old woman who was helping to rebuild her Lakeview community told us:

We still have our meltdowns, and [the pastor of our church] called me and he said, you know what? I have been through a lot since coming because—he goes— "something I had in Iraq [he had served in Iraq for two years before coming to Lakeview] was posttraumatic stress, because I had 'first trauma' where I was twitching." He's been seeing somebody [a medical professional] for a year. He told me. Since he came from Iraq, because he was twitching in his sleep, he couldn't be in crowded places, and he started sharin' all that with me, which I didn't even know. And he said, "But you

know what? This is teaching me about second trauma." And he said, "I think you're having second trauma— stress." Because of what we're taking on, that we don't realize what we're taking on, on a day to day, how it's affecting us, because—many articles have been written about mental health, and one of the big concerns is that depression is the norm here, and people accepting, I'm supposed to be depressed. It's the norm. We're supposed to feel this way. Don't we all feel this way? This is normal! And, every day we think this trauma, this crazy pace, all of these things that we deal with, are normal, 'cause I've been doin' it for two and a half years, and so—and it's not. But I'm thinking, oh yeah, it's normal. . . . You know, he came here from Iraq and I asked him . . . "You must think this is easy compared to Iraq?" and he said, "Are you kidding? This place is nuclear—it's like a nuclear bomb went off here."

For many people, the idea that they had to stay in a state of heightened response to the pending "crisis"—a state they had already been in for over two years—produced huge anxiety and exhaustion. Even when they made progress, many still felt that there was too much more to be done for things ever to begin to feel normal in a healthy way. Much of this had to do with seeing loss of neighborhoods and communities. A 57-year-old computer programmer who was still in a trailer told us about his neighborhood:

And there's pieces of their house that are next to my house. I helped 'em take the railing off and stuff, and we were hoping that they'd rebuild. We didn't think they would, but we were hoping they were. Not only are they not rebuilding, but you notice, all the houses on this side of the street have all been rebuilt and are occupied [about five houses]. On the other side of the street, it's a field, and so when people—they're like the kids that say, "Did I cause the storm because I didn't want to take a test that day?" And "Did I—I tell people, well, you know, I wanted to live in the country, so it's my fault, because now the country came to New Orleans." Look at it. One out of eight houses across the street are there. There's only one there, there's seven empty lots. So we've got a field across the street . . .
(Interviewer: And what about the dispersal of family and community?)
Oh, man, oh, man, you said it exactly. That's one of the things that—I talk about the hurt, if I haven't said that—that's something that I say as much as anything is that—I talk about two things, the love that we get—which is the positive, and the break-up of families, which is the big huge negative. So I'm not even moderately recovered.

A 53-year-old woman still living in a "first responder" trailer that was given to her son, a fireman, explained how her family had been torn apart by Katrina, not simply by

physical dispersal but by the emotional trauma of displacement and the continuous, arduous stress of failed recovery.

> And the patterns with the family too. A family is—for as close as we were—and I mean every birthday, with a big family, every holiday, every everything—we got together. We got together. It never did change since I was a little kid. And now, it's the closeness that's all gone. And it's not just the distance. You can blame it on the distance, use the distance as an excuse. But even when we get together, nobody wants to stay. Everyone wants to get home. Home. That word "home" comes so easily now . . . that's their home where they've decided to stay [outside of New Orleans]. And it's like they can't . . . we just don't. And I know that when mom dies, that's gonna be it. That's gonna finish it off right there. It's gonna all come apart when she dies. So yeah, Katrina did a lot of damage. And believe me, I've heard that more than anything, about how families just fell apart. . . . The government can't even begin to know what this storm has done to families. I mean, really. We were, like I said, we were close. No more. Not anymore. And some of it too is that we got away from one another and we realized how little we got in common. Or else the storm took it away. I don't know which it is, you know. Cause I'm an analyzing person and I'll try to figure it all out sooner or later. But it's either we just really don't have anything to talk about anymore, or we never did, and we just thought we did. It's weird. . . . You don't quite understand it the way you can when you're livin' through it. And I never had no idea what stuff like this did to people, and now I know. It ain't nothin' nice. So, I hope when you all do this—whatever you all are gonna do, that that's a good point to put across, is all the things that the storm undoes, that you can't put back together.

Families fell apart not simply because they were dispersed to places far distant, but because, without the physical and emotional structure of routines holding people in place, giving them a place to come and simply "be" together, the tensions of life in chronic-disaster New Orleans became more visible as triggers for their problems. People were displaced, but so too were families, communities, and in these layered displacements, we found lives that were not simply not-yet-recovered but were experiencing the effects of chronic displacement as a sort of ongoing disaster. Suddenly, despite their shared experience of displacement, victims felt a new awareness of the things they did not have in common. These were now reasons not to get together. Such stories are vividly and compellingly documented in the film *Still Waiting: Life after Katrina* (2007), made by the anthropologist Kate Browne and filmmaker Ginny Martin. The film traces one extended family's evacuation and partial return to New Orleans, showing the family's struggle to recover in the face of the physical dispersal of its members and the ensuing strains on emotional and social bonds.

Destitution imposed by the disaster and the failure of effective government responsiveness created new life challenges that threatened the very core of the family's relations. Their story speaks for many families in New Orleans who are still waiting to recover and fear not only that their lives will never be the same but also that they may not recover "intact" at all in some fundamental physical, emotional, or familial sense. Ultimately, the stresses of these varied kinds of emotional, physical, and familial displacements become the reasons for families breaking up. In some disaster situations, trauma can bring families and communities together to join forces to provide mutual support at a time of need. In the case of post-Katrina New Orleans, the length of time of displacement and the visible lack of progress mitigating it has eroded even this kind of possibility for a good number of returnees.

A recurring theme in accounts of those who had returned to New Orleans was the feeling that "no progress" was being made. Bureaucratic "endurance marathons" and feelings of being given the "runaround" by aid agencies made this worse. An elderly woman who was still waiting to get out of her trailer told us,

> Well, it's kind of like a hamster's wheel. You keep spinning, but you are trying to reach the end of your destination in terms of a job, a home, resources, rebuilding, but you are not getting anywhere. You are in that spinning wheel, you know, but you keep trying. You get up and you go to this place, and you go to this place. The Road Home to me is like an imaginary tale, like Alice in Wonderland. Really, that's what it is because you are still in the well, but you haven't heard anything else, you know. You are still in the well, so that's like a spinning wheel, and you can't move forward until you absolutely know that you are not getting any help from this, because if there is a chance that you are getting help from that you'll purchase this. But, if you are not getting any help, then you've got to see what other avenue to take. And, meanwhile you are sitting on property that may or may not have anything on it for the next month or two, so it's just like a spinning wheel, you know. And, then, you try to do this, you try to do that, but you can't lock yourself into one thing because you might have to go this way instead of this way. So, in the meanwhile the world keeps spinning. I got a jury duty notice; I am going to do jury next week, no the first week in October. Life keeps going on, you see, it's like it's going on, but it's not going on.

The ongoing conditions of displacement have prompted some to report that, despite the length of time since the actual disaster, New Orleans is still in a state of "responding" rather than "recovery."[4] This ongoing predicament is key to understanding that what we are calling "chronic disaster syndrome" is different from posttraumatic stress disorder, in which traumatic events

are isolated in time and symptoms are related to events in the past. In the case of Katrina displacement, conditions that are traumatic continue; they are ongoing. "Katrina is a funeral that won't end," a 53-year-old man told us as he looked out from the dirty window of his 20-foot-long and 8-foot-wide FEMA trailer, filled to the brim with paperwork and letters sent to government agencies and insurance companies that have gone unanswered. We looked with him at the gutted, collapsing structure that he still wanted to call "home." Even though the trauma of the initial storm is over, the effects of the storm, the displacement, the ravaging of personal and family finances and the loss of family and community cohesiveness continue to inflict trauma with a vengeance. The "chronicity" of trauma that emerges as a form of ongoing "displacement" is the first piece of the constellation of "chronic disaster syndrome" that we point to.

A second characteristic we point to is the politicoeconomic context of the syndrome's production. Although feelings of hopelessness, frustration, depression, and anxiety were shared among New Orleans residents, and although we are not providing the counterpoint cases of absolute commitment, endurance, and resilience residents have shown as they try to rebuild, we point here to a socioeconomic hierarchy of effects. As one might have predicted, families that had resources (homes, insurance, jobs with companies that did not disappear) have had the option of returning. Their struggles are significant, but their options are greater than those of people who were displaced and who did not own their homes or who previously lived in mobile homes. The poorest residents of New Orleans have clearly fared worst in the aftermath of Katrina. We turn now to a discussion of the unequal effects of chronic disaster syndrome in relation to what Klein calls "disaster capitalism." Disaster capitalism, as we discuss below, refers to the constellation of government and economic policies and practices that have found ways to make "disasters" profitable as a new source of capital.

Responsibility for recovery and betrayal by the government

As the weeks, months, and, now, years drag on as people wait to "recover" or rebuild their lives post-Katrina, they inevitably ask questions about the slow pace of recovery. They read the figures suggesting that an enormous supply of federal funding is available to help rebuild New Orleans (statistics are varied: $17 billion, $11.5 billion, $109 billion), and they look at their neighborhoods, which are nowhere near recovered. They know that the only visible signs of recovery are the results of the work of volunteer groups: kids from churches all over the country, nonprofit volunteer groups from other states, Habitat for Humanity, Brad Pitt's Make It Right Foundation, Common Ground (which offers non-

profit community-based health clinics, house gutting, and a variety of other services), and Save the Children. Some schools have been rebuilt, but mostly by churches and with church funding. Hospitals have not been rebuilt, and although community health care clinics have been reestablished and are flourishing under nonprofit leadership and support, general acute care and hospital beds are in short supply. By August 2008, the availability of hospital beds was still 38 percent below pre-Katrina levels, and acute care availability was down by 25 percent (Pope and Vanacore 2008).

Returning New Orleanians often took pride in how effective they had been at rebuilding on their own. Deep, abiding love for their city was combined with a sense of fierceness about knowing they could rebuild by their own "bootstraps": "We live in the 'do it yourself city,'" one 53-year-old man told us. "'No,' is not in our vocabulary," a 49-year-old woman told us. Residents were not "waiting around" for others to help them but, rather, had become worn out and disheartened by both the enormity of the problem and the delays, diversions, and incompleteness of recovery programs that were aimed at helping them but had not, despite how hard people tried.

Inevitably, many residents began to wonder where all the government money had gone, why the effects of such huge amounts of money were not seen or felt. Complaints about the failure of federal and state government agencies were common among returning residents of New Orleans, and in them one could see yet another dimension of long-term displacement: loss of faith in the government. This became apparent in criticisms of the disbursement of state and federal resources and in more direct critiques aimed at politicians and at "bureaucracy." Robbie Etheridge (2006) noted this criticism during the immediate aftermath of the storm and called on anthropologists to "bear witness" to the complaints offered at the local level. Even now, three years later, a similar sense of the misplacement of resources pervades communities. This perception is attributable to the complexity of the resource infrastructures that came into being post-Katrina. For homeowners, there were three main routes to funding for rebuilding one's home in post-Katrina New Orleans (not including nonprofit foundations that offered to rebuild homes, e.g., Habitat for Humanity, Make It Right Foundation, the St. Bernard Project, etc.): private insurance; the LRA's Road Home Program (RHP), whose implementation and administration, with federal dollars, was contracted out to a for-profit company, ICF International; and the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) loan program. SBA loans were disbursed to eligible individuals who qualified on the basis of credit history, repayment ability, and collateral. The SBA offered three types of loans to Louisiana residents affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the form of home disaster loans, business disaster loans, and economic injury disaster loans. These loans

included funds to replace or repair private homes and businesses and loans for working capital to small businesses (SBA 2005).[5]

Although some residents were able to get RHP money fairly quickly (within the first two years), many residents were refused funding or had not yet received funds, and no one seemed to understand what the criteria or priorities were for allocating the funds. Their distribution seemed, to most, to be absolutely random. By August 2008, the RHP had issued awards to 116,708 homeowners, approximately 73 percent of those eligible. It is estimated that disbursement will not be completed until at least October 2009, resulting in a more than four-year wait before some eligible homeowners receive the funds to which they are entitled for rebuilding. In 2007, the average homeowner received $72,660, but by 2008 the average homeowner received only $58,893 (Lui and Plyer 2008; RHP 2008).

In the criticisms of Road Home, we gain insight into the first workings of disaster capitalism: bureaucratic processes that actually reproduce conditions of displacement as often as they ameliorate them.

> I mean, this Road Home program, when you go in, you are guilty until proven innocent. You are guilty of lying that you own a home. You're fingerprinted, you're mug-shot, they spend—there's 67 something steps that a person goes through before they get to a closing. It was 78 steps. They whittled it down, because of complaints, because of HUD [the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development], it's not just the ineptness of ICF. It's that their hands are tied. ICF International is the company that was contracted to distribute the Road Homes money. It's another big government thing. Then you have the auditing agencies . . . because they had put it on hold to audit it twice. They were afraid that people who actually didn't own homes would be getting Road Home money! And so people who were without any of their possessions, or their bank notes or anything, can't really prove that they owned things . . . I mean, you'd have a 90-year-old World War II veteran go in, who's lived in his house for 70 years, and come out with nothing . . . I mean, there was a poor little guy, I'm serious, 90 years old, he and his wife, and their award grant was initially like $15,000 because they totally miscalculated it for them. They'd lost his application twice. They said they did the title search, and it didn't look like he owned the property. I mean, just—constant, constant. . . . Each one of those 67 steps. It's really been—the Road to Hell, is what we call it.

The RHP not only frustrated and angered those involved in getting funds, as the result of files being lost, applications being arbitrarily dropped without explanation, homeowners receiving checks as low as $16, and external audits that stalled the process while utilizing monies meant for homeowners, but the program also served to pit peo-

ple against each other over where the money was actually going. The lack of the program's transparency left homeowners wondering: Why did my neighbor, who sustained the same amount of damage I did, receive money and I did not, why are Caucasian homeowners getting money more quickly than African American homeowners? Why are some GNO areas receiving funds and others receiving none? Four out of five RHP recipients are estimated to have received inadequate funding to rebuild their homes to pre-Katrina standards, with the average homeowner needing $35,000 more than allocated (Rose et al. 2008). This was more often the case in predominantly African American neighborhoods, where grant amounts were calculated using pre-Katrina home values, as opposed to estimated costs of repairing hurricane and flood damage. African American communities that endured significantly more damage from flooding faced the same rebuilding costs that other neighborhoods did but were given substantially lower grant amounts than white neighborhoods where comparable properties have higher values (Finger 2008).[6]

The response to the disaster was recognized as a bureaucratic nightmare that, regardless of the intent of the federal and state governments, appeared to homeowners as a sign of their having been abandoned. Residents we came to know felt that the government agencies and those who won the contracts to do their work had been inept and incompetent, rife with bureaucratic ineffectiveness. Even more infuriating and disheartening was that local government corruption continued to hamper recovery, from questionable mayoral-family contracts with the Home Depot to the New Orleans Affordable Homeownership (NOAH) program facing discrepancies questionable enough in its home remediation program to warrant federal investigation. A 452 percent spike in corruption from 2002 to 2007 has been generally attributed to the influx in federal recovery funds (Jervis 2007).

One woman who had helped form a community organization that was rebuilding her neighborhood described the sense of betrayal by the government that she and her neighbors felt. On their own, the community had created resource networks for those trying to move back and rebuild and offered information support for those trying to get insurance or government funds or to track down relatives of deceased homeowners or homeowners who had apparently abandoned their property. Daily, they sent teams of volunteers to remove debris and abandoned cars from properties, to gut homes long since left to fester, and, later, as rebuilding began, to cut weeds on properties that were still derelict. She was incredibly angry about the lack of government support at the local level. She told us that New Orleans has witnessed the largest grassroots voluntary effort in the history of the country, and although this gave her a great sense of pride in the people of her nation, she felt success had come despite abandonment by the government at the local,

state, and federal levels. She tied the sense of abandonment to a critique of where federal money was being sent—to the Office of Homeland Security and to rebuilding Iraq. She said,

> There should have been a Katrina bill passed. We all said this. Congress should have had a Katrina bill passed [e.g., to help with rent control and insurance]. . . . You wouldn't dare go complain to your insurance company, 'cause—they'll say, that's fine! We'll be happy to drop you! You're a big risk for us. We're still a huge risk, because they don't have any confidence. If the insurance company had confidence in our United States Corps of Engineers—but they don't have confidence in us—so they just pass that to us. . . . Yeah. We need a bill. Just to address Katrina. One of my biggest disappointments in George Bush is, you give a whole 9/11 commission for two buildings and 16 acres affected. . . . I mean Katrina was the worst natural disaster the country has ever experienced. . . . And you give one man—one man as a recovery czar for—not even give him. We have to hire him. Don Powell is the recovery czar for two states. And all he really is is the money guy, sayin', oh yeah, we're gonna give a hundred million to Mississippi, and we're gonna give—whatever. . . . I guess—really the most disappointing factor, too, for me, on the federal level, why in the world we didn't get one. We could still use a commission. It's not too late! I asked Hillary Clinton when she was here, "Why? Don't you think we could use a 9/11 commission here still?" And everyone's just like—"I'll have somebody in my office every day, reporting on the recovery of Katrina"—I said, well, you know what? That's not good enough! We want somebody in OUR office every day. Get out of Washington, get on the ground here! But that—the insurance thing—could have been addressed through a Katrina bill—through a commission, a Katrina recovery commission, for these two states. . . . I mean, if they can build community centers in Iraq to help rebuild their country, you'd think they could build community centers in New Orleans.

Her own community center received virtually no funds from the government and was run entirely by volunteers. What financial support they received was from the local Episcopal Church, which also gave them a space to house their operations. She noted that although some homeowners in her neighborhood had received insurance, RHP grants, or SBA funds to rebuild, the government had done little to nothing to help them directly, other than allowing the National Guard to remain in the city to help with pick up and removal of trash, cars, and other debris for about a year after Katrina. She said, "Really, it is like living in the Third World. It is worse than Iraq."

Much of what residents in New Orleans articulated as a reason to be angry at the government emerged from their sense that, from the beginning, government resources seemed absent or inappropriately allocated. The government sent military services when what was needed were construction crews. Many residents felt as if the government's objective was simply to "keep the peace" by a show of military force, when the community needed resource centers, social workers, road builders, electricians, and carpenters. One reason that priorities were perhaps misplaced, and that affirms residents' complaints, however, is that FEMA had itself been merged with the Office of Homeland Security only a few years prior to Katrina. In fact, the office charged with handling emergency response and recovery had become a branch of government concerned primarily with counterterrorism and internal security threats (Giroux 2006). It was and remains, perhaps, difficult for such an agency to effect efforts to help rebuild when its overt mission is to protect the nation from "threats." Over time, some residents began to feel as if the efforts of FEMA were more directed to addressing New Orleanians' problems—and ultimately the people of New Orleans themselves—as threats. It was as if, with the storm and flooding long over, the only "threats" were the ongoing problems of displaced people. A confusion of priorities was perhaps inevitable.

What one saw in the aftermath of Katrina was a displacement not only of people but also of the idea of "public security." Public security could have been achieved by federal assurances that insurance companies would follow through on payments and that they would not be allowed to raise rates, that funding for rebuilding homes would be distributed fairly and swiftly, and that resources and manpower for rebuilding would be sent to New Orleans. Instead, the notion that New Orleanians themselves were a threat to public or national security circulated and became a rationale for the efforts the government did take to effect change in New Orleans. This change, in effect, targeted the poor. The poor, it seems, were to be evicted from New Orleans as a way to "clean up" the city and help it recover once and for all.

This last point brings us to the second aspect of "disaster capitalism" that Klein identified for post-Katrina New Orleans. The transfer of government funds from institutions of social welfare and public works to those of free-market privatization and security occurred as a direct result of the "disaster" in New Orleans. Below we examine how this was effected through the final type of displacement: the government-authorized eviction of the poor.

The eviction of the poor and disaster capitalism

For residents who were not homeowners, the effects of the disaster were much worse than for those who owned homes or land. FEMA continued to help those who did own

homes or other property, providing rent subsidies to those who were able to find rental units in New Orleans after the cleanup began.[7] However, for most urban poor residents, it became clear fairly soon after the disaster that they would not be welcomed back to the city. In the days leading up to the storms and flooding, public housing units, including those that were not flooded, were all evacuated. Within weeks, most of these units were boarded up with metal plates, riveted at their edges to the buildings' windows and doors. Residents were not allowed to return, even to collect their personal things. Their possessions were eventually thrown away by the city, regardless of whether they sustained storm damage. Huge piles of toys, clothes, furniture, and personal mementos lined the streets and courtyards of the housing developments for months as a representation of the residents who no longer lived there and who were not given the right to gather and save the few possessions that remained to them after the storm had taken everything else.

When the city finally allowed people to return, most renters were put into FEMA trailer parks miles from the city. These trailer parks were enclosed by chain-link fences, and a private FEMA-hired security guard was stationed at the front entrance to each park. Only authorized visitors and residents were allowed in. Residents in these parks had a good deal of anger about their situation. Within two years, 4,600 of the publicly subsidized housing units in New Orleans were being torn down and $1 billion was committed by HUD to out-of-town developers to create "mixed income" residences; however, developers were not expected or required to build one-to-one replacements for units lost. Public outcry began when private firms given contracts for rebuilding were seen to be in collusion with public officials (Quigley 2007b).[8]

Prior to Katrina, there were 11,000 occupied affordable housing units in the metro area and approximately 9,000 government voucher–supported units. After the hurricane, the numbers dropped to 2,300 housing units and only 1,800 vouchers. This left approximately 80 percent of those who had occupied these units, or 16,000 households, without housing (Rose et al. 2008). No alternative low-cost or affordable housing units were available. Eighty percent of project housing was damaged, 53 percent of low-cost housing was damaged, and 80 percent of affordable housing was damaged citywide (Rose et al. 2008). By August of 2008, the research and action institute PolicyLink estimated that only one in three rental units in the metro area would be rebuilt with recovery assistance, and only 82 had been funded and completed to that point (Rose et al. 2008).

A 49-year-old mother who had been moved out of public housing told us about this state of affairs:

Before the hurricane, they got some condominiums down the street. They built up those condominiums. They tore down the projects before the hurricane. They tore the projects down, and they built up them condominiums and they built up the Wal-Mart so the price value around here went up.

(Interviewer: What happened to the people who lived there?)

In the projects? They went to other projects or they put them in Section 8 housing in other states. Some of them was allowed to come back if they never had got into any kind of trouble with their houses and they had to pay a certain amount of rent. You have to work now because before, down here . . . I don't know how it is where you are from, but down here if you are living in housing, you don't pay rent. If you don't work, you don't pay no rent. If you pay rent you might pay $22 a month. You don't pay no light bills and phone is optional. So you got people that are staying in the projects that don't work, so they might pay $22 a month. Don't pay no light bills, getting food stamps and getting welfare. They ain't trying to find no work. They got it too easy. Why do they want to work for? So now, since they built the new area up they allowed doctors and physicians and lawyers and residents that were there before but that worked and showed good records. If you were living in housing before and you moved back, there is a three strike law. If you did three things [illegal acts], you are out of it anyway. So that's what they did with all the projects. Well, not all of them. But it was like maybe four of them.

(Interviewer: So if you were really poor, you were out of luck?)

Well, didn't you hear the statement that Nancy Reagan [i.e., Barbara Bush] made? We were better off [because of Katrina] since we were flooded out because we were going to different places and they were giving us different stuff, so the people from New Orleans was better off! And it is not necessarily true because I was one that always worked. I was never one to stay on welfare. I did live in housing because I always worked. I always paid the rent. I didn't get the $22 break. I didn't get food stamps and a lot of the stuff I didn't qualify for because I only had one child. Well one child and working, they figured paying a little rent, they didn't have to help me because I got enough money to take care of me and my daughter. I didn't get the benefits like other people. I've always worked. My mom always worked. My mama never lived in housing. She always made sure we had a house to live in. My mama always worked, made sure we had food on our plates and clothes on our backs. She was never one to stand out and wait for welfare. So to put that on people in need, and in New Orleans . . . I thought it was wrong because everybody's not like that. But you take on [that] bunch out there and combine it with everybody—you think everybody is making off easy.

For those still living in trailers outside of the city, FEMA's initial generosity in supplying trailers was, by the second year, seen as a bittersweet solution when the Sierra Club, and many months later FEMA itself, discovered that the trailers contained dangerous levels of formaldehyde. The Sierra Club conducted indoor air-quality testing of 31 trailers in May 2006 and found that only two had levels of formaldehyde within the safety limits set by the Environmental Protection Agency (Sturgis 2006). The Sierra Club suggested that residents not spend excessive amounts of time in their trailers, denying displaced people yet another safe space to call home (Sturgis 2006). Of the residents still remaining in trailers in November of 2007 (approximately 52,000 people), 4,600 households, or 8.7 percent, have reported health problems to FEMA (FEMA 2007a).

By the third year post-Katrina, with many families still living in these trailers, the government put a full-stop deadline for people to vacate them or, ironically, to exercise an option to purchase the trailers through online government auction for $5,000 to $12,000 (Associated Press 2007). Although FEMA officially stated that each trailer cost approximately $14,000 to $20,000 to manufacture, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimates that the costs incurred for each FEMA trailer could be as high as $229,000. That is, the government paid nearly $230,000 per trailer to the contractors who built and delivered them, Halliburton among them. The GAO found that FEMA profited from a total of $30 million in fraudulent payments for trailer maintenance and cited examples of rigged bids and excessive payments on their trailers (Myers and Gardella 2007).

In May 2007, a Department of Homeland Security review found that FEMA trailers had been sold at inconsistent prices, ranging from $1 to $20,000, resulting in poor government returns and inequity for buyers. FEMA rescinded the offers to sell trailers to permanently displaced residents, owing to inconsistencies in pricing (Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General 2007). In August 2007, FEMA ended the offer to Gulf Coast residents to purchase their temporary trailers, citing reports that people were suffering health consequences from formaldehyde exposure (CBS News 2007). One wonders what benefit might have come from a program in which the government gave the $230,000 it paid for the trailers directly to residents rather than to Halliburton.

This chain of events prompted residents to say things like: "We all asked, 'Who was meaner: Katrina, Rita or FEMA? And everybody's pointing at FEMA.' Which is worse—Katrina, Rita or FEMA? FEMA" (William, 54 years old).

Despite the trailers' toxic interiors, the idea of vacating them posed a serious problem to many who lived in them for one obvious reason: There was little public or low-income housing for them to return to. Job fairs and housing fairs were offered to trailer residents as a way of show-ing that the government had a plan to help them, but most found these fairs to be of little help. The events, organized not by FEMA but by Save the Children and the Red Cross, hosted mortgage companies, although few low-income and now-jobless residents could qualify for their services, and no companies that were actually hiring participated in the job fairs. Instead, long lines formed at the FEMA tables as people begged to extend the deadlines for vacating their trailers, and people flooded the desk of the one participating housing agency (Unity Housing) with actual units available in the GNO area.[9]

By November of 2007, FEMA had moved to close 91 of its Gulf Coast group trailer sites, leaving 20 open (FEMA 2008). As we note above, in June 2008, FEMA and media sources reported that an estimated 100,000 people still lived in the trailers throughout the Gulf Coast, encompassing 52,047 households (FEMA 2008; San Francisco Bay View 2008). In August 2008, FEMA reported it had 6,982 occupied trailers in the New Orleans metro area (Pope and Vanacore 2008). Their residents faced eviction by the beginning of 2009. Despite multiple housing fairs, held in most FEMA trailer-park communities and in local public gymnasiums and on community college campuses, many residents still had no place to live. In the long progression from low-income or public housing to eviction and displacement to trailers, homelessness was and continues to be the ultimate end point for many New Orleanians. By March 2008, it was estimated that one in 25 people in New Orleans was homeless, or about 12,000 people, nearly double the pre-Katrina rate and four times that of any other U.S. city (Jervis 2008).

Katrina became a means of evicting the poor from New Orleans, a process that also fell along obvious racial lines. Most returning residents talked about their sense of having been betrayed by the government at a time when they needed its support and relief, but those from the lowest socioeconomic positions felt not just abandoned and betrayed but actually under attack by the government. Some residents said their situation was like the Holocaust, an experience that seemed unending and that would never be forgotten by those who went through it. They were uprooted and sent to a prison camp of a trailer park hours outside the city and with no access to public transportation, jobs, stores, clinics, and schools. And, then, with no place to return to in the city, they were told to vacate the trailers that they had been sent to. A substitute teacher who was living in one of the parks outside the city told us,

Mentally, it's stressful. Especially bein'... OK, now there's a deadline. We have to be out of this park by May 31. We didn't receive any FEMA money. You know, there's people that still didn't receive FEMA money? We didn't even get an initial check for $2,000 from FEMA, and they're telling us, two years on now, here we are. We

had a place to live before the storm, right. We had everything taken out. We didn't get none of it. They didn't give us that even. And now we have to be out of here by May 31st. I don't know what will happen, and I'm not the only one that don't know. In your mind, you want to say, I can't see that happenin'. You want to say, I know they're just not gonna tell us—well, y'all are now homeless. You know? When these people could easily, most of the people here, you see, some people . . . A lot of people just didn't come back. That's why you have a lot of barren land. But there was basically everywhere you see a FEMA trailer, there was a nice home [in the city] or a little trailer. But all these people—what do you tell 'em? Where you goin'? You ain't got a home, but get the hell outta here. Go where? Do what? You're homeless. They're gonna close that gate and say you can't come back in here. That's on them—the government! Yeah! You put me in this trailer! Now, you're telling me to get out—you know what I'm saying?

OK you have generations of people that lived in these projects [public housing]. OK? And you want to tear these projects down. Which is all fine, and you want to make 'em better living conditions. Well, before you tear these down, please put me in another one. Then go tear it down and do what you want with 'em. But don't knock 'em down and then these people want to come home and have nowhere to go. Nowhere to go. . . . Go pay $1,500 a month for a three bedroom shack in the city? In the worst neighborhoods you could get that for $250, $300 before the storm! Come on man!

Not surprisingly, residents and those still trying to return to New Orleans are asking the question: Where did all the federal money go? Residents still living out of their trailers wonder why they could not get Road Home or FEMA funds and continue to wait to find out if their rental housing will be rebuilt. Of course, one answer to the question about where the money went is obvious: The levees had to be rebuilt. That cost a lot, $16,622,900,000. And although the levees are now restored to the point of at least affording the same level of protection that they did pre-Katrina, they are only 20 percent completed in terms of a projected 100-year flood-protection plan, and 0 percent improved to withstand a category-five hurricane, which was Katrina's original size (Pope and Vanacore 2008). Still, $16 billion has been spent.

Halliburton earned a lot from Katrina: $124.9 million in assorted contracts with the Department of Defense, FEMA, the U.S. Navy, and the Army Corps of Engineers (Halliburton Watch 2005). Despite criticism of its poor performance in Iraq and the 20 investigations it faced for wrongdoing, law violations, bribery, bid rigging, and overcharging, the company was given multiple Katrina contracts to clean up Navy yards, pump water out of New Orleans, help the Army Corp of Engineers to restore utilities, and assorted other tasks (Halliburton Watch 2005).

Bechtel also won no-bid contracts. It was contracted to begin supplying temporary housing on the day the hurricane hit, even before damage had been assessed or the levees had broken (Bechtel Corporation 2006). The company ultimately won the contract to supply and install 35,000 FEMA trailers for Gulf Coast residents, for a total of $154 million (Waxman 2006). The Defense Contract Audit Agency later found that Bechtel had been billing double amounts for both corrective and preventative maintenance on the trailers it provided, leading to a $48 million error paid for by taxpayers (U.S. House of Representatives 2006; Waxman 2006). In addition to double billing, the company was found to have improperly estimated costs of services provided and failed to comply with federal acquisition regulations (Waxman 2006).

In total, FEMA spent approximately $1.7 billion to purchase 114,000 temporary trailers, tens of thousands of them without price negotiations (U.S. House of Representatives 2006). According to FEMA (2007b), the Department of Homeland Security awarded $3.6 billion in over 36 different contracts for the trailers used for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The Office of Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security, after being formally requested by Senators Byron Dorgan and Mary Landrieu to investigate the contracts, found that, although the companies awarded contracts by FEMA had adequate qualifications and complied with federal regulations, they did not meet additional crucial criteria and lacked fiscal responsibility. Regardless of the recommendations of the Stafford Act, preference was not given to local bids from the affected region of the Gulf Coast, and no criteria were designated to determine the difference between companies that were actually from Louisiana and companies that simply conducted business there (FEMA 2007b). The Institute for Southern Studies found that over $136 million had been fraudulently spent in Katrina-related contracts and that another $428 million, although not fraudulently invested, has been misappropriated in corporate contracts (Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch 2006).

Blackwater Security, a company made famous by its work in Iraq, especially its failures in Fallujah, was hired too, as were 50 other private security groups, including the Israeli company Instinctive Shooting International (ISI; Scahill 2005). These companies' "mercenaries" hit the streets of New Orleans, patrolling in armored cars with heavy artillery and with no official explanation as to who they were and why they were there, just days after the storm. Blackwater later received a federal contract to provide armed guards to FEMA reconstruction projects through the Department of Homeland Security, despite the company's dismal reputation for misconduct and killing unarmed civilians in Iraq (Beeston 2007; Scahill 2005). On its website a mere two days after the hurricane made landfall, Blackwater advertised that it was helping with the Gulf

Coast relief effort through airlift services, security services, and crowd control (Blackwater USA 2005; Scahill 2005).

Perpetuating "the emergency"

Klein (2007) provides a useful analysis of what she calls "disaster capitalism" as it applies to the case of Katrina and its aftermath in New Orleans. She notes that this particular form of capitalism was developed as an outgrowth of post-Keynesian socioeconomic policies (of the so-called Chicago School), which were set in motion in the 1950s and fully matured under the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations as both national and foreign policy directives. In her book *The Shock Doctrine* (2007), she argues that disaster capitalism involves an initial "shock treatment" to economies—provoked by events like invasions, wars, or natural disasters. The creation of an economic and infrastructural "blank slate" in the wake of such disruptions enables government reconstruction programs to prioritize private-sector contracts over the continued support of public-sector infrastructure. The "disaster economy" she notes,

> has been built with taxpayers' money, thanks to the boom in privatized war-zone reconstruction. The giant contractors that have served as "the primes" in Iraq and Afghanistan have come under frequent political fire ... [for making] huge investments in corporate infrastructure—Bechtel's battalions of earthmoving equipment, Halliburton's planes and fleets of trucks. [2007:416]

She explains that the buildup of contractor infrastructure during the George W. Bush years can be "seen as a fully articulated state-within-a-state that is as muscular and capable as the actual state is frail and feeble" (Klein 2007:417). Klein's work echoes that of Eric Klinenberg and Thomas Frank (2005), who note that the display of private contracting post-Katrina and the rapacious effects on displacing the poor represent a looting of government infrastructure itself, what they call "Looting Homeland Security."

Klein argues that the replacement of government infrastructures aimed at serving the public good with private contractors whose interests lie in corporate growth directly harms the target community the contractors ostensibly are paid to serve. She uses post-Katrina New Orleans as a prime example: "Post-Katrina New Orleans may be providing the first Western-world image of a new kind of waste urban landscape: the mold belt, destroyed by the deadly combination of weathered public infrastructure and extreme weather" (Klein 2007:415). The eviction of the poor from New Orleans, the obliteration of a public infrastructure that could care for those evicted, the eventual demolition of their homes, the payment of exorbitant prices to private companies to provide substandard trailers as tem-

porary housing, and, finally, the huge contracts awarded to private firms to rebuild former public housing units as mixed-income condominium properties all point to an exemplary study in disaster capitalism (see also Klinenberg and Frank 2005).

Klein notes that Katrina can be read as a failure on the part of the government to deal with an impending natural disaster (by failing to repair the levees), and, moreover, that the government took advantage of the disaster to mobilize new contracts with "the giants." "The Bush administration," she notes, "refused to allow emergency funds to pay public sector salaries" (Klein 2007:414), but it did award huge contracts to its favorite companies to "clean up the mess." "Cleaning up the mess" in this case included a deliberate effort to get rid of the poorest sectors of the population, who were seen as a drain on public resources—those who lived in public housing. The notion that subverting support for public-sector recovery and using disaster to enrich private contractors by evicting and "erasing" the poor were part of a deliberate plan was affirmed for residents when they heard one of their state lawmakers say, in regard to the loss of public housing from the storms and flooding, that "God did what we could not do."

Disaster capitalism thus has particular contours. What the victims of Katrina also help us understand is that this sort of economy requires, in some sense, an ongoing production of "disaster" in the form of "failed recovery" to justify ongoing financial growth. Giorgio Agamben (1998) and Didier Fassin and Paula Vasquez (2005) demonstrate, the latter more recently with respect to humanitarian relief, that various kinds of inhumane arrangements and interventions can be authorized under conditions that are deemed sufficient to call for a "state of emergency." Katrina offered an opportunity for disaster capitalism to become entrenched, supported fully by the U.S. government. But the failure of an effective recovery in New Orleans has created yet another kind of "disaster"—the ongoing disaster. New Orleans offers an example of the perpetuation of a "state of emergency" that was initiated by Katrina but has been sustained by ongoing politicoeconomic machinery—a machinery that ultimately needs to "have a disaster" to justify its existence.[10] The bureaucratic machinery that has kept New Orleanians in a state of disruption and "ongoing recovery" might be seen as the apparatus of "exceptionalism" in everyday life that continues to authorize violence by way of its inhumane erasures and interventions.

Hurricane Katrina was an "event" disaster that mobilized a "state of emergency," which subsequently led to the authorization of a military response to an "ongoing" disaster that the failure of bureaucratic machinery helped to prolong. The "state" was erased as a functioning buffer for the poorest sectors of the socioeconomic hierarchy, and in its place a "free market" in private-sector development contracts emerged. Just as those citizens who were living

paycheck to paycheck or welfare check to welfare check were evicted first by the forces of nature and then by the force of the unfettered free market authorized by the "emergency," so too were the social programs, previously offered by the government to provide safety nets to these populations, eviscerated. Disaster capitalism authorized the arrival and insertion of private corporations not to do the jobs that were previously done by the government but to shift the focus away from what the government ought to do, to what the market is thought to be able to do better. The priority is not actually to rescue or attend to the needs of the poorest but, rather, to invest in profit growth sectors. The counterpart to disaster capitalism, what we might call "recovery capitalism," is the inefficient use of resources (the siphoning off of resources by corporate interests); the shedding of the poor, who cost too much to maintain in the process; and the dissolution of the state as a buffer for those who live at the margins of the economy. These effects impact not only the displaced but also those who remain behind, trying to "recover." Disaster, and the political-economic machinery of disaster's response, create a situation in which victims of disaster are only visible if they remain in a state of "attempting to recover." That is, they must stay in a state of ongoing disaster.[11]

Rather than seeing these political and economic arrangements of disaster capitalism as ancillary to, or a remedy for, the individual experiences of chronic disaster syndrome, we suggest that they need to be seen as part of the syndrome itself. That is, government policies that have authorized an eviction of the poor, underfunding of community rebuilding efforts, and an evisceration of the role of government in providing public security networks are, in fact, a part of chronic disaster syndrome. They are not a solution. In fact, they have helped perpetuate the conditions of displacement and its sequelae in human suffering and ill health. Nevertheless, these programs are being espoused and supported by many as the route to a recovery and rebuilding of New Orleans.[12]

Everyone has felt the effects of disaster capitalism in New Orleans, not just the poor. Middle-class, homeowning communities have received little help in rebuilding as a result of the gutting of government-supported social security networks and programs. Their sense that they must pull themselves up by their own bootstraps is expected and celebrated by neoliberal policymakers, who do not feel that the government has a responsibility to rebuild communities household by household. Ironically, citizens themselves also put forth this view, sometimes as a means of deflecting criticisms they hear in the national press about how New Orleanians must be "lazy." We also found that some residents of New Orleans, regardless of socioeconomic status, were in favor of the destruction of public housing. They too felt the need to "cleanse" New Orleans of its poverty, assuming this would also eliminate crime, drug use, and violence

associated with such poverty. As alluded to above, Louisiana Congressman Richard Baker publicly stated after the hurricane, "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did" (Quigley 2005). Adopting the language one could find in policy papers that openly discussed the idea that Katrina had a "silver lining" because it hastened urban redevelopment, a 54-year-old man interpreted the storm as a kind of "cleansing": "I think Mother Nature was telling us, we were overdue for a disaster that hits in such a way, you know. We talked about it for years. We got lucky every time. We found out that Katrina means cleaning. It means 'cleaning.' Who would have known that we needed such a cleaning up!"

A 49-year-old woman offered a slightly more sympathetic view, indicating that she hoped the government would tear down old, rat-infested structures and replace them with something better, but she understood that there were risks of creating homelessness if such an effort led to the loss of public housing. She refers to the large public protests against the demolition of public housing units:

> I was disappointed that these activists came in, that they didn't want 'em torn down. I think they should tear 'em down. They're terrible! I wish they would tear the ones down up the Canal Street by the Quarter. But— oh well—anyway—and just feel for the people that— and another thing that makes me upset is the homeless people, that were in the plaza on Claiborne Street. Now, I know some people are homeless because of either the mental state and they just can't hold a job, and all. But I must admit, I think there are some of 'em out there that do work, but unfortunately don't have enough to pay for rent. A lot of people were renting places in the city, when they got demolished. And their landlord, for one, doesn't wanna rebuilt. It's not worth it, or if they do rebuild, they're gonna have to charge a lot higher to recoup.

Postdisaster syndrome, emergent from the effects of ongoing displacement and the idea that the "disaster" is still in place, has created a fertile ground of support for what would otherwise be considered draconian interventions and internalized feelings of perseverance against all odds and has fed the belief that displacing the poorest sectors of the population of New Orleans will lead to "recovery" once and for all. This, too, can be thought of as a part of the pathology of "chronic disaster syndrome."

Conclusion: Katrina is the future

> I'll probably never be recovered from Katrina. Fully, never. This'll affect me until the day I die. I mean, its devastation is so upsetting and heartbreaking that I don't think I'll ever, ever, ever forget. And if it ever happens again, I don't think—I would ever—want to be

here to see it happen again. I don't even want to come back to get anything, even if it's salvageable, to salvage. Because then I'd just give up on this landscape and lifestyle and move on to something, a little higher ground and start all over again.

—Wallace, 54-year-old male

In our opening quote, our colleague Martha Ward insightfully notes, "Katrina is not something that happened in the past. It is the future." We would like to suggest, in conclusion, the importance of reading the events of Katrina and its aftermath storms and floods not only as history but also for what they augur for the future. Like a canary in a coal mine, New Orleans offers a warning that the future has arrived. The collapse of government infrastructures and the wholesale selling of government social welfare provision to private-sector for-profit security interests (and leaving the nonprofit nongovernmental sector to fill in the gaps the private sector fails to fill) has not generated a good deal of confidence or recovery in New Orleans. In fact, from what New Orleanians tell us, this future is foreboding.

For most residents of New Orleans, "recovery" has been a slow and steady process of realizing that life as they knew it is gone and that living in a state of quasi-emergency, of "responding" to ongoing trauma, is "the norm." These are the characteristics of a future in which chronic disaster syndrome emerges as at once a health, social, and political nexus that functions to perpetuate disaster capitalism and ongoing trauma for those in the avant garde of the neoliberal social experiment.

Stories of loss and accounts of the perception that recovery from Katrina is far from complete suggest that returning New Orleanian residents are not allowing the wool to be pulled over their eyes by the "natural disaster" argument. They understand that Katrina, although a natural disaster in its first days, became a humanly perpetuated disaster and has remained so for some time. We have attempted to show some of the structural forces that keep disaster alive in New Orleans and have made it into an ongoing "way of life." Not by accident but, rather, by design are so many in New Orleans still displaced. "We've become third class citizens in this world, in a lot of ways," one elderly man told us. "Katrina . . . it just keeps going on and on. Will it ever end?" an elderly woman asks.

Notes

1. In this article, when we refer to New Orleans we are denoting the GNO area, which includes Jefferson Parish, Placquemines Parish, Orleans Parish, and St. Bernard Parish.

2. Some residents of these trailers were told to vacate as early as February 2007.

3. We refer here to the work of Allan Young, Arthur Kleinman, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Paul Farmer, João Beihl, and Mark Nichter, to name only a few.

4. These are the words of Paul Rainwater, executive director of the LRA (see Dewan 2008: 1).

5. The RHP was launched in 2006 as the largest housing recovery program in U.S. history (RHP 2007). The program, designed to help residents rebuild their homes through federally funded grants, allotted up to $150,000 to each eligible homeowner for three options: (1) stay in one's previous primary residence and rebuild; (2) relocate within Louisiana after selling one's original residence to the state; or (3) sell one's original primary residence to the state and leave Louisiana (Finger 2008). To qualify for Road Home funds, an applicant must have owned and occupied the home as a primary residence at the time of Hurricane Katrina (August 29, 2005) or Rita (September 24, 2005). In addition, the home had to meet FEMA eligibility requirements as having sustained major or severe damage from flooding of at least $5,200 (although this was not how the disbursement criteria were deployed); or a Road Home inspector had to determine that the home required rebuilding; or the home must have sustained at least 601 square feet of roof damage, or been flooded by more than one foot of water, or have had structural integrity issues owing to the storms. Homeowners who were uninsured were eligible for the program, but they would be penalized 30 percent for not having had insurance (RHP 2007, 2008). The Senate oversight hearings on the disbursement of Road Home funding noted that, originally, the plan was to provide assistance only to owners of homes damaged by the failure of the levee system (i.e., damages the U.S. government took responsibility for). However, during the hearings, it became clear that homeowners who sustained damage from the storm and not necessarily the flooding should also receive grants.

6. The initial program determined the amount of federal funding on the basis of the number of homes affected on the Louisiana coastline and the average price of those homes and reached an average loan amount of between $63,000 and $76,000 per home. This figure was used initially to determine the amount of federal aid, but it does not reflect the actual amounts disbursed, which varied wildly.

7. The information about public housing closings is available in the following accounts: Browne-Dianis 2007; Morse and Dale 2007; Nossiter 2006; Palast 2007; Quigley 2006a, 2006b, 2007a; Saulny 2006a; Walsh 2007. We would like to extend a special thanks, again, to Martha Ward for providing us with a tour of the Treme Projects with an explanation of the timing of their closing.

8. A federal investigation was launched of the top U.S. housing official, Alphonso Jackson, for favoritism in contract awarding, and of one of the contracting companies out of Atlanta, Columbia Residential, which had ties to Jackson and owed him money (Quigley 2007b).

9. Unity Housing was founded in 1992 to prevent, reduce, and, ultimately, end homelessness. Its goal is to help the public find

affordable housing as part of the rebuilding of Greater New Orleans. See UNITY HousingLink n.d.

10. Fassin and Vasquez call attention to a particular reading of the work of Agamben and of Carl Schmitt. Agamben points to the way in which the "state of exception" that authorizes "emergency" interventions (exemplified in the Holocaust) has become routinized in the everyday of contemporary modern industrial life, shifting from the decision of the sovereign (who is himself exempted by the rule of exception) to the apparatus of governance, which perpetuates and produces exceptionalism as a biotechnological and societal norm. Agamben notes that the state of exception involved a stripping of humanity to a state of "bare life"—*bios* without *zoe*—authorizing inhumane interventions without social approbation; there was no sense of sacrifice in the killing of forms of life with no social identity. He insightfully notes that such regimes of exceptionalism are found in everyday spaces today (e.g., life-support units in hospitals), not simply in the moment of crisis. Fassin and Vasquez note how much more useful it is to recognize the temporal specificity of the state of exception, focusing on the Venezuelan *Tragedia* of 1999—the flooding and mudslide disaster that killed some 10,000 persons. Occurring during a democratic reform election, the disaster response was mobilized with the consent of the public even while it authorized a militarization of intervention and produced an old and familiar violence against the most vulnerable of the disaster's victims. Both accounts are useful in explicating Katrina. The initial militarization of disaster response, including the violence it produced, reminds us of the temporal and event-based specificity of the "state of emergency" that came into existence in New Orleans. At the same time, Agamben's insight that such regimes can be routinized into the spaces of everyday life is clearly useful in exploring how bureaucratic regimes that became a modus vivendi in the years after the "event" continue to produce an ongoing state of exception and emergency in New Orleans.

11. Ironically, the poor have not left New Orleans. They have just changed ethnicity. Immigrant Hispanic populations now fill the ranks of the underclass that were previously held by poor African Americans. In the wake of Katrina, immigrant laborers flooded the GNO area, hoping to work in the reconstruction industry. This opportunity was made easier by suspension of federal minimum wage laws and sanctions for hiring unauthorized workers. Companies were allowed to apply through the federal government for temporary H2B visas for the purpose of satisfying labor needs unmet by the local population (Donato et al. 2007). These immigrants cost the government considerably less than local residents in public assistance. Promissory economies that will grow a new and better New Orleans are supposed to arise out of this mess. This situation, of course, seems inevitable. The eviscerating of public social services financed by the government is not a surprising outcome of disaster capitalism; it is an inevitable outcome. This, then, is the second step in the process of creating an ongoing "state of emergency." Without medical institutions, public services, or resources to help people, particularly the most needy, rebuild lives, the emergency in some very obvious ways, continues.

12. As with other "syndromes," we can also point to a subtle and important component of "chronic disaster syndrome" that emerges from the already named notion of "disaster syndrome." "Disaster syndrome" is used to explain the phenomenon in which people assign more importance to disasters than they should because of the heightened sense of severity and intensity of the events that become labeled "disasters." So, for example, people are more fearful of flying than driving because plane crashes are considered "disasters" even though automobile accidents claim far more lives on a daily basis than plane crashes. Under conditions of disaster, peo-

ple are more likely to exaggerate the need for certain interventions that would otherwise be thought of as inhumane or intolerable. In the case of New Orleans, we suggest that one way to read the eviction of the poor is as a byproduct of "disaster syndrome"—again, a component of chronic disaster syndrome. This, in part, explains why so many people in New Orleans also felt that evicting the poor would help resolve their problems and help generate some sort of "recovery."

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