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Neoliberal disasters and racialisation: the case of post-Katrina Latino labour

NICOLE TRUJILLO-PAGAN

Abstract: This paper argues that Hurricane Katrina accelerated ongoing social processes involving neoliberal policies, labour migration and racial boundary shifts. In the storm's wake, neoliberal policies promoted the reorganisation of the local labour force and stimulated the immigration of vulnerable Latino immigrant workers. The ways in which existing labour policies were selectively enforced also worked to promote workers' vulnerability and to 'privatise' risk. These policies were designed to recover and rebuild New Orleans, but ultimately relied on racialising immigrant workers.

Keywords: disaster capitalism, FEMA, Hurricane Katrina, Latino labour, neoliberalism, New Orleans, privatisation, racialisation

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated many coastal towns on the Gulf coast, but much of the damage affecting New Orleans resulted from breaches in its levee system. The city and its surrounding areas were flooded and, particularly in low-lying areas where water was slower to recede, the damage seemed to continually exceed initial expectations. The disaster's impact stretched beyond thousands of families' insurance claims. It devastated the city's existing economic

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infrastructure and precipitated the loss of thousands of jobs in the city. Displaced residents struggled to recover their lives by securing homes and employment.

Although there are many narratives about what happened in the days, weeks and months following Hurricane Katrina, a consensus emerged about the federal government's failures. Many observers held government agencies, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), accountable for failing to coordinate a large-scale emergency response to the crises that ensued. Many also considered delays in rebuilding, and particularly the lack of federal funding for recovery, to be an aspect of the disaster. An important limitation of these narratives, however, is that they obscure the ways that agency practices and policy limitations make some government 'failures' productive. More specifically, a post-Katrina New Orleans reflected the emergence of a new set of policies creating profitable post-disaster markets and promoting new forms of labour control. These more 'productive' market aspects of the federal government's response help us to understand neoliberal policies and their implications in emerging immigrant destinations.

Government 'failures' are most clearly productive when we consider the ways that human agency creates disaster. Scholars argue that disasters are social products;¹ in other words, humans fashion 'disasters' through their actions before and after a natural event. Disasters are also produced by social structures, including those that make and implement the policy decisions surrounding recovery. (Human agency should be distinguished from the many agencies that were involved in relief efforts, including FEMA, the Citizenship and Immigration Service [CIS], the Occupational Safety and Health Administration [OSHA] and the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.) Although many agencies were involved in the Katrina disaster, political decisions ultimately dominated the ways that agencies carried out their administrative relief efforts in New Orleans.² In the wake of the hurricane, neoliberal policy decisions included both the implementation of new policies and the selective enforcement of existing regulations that shaped profitable markets for contracting recovery work. These decisions also encouraged the development of a large and low-paid labour force for work in construction jobs.

Neoliberalism profits from the increased commodification of human labour.³ The disruptions it causes in one location drive migrants to markets with a high demand for labour, such as New Orleans. Although many scholars agree that neoliberalism normalises unequal economic growth, they differ on how race factors into its effects on markets and society. Some, like Edna Bonacich, view racial inequality as an outcome of neoliberal globalisation.⁴ Such theorists are beginning to explore how neoliberal policy creates and refashions racial difference. What follows is a contribution to this emerging scholarship.

Hurricane Katrina, in short, accelerated ongoing social processes involving neoliberal policies, labour migration and racial boundary shifts. In the storm's wake, these policies promoted the reorganisation of the local labour force and stimulated

the immigration of vulnerable Latino immigrant workers. The ways in which existing labour policies were selectively enforced also served to promote workers' vulnerability. Such selective policy enforcement meant that government agencies eschewed responsibility for ensuring workplace safety and shifted the burden on to already vulnerable workers.⁵ The policies that were designed to recover and rebuild New Orleans ultimately relied on racialising immigrant workers,⁶ a process to which neoliberalism contributed.

Neoliberal policies and practices inform disaster capitalism

One example of the process by which neoliberal politics use natural hazard events to produce profitable 'disasters' involves labour market changes. Ideally, emergency management strives to mitigate the effects of one type of disaster without creating another. However, the neoliberal policies that followed Hurricane Katrina, and the labour market changes they encouraged, promoted the vulnerability of low-wage Latino workers, a finding whose implications extend beyond this particular group of workers. Understanding the post-disaster labour market provides a unique lens to refract the changing contexts in which a mobile and flexible labour force is embedded, such as the increasing lack of union protection or employer-sponsored benefit packages that include medical insurance.

Three political decisions were perhaps most immediate in shaping the post-Katrina labour market. First, on 7 September 2005, the Department of Homeland Security issued a 45-day moratorium on the sanctioning of employers for hiring workers unable to provide I-9 documentation (required under the Immigration Control and Reform Act of 1986). This literally meant that employers did not have to prove a worker's identity or authority to work in the US. The following day, then-president George Bush suspended the Davis-Bacon Act, which required employers to pay the prevailing wage for contracts paid with federal money. (The Act was originally brought in, in 1931, to provide a wage floor for workers, so that employers would not undercut prevailing rates, which led to deskilling.) This decision particularly affected the construction industry, which was 'the most turbulent and unstable major sector of the economy' and required government regulation of construction workers' wages in order to ensure the continuity of a skilled labour force.⁷ Finally, the Bush administration suspended affirmative action requirements for federal contractors and, by default, their subcontractors as well.

These policy decisions had two important consequences. First, they made undocumented workers in surrounding areas ideal low-wage workers. Mounting criticism from unions and politicians led to the Davis-Bacon Act being brought back into effect approximately two months after its suspension, but the immigration of Latino workers suggested that the city had become a haven of new and unregulated economic opportunity.⁸

Second, the decisions affecting the labour market coincided with the privatisation of the post-impact emergency response. In turn, this privatisation facilitated

the expansion of a chain of subcontractors well beyond the affected areas and well into the recovery phase of the disaster.⁹ In what has come to be known as 'the largest and costliest rebuilding effort in US history', the federal government awarded large no-bid contracts with provisions that guaranteed profits for the contractors. US government agencies funnelled public funds into private contracts and significantly expanded the latter's profit margins. A host of scholars, activists and media commentators protested the contracting of industry giants, such as Shaw Environmental & Infrastructure, Bechtel National, CH2M Hill Inc. and Fluor Enterprises, for a variety of reasons that included the loss of local control over recovery, the preferential nature of 'no-bid contracts' and the expansion of 'disaster capitalism'.¹⁰ The companies provided temporary mobile housing units, some of which were found to contain hazardous levels of formaldehyde.¹¹ A subsequent Senate Committee report also found that 'the manufactured and modular homes purchased represent some of the most serious waste discovered to date'.¹²

The federal government's 'failed' response was reflected across multiple agencies that did not consistently enforce pre-existing policy. OSHA, for instance, did not enforce health and safety regulations and reduced its operations in New Orleans to acting in an advisory capacity.¹³ This decision seemed like 'benign neglect' towards what OSHA and other occupational health and safety organisations, such as the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), considered inaccessible low-wage workers. An occupational risk specialist in post-Katrina New Orleans explained that it wasn't possible to enforce regulations amidst the huge quantity of clean-up and recovery subcontractors that had flooded the area.¹⁴ As government agencies eschewed responsibility for workplace health and safety regulation, and as contracts ended and contractors abruptly disappeared, an estimated 30,000 vulnerable Latino workers were literally left to fend for themselves.¹⁵ In these ways, agency practices not only magnified persistent and emerging challenges in labour equity, but also actively contributed to structuring Latino workers' vulnerability in a post-Katrina labour market.

The equitable recovery of New Orleans was undermined by a labour market that reproduced racial stratification and structural disadvantages, including unequal protection under the law. In her 2007 book, *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein helps us to understand how capital expands through crisis. Like other scholars, Klein finds that disasters force through broader structural changes, including those involving social and economic policy.¹⁶ Amidst the chaos, she argues, powerful groups are in a good position to direct change to their advantage and implement neoliberal policies. One common example involves privatisation: elites promote the selling-off of public resources while citizens, still reeling from the shock, are unable to respond. Critical government functions, including those involving policing, schooling and medical care, are also transferred mid-disaster to private companies. For example, in New Orleans, Blackwater USA employees carried automatic assault weapons and were deputised to use lethal force in the immediate post-impact phase of the disaster. Similarly, the US

Department of Education imposed 'the largest-ever school voucher experiment for the region and the nation', transforming a formerly public system.¹⁷

The case of immigrant recovery labour in a post-Katrina New Orleans raises an interesting caveat for understanding neoliberal dynamics. In David Harvey's oft-cited analysis of neoliberalism, he defines the state as responsible for 'creating and preserving ... an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade'. Harvey notes that states must create markets where they do not exist, but 'state interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum'.¹⁸ I argue that, although the state is not directly involved in labour control, it nonetheless establishes a framework in which labour violations among immigrant workers are more likely to occur.

Government contracts are not simply another business transaction, but instead play a decisive role in structuring an industry's markets. The ways in which the government contracted out recovery work stimulated the development of a variegated recovery industry, which included the growth of smaller subcontracting firms, new wage structures and lax labour law enforcement in the city and its surrounding areas. Recovery work included both migrant and displaced workers, but federal government contracts undoubtedly prioritised private business interests. In the words of General Douglas O'Dell, federal co-ordinator for Gulf Coast Rebuilding, 'rebuilding involves every agency at every level of government. But government alone is not the solution. The private and non-profit sectors play a determining role in the long-term recovery of the region. We should do everything possible to clear red tape and empower them to succeed.'¹⁹ In a post-Katrina context, the elimination of 'red tape' that was deemed necessary ultimately ensured a low-paid and vulnerable workforce that promoted profitable recovery contracts.

Disaster capitalism and labour conditions

Many Latino workers carrying out recovery jobs in New Orleans felt they had jobs because of the risks they took. For instance, one worker interviewed, called Negro, who lived in a gutted and abandoned home near the day labour site at Elysian Fields, suggested that day labourers in New Orleans were 'on their own'. He hadn't been hurt on the job, but explained that, 'this is construction and sometimes there are accidents'. You have to be careful, he said: 'If you don't take care of yourself, who will take care of you?' Although he felt that contractors were responsible for having appropriate equipment, including that related to safety, he concluded that, 'many [day labourers] go' and take a job 'because of [economic] necessity'. 'The pay is good here, especially when the money comes from the government. But [they] don't pay anything [close to] what one should earn. I know [all the trades], you understand?' Workers often repeated statements such as 'who else would do these jobs?' to emphasise their degraded working conditions and hopes for better pay. Such claims assumed a position that was relative

to a larger labour market and other occupations, including the growing population of 'independent contractors'. Both within and beyond New Orleans, neoliberal government policies stimulated an increasing degree of work transfer (outsourcing and subcontracting labour), the effects of which served to expand the location occupied by market intermediaries, including labour recruiters.

Labour recruiters working in New Orleans ranged in size, but the degree of subcontracting meant that OSHA and the Department of Labor found it difficult to hold them accountable for labour violations. In addition, what is referred to as 'nested' or 'tiered' contracting meant that a single contract could involve several layers of subcontractors. Recruiters included construction contractors and subcontractors of varying sizes. Their operations ranged from securing workers for individual employers to simply transporting them from surrounding labour markets in cities like Houston and Atlanta. Many simply dropped off workers by the bus-, van- and car-load. Recruiters were at times referred to as *polleros*, or men who tended chickens, because they gathered workers who did not know what to expect when they arrived in New Orleans; they often got workers to agree to the trip by promising wages, food, water and shelter.

In contrast to the recruiters' lucrative market, workers' experiences were mixed. Take the experience of Libre and his nephew, who were recruited to New Orleans by a Belfour subcontractor. They worked for the subcontractor for three months, but their problems began when the Belfour contract ended. They were part of a group of twenty-four workers who stayed with the subcontractor after he began to take on new contracts. Libre explained that they stayed in a hotel during the months that the subcontractor had the Belfour contract. After that contract ended, the subcontractor bought a bus and they slept in the parking lot of a hotel. 'We paid the parking. He didn't pay anything. We paid the bus's parking at \$180 per week. Yeah. But since there were a lot of us, we didn't feel it. There were ten of us living in the bus. We just put a board and a blanket there and slept [he laughs].' They bought food at the store and used a microwave to cook. Because they trusted the subcontractor, who 'supposedly was going to pay us', all the workers went unpaid for at least two weeks of work at twelve hours per day after the subcontractor abruptly 'disappeared'. As Libre explained, 'he promised us so much that we believed too much in him. Because the first payments came out okay, right? But then the man cut the idea of paying and ... well, he decided to go.'

Many workers found themselves scrambling to access food. Some hungry workers were turned away at Red Cross stations, while others were harassed by immigration authorities. They slept in warehouse-like conditions, outdoors, in cars, vans and tents or in derelict buildings. Everyday tasks were more difficult, including washing clothes that had been worn during days spent amidst a variety of hazardous substances. Most laboured amidst stuffy, mouldy structures without adequate ventilation or equipment. Without adequate protective footwear, for example, Jorge was wearing sneakers on a demolition job when he stepped on a nail. He went back to the hotel where he shared a room with two

other men. He was cured by *la china* who worked at the hotel. She cleaned the wound and gave him medicine, which he took for three days. He didn't go to the hospital: 'various friends who have hurt themselves [their wounds] have been infected ... if you go to the hospital, you get the bill, and everything's expensive'. Others have found themselves summarily abandoned at a medical station if they have been injured on the job.

Despite the myriad problems that compromised their adequate working conditions, workers were often most concerned about their wages. Studies have confirmed the workers' complaints of being paid differentially, according to their nationality and legal status.²⁰ Many workers were not paid time-and-a-half for overtime, while many others were not paid at all. Many Latino workers experienced 'wage theft' or 'wage fraud', which meant that they were not paid for the tasks they performed. A study by the Southern Poverty Law Center found that 80 per cent of Latino immigrant workers surveyed had experienced wage theft.²¹ Some workers felt humiliated, and others manipulated, by employers who paid them part of their wages as an inducement to continue working or who over-charged workers for housing, food and transportation.

In this situation, many Latino workers felt that they lacked institutional protection. They complained of being harassed and threatened with deportation, physical assault, and even with their lives, when they demanded their wages. Many workers felt that they could not trust local police officers to mediate conflicts with employers; their fears were found to be justified. A 2011 federal government report found that the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) had engaged in discriminatory policing, unwarranted searches and arrests without probable cause.²² Many Latinos in the city felt targeted by police officers who stole money from them at traffic stops, and, in 2009, an NOPD officer was charged with a variety of crimes targeting Latinos, including sexual battery, kidnapping and false imprisonment.²³

The degree of subcontracting in New Orleans also meant that even government contractors were not held accountable for ensuring a working environment that conformed to legal standards in the US. These problems reflect the expanded influence of neoliberal policies on contracting construction work and the reduced influence of regulations ensuring basic standards of working conditions, income security and freedom from discrimination.

The racialisation of post-Katrina recovery labour

Just as neoliberal policies shaped the development of recovery contracts and the attendant labour market, including the unique position occupied by a largely new Latino migrant labour force, so disaster capitalism may often involve racialising workers. In particular, the case of post-Katrina labour demonstrates key features of how this process works.

First, the dirtiest and most dangerous demolition jobs were overwhelmingly carried out by a largely undocumented and foreign-born, non-English speaking

and vulnerable Latino workforce. These workers were distinguished by their location within the disaster labour market. As 'independent contractors', they were also excluded from labour protection regulations, which was another distinction facilitated by policies that promoted a high degree of subcontracting following the hurricane. Second, a rapid process of racialisation followed the workers' introduction to New Orleans. In the weeks and months that followed Hurricane Katrina's impact, the media heightened strong public anxiety about racial tensions in the city and scapegoated new Latino migrants, conflating them with profiteers who were outsiders and 'alien invaders' in the city.²⁴ The stories used emotive terms to describe the arrival of immigrant workers, such as 'descended', 'poured into', 'appeared throughout'; they were said to have changed 'the complexion' of the city.²⁵ The invasive character of the 'influx' was suggested by writers who claimed that the 'recent and sudden influx of immigrants seems a little too much, too fast' or who blamed federal authorities that had 'opened the gates ... [for] ... a new flood'.²⁶ Other commentators echoed this emphasis, portraying Latinos as a unique 'army of aliens' who would recover New Orleans and set it 'on its way to becoming a largely brown city'.²⁷ The stereotypes heaped on the new Latino workers served to normalise brutal and inhumane working conditions.

Perhaps one of the most publicly visible sources of tension facing workers involved racial tensions refracted by Hurricane Katrina. Black evacuees faced obvious discrimination, and the 'right to return' embodied the contentious racial politics of the city's recovery. Demographers noted that the city was older and whiter in the months following the hurricane.²⁸ The tensions of displacement were heightened by this new migrant labour force. Latino workers seemed to occupy a lucrative labour market position in the city, while many black residents felt displaced from it. Undoubtedly, Latinos' new labour market position in New Orleans had been informed by the US racial hierarchy.

Despite the history of racialising Latino labour in the US and its more recent history in the construction industry, what is unique about the post-Katrina moment, and disaster capitalism more specifically, is the unique relationship between policy, government agency practices and private interests. The federal emergency response certainly did not include a specific plan for supplying recovery *labour*; indeed, it could not anticipate the magnitude of damage, nor take direct responsibility for supplying a labour force for recovery jobs. Nonetheless, policy actions and agency practices participated in racialising Latino labour, which ensured its availability as a vulnerable and low-cost workforce.

In effect, the choices that the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (BICE) made in terms of where it would conduct raids discouraged labour migration from some areas in favour of others. For instance, many people gathered to look for work in Lee Circle, which lay slightly west of the French Quarter. The numbers of workers, many of whom were Latino, swelled at corners like Lee Circle as the recovery progressed. After areas adjoining the French Quarter had been recovered, and as tourism to the city resumed, these corners became

increasingly visible to the many tourists re-entering the city. BICE officers selectively chose these public and highly visible areas to conduct raids on large gatherings of Latino day labourers.

Ironically, there was nothing to identify persons who 'loitered' in Lee Circle before and after Katrina except the colour of their skin. Despite the obvious infringement of their civil rights, Latinos who gathered in front of the convenience stores in the Circle were chased, thrown to the ground, handcuffed and interrogated about their legal status, before they were summarily shipped off to processing facilities. Workers described these 'raids' on public space as *redadas*, or roundups, a term also used in reference to the handling of livestock. Similar patterns occurred in other corners, where numbers swelled as recovery in adjoining areas progressed, leaving more people visible to the public at later hours in the day. In this way, federal officials selectively enforced immigration law in ways that intensified a post-terror, post-disaster climate of panic and fear. Scholars have argued elsewhere that fostering such a climate ensures little public resistance to neoliberal reforms, including those that undermine democratic freedoms.

In the same way that officials chose areas for raids that had been recovered and were more accessible to tourists, so they neglected less recovered areas. Such practices encouraged workers to migrate to areas that had a greater need for low-cost and vulnerable labour, but they were also places with fewer resources and where workers had greater difficulty accessing electricity, food and transport. Workers in remote areas were also more vulnerable to unscrupulous employers.

Worker solidarity was undermined by differences in legal status. On the one hand, many Honduran workers either enjoyed legal status (Temporary Protected Status [TPS]) or felt they had access to regularising their presence in the country. In this way, TPS manufactured a unique population that existed mainly on paper because Honduran workers were largely indistinguishable from their Mexican counterparts. On the other hand, many Mexican workers argued that it was easier for them to return to the US in the event that they were deported because their homeland was closer and the barriers were not as great as for their Honduran counterparts. These differences served to highlight Latino workers' tenuous presence in the US workforce.

Other facets of the local context further undermined the Latino workforce in the area. Louisiana excluded immigrants from basic labour protections, such as general workers' compensation. After the major contractors left the area, smaller construction firms hired Latino workers from different areas. The increasing number of employers and erosion of a shared background among workers further undermined solidarity. Finally, the area's relative lack of experience with a large Latino workforce meant that information was inaccessible to them. In the immediate post-impact phase of the disaster, local agencies relied heavily on computer technology and English-language publications. The Latino labour force struggled not only with limited English-language skills, but also more generally with literacy. These aspects of the local context amplified the difficulties facing the new migrant labour force and bolstered its isolation.

Employers and racialisation

Employers both benefited from and contributed to the racialisation of Latino workers in the post-Katrina labour market. Subcontractors expanded the racialisation of Latinos as 'hard workers'. For instance, a worker advocate claimed that he overheard contractors on Bourbon Street casting Latino workers as 'mules' that work hard and don't complain.²⁹ Latino workers and scholars confirm the effects of this racialisation. Workers felt that the way they were perceived encouraged contractors to select them for difficult work. Researchers have found that 'immigrants are disproportionately employed in ... construction, [a sector] with relatively high injury and fatality levels. Moreover, immigrants may be in riskier jobs or perform riskier tasks than natives within those sectors.'³⁰

The construction industry's growing interest in recruiting Latino workers is evidenced in its increased attention towards the population. For instance, industry publications indicate the widespread use of English-Spanish dictionaries of construction terminology. In local business journals in the South, construction industry leaders estimate their Latino workers at anywhere from 20–50 per cent of their workforce.³¹ These business leaders also popularise and reinforce assessments of Latino workers that are based on racial/ethnic difference. For instance, according to one construction company president: 'They [Latinos] were one of the best things that ever happened to the construction industry ... Days don't mean anything to them. They'll work 12 hours. And they can do many things.'³² In other words, the company president suggests that Latinos have a physical capacity for work that exceeds that of others. Another industry publication claimed that Latinos had proved 'themselves capable, dependable, hard working and loyal to employers'.³³ Here, the description of Latinos as 'loyal' makes their racial/ethnic difference palatable and underscores their subordination. These types of claims are echoed throughout the industry. For instance, another construction company president and CEO stated that, 'Latino workers are productive, rarely miss work and are willing to put in long hours'.³⁴ Such characterisations depict workhorses who are unlikely to complain. In this way, construction companies and contractors obfuscate workers' vulnerability and recast their own economic interests and sense of opportunity as a set of cultural values unique to a specific racial/ethnic group. The idealised constructions surrounding Latinos' so-called capacity for work are an interpretation of productivity that contractors use to control workers' productivity.

Contractors' racialised assessments of Latino workers fit within a broader context of racial discrimination in workplaces. Latinos' 'hardworking' abilities are frequently contrasted with similar racialised constructions of blacks' laziness. Scholars have critiqued the 'model minority' typology, arguing that the social construction of a particular racial/ethnic group as hard workers presumes that all individuals within the group are 'silent, efficient, uncontentious labor'.³⁵ The idealised constructions concerning Latinos' capacity for work are used by contractors to control workers' productivity.

Menaced by the spectre of existing only as 'hard workers', some Latinos were concerned about their employers perceiving them as weak, unwilling to work or as someone who *hace problemas* (i.e. makes problems – a 'troublemaker'). Most believed they had been hired because 'Latinos have a reputation for hard work', and many were concerned that if they were to use personal protective equipment, such as masks, this would negatively impact upon what they already perceived to be tenuous employment. One worker succinctly summarised his work as being done 'à la Mexicana'; that is, in the Mexican way. Mexicans generally use the term to imply a raw, unadulterated experience. This worker's expression overlapped with a general claim among Latino workers that their work involved hazards and risks because they were subjected to discrimination in their work assignments. Jose, an undocumented Honduran worker who had migrated from Ohio, explained:

They [employers] give us [Latinos] work because they know that Latinos work more. We work harder and faster and take risks. I used to work in demolition in New York. I worked from 8am to 2am and made \$200 a day. Other workers don't care about finishing the job in a day.

The worker's narrative represented one response to a racialised context in which workers were the product of neoliberal policy and a variety of governmental agencies' practices. There are the 'hard workers', who are effectively silenced, and then there are troublemakers who make claims about controlling the terms of their work and productivity.

Conclusion

Under disaster capitalism, a crisis and devastated economic infrastructure created new opportunities. Policy and agency practices following Katrina not only shaped profitable markets and encouraged the development of a large and low-paid labour force, but they also racialised this labour. Hence, racial inequality wasn't so much an outcome of policy as a part of how policies were enforced in a place that hadn't previously experienced large-scale Latino migration; neoliberal policy produced Latino workers as a labour force that assumed the burden of occupational risk. Both immigration and labour policy and agency practices worked to shift the burden for the risks in a disaster context on to already vulnerable workers.

In short, policy decisions fashioned a 'disaster' that made recovery profitable. The suspension of labour-related policies following Hurricane Katrina encouraged the immigration of vulnerable workers. The suspension and/or selective enforcement of pre-existing immigration and labour policies created a context that encouraged labour and human rights violations. In this way, federal and local governments eschewed responsibility for equitable recovery and established patterns that would have long-term implications for the city. Specifically, they used policy to promote the marginalisation and racialisation of recovery workers.

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