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The Streets are Talking: The Aesthetics of Gentrification in Two Downriver New Orleans Neighborhoods

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In memory of Reggie Lawson, his spirit, legacy, and fierce passion and dedication to fighting for social equity and racial justice in every New Orleans' neighborhood.

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This work is a culmination of seeds sown over the past few decades, during my teenage wandering around the boroughs of New York City; hot, laborious days in the sandy, irrigated vineyards of Southeastern Australia; long, meandering walks along the wide, flat streets of Chicago; and nearly every day in the home I found on the banks of the muddy Mississippi River in New Orleans. On one of my last days living in New York, I shared with a friend that if I went back to school, I would write about graffiti. She looked at me quizzically, not sure how that could possibly be considered academic scholarship, but I knew even then that this work was coming, even if the form was still fuzzy. This thesis is both an end and a beginning.

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Abstract

Since the 1970s, when neoliberal policies and changing consumer patterns began remaking cities, scholars have conducted research about gentrification. In New Orleans, these studies have helped explain the demographic and economic shifts in some neighborhoods. However, there has been limited focus on the built environment aspects of gentrification in New Orleans, specifically the interpretation of the external aesthetic shifts in streetscapes as part of the gentrification process. This thesis examines the relationship between these aesthetics, primarily graffiti and street art, and the gentrification process, as perceived by various stakeholders in two New Orleans neighborhoods: St. Roch and Bywater. Using empirical, qualitative evidence, this thesis argues that graffiti and street art signify a culture and aestheticization of gentrification. Research methods for this thesis include participant observation, semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis.

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PREFACE

I come to this work as a city girl. While at times I have lived outside of urban areas, I feel deeply rooted in and connected to cities. On my mother's side, I am a third-generation Bronx dweller and my father, despite having relocated in the late 1950s, spent his formative childhood years in Detroit, MI, the son of a steel worker. My adolescence, teenage and critical adult years were shaped by the urban experience, and specifically the New York City streetscape. I am of urban parks and subway stations, 1990s beats and pizza slices, quarter drinks and stoops. As a young artist wandering the boroughs of New York, but most often the Bronx, I found myself mesmerized by the bright boldness of bubble letters and corner store murals. It is from this place of memory, nostalgia and history that I embarked on the journey of this research.

To be clear, I have written this thesis from the vantage point of a white middle-class gentrifier living in post-Katrina Bywater, a New Orleans neighborhood recently and increasingly referred to as the "Williamsburg of the South" (Campanella, 2013). It is important to name my positionality at the onset, as, for better or worse, it shapes my perspective on the gentrification process in present-day New Orleans. Growing up in the neoliberal, white supremacist state that is 21st century America, my white skin privilege (among other layers of privilege – socioeconomic, educational, etc.) shape how I see and interact with the world around me. Throughout the genesis of this project, though not because of it, I became increasingly politicized. I grew more deeply involved with and committed to the larger struggle for racial and economic justice, specifically in the U.S. south through the lens of antiracist, cultural organizing. This conflation is by no

means coincidental and has helped to broaden my own scope and challenge my own assumptions about the research herein.

I occupy a white body, living amidst the post-Katrina gentrification of New Orleans. I am both product and cause. Of course, my identity is not as simple as these few signifiers. Still, the necessity to state this truth right at the beginning of this project is to clearly identify my place in this research and the urban U.S. overall. While my individual circumstances and background guide and shape this study, they are also not without historical, cultural, and social context. I was raised in an apartment building located on the northwest border of Bronx County and Westchester County in Yonkers, NY. I lived on this literal border and liminal space between two very different New York neighborhoods for the bulk of my childhood. On one side of this border is the middle-class, predominantly white neighborhood of Riverdale in the Bronx. On the other side is the southernmost section of Yonkers, which in the 1980s and 1990s was a working class, racially diverse neighborhood.

Neighboring my childhood apartment building on the Yonkers side was a park and playground home to community baseball teams, me and my neighbors, and a pretty steady stream of graffiti writers. This park in some ways embodies the collision between these two neighborhoods in all their splendor and tribulations. It was a gathering place for all ages of youth and community members, demarcated with the growing urban aesthetic of graffiti and all it symbolized. For as long as I can remember, and perhaps in part due to this early and constant exposure to graffiti, it has been the aesthetic I'm most drawn to. I now believe that this aesthetic was for me a visual marker uniting and dividing these two neighborhoods, signifying my building's liminality and the demographic and structural changes that one encountered passing from Riverdale into Yonkers.

Throughout the 1990s, on my daily commutes to middle school in lower Harlem ("El Barrio") and high school on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, graffiti was the dominant aesthetic of the landscape. Whether it was a tagged U.S. Postal Service sticker pasted onto a subway car wall, or a painted portion of a building wall, there were bright colors and, often, illegible letters. For the duration of my teenage years, I watched this artwork slowly shift from messy scratches, tags and self-aggrandizing throw-ups to detailed wheatpastes and stencils (now more commonly referred to as street art) frequently providing social and political commentary across the city. Upon returning to New York in 2006 and making my home in the Clinton Hill neighborhood of Brooklyn, graffiti and street art were everywhere. Walking from DUMBO through downtown Brooklyn to Fort Greene to Clinton Hill to Williamsburg to Bedford Stuyvesant to Bushwick, it was difficult to find a wall or space untouched by a wide variety of street and graffiti artists.

Through my viewing of this graffiti and street art, questions began to stew. They did not fully formulate, however, until I relocated to New Orleans in 2009. Questions like at what point do the narratives of neighborhood decline, blight and a need for 'revitalization' — often coinciding with incidences of graffiti and street art — shift to narratives of neighborhood vibrancy and gentrification? In post-Katrina New Orleans, along the St. Claude Avenue corridor and adjacent neighborhoods, issues of gentrification, graffiti and blight remediation have steadily dominated the narratives of residents, municipal actors and journalists alike. As a resident of the Bywater neighborhood, an artist, a non-profit professional working with neighborhood groups, and an urban studies scholar, I was compelled to dive deeper into understanding the role that graffiti and street art play in neighborhood change and specifically gentrification.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Across the street from my home in New Orleans' Bywater neighborhood is a 6-unit, brick apartment building. When I moved into my house and the neighborhood in the summer of 2011, that building was still blighted from damage during Hurricane Katrina and the ensuing federal flood. My block never took in water, as they say, but there was still wind and structural damage to many properties, including the apartment building (Campanella, 2006). My landlord, who owns the majority of the 600 block of Lesseps Street as well as a sizeable amount of property in the Bywater and Marigny neighborhoods, purchased this building at 610 Lesseps Street in 2010 for $81,000.[1] Prior to the storm, the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) owned and operated the building as affordable housing, renting these units out to Section 8 voucher recipients. At the same time that I moved in across the street, my landlord, Maurice Slaughter, began redeveloping the building and subsequently rented those renovated units out at market rate, suspending acceptance of Section 8 vouchers. Now in 2013, the building is assessed at $228,900 and called Bywater Riverview Apartments, despite being blocked from any view of the nearby Mississippi River by a natural levee, floodwall and Chartres Street.

In 2008, this same building was the site of a public art piece created by one of my former neighbors (see figure 1).[2] The piece, entitled "I Miss My Neighbors," drew ire from HANO. The artist noted that, "the first night the banner was up someone tore it down."[3] While neither graffiti nor street art in the way that they are typically interpreted, this artwork was an un-commissioned spatial and artistic intervention. It was an intervention that contained a salient socio-political message, honoring the neighbors that had been unable to return to their homes in post-Katrina

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[1] http://qpublic4.qpublic.net/la_orleans_display.php?KEY=610-LESSEPSST
[2] http://artsneworleans.org/events_framed/for_artist/10396/Morgana-King
[3] http://artinaction-nola.blogspot.com/2008/06/site-27-morgana-king-i-miss-my.html

Bywater and implicitly attacking the municipal structures that had prevented this return. The

artist did not intend for this public artwork to be a catalyst for change, but the successive

purchase and redevelopment of the building into market rate apartment rentals were and are

indicative of larger, structural changes afoot in the neighborhood and area.[4]

Figure 1: Public artwork by artist and then Bywater resident, Morgana King, 2008

Source: http://artinaction-nola.blogspot.com/2008/06/site-27-morgana-king-i-miss-my.html

The study of neighborhood change and gentrification, situated in both local and global

paradigms, spans the past several decades. Scholars have examined various social and economic

forces that lead to a given neighborhood's restructuring. However, little light has been shed on

how the look and feel – the aesthetics – of a gentrifying neighborhood is experienced by both

long- and short-term residents. Put another way, there has been limited focus on how residents

across categories of race and tenure interpret the aesthetics of their neighborhood as it changes

around them or because of them. This particular topic has not been entirely overlooked in the

scholarly research. David Ley, Rosalyn Deutsche and Luke Dickens, among others, have

examined the role of artists and their art, including the art in the streets, within the context of

gentrification (see Deutsche, 1996; Ley, 1996; Ley, 2003; Dickens, 2008; Dickens, 2009).

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[4] http://www.bestofneworleans.com/blogofneworleans/archives/2009/01/31/brickbat-for-hano

The topic of gentrification has been increasingly prevalent in both the Bywater and St. Roch neighborhoods over the past few years – in casual conversation, at neighborhood association meetings, and in the local and national media. Since 2005, St. Claude Avenue and the surrounding area have also been marketed locally, nationally and internationally as an artist haven and welcoming space for 'creatives'. Simultaneously around the world, street art has been steadily affiliated with a cache of cool. This thesis is a qualitative study of the aesthetics of the street amidst gentrification in Bywater and St. Roch, focused primarily on the meanings of graffiti and street art for short- and long-term residents amidst social, cultural and economic change in their neighborhoods. The research questions that guided this work are as follows: What do the aesthetics and streetscapes of a neighborhood signify to different stakeholders? What is the aesthetic appeal for gentrifiers versus long-term residents witnessing the gentrification process happening around them? Is there a perceived shift from graffiti/blight to street art/gentrification and, if so, how does this impact the experience of gentrification?

Using qualitative methods such as participant observation, discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews, I argue that external aesthetics, particularly graffiti and street art, play an important and nuanced role in how residents understand themselves, their neighbors and outsiders within the gentrification process. Moreover, various actors and stakeholders in the gentrification process — defined as residents, real estate industry professionals and business owners in the Bywater and St. Roch neighborhoods — interpret the aesthetics of the street differently and through these differing interpretations further impact the gentrification process. This impact is based largely on cultural and economic capital and, thus, power. The data reveal how residents, real estate developers and business owners understand change and neighborhood

aesthetics in Bywater and St. Roch through visual cues that reinforce their own positionality and power within the gentrification process.

There is an explicit residential and discursive differentiation between graffiti and street art, wherein the latter signifies gentrifiers and gentrification while the former is seen as more authentically urban. I argue that the ability to interpret, discern and explain a difference between street art and graffiti illustrates a particular actor's understanding of global-local link in the overall urban economy. This thesis demonstrates that the perspectives of short- and long-term residents, as well as local business owners and real estate developers, overlap to a large degree in their understanding of what graffiti and street art signify amidst gentrification, but diverge at critical points. The data herein conveys that residents in both St. Roch and Bywater view graffiti and street art as vandalism, blight and disinvestment (both economic and social), but also as a signifier of artists and/or gentrifiers.

This thesis addresses a gap in the gentrification literature, in terms of how graffiti, street art and blight compel stakeholders in the gentrification process to engage with the realities of dis- and re-investment in their neighborhood. Additionally, through the voices of the various stakeholders and discourse represented herein, we are able to gain an understanding of how residents in Bywater and St. Roch read and engage with the changing world and aesthetics around them. Whether it is to speed up the gentrification process, or to move into a neighborhood previously deemed unsafe or wild (an urban frontier), I argue that stakeholders understand the aesthetics of the street differently. Graffiti and street art occupy a particular place in this *modus operandi*. I argue that actors with power and capital are using these art forms as a way to further leverage urban space and profit. Meanwhile, less empowered residents are using old school tactics in a new school world. By minimizing or misinterpreting the economic symbolization of

graffiti and street art, the most marginalized and disenfranchised residents among us stand to lose the most.

Using resident voices and my own participant observation, supported by media discourse analysis, this thesis illustrates how various actors and stakeholders interpret the visual cues of gentrification differently. Chapter Two examines the literature of twentieth century U.S. urban history with a focus on racial and spatial segregation, academic interpretations of gentrification locally and nationally from both the production and consumption viewpoints, and the role of graffiti in public space. Chapter Three outlines the post-Katrina context of the Bywater and St. Roch neighborhoods, as well as the methods and methodology employed in this case study. In Chapter Four, I situate the varying perspectives of art and decline through a discussion of graffiti and street art as markers of blight, authenticity and an attractive urban aesthetic. Chapter Five details how graffiti, street art and gentrification function on a supposed spectrum of blight to gentrification within larger frameworks of New Orleans' tourist economy and neoliberalism. I conclude in Chapter Six by further contextualizing these voices and visual signifiers as a culture and aestheticization of gentrification.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

The discourse and actuality of neighborhood change is widespread these days. Over the last several decades, neighborhoods in cities across the U.S. have seen dramatic changes in the demographics of their residents, amenities available and their overall aesthetics. Since the 1970s, these changes have been referred to as gentrification, a term originally coined in 1964 by Ruth Glass and popularized and re-defined by various industries, writers and scholars from then until now (Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008). Glass' early definition of gentrification was based on her research in London, having noticed that new middle-class residents were displacing and replacing former working-class inhabitants. While New Orleans has experienced much of its most recent dramatic demographic changes as a result of the neoliberal policies implemented after the massive flooding from the failure of the federal levees and Hurricane Katrina disaster in 2005, the city is also no stranger to the gentrification process. Gentrification has impacted certain New Orleans neighborhoods (notably the French Quarter, Marigny, Bywater, Lower Garden District and Irish Channel) well before Hurricane Katrina, and continues presently in those neighborhoods and others, such as St. Roch, eight years since the floodwaters receded (Stout, 1994; Knopp, 1997; Gotham, 2005; Gladstone & Préau, 2008).

This thesis is informed by the history of gentrification in New Orleans, as well as by a variety of disciplines on the social, geographic, economic, cultural and political nature of cities. I draw upon a wide body of literature and scholarly research from history, sociology, anthropology, urban planning, urban design and geography to situate my findings within the larger framework of urban studies. Designating themes of the racial construction of urban space in twentieth century U.S. history; the production and consumption of gentrification globally, nationally and

locally; and graffiti's function in public space, this chapter sets the stage for the residential and discursive perspectives of the aesthetics of gentrification in Bywater and St. Roch.

Race, Space and U.S. Urban History

Twentieth century American urban history is largely a history of capital migration and racialized spatial segregation. This spatial construction of U.S. cities was assembled around ideals of isolation and racial segregation, dually set forth by governmental policies and cultural trends. Historian Arnold R. Hirsch describes a process of "racial secession" when defining the creation of the "second ghetto" in twentieth century U.S. cities (Hirsch, 1998). Ideologies of isolation and racial segregation surrounding American residential tendencies were promoted by federal policies, primarily the Housing Acts of 1934, 1937 and 1949, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) rating systems (redlining), the Federal Housing Administration (FHA)-backed mortgage loans, and the Interstate Highway Act of 1956. Such policies hastened the shift from densely populated, racially and socioeconomically heterogeneous urban central cities to racially and socioeconomically homogenous populations split between urban central cities and suburbs beginning predominantly in the 1950s.

Hirsch's concept of the 'second ghetto' that developed in post-WWII, urban America was the result of public policy, private interests and an overall white compromise in where to best house black communities within the context of white supremacy, whereas the first ghetto had been (largely) constructed by early twentieth century white European immigration patterns, proximity to existing ethnic communities and proximity to industry and labor opportunities (Hirsch, 1998). The confluence of retraced, racial neighborhood borders, due to in-migrating (following the Great Migration from the U.S. south) and displaced black residents needing large-scale public housing – resulting from deteriorated residential property (blight), violence and public policy –

created the so-called second ghetto. The concepts of race in the larger structure and creation of America's second ghettos thus became more generally focused on the dichotomy of white versus black.

White ethnic populations, after having attained the privilege of 'whiteness' in the postwar period through a succession of federal immigration policies, and thereby fully assimilating into an American identity focused on home ownership and spatial isolation, sought after the single-family, residential zones of the suburbs (Jackson, 1985; Roediger, 2005). By contrast, black urban populations were thrust into isolated residential zones designed, mandated, and regulated by the state. The local jurisdictions that controlled municipal housing authorities, in the wake of the 1949 Federal Housing Act, wished to spatially segregate poor, urban communities of color into redesigned public housing projects. Goals of isolation are also reflected in the preference of FHA-backed lending towards single-family constructions for privately financed, white-owned residences, versus Le Corbusier-modeled high-rise public housing constructions for working class black urban residents (Venkatesh, 2000).

Discussions of space as a construction of capital denote the very purposeful way in which the real estate industry and its supporters manipulated public space to continue a long-term American apartheid state. Historian Robert O. Self characterizes the suburbanization of postwar America noting that, "the federal government dramatically democratized the housing market for whites while simultaneously enforcing a racial segregation that resembled apartheid" (Self, 2003, p. 97). The political backlash of the black community in Oakland, CA, for example, acknowledges a decades long struggle against such spatial manipulations, while simultaneously mobilizing a black political class in support of self-determination (Self, 2003). Self maintains that the political chasms among both white liberalism and the Black Power movement

continually led to rifts and an inadvertent strengthening of the white home owning, middle-class population.

The impact of these policies, and white Americans' privilege through such policies, on the U.S. inner city was dramatic. White property owners were heavily incentivized, through the tax code and bank lending practices, to amass wealth through individual land ownership and allow urban residential and commercial properties to fall into disrepair, especially properties located in redlined communities of color (Schwartz, 2010). The advent of commuter transportation, low-density zoning regulations and public policies in nineteenth and twentieth century urban America fostered a nation of suburban isolationists and, conversely, isolated urban centers (Jackson, 1985). Mary Patillo's discussion of the black middle-class population residing in peripheral areas of black, inner city neighborhoods symbolically mirrors the white suburbanization trend. However, due to the shared racial identification of both the peripheral and inner city residents, Patillo argues that those interstitial zones "were quickly re-absorbed into the black ghetto" (Patillo, 2007, p. 103).

Dissecting the residential trends around isolation in twentieth century urban American history requires examination into the strategic use of zoning. According to Kenneth Jackson, zoning was used as a spatial isolationist and segregationist technique, specifically with regards to race:

> In suburbs everywhere, North and South, zoning was used by the people who already lived within the arbitrary boundaries of a community as a method of keeping everyone else out. Apartments, factories, and "blight," euphemisms for blacks and people of limited means, were rigidly excluded (Jackson, 1985, p. 242).

This technique was employed in suburban areas across the country. Self highlights the 1968 Westview Estates rezoning conflict in California to illustrate the practice of low-density suburban zoning and "how thoroughly Anglo homeowner populism supported a suburban geography of segregation" (Self, 2003, p.277). Suburban area zoning was effective in upholding

and furthering the federal policies that promulgated racial segregation. Federal policies may have initially supported white suburban homeowners to racially segregate, but these homeowners' respective suburban community organizations ensured that restrictive, racist zoning practices continued: "Both government and private developers saw the ownership of property as the key to ensuring a long-term bourgeois ideological consensus…They and other city-builders believed that class and place were mutually constituting elements of the social order" (Self, 2003, p. 31).

The imposition of spatial borders and isolating boundaries around the second ghettos of urban, public housing projects were highly effective and common in maintaining a white supremacist social order. Hirsch describes the impact of race on the site selection for South Chicago's public housing projects as often requiring "'buffer zones' such as factories and railroads" (Hirsch, 1998, p. 225). In specific regards to Chicago's Robert Taylor homes, a public housing project on the city's South side, "Mayor Daley's successful construction of a freeway next to the housing development…cut off tenants from the wealth of services in the neighboring white working-class communities" (Venkatesh, 2000, p. 23). This construction, paid for by Chicago's taxpayers as a result of the Interstate Highway Act of 1956, displays white America's propensity to spatially isolate communities on the basis of race.

The very existence of a binary between urban and suburban residential development speaks to the paradox of space and capital that is an ever-present theme in American urban history. The federal policies that beckoned and supported a white migration towards the suburbs subsequently led to additional federal policies that regulated urban public housing projects populated overwhelmingly by black residents. As Jackson argues, "the result, if not the intent of the public housing program of the United States was to segregate the races, to concentrate the disadvantaged in inner cities, and to reinforce the image of suburbia" (Jackson, 1985, p. 219).

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, a private and public thrust towards segregated, isolated American lives was solidified by residential patterns. Walls were constructed to isolate white middle-class suburbia from low-income, black ghettos, both symbolically and literally. Eventually, however, as city governments struggled with the loss of their white middle-class (and, to lesser degrees, the black middle-class) tax base, new strategies emerged to re-envision urban cores as attractive, safe spaces for middle-class consumers. These strategies largely focused on cultivating tourists in the growing leisure-based, global tourism economy and embracing artists and other pioneer gentrifiers in their re-claiming of industrial, urban spaces, such as the redevelopment of airports, sporting arenas, downtown riverfronts, festival marketplaces and residential lofts (MacCannell, 1976; Zukin, 1982; Frieden & Sagalyn, 1989; Chambers, 2000; Altshuler & Luberoff, 2003). Race and space remained dominant themes as capital and middle- to upper class residents migrated from the suburbs back into U.S. central cities beginning in the 1970s.

Gentrification and the Changing Urban Landscape

Much like the construction of urban and suburban America leading up to the last quarter of the twentieth century, "gentrification is itself a reflection, part of a dynamic, complex, and powerful 'new segregation'" (Wyly & Hammel, 2004, p. 1239). We cannot divorce race from the construction of cities, very much including gentrification and artistic interventions, especially "if we understand dispossession and displacement as a particular condition of Black experience" in America (Farrow, 2011). Building on the historical and social context detailed above, "whites with the privilege and wherewithal to do so are expected to avoid black neighborhoods. When whites move into predominantly black neighborhoods, they upset the prevailing notions of who belongs in particular areas" (Freeman, 2006, p. 82). Referencing the so-called gentrifying

pioneers whom have historically most often been white artists, Freeman writes, "many of those that might be classified as the gentry may be starting their careers or be in relatively low-paying occupations, like the arts." (Freeman 2006, p. 89). Historian Robin D. G. Kelley further points out that,

> Unlike the integration of African Americans into white neighborhoods, where fear of declining property values compels white residents to fight (burning crosses, burning houses, mob violence) or flee altogether, whites moving into black communities tend to push property values up, thus pricing many longtime black residents out. It's funny how we never call this process integration; instead, we use the presumably race-neutral 'gentrification.' In Harlem, as with all other urban neighborhoods experiencing gentrification, white homebuyers who move into predominantly black neighborhoods earn significantly more money than established residents, whereas black families who move into white neighborhoods tend to have the same incomes (Kelley, 2003, p. 12).

Amid widespread American suburbanization, the depiction of the city as an untamed frontier simultaneously repelled and attracted white America over time (Smith, 1996).

A vast body of scholarly research has addressed the social, economic and physical changes of cities over recent decades. Various scholars have approached the aspects of these changes that manifest as gentrification from both the economic supply- and demand-side. Lees, Slater and Wyly define gentrification as "the transformation of a working class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential or commercial use," and go on to state that "gentrification is the leading edge of neoliberal economics" (Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008, p. xv, xvii). Similarly, Jason Hackworth defines gentrification as "the production of urban space for progressively more affluent users" (Hackworth, 2002, p. 815). It is important to understand the connection between micro-level urban transformation and shifts in global power and economics. Municipalities have been employing neoliberal tactics to re-envision the urban core for more than three decades (Harvey, 2005). The onset of these tactics, in the form of festival marketplaces and mega-project developments, beckoned a wealthier class of residents back to the city (Smith, 2002; Miles,

2010; Spirou, 2011). Production-side gentrification research addresses many of these larger economic implications, while approaching gentrification research from the consumer – or resident – perspective yields an understanding of individual and select group agency.

The supply-side of gentrification (also referred to as a top-down and production approach) refers to various policies, mechanisms and tactics by private developers and municipal agents that create the space and means for social restructuring in a transforming neighborhood (Gotham, 2005; Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008). Neil Smith's 'rent gap' theory is thought to be the origin point for this supply-side argument (Smith, 1979). In short, the rent gap looks at the present return on investment of a given land parcel, based on its current land use (capitalized ground rent) versus its future, potential return and land use (potential ground rent). Smith theorizes that as this rent gap increases in a capitalist free market, based on disinvestment and depreciation, the potential profitability of a given land parcel also increases, making that parcel prime for reinvestment. Put another way, the rent gap is the difference between the amount land owners are actually pocketing from their parcel in its current land use and the speculated maximum that could be collected by the land owner if the land "was put to its 'highest and best' use" (Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008, p. 52). Thus, the rent gap theory "situated gentrification within the broader context of capital investments by financial institutions in an already existing built environment—rather than on the neoclassical 'clean slate'" (Rose, 1984, p. 50). Smith succinctly summarizes the production/supply-side of gentrification as he writes, "the urban wilderness produced by the cyclical movement of capital and its devalorization have, from the perspective of capital, become new urban frontiers of profitability. Gentrification is a frontier on which fortunes are made" (Smith, 1986, p. 34).

In assessing the gentrification process from this supply-side vantage point, researchers have often lumped gentrifiers into a homogenous grouping. While it is critical to understand how the network of global cities and migrating capital function to remake the landscape on the neighborhood scale, it is also necessary to properly represent gentrifiers' agency. Focus on the consumption-side of gentrification began in the early 1980s. Scholars such as Damaris Rose and David Ley sought to examine the class complexity of gentrifiers. Notably, Rose also spearheaded the idea that gentrification is a complex, messy process, in which both the supply- and demand-sides function in tandem and aid one another simultaneously (Rose, 1984). Rose aptly highlighted that, "the crucial point here is that gentrifiers' are not the mere bearers of a process determined independently of them. Their constitution, as certain types of workers and as people, is as crucial an element in the production of gentrification as is the production of the dwellings they occupy" (Rose, 1984, p. 56).

Approaching gentrification from the bottom-up, demand-side, or consumption approach, scholars like David Ley, Japonica Brown-Saracino, Lance Freeman and Mary Patillo have looked to neighborhood residents – both long-term and recently arrived – to gain better insight into the perceptions of gentrification on the ground. Ley has argued that the shift to postindustrial cities in the late twentieth century created a middle class that demanded a particular, amenity-rich urban quality of life (Ley, 1996; Ley, 2003). Chris Hamnett expanded upon Ley's argument, noting that the "increase in the size and purchasing power" of a recently developed 'professional class' has a "greater ability to afford the cultural and social attractions of life in the central and inner city" (Hamnett, 2003, p. 2424).

Brown-Saracino's research of gentrifiers in four geographically and socially diverse sites sought to examine the motivations of in-movers to gentrifying areas, and the reactions to their

relocation by newer and longer-term residents. According to Brown-Saracino, various groups of gentrifiers had different perspectives. Through her study of both urban and rural sites of gentrification, Brown-Saracino identifies groups of gentrifiers, one of which she terms "social homesteaders," who "seek to unobtrusively carve out a space for themselves" (Brown-Saracino, 2010, p. 55). Social homesteaders see their in-migration as an act of "positive change" not apart from or limited by gentrification.

Lance Freeman's study of two New York City neighborhoods, Harlem and Clinton Hill, primarily addressed the perspectives of residents undergoing the gentrification process (Freeman, 2006). Freeman's research elucidates that, "residents of both Clinton Hill and Harlem were appreciative of the improvements in amenities and services," which came in lock step with gentrifiers, regardless of race, though they remained ambivalent towards both the improvements and the new residents (Freeman, 2006, p. 93). Building on his earlier research, the issue of displacement within gentrifying and gentrified neighborhoods was a central theme in this study. Though Freeman found evidence that physical displacement was less of a personal issue for working-class residents living amidst the gentrification process than was previously thought, in part safeguarded by New York City's rent control policies, aspects of alienation, physical and social displacement were present.

Focusing on one South Chicago neighborhood, Mary Patillo argues that in-migrating black middle-class newcomers acted as brokers and middle people. Inherent in black gentrification, versus white gentrification, is an aspect of "racial uplift" based on socioeconomic class hierarchies (Patillo, 2007, p. 301). This concept of navigating the middle (liminal, border) zones of social, economic, political, educational and residential schemas is what makes the black gentrification of a black neighborhood additionally complex. Patillo carefully constructs her case

that the black community is a multifaceted political body, comprised of participants that must

embody dualistic ideals, goals and pursuits, namely as middlemen and women. In this middle,

conjoining place that the black gentry occupies, these black middle men and women are

consistently balancing the benefits of improved mobility and services for some now against

better circumstances for the whole of black America at some undisclosed later time.

Perhaps the most critical, troublesome byproduct of gentrification is the aspect of

displacement for lower-income, longer-term residents, typically those of color, in a gentrifying

neighborhood. Omitted from Freeman's conclusion that physical displacement is relatively

uncommon for low-income and long-term residents in gentrifying neighborhoods is the

additional explanation of such residents' lack of choices in securing affordable housing

elsewhere (Marcuse, 1985; van Criekingen, 2006). Furthermore, through his 'revanchist city'

argument, Smith claims that displacement of marginalized, inner city residents through

gentrification is precisely the underlying goal: "More than anything the revanchist city expresses

a race/class/gender terror felt by middle- and ruling-class whites who are suddenly stuck in place

by a ravaged property market" (Smith, 1996). Lees, Slater and Wyly continue this sentiment in

their synthesis of recent scholarship by Rowland Atkinson, Gary Bridge, and Wendy Shaw

wherein they interpret contemporary gentrification as a modern form of European colonialism

that "privileges wealth and whiteness" (Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008, p. 167). The issue remains,

however, as Atkinson explains, that "the fact that displacement has been inferred more often than

directly measured is directly linked to the difficulties of developing methodologies capable of

tracking those who are displaced" (Atkinson, 2002, p. 9).

Long-term, lower-income residents living in a neighborhood undergoing gentrification may

not always be physically displaced. Still, problems of social displacement are at play. Social

displacement, then, can be understood as one's alienation from their personal, historic sense of place. Fullilove examines the issue of displacement as "the rupture of person-place relationships," thereby situating neighborhood trauma and enduring psychological scars on a displaced community (Fullilove, 1996, p. 1517). In the downriver New Orleans neighborhoods of Bywater and St. Roch, black interview participants discussed aspects of social displacement that they themselves experienced or in relation to other long-term residents (both black and white).

Gentrification in New Orleans

Scholars have researched gentrification in various New Orleans neighborhoods for decades. Dennis Gale argues that gentrification occurred in the city as early as the 1930s (Gale, 1979). Daphne Spain and Shirley Laska began studying gentrification in the city in the 1980s. Their research has been primarily quantitative, and, interestingly, not much has shifted in the characteristics of the group they term "renovators" since the 1970s. Laska and Spain define this group, now more often referred to as 'urban pioneers' and 'gentrifiers', as "young, often single individuals or small families with young children" and people that "often choose a specific neighborhood, either low-income or in transition, and help to make it a gentrified area" (Laska & Spain, 1984, p. 105). Lawrence Knopp's research focused specifically on the gentrification of the Marigny through ethnography and qualitative analysis of its gay gentrifiers (Knopp, 1997). Michael Stout completed a quantitative study of gentrification occurring across multiple census tracts in uptown New Orleans and found that displacement was a primary concern throughout the gentrification process (Stout, 1995).

Although recent research has focused more on the bottom-up aspects of gentrification through ethnographic methodology, very few studies have examined gentrification through the lens of

both gentrifiers and long-term residents simultaneously. Trushna Parekh acknowledges this in her dissertation on gentrification in New Orleans' Tremé neighborhood wherein neighborhood narratives and memory were either honored or disavowed depending on the racial identification of the resident (Parekh, 2008). Perspectives of both in-movers and long-term residents are given equal weight in this thesis, following Parekh's assessment that "quantitative studies that minimize impact of gentrification on longstanding residents of gentrifying neighborhoods fail to provide a complete picture of the challenges faced by those residents who remain in such neighborhoods and live under the constant threat of displacement" (Parekh, 2008, p. 37). Furthermore, this thesis builds on Parekh's linkage of gentrification and race in New Orleans.

Lees, Slater and Wyly, when discussing New Orleans, note the discursive treatment of the city as a clean slate, ripe for gentrified rebuilding following the destruction of Hurricane Katrina (Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008). Kevin Fox Gotham locates this discourse in the context of neoliberal policies, specifically the privatization of disaster recovery services (Gotham, 2012). While not directly addressing gentrification in post-Katrina New Orleans, Gotham's recent scholarship illustrates how "the post-disaster recovery period is notable for the restructuring of government to mimic the features and logic of the private market" under Mayor Mitch Landrieu's stewardship (Gotham, 2012, p. 641).

In addition to this focus on operating the city according to free market principles, New Orleans' municipal leadership has, steadily since 2005, undertaken strategies to attract greater numbers of a new, entrepreneurial middle class, following in many ways the steps outlined in Richard Florida's 'creative class' thesis (Florida, 2002; Florida, 2004). Florida's argument has received widespread attention, both positive and negative, as a basis for making cities inviting and stimulating for young creative, tolerant, well-educated professionals. Mayor Landrieu, in his

previous tenure as Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana, coined the term "cultural economy" and commissioned an expansive report on the state's cultural assets as a means for future economic development a mere month before Hurricane Katrina hit (Mt. Auburn Associates, 2005). While Florida's argument and Landrieu's framing of post-Katrina New Orleans as the epicenter for thriving culture and creative enterprise are not explicitly linked to gentrification, they have certainly been catalysts for a restructuring of the city's social fabric.

Similarly, it is difficult to address creative class initiatives and gentrification in New Orleans without acknowledging their connection to the city's tourist economy. Scholars Gladstone and Préau note that,

> Land use, housing policy, and tourism-led redevelopment are not only tied together in shaping neighborhood transformation and character in New Orleans, but that the decades long strategy of transforming large parts of the city into a tourist zone has led to significant levels of gentrification and has had distinct implications for city residents, particularly longer-term residents who reside in and around the French Quarter and the CBD. Our findings are therefore broadly consonant with much recent research stressing the importance of amenities as a lure to prospective workers and the industries that employ them, but also as a catalyst of gentrification in their own right (Gladstone and Préau, 2008, p. 166).

Gotham, Gladstone and Préau refer to this trend in New Orleans as tourism gentrification, which Gotham defines as "the transformation of a middle-class neighbourhood [sic] into a relatively affluent and exclusive enclave marked by a proliferation of corporate entertainment and tourism venues" (Gotham, 2005, p. 1099). Gotham aligns the gentrification of the French Quarter neighborhood with the timeline of transforming New Orleans into a "tourist city." J. Mark Souther also attributes such transformations, like the conversion of manufacturing spaces into residential lofts in the Warehouse District neighborhood, to the municipal tactic of using tourism as a tool to drive economic development in New Orleans for the past several decades (Souther, 2006).

The merging of cultural/creative economy marketing, tourism and gentrification is certainly not unique to New Orleans. Costas Spiro argues that the arts are one of the central factors in urban tourism development (Spirou, 2011). Still, the conflation of these elements in New Orleans, plus the destruction, blight (though the city struggled with blighted property well before the storm) and residential displacement caused by Hurricane Katrina, created an environment ripe for rapid gentrification. The 2010 *Cultural Economy Snapshot*, published by the office of Mayor Landrieu, indicates that, "the cultural sector is the second largest sector by employment in New Orleans after tourism," and that "cultural industries drive the city's tourism industry" (The Mayor's Office of Cultural Economy, City of New Orleans, 2011, p. 2).

Souther's exploration of the development of tourism in the Crescent City touches upon the perpetually slow pace of change in New Orleans and how it, ironically, seems to have made using tourism as an economic development strategy somewhat inevitable (Souther, 2006). The complicated racial history and landscape of New Orleans added a problematic layer to how tourism grew after World War II. Much like its antebellum roots, tourism as an economic development tactic in New Orleans grew, in many ways, on the backs of its African American residents' labor and culture. The service sector of tourist enterprises in the French Quarter, for example, has historically been staffed with an underpaid, black workforce. Similarly, it has been the images and practices of black popular culture that have long attracted tourists to New Orleans, despite the fact that the powers behind the industry itself were predominantly white (Souther, 2006). As anthropologist Helen Regis noted in relation to the performative practice of secondlines, this trend seems to have only grown throughout the twentieth century: "This highly salient image is pervasive in the city's representation of itself, from promotional tourist literature,

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to the Jazz and Heritage Festival logo, to billboards and banners promoting Harrah's" (Regis, 1999).

Increasing gentrification has further complicated issues of tourism and race in New Orleans. Gladstone and Préau highlight that,

> The white flight and housing abandonment that had come to characterize earlier decades seemed to be reversing itself: Investment began to flow back into inner-city neighborhoods, accompanied by waves of residential displacement, particularly displacement of poor black renters by more affluent white homeowners (2008, p. 141).

This increased investment back into New Orleans' downtown, specifically in the Warehouse and Central Business Districts, was very much intertwined with tourism initiatives. Much of the transformation from old manufacturing plants to loft-style apartment buildings in the Warehouse District was due to public-private partnerships developed around the 1984 world's fair (Souther, 2006; Gotham, 2007).

It seems that while city leaders took decades to get on board with utilizing tourism as an economic development plan, the demographic changes of neighborhoods within and surrounding the "tourist bubble" rapidly adapted to tourist behavior and became (and continue to become) gentrified (Judd & Fainstein, 1999). According to Gladstone and Préau, "demographic change and rising property values in the French Quarter were central to shifts in population and development in surrounding neighborhoods and established tourism as a key factor in the economic revitalization of New Orleans" (Gladstone & Préau, 2008, p. 148). Thus, the process was clearly reflexive. The compounding of an ever-growing tourism industry with rapid gentrification of naturally high ground, tourist-centered neighborhoods (sped along in part by the ensuing floods of 2005) exacerbated these effects. If the workforce that primarily serves tourism is displaced from neighborhoods providing easy access to their jobs, residents may find it increasingly difficult not to criticize the city's leading industry: "striking is the number of

tourism workers who live in gentrifying neighborhoods: In 2000, nearly one in four workers living in neighborhoods within walking distance of the tourist zones" (Gladstone & Preau, 2008, p. 154). However, this may be of no consequence to tourism industry leaders in New Orleans, as much of the population employed by tourism-related occupations is living close to, at, or below the poverty line and is thus significantly disempowered economically.

Souther touches on this aspect of tourism's growth in New Orleans as compared to other tourism-based cities. He notes that New Orleans, unlike Las Vegas and Charleston for example, is plagued with a "conservative tax structure," limited land sources for added development, and a "large disadvantaged population without access to decent education, housing, medical care, job skills training, and city services" (Souther, 2006, p. 225-6). Related to these hindrances on the city's ability to equitably thrive from tourism is the constant presence of crime. However, as Gladstone and Préau so eloquently argue, "In New Orleans, the threatening native is more often than not a poor black male who is more likely to lose his home as the tourist bubble expands out of the downtown area and into surrounding neighborhoods" (2008, p. 158). In direct contrast to the oft-celebrated New Orleans exceptionalism, scholar and Bywater resident Richard Campanella writes that, "the entire scene in the new Bywater eateries—from the artisanal food on the menus to the statement art on the walls to the progressive worldview of the patrons—can be picked up and dropped seamlessly into Austin, Burlington, Portland, or Brooklyn" (Campanella, 2013). At a November 2013 panel discussion presented by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities focused on arrivals to the city since the 1980s, a comparable recognition of New Orleans' similarity with many other U.S. cities' housing and economic development policies was made. Much like these conventional social policies, pre- and post-

Katrina graffiti and street art in New Orleans are not dissimilar to other U.S. and international cities.

The changing image of Bywater and St. Roch in postdiluvian New Orleans is integrally related to gentrification (Laska & Spain, 1980). In some aspects, these aesthetics are not new. Gentrifying in-movers and real estate speculators have long been attracted to the decay and grit associated with urban abandonment and disinvestment, as is discussed by scholars in relation to the gentrification of New York's Lower East Side and urban frontiers in general (Deutsche, 1996; Smith, 1996). Following Hurricane Katrina, journalists began describing New Orleans as a "blank slate" (Brooks, 2005; Elliott, 2012). Geographer Richard Campanella asserted that this *tabula rasa* description has been used in relation to post-disaster New Orleans, though to very different ends, since the 1720s, at a November 2013 Tulane University event. This language suggests an empty landscape, a city in which there are no inhabitants, and is reminiscent of the frontier language and false spatial constructions that Neil Smith identified within the framework of gentrification on New York City's Lower East Side neighborhood nearly twenty-five years ago. As Smith described, in relation to urban frontiers in general, this erasure ostensibly wipes "the city clean of its working-class geography and history" and serves "as a preemptive justification for a new urban future" (Smith, 1996, p. 26). Similarly, as Rosalyn Deutsche argues, "'revitalization' conceals the very existence of those inhabitants already living in the frequently vital neighborhoods targeted for renovation" (Deutsche, 1996, p. 13). In New Orleans and elsewhere, urban frontiers are borderlands and liminal spaces that lend themselves simultaneously to spaces of contestation and consumption (Turner, 1979). Notably, such spaces are also commonly marked with graffiti.

Graffiti and Urban Public Space

Graffiti and street art are public art, in the truest, most literal senses of the words. It is art for the public, made (most often, illegally) by the public. It is a method of communication, in much the same way as advertising, but more immediate, more incendiary, more provocative, and usually, fleeting. The increased sanctioning of graffiti and/or street art by municipalities arguably removes certain inherent aspects of the art and provides a level of control to be exerted by the State. This recent and growing sanctioning has not necessarily meant that there is a curbing of graffiti/street art that's deemed as vandalism by property owners and the authorities, but it can be understood as an effort to co-opt and control a potentially revolutionary act.

The widespread emergence of urban graffiti in the 1970s initially grew out of the hip-hop movement, having always been one of the four elements of hip-hop alongside MCing, DJing, and B-boying/breakdancing, and coincided with the broader emergence of academic research on the topic of gentrification (Chang, 2006). These events are not to be conflated, but nonetheless, as neighborhoods across the U.S. began to cycle through the gentrification process, graffiti was being framed as a quality of life issue by these same municipalities (Chang, 2002). The laws and tactics employed by municipal authorities to eradicate graffiti grew in force and number in the 1990s, following the popularization of the 'broken windows' theory (Kelling & Coles, 1996; Vitale, 2008). In New Orleans, these quality of life policing tactics are still pervasive (MacCarthy, 2011). However, this connection between graffiti and crime begin to splinter and shift as consumer product companies like Puma, Adidas, Coca-Cola and McDonald's increasingly commodified graffiti in the late 1980s and 1990s. Select graffiti and street art were starting to appear on gallery walls, and the artists producing this work were gaining fame and legitimacy (Dickinson, 2008). From that point on, there seemed to be an ever growing awareness

in the national discourse of street art's value, and prominent street artists like Shepherd Fairey, Banksy, Swoon, and JR (notably, all white artists) were earning large sums of money and making national headlines.

Since the 1980s, graffiti and street art have been the largest, cohesive global art movement. Banksy pieces sell for millions of dollars, are included in the permanent collections of respected museums around the world (including the New Orleans Museum of Art), and spur blockbuster exhibitions such as the 2011 Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art's *Art in the Streets*. There have been countless artists that cut their teeth, so to speak, as illegal street artists only to go on to great commercial success and worldwide fame. This reality is not without conflict and nuance, even within the graffiti and street art scene. Street artist Mau Mau recently described recent legally sanctioned murals in East London as "part of a whole culture of graffiti gentrification…with the commercialization of street art, it's becoming pay-as-you-go wall" (Byrnes, 2013). Another famous street artist, Swoon, tends to engage in unlawful art making practice alongside commissioned, legal works. During her 2010 and 2011 exhibitions at both the New Orleans Museum of Art and the Dithyrambalina, multiple wheatpastes of hers were spotted around Bywater on both abandoned and occupied privately owned buildings.

As John Tehranian has argued

> It is the graffiti artists in urban corridors whose renderings eventually make their way into the newly sacrilized work of the modern art world's latest sensation, whose multi-million dollar originals and 'affordable' limited edition prints are carefully controlled and regulated, in order to obtain the Benjaminian aura that generates value in the art marketplace (2009, p. 1456).

Jan Mieszkowski similarly notes that, "the simple equation of graffiti with vandalism is of relatively recent vintage, and its prominence today can obscure some of the other complexities

that have surrounded wall writing since ancient times" (Mieszkowski, 2010, p. 3). Another point

made by Mieszkowski speaks more to the issue behind how the public reads these art forms:

> When the entire city becomes a blank page for scribbling, whether virtual or actual, any individual scriptural intervention loses the ability to manifest itself as a violation. This is arguably the state of affairs in a modern metropolis such as Los Angeles or Tokyo, where the mélange of professional and amateur advertising, street art, and casual graffiti has become so intricate that even the expert eye has trouble distinguishing them (Mieszkowski, 2010, p. 9).

This difficulty in discerning the messages of graffiti and street art, such as the New Orleans tag

'Gay For Pay', was cited by many of the interview participants in this research. Residents in both

Bywater and St. Roch had negative reactions to the tag, while the artist himself noted that it was

a socio-political message in support of queer communities (Fein, 2013).

Along with the influx of creative class residents to post-Katrina New Orleans, "New Orleans

saw increased creative activity in its streets from local artists and prominent national and

international street artists" (Gunnell, 2010, p. 26). One of the artists in the Bourghog Guild (the

writers behind the 'R.I.P.' tags; see figures 12 and 13 in Chapter 5) notes, street and graffiti art

have exploded in New Orleans (Fein, 2011). Katie Gunnell's 2010 research on the topic of street

art in New Orleans further speaks to this explosion and illustrates the many complexities

involved in municipal negotiations of the illegal art form (Gunnell, 2010). However, while

Gunnell states that, "the visual battle over public space and in the streets of New Orleans brought

to light the challenges cities face nationwide," she makes no mention of gentrification or race

(Gunnell, 2010, p. 26). Gunnell's omission is precisely what this thesis delves into.

Both local and international artists have created this increased street art, but lumping the

actions and motivations of these artists together is tricky. Similarly, defining graffiti and/or street

art as a field of social practice is challenging in and of itself, due to overlapping impulses and

reasons for its production. As Andrea Brighenti argues, graffiti "cannot always be clearly

separated from a number of other practices, including art and design (as aesthetic work), criminal law (as vandalism crime), politics (as a message of resistance and liberation), and market (as merchandisable product)" (Brighenti, 2010, p. 316). Given this challenge, Brighenti defines graffiti as an "interstitial practice" meaning that it "is precisely a practice about whose definition and boundaries different social actors hold inevitably different conceptions" (p. 316).

The agency of writers and street artists remains important, in terms of what spaces are chosen to claim and what names are chosen as tags. However, this thesis is primarily concerned with how the art and messages of these artists is understood in the public sphere in relation to gentrification. As Brighenti argues,

> For inscription to take place, witnesses are needed. It is in this sense that the visible is the element in which every territorial inscription is operated. The visible is the element in which boundaries are inscribed, and in which the distinction between the visible and the invisible can be made. Every such distinction is in fact an act of boundary drawing, and boundaries can be drawn only for a public and, in this sense, in public (Brighenti, 2010, p. 326).

Brighenti further emphasizes, in an ethnographic study of a group of Italian graffiti writers, that one must not conflate the practice of graffiti writing with hip-hop, despite their relational origins (Brighenti, 2010). Writing amidst the early days of widespread urban graffiti, Ley and Cybriwsky note that, "Graffiti in an ethnic neighborhood identify tension zones related to social change" (Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974, p. 491). Ley and Cybriwsky argue that, in the 1970s, tags were largely inscribed on walls outside the ghetto, to communicate visibility to the rest of the city. Though as graffiti and street art have gained legitimacy in the public sphere, the marking of space in this way seems less about visibility and street gang turf and more about a communication system within a neighborhood.

Ley and Cybriwsky discuss the high incidence of defensive graffiti by (presumably) white writers against encroaching black residents in a Philadelphia neighborhood (Ley & Cybriwsky,

1974). St. Claude Avenue is certainly a contested zone, a border, but the defensive posturing of

the art on the streets does not seem as simplistic as one population defending space against

another (MacCash, 2013a). Furthermore, there remains a distinction, both by the artists and

viewers, between graffiti and street art. Finders Keepers Crew (FKC) artist D*Face refers to "the

term 'street art,' which he seems to view with a certain ambiguity, as both a term which he felt

was devised by marketing executives, while also conceding that it did indeed make sense as 'just

a new term for graffiti'," while "Mysterious Al confirmed this stance by explaining that his

street-based work was always something he understood as graffiti plain and simple, pointing out

that 'when we started doing it, we didn't know what street art was, there was no such thing'"

(Dickens, 2008, p. 5).

Still, in Dickens' research, the glamorizing of the street, of the inner city and all its

discontents, set the stage for the FKC's underground street art events, which were pop-up,

outdoor painting parties (Dickens, 2008). While the artists expressed ambiguity over the naming

of the art form, they still played a role in promoting "the aesthetics of decay, dereliction and

depravity…as something to be appreciated in an ironic sense of 'cool'" based on where these

events were held (Dickens, 2008, p. 19). Dickens goes on to note that, "there is a good deal of

evidence to suggest that various publics seem to view some of these alternative inscriptions as a

beneficial and desirable part of living in the 'creative city'" (p. 26). Graffiti and street art as

aesthetic markers of space, among other visual signifiers like blight, are embodiments of how

viewers understand neighborhood-level shifts from disinvestment to reinvestment to

revitalization. The discussion of the perceived connection between graffiti, street art and

gentrification in the national and local media has been heavily weighted towards the artists

creating the work, the viewpoints of real estate developers, and new residents (i.e.: gentrifiers),

rather than an analysis of the complexities around neighborhood change and the related

aesthetics of dis- and re-investment (Tauches, 2010; Arlandis, 2013; Bentley, 2013; Byrnes,

2013; Costello, 2013; Gallagher, 2013; Hoffman, 2013; Madden, 2013).

Conclusion

    The construction and changing landscapes of U.S. cities throughout the twentieth century and

into the twenty-first has created spatial contestations along racial lines and following migrating

capital. Cultural and economic consumer capital, largely dictated by whiteness, has both led and

followed public and private investment. This migration of multiple forms of capital has resulted

in the transformation of urban cores, including the downriver New Orleans neighborhoods of St.

Roch and Bywater. The public markings (graffiti and street art) of these urban spaces have

followed similar trajectories, ebbing and flowing with and against the tides of cultural and

economic capital.

CHAPTER 3: Methods, Methodology and Context

This thesis is a case study examining multiple perspectives of the visual aesthetics of gentrification in the St. Roch and Bywater neighborhoods, drawing on evidence from participant observation, observations of the built environment, discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews. This mixed methods approach allowed me to highlight and centralize individuals' voices, alongside both my own perspective as a participant-researcher and the local, national and international media discourse on gentrification, graffiti and street art. The inherent benefit of comparing these two neighborhoods helps situate the responses to these aesthetics across the spectrum of the gentrification process. According to Yin, the case study approach to examining "a contemporary set of events" is advantageous (Yin, 2003, p. 9). This thesis illuminates the various perspectives of residents and other stakeholders as they observe visual elements of neighborhood change. I defined these various actors and stakeholders as short- and long-term residents, real estate industry professionals and business owners in the Bywater and St. Roch neighborhoods. Although this research is not limited to graffiti and street art, it pays particular attention to responses to these practices.

Throughout the process of developing this thesis, it remained important to me to center the voices of both long-term and newer residents in Bywater and St. Roch. As a gentrifier myself, I believe it necessary to critically examine and interrogate the role I and other white middle-class in-movers play and the agency that we exert in the overall process. Conversely, in much of the scholarly work on the topic of gentrification, researchers have focused solely on one resident side or the other. I believe that highlighting the experiences of both gentrifiers and long-term residents alongside one another can illuminate shared experiences as well as divergent ones. Similarly, contextualizing these voices within a larger framework of how these topics are

covered by the media helps shape a broader narrative of how gentrification is discussed in each of these neighborhoods and the city at large. This research is heavily focused on how residents understand the aesthetics of their neighborhood and, thus, a direct analysis of those visual messages and cues was also valuable and necessary. To best understand my methodological choices, it is important to understand the post-Katrina social landscape of Bywater and St. Roch.

Bywater & St. Roch in a Post-Katrina Context

In post-Katrina New Orleans, St. Claude Avenue, stretching from Elysian Fields Avenue all the way down to the Industrial Canal that breaks apart the Ninth Ward into the upper and lower areas, has and continues to function as an urban frontier borderland. On the western side of this broad avenue, boasting four lanes of traffic, two bike lanes and a central green space (locally referred to as neutral ground), lie the neighborhoods of Faubourg Marigny (the Marigny) and Bywater. To the east lie Faubourg St. Roch and St. Claude (Walk, 1979).[5] These four neighborhoods are separated on the eastern and western sides by railroad tracks along Press Street (see figure 3 for neighborhood maps).
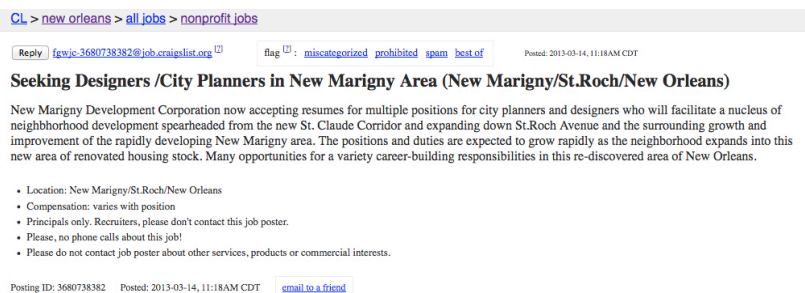
Figure 2: March 2013 advertisement seeking designers and urban planners in the "New Marigny" (St. Roch) neighborhood

Source: neworleans.craigslist.com

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[5] St. Roch was known as La Nouvelle Marigny until the 1800s when the neighborhood was renamed Faubourg St. Roch, a name now being Anglicized and resurrected as the "New Marigny" potentially for purposes of real estate speculation – see figure 2

Evidence of residential change has been occurring in the neighborhoods of Bywater and St.

Roch over the last ten years, at least, and most specifically over the last eight years since

Hurricane Katrina. Both the Marigny and St. Claude neighborhoods have seen fewer

Figure 3: Neighborhood map of downriver New Orleans, including St. Roch and Bywater

Source: https://gnocdc.s3.amazonaws.com/maps/PDFs/Neighborhood.pdf

demographic changes since 2005. The Marigny did, however, begin steadily gentrifying in the

1970s alongside neighborhoods in many cities around the country and world (Knopp, 1997;

Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008). Conversely, based on the 2010 census data, St. Claude does not

show any indicators typically associated with gentrification, such as residential replacement of

one racial or ethnic group to another, higher levels of college degree attainment and a shift from

majority renter-occupied to majority owner-occupied housing (Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008).

Appendix A shows statistical breakdowns of Marigny, Bywater, St. Roch and St. Claude, as well

as Orleans Parish overall, from 2000 to 2010.

Participant Observation

From February 2012 to August 2013, I was employed by Neighborhoods Partnership Network

(NPN), a local non-profit organization. This organization is unique in the landscape of non-

governmental organizations (NGOs) in the city of New Orleans, in that it serves as an umbrella

organization for neighborhood associations across the city, as well as acts as an intermediary

resource between residents and city government. While this research project began developing well before my time as a NPN staff member, it was integrally shaped by that experience. Throughout that period, I worked closely with neighborhood associations, leaders and activists from across the city, but notably with leaders in both Bywater and St. Roch.

The access that this position gave me cannot be overstated. As the Director of Programs for NPN, I was considered a trusted source. In this period, I sat in meetings with organizational leaders from neighborhood associations, schools, city government, non-profits and religious institutions, among others. While my participant observation was thus greatly influenced and expanded by this access, it is of utmost importance to me as a scholar that the trust bestowed in me during that period of duality is honored. For this reason, I have made informants that shared relevant data, experiences and opinions with me under the guise of my professional role anonymous in as much as is possible (based on leadership positions held) throughout this thesis.

I was a participant-observer at various events, including the 2013 Network of Ensemble Theater's (NET) MicroFest panel discussion on gentrification held in an art gallery on St. Claude Avenue; a community meeting dedicated to race and gentrification hosted by the Faubourg St. Roch Improvement Association (FSRIA); and a performance of the play Clybourne Park, staged on St. Claude Avenue and focused on gentrification. By attending these and similar events, I was privy to diverse perspectives and met additional residents of both neighborhoods that were willing to be interview subjects. For both Bywater and St. Roch, I regularly attended the respective neighborhood association meetings, which meet monthly in each neighborhood, from October 2012 until September 2013. At these meetings, I both observed and participated. Thus, I was actively engaged in my own research, rather than acting as a distant researcher. As a resident of one of the neighborhoods under study, as well as a non-profit professional working in

community development at NPN, I carefully negotiated the defining lines between my research, place of residence and my job (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). Participant observation the MicroFest panel discussion in January 2013 allowed me to understand the perspective of how the aesthetics of the street impacts investment decisions for one Bywater resident and local real estate developer, one Bywater resident and business owner and one St. Roch business owner—all of whom presented at the event.

I moved to Bywater in the summer of 2011. This intimate perspective on the neighborhood has undoubtedly influenced my research and my role as researcher. As a Bywater resident and gentrifier, I had greater access to other residents in my neighborhood. However, many of these residents shared my position as a gentrifier, which certainly influenced who I was able to interview for this project. My dual role as a NPN staff member and Bywater resident inherently broadened the scope of my own personal network, but nonetheless, my connections leaned more to the side of gentrifying residents.

Observations of the Built Environment

Since much of this research focuses on visual cues in the built environment, I conducted regular photographic surveys of both St. Roch and Bywater from April to September 2013. These surveys concentrated on incidences of graffiti and street art in areas of high visibility in each neighborhood, namely streets with both residential and commercial properties. Photographic evidence from these surveys and local media coverage of graffiti and street art served as visual illustrations during my interview process. As Dona Schwartz notes, "American middle-class viewers routinely respond to photographs by telling stories that stem from specific pictorial elements which seem personally significant. Instead of responding to an encoded message, most viewers' responses reflect their own social realities" (Schwartz, 1989). This

argument proved true in each of the interviews conducted, as participants felt compelled to respond to the photographs in ways that conveyed their personal knowledge of the locations and, when applicable, the artists behind the images shown.

This visual observation and analysis serves to support the data collected through other methods, while also documenting the changing aesthetics of both neighborhoods. However, the difficulty of documenting street art and graffiti is that, by its very nature, it is ephemeral. Throughout my research period, I would see a tag, piece, stencil or wheatpaste visible one day and by the time I was able to return to that location, the art was often altered. At times, it was painted or tagged over. On occasion, the given building or structure on which the art was previously located had since been demolished. Specifically, this was the case with a house in Bywater on Piety Street on which a wheatpaste about Pres Kabacoff, a Bywater resident and New Orleans real estate developer, was visible for one photograph, but upon return, the blighted building had been demolished (see figure 4). Again, the necessity and challenge of documenting and observing this artwork, these messages, is the fact that they are temporary. Graffiti and street
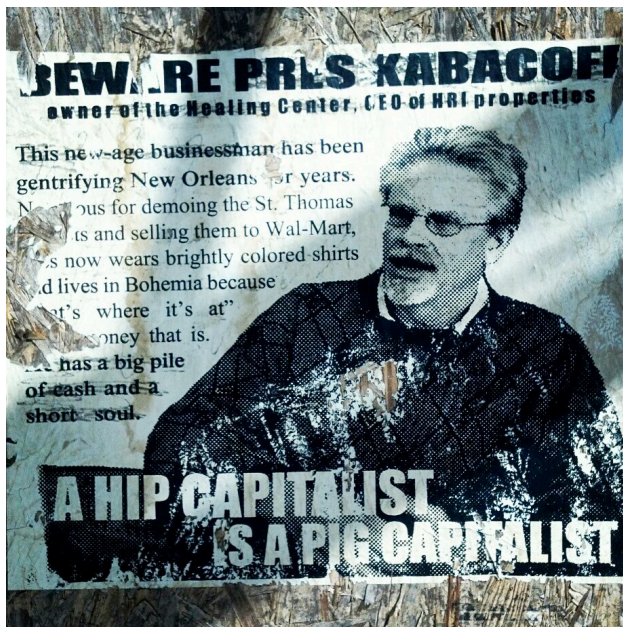
Figure 4: Bywater wheatpaste featuring an image of local real estate developer, Pres Kabacoff, and text related to Kabacoff's investments and redevelopments, 2012

Source: Photograph taken by author

art are impermanent. Thus, interpreting what a given work signifies is challenging in the very nature of the work being fleeting.

Discourse analysis

Recognizing that media coverage of neighborhood change, and gentrification specifically, influences the way in which the overall public understands this process, I analyzed New Orleans' local media discourse to help situate the data collected through my own participant observation and interviews of residents in these two distinct neighborhoods. As Rallis and Rossman point out, discourse analysis is "frequently concerned with how social issues such as power, gender relations, or racism are expressed in talk" (Rallis & Rossman, 2003, p. 298). Furthermore, employing this method allowed me "to investigate and analyse [sic] power relations in society and to formulate normative perspectives from which a critique of such relations can be made with an eye on the possibilities for social change" on the subject of gentrification in New Orleans (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 2). In order to understand the media coverage in the broadest context, I analyzed discourse from the following print, digital and broadcast media sources: The *Times-Picayune* and its online complement nola.com, *Gambit* and its online compliment bestofneworleans.com, *Louisiana Weekly*, WDSU-TV, WWL-TV, FOX 8 News-WVUE, WWNO, *The New Orleans Tribune*, *Nola Defender* and *Antigravity*. This analysis overall acts as further supporting evidence to the data collected through my participant observation and interviews.

In order to understand the various ways the topics of graffiti and street art are discussed in the context of gentrification in New Orleans, I ran multiple Internet searches. On Google.com, I searched both the term "graffiti" and "street art" alongside "gentrification" and "New Orleans," respectively. The search of "street art" in relation to the other terms yielded 648,000 results.

However, much of these results focused on one or two of the search terms, very rarely was there a search result that addressed street art in the context of New Orleans' gentrification specifically. Similarly, the search of "graffiti," "gentrification" and "New Orleans" returned over a million results, but very few results addressed all three terms in direct relation to one another.

I also searched the aforementioned terms in each of the media sources listed above, so as to yield local coverage on the topics. Since the topics of street art, graffiti and gentrification were being discussed with much greater regularity in the national discourse, I broadened my scope of discourse and analyzed national media coverage from 2010 to 2013 from the overall Google.com searches detailed above as a way to place these topics in New Orleans in a larger discursive context. The date range was selected as a way to reflect the gap between the most recent U.S. census and the corresponding demographic data analyzed in Appendix A.

Semi-structured Interviews

My research utilized semi-structured interviews to distill the perceived relationships between actors of gentrification, long-term residents, and the external aesthetics of neighborhood change. This data provided first-hand accounts of how post-Katrina gentrifiers alongside long-term residents across racial identification in both St. Roch and Bywater interpret the aesthetics of their neighborhoods' changing landscape. I intended to interview no fewer than twenty residents. My goal was to interview at least ten residents per neighborhood with proportionate distribution across race (white/black) and length of residence (pre-/post-Katrina). I selected 2005 and Hurricane Katrina as a marker of time because that has become a marker of insider/outsider identification. This target number was established primarily as a means to generalize the data back to the larger neighborhood populations. However, upon beginning this portion of data collection, it became evident that the empirical evidence provided by my interview participants

was rich and in-depth, if not scientific. Scheduling, conducting and transcribing interviews are a time-consuming process and one that was definitively impacted by my full-time work schedule while conducting this research. In total, I was able to conduct seven interviews with four residents in Bywater and four residents in St. Roch (one interview participant resided in both neighborhoods between 2010 and 2013). Each interview participant received and signed an informed consent form, which can be found in Appendix B. A matrix of these interview participants can be found in figure 5. Anonymity was promised to each interview participant, so this matrix includes pseudonyms for each person in an effort to discuss their thoughts with narrative ease.

	Race		Neighborhood		Length of Time (Pre/Post-Katrina)	
	White	Black	St. Roch	Bywater	Pre-Katrina	Post-Katrina
Interview Subject #1 ("Laura")	X			X	X	
Interview Subject #2 ("Mark")	X		X	X		X
Interview Subject #3 ("Lucy")	X			X		X
Interview Subject #4 ("Lisa")		X	X			X
Interview Subject #5 ("Jen")	X		X			X
Interview Subject #6 ("Bob")		X	X			X
Interview Subject #7 ("Melissa")		X		X	X	

Figure 5: Matrix of interview participants according to race, neighborhood of residence and pre-Katrina versus post-Katrina arrival in that neighborhood

For my initial interview subjects, I drew on my existing relationships with residents in both neighborhoods based, in part, on my professional work with NPN. Additionally, as a resident of Bywater, I drew on my personal network within the area to locate interview participants. I used snowball sampling from these first participants to find additional interview participants. I further intended to interview a total of five small business owners and real estate developers, but given time constraints, these interviews were not conducted. However, data from local, small business owners and real estate developers was collected via participant observation and discourse analysis.

As neighborhood organizations and NPN's membership contain some of the most active residents in both of these neighborhoods, I sought out interviewees through this channel. Through these connections, I requested to be introduced to additional long- and short-term residents that may have similar and different perspectives on the issues of street art, graffiti, gentrification, blight and overall post-Katrina neighborhood change so as to snowball my sample. Since oftentimes homeowners dominate neighborhood associations, it was critical to also gain renters' perspectives that may not be members of a neighborhood association.

All interviews conducted covered themes such as neighborhood change, the visual dimensions of public spaces undergoing gentrification and the varied resident experiences of gentrification. Nearly every interview conducted ran close to or just over an hour in length. The shortest interview was thirty-eight minutes in length and was, notably, with the person I am most personally close with of all the interview participants. Interviews were conducted in various locations, including most often participants' homes, a local bar and a coffee shop. All interviews were transcribed in full and in a manner that reflects the diction and speech patterns of the

participant. The transcriptions were then coded according to the themes that comprise Chapters 4 and 5.

The format of semi-structured interviews proved extremely helpful in allowing me to navigate other topics as they arose, as well as organically cover all of the themes at hand in my research. Initially, there were fourteen interview questions with four having sub-questions. Following my first interview, I removed an entire question realizing that it was not as pertinent (question #12), as well as amended question #14 to explore participants' thoughts on the relationship, rather than connection, between graffiti, blight and gentrification. The photographs used as complements to my interview questionnaire were selected to represent various interpretations and messages along the spectrum of graffiti and street art. There were eight images in all, each representing a legible tag, an illegible tag, a wheatpaste, a tar painting, a stencil, and three examples of tags conveying social and political commentary, respectively. My interview questions and photographic supplements are included in Appendix C.

As with any research project, there are limitations. The greatest limitation that this project faced was time. The amount of time that I could devote to full-time academic scholarship was seriously hindered and limited by my full-time work schedule. That being said, there were also advantages to this professional work, in terms of the access that it gave me to organizations and individuals with whom I was able to build relationships with and interview. Their voices solidified a range of perceptions around the aesthetics of gentrification in St. Roch and Bywater. However, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the many, many voices that are omitted from these pages, specifically those most deeply impacted by the process of gentrification – low-income residents, people of color from various ethnic backgrounds and renters. Such voices

ought to be included prioritized in future research on this topic, as a way to acknowledge and

highlight their thoughts and perceptions of gentrification as it happens around them.

CHAPTER 4: The Art of Decline

"With its last-frontier appeal and magical mixed bag of culture, New Orleans is quietly luring a circle of expats, who find an evolving city that's just the right amount of undone."
~ Sara Ruffin Costello, *New York Times*, October 2013

It is a familiar image: Brick wall covered in various layers of spray paint in some seemingly forgotten urban space. Graffiti and street art literally claim and mark space, but the ways in which this territorial marking is understood varies at times by race, class and other forms of privilege held by the viewer. Historically, graffiti's presence has communicated a level of disinvestment and disinterest towards a given property (Vitale, 2008). It has also served as a vehicle of remembrance, a way to literally see that someone was there. There is a point, however, wherein graffiti shifts to street art. Nearly all of the residents in both Bywater and St. Roch explicitly see not only a difference in these art forms, but in the artists behind them. External systems, such as the real estate industry, also interpret and define a difference in the way these art forms are understood and to what end they can be capitalized upon. These are key, albeit nuanced, shifts in how graffiti and street art play an important role in the gentrification process.

There are many actors and participants in the gentrification process, all with varied levels of agency and power. The visual messaging of graffiti and street art offers clues as to how the visible art of an urban landscape indicates change. These messages also inscribe different levels of change enacted by those actors. Vanessa Mathews writes that, "artists are attracted to marginal spaces of the downtown for their central location, social tolerance, aesthetic, and monetary appeal. Bain (2003) uses the term 'improvisational spaces' to characterize the unordered quality of these areas and their openness to multiple usage. Artist locations are typically described as 'edgy,' 'run-down,' and 'experimental'" (Mathews, 2010, p. 663). Thus, there is a certain aesthetic that both attracts particular new residents to a given neighborhood and allows for the

aesthetic construction of that neighborhood to be perpetuated by those residents as well as outside forces.

This chapter lays out the nuanced residential perspectives of graffiti and street art in the Bywater and St. Roch neighborhoods. During the interviews conducted, newer residents in Bywater indicated having been attracted to the neighborhood because of these art forms, while St. Roch residents were mostly united in wanting to eradicate graffiti and street art. Residents in Bywater and St. Roch also identified a surge in graffiti and street art post-Katrina. I situate these residential viewpoints through a discussion of graffiti deemed as blight, and the underlying criminalization therein, alongside the authenticity and distinctively urban aesthetic often associated with graffiti. I argue that the dividing line between appreciating and being attracted to graffiti or street art, as opposed to finding it repulsive and criminal, appeared in expressions of self-identity as homeowners and as artists. Race, neighborhood affiliation, or length of time living in that neighborhood was less important determinants of resident perspectives on graffiti and street art. Ultimately, no matter where residents' perceptions of graffiti fell on a spectrum of social ill to attractive aesthetic, there was an overall acknowledgement that blight, graffiti and street art are all tied together in the complex process of gentrification.

Graffiti as Blight

In the 1990s, cities across the U.S. continued to critically respond to widespread disinvested and abandoned urban cores, following decades of globalized capital migration and neoliberal policies. Notably, municipal governments began to incorporate the now infamous 'broken windows' theory into their policing strategies (Harvey, 2005; Sassen, 2011; Vitale, 2008). This trend, spearheaded by New York City authorities, quickly became a model followed by cities all over the country, including New Orleans. Graffiti was deemed a nuisance and its existence was

thought to devalue property and lead to increased crime. Maggie Dickinson, in her research of

race and graffiti in New York from the 1970s to the early 2000s, critically points out that,

> The increasingly violent tactics of police in dealing with graffiti writers was part of a more general increase in violence against young black and Latino men within the city as a whole. The acceptability of these increasingly violent tactics as a way to stop graffiti writers can be linked to this more general phenomenon, which was justified through a portrayal of young men of color (Dickinson, 2008, p. 34).

The majority of interview participants perceived graffiti as a signifier of both blight and

criminal activity. Residents in Bywater and St. Roch cited both an increase in the art form and

the attempted eradication of it post-Katrina. Laura, a white pre-Katrina Bywater resident, noted,

> We've been inundated with graffiti. I know we had graffiti before, it just seems much more prevalent and a bit like an assault, and maybe that's not the case at all, but it's just, you know, again perception is that it seems like we are constantly hit by the same graffiti taggers over and over again.[6]

Explicitly citing the aforementioned theory and discursive sentiment, Laura went on to say,

> It [graffiti] creates a lot of upset in the community and the belief is that it's just like a broken window on a house, that no one cares and that people will come back to try and break into the house if it's not fixed right away. There's a website called graffitihurts.org that a lot of community members have spent a lot of time researching, creating a committee around graffiti abatement, and that has been a really, it's been a sticking point for a lot of community members because they really would like to see all graffiti removed within twenty-four hours. If it's not removed within twenty-four hours then there's this thought process that you'll continue to be, you will continue to be targeted. If you continue to remove it, people will just say, well they care too much and they'll move on, I guess. We haven't had a chance to prove that yet, because there's so darn much of it.

Another Bywater resident, Mark, a white post-Katrina renter between 2011 and 2013, further

acknowledged that blight is problematic for neighborhoods, except for graffiti writers and street

artists. When asked what he associated with blight, Mark responded,

> Divestment…a problem to be solved…It's also…a detriment to neighborhoods. Um, it's a sign of a not necessarily, a neighborhood in, not turmoil, but maybe struggling or had struggled depending on the amount of blight…generally, it's bad. You don't want blight.

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[6] For reference of the pseudonyms given to interview participants, see figure 7.

No one wants blight, except for maybe people who want crack houses or places to squat…or to do graffiti on.

In St. Roch, the opinions were largely the same. Bob, a black post-Katrina homeowner who grew up in New Orleans, noted,

What it [graffiti] does is it brings the value of the neighborhood down…this is not freedom of speech, this is total disrespect for the community when someone does that. This costs homeowners and property-owners additional money, they have to cover this up.

While Jen, a white post-Katrina homeowner in St. Roch, expressed her feelings on graffiti in the context of blight as,

I mean, like, the just tagging, just, like, words, I just think it's ugly and I think that, you know, that even on the blighted properties, it adds another level of ugliness to me.

Not every interview participant shared the idea of graffiti as an eyesore or component of blight. In these differences, in fact, are nuanced interpretations of the art form and its aesthetic value, if not its economic value. Lucy, a white post-Katrina Bywater resident, noted that,

It's changed a lot [the graffiti that's seen in Bywater], I think, in the last…five or six years or whatever…maybe it was because I was more excited about it early, a couple years ago. You know, I went out and looked for good graffiti.

This acknowledgement of a shifting aesthetic in Bywater's graffiti illuminates the fact that, upon first moving to the neighborhood in 2009, Lucy was attracted to and 'excited' by the presence of graffiti. She did not read graffiti as a demarcation of disinvestment, but rather as an indication of something else, as she put it: "a wildness that I appreciated." When prompted, Lucy defined 'good graffiti' as

Technically good, but I think also there's a lot of other kinds like, you know, Harsh and what's his name? Old Crow and READ. What's his name, the guy that does all the fat whales? Tard. I think they have, like, good technical talent, and I think I would consider both of those good, just what they're going for is two different things. I think Harsh and Tard and READ are all very much working in the traditional vein of graffiti and I think Banksy and Swoon are working in the vein of street art. I just see them as two different genres.

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Lisa, a black post-Katrina homeowner in St. Roch and native to New Orleans, spoke about appreciating the art form, but recognized that,

> Since I think we're [the Faubourg St. Roch Improvement Association] trying to attract homebuyers, who don't understand street art or don't care for graffiti, I think we would probably have to do without 'em. Personally, I love them, but it would really depend on what we're [FSRIA] tryin' to do and how it would affect the outcome of it.

Residents differentiated between graffiti as an indicator or element of blight; of a shift from 'good graffiti' to something else (street art); and of graffiti and street art as an appealing aesthetic, but not one that attracts homeowners. This differentiation reveals some of the complexities in the residential interpretation of graffiti and street art and its perceived link with blight in post-Katrina Bywater and St. Roch. Differences in race, neighborhood of residence or educational attainment did not separate these varied interpretations, but rather homeownership and identification as artists. Both Lisa (St. Roch) and Lucy (Bywater) self-identify as artists and spoke of an appreciation of graffiti and street art. Lisa made this identification clear in our interview, stating, "I've been in art forever…I did theatre and scenery props for fourteen years, with different theatres, and that's the folks I know."

Discussing the connection between graffiti, street art and gentrification in New York and Paris, a January 2013 *Le Monde* article notes that, "street art has always represented a dilemma for municipal authorities. On one hand, they make a point of fighting against graffiti-related "vandalism," while on the other hand encouraging "artistic" practices. The difference between vandalism and art is not always easy to tell" (Arlandis, 2013). The article goes on to highlight this connection from the vantage point of both a graffiti writer/street artist and scholar, highlighting the artist's sentiment that graffiti and street art can bring communities together whereas the scholar decried the fact that street art illustrates a neighborhood's liveliness and

often attracts wealthier visitors and residents (Arlandis, 2013). Most telling, perhaps, is the scholar's recognition that "other cities have understood…that they could use street art to their advantage" (Arlandis, 2013).

Similar to the municipal criminalization of graffiti, the city of New Orleans addresses blight with a singular response of demolition. A few interview participants spoke about the city's limited tactics towards blight. Bob in St. Roch expressed his frustration with demolition being the only municipal strategy for eradicating blight, explaining,

> It's a ton of blight here in St. Roch, but, unfortunately, the challenge that we have had was that, because some properties are blighted, and there's a process or a desire to eradicate blight, many of our properties have been up for demolition and they've been approved for demolition, but the problem is, those are homes that we cannot get back that could, had great architecture to them and so, to eradicate blight doesn't mean that we have to demolish it.

Jen in St. Roch spoke similarly of the city's tactics, but alluded more to the supposed, desired end point of those strategies by saying,

> I think…that right now…the city looks at neighborhoods that are being more, that are more gentrified, I think that they are looking at that as a solution for all of us. I think that will cause, ultimately, for a change…I mean, it all comes to down to, like, if your, if your model's gonna be, like, in reducing blight we're gonna try to bring in…I mean, the things that are told to me [by the city] is, like, people wanna see increased boutiques and boutiques people can't afford. I mean, we need a grocery store. And a grocery store that can be afforded and it'll be great if Robert's [locally owned grocery chain] gets to come back, but I mean, but, you know, a lot of my neighborhood still can't afford Robert's.

Through my own participant observation and visual documentation, I noticed that one particular tag — "cultür" (sometimes written as "culture" or "cultr," but usually in the same handwriting and style) — started appearing on blighted property around Bywater and St. Roch in spring 2013, primarily on commercial strips. The fact that the word "cultür" (pronounced as culture) is marked on blighted buildings throughout these neighborhoods could be understood in a variety of ways, and illustrates a conflation of graffiti and/or street art with both blight and

gentrification. The word and location choice might indicate the writer's belief that these

buildings signify New Orleans culture, which has been lost by the structures falling into disrepair

and, thus, blighted status. These choices could also signify the writer's belief that these spaces

are ripe for cultural production or a signifier of cultural capital.

Figure 6: Tag "cultür" written on vacant
property on Franklin Avenue in St. Roch,
2013

Source: Photograph taken by author

Figure 7: Tag "cultür" written on blighted
property at Piety Street and Burgundy Street in
Bywater, 2013

Source: Photograph taken by author

The presence of this tag on blighted structures is indicative of Lisa in St. Roch's response to

what she associates with blight. Lisa shared, "When I see blight, I always think of what could be

with this property, instead of what it is now, you know." Similarly, this tag and its locations

suggest an awareness of the changes that are happening in these neighborhoods and the world

around the artist/writer. In addition to showing awareness, this writer is choosing public space, a

canvas of blight and an audience of the everyday, passing public, to convey his/her message. The

buildings on which this tag appears are typically found on main thoroughfares, border zones and

liminal spaces in Bywater and St. Roch (Elysian Fields Avenue, Poland Avenue, Franklin

Avenue, St. Claude Avenue). The writer has written on a few buildings on St. Claude Avenue in

Bywater and the Marigny, on a bus bench at the intersection of Elysian Fields Avenue and N.

Claiborne Avenue (the western border between St. Roch and the Seventh Ward neighborhoods),

in Bywater on Lesseps Street across the street from the Daughters of Charity community health clinic, on a building on Franklin Avenue (see figure 6), and a building at the intersection of Burgundy and Piety Streets in Bywater (see figure 7), all busy, well-traveled thoroughfares. The spaces chosen, in addition to sending a message about blight and graffiti – by the very nature of the tag being graffiti on blighted property – are very visible. This writer/artist seems to be deliberately selecting high visibility locations on which the tag will be read. The tag is also a literal illustration of cultural capital, which Bourdieu and Ley argue precedes economic capital in the gentrification process (Ley, 2003).

This deliberateness speaks to the early history of graffiti writers trying to get 'all city', being very concerned with and aware of visibility and laying their mark, their name, their tag on as many properties as possible to claim territory in a specific way (Iveson, 2007). Such territorial claim was not necessarily affiliated with gang turfs, but rather is about 'getting up' and showing the world that a given graffiti writer was visible (Dickens, 2009). The message inherent in this particular graffiti is very different than many writers' tags. Additionally, this particular tag and its selected locations are related to gentrification, in that the idea and question of what spaces are considered cultural and for whom is inherently raised in the viewer.

Writing about graffiti and street artists in Sydney, and the city's responses to these public markings, Cameron McAuliffe examines these questions about cultural definition, value and capital from the primary vantage point of the writers and artists amidst the neoliberal development of the creative city. He discusses the liminality that graffiti and street artists exist among in relation to the legal and illegal, but also notes that, "now, with the opportunities afforded by the valorization of creativity, the inconsistencies [between what is authorized and unauthorized, legal and illegal] may be more keenly felt" (McAuliffe, 2012, p. 190). McAuliffe

situates the liminality of graffiti writers and street artists amidst the conundrum of morality in the neoliberal city,

> The instability that is increasingly being recognized as a condition of the postindustrial city unsettles the ground on which moral codes are laid down. The increasing presence of precarity, or its ideological neoliberal corollary of 'choice,' in the labor market and consumer lifestyles, contributes to the late modern destabilization of urban identities. This condition of unsettlement muddies the ethical waters, with the late modern urban citizen finding it more difficult to understand the correct moral ways of being in the city. This all contributes, at least in part, to a so-called loss of community, and the subsequent search for the conditions that will return lost communal experiences (McAuliffe, 2012, p. 192).

In this context and paradox of neoliberalism and a search for community, Maggie Dickinson notes that graffiti as a means to create "shared, public, democratic visual space, is particularly troublesome for the project of neoliberalization, which is about radical privatization of the public sphere in the service of capital accumulation" (Dickinson, 2008, p. 29). Furthermore, she adds that, "while private property remains a powerful notion in the construction of graffiti as a crime, this argument overlooks the writing community's own preference for presenting work on shared, collective spaces…shared public space is increasingly privatized with the neoliberal economic restructuring of the city, largely through increased policing" (Dickinson, 2008, p. 39).

Every resident interviewed in both Bywater and St. Roch shared this belief of graffiti as most problematic when placed on private property. Lucy, a white post-Katrina Bywater renter, noted in response to one of the images shown in our interview that, "It looks like it's on private property, which…if I was a graffiti artist, maybe tagging on private property that's in use would be something that would be against my personal rule set." While Bob, a black post-Katrina homeowner in St. Roch, who was particularly bothered by what he views as the constant presence of graffiti in St. Roch, explained in response to whether or not he thinks there is a relationship between graffiti and gentrification,

I mean there's graffiti everywhere, not in certain neighborhoods, maybe less of it and more of it in certain neighborhoods, but I don't think that there's a real correlation, a real direct deal as it relates to gentrification…most likely you're gonna see it in St. Roch or where there is blight, where there is a lot less attentive, or a lot less attention to that and where people can get away with it.

While Bob did not name race explicitly, he did say that, "of course, it's [graffiti] not on Audubon Place," an upper-class, white private street near Tulane University in Uptown New Orleans. Much like Bob, many interview participants' discussed graffiti in implicitly racial terms, especially with regards to authenticity.

Authenticity and the Glamorization of Decay

In 2011, *Nola Defender* published an article about an art exhibition in which blighted property around the city was hypothetically re-imagined. Writing of the city's widespread abandoned properties and vacant lots, the article states, "At times, even the decay seems to be set in place on purpose" (Carlton, 2011). True for the Lower East Side in the 1980s, Vancouver, British Columbia in the 1990s, various Brooklyn, NY neighborhoods in the 2000s, and Bywater and St. Roch in post-Katrina New Orleans is the gentry's, or present-day creative class', glamorization of poverty, decay and urban grit (Smith, 1996; Ley, 1996; Zukin, 2010). As art critic Walter Robinson wrote, in relation to the 2008 Prospect.1 contemporary art biennial that sprawled across numerous neighborhoods in the city, including Bywater and St. Roch, "the art is a perfect excuse to tour the city, which Hurricane Katrina has made into a showplace of the kind of dilapidated industrial and urban architecture that has great appeal to art lovers" (Robinson, 2008).

While the young, urban dweller's attraction towards grit, decay and abandonment may not be a recent phenomena, the romanticization of this aesthetic is increasing in post-disaster cities like New Orleans. Nick Shapiro writes, "for northern and northern-educated transplants, and even

urban southerners like me, the ruins of New Orleans…represented the hope of escaping

capitalism's constrains; of finding self-sufficiency, authenticity, and partaking in the larger

hipness of nostalgia" (Shapiro, 2013). These "ruins," found in nearly every city – blighted,

dilapidated buildings; vacant, overgrown lots; and layers upon layers of graffiti and street art

simultaneously signify landscapes of disinvestment and landscapes of promise (Shapiro, 2013).

The ways Mark, a white middle-class, male urban planner and former resident of both Bywater

and St. Roch, discussed his attraction to New Orleans overall ties directly to Shapiro's

assessment,

> The reason I was moving to New Orleans is because that, well, number one I was
> accepted to grad school for city planning, but also because it was kind of an opportunity
> to be amongst people who were trying something new for themselves. In retrospect…it's
> been more like study-abroad than moving to a whole city…to ground my life…so it's like
> a bunch of people living in a place that they may or may not be from and who are really
> looking to do something, you know, what they can afford to do, rather than having to get,
> like, a full-time job and necessarily attack the corporate world.

This idea of unfettered, wild, frontier living has proliferated in the descriptions of St. Claude

Avenue and the surrounding neighborhoods post-Katrina, especially in relation to the area's

artists (see Bentley, 2013; Costello, 2013; and MacCash 2013). In early 2012, the Contemporary

Arts Center of New Orleans (CAC) exhibited the work of artists based in galleries and art spaces

along St. Claude Avenue. In a review of the exhibit, the CAC was described as "first founded in

1976 as an artist-run, artist-driven community organization in a downtrodden neighborhood, and

now sitting at the bustling center of the city's museum and arts district—hosted the newest crop

of artist-run, artist-driven galleries, most of them from the up-and-coming St. Claude arts

district" (Rhines, 2012). Rhines went on to acknowledge that, "the artists working primarily in

the Marigny and Bywater neighborhoods existed for some time in a vacuum, free from the

influence of the capital-A Art World and beholden only to the tastes and critiques of themselves

and their peers" (Rhines, 2012). Local art critic D. Eric Bookhardt, in his review of this same

exhibit, noted that,

> Another post-Katrina phenomenon was the rise of artist-run co-op galleries along the St. Claude Avenue corridor. What both phenomena had in common was a sense that creative and personal freedom are what this city is really all about, and the militant, do-it-yourself spirit of the recovery inspired artists to create their own gallery scene in the city's Bohemian epicenter (Bookhardt, 2012).

More recently, in a 2013 "arts and culture guidebook" entitled *Saint Claude Index*, published by

Constance (a New Orleans-based arts and design collective) and funded by St. Claude Main

Street and the New Orleans Tourism and Marketing Corporation, Bookhardt writes, "only in

relatively recent times has its [New Orleans'] visual arts community become a hotbed of

experimentation as the historically seedy thoroughfare that is St. Claude Avenue…it's a place

where creative expression and experimentation seem to exist almost for their own sake"

(Bookhardt, 2013, p. 2). He goes on to reference not only the long-standing presence of artists in

the "mostly working class enclaves" of the Marigny, Bywater and St. Roch neighborhoods

(pointedly omitting the fourth neighborhood in this quad, St. Claude, which is 81% black

according to the 2010 census), but also that "St. Claude's iconic mix of whimsy and grit was

eventually immortalized by artists and writers including Tennessee Williams" (Bookhardt, 2013,

p. 4). In our interview, Melissa, who purchased her home in Bywater in 1993, remembered her

first few years in this same way, explaining,

> Bywater, I found when I first moved back here, very eclectic…you had a lot of people that worked in the service industry, but they were writers or actors or something artistic, creative fields, and they worked in food and beverage to support them until they got to where it was they wanted to go. Never had a whole bunch of kids…like suburbs with a gazillion children runnin' all over for him [her son] to play with and Markey's Park was more of a dog park even back then…but it was…a nice neighborhood, everybody knew each other, you'd speak to people, even if you didn't know their names, you'd wave down, say 'hey, how ya doin'?' If you didn't know them by name, you knew them by face, you that where they lived, and you would start up, it was, it was still New

Orleanian, that camaraderie, that thing that New Orleans has about itself, so that's why I stayed I guess. I guess that's why I'm still here.

Graffiti and street art have become external, visual signs associated with this 'bohemian epicenter' and an overall fetishization and urban imaginary of decay as part of the gentrification process. In a 2013 article about the increased graffiti, street art and even street art tours in Brooklyn, NY's Bushwick neighborhood, a Bushwick resident noted, "'Graffiti is edgy and authentic. You lose the authenticity when you have that many people looking for authenticity…'Graffiti is guerilla,' he said, claiming that when it became legal and organized it felt 'contrived'" (Hoffman, 2013). Sharing this sentiment, a writer for the Atlanta-based, art-focused publication *BURNAWAY* wrote, "after all, what is an urban environment without graffiti?" (Tauches, 2010). Greta Gladney, a native New Orleanian, stated at the January 2013 NET MicroFest panel discussion held in Bywater and focused on art and gentrification, "artists are willing to take on risks of living where it's affordable…artists bring excitement to a place…or if there's interesting graffiti [the excitement of the graffiti draws artists in]." Gladney is also the Founder of St. Claude Main Street, a non-profit organization focused on economic development along the St. Claude Avenue corridor, though she no longer works with the organization in any capacity.

Bywater resident Mark discussed his thoughts on authenticity, after describing one of the images shown during the interview as more authentic than others. Mark's response to image #8 in Appendix C was quite positive. He remarked,

> And this one is awesome. The last one is the best one, I think, because it is just, like, un-self-conscious, not bullshit, it's a straight up tag. And, to me, that's like the most…I just don't if it's true or not, but this, to me, is done by someone who is more in line with what I see is the history of graffiti. Um, like, they're the roots of it, the genesis, where it's just like claiming ownership of public space. I mean, is this, is this on the, um, where is this?...is this the old projects down near The Joint? It is, okay. Um, I mean, like that, that in itself is kind of cool, 'cause that is actual public amenity. Um, it sucks because it's

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where someone lived, no longer lives, I guess they haven't lived there since the 90s or maybe post-storm, I don't know…I like it 'cause it's not self-conscious. It's just doing it to do it…which is funny, because the people that were doing the stencils [image #4 in Appendix C], like that's art for art's sake, and this actually, strangely enough, more art for art's sake, but it's not art with a capital A it seems, which inevitably makes it more art with a capital A. You know what I mean? It's just, like, the un-self-consciousness of it is really what gives it, like, in my opinion, like, museum quality. Whereas this other stuff is just, like I said before, like a RISD grad or something, who was just like emulating the urban experience and, like, trying to live into that urban experience and create that urban experience for themselves, which I don't think is necessarily problematic, like, we all need to create our own urban experience. Like, my urban experience is me creating it, um, in a very different way than making stencils. Um, not to say I haven't done it, but not in New Orleans, but, um, that being said, like, I just appreciate this much more because it, due to its un-self-consciousness.

When asked if he thought image #8 was more authentic, Mark explicitly struggled with the idea

of authenticity, explaining,

> The nuance with authenticity is that, like I said, I don't believe it exists because …as soon as something is labeled authentic, it's no longer authentic. It's just this ever disappearing thing that, as soon as you reach it, it fades into smoke…I don't, I just, that's why I don't think it exists. But, that being said, yes, this is much more authentic, but, in this case what, to me, when we're talking about cities, especially in the 21st century, especially cities growing in the 21st century, authentic is a code word for black. Authentic is a code word for poor, black…when you talk about authentic New Orleans culture, what are we talking about? [We're talking about Mardi Gras Indians…*that's* what we're talking about, actually. We're talking about secondlines.

This explanation of authentic as a racially coded word hearkens back to the frontier mentality of

colonization associated with gentrification (Smith, 1996). If what is authentically urban traces

back to race, in terms of the presence of communities of color and their cultures being authentic,

this frontier mentality allows for a sense of discovery of authenticity among gentrifiers. By

referring to components of the urban landscape that gentrifiers are attracted to as authentic, in-

movers are able to romanticize the decades of capital disinvestment that predominantly

communities of color dealt with, survived amidst and, ultimately, re-fabricated.

The graffiti and street artists marking such places and spaces, in part frontiers-people in the

gentrification process, visibly and aesthetically pave the way for middle-class residential

successors to move in and stake claim (Deutsche, 1996). These markings serve as a visual representation of authenticity nostalgia for second-wave gentrifiers. Laura, in her discussion of what she associates with graffiti called upon her insider knowledge of the individuals behind the markings in Bywater, "with the intelligence that I have from the police department, and from residents who have caught these people in the act, and the people who take ownership for it, are often young, transient individuals. When we're not talking about street art, only talking tagging." Lucy in Bywater acknowledged that, "Usually, a total stereotype, I associate taggers to be young, younger, not necessarily, like, artistically trained." Bob in St. Roch made a similar association,

> I also relate it [graffiti] to a lot of our transient community that, by us being so close to the train tracks, they flow into this neighborhood and this is just a signal or sign to some folk that maybe they communicated with upon their travels, that this individual or group of transients were here and when they see that, then they can know, I guess, I know that there's a good spot to hang out in. I don't know why, but I think that's a distinct possibility.

Mark also identified an association with 'transients' or 'train kids' in his response to image #7 (see Appendix C), saying,

> I prefer a tag. Like, that's so dumb. If you're gonna tag your space, and like try and claim public space, at least be clever. Or even not clever, at least, like, straightforward. "I got Eggos," grow up. I don't know. It's stupid. It, like, reeks of, like, someone coming in on a train on Press Street from Oklahoma and they just decided to paint this on a building.

When asked what she sees around St. Roch, Jen noted, "I see a lot of, like, twenty year olds or like teenagers and twenty year olds out and about…I see a lot of squatters and I see a lot of train kids and I see a lot of people bumming for money." Jen elaborated that, "train kids leave, squatters don't leave. They, like, set up shop in a vacant house and then destroy the house." This association between graffiti and transients or squatters draws an implicit connecting line between this social group, whom Campanella identifies as pioneer gentrifiers, graffiti and gentrification (Campanella, 2013).

Rebecca Reynolds, the moderator of the January 2013 NET MicroFest panel discussion and a recent transplant to New Orleans (she noted having moved to the city in August 2012 for a teaching position at UNO), said she's "been told how much the neighborhood [Bywater] has changed since Katrina." Kevin Farrell, Bywater resident and co-owner of the recently opened restaurant Booty's, agreed and elaborated that, "before Katrina, the neighborhood was scary" and "wasn't on people's maps." Interestingly, when Lucy, a Bywater resident since 2009, was asked what she associated with gentrification in our interview, she named the restaurant Booty's Street Food alongside Whole Foods. Keene Kopper was the first panelist at the event to name gentrification, explaining that before moving to New Orleans, he lived in Brooklyn (the Bushwick neighborhood, specifically) where one could "see gentrification over night." Kopper added that "Bywater is rapidly changing," but that his gallery, May Gallery, is "in a neighborhood [St. Roch] where probably no one would have gone before four years ago for the arts." Farrell and Kopper's statements implicitly place themselves, and presumably their peers, as discoverers, frontiersmen, and colonizers. It is as if they braved the dangerous wilderness for the sake of providing cool, hip destinations for others like them. A 2013 article in *The Guardian* discusses the aesthetic draw towards the Peckham neighborhood of London, mimicking Kopper's sentiments about Bywater, stating,

> Here we see the first indication of complicity between art and capital. The disdain that 'aesthetically minded' people have towards commodified spaces – shopping and eating in 'authentic' boutiques and cafes rather than the crass commercialisation [sic] of a Westfield – extends to living spaces too. Middle-class kids who reject the conservatism of the suburbs are drawn to urban areas with 'just the right amount of danger' for 'meaningful' experiences" (Bolton, 2013).

New Orleans has even been described, as recently as October 2013, as "a dangerous and ruined city" that attracted "a somewhat counterintuitive mass migration" of creative individuals (Costello, 2013).

The idea of danger and safety, unsurprisingly, came up in several interviews with both

Bywater and St. Roch residents. In response to what she likes about Bywater, Laura stated,

> Well there is perceived safety now because there are more people walking in the
> community, even in pre-Katrina, there weren't as many people living in this
> neighborhood as there are now. There are a lot more people in – perceived – in the
> community walking, moving, biking at different times of the day where there, in the past,
> there weren't as many businesses that offered themselves up to being able to walk to and
> experience. And then, for a long period of time after Katrina, there were very few
> businesses, so there's definitely the perception that the community is safer.

Mark, who lived in St. Roch from December 2009 to August 2010 and again from December

2010 to March 2011, cited crime as the reason he initially left the neighborhood, explaining,

> When I moved to St. Roch, it was, I mean, I don't know, I don't know how dangerous it
> was. Upon my first week living here, there was a triple murder two blocks away, so that,
> I had no idea what to do. I had never experienced that level of crime so nearby me, so it
> definitely put me in a state of, hardly crisis, but more of just questioning. So, it was
> dangerous and I guess it still is dangerous. I think less so just because of the influx of
> people like myself, it's just been more and more since living here, since moving here
> about four years ago.

Whereas Jen, another St. Roch resident – a white homeowner since 2010 – spoke of a clear link

between blighted property and crime on her block when she first arrived, prior to her actively

working to have the properties demolished or those buildings having burned down:

> Nobody was clean [in St. Roch]. People were squatting in all the houses, turning tricks to
> get drugs, buying drugs on the corner, doing the drugs, wandering around up and down
> our street like high off their whatever, I guess it's heroin, and then using the bathroom in
> the other houses. I used to go to work at 7 in the morning and they'd be like dragging the
> prostitutes home, like, half naked, vomiting from whatever drugs they'd taken the night
> before.

Upon reflecting on Image #6 in Appendix C, which accompanied the interview questions, Laura

in Bywater explained,

> There was a terrible, terrible crime that was committed inside of the house as well, and
> when those boards [upon which the word READ is written] went up, it was lovely and
> then we saw READ go up all around the community and it was kind of like a, seemed
> like a call to, for people at the time to start paying attention to what was going in the
> newspaper, that's sorta what I got out of it, which a lot of people don't.

Whereas, Lucy seemed to wax nostalgic about the violence in her neighborhood when she first

arrived, saying,

> When I first moved here, there was definitely a wildness that I appreciated. It was still
> pretty violent. My first year or two, I'd say [2009/2010]. The first summer I spent here,
> you couldn't really cross Press Street at night because there was a couple weeks where
> there was always a guy there with a gun robbing people and I knew so many people
> getting robbed. I mean, it was like every week you talked to someone who had got robbed
> and it was just such a common thing. There was a real community at that point. I think I
> was going to bars more than I do now, so I really got to know a lot of people in the
> neighborhood through that, and it felt like a community of musicians and artists and, you
> know, people in the neighborhood that you just knew. You know, I knew every single
> one of my neighbors on the block. Now, I think, I don't know as many just because so
> many people have moved in and out in the time I've lived here that I don't try as hard
> maybe.

Jen, a white St. Roch homeowner since 2010, when discussing her first encounter with the reality

of decay and poverty that her fellow residents were living in, was appalled:

> I was definitely, like, taken back 'cause it was one of the first times I'd been there at
> nighttime and I could see into everybody's houses 'cause they had their lights on and
> stuff, and the sort of, like, terrible conditions people were living in. I was, I was kind of
> shocked that people were, like, living in that way…Both [renters and homeowners]. Like
> people who, squatters who were obviously, like, living in houses that had, like, no
> plumbing and stuff, but they didn't have electricity, so I really couldn't see them. I mean
> people who were, like, paying rent and their house was, like, falling down around them.
> That, from the outside it didn't look great, but it didn't look terrible necessarily, but you
> walk by at nighttime and you can see in, you can see their, there's not, like, sheetrock on
> the walls, like, like, the corner, the house at the corner of Villere and St. Roch that's by,
> it's orange and the outside is, like, really cute, people stay in there. There's no walls in
> there. There's 2'x4's, it's completely gutted.

Graffiti and street art are components of authentically urban spaces. Of course, the art forms

appear outside of cities as well, but they are equally celebrated and reviled as urban. Increasingly

though, graffiti and street art are transcending "the loss of authenticity as economic follows

cultural capital; again reflecting on the paradoxes of the cycles of gentrification as

commodification destroys the appeal of gentrified neighbourhoods to the artist" (Cameron &

Coaffee, 2005, p. 43). Tourism is being developed around the existence of graffiti and street art,

individuals are migrating into neighborhoods because of this aesthetic, and, perhaps most critical, real estate developers are using this authentically urban art to transform spaces from one socioeconomic group to another. Sociologist David Madden's 2013 article on the economic consequences of gentrification in *The Guardian* is tellingly accompanied by an image of a graffiti-ed building. Still, the vital point that he concludes on is that "the opposite of gentrification isn't urban decay; it's the democratization of urban space" (Madden, 2013). The cycles of economic and cultural capital, as dictated in part by the presence of graffiti and street and whom it attracts, are intrinsically connected to New Orleans' tourist economy.

Urban Aesthetics and Post-Graffiti

Following the floodwaters of 2005, local and visiting street artists began "using the streets to communicate hope and to reflect on what the city was experiencing, this movement began a dialogue about art in public spaces" (Gunnell, 2010, p. 1). Since 2010, journalists have touted New Orleans as the "fastest growing city" in the country, while other local and national media have focused on the "burgeoning arts scene" along the St. Claude Avenue corridor and the integration of graffiti and street art into luxury residential complexes (Bass, 2012; Lopez, 2012; Read, 2012; Yoo, 2012). This same coverage acknowledges that much of the growing population is comprised of middle-class residents new to the post-Katrina city (Lopez, 2012; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). Downtown New Orleans, however, has long been a hotbed for artists and creative residents. As Laura noted, a white homeowner in Bywater since 2004 and New Orleans resident since 1992,

> When I first moved to Bywater and became aware of Bywater, it was a very ethnically mixed neighborhood that was predominantly lived in by people who had an arts or craftsmen trade on the Caucasian side, and on the African American side, more of your blue collar workers all over the map, so mechanics, offshore workers. You know, some of them highly, highly paid. But it was definitely, in 2005 and even prior to that period, more mixed racially.

Mark, a white post-Katrina renter in both St. Roch and Bywater between 2010 and 2013,

discussed his attraction to the area, initially in St. Roch,

> There was only one person I knew in New Orleans when I moved here and he lived in the Bywater, so I wanted to live nearby…So I moved to St. Roch because it was affordable and available…fun, low-key – fun being, you know, availability of bars, maybe restaurants, music venues, art happenings or at least some sort of like alternative art scene, and alternative music and what not, not really the main, I didn't really care about the mainstream cultural experiences.

Lucy, a white post-Katrina renter who moved to Bywater in early 2009, talked about her reasons

for moving into the neighborhood,

> As I moved the first month into New Orleans, I was driving around to a lot of different neighborhoods and I was really attracted to the architecture in this neighborhood…So it was really more of like some sort of interesting energy, beautiful architecture and affordable housing that led me to this place,

and when asked to describe Bywater, Lucy responded,

> I think there's always been an artistic element to this neighborhood, since like, I don't know, I imagine the 80s and 90s. Before that I think it was a pretty working class neighborhood. But I think because there was a bit of a reputation before Katrina that was it was an artistic epicenter, I think after that it sort of exploded. So that's definitely the sort of overarching adjectives that people tend to say about the Bywater. I think it also tends to have, I mean it's also a neighborhood that has a lot of bars, no grocery stores. It's a neighborhood that attracts a demographic of like 20s to 40s who are young and interested in music and alcohol and entertainment and going out.

Immediately following the NET MicroFest event in January 2013, Greta Gladney also

mentioned this same history of Bywater's long history of artistic residents. Gladney informed me

that her reading of some audience members prompted her to note during the panel discussion that

she is "conscious of artists – though they're mostly white – [who have] been here [in Bywater]

for 40, 50 years." This history notwithstanding, shared among all Bywater interview participants

was an acknowledgement that graffiti and street art have dramatically increased post-Katrina.

Whether it is the public consciousness around this art or nuisance, depending on the respondent,

has increased or the actual occurrence that has increased is difficult to quantify. Laura, who

purchased her home in Bywater in 2004 after having rented in the Marigny, expressed that,

> This [graffiti/street art] is really, really heated up the last couple of years. When we had the larger graffiti players that did some pretty crazy things off the side of buildings and their, their end product was legible, they sort of controlled the environment. I don't know if it was because they were well respected or because we now have a greater population of people who find it interesting to go out and, you know, mark space…But, yeah, it has definitely heated up in the last several years. I would say, probably, in the last four or five [years] mostly.

Mark, a white post-Katrina resident of both Bywater and St. Roch between 2010 and 2013, in

response to what he sees when he walks around Bywater noted,

> A lot of like weird – well, actually in the beginning, there wasn't much graffiti. But now as we've kind of moved over the course of the years, it's something, different kinds of graffiti…I'd say it was more graffiti writing prior, not necessarily gang stuff, but like more of the, what the genesis of graffiti was like in Philly, with claiming ownership of space, it looked more like that and more just typical tagging. Whereas, over the past few years, you've seen more street art and more of a new, more contemporary, it seems to me, more contemporary definition of what graffiti is, so, I don't know, politi-, more political, more overtly political graffiti, more like art, like I said, like *street* art rather than graffiti that could then be construed as street art, like people wheatpasting things, things I can see, you know, you could see that the Bywater attracts a certain activist level of folks and -- which is just too funny, the irony is just abound and people don't even, the people that move here and paste wheatpastes about how gentrification is the end all, be all of the worst things in the world and then wheatpaste their things that say that after having then moved here from Providence [Rhode Island] and going to RISD [Rhode Island School of Design].

Much scholarly research has been conducted on the connection between artists and

gentrification (see Deutsche, 1996; Bain, 2003; Ley, 2003; and Markusen, 2006). Scholars

Cameron and Coaffee explain that,

> What the artist par excellence provides as an engine of gentrification is cultural capital which identifies and utilizes the attraction of devalorized inner-urban residential zones. In part, this involves an aesthetic valorization of the urban fabric of decayed historic neighbourhoods…what the artist values and valorizes is…more than the aesthetics of the old urban quarter. The society and culture of a working-class neighbourhood, especially where this includes ethnic diversity, attracts the artist as it repels the conventional middle classes. Identification with the dispossessed, freedom from middle-class convention and

restraints, and the vitality of working-class life have all long been associated with the artistic, bohemian lifestyle (Cameron & Coaffee, 2005, p. 40).

Luke Dickens, building on Tim Edensor's research, further notes that abandoned urban spaces cultivate spontaneous creative action (Dickens, 2008). In his 2009 dissertation on the topic of recent trends and geographies of graffiti in 21st century London, Dickens employs the term "post-graffiti" to describe the growing political context of these urban inscriptions in municipal investment and decision-making (Dickens, 2009). Building on related themes, this thesis similarly uses the idea and framework of post-graffiti to clarify some of the complexities that residents in Bywater and St. Roch named in perceiving the aesthetics of their streets.

Graffiti and street art offer a seemingly race-neutral, nostalgic relic of disinterest and disinvestment, indicating and literally illustrating that a given place was or is in need of rescue or revitalization, much like Robin D. G. Kelley's articulation of gentrification as "presumably race-neutral" (Kelley, 2003, p. 12). However, the messages of these markings cannot be ignored nor should not be stripped bare of racial connotations or gentrification. Kelley explains that, in his introduction to a photographic essay of Harlem over the 1980s and 1990s, the messages of graffiti scrawls documented by photographer Alice Attie simultaneously signify "a warning against such amnesia [of police brutality against black Harlem]" and "a marking of territory by the new Harlemites" (Kelley, 2003, p. 9). In fact, two interview participants, Jen and Bob – one white one black – living in St. Roch, both younger, post-Katrina residents discussed seeing blight and graffiti going hand-in-hand, as well as explicitly believing that blight sets the stage for gentrification. In Bob's words, "blight gives light to gentrification."

In early 2013, Richard Campanella, geographer and Bywater resident, wrote about the changes occurring in neighborhoods along St. Claude Avenue. He outlined New Orleans' long history of gentrification, dating back to the French Quarter in the 1920s, and how the process has

continued in fits and starts in neighborhoods such as the Marigny, Lower Garden District and

Bywater since the 1970s (Campanella, 2013). He pointed out that the Faubourg Marigny, in fact,

was "a historical moniker revived by Francophile preservationists and savvy real estate agents,"

much like the current re-naming of St. Roch as the New Marigny (Campanella, 2013). In our

interview, Bob discussed this new name for St. Roch, saying,

> So now, St. Roch is even known as New Marigny! In a sense, which is I think the, you
> know, the craziest thing in the world, but because of that…because of its location, a part
> of this area is known as the New Marigny…Now, that front part of St. Claude, people
> like to call that still part of the Marigny and there's some issue with that. And it's
> designated [by the city] as the Marigny, but however, it is St. Roch property.

Campanella further discussed the aesthetics and urban imaginary that attracts newcomers into

Bywater and St. Roch, writing that

> Most people who opt to move to New Orleans envision living in Creole quaintness or
> Classical splendor amidst nineteen-century cityscapes; they are not seeking mundane
> ranch houses or split-levels in subdivisions. That distinctive housing stock exists only in
> about half of New Orleans proper and one-quarter of the conurbation, mostly upon the
> higher terrain closer to the Mississippi River. The second factor is physical proximity to a
> neighborhood that has already gentrified, or that never economically declined in the first
> place (Campanella, 2013).

While architectural style was certainly a factor named by a few interview participants as to why

they moved to Bywater (more so than residents discussed in relation to St. Roch), there were

other aesthetic lures. Laura, in discussing her move back to New Orleans (and the Marigny,

specifically) in 1992, said,

> When I returned to New Orleans, I chose the urban environment again because that's, I
> was single and that's where everything was taking place that I wanted to do like go out,
> go to a club, hear music, eat out. So all these things that were taking place were within
> the urban environment. So, I think about…why do people move to urban environments?
> There's more things to do, they don't have to worry about drinking and driving, there's
> not a lot of gas spent driving around getting from place to place, it's easy to make friends
> in an urban environment because you don't have to travel to a certain, specific place to
> meet someone.

Mark talked about moving to St. Roch in 2009 because it seemed like the neighborhoods he was

used to in Brooklyn, where he was living previously. Mark explained,

> [I] moved to St. Roch because it was near the neighborhoods that I wanted to live in but couldn't necessarily afford, initially. Basically, I saw upon my research that Frenchmen Street was nearby, which I thought that…was fun and wanted to live near that being in New Orleans, being music, also knew that it was sort of, you know, I had been living in New York City prior and knew the neighborhoods in New York that I liked, which were, you know, Brooklyn neighborhoods generally, and wanted similar experience and knew that this was kind of the area.

While Jen was excited to purchase a home on Villere Street in St. Roch in large part due to the

art projects nearby. Jen shared,

> Originally we were pretty excited about what was going on with Kirsha's properties. Like, when we first looked at our house, there was a community garden in our front yard. Which…not necessarily, I don't know what we would've done if we had actually been, like, feeding the neighbors, you know, maybe we would've looked at keeping it, but our whole front yard was filled with basil when we first looked at it and it was supposed to, there's three lots next to ours. And there was the *Safe House*, at the time, and there was a community garden in front of the *Safe House* and the middle lot was, the building had been knocked down and they were supposed to make that into a community garden…So, I mean, we were even excited to be part of it what she was doing.

The *Safe House* was an installation sculpture by artist Mel Chin unveiled in 2008, as part of

Kirsha Kaechele's Life is Art Foundation/KKProjects and coinciding with the Prospect.1

contemporary art biennial.[7] In the piece, Chin transformed a house at 2461 Villere Street in St.

Roch into a bank vault, wherein hundred dollar bills were created by New Orleans youth and

other visitors (Schindler, 2008). Following the de-installation of the sculpture in 2010, the house

fell into further disrepair. In the spring of 2011, a series of articles were published on the state of

the former *Safe House*, as well as other properties that Kaechele owned on the 2400 block of

Villere Street between Music and Arts Streets. In our interview, Jen shared that her calls to the

Times-Picayune were what prompted the coverage. In one of those articles, New Orleans art

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[7] http://lifeisartfoundation.org/art/safehouse

critic Doug MacCash wrote of the 2007-2009 KKProjects heyday, "the St. Roch neighborhood streetscape itself became sculpture" (MacCash, 2011). MacCash noted that,

> The houses that form the unusual art space were already in states of decay when Kirsha Kaechele…first adopted them and dedicated them to artistic experimentation. At the time, KKProjects seemed to represent the sort of outside-the-box thinking that could breathe vitality into imperiled historic neighborhoods in the bleak post-Katrina recovery period…Now, ironically, the site, between Music and Arts streets, is worse off than it might have been (MacCash, 2011).

Columnist Jarvis DeBerry wrote a response to the back-and-forth articles by MacCash documenting his exchanges on the 2011 state of the Villere Street properties noting that, "of course, in New Orleans, we'd never know about the intersection of creativity and chaos unless some sophisticate came in to show us where it's located" (DeBerry, 2011). A little later in 2011, Michael Martin, then Bywater resident and present Director of St. Claude Main Street, wrote an article in *The Lens* stating that, "downtown neighborhoods have become havens for many young, highly educated transplants interested in urban living with a distinct cultural edge. In fact, living on 'the edge' and experiencing 'the struggle' is part of the draw. Lack of a full-service grocery store in the area, for example, has made urban gardening the height of hip" (Martin, 2011).

In June 2012, an article in the *New York Times* discussed local real estate developer Sean Cummings' decision to leave selected graffiti and street art in and on the Rice Mill Lofts, a high-end residential apartment complex located in Bywater, as a selling point for new tenants (Read, 2012). According to the article, the lofts were converted from a former rice processing plant after years of falling into disrepair. During that period of decay and disinvestment, the building became covered in graffiti and street art. The article illustrates that the aesthetics of the building, as well as the actively gentrifying Bywater neighborhood, were appealing for the targeted residential audience (middle- to upper-class tenants) of the converted lofts. This artistic remnant of an authentic, downtrodden past lent a certain charm to the building for its new residents. A

more tongue-in-check interpretation of Cummings' decision to retain graffiti and street art in his

redevelopment of Bywater's Rice Mill was made in a 2012 *Gambit* article, stating,

> It seems the building aims to cultivate a culture with members of the self-branded
> 'creative class' that's proliferated post-Katrina…Developer Sean Cummings of the firm
> Ekistics says there is usually a waiting list for apartments with expressive graffiti. That's
> funny, because you can usually live among graffiti (outside) for free, without waiting at
> all (Laborde, 2012).

The Rice Mill Lofts offer an interesting site through which to literally see private capital's

perspective (in the form of real estate development) and urban transformation in Bywater and the

entire St. Claude quad community. The building, which once functioned as a space of material

production, was left to decay and deteriorate as the production shifted elsewhere. Presumably,

once the rent-gap was wide enough, the developer transformed the property into a space of

consumption through luxury living and bearing witness to its transitional states through a

disembodied lens. As Sean Cummings stated at the January 2013 NET MicroFest, "the

neighborhood [Bywater] was a green banana…graffiti covered for years" but in 2010,

Cummings discovered that graffiti was "stunningly beautiful art…that street art harnessed the

creativity [of Bywater]." Cummings' discovery of graffiti and street art's aesthetic appeal

allowed him to pioneer the preservation of these art forms in the neighborhood, profiting from

Figure 8: Graffiti on Rice Mill building
pre-development, 2010
Source: Anna Hackman

Figure 9: Graffiti on Rice Mill Lofts,
after re-development, 2012
Photograph taken by author

the now-ripened cultural capital of graffiti and street art. The graffiti preserved in and on the building is severed from its larger visual and historic context, selectively highlighted as a selling point for the residences (see figures 8 and 9).

As seen in figure 9, the Ninth Ward moniker and is rendered literally and symbolically illegible through the Rice Mill Lofts redevelopment; the previous "9th Ward" tag (visible in figure 8) has literally been broken apart by windows and doors. This construction choice further aids in a re-branding of the area from the Ninth Ward to the boutique, hip Bywater. Much like Luke Dickens argued in regards to London's Hoxton neighborhood, "the visible traces of post-graffiti art…actually appear implicated in the reproduction of a kind of 'grime chic'" (Dickens, 2009, p. 30). The re-branding and erasure from the Ninth Ward to Bywater is not recent, but is certainly still felt. As Melissa stated in our interview,

> When I moved in, it was the Ninth Ward…but then after that, after I got in here, all of a sudden…the Historic Bywater, what? It's the Ninth Ward, what y'all talkin' about? I live on the Ninth Ward on this side, I lived on the Ninth Ward on that side…after I bought my house, the early 90s, I bought my house in '93. I didn't know I was coming into the Historic Bywater...then after I moved here, about a year or so later, '94, '95, '96 and onward, Historic Bywater. I said I'm not Historic Bywater. What's historic about the Bywater that makes it different from the rest of the historic Ninth Ward? If it's historic over here, it's historic over there.

Figures 8 and 9, and the Rice Mill Loft redevelopment overall, illustrate Andrew Herscher's recent argument of how contemporary art and artists engage with urban space and how that engagement is then interpreted through economic action (Herscher, 2013).

In mild opposition to Cummings' celebration of graffiti and street art in Bywater, Laura noted in our interview that,

> There were several [graffiti writers] that were hitting this community fairly hard. There were several people that were hitting this community very hard post-Katrina, but they have landed actual careers in art so they're no longer tagging neighborhoods. So I don't know, maybe the current ones will land careers in art and move along as well and we'll have a fresh breed to deal with in the future.

Laura later added, "I don't think anybody wants to live in a vanilla box either, so a little grit, I think people can understand, but when you're just going around using the same message over and over again, it's a trigger that inspires something else in other people, that is not positive." Despite the fact that both Laura and Cummings fall into the same categories of white middle-class, long-term residents of Bywater, their opinions of and appreciation for, or lack thereof, graffiti and street art are rather divergent. The former views this aesthetic as a property enhancement, whereas the latter agrees with the discourse that graffiti and street art are detrimental to property values.

Conclusion

Gentrifiers in Bywater glamorized decay and urban grit (including graffiti), which they simultaneously viewed as a signifier of authenticity amidst the wild, urban frontier, paralleling various scholars' research of gentrification, such as Neil Smith, David Ley and Sharon Zukin. Mark and Lucy both mentioned a wildness and freedom of experimentation as elements that attracted them to Bywater, while Melissa, who moved to the neighborhood in 1993 and defined herself as a gentrifier during our interview, found the eclectic, artist community at that time inviting. Similarly, Laura, a Bywater resident since 2004, remarked that she thinks a modicum of grit is acceptable among her fellow neighborhood residents. Business owners in Bywater and St. Roch (namely Booty's Street Food and May Gallery) framed their selection of each neighborhood as a location for their respective enterprises as pioneering amidst what were previously deemed unsafe places. Media discourse of the St. Claude Avenue corridor similarly lauded a "creative freedom" as attractive components of the area. While graffiti was often deemed as a component of the urban frontier, regardless of whether that aspect of the frontier was enticing or repellant, residents in both neighborhoods associated street art with artistic skill,

aesthetic sensibility, socio-political messaging and creative types (notably Laura, Lucy, Jen, Mark and Melissa), often in response to the image of a wheatpaste created by Swoon shown during our interviews. While there was a clear differentiation between graffiti and street art by interview participants, defining one versus the other proved challenging for many, especially if the marking was written text rather than stenciled or wheatpasted imagery. Utilizing Luke Dickens' terminology of "post-graffiti" became useful for this reason. Dickens argues that "post-graffiti differs from graffiti writing in its attempt to directly engage with urban audiences through 'readable' iconographic inscriptions - using critical, intriguing and often humorous graphics - in order to challenge their visual understandings and appreciations of the city" (Dickens, 2009, p. 19).

The nuances and complexities of the perceptions of graffiti and street art parallel the complexities in the creation of the art itself. In relation to London's graffiti and street artists, Dickens writes,

> A particular effect of urban inscription is that these practitioners' identities do not just feed off an aesthetic appreciation of urban decay, but are more literally rendered present in the landscape. (Dickens, 2009, p. 30).

What is perhaps most critical is that this 'grime chic' attracts a particular type of clientele and resident, namely members of the creative class, and is molded by powerful actors and structures. The neighborhoods we inhabit are both products of their residents, as well as produced by external actors and larger systems. The aesthetic elements of this production are increasingly important as municipalities take an active role in re-making space for consumptive roles within the creative or cultural economy.

CHAPTER 5: Connecting the Dots[8]

"Dead bodies draw vultures."
~ "Melissa," interview participant and Bywater resident, October 2013

"It was death that birthed this new New Orleans"
~Kalamu Ya Salaam, November 2013

There is a cyclical relationship between New Orleans' tourist economy and the development of the cultural economy, which is largely comprised of social and creative entrepreneurs. With festivals and events nearly every week of the year, the city of New Orleans has branded itself as a cultural tourism mecca. In fact, 2012 boasted the "second-highest visitor count on record…when 9.01 million people traveled to the city" (Waller, 2013). In the mid-twentieth century, it was outsiders that initially promoted the culture of the city to tourists (Souther, 2006). At present, we see similar trends continuing, specifically after the incorporation of U.S. Biennial, Inc. and their unveiling of the Prospect.1 (2008) and Prospect.2 (2011) contemporary art biennials and the formation of the city's Office of Cultural Economy (2011) under Mayor Mitch Landrieu. The *Times-Picayune* further noted that, "Mark Romig, president of the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation, said recent campaigns promote a broader set of amenities beyond the tourism epicenter of the French Quarter" and that "we [the city of New Orleans] are the most authentic destination" (Waller, 2013).

There is a confluence of forces working together to not only brand New Orleans as a destination, but to draw visitors into new areas of the city beyond the tourist bubble of the French Quarter: City Hall, New Orleans Marketing and Tourism Corporation, various organizations that produce festivals, to name a few. The recent publication of a guidebook for St. Claude Avenue,

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[8] The title of this chapter is an homage to a book of the same name written about Detroit's Heidelberg Project, published in 2007: http://wsupress.wayne.edu/books/detail/connecting-dots

Saint Claude Index, is one key example of how the downriver neighborhoods of Bywater and St. Roch are being thrust in the middle of this explicit tourism-branding venture. According to Greg Richards' research, this trend is widespread, in that "cultural events in cities have slowly evolved from the staging of royal pageants and other cultural rituals of power to the bourgeois patronage of culture that characterised [sic] the industrial city, to the postmodern mixing of public and commercial culture" (Richards, 2013, p. 2). Explicitly reflecting New Orleans' tactics, Richards further notes that "tourism has been an important part of the creative revival of cities, since tourists were arguably attracted to the same 'buzz' as the creative workers, and attracting tourists in turn helps to support the facilities that creative workers sought" (Richards, 2013, p.4). Thus, the branding and marketing of New Orleans, and specifically Bywater and St. Roch, as a destination for the creative class both boosts the tourist economy as it also attracts new, creative class residents, thereby producing spaces that are conducive to both inter- and intra-city tourism. As Richards argues, "creative entrepreneurs often play an important role in developing the creative spaces that attract creatively interested visitors and these in turn play an important role in creative regeneration of the city" (Richards, 2013, p. 19). In this chapter I examine how the places and spaces of Bywater and St. Roch are marketed inside and outside the city of New Orleans, within the economic and social frameworks of neoliberalism and race, the trajectory from blight to gentrification becomes clearer. Residents understand this trajectory and situate graffiti and street art on a spectrum of blight to gentrification.

Creative Tourism and Place-marketing

In early 2013, just on the heels of the city hosting Super Bowl 47, the *BBC*'s travel blog featured a post discussing Bywater's hipness and the new New Orleans. The article boasts,

> Riverfront neighbourhoods, miles-wide public spaces on the banks of the Mississippi
> River and empty buildings due to the city's slumped economy have been rebuilt since

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2005's Hurricane Katrina to attract entrepreneurs, artists, designers and creative-minded travellers [sic] (Raymundo, 2013).

Accompanying the post is a photograph of the Rice Mill Lofts and its adorning street art. The redeveloper of the property, Sean Cummings, is quoted as saying, "The city is a magnet again for new talent and new ideas, co-creating a new New Orleans" and deeming post-Katrina New Orleans as a "boutique city," which he defines as "a boutique city stands for something. It's original. It's authentic. It's one-of-a-kind" (Raymundo, 2013). More recently, a *New York Times* travel section article in October 2013 highlighted New Orleans as having "the bewitching last-frontier appeal of an idyllic small town that seemed to promise real human connection and a chance to disappear at the same time" (Costello, 2013).

Bywater residents are aware of this tourism boom. Mark, who rented in Bywater from 2011 to 2013, remarked on not only the increase of visitors with cameras, but also his own similar behavior as an urban tourist, explaining,

> There's a lot more people walking around the streets [in Bywater] and a lot more people with cameras walking around the streets, actually. Yeah. You notice them, you know, they're like 'oh, look at this house', 'look at this tree'. I think we've all been them. Yeah, we all go to cities, especially if you're interested in cities, you go to cities and you're 'oh, what is this city? What makes it interesting?' You take pictures of the city, but that just, the fact that it's happening in the Bywater speaks to the, its kind of changing nature, I'd say, and like its public consciousness outside of New Orleans. Maybe that's the *New York Times* style section.

Residents in St. Roch were less aware of the area's tourism boom, but not blind to it. Lisa noted that, "a lot of people that are important they're in the [St. Roch] cemetery…by being on the corner right by [the cemetery], I have to deal with the tourists. We have a lot of tourists. Now we have new types of tourists, the bicycle tourists. But they are all normally some pretty nice people." The tourism around St. Claude Avenue was also referenced in an art piece that was exhibited in 2012 at the Contemporary Arts Center in downtown New Orleans:

> Another popular attraction was 'See St. Claude,'…In this interactive piece, a small alcove featured an over-sized photo print from St. Claude Avenue of a weathered, graffiti-tagged door beneath a dilapidated awning. The print was positioned as a backdrop where guests could take pictures. An accompanying how-to poster, labeled 'See St. Claude! 1-2-3' encouraged amateur shutterbugs to 'zoom in and crop to make it realistic! (Rhines, 2012).

The 'See St. Claude' piece embodies a new function of creative tourism, as defined by Greg Richards to be an extension of cultural tourism, in that the work invites viewers into having a decidedly local, authentic and staged St. Claude Avenue experience (Richards, 2013). Richards argues,

> It seems that many creative experiences are closely linked to the idea of 'living like a local'. Local people are framed as the gateway to local culture and experience…there is a particular emphasis on 'cool' and trendy places in cities, many of which are currently undergoing gentrification (Richards, 2013, p.13-14).

The public and private capital investment that is flowing back into Bywater and St. Roch has not gone unnoticed by residents. Laura in Bywater mentioned that "we have a $30 million park that should be opening any day now," referencing the Crescent Park that runs along the Mississippi River through the Marigny and Bywater. Graffiti has been a recent issue with the park development. In April 2013, local FOX news affiliate WVUE produced a story on graffiti that was appearing throughout the neighborhood and specifically on the pedestrian bridge connecting residents from Chartres Street to the riverfront park. A Bywater resident since 2004 is quoted in the story saying, "it really wasn't until we started to become cool that people started saying, 'Oh wait, there's a lot of blank canvasses down, here let's start doing something with it'" and for another resident, "a graphic artist," "part of what attracted him to this neighborhood is the art evident on every corner" (Scofield, 2013). In September 2013, a tag of 'Art Go Home' appeared on the levee wall that separates Chartres Street and the park on the Bywater side (see figure 10). One of the park's primary purposes, as presented at a Bywater Neighborhood

Association meeting in the spring of 2013, will be to host large-scale music festivals. Thus, this development will function as a supplement to the city's overall tourist economy and an amenity to attract creative class residents, who value bike paths and riverfront parks to Bywater (Peck, 2007a).

Mark, reflecting on his time as a resident of Bywater (from 2011 to 2013) and in response to the images shown during our interview, explained,

> I think that…certain ones [photographs] reflect…a more, um, maybe global, contemporary global understanding of what graffiti can be or is and New Orleans, obviously, has been a global city ever since its inception. That's the nature of the place and I think that when we talk about New Orleans as place that is not that, we're totally wrong. That being said, like, New Orleans has been a little bit walled off from that in the past sixty years, maybe, as the economy has kind of, you know, fallen apart and people may not have been moving here…New Orleans is getting, seemingly, more and more connected to the rest of the world again, in a different way entirely. One that is involved in, like, the "creative class" [quotes added by Mark], um, and you can see that that creative class has worldly experience and so they've been to places that have been doing this type of, like, stencil work and, um, wheat pasting that may not have been happening here…and that to me represents, again, those people that have been elsewhere and moving in, which, who are the gentrifying class of the city.

Figure 10: Graffiti on the levee wall that divides Chartres Street and the Crescent Park in Bywater, 2013

Source: Photograph taken by author

Vanessa Mathews, in her research on the urban aestheticization of space, notes that, "The ability for artists to alter space in symbolic and physical ways…makes them an attractive ingredient in revival initiatives" (Mathews, 2010, p. 665). Not only are Bywater and St. Roch residents clearly aware of the artistic alteration of space, but also powerful actors in the city have taken notice and invested capital as a result. Mathews also argues that, "over the past couple of decades, the arts have been placed in a position of privilege by city officials, development agencies, and private investors for their ability to catalyze and naturalize reinvestment in declining or underdeveloped areas of the inner city," which is clearly at play in downriver post-Katrina New Orleans.

In my interview with Bywater resident Mark, he also cited projects that newcomers to the neighborhood have undertaken, as a way to make Bywater more desirable for themselves and others like them, explaining,

> You could see parks being, like popping up. Not necessarily Markey Park, but like Clouet Gardens, for instance[9]…I don't think it's a bad thing, I think it's a great thing, it's a community built park, but the fact that like people are taking interest in a place that had long been fallow, it's just, to me that like represents a sense of vigor and a sense of new ownership, maybe. Maybe if you, if you've lived here a long time, you just have accepted that this was a vacant piece of land and you used it maybe as a park, but not necessarily like, 'we gotta spruce it up and pick up the trash', but then people, you know, decided finally to be like 'okay we're just gonna do this'…I don't know what the tipping point for them to decide to do it was, but I can only infer that it's a sense of, you know, wanting it, almost an expectation of better. You know, to me that's a lot of what neighborhood change results in. You know what I'm saying is like new residents moving in and there's just like different levels of expectations of where people have come from. You know like when I moved from New York, I was like 'where, where are all the bike racks'? Where are the bike lanes? Why are the streets so unpaved? And it's not that I fundamentally hated the fact that there wasn't bike racks and unpaved streets and not trees, but it's just like, well that would be nice. Well that sense of "betterment," can lead to a lot of other things.

The majority of St. Roch residents interviewed explicitly discussed increased investment and economic development in the area as a guiding force in their decision to live in the

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[9] http://www.clouetgardens.org/About-Us.html

neighborhood. Lisa, a black post-Katrina homeowner, also touched upon the rhetoric and reality

of St. Claude Avenue as a dividing line in relation to these investments:

> You have to understand way, way back…it was a situation whereas money was more, it's always been more on that side [Marigny side of St. Claude Avenue]. People with monies or housing…now at this point, it seems…the property values are going up on this side, our side, quite a bit. But as far as the dividing line…why I'm saying that now that it's a dividing line, it's because at this point, the ways they're gonna, trying to regulate what comes on St. Claude – and believe or not, I love Magazine Street, I'm that type of person – but a lot of the people are, on this side, are not affiliated with the kind of things that you find on Magazine. They don't, they're not coffee shop people, they're not market people…The Mayor has designated that little area, well St. Claude Street [Avenue] is like a pet project now. It's become a pet project, and he's, everything I see, he's making another Street, another Magazine Street really, and I know this personally 'cause I've had quite a few photo ops with him in that area…or their little closed meetings where they just call upon us [Faubourg St. Roch Improvement Association] or whatever, and when it's his pet peeve [project], it normally comes about, so I'm expecting whatever it is to happen…'cause if the Mayor's gonna take that much interest in something, then in all likelihood, it's gonna be real.

Bob, a fellow black post-Katrina, St. Roch homeowner, when discussing the changes in his

neighborhood, talked about the explicit marketing of certain aspects of St. Roch and the

associated problems with that marketing,

> When they start marketing that Tom Benson [owner of the New Orleans Saints] grew up in this neighborhood, when you start marketing the St. Roch Cemetery, when you start marketing certain little things, you have to pick up on these trends, but the folk are unaware because they're so busy surviving. Okay. And the other thing is, is that these folk are gonna be displaced and they don't have anywhere to go, but my theory is we're gonna push them out to New Orleans East. We're gonna push them further and further away from the city.

Laura in Bywater also touched upon the nature of branding urban spaces, explaining that,

"because it's [living in cities]…what becomes hip and then people are doing it and whether it's

hip or not, you know, I mean everything is marketing." Jen in St. Roch read much of the graffiti

in her neighborhood and in the images shown to her during our interview as branding, but to a

different end than tourism, responding that,

Tagging is, is more frustrating then I suppose other types of graffiti. I don't like tagging…Because it's not, it's not creating any sort of, like, movement in me…if it was going to be any kind of art I might, then maybe I might have some kind of emotional response outside of the, you know, I don't need to know what gang you're affiliated with or what you think that this area is affiliated with, because it's not. We won't let you be affiliated with us. Eventually we will win.

The marketing and branding of New Orleans, and Bywater specifically, as a boutique city ripe with just the right amount of adventure and authenticity, has meant that individuals and capital have re-migrated to the residential streets outlying St. Claude Avenue. In Bywater, it seems the laissez-faire, avant-garde artistic sensibilities have piqued the interests of both short-term visitors and new residents. That spark being lit, public and private investment have followed, in the form of the New Orleans Healing Center, the St. Roch Market and the riverfront Crescent Park. As a result, and in search of both affordability and the potential for returns on an individual investment, a new class of residents has been attracted to homeownership in St. Roch. Street art and graffiti, simultaneously functioning as authentically urban, hip and problematic, has marked the spaces of these neighborhoods for the benefit of some, but not all. As Vanesa Mathews explains,

> There is widespread recognition by the state, private investors, and corporate developers of the regenerative potential of the arts…Specifically, there is marked evidence of how the arts prompted local property values to rise, fashioned a place-image that spurred investment, and fostered a place identity that could be marketed within and beyond the local urban economy…The arts sector is incorporated into policy strategies to enhance place image, build social cohesion (quality of life and livability), and to diversify the economy (Mathews, 2010, p. 667).

At the January 2013 NET MicroFest panel on art and gentrification, Sean Cummings (developer of the Rice Mill Lofts) spoke directly to this revived emphasis on urban quality of life, stating that, "we've all noticed that cities have shifted, [cities are] now less of a place where we go for a job, but more for quality of life." Cummings then succinctly relayed the entirety of Richard Florida's 'creative class' theory, while concurrently highlighting the storied history of

past Bywater residents and historic places. He later added, "I find the quality of life that exists and is being enhanced here [in Bywater] to be really special." Laura had a difficult time discerning whether Bywater was changing from within or if larger, structural forces were at play, noting that, "it just seems that people have been looking for more walkability just in general for quite some time now. But it's also the cool, hip thing to do, which takes me back to my original question of is this all some construct?" Put another way, Lucy stated that,

> I think once the city realized that there was a gentrification process happening, they started regulating the physical spaces of the neighborhood more. Like the building of the park along the river [Crescent Park] and Markey Park being converted into a very pretty, nice space that's no longer really utilized half as much as it was before when it was a ugly old field. The regulation of the musicians playing at night…I think the best example of that is what happened at Markey Park. Before it was basically just a field and there was a playground. The playground was fenced off from the field. It was always busy because that was a place people could go and take their dogs off the leash and let their dogs run. It was also really close to Frady's and Markey's Bar and the Country Club and Satsuma, so it was kind of like a bit of an epicenter, and it was always in use. I mean, every time you walked or drove by, there was [sic] always people there. Maybe six months ago, the city decided to make Markey Park more vibrant, by basically like mowing everything out and putting in a weird sidewalk and lots of plants and now dogs can't run off the leash there.

Focused on the graffiti and street art of Sydney, Australia, Cameron McAuliffe argues that, "the rise of creative cities discourses has afforded the opportunity to rethink the way the creative practices of graffiti writers and street artists are valued" (McAuliffe, 2012, p. 189-90). Similarly, Richards, in his research of the merging of urban tourism and the making of a creative city, recognized that "the transformation of graffiti into 'street art' has provided a number of cities with new tourist attractions as artists such as Banksy have become internationally popular" (Richards, 2013, p. 5). Laura in Bywater remarked that, "if at some point we become a city that people come to view our graffiti, then I guess the tide will have turned." When asked to elaborate on how he defined street art versus graffiti, Mark (a post-Katrina resident of both Bywater and St. Roch) explained,

This one, [image #4 in Appendix C], is, um, like typical street art…It's art for art's sake…it looks like a punk did it. Maybe, like, wannabe Black Bloc. I don't know. It's boring to me, if I saw it, I wouldn't stop to take a photo of it really…street art as conceived of in terms of wheatpastes and, um, you know stencils and what not, it's more of an art world thing, and it's also more of a global thing, or at least a conception of the global. Um, which is inherently privileged…thus, it signifies those people who have been elsewhere and have seen, had the opportunity to see what it's like elsewhere, they then bring that in. They bring those conceptions of the world, um, and then add it to the mix. So that, to me, but, so the difference is between that and those who haven't had that opportunity and those who may not had access to seeing those things and they're just tagging. Not to say that they couldn't stencil and what not, but it's just like, it's a matter of access to me.

Melissa, a black homeowner in Bywater since 1993, did not explicitly use the term street art, but did acknowledge differences in the graffiti she sees in Bywater and around New Orleans, explaining,

Oh yeah…they have graffiti on the garbage cans, on the stop signs, not too much on the buildings…that building over there by the railroad tracks…they made a mural on the side so it's not *graffiti* graffiti anymore…Yeah, there's graffiti in the neighborhood…There is one graffiti artist that is hateful as all hell…he came to New Orleans and he went around [Banksy]…and his graffiti is really artwork…well he did one of his pieces on Kerlerec and Rampart and so they put a piece of plastic over it to protect it. Some hateful soul went there and tried to dump black paint over it…So that is very hateful…I remember he had one of this little girl, I forget where I saw it though. I thought, 'this is a graffiti artist?' He's dynamite. Dynamite…Maybe I better grab me a camera and go around taking pictures of 'em before they disappear, because this is artwork.

Writing about the recent changes in the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY, and specifically the tourism around street art that's arisen, it was noted that, "first comes the graffiti, then comes the…tourism" (Hoffman, 2013). Katie Gunnell's research on street art in post-Katrina New Orleans in many ways addresses this municipal dilemma, but largely avoids the ways in which a city's cultivation of the creative class places artistic action into the neoliberal machine of tourism boosters and city-making (Gunnell, 2010).

The aesthetics that attract short- and long-term visitors, as well as new residents or gentrifiers, to Bywater and St. Roch are often fleeting. Graffiti and street art are symbolic in this

contradiction, as ephemera of an urban past, present and future. The erasure of some of these markings and the preservation of others is interwoven with issues of racism and neoliberalism, for much like Richards notes, "such an 'edge' is however often hard to maintain in the face of gentrification and large-scale urban redevelopment" (Richards, 2013, p. 8). As Lisa remarked in our interview, in response to whether she sees a relationship between graffiti and gentrification, "Before, I was seeing graffiti. Not a lot of graffiti, actually, but I'm seeing less graffiti, so I'm figuring the people who did the graffiti are kinda leaving. If they're not leaving, they're doin' it someplace else."

Race and the Neoliberal, Creative City

In the eight years of rebuilding and recovery following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and the federal flood that left nearly 80% of the city underwater, virtually every major social system of the city has undergone some level of neoliberal reform, including education, housing, recreation, healthcare and transportation (Flaherty, 2012). In his research of the widespread privatization that occurred in New Orleans post-Katrina, Kevin Fox Gotham defines neoliberalism as "the range of efforts by governments to move public functions into private hands and to use market-style competition to address regulatory problems" (Gotham, 2012, p. 634). Furthermore, neoliberalism is a particular economic function of late-stage capitalism, wherein the so-called free market increasingly dictates the public sector (Harvey, 2005). While Gotham's definition of neoliberalism does not name race or racism, it is critical to note that race and racism amidst neoliberalization cannot be ignored, especially in a city where the majority of residents are black both pre- and post-Katrina. Local writer Lovell Beaulieu situates race in the context of both neoliberalism and gentrification from an historical lens beginning with the colonization of the U.S. in relation to indigenous populations, proceeding to the mass migration of white Americans

from cities into the suburbs (commonly referred to as White Flight), and bringing the present into focus by stating, "today, whether driven by a desire to live closer to jobs, cultural amenities, the New Orleans night life, or a chance to be a part of the new New Orleans, Whites are returning to reclaim their place in the city" (Beaulieu, 2012).

Perhaps the most salient observation during all of the interviews conducted for this thesis was how coded and uncomfortable the topic of race was, especially for white participants. White people are typically unaccustomed to speaking about race and racism, and nearly every white interview participant embodied discomfort (through speech patterns and/or body language) when explicitly asked to discuss race in the context of their responses. Not surprisingly, people of color were much more willing to explicitly name and engage with race as a topic. Some white interview participants explicitly named race (Mark and Jen), but often the topic come across as a source of tension and uneasiness during the interviews. This is significant considering how large a role race plays in the discourse and reality of both gentrification and neoliberalism (see Reed, 2006; Roberts & Mahtani, 2010; Goetz, 2011; Hyra, 2012; and Reckdahl, 2013).

At the January 2013 NET MicroFest, Kevin Farrell, co-owner of Booty's restaurant in Bywater, stated, in response to why he thinks Bywater is changing, that, "you can get away with more here." Farrell went on to relay the story of Clouet Gardens on Clouet Street in Bywater, sharing that prior to being an open green space and community garden, the plot of land that Clouet Gardens now occupies had previously been a HANO scatter site that housed Section 8 voucher recipients. As Farrell told it, once the building began to deteriorate, neighbors cleared the rubble, transformed the land into a garden and public green space and requested that HANO and City Hall grant them ownership of the site since they had been maintaining the space, which they did. At this point in the discussion, everyone on the panel except for Greta Gladney (a black

native New Orleanian) had avoided the subject of race. With a majority white male panel, this avoidance was not unusual, but given that the conversation was now explicitly addressing the gentrification of neighborhoods along St. Claude Avenue, it was odd to omit how race factors in. Gladney, in response to Farrell's story about Clouet Gardens, said that, "it does not work that way for everyone…I have a real fear of retribution if I color outside the lines…[I'm] not trying to make it about race, but it's a part of it."

Nearly a week prior to the panel discussion, during a community leadership training I was attending as a NPN employee, I heard a similar, but unsuccessful, story from a black Central City neighborhood resident, Theophilus Moore. Moore shared with the group that he had been maintaining upwards of ten abandoned lots in Central City – mowing the lawn, securing unstable structures – and requested multiple times that the city declare the properties blighted so that he and other residents could legally purchase the land. The city denied every one of his requests, citing that, due to Moore's maintenance of the properties, the lots did not meet the necessary legal requirements of blighted property. Farrell's comments stand in direct contrast to Moore's story, where race, class and geography created two very different outcomes for similar experiences. Gladney's acknowledgement of how race and racism are embedded in the process of gentrification and Moore's experience, speak to the larger racial implications of neoliberalism (Johnson, 2011). Geographers David Roberts and Minelle Mahtani argue for a need to "race neoliberalism," stating that, "to begin the process of racing neoliberalism, it is essential to understand neoliberalism as a facet of a racist society that works to both reinforce the racial structure of society, while also modifying the processes of racialization" (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010, p. 250).

Another panelist at the MicroFest event, Stephanie McKee, a long-term, black resident of the Seventh Ward neighborhood, pointed out that she "saw change [in Bywater] when NOCCA [the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts] was built [in the 1990s]…the neighborhood was changing before Katrina…the State helped to re-build NOCCA on Press Street." Gladney then added that, "New Orleans being a port city always had a vibrant population" and that she "founded St. Claude Main Street in 2007 to improve quality of life around St. Claude [Avenue]…it is important to acknowledge what was here before." Sean Cummings then asked Gladney directly, "Greta, do you think this area has more traction since artists were priced out of the French Quarter in the 1980s and 1990s?" Gladney responded, saying "I see myself as, in some ways, singlehandedly responsible for the gentrification of downriver neighborhoods…we definitely need an influx of resources, but we need to be intentional." Farrell appeared triggered by the ongoing, explicit discussion of gentrification, and added, "I think that gentrification has an inherently negative feel…here I am, a gentrifier, but I pay my employees a living wage [noted as $8.00 per hour], I pay health insurance." Keene Kopper, owner of May Gallery in St. Roch, added, "it seems like there's a question of integration when this topic of gentrification arises…I want to try to figure out how to integrate people." Gladney then posed the question, "the challenge is, who gets to integrate?" She went on to discuss Kirsha Kaechele's public art projects in St. Roch and how neighbors were not invited to the high-end outdoor dinner parties held on St. Roch Avenue (Cohen, 2011). Gladney then added, "can integration work? No." Cummings disagreed, stating that he "thinks Bywater can make that dream of integration a reality…this has always been a working class, immigrant neighborhood."

Similar to Farrell and Kopper's instincts to gloss over the difficult topic of race in the context of their changing neighborhood, Laura, a white Bywater homeowner since 2004, framed the

gentrification of Bywater as a saving grace for long-term black business owners on St. Claude

Avenue, explaining that,

> We need to look at minority business holder/owners and ask them about the health of their business and make sure that they have what they need. I've got these people right now that are calling about whether or not St. Claude Avenue is being gentrified and what minority business, you know, can we save space for. When a neighborhood has been as depressed as the neighborhoods that we're talking about, people are looking forward to the gentrification coming because it's their only way out. When minorities are the only people that are left holding the businesses on the main thoroughfares, when the prices start to rise, they can't wait to get out because there's no other option for them. There isn't a big savings and retirement account on the side. They're looking at 'I'm going to sell my property for a lot more money than I may have ever imagined it would be worth and get out of here', because, trust me, they don't live here either…I got a call this week about a [black] gentleman who's owned a business on St. Claude for a very long time and his son is very unorganized and it's not gonna be a business that he's gonna be able to hand down in his family, so he's not on the spring chicken side of life and he's thinking it's time for him to go. Now if he holds out five more years, could he get more? Probably, but right now he's probably looking at more money than he's ever made in his entire life on one real estate transaction.

Mark, a white post-Katrina resident of both Bywater and St. Roch, also sought to rationalize the

racial implications of gentrification, explaining,

> It's not necessarily a racial…in many places, it breaks down to be racial, um, it breaks down to, like, more white people pushing out black people, but I think it's a class thing more. Because black people can gentrify a neighborhood, too. It's just that, the way that, in the practical terms of how, you know, post-, well, we can go back as far as slavery, post-slavery, African Americans have had so little opportunity to make gains in terms of economic well-being, that class breaks down along the same lines as race…I can't speak to this, the whole, you know, in terms of, like, conjecture, maybe Atlanta could be a place where black people gentrify neighborhoods, um, because there is a thriving black middle class there. You know, like, maybe even Fort Greene [Brooklyn] back when it was, I mean back in the 1800s hell, I mean I don't know, I don't know what it looked like then, but…I'm sure it was not, like, necessarily a nice place, it was on the docks. You know, it's like right near the Navy Yard but then you had the, um, African American middle class move to Fort Green and it got really nice and then they inevitably got pushed out now because they moved out in the 40s and 60s, 40s and 60s with everyone else that had money and they moved to Long Island or New Jersey or Westchester or wherever…in a perfect world, it wouldn't break down by, um, well it wouldn't have happened at all, but it wouldn't break down by race, it breaks down by class, but class is so tied to race in the United States at the present moment anyways.

Mark touched upon the intersectionality of race and class in the U.S., which political scientist

Adolph Reed, Jr. expresses as, "race is a language through which American capitalism's class

contradictions are commonly expressed" (Reed, 2005, p. 6). Melissa, however, discussed her

experience of overt racism as a black woman living in Bywater in the early 1990s, explaining,

> Oh, Piety Street was full of, it was slumlords and absentee landlords and all this kinda stuff. The parents who lived in the neighborhood, they died and their children live in Slidell and Metairie and where ever else they were living, St. Tammany Parish, anywhere but here…but see when I first moved around here…there was nothing unusual about seeing a flood of white vinyl boots [neo-Nazis] floatin' around in the area, because they would come from Chalmette [in St. Bernard Parish] to here to Markey's Bar. Oh yeah, Chalmatians hung in Markey's Bar. Baby, when I first moved around here, I was, well I still don't go in Markey's Bar because of that, but I wouldn't go into Markey's Bar, full of Chalmatians. [I] liked living and didn't wanna see myself hanging from none of these old oak trees lyin' around here, so I just stayed my little self right out of Markey's Bar.

Residents of St. Roch and members of the Faubourg St. Roch Improvement Association

(FSRIA) attempted a more proactive approach to the topic of race. Beginning in June 2013, the

FSRIA hosted three community conversations on race. At the first of these events, the word

"gentrification" was named only once in the four-hour event, and "capitalism" as an economic

structure in which gentrification is embedded was never named. Many residents present stated

that they lived in Bywater, Marigny or St. Roch, and many also acknowledged being a part of the

FSRIA, the group that organized the event. Throughout the event, people appeared to be

comfortable, open and honest in regards to the topic of race. Conversations ranged from the need

for future events in the series to have greater racial and economic diversity represented; to

questioning the decision to hold the event in the controversial, "politicized" space of the New

Orleans Healing Center; to what it means to be from New Orleans or not. The idea of needing to

support more homeownership and prevent residential displacement was addressed and discussed,

with mixed feelings amongst the group, but very little discussion was had on what could be done

to avoid displacing lower-income residents nor were any ideas about long-term affordability, such as rent control or community land trusts, brought up.

During the larger, final group discussion, Reggie Lawson, a black homeowner in St. Roch since 1993; founder and former President of the FSRIA; and licensed real estate agent, mentioned that the land market value on the south side of St. Claude Avenue (Marigny and Bywater) is four times greater than the north side (St. Roch and St. Claude). He also spoke about the demographic changes in St. Roch that began in the 1970s following the Louisiana oil bust, noting that many white residents at that time moved out of the neighborhood to neighboring St. Bernard Parish, just a few miles away. He added that after that out-migration, which he remarked left many properties vacant, lower and middle-income black residents began moving into St. Roch. Derrick Floyd, a black resident of St. Roch, member of FSRIA and one of the event organizers, talked about the drastic increases in rental costs following Hurricane Katrina; "the average price of a home in New Orleans has gone up more than 40% since Katrina" (Jazeera Clips, 2013). Floyd also added, in reference to why there were not more black working-class residents present at the event, many of those individuals were too busy working to spend four hours on a Saturday at a meeting. In that same group discussion, a white woman named Rhonda (a business owner on St. Claude Avenue and homeowner in Marigny) reacted strongly to the topic of racism by stating that she "doesn't see race" and that she feels "the discussion of racism to be devoid of hope." Max, a white male, agreed and discord ensued amongst the group.

In my interviews with St. Roch residents, race came up repeatedly and most often in relation to displacement, both physical and social. Lisa shared,

> Well I see the racial change changing, 'cause we have new people. We have so many people. We're losing renters, because a lot of the houses are getting sold. And we've been trying to make quite a few of them be first-time homebuyers, but we're finding that a lot of them are older people.

When further probed, however, Lisa explained that she finds many of the older, white residents

have a problem with the newcomers in St. Roch,

> It seems to be the white, believe it or not, the white and black homeowners who have always been here. And, like I said, it's mostly older ones and I think it has to do with change, a lot to do with change and things changing. And, like there's an old Caucasian lady up the street and she told me, 'they're coming in here with all their ways'. I said, 'Miss Stephanie, what do you mean their ways?' She say, 'you know, Darla, they're coming to change things.' And it's really strange, but she is Caucasian but she does not like the idea of gentrification because it's a lot of young, new people.

Bob's discussion of race in relation to St. Roch changing was more in line with the discourse of

white replacement of black residents, explaining that,

> When you have white folks moving into, at one time, was a predominantly African American community, and housing value goes up, that means that those individuals who are, who, let's say they're homeowners, right, so it means that taxes go up. So a [black] grandmother who's had the house for twenty, thirty years, her taxes has kinda been level, and her Social Security or something like that has gone up a little bit to allow her, for the value, as the value increase, her monthly payments, her earnings have kinda increased to keep up with the market rates of taxes, and so, when you have people like that, they can't afford it. So one, they're selling out. Right. We know many that's done that after Katrina, but now, they're selling out because they can't afford to live here.

Jen, a white post-Katrina homeowner in St. Roch, referred to the FSRIA race-focused event

series in our interview, stating,

> I think that, ultimately, it's [gentrification] not a race thing, it's a class thing and ultimately in our conversation, everybody who was in the room maybe didn't look the same when it came to race, but we look the same when it comes to class. Yeah, but like everybody who's, who's lower-income, I mean, they don't, they weren't aware of that conversation. They weren't, like, they didn't know that that was something people even talked about.

Over the course of my research, there were a few explicit mentions of rising property values

in both Bywater and St. Roch. Lucy in Bywater remarked,

> I have watched houses sell for the last four or five years and they have definitely moved up, you know, to a higher price bracket. Once it was, like, $200,000 then it slowly became $300,000 and the house down the street [Gallier Street], last year they tried to sell for half a million, and two blocks from my house, they just built this very monstrous,

> modern take on New Orleans architecture, which is two stories and has this wing that goes outside and I'm sure that cost a pretty penny. So, yeah, I am sure that the real estate value's rising.

Similarly, following a NPN-related meeting about uniting the neighborhoods the lie along St. Claude Avenue, Ben, a white property owner in St. Roch, shared that he purchased his home in 2003 at the price of $37,000. A decade later, this same property was appraised at $250,000. Ben spoke of other residential property that he owns and has renovated being valued at a starting price of $150,000 for a single shotgun-style house. Another participant at the meeting, who lived in Marigny with his family prior to Katrina, added that he saw a house that is boarded up and seemingly uninhabitable for sale in Bywater in the spring of 2013 being priced at more than $200,000. Bob in St. Roch also shared the experience of a friend of his, who purchased a home in St. Roch in 2011, saying, "because it was in St. Roch…he was able to, at that time, he was able to get the house for, two houses, one shotgun, one converted double, both got driveways…both of 'em, for a $100,000 [total]…Now that the neighborhood has value, you can't do that."

Implicitly at play with these rising property values are issues of physical displacement. During the June 2013 event on race, hosted by FSRIA, there was a physical activity wherein participants were asked to literally step up or back based on their experience with a given question (such as "Did your parents own the home you grew up in?" "Did you move here after Katrina?" "Do you have health insurance" "Have you been approached by the police based on your skin color or gender?" etc.). The only moment where there was full consensus was following the question, "do you expect to be displaced from your home in the next 5 years?" Not a single participant stepped forward, indicating an answer of no. Perhaps this was a product of the many homeowners present or the many white middle-class residents present, who have

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relative job and housing security in post-Katrina New Orleans. However, when pressed on this issue in the group discussion that followed, one woman, a white St. Roch homeowner and active member of FSRIA, pointed out that she was hopeful and the question including the word "expect" led her to hope that she does not expect to be displaced but does think it is possible. In our interview, when asked directly about displacement, Bob, a black St. Roch homeowner, responded,

> We are seeing it [displacement]. It's happening every single day. Folk are not paying attention to it, as we should have been paying attention to it twenty years ago…We knew that these trends were happening, right, but we had not prepared the people for what was happening, what is, because, these things do not happen overnight. Okay. Katrina exposed a lot of the ills of this community, okay, but we knew down the, folk knew down the line.

Laura, a white homeowner in Bywater, also acknowledged a concern about displacement in regards to the earlier gentrifiers (in the 1990s) of her neighborhood, saying,

> So the very people who showed up here in the first place, and turned the change, are possibly not thinking about where they're going to live, because it really takes very little to put you out of your home in this country. It can be about stock market, it can be a sick family member, it can be an increase in your property taxes, it takes very little to just put a family out of their home in this country, and there's really not a lot of safety net, as they like to call it, for one to fall into in this community.

Bob in St. Roch, who never explicitly referred to himself as a gentrifier, did explain his reasons for purchasing a home in the neighborhood as,

> It was several factors, variables if you want to use that. One, it was all of the development that I had heard of and read of in this, about, in this neighborhood. There was supposed to be a streetcar coming down St. Claude, right, we had heard about all of the money that would be poured into St. Roch and the other historic districts where people were renovating and, even in '11, the process of gentrification was happening, right. We heard about all of the other things that were happening with the Healing Center, the, the, the, the development that was happening in Bywater and so, those factors contributed to my overall thinking of how the value of this house would increase…those were some of the factors that contributed to me buying this house, but more importantly, considering that St. Roch is a historic district, but another aspect of it, it's that I was in the right district. Because St. Roch is divided into two districts, into [City Council] district D and district C…being in a certain district, that gives your house value. I truly believe it, because of

the association with your house being in the same district as a Marigny, as a Bywater. As a Tremé.

At various points in our interview, Bob spoke about how, as an educated, middle-class black man, he felt compelled to advocate on behalf of his neighborhood, and especially lower-income residents of color. In this sense, he embodied what Mary Patillo refers to as the role of the middleman in black gentrification (Patillo, 2007). Specifically, Bob shared, "It doesn't make sense for me to get my forty acres and a mule and I can't help someone else get theirs." Further complicating the issue of physical displacement in the context of post-Katrina New Orleans is the fact that approximately 100,000 residents (mostly people of color) have been unable to return, in large part dues to the City Council's 2007 decision to demolish four, major public housing projects throughout the city (Jazeera Clips, 2013). The "public housing demolition and dispersal have been employed as economic development strategies by local governments intent on finding and forcing new paths of neighbourhood [sic] change and gentrification," wherein 99% of public housing residents in New Orleans were black, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Goetz, 2011, p. 1582-4).

In 2011, the New Orleans Healing Center opened on St. Claude Avenue, directly across from the then graffiti-covered St. Roch Market (see figure 11). An article about the opening in *Gambit* discussed the intentions behind the project, noting that,

> Following the 2005 levee failures, Kabacoff put together a 'salon' to discuss potential revitalization projects, ultimately deciding on the center and plans for a 'healing center' in 'the sliver by the river that's been ignored,' he says. The project has a $13 million price tag, backed by investors, a New Orleans Redevelopment Authority grant, and federal and state tax credits. The project's three goals, Kabacoff says, are to unify the area's neighborhoods, stimulate the corridor's economic recovery, and provide needed, affordable services to an underserved stretch of the city that still doesn't have a grocery store, among other things (Woodward, 2011).

St. Roch residents cited the Healing Center in varying ways, mostly as an example of the

development happening along St. Claude Avenue that could later boost property value, but there

was also an air of disappointment and betrayal. Lisa discussed the lack of affordable amenities

for residents living in St. Roch, explaining,

> When the Healing Center came on St. Claude, I remember different friends of ours being, different ones…speaking to people and asking them [Healing Center developers] would they have anything that was cost effective for the people who lived in the area maybe because the monies, like for example, we really don't have anybody in there who's prosperous as well as…they are working towards it or whatever, but they don't have it [affordable options].

Pres Kabacoff, the developer behind the Healing Center, has also been deemed the "driving

force behind the demolition of most of the city's public housing" (Jazeera Clips, 2013). He has

actively invested and re-made properties with a free-market, neoliberal vision stating that,

"gentrification is a very hot issue, and one of great concern, and an inevitability" (Jazeera Clips,

2013). He and his company, HRI Properties, are behind projects such as the Bywater Art Lofts I

and II, as well as the HOPE VI redevelopment of the Lower Garden District neighborhood's St.

Thomas public housing projects into River Gardens, a mixed income housing community (Hoch,

2011). In September 2013, *The Lens* reported on Kabacoff's "$1 billion vision to redevelop New

Orleans' urban core," noting that "his favorite subject" is "how to transform New Orleans into an

Afro-Caribbean version of Paris…[and] If we can make this area better, it will lift all boats"

(Bridges, 2013).

Figure 11: The back of St. Roch Market, facing Marais Street, as seen from St. Roch Avenue, 2012

Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File: St_Roch_Market_NOLA_Nov_2011_Back.JPG

This 'inevitability', coupled with gentrification and a celebration of tourist destinations, is a neoliberal myth, much like the trickle down effect of free-market investment. David Madden argues,

> Here's how gentrification talk typically goes: poor neighborhoods are said to need 'regeneration' or 'revitalization', as if lifelessness and torpor – as opposed to impoverishment and disempowerment – were the problem…After gentrification takes hold, neighborhoods are commended for having 'bounced back' from poverty, ignoring the fact that poverty has usually only been bounced elsewhere…But the trickle-down argument for gentrification ignores the fact that the 'very fortunate' invariably seek to bend municipal priorities and local land uses towards their own needs, usually to the detriment of their less powerful neighbors (Madden, 2013).

Jen, a white post-Katrina, St. Roch homeowner explained this myth from a different perspective. When asked if she sees any relationship between graffiti and gentrification, Jen responded,

> Well yes, in the fact that…so middle- to upper-income residents then are more involved and more likely to fight blight, or they're more likely to fight graffiti, they're more likely to fight drugs. There's a level at which low-income residents, and I don't really, I could come up with a lot of reasons of why this is the case, it could be time, it could be fear, it could be capacity, but you see more middle- to upper-income residents more likely to fight some of those nuisances than low-income residents, so…you're gonna see increased graffiti in areas, well, it will perpetuate itself and, like, build on itself in areas where people aren't gonna tackle it. You're not gonna go out and paint it, you're not gonna go out and paint it for your neighbors, you're not gonna keep an eye out for who's doing it and, like, coordinate to try and stop it in low-income areas. So I would say there's a tie there.

The myth here — that residents living at or below the poverty line have no interest in making their neighborhoods better, cleaner, safer — allows for the invisible hand of a new

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socioeconomic class of residents, the state and private capital to swoop in and re-make that space

for these so-called helpless, careless residents. As scholars Hetzler, Medina and Overfelt argue,

"In this current general policy trend, all responsibilities for inequalities are shifted to the market

and individuals, allowing policy makers to deemphasize issues of race while they continue with

the implicitly racist (and still explicitly classist) New Urbanism/new gentrification project"

(Hetzler, Medina & Overfelt, 2006). Further, the incentive for the state and private capital

investors is a return on that investment, oftentimes in the form of tourist-based economic

development.

Capitalism was alluded to, if not directly named, in a few interviews in relation to

gentrification, as was the suggestion that gentrification is inevitable and rooted in capitalism.

This myth of gentrification's inevitability is deeply rooted in the capitalist economic structure.

Gentrification is only inevitable in the context of migrating capital, wherein the migration is

dictated by low cost locations that can yield the greatest profits. In response to whether or not she

sees a relationship between blight and gentrification, Lucy responded,

> When there's blight, typically real estate value is low. If there's an element of something, whether it be a historic element or an artistic element or I don't know what, I think developers see an opportunity. And developers, or people with money, can come in and purchase those blighted properties for low cost and then slowly redevelop them and fix them, put in amenities such as condos or bars or restaurants, so that slowly those real estate values rise, but they've got in on the ground floor, so now there's lots of money to be made. So, yeah, I would say…maybe that's not gentrification, though. I think it is capitalism.

Mark remarked, "I don't think you can avoid it [gentrification]. I don't think it can be avoided,

necessarily, unless we really shift the mechanics of capitalism, um, and are wholly cognizant of

it from the beginning." Laura in Bywater also referenced race, migrating capital and other

external factors and forces in relation to the changes in her neighborhood and gentrification

overall,

It's [gentrification] a term that I have been thinking about for probably the better part of four or five years now, and really grappling with the understanding of what it is, who does it to whom, and is it necessarily a bad thing? Or is it the outcome of something that started with good intention? I think about urban communities being decimated by the construct of the civil rights movement and the construct of people being asked to move into other communities like Levittown, NJ and these pre-fab, pre-made communities. The housing, U.S. housing, policy that took place that really gutted all urban enclaves of any diversity and left very poor minorities living in urban centers. What I've seen in my years is that there's a movement to come back to the urban center. I thought that it was about saving money on gas and people becoming more drawn into urban environment because they, there was more opportunity for them there. I also thought that it was because people were really starting to understand that you can't spend your whole life commuting, that there are other things to do, but as I really tear it apart today, I see there's a lot more going on and you really have to wonder if it's your own idea to make a move back into a community that is urban, or if someone else gave you that idea and you just acted upon it. So is it another construct that is being created by some organization or government body that has an ulterior motive.

Much like Lucy's observation of the municipal contradiction of seeking vibrancy in relation to the city's renovation of Markey Park in Bywater, the desire to create vibrancy is tied to larger neoliberal goals. In March 2013, the local publication *Antigravity* took a more direct, pointed jab at the problems with using vibrancy as an indicator of neighborhood health:

Vibrancy—big buzzword within hipster capitalism. Hipster capitalism eternally seeks to co-opt or imitate youth culture as a means to get young people more excited about commerce, gussying up the worship of Mammon for generation whatever. Flash mobs become 'pop-up' markets. Potlucks become 'speakeasies' centered around the purchase of food and drink. DIY becomes Kickstarter… all must be commodified…Beyond using the trappings and signifiers of subculture—e.g. graffiti as décor—hipster capitalism also brands itself as underdog or revolutionary, employing the language and techniques of social justice movements" (Bentley, 2013).

In this way and aligned with the scholarship of Luke Dickens, Maggie Dickinson and Cameron McAuliffe, the tag "cultür" discussed in Chapter 4 and its placements in Bywater and St. Roch are live inscriptions of the neoliberal, vibrant, creative city.

In an August 2013 *Al Jazeera America* video focused on gentrification and displacement, the journalist in the video points out that, "the Bywater neighborhood is a prime example of this changing New Orleans. Before Katrina, it was a residential, majority African-American

neighborhood" (Jazeera Clips, 2013). In response to the critique that there is not enough

affordable housing in the rebuilding of New Orleans, Kabacoff responded that, "it's just a

question of resources" (Jazeera Clips, 2013). Bob in St. Roch brought up his thoughts on mixed-

incoming housing developments — a neoliberal takeover of U.S. public housing — during our

interview, which Kabacoff has been a leading proponent of over the last fifteen years,

> I'm speaking outside of St. Roch now, this idea of mixed income housing, I believe it's a
> joke. I believe it's a joke. I sat in a HANO meeting and Board meeting today and listened
> to residents talk about that their children can't even play outside as children. They have to
> keep a certain tone, now whenever have you heard of a child playing quietly outside?
> Now inside, different story. This is ridiculous. But these are the things that happen when
> folk are not informed, they're not aware and/or they cannot communicate successfully
> their needs and they are underrepresented.

Residents in both St. Roch and Bywater did not explicitly situate race in their discussions of

graffiti and street art, but there was an acknowledgement of a shifting aesthetic and, implicitly, a

shifting population. Laura, in response to image #8 in Appendix C, explained that, "these were

some of the early things I remember seeing right after the other graffiti artists sort of left the

community and got big or jobs. Those were some of the first that I remember seeing, that style of

writing." She further remarked on her personal reactions towards graffiti versus street art,

> You know, if you write the words "fried chicken" on a building, I'm not really sure what
> you're getting at. If you're talking about the current state in Syria, I might be moved in
> some way. I have trouble understanding why anyone would damage a piece of property if
> they weren't creating something really thoughtful to look at, whether it be words or art
> or, I mean of course words can be art, I just, I struggle with that.

Lucy explained her differentiation between graffiti and street art by saying,

> I guess there's two levels of graffiti…well, maybe there's three levels. There's the tags
> that I don't really see much worth in, you know, it's just people's names and it's usually,
> there's no aesthetic or anything, and then there's really nice tags that are done beautifully
> and that shows, like, technical skill, and that I think is worthwhile and interesting, and
> then there's what I would call street art, which is more like the Banksys and Swoons that
> came through. And you don't see as much Banksy and Swoon street art stuff. That high-
> level stuff I think ended in the years after Katrina. People were interested in making a

statement and I think now there's other more cool places to make statements for those people.

Even Jen, who overall responded to graffiti and street art by feeling, "visually sort of like berated by not particularly pretty stimuli," noted that, "I appreciate the Banksy stuff and there's other graffiti that I appreciate. I don't very often see it around any more, like anything that I might appreciate." She did, however, racialize her association with graffiti-covered urban spaces, explaining,

> I was in Peace Corps in Samoa and when I went to New Zealand, I stayed with my Samoan family in Auckland and there, like, the Samoan, like, islander part of the city where the Samoans and the Tongans and everybody else lives, is, like, tags, there was not a surface that wasn't covered and I don't wanna, I don't want it to look like that.

Discerning the role of street art and graffiti, within the contexts of race, racism and neoliberalism, is complex and nuanced. Still, when interpreted as the visible, external messaging of the messiness of gentrification, "the sometimes arbitrary separation of graffiti from street art by metropolitan agencies has allowed an embrace and even valorization of the power of 'street art' to activate space, at a time of increasing criminalization of 'graffiti'" (McAuliffe, 2012, p. 190). McAuliffe recognizes the untested reality of this new, unbridled valorization of creativity in cities around the globe, noting that, "there remain serious questions about how creativity will live up to its promise of being the salve for the wounds of the postindustrial city" (McAuliffe, 2012, p. 190). Jamie Peck argues that this cultivation and celebration of the creative "is predicated on, presumes and (re)produces the dominant market order. So is revealed the funky side of neoliberal urban-development politics" (Peck, 2007b, p. 2). Much like the rent gap in relation to gentrification, "capital has to leave a space open for the next bout of apparently authentic cultural development, which may open up new opportunities for monopoly rents. It is here that artists can perhaps act as antagonistic grit, exploiting the contradictory space within

which they find themselves" (Bolton, 2013). It is in this 'antagonistic grit,' embodied by graffiti and street art, that private capital and municipalities understand where to invest as part of the gentrification process.

From Blight to Gentrification

According to the 2010 U.S. census, Bywater has experienced shifts in demographic indicators such as racial make-up, homeownership and educational attainment levels, which are most commonly associated with gentrification (Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008). There has also been an influx of both state and federal capital in the forms of affordable housing for artists using Low Income Housing Tax Credits (Bywater Art Lofts I & II) and the riverfront park development (Crescent Park). Similarly in St. Roch, the redevelopment of the St. Roch Market and St. Roch Park are receiving federal, state and city dollars (Rainey, 2012). In a 2011 *Gambit* article, the Market is noted as having been "built in 1875" and "once was St. Claude's cornerstone, but since 2005, it's been unoccupied and a blighted pockmark on the avenue" (Woodward, 2011). The St. Roch neighborhood remains predominantly working-class, but is certainly showing signs of change in racial and socioeconomic demographics.

Much like residential perceptions, the 2010 U.S. census data show that Bywater is actively gentrifying. In the last ten years, the racial demographics of Bywater residents have flipped almost entirely from a majority black to a majority white neighborhood. In 2000, black residents comprised 61% of Bywater and white residents were only 32.4% of the neighborhood. As of the 2010 census, the white population of Bywater had grown to 56.1%, while the black resident population had decreased to 33.1%. Table 1.1 in Appendix A illustrates that, in addition to this switch in racial make-up, there has also been a reversal of owner occupancy as compared to renters: Owner occupied housing rose 4.3% from 2000 to 2010, while renter occupied housing

dropped 4.3%. College degree attainment by Bywater residents also increased from 12% in 2000 to 23% in 2010.

Walking through the streets of Bywater, it becomes clear that the neighborhood is undergoing change. Hip, trendy restaurants, bars, art galleries and coffee shops sprinkle the landscape, amidst blighted buildings, vacant lots and longtime neighborhood institutions like Vaughn's (in operation since 1982) and Frady's One Stop Food Store (open since 1974). Unmistakably, graffiti and street art are also interspersed through the streets. The ubiquitous tags 'cultür' 'HAVE FUN' and 'R.I.P.' (primarily in honor of obscure to well-known artists, rather than deceased local residents; see figures 12 and 13) adorn walls. Some of these artists and graffiti writers have achieved local notoriety (Fein 2011; MacCash 2011; Fein 2012). Wheatpastes by internationally recognized street artist Swoon also remain in the neighborhood, having been put up at various times since 2005 (see figures 14 and 15).

Gentrification in the St. Roch neighborhood, on the other hand, is ostensibly subtler. Table 1.2 in Appendix A displays the comparison between the same categories noted above for Bywater, but shows a less dramatic picture. St. Roch lies on the 'other' side of St. Claude Avenue, historically having greater ties with the Creole communities of New Orleans (Walk, 1979; Medley, 2003). Owner-occupied housing has increased nearly 3%, from 42.2% in 2000 to 45% in 2010 (see Table 1.2 in Appendix A). The neighborhood has also experienced a black residential population dip from 91.5% in 2000 to 86.8% in 2010 and a white residential population increase from 3.9% in 2000 to 7% in 2010. College degree attainment has remained equal.

Figure 13: Bourghog Guild's R.I.P. Banksy over a Banksy stencil, 2012

Source: http://www.nolade fender.com/content /rip-and-run

Figure 12: Bourghog Guild's R.I.P. Cy Twombly tag in Bywater, 2013

Source: http://friedgreendesign.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/img_3571.jpg

Figure 14: Swoon wheatpaste on Piety Street in Bywater, 2012

Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File: Piety_1000_Block_June_2012_Art_Wall _6.JPG

Figure 15: Swoon wheatpaste on Poland Avenue in Bywater

Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/F ile:Burgundy_Poland_Union_Swoon. JPG

Gentrification in St. Roch is most readily apparent on the six block stretch of St. Roch Avenue trailing behind the St. Roch Market on St. Claude Avenue until St. Roch Park at N. Roman Street, in part due to the *Art Walk*[10], a few art galleries and a number of newly painted and

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[10] The St. Roch Art Walk was initially conceived as a public art project in 2008, through a partnership between the Arts Council of New Orleans and the now defunct St. Roch Project. Though the plan was never fully completed, a

renovated homes (Arts Council of New Orleans, 2008). Most other blocks in the neighborhood

are not only less commercial, but also have a high amount of blight. The more prominent

commercial strip in the neighborhood, Franklin Avenue stretching from St. Claude Avenue to

Galvez Street, seemingly illustrates a stronghold of working class residents through a series fast

food restaurants, dollar stores and affordable corner and grocery markets (Sav-A-Lot, for

example).

The aesthetics of gentrification found in Bywater and St. Roch link back to ways in which

Neil Smith, Rosalyn Deutsch and others described the Lower East Side during its gentrification

in the 1980s. Smith, quoting Robinson and McCormick, notes that,

> With gushing enthusiasm, the attraction of the Lower East Side was once attributed in the
> art press to its 'unique blend of poverty, punk rock, drugs and arson, Hell's Angels,
> winos, prostitutes and dilapidated housing that adds up to an adventurous avant-garde
> setting of considerable cachet' (Smith, 1996, p. 198).

Nearly the exact same description could be suitable for present-day Bywater and St. Roch.

Descriptions of Bywater on the popular tourism website *Not For Tourists* include, "the Bywater

makes strange bedfellows out of blue collar workers and crust punks" and the statement, "Dirty

and sparsely gorgeous, salivating developers will rid it of any grit before long." Similarly,

Roberta Brandes Gratz described the neighborhood as one that is "a magnet for artists and young

newcomers" in her 2010 *New York Times* editorial (Gratz, 2010).

In 2011 some pranksters tapped into the growing local discourse of gentrification along St.

Claude Avenue by placing a fake advertisement for an upcoming Starbuck's at that intersection,

over the same blighted building that earlier in the year displayed a large wheatpaste by street

artist Swoon (see image #1 in Appendix C). The online news magazine *Nola Defender* covered

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paved pedestrian pathway was installed in the neutral ground along St. Roch Avenue from St. Claude Avenue to N.
Roman Street.

the prank by writing, "with coffee shops sprouting up on St. Claude Ave. as quickly as gutter punks and their dogs, the strip might appear to be easy prey for the world's ultimate gentrifying force, Starbucks" (Babcock, 2011). Though the Starbuck's billboard was a prank, the palpable changes along St. Claude Avenue and in Bywater and St. Roch made the idea that the coffee chain was coming to St. Claude Avenue and Bartholomew Street believable to many. All but one resident interviewed affirmed that Bywater and St. Roch are undergoing gentrification. The lone dissenting voice, Jen in St. Roch, did acknowledge, however, that

> I think that the front half, like the first few blocks [from St. Claude] there's an increase of middle-income residents moving in. I don't, I don't feel like we're gentrifying yet…I still feel like, I still feel like our, with the vacancy levels that we have, we're not gentrifying. However, when I talk to people who, even today, when we were talking with the lawyers about Jack's Meat Market he referenced Freret, and if the solution is to look like the Freret Boulevard, then yeah, we'll gentrify. That's not a solution, that's not the only solution to blight, but that is a solution that leads to gentrification and prices people out of the neighborhood.

In both Bywater and St. Roch, every resident interviewed clearly identified a relationship between blight and gentrification, situating graffiti and street art at various points along that spectrum. In response to the what the series of photographs shown during our interview made him think of, Mark responded, "Um, gentrification." Lisa, in St. Roch, responded to whether she sees a relationship between graffiti, street art and gentrification by saying,

> It's changing. It's turning more into street art. You know, because I think a lot of the people who are coming in are more, what I call artsy. Just like myself, we're artsy people, you know, whatever. Really, no matter how crazy our art is, it has to be lookin like art sometimes, you know. 'Cause like I said, a person who does graffiti is not just gonna draw a little lady standing up. Not write anything by it, not leave a message or anything. So, it's more, street art is becoming, essentially becoming more of an art. They are expressing themselves, but more of an art, well, more of an art expression than graffiti is in this area. I'm seeing a lot of street art.

When viewing image #4 (see Appendix C) in our interview, Lucy remarked, "I think the stencils, for me, are indicative of the changing neighborhood 'cause to do stencils, like, and that's a pretty

detailed stencil, I feel like you have to have some thought and training into what negative space

is," and reflecting on whether she sees a relationship between graffiti, street art and

gentrification, Lucy stated, "I think in the case of the Bywater, yes. I think the graffiti was often

times a symbol of an artistic element found in the neighborhood, but I don't think necessarily

[there's a relationship]…[but] I'm trying to think of another example in which there was

gentrification without graffiti and I don't have much coming to me."

   Dickinson argues, in relation to race and New York City's graffiti since the 1970s, "the

construction of graffiti as a problem has significant parallels to urban poor people being

constructed as a problem more generally" (Dickinson, 2008, p. 42). When trying to define her

differentiation between graffiti and street art, Lisa placed both graffiti and street art among the

larger framework of the criminalization of graffiti and the capitalist art market in which street art

has a role. She remarked,

> I've seen people do street art and I've seen kids and people do graffiti and it is all so good
> that it's hard to separate the two, except that one you should not do, because it, you
> know, it's vandalizing some property or something. But I've seen some people are very
> good, regardless, who should be putting their work on something so it can be transported
> and sold.

In a similar economic reference, Laura described the abatement of graffiti in Bywater to be

trickle-down, saying,

> I think that when people see other people caring for something that it reminds them that
> they should be caring. Whether they, whether it's a sense of, 'I should do this because
> they're making me look bad' or if it's a sense of, 'oh, how did I let this get this to this
> point'…it seems to be a trickle down effect with anything. The house painting, the
> picking up garbage, the whatever it is. There's a tendency to not wanna stick out, I think
> is maybe the bigger underlying psychological issue.

Melissa in Bywater also framed graffiti as crime, explaining,

> This is junk graffiti [on the garbage cans in the neighborhood]…This is what, when you
> say graffiti and you think of vandalism? That's what this is…that's what I think about
> and when I look at it, it's all on stop signs, it's all on, it's all where it's not supposed to be

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and it's aggravating…this is the graffiti [in response to image #8 in Appendix C]…[image #6, Appendix C] this is graffiti, but it's not what I would throw into…oh, and this is an example of blight.

After viewing the series of images in our interview, Jen in St. Roch talked about where she sees graffiti in the neighborhood. She described recently seeing art on a blighted building across from her house, which she defined as "guerilla art." Jen explained,

I don't see graffiti where, like, everybody thought they'd see it. Like, I don't see graffiti on the park benches on the Art Walk or on the sidewalks, there's like, specific houses that continue to be targeted. And it's the vacant, it's, like, the larger vacant structures that continue to be targeted. And then, of course, you know, directly across from my house is the weird guerilla art graffiti…There's a white house across the street from us and…I came out one morning and it's covered in plywood that has been, that they, like, painted art on, I guess, and then changed all the plywood art pieces and screwed it over the plywood that was there…Guerilla art…the, like, one at our house, people were like, 'well at least we've got something else to look at besides boarded up house,' no, like, that's not how it feels. It doesn't feel like, 'oh, well now I get, like, art to look at,' it just seems like I have more ugly stuff to look at.

Despite referring to the 'guerilla art' as ugly, Jen understood the work to be an art installation, stating, "I really thought that somebody was gonna come take it back down…'cause it seemed like an installation. Installations usually come back down. I don't know, like, somebody spent time making art and [I] just thought they'd want it back or whatever."

In general, interview participants in Bywater and St. Roch associated gentrification with improvement, progress and health, but also with loss and fear. When asked what gentrification looks like to her, Lisa, a black homeowner in St. Roch, explained that, "it looks like taller buildings and…warehouses turned into condos, coffee houses, well, we already all that, but a lot more coffee houses and a lot of bikes, a lot of healthy people running around. Healthy acting and healthy eating people, those people. Runners." Bob, also a black homeowner in St. Roch, explained that what gentrification looks like to him is,

Visually, gentrification is what it is from a historical standpoint, right, you have new businesses, certain race of people moving into a neighborhood, property values are going

up, people are eventually gonna move out of the neighborhood, because they cannot afford it, but we can do gentrification a different way, where there are multiracial business owners, property owners, people of all ethnic backgrounds, all socioeconomic backgrounds, coming into a neighborhood with the goal that 'I love my neighborhood and I wanna make it a better place.'

Bob also discussed his identification of gentrification in the neighborhood beginning in 2011,

Well, when I moved to this neighborhood, as I rode around, checking things out, there's a gentleman in the neighborhood by the name of Dan who has bought a, I mean, just bought a tremendous amount of property along St. Roch [Avenue] and Dan was renovating homes. White guy, and there were not any other African American people doing the buying and moving in…and if they were, they were very minimal moving in or they had already lived here prior to Katrina. And so when I saw Dan moving in, I talked with him and he's a great guy, and started talking about what he was doing and how he was doing it and he was getting a lot of tax credits and this and that, buying at auction, buying cheap, and you saw that even at some of his properties now, he bought at cheap, but his rents are not cheap…So that means that a certain clientele or certain customer base he's desiring to move into the neighborhood, which typically aren't the current people that live here, that can afford that level of rent. And so, I saw that, but then my thing that I didn't see was blacks having an extended, vested interest in homeownership and so I definitely wanted to...but people are not moving in neighborhoods to better the neighborhood, instead they're moving in the neighborhood to change it to what fits them and not keep the historic culture of the neighborhood and value of the neighborhood. That's why gentrification is happening so quickly. That's why I saw that happening in 2011.

Lucy, a white renter in Bywater, describing what she sees when she walks around Bywater, said,

Young, white kids. Well, I see a lot of young white kids and…a lot of forty to fifty year-old working professionals. I don't see as many African Americans as I used to, and those I see I know really well because they've lived here much longer than I have, and I know a lot of them…So, that I feel like is definitely disappearing, the diversity…I would say the biggest change that I've seen, as I physically walk down the street, is a lot of houses are really well repaired now. You know, they've been painted and fixed, which is really good…The roads are half well paved and half terribly cracked. I feel it's a great dichotomy for the changes, the state of the streets. Or some, like, metaphor for the changing neighborhood.

Lucy explaining what gentrification looks like to her had more negative associations, stating, "the Bywater…I think you could also say what it looks like is what it doesn't look like, you know? I guess when there becomes that migration of people into a neighborhood also what you see or what you feel is that loss of those that were there before." Melissa in Bywater also had

entirely negative associations with gentrification and acknowledged a difference in the

construction of space in her neighborhood, explaining,

> A bunch of unfriendly folk, and I can't say white folks, because they have some black folks that's mixed into that too, who think that because they're able to buy an old house and fix it up, it makes them so much better than, they're just so much better than everybody else…I think of elitists, I think of people being pushed out. I have no pleasant thoughts when I think of gentrification. You know, I can see this family who has been struggling to hold onto their home and encountering all kinds of obstacles and finally their home went into foreclosure, and boom, here's some I'm-all-of-that type person comes in and buys their home. No, I do not have pleasant thoughts when I think of gentrification, because it doesn't…and I know this is a stereotypical thought, because as I'm, as we're talking, I realized that I'm part of gentrification, in a sense, but I bought my home, I bought this house from some people who were from the East coast who, her husband I guess was trying to make it in the music business and couldn't here or…I don't know what happened, anyway, they were moving back to the East coast, so I bought it from them and the people who owned it before that, they just bought it and fixed it up real cheap to rent it out, so I didn't feel like I was pushing anybody out of the neighborhood type deal.

Mark, reflecting on what he would see walking around Bywater in the years that he lived there

(2011 to 2013), remarked,

> Seeing people fixing up all of their houses and…I mean, frankly, just more white people…Like more white people, more young people, more people that were clearly dressing up in like professional work garb, so like a collared shirt, pressed pants, rather than like wearing chef pants and like just a t-shirt to work…you could see the mix of people and as time went on, you could see more of those people…and I mean, just obviously just reading the news, too…reading the news, seeing like how property values were increasing, listening to neighborhood conversations and how those were kind of changing tenor from like 'we just live here' to maybe more of a sense of fear, or a sense of the outsiders are coming in. That being said, like, I have no idea if that conversation was happening before…you can see the Bywater was empty and it's not – not empty, but it was just like not as much street life, not as much people just walking around and kind of like typical, what we typically associate with a healthy neighborhood, it wasn't necessarily as prevalent.

Melissa, a native New Orleanian and black homeowner in Bywater since 1993, discussed her

identification of gentrification in the neighborhood as a slow process that quickened pace after

Katrina. She shared,

The real change, okay, prior to the storm, pre-Katrina days, it was a slow change, because it was mostly local people, New Orleanians, kind of like buying houses because they couldn't really afford Uptown, but they could make this look like Uptown and properties were really cheap. So, things were kinda moving and then we had a lot of gay males that were purchasing properties and changing and renovating, which I totally loved, because they had great ideas…They had great ideas and they'd be , they were improving the property value. Then Katrina comes. Well when Katrina comes, the vultures descended…Well, everybody wants to live by the sliver by the rive and then this part of the sliver was still relatively cheap, compared to west of here [Marigny] and we have an influx of, the first influx with post-Katrina were the hippies, the grungies or whatever the heck they call themselves. That's all that they had here and then, like I said, the vultures comin' and the flippers, because there's always somebody leaving a note on my door, writing me a letter. One guy, I don't even know how he did it, but he had my phone number and would call, was calling me about selling him my house and all the…'cause like before the storm, this guy offered me money for my house and he was in the process of flippin' a house on the, in Marigny, on the other side of the tracks. So, it's, it has become transient, is what I call it. Transient, because we not only have a lot of people from out of town, but we have a lot of people from out of town that's buying property to flip it or rent it, but they're not looking to be a part of the city, you know, to make it home. So, that's pretty disheartening. And I must admit, I get a bit resentful about it.

Melissa, describing who and what she sees when she walks around Bywater, also shared,

I see how there are improvements and beautifications in some places, and in other places, it has deteriorated…we don't have, in the areas that I travel, we don't have any heavy blight, but it's not as up to par as it could be, but people are doing stuff around it, so I mean…we have different kinds of people in our neighborhood…there's a lot of younger people and…they don't look really professional…I don't see yuppies around here. They're more like, I would look at 'em and the first thing I would think is that either they're unemployed or they're artistic, but they're not, you know, we don't have, at least I don't encounter that many suits and ties and super dressed up ladies…this street, as far as I know, is very quiet and you have houses that are being fixed up, houses that are sitting there, like mine. You walk around my house and it's on the verge of blight…Bywater has some great, great, great potential, but it needs compassion.

Jen, a white post-Katrina homeowner in St. Roch, in response to whether she's seen changes in

the neighborhood over the past three years, explained,

I think parts of the neighborhood are changing. You know, I see like a lot more residents on the Avenue. On St. Roch Avenue, well, and St. Claude Avenue, but St. Roch Avenue, like, the housing stock is, on the front half of it not the back half of it. I mean, more people are buying properties and renovating them and, like, raising rents and so forth and then, like between St. Roch and Elysian Fields and Robertson and St. Claude, I've seen a lot more investment. Our side still, still kinda loosey goosey over there. Like, people aren't sure about us yet. So, I mean, there's…it's kind of sad, my husband and I, like, we get so depressed sometimes. We're so pessimistic about the people, like, buy a property

and they start work on the property, we're like 'oh yeah, whatever, like, we'll see where that is in six months', 'cause, like, people just, like, come in and they start and then they leave. Yeah, we have a lot of people, a lot of people who buy property at, like, Sheriff's sale or tax sales or however else they're acquiring properties, and they might come in and, like, shore it up a little bit and then, like, put new, cover the windows and stuff, and then that's it. Yeah. Well 'cause they're waiting for the property values to go back up…Or just sell it…it's just people buy properties, sittin on it, waiting for the market to go up. There's nobody fixing the blight. So, I mean, our, our neighborhood has only changed, like our block, a couple blocks, has only changed because houses burned down. Like, outside of that, there's not been a change.

When asked what she associates with gentrification, Laura in Bywater remarked,

> People in this timeline, in this time, are very transient, there's this global economy that we live in and people often can't be tied down by things such as mortgages or, by the time they are ready to be tied down by a mortgage or have children, their life has already existed within this urban enclave and they're very hesitant to move out of the urban enclave and into something else because they've already built a life there. I also think that gentrification is often about what you can afford and when I think about what you can afford, by the time a lot of people are looking to become homeowners or even long-term apartment holders, they are part of what is making their community interesting, so they're driving up prices just by being in the community themselves, creating the supply and the demand.

Lisa, a black homeowner in St. Roch and active member of the FSRIA, discussed in our interview some of the difficulties in uniting long-term and newer residents in St. Roch, explaining that,

> The real dysfunction for the organization [FSRIA], we try to get people to come out and just can't. We will give it for them and it will be all people who don't live in the area. You know, we used to give a 'Night Out on the Roch', we used to call it, on this neutral ground [on St. Roch Avenue]…And that was rarely the people who live around here. They would stand in their doorways. they just don't feel that they part of…part of the club…and they just don't feel that they're part of some of the things that are in the city…lifestyle is what it is…so then I'm saying, when I say that dividing line, it seems to be that St. Claude is about to turn into a street – I actually have the whole folder with different things that will come about, because I'm on the board for the art association for St. Claude Main Street…so, I thought we could find out stuff, so I know a few of the changes that are coming, and it's fine by me, 'cause I'm an artist and I like some of it, but it is a little hard to make the other people understand and then they worry so much about quite a few things that are happening, are going to happen, but sometime I have to tell them, or [my husband] tells them, that you cannot complain if you're not goin to be a part of something. You can't get them to use that time.

She put little blame for these difficulties on the new residents, noting that,

> So far I haven't seen any of the people, to be honest, who have moved in that I see or know personally, turn up their nose at people. So I'm kind of glad of that. The ones who have come in who I know of seem to be trying to get along and so a lot of the people are trying to get along with them and I see that.

Still, Lisa alluded to a lack of involvement in neighborhood issues by recent in-movers and an

influx of squatters or transients,

> We have a blight committee for our association [FSRIA] and I've been working on that, and so I'm seeing a few changes with that since Katrina, we…it really doesn't matter, people are really looking for walking in the areas where they don't see the blight, but there is so much blight still left in St. Roch in so many places. We're fighting situations. So I'm still seeing a lot of blight. I'm seeing a lot, believe it or not in St. Roch, we're seeing a lot of squatting. A lot of squatting.

Melissa in Bywater conveyed a much deeper sense of alienation and racism when discussing

newcomers her experience with new comers to the neighborhood, explaining,

> And then now you have people that will walk past you on the street, they'll talk to their black ass dog, they'll stop and meddle a black ass cat, but they won't speak to the black ass person and other kind of foolishness. Here we talkin' about a possible hurricane blowin' through here and if somethin' go down, I'm a tell you, 'go talk to the dog, go talk to the cat' because the person ain't tryin' to hear it. And it wasn't like that before. Like I said, you didn't, pre-Katrina, you didn't run over and 'ohhhh, my brother' and hug and…you know, you didn't do the kumbaya thing, but, you know, that's your neighbor over there and you kinda like, well, looked out for each other, 'well, I know, what's goin' on over there because I've never seen that car over there before, I've never seen that person comin' and goin' over there before.'…And if it really seemed strange, you would either tell the neighbor or call the police or whatever was necessary, but it's, you don't feel, at least I don't feel that anymore around here…'cause these people around here are not, these are not native New Orleanians, because no matter how racist you are, a native New Orleanian, before they not speak to you, they'll cross the street…it won't be, I'm a walk past you and not speak to you, you understand, I've, 'you a n----- and I'm not speaking to you, but I'm gonna go across the street so I don't have to', 'cause then it's like, 'I didn't see you', especially if you live in the neighborhood. Because, like, you have always had some type of living integration going on in the city of New Orleans, always, even when it was deeply segregated…there was a little pocket of integration somewhere in the city, if it was no more than the white neighborhoods started directly across the street from us. All the black folks on this side and the white folks on that side, that's a spit's throw away. That ain't no miles and miles apart and you're gonna cross each other at some point, you're riding a bus together, you're walkin' down the street together, somethin'…so, you get to see each other's face and you get familiar with the

faces…Now, people walk past ya down the street. Some of 'em, they look right at ya and turn their head and keep right on steppin'…Any age, doesn't matter. Doesn't matter. They could be young, they could be older, they could be right smack dab in the middle…But it's always white. And if it's not always white, it'll be black with white.

In Richard Campanella's discussion of the "social cohorts" of gentrification, he places "gutter punks" among the first or earliest cohort (Campanella, 2013). While the process of gentrification is more complex and often un-predictable (as migrations of capital and incidences of environmental disaster dictate) than the cohort or phase model of gentrification implies, this explicit naming of 'gutter punks' as the pioneer gentrifiers aligns with the resident interpretation of graffiti in Bywater and St. Roch. In a 2013 article in the *New Orleans Tribune*, one of oldest black-owned newspapers in the country, Lovell Beaulieu writes of these same pioneers,

> Those 'grunge' kids, the socially clairvoyant offspring of the Kurt Kobain generation sporting pierced noses, tattoo-splattered necks, arms and ankles that intersect with drug and alcohol use, primarily have a history of homesteading and loafing off their parents pockets and the generosity of strangers even as they enjoy the protection of well-fed dogs. They prey on vacant and abandoned properties while paying little if any rent. Moreover, they often, almost by osmosis and because of their race, receive police protection from the mostly Black and long-standing occupants of the neighborhood, according to those who have witnessed this component of the gentrification movement (Beaulieu, 2013).

Melissa referenced the presence and absence of 'gutter punks', as well as the presence of another, artistic type of newcomer, in Bywater, explaining,

> Now, if you find somebody from Chalmette over there, you doin' good. Good, you doin' excellent. I don't think Markey half way goes in his bar as much as he used to, because the grungies are…the artistic crew, with the tattoos all over 'em and go to the flea shop, the flea market and buy underwear, clothes, dresses all kinda ways and…I call 'em hippies myself, 'cause they're not…no, they're not the grungies, the grungies you smell 'em three blocks up the road…now see we have an influx of them around holiday time, festivals and that kinda thing…I haven't been seeing that much of them, so that's why I figure they must be outta town or the thrill of New Orleans has worn off, but the artistes, they're still around with their whatever it is outfits that they have where they find little odd jobs and panhandle in the French Quarter and cuss you out 'cause you don't give 'em your money.

When asked whether she sees a connection between blight and gentrification, Lisa shared an interesting anecdote, "Well, I know for a fact that a lot of the kids that are squattin, either have parents with money or whatever. I've known a kid who was actually a squatter came back and bought that house." Melissa, relayed a similar story about one of her neighbors explaining,

> Just like my neighbor over here, he's from Southern California. The most un-neighborly person I have ever encountered in all my, you don't live next door to people…you own a home, I own a home, so that means we gonna be stuck with each other for twenty-five, thirty years…he moved in before Katrina so he's been there, oh, about ten, eleven years, or close to ten, I think. Squatter. Got that house for little or nothin' and, baby, I know, if he should ever sell it…$500,000 minimum, because he's trying to redo all of the original stuff in there…using all of the same woodwork and this kinda stuff. Unfriendliest person…I hope somebody comes and offers him $2 million just for that house, give him $10, make it so good that he wants to move…give him $10 million and let him go on back to Southern California.

Both of the pre-Katrina Bywater residents interviewed acknowledged that their neighborhood has been gentrifying for quite some time. Laura explained,

> I think it, that Bywater started gentrifying probably thirty-five years ago. I think that everybody just kind of figured out what it was recently, because their rent is well above anything that they could ever imagine. I think it happens over a long period of time, but there is the hyper place that it gets to when people recognize it. It's just like with anything, you know, you could be sick for a really long time, but until you're diagnosed with stage four cancer, you don't really get what happened. You could tolerate a lot of stuff, but I think that this has been happening for a very long time and I think, you know, it started happening, it starts happening and it just sort of moves down the street or across the street. I don't think that people really understand that it's not…I find it, it's kind of funny that everyone wants to talk about Bywater gentrifying right now, when did we talk about when that happened in Marigny? It was not on people's radar.

Melissa, a black homeowner since 1993, described the changing neighborhood through her experience of newcomers and visitors to Bywater not respecting the tradition of blocking of a parking spot in front of her home. She lives amidst one of the most commercially developed areas of the neighborhood, on Louisa Street equidistant between popular restaurants and bars like the Country Club, Markey's Bar, Booty's Street Food, Frady's One Stop Food Store and Satsuma. Melissa shared,

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There all these young folk, well, they're young, they're from out of town, they don't do this kind of thing in New York [hold parking spots in front of one's home], they don't do this kind of thing in Chicago, California, whatever, they don't do that. So, you just stepped out of Pampers, just walked into the city of New Orleans, and you are going to tell me what's the law and what's not?! I know that that's a public street, I'm payin for that street! Through my property tax, I have to buy my house back every year. I'm payin' property tax for that public street, so I know what it is. I was born and reared in the city of New Orleans, so half the ordinances, if you wanna be cute about it, half the ordinances, I was here when they put 'em on. Okay. I don't need you to bring your lil' high flyin' ass from wherever you come from, to tell me about what's goin' on here…it's out of respect, I'm a tell you what, you did it here and you get away with it 'cause I don't feel like goin' to jail, and I don't feel like vandalizing your car because the Universe will pay me back for that, so I'm not gonna vandalize your car, but be thankful for that…You got to understand how to, when you're comin' into somethin', you have to come in and respect what you find. Doesn't make any difference who the people are. These people have been living here, you're not...now see, this young couple over there, well they're buying that house so they're gonna be there, that's a different thing. You're comin' over here, you're renting, you're not gonna be here for no twenty, thirty years, that is not your intention, so why is it you wanna, you found it this why, you wanna, all of a sudden you wanna change it. No. So those kinds of little things irritate me in how the neighborhood has changed. It irritates me, but it doesn't rock my world or anything, because I know, 'well [Melissa], you've been here almost thirty years, they've been here almost thirty minutes and they gonna be gone in the next half hour'. Give 'em a couple a months and they're gone.

In relation to the Cabbagetown neighborhood in Atlanta, GA, the online art publication *BURNAWAY* published an article saying, "residents who once enjoyed the urban flavor of the ever-morphing graffiti expression have had to endure the oppressive presence of cheerful green paint and gung-ho gentrifiers, smug to win an aesthetic battle over shared space" (Tauches, 2010). Though not in direct relation to graffiti, Lisa spoke about aspects of this cultural conflict between newcomers and long-term residents in St. Roch, explaining,

My husband calls most of the people, in an innocent kinda way, he calls a lot of people transplants, because people are coming from different places since Katrina and they're moving in. What we're finding is, maybe what we need, a lot of young people, to keep the city kinda going. So we're finding a lot of young people, but part of the problem with some of them, that we see, that nobody wants to address, is that a lot of people are moving from other places with an idea for New Orleans and New Orleans is *New Orleans*…everything is here already for us. So, what I'm saying, so like, if you from an area, and they have clubs and they have this, that and the other, but they don't play loud music, you know, then you come to New Orleans and go on Frenchmen Street and part of

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the French Quarters and you want a noise ordinance. Okay, this is good, but then you want the trees planted, the kind of trees that you had where you were, the kind of everything 'til it's starting to look like…this place looks like so many different places now and I don't know if anybody's paying attention. Instead of having…it's gonna have the culture, but it's gonna have so many different things that, at some point, it's gonna lose something. It has to lose something. You can't have those, that many different ideas and not lose something somewhere…I mean the people are a melting pot and that's wonderful, but they trying to make everything you look at a melting pot. It's gonna get confusing. You know, you're gonna have an Indian Chief plume next to an old house that is culturally historic and has designs on it called birthday cake, which is a lot of money or whatever, next to a teepee and I don't know, a igloo, and that's not gonna work, sooner or later, so, you know, that's what I'm seeing a lot of. You know, I just wish they'd either leave the culture alone or something, because if you look at it, this, the funny part, those same people are coming here because those things are here. They say, 'I came to New Orleans, I loved it so much, I stayed.' That's why you stayed. I mean, and now you gonna change it so you could feel comfortable like where you were. Why would you leave where you were to come some place to make it like where you were? I mean, at some point it just crazy.

As Laura expressed in relation to various gentrifying or gentrified New Orleans neighborhoods,

If you have less places for people to move into, people have to go into one place. I mean, I think the other reason that this whole city has experienced – the Irish Channel, St. Roch, Bywater, Marigny even the French Quarter – has seen so much influx of people is because we all got pushed to this one area of the city that was undamaged, which created the initial opportunity for this kind of demand to happen in the first place. So if you can't open up your supply, your demand all has to go to one place, and as I spoke to my neighbor the other day, she said…We were having a discussion about there not being enough available housing and her attitude is, 'well, why don't they just go live somewhere else?'…[in terms of] The neighborhood. But if you, again, it goes back to if you create a place that people want to be, you create a place that people want to be.

Jen in St. Roch was the one interview participant that does not think St. Roch is gentrifying. However, her explanations behind this were complex. In part, she believes that blight is a more urgent matter in St. Roch, stating,

I feel like on one level, that there's a grave possibility that we will be priced out of our neighborhood, but I don't think that that's the conversation that we're having right now in St. Roch. I think the conversation we're having is, I don't have the exact percentage, but a large percentage of our neighborhood is vacant, blighted property, so if we're concerned about pricing people out, well let's clean some of this stuff up and, like, put people in the houses already. Like, how can we have a conversation about gentrification when most of our housing stock is vacant? I hear the opposing viewpoint from other people who look just like me [white, middle-class].

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Jen also referred to a lack of awareness among some St. Roch residents of what gentrification

even is as reasoning for why she does see gentrification as a current, pressing issue in the

neighborhood. She discussed her experience doing outreach in St. Roch for the FSRIA's event

series on race — and implicitly gentrification — explaining,

> I did outreach for their conversation about race that we did…my fellow neighborhood resident wanted to cover more ground, so they sent me off by myself in the back of St. Roch neighborhood the day after the Tray Martin announcement [July 2013]…So it's like, 'we're having the conversation about race,' and, unfortunately, that conversation…I think that for the residents who were involved in the planning part, it was a wonderful learning experience for them…so, like, describing to people what we were doing was really difficult and when I described to people like, 'we're having a conversation about gentrification', I don't know what other people were saying, 'cause I was alone, but I was like, 'we're having a conversation about, like, you know, about race and how it's played out in our neighborhood and how people feel about it and how we can work together to overcome our challenges and how, you know, how gentrification is playing out in our neighborhood. Do you know what gentrification is?' Nobody knew what I was talking about…I didn't talk to a white person that day. So, and, you know, probably, like, [I was talking to] low to moderate income, African Americans…I mean, they weren't gonna like given on that they didn't know what I was talking about, so I went ahead and put it out there, like, 'do you know what gentrification is? Have you heard the term? Do you understand?' because I know better than to be like 'gentrification blah blah blah blah blah' so I went ahead and, like, went to the next level and nobody knew what I was talking about. So, I mean, I don't think the people who are being impacted by gentrification understand what gentrification is…I didn't get the impression from anybody that, that anybody felt particularly threatened by…so when I was, they were like, 'what is it?' and I was like, '…it's a concept that basically means that, like, people who look more like me [white] are moving into your neighborhood and possibly when that happens, people who look more like you [black] can't afford to live there' and they were like, 'does that happen?' and I was like, 'that's the theory' so I didn't get, I didn't have anybody, like, really, like, on board with that being an issue in our neighborhood.

Still, as a white post-Katrina, middle-class homeowner, Jen recognized that she and other

residents like her are contributing to rising costs of living in St. Roch. She shared,

> Other white people who moved into the neighborhood because it was affordable and are essentially therefore raising the value of the property because they're gonna rent out at not Section 8 or whatever values, you know, like my first year that I lived there, I rented a 450 square foot apartment for $750 a month. To a hipster, because my neighborhood is cool, so. A twenty year-old hipster, whose mom paid for her rent.

Following our interview, Jen did mention that she tried to rent her adjoining rental apartment to Section 8 voucher recipients for three months but had no applicants. She then placed a flyer with market rate rent in the Orange Couch, a coffee shop in the Marigny, and was able to get it rented the next day. Jen noted that she is alone among FSRIA members in thinking that the neighborhood is not gentrifying, but she did acknowledge that the fear of a land grab could be a reason that others do think it's gentrifying. Jen added, "but from I what see, a lot of the land grab is happening from black property owners," which I pointed out does not disqualify it from being a part of the gentrification process.

Bob, a black post-Katrina homeowner in St. Roch, who does believe that "gentrification is massively happening," explained opposing reasons as to why the topic might not be relevant to a lot of the working-class black residents in the neighborhood. Even with that acknowledgement, though, Bob expressed some of the class complexities inherent in the black gentrification of a black neighborhood. He remarked,

> As I see it, folk cannot purchase at a value in Marigny. They cannot purchase at a value in Bywater anymore. And so what available housing there, there is, it's in St. Roch…and because of the quick access to downtown and other venues. There's not another neighborhood in the city that can afford you the access that, other than St. Roch…when people are so busy surviving, how can I focus on buying a home? Right? How can I deal with, I gotta get my son outta jail. I have to pay, figure out how I'm a pay this $400 light bill…'cause I'm surviving. I can only work. I can't do all that other stuff, because the time I work and the time that the city does business, I'm at work, and by the time I get off of work, they shut down, so I don't have time for anything else…we wanna increase homeownership and we want to do it in a way where African Americans, minority people, okay, can live in a safe environment and have homes that are assessed at their appropriate value. You don't need a white person moving in your neighborhood to have good value, have your home valued equally as much as another home with a white family in there…And that's, and you hate to say that it's a racial thing, you hate to say that it's a racial thing, but it is. It is. It has always been…but also a part of the problem, a part of the challenge, and you know I been on saying that, 'oh, I don't want folks to think that oh, it's the white man or whatever,' but a part of the problem is that the African American community has to do it's job as well.

Lisa also believes that St. Roch is gentrifying, but cited the changes along St. Claude Avenue as the largest catalyst for this process. She shared,

> Yes, I think St. Roch is being gentrified, but it doesn't seem to be being gentrified within St. Roch in a sense. It's more the bordering areas, areas that would affect St. Roch. More or less, they could've used another serious grocery store some place or clinic or something like that on St. Claude or something. This one is way down, way, oh no, actually that one is gone, that's gone now. Yes, I feel it. I feel it in the air. Quite a few little things. I see the changes. I see the changes with people who are…well actually, I can't say it's not from within, because we do have homeowners who are buying onto this side, and so we're seeing more runners, more bikers, more, you know, a lot of things that you just weren't seeing before. Yeah, I'm seeing a lot of people who don't understand the area who are coming into the area.

In response to who or what she associates with gentrification, Lisa explained,

> It seems to be mostly like the same, or mostly younger people come in, buy property, um, make a lot of changes. Or it seems like the changes are being made by the city and by different people, prosperous people or whoever could benefit, to accommodate the people who are coming in more than the people who are here. And since I know everything is about progress financially, for the city, and that's why it's easy for me to understand that. That's pretty much what I think about it. I know a lot of the changes and accommodations and high-rise and apartments that are being made out of the warehouses and stuff to that effect, that's who it mostly attracts: Young professionals, who have the financial status to do that. We now have bike lanes everywhere. We now have everything that would attract…Just like we're trying to attract homebuyers to St. Roch, they're trying to attract people also, so they have to do…Just like us, like I said with graffiti or whatever or street art might not help us attract, they seem to be getting rid of everything that might not attract the younger people or anybody else that's coming in that would be part of that. Sometimes, most of the time, I hear people say that they're mostly, they're Caucasian people, but that's not true. I see a lot of black, young black professionals, Indian professionals, a lot of people who have come in. They're more than just young professionals.

Mark, a white post-Katrina resident of both Bywater and St. Roch, in response to what he thinks of when he hears the term gentrification, remarked,

> Complicated. For whom are we making neighborhoods? For whom are we building neighborhoods? For whom are we promoting and marketing neighborhoods to, in general? What does…How do we make it work for everyone?...The mission needs to be, I don't know, I don't think anti-gentrification, but at least mitigating it, 'cause when I think of gentrification I think of amenities and I think of, like, nice things, and is there really…objectively, is it problematic? The question, rhetorically I suppose, is it problematic for a neighborhood to…Objectively and…not necessarily considering up

front the externalities, is it problematic for a neighborhood to gentrify, if we consider gentrification the, um, development of amenities and, like, general beautification? No. I don't think that is actually the case, I don't think it's [gentrification] inherently problematic. Now, including the externalities – and what that means is, in how capitalism works, I would say, in terms of real estate specifically, is that as soon as a neighborhood looks nice it becomes inherently more desirable and, with that desire, you're going to get people with money who can afford those things, so…can gentrification then be separated from…should we separate the idea of gentrification from the improvement of amenities and beautification? Yes, because gentrification is the process by which those amenities, improved amenities, then result in the pushing out and pricing out of long-time residents. That's, that's gentrification as the process, it's not the improvement. So, I guess the problem then is, it's not, I don't think the problem is improving. I think the problem is the management of what happens after the improvement.

In our interview, Laura marked the start of the gentrification as, "I think the first time you see someone move into a community that is known as a really rough community, gentrification has happened…that's the defining moment." Writing in 2011, then Bywater resident Michael Martin acknowledged the tangible reality that the neighborhood was and is facing, "Longer term, the area is confronted by a paradox: that its charm – the very thing that makes it "hip" – will be destroyed by the developers it attracts, one unsanctioned second-line and graffiti-ed building at a time" (Martin, 2011). Laura in Bywater remarked on this paradox saying,

> I just spent so much time thinking about because it really…it was one of those things that really gnawed at me, trying to find, not that I was part of the problem, of course I'm part of the problem, but trying to determine how to identify when the problem starts, and then trying to identify how to slow it down so that you don't lose the very people that you want in your community.

In response to whether she sees a connection between graffiti, street art and gentrification, Laura also responded,

> I think that there are probably moments where that is the case, but a lot of, from what I am understanding, a lot of the people that are participating [in graffiti/street art] are not participating in the community at large and are probably not paying rent or buying a home anywhere in the community. Again, as I said, I just keep going back to the idea that it's a bit juvenile. Are there messages like that? Yeah, but I mean, this is a different time. You don't see people making profound messages, like they were touched by Aristotle or something on a daily basis.

Mark also explained that he views graffiti and street art as a signifier within the process of

gentrification,

> I don't see the difference between graffiti and street art, in terms of blight. I would say that blight is a canvas that will not be painted the next day, that will not be taken care of necessarily. Blight, to me, is again to use the word, a signifier of divestment and, you know, lack of care or lack of ability to care. Thus, providing the perfect place to put whatever you want on it. It's a blank canvas, and one that is going to, you know, probably stay around for as long as you, as long as the neighborhood continues to be in a state where the blight can't be taken care of. But I don't think there's a difference necessarily between the type of art, or the type of graffiti, that is done on it, but rather it's just more of like a place to do it…it's not the medium, but it's the place where the medium can take place…blight is the, um, blight is the kind of groundwork laid for gentrification because blight is…a social ill, but it also, on the opposite, on the flip side of that, it's an opportunity. You can buy low and sell high, if you fix it up. If you fix up enough blight, if you're a property owner and you fix up enough blight in the same block, you can sell, you can sell that block, um, and you can sell it for a higher price and you can sell it to people that, well no one is obviously living in it if it was blighted, um, or if it was blighted, the people living there, they couldn't afford to fix it up, so you can sell that for a much higher price. That being said…blight is a canvas for artists to, artists and those who are maybe not considering themselves artists but graffiti writers, um, maybe I just amended my…other answer, um, as soon as street art goes on a, well, okay, if you're a savvy investor, as soon as street art goes on a blighted building, you know the people that are hanging out, you should know who's hanging out in that neighborhood. That's the difference between graffiti, like tagging and street art, is that it's different people doing it, and – probably different people doing it – and as soon as that starts showing up on blighted buildings, like I said, if you're a savvy investor, you should know who's doing that and you should know that those kids went to RISD [Rhode Island School of Design] and you should know how much RISD costs and you should know that they probably have money and if they don't, their parents do and that means that they are a different class even if they pretend to be poor. And maybe they are poor at the moment, but they've had opportunity, and then that can lead for you, as an investor, to be like, 'oh, well, hmmm, maybe I should fix this up because these are people are gonna be moving-these people are now hanging out in this neighborhood', and if they're hanging out there, they have a modicum of cool as the world and cultural capital dictates. And that starts the [gentrification] process. I mean, that to me is kind of the way it works.

Melissa in Bywater explained a similar relationship between graffiti and gentrification but made

no reference to graffiti signifying an artistic presence, saying,

> Well, I guess there could be, because, like, what happened, that business over there, waterproofing business or whatever kind of business that is over there, they had graffiti on their wall that they, at the railroad tracks, and so what they did was hire I don't know if it's graffiti artists or what, but, and they put a nice mural up, since they couldn't keep

the graffiti off, they like incorporated it into a mural and now it looks artistic type thing. So, I guess, and, like, this artist has this lot that they're making into a little park with murals, I haven't been over there, I don't know if she's using the tile, I think they're using pieces of mirrors and tile, I don't know [Clouet Gardens]…so, I guess there could be a connection where you could hook the two of them together. There's that possibility…'cause see, like, graffiti is connected to blight and if you see that the building, the area is full of graffiti, it means that the area is full of neglect…abandonment or something's going on that's allowing these people to come in and put, because you don't see any graffiti on the walls of Frady's grocery store, Markey's Bar, Booty's, Maurepas, because these are businesses and there working businesses, they're open. So, before these people came in to take over these buildings and do that, there may have been graffiti on the walls, the walls may have been boarded up, who knows what was going on…if I were an investor, these are the things that I would be looking for: Blight and graffiti, because graffiti, where ever blight is, graffiti is coming…because graffiti artists know nobody's there to tell me I can't do that and nobody's gonna come and take it down like talkin' about it, but any place else, if it's a vacant building and somebody comes and puts graffiti on it, and the owner comes by, he's gonna have it taken down, but if nothing's done about it, then he's gonna come and the next one's gonna come and on and on and on and on it's gonna go. So, yes.

In her research of art, gentrification and urban space, Vanessa Mathews argues that,

How artists negotiate the city for live/work space is an important part of understanding the re-imaging of space through art. Their attraction to particular areas of the city, their differential needs within these spaces, and the ways in which these areas become attractive to other users with greater purchasing power, offer insight into the familiar cycle of displacement (Mathews, 2010, p. 672).

In 2009, local art critic Doug MacCash, in relation to his documentation of Fred Rathke's

(The Gray Ghost) visual battle with graffiti and street artists around the city, wrote,

I never much cared if Radtke grayed over the various tags and doodles hastily sprayed here and there. Not because they were illegal, but because they were self-indulgent and stupid. The big balloon-y signatures and faux primitive drawings that passed for street art in New Orleans weren't worth defending. Let's face it. It's not 1980 anymore. Old school graffiti is old hat. I'm sorry to be the one to tell them, but Harsh, Top Mop and the other nocturnal scribblers are well, boring (MacCash, 2009).

Mark, in response to the images shown in our interview, explained,

The more tags and the writing ones are, like, derived from the existing…I don't know who does those, but, like, it's more in line with, like I said before, the genesis of graffiti, which was not necessarily done by outsiders, but which was done by kids in, like, West Philly and just, like, tagging their neighborhoods. And, New York tagging the subways and, like, who lived in, like, Ozone Park, and just like jumped on the subway. Um, not

like some person who came from Ohio and thought about it, and, like, has, you know, been to, studied abroad in Berlin. And I don't say that derisively, though it inevitably comes off that way, because I'm one of those people, you know. I didn't study abroad in Berlin, I studied abroad in Amsterdam, the distinction is so different [laughter]…they speak a different language…I have a book of, like, street art from around the world at my house and it's all of, like, that, like stencils and wheatpastes and stuff like that, but that's me, that's my conception, that's not, I wouldn't tag, because, like, I don't need to own public space. I, as a white male, already have the levers to the power of ownership. I'm, like, societally allowed to own it. I don't have inherent oppression. Um, so to me, that's, you know, the nuance of gentrification…Street art is, like, the signifier – street art and graffiti is the signifier of privilege and, like, the difference between them is the signifier of, like, those who have it [privilege] and those who don't, and privilege is the underpinning of gentrification.

Bob did not mention graffiti and street art in the relationship, but does believe that, "blight gives way to gentrification, means that it gives light. Blight gives light to gentrification, because it allows people to transform a neighborhood quickly at a cheaper value, and that's what you see happening in St. Roch and throughout the city." Lucy, in response to whether she sees a relationship between blight and gentrification, explained,

There has to be this, like, turnkey that somehow…'cause there's lots of places in the United States that are blighted that will stay blighted for a very long time probably, but there has to be some catalyst that starts the snowball effect of people coming in and being interested in purchasing real estate, 'cause it can't just be one person…to get to that tipping point, you need some sort of turnkey element, and I think in the Bywater, it was this sort of, like, understanding that there was lots of artists and musicians and, like, sexy, cool things happening here. I think other times it can be really beautiful architecture, like if it was on an old port, with beautiful old warehouses, you know, like Red Hook [in Brooklyn] I think of…whatever that catalyst can be can be many different things. I just think that in the Bywater, for some reason, it was…well, we have both, the beautiful architecture, the history of the neighborhood and this artist thing, which is maybe why it made it happen so fast.

Melissa in Bywater explained that, while she does not see all that much blight in her neighborhood, she does see a clear relationship between blight and gentrification, saying,

Well, there's not a whole lot of blight, because most of the vacant buildings that fell into what I would call the blight were along Chartres Street and they've kind of like taken over those, made 'em into lofts and that kinda thing. Like that big old building that was over there, that's over there by NOCCA, they turned that into apartments. They made it very high-end…and the artist apartments that were over here on Dauphine [Bywater Art

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Lofts I & II], that used to be the sewing factory…but there's never been no huge amount of blight…not around here. Now, on the other side of St. Claude, tons of it, but on this side of St. Claude, not since I've been here…because this is where the re-gentrification started and is concentrated, on this of St. Claude, so I guess I was part of the gentrification, too, and it just started pickin' up speed as the…because when you say the Bywater neighborhood, most people think of from St. Claude to the river, the Bywater neighborhood goes from Florida to the river, but the people on that side, they don't count. Not yet, anyway. Wait til the gentrification, and it's already here and it's already started…yeah, I would say that there's a connection, because where ever there is blight, there is going to be one of the gentrifiers who sees an opportunity and I don't mean that in a negative sense, because it's good to walk into an area, see the beauty in something that nobody else has seen beauty in and take it and make it beautiful and livable and workable and improve the environment, clean up the environment around it. I like that. So, yes there is a connection between blight and gentrification. If it were to beautify, take this blighted building, bring it back to life, bring the neighborhood back to life and keep what's there, don't destroy and kick out what's there, because, just because you've rectified this does not mean that you have to get rid of everything that's in there, 'cause there's some things that don't need to be changed. They can be a part of the picture.

Lisa's response to the images shown in our interview referenced how the aesthetics of the street reflect the demographic changes in post-Katrina New Orleans. She explained,

I think it's just people expressing themselves. It's just expression…I just feel like it's just forms of expression. There are people who didn't want to put it on Facebook, so they put it on here. 'Cause that's what it feels like, it's just the same people from Facebook, you know, expressing they self, they just find a way to do it…It just seems like people are stepping away from the on paper only way to express themselves through art and through poetry and through just sayings or just things that have on their mind. It's just stepping away from that and they're using things, everything as a canvas. They're using anything they can find. That's what all of it, it's just starting to look like the city is becoming a canvas…This is, we turned into an artist's city, really. Seriously. Because people have turned the city, everything they could find, into graffiti.

Conclusion

In his research of gentrification in Vancouver, British Columbia, David Ley argues that, "the redemptive eye of the artist could turn junk into art. The calculating eye of others would turn art into commodity, a practice as true of the inner-city property market as of the art work" (Ley, 2003, p. 2542). To varying degrees in Bywater and St. Roch, short- and long-term residents, along with private and public capital investors, view blight as an entry point for the gentrification process. In both St. Roch and Bywater, residents across racial lines and length of time in

residence practice and embody "an ideology that regards revitalization as a socially responsible act that will help a place recover from blight and return to its true nature" (Brown-Saracino, 2009, p.68). While the real estate industry and governmental entities are actively capitalizing on the aesthetic appeal of graffiti and street art for a new class of residents and tourists, homeowners in both neighborhoods remain convinced that these 'urban inscriptions' will lower their property value and the appeal of their neighborhood for future home buyers.

In post-Katrina Bywater and St. Roch, much like similar neighborhoods in cities around the world, "art has emerged as an important element in the urban economy, a tool through which to build and expand the image and representation of place using a neoliberal urban agenda" (Mathews, 2010, p.673). However, most residents in these neighborhoods are not reading the art in and on their streets as a puzzle piece in a neoliberal agenda to brand a place that may soon not include them or their neighbors. These varied interpretations of graffiti and street art, an external aesthetic marker for capital in-migration, further complicate how residents can ward off gentrification and prevent residential displacement. Graffiti and street art may not hold the answers, but they are certainly clues in the ongoing scavenger hunt of gentrification.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

The streetscapes of Bywater and St. Roch are talking. St. Claude Avenue is being branded as an avant-garde artistic haven (Constance, 2013). Property values in both neighborhoods are rising. Tourists are venturing out of the French Quarter and into the frontier spaces of Bywater and St. Roch and certain graffiti and street art are marking this new territory. State-sponsored and private developments are following this trail of breadcrumbs left by pioneering gentrifiers, tourists and creative class newcomers. In turn, this capital begets more capital, such as the $375,000 ArtPlace "creative placemaking" grant to St. Claude Main Street and the multi-million dollar, riverfront Crescent Park.

Graffiti and street art visually indicate points of investment and gentrification, and are often created by gentrifiers in both Bywater and St. Roch. Nearly all of the residents in both Bywater and St. Roch explicitly see not only a difference in these art forms, but in the artists behind them. The aesthetics of the street, much like the contemporary forms of gentrification, are both produced and consumed, largely to the advantage of those actors and stakeholders who already hold cultural and economic power and privilege. A criminalization of graffiti and valorization of street art are symptoms of a larger construct in the neoliberal modeling of the creative city. Street art and graffiti, simultaneously functioning as authentically urban, hip and problematic, have marked the spaces of these neighborhoods for the benefit of some, but not all. Much like the racial and class succession of gentrification, I argue that there is a racialized aesthetic succession from graffiti to street art.

For working-class residents along this corridor and living in these neighborhoods, it is critical to understand the mechanics of gentrification in present day New Orleans. The aesthetic dimension at play in the current gentrification of Bywater and St. Roch is no longer just an

attraction to historic architecture. Layered atop this attraction now is a search for urban authenticity embodied in blight, graffiti and street. Comprehending how these visual aspects of Bywater and St. Roch's streets are branded and commodified as part of the tourist economy and gentrification can assist residents in their fight to mitigate this process.

Along no discernible racial lines, residents are holding on to ideas of graffiti and street art as aspects of devalorization and criminalization, despite the potential economic benefits of these markers in relation to public and private capital. The discursive narrative, and thus perceived reality, has in part shifted. However, the state has been successful in its attempt to maintain urban renewal through a determination of blight as decay. Multiple residents acknowledged wanting to see blighted property put back into use, rather than simply demolished. This municipal-led demolition tactic then allows the city of New Orleans to sell off land to the highest bidder. Predominantly and historically, this process has and continues to occur predominantly in neighborhoods of color (Weber, 2002).

Every interview participant discussed a conflict when the markings were viewed on private property, regardless of an appreciation, dislike or indifference towards graffiti or street art, keeping with the historical construction of graffiti as criminal activity. Additionally, many interview participants' racialized graffiti in relation to street art. While rarely explicit, comments such as associating graffiti (as opposed to street art) with residents who are no longer there; associating graffiti with the originators of the art form in New York and Philadelphia (which were primarily writers of color); and statements about what neighborhoods one typically finds graffiti in denoted an awareness of race is rendered visible and visible in the aesthetics of the street.

Residents in both Bywater and St. Roch remarked upon the tourists in their area and the public and private investment in certain amenities, such as the Healing Center, St. Roch Market and the riverfront Crescent Park, all of which serve dual functions as sites for tourist and economic development. Residents also related street art (as opposed to graffiti) to gentrification and the explicit construction of post-Katrina New Orleans as a global, neoliberal, creative city. The neoliberal approach to post-Katrina rebuilding in New Orleans is further seen through the widespread demolition of public housing and transformation into mixed income developments, guided by a trickle-down economic ideology; the charterization of the city's public schools; and the promotion of a cultural economy – largely in the form of social and creative entrepreneurship. The privatization and disinvestment of social services and public amenities for all sectors of society have eliminated a safeguarding of affordability. Interview participants also expressed the neoliberal myth of gentrification as an inevitable phase in urban development. Some interview subjects even alluded directly to this myth and the process of gentrification being rooted in capitalism. However, most residents in Bywater and St. Roch expressed that gentrification was largely the result of individual actors – home improvements, small businesses like coffee shops and art galleries, and by extension certain graffiti writers or street artists.

Racism is inherently mixed into this neoliberal recipe and the ensuing gentrification of Bywater and St. Roch. The spatial construction of U.S. cities in 20th century urban history, based on racist ideology, created disinvested urban centers prime for capitalist reinvestment and a white re-migration to the inner city (see Jackson, 1985; Hirsch, 1998; Patillo, 2007). Much like Lees, Slater & Wyly argument that contemporary gentrification is a form of neocolonialism based on racial and class hierarchies, residents in Bywater and St. Roch viewed the aesthetics of the street as markers of a certain type of new or lost resident. While most white residents linked

gentrification in their neighborhood to class and black residents linked it to race, both white and black residents in Bywater and St. Roch expressed levels of racial and class complexity in defining who these new residents are.

The aesthetics of Bywater and St. Roch say different things to different people. However, the reactions, while at times divergent, all suggest that the Bywater and St. Roch streetscapes indicate points along the path of gentrification. Every interview participant expressed some level of relationship between graffiti and/or street art and gentrification. This relationship was defined as the visibility of artists – a certain type of artist, at that – in either neighborhood, as well as a marker for public and/or private re-investment. A long-term resident like Laura sees graffiti on one piece of property and feels compelled to cover it up, thereby sparking neighbors on that block to clean up their property. In one way, this series of actions can amplify the gentrification process. Someone else, like Lucy or Mark, views graffiti or street art in a neighborhood and feels compelled to make their home there, also amplifying gentrification. This visual code references the fact that there are artists here, that there is hipness here, that this is an authentically urban neighborhood. A real estate developer, such as Sean Cummings, sees the discursive responses to graffiti and street art and responds by celebrating and preserving these markings in a residential property intended for upper-class residents. Through this thesis, I argue that graffiti and street art signify a culture and aestheticization of gentrification.

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APPENDIX A: Demographic Breakdowns of the Bywater, St. Roch, Marigny and St. Claude neighborhoods and Orleans Parish

Table 1.1: Bywater Neighborhood, 2000 versus 2010			
Category	2000	2010	% change
Total population	5,096	3,337	- 34.5%
Total households	2,263	1,763	- 22.1%
Black/African American	61.0%	33.1%	- 27.9%
White	32.4%	56.1%	+ 23.7%
Total housing units	2,725	2,498	- 8.3%
Occupied housing units	83.0%	70.6%	- 12.4%
Vacant housing units	17.0%	29.4%	+ 12.4%
Total occupied housing units	2,263	1,763	- 22.1%
Owner occupied	38.1%	42.4%	+ 4.3%
Renter occupied	61.9%	57.6%	- 4.3%
Owned w/mortgage or loan	72.6%	63.7%	- 8.9%
Owned free & clear	27.4%	36.3%	+ 8.9%
Average contract rent (in 2010 dollars)	N/A	$729* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $188)	
Average gross rent (in 2010 dollars)	N/A	$906* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $236)	
Average household income (in 2010 dollars)	$35,652	$43,504 *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $10,005)	+ 18%
People living in poverty	38.6%	24.4%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 9.8%)	- 14%
People living at or above poverty	61.4%	75.6%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 8.6%)	+ 14.2%
Bachelor's degree	12.1%	22.6%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 12.5%)	+ 10.5%

Table 1.2: St. Roch: 2000 versus 2010			
Category	2000	2010	% change
Total population	11,975	6,632	- 44.6%
Total households	4,336	2,604	- 39.9%
Black/African American	91.5%	86.8%	- 4.7%
White	3.9%	7.0%	+ 3.1%
Total housing units	5,200	4,178	- 19.7%
Occupied housing units	83.4%	62.3%	- 21.1%
Vacant housing units	16.6%	37.7%	+ 21.1%
Total occupied housing units	4,336	2,604	- 39.9%
Owner occupied	42.2%	45.0%	+ 2.8%
Renter occupied	57.8%	55.0%	- 2.8%
Owned w/mortgage or loan	69.0%	43.9%	- 25.1%
Owned free & clear	31.0%	56.1%	+ 25.1%
Average contract rent (in 2010 dollars)	N/A	$588* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $201)	
Average gross rent (in 2010 dollars)	N/A	$760* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $251)	
Average household income (in 2010 dollars)	$37,006	$27,400* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $5,042)	- 26.0%
People living in poverty	37.1%	33.9%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 10.6%)	- 3.2%
People living at or above poverty	62.9%	66.1%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 7.7%)	+ 3.2%
Bachelor's degree	6.2%	5.5%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 16.4%)	- 0.7%

Table 1.3: Marigny: 2000 versus 2010			
Category	2000	2010	% change
Total population	3,145	2,973	- 5.5%
Total households	1,960	1,881	- 4.0%
Black/African American	17.7%	12.7%	- 5.0%
White	72.7%	75.5%	+ 2.8%
Total housing units	2,349	2,359	+ 0.4%
Occupied housing units	83.4%	79.7%	- 3.7%
Vacant housing units	16.6%	20.3%	+ 3.7%
Total occupied housing units	1,960	1,881	- 4.0%
Owner occupied	32.9%	36.3%	+ 3.4%
Renter occupied	67.1%	63.7%	- 3.4%
Owned w/mortgage or loan	70.0%	65.5%	- 4.5%
Owned free & clear	30.0%	34.5%	+ 4.5%
Average contract rent (in 2010 dollars)	N/A	$737* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $188)	
Average gross rent (in 2010 dollars)	N/A	$883* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $225)	
Average household income (in 2010 dollars)	$46,799	$68,421* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $18,149)	+ 31.6%
People living in poverty	24.1%	9.4%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 3.6%)	- 14.7%
People living at or above poverty	75.9%	90.6%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 6.2%)	+ 14.7%
Bachelor's degree	18.8%	27.5%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 8.4%)	+ 8.7%

Table 1.4: St. Claude: 2000 versus 2010			
Category	2000	2010	% change
Total population	11,721	6,820	- 41.8%
Total households	4,114	2,713	- 34.1%
Black/African American	90.5%	81.1%	- 9.4%
White	6.9%	14.0%	+ 7.1%
Total housing units	4,894	4,446	- 9.2%
Occupied housing units	84.1%	61.0%	- 23.1%
Vacant housing units	15.9%	39.0%	+ 23.1%
Total occupied housing units	4,114	2,713	- 34.1%
Owner occupied	44.9%	48.9%	+ 4%
Renter occupied	55.1%	51.1%	- 4%
Owned w/mortgage or loan	61.8%	49.3%	- 12.5%
Owned free & clear	38.2%	50.7%	+ 12.5%
Average contract rent (in 2010 dollars)	N/A	$729* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $227)	
Average gross rent (in 2010 dollars)	N/A	$953 *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $287)	
Average household income (in 2010 dollars)	$38,997	$28,149* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $4,968)	- 27.8%
People living in poverty	39.0%	46.7%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 10.6%)	+ 7.7%
People living at or above poverty	61.0%	53.3%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 4.4%)	- 7.7%
Bachelor's degree	7.2%	7.5%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 18.2%)	+ 0.3%

Table 1.5: Orleans Parish/City of New Orleans: 2000 versus 2010

Category	2000	2010	% change
Total population	484,674	343,829	- 29.1%
Total households	188,251	142,158	- 32.4%
Black/African American	66.6%	59.6%	- 7%
White	26.6%	30.5%	+ 3.9%
Total housing units	215,091	189,896	- 13.3%
Occupied housing units	87.5%	74.9%	- 12.6%
Vacant housing units	12.5%	25.1%	+ 12.6%
Total occupied housing units	188,251	142,158	- 32.4%
Owner occupied	46.5%	47.8%	+ 1.3%
Renter occupied	53.5%	52.2%	- 1.3%
Owned w/mortgage or loan	67.0%	60.8%	- 6.2%
Owned free & clear	33.0%	39.2%	+ 6.2%
Average contract rent (in 2010 dollars)	N/A	$781* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $34)	
Average gross rent (in 2010 dollars)	N/A	$963* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $41)	
Average household income (in 2010 dollars)	$56,497	$59,952* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- $1,700)	+ 6.1%
People living in poverty	27.9%	24.4%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 1%)	- 3.5%
People living at or above poverty	72.1%	75.6%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 1%)	+ 3.5%
Bachelor's degree	13.9%	17.2%* *2006-2010 (MOE +/- 0.6%)	+ 3.3%

APPENDIX B: Letter of Consent for Adults

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Renia Ehrenfeucht in the Department of urban planning and studies at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a research study to understand how residents in the Bywater and St. Roch neighborhoods view neighborhood change since the Hurricane Katrina disaster.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve an interview lasting approximately 30-60 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is to have an in-depth understanding of how long- and short-term residents in both St. Roch and Bywater view, experience and participate in changing neighborhoods.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call or text me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

Tara Foster

By signing below you are giving consent to participate in the above study.

_____   _____

Signature   Printed NameDate

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon at the University of New Orleans (504) 280-6501.

1. Hi, can you tell me your full name?

2. What neighborhood do you live in?

3. Tell me about your neighborhood. What defines the neighborhood to you?

> i. What do you like? What don't you like?

> ii. What do you see when you walk around your neighborhood?

4. How long have you lived there?

5. (If pre-Katrina resident) How has the neighborhood changed since the storm?

    (If post-Katrina resident) What made you move to the neighborhood?

6. What do you think of when you hear the term "blight?"

> i. What do you associate with blight?

> ii. Do you see any blight in your neighborhood? Do you see any graffiti?

>> a. (If yes) Where do see blight? Graffiti?

7. What do you think of when you hear the term "gentrification?"

8. What do you associate with gentrification?

> i. What does gentrification look like to you?

9. Do you think your neighborhood is being gentrified?

> i. If yes, what makes you think that?

10. What do you think of when you hear the term "graffiti?"

11. (Show a few photographs of graffiti and street art) What do these photographs display to you?

12. Do you see any difference between this photo (graffiti tag) and this photo (street art example)? How do you explain the difference?

> i. Do you like one more than the other? Why/why not?

>> 1. In what ways?

13. What do these photos make you think of in terms of your neighborhood?

14. Do you see any connection between graffiti and the changes in your neighborhood?

> i. Can you explain the connection?
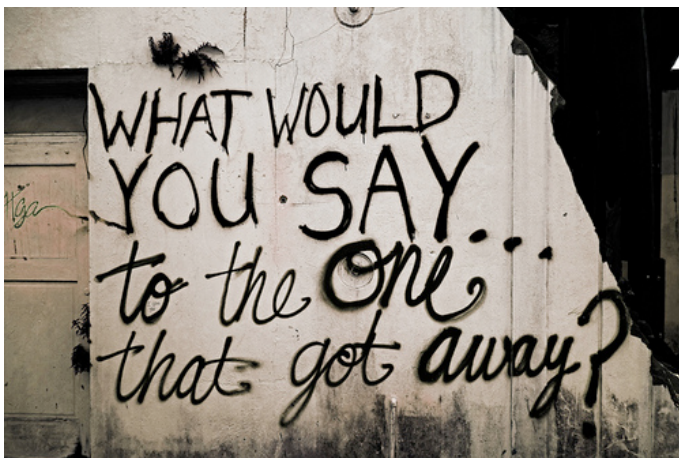
IMAGE #1: St. Claude Avenue, Bywater, 2010

Source: http://nolafemmes.com/2011/06/10/swoon-at-noma/

IMAGE #2: Press Street, Bywater, 2013

Source: http://www.noladefender.com/content/ga45y-p67ay-speaks

IMAGE #3: Dauphine Street, Bywater, 2012

Photograph taken by author

IMAGE #4: Royal Street, Bywater, 2012

Source: http://www.thecausemopolitan.com/exploring-the-bywater-in-new-orleans/

IMAGE #5: Chartres Street at Piety Street, Bywater, 2011

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/51252573@N00/5659091069/

IMAGE #6: St. Claude Avenue, Bywater, 2009

Source: http://www.themorningnews.org/article/signposts-in-a-strange-land

IMAGE #7: Burgundy Street, Bywater, 2013

Source: http://bgpiperphoto.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/315-i-got-eggos.jpg

IMAGE #8: Burgundy Street at Piety Street, Bywater, 2013

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/nolaphotos/8365545192/

Vita

Tara Foster has spent the past ten years working in both the non-profit, public and private sectors. Tara has worked with a variety of organizations on program design and implementation; strategic communications and brand marketing; and organizational development, including Prospect.2, Neighborhoods Partnership Network, Gris Gris Lab, SEIU Local 21 LA, DailyServing, the Arts Council of New Orleans, and Junebug Productions, among others.

Tara holds a M.A. in arts administration from the University of New Orleans. She was the first graduate of the university to have pursued master's degrees in arts administration and urban studies concurrently. Her academic program was self-designed and rooted in the intersectionality of urban design, community-based and public art, and urban policy. Tara received a B.A. in art history from the University of Vermont, with a minor in studio art focused on photography and printmaking.