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Twice Displaced: Katrina and the Redevelopment of the Magnolia

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Twice Displaced: Katrina and the Redevelopment of the Magnolia

A Thesis

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Abstract

Where and how to house the urban poor remains a controversial issue. Public housing residents are particularly vulnerable. Issues of race, class and gender intersect in their lives. Public-private partnerships in urban redevelopment projects and a focus on issues that arise from concentrated poverty gave rise to HOPE VI policy aimed at deconcentrating poverty via public housing demolition and redevelopment. In New Orleans, the effects of Hurricane Katrina further complicate this contested process. The purpose of this case study is to understand how residents experienced and framed the process of displacement brought on by disaster and the redevelopment of the Magnolia projects, comparing those who returned to the revitalized project to those who did not. The data I collected are 4 semi-structured interviews and one focus group with residents, 56 newspaper articles, 25 YouTube videos, and 60 photos. Doing so uncovered nuanced resident narratives often left out of public housing redevelopment decisions.

Keywords: C.J. Peete, demolition, displacement, New Orleans, projects, public housing, redevelopment
**Introduction**

The question of where and how to house the poor in urban areas has historically been divisive and controversial. This debate is bound by issues of race, class, and gender. In fact, race and class are strong indicators of where public housing projects were built in the United States. The median income and percentage of African Americans present in a neighborhood in 1950 are reliable predictors of a public housing project being built in that neighborhood (Goetz 2000). Therefore, while the urban issue of housing the poor is obviously one of socioeconomic status, it is also about race. Studies have also shown the obstacles to securing affordable housing that low-income women of color are faced with. From the initial campaigns of slum clearance to make way for public housing to our present reimagination of public housing in the United States, the displacement involved in these processes is a central issue. The poor in urban areas already face the various effects of social inequalities, such as difficulty securing housing, and also find their communities and housing under the threat of demolition and displacement.

In addition to the social inequality that low-income people of color in the city face, there are a number of social problems that directly affect this population. Violent crime as a social problem of the poor is a major political talking point. Other issues are joblessness, single-parent households, lack of social mobility, healthcare disparities, financial hardships (e.g. less likely to get a loan/higher interest), and housing issues. Beginning in the 20th century, American cities experienced an industrial boom in the north, attracting black migrants from the south in search of better opportunities and an escape from racism. Racial tensions in the north came to a head as the black population climbed, exposing deeply ingrained racial prejudice and prompting white flight from neighborhoods where any blacks were present. As poverty concentrated in urban neighborhoods, several federal policy initiatives were advanced to house the poor that involved building large complexes that inevitably deteriorated, socially and physically, as a result of state neglect and disinvestment. The two main policies that initiated the construction of public housing were the Housing Acts of 1937 and 1949. These first public housing projects were built on slum clearance (Vale 2013). Though the Housing Act of 1937 promised to help the worst off of the poor, it did not. In *Purging the Poorest*, Vale argues that the first projects were selective, leaving the poorest on the margins. It was mainly upwardly mobile working poor who were admitted to
the first projects. Public housing was seen as transitional housing to get working families on their feet.

Then, in the 1960s, legislation was passed to ease up on this de facto distinction of “deserving” and “undeserving” poor. This resulted in disinvestment and state neglect. The projects then became symbols of concentrated poverty and the problems that accompany it. Public housing was no longer a stepping-stone to a better life. It became more permanent housing for the poor, and shifts in the economy soon followed that further disadvantaged low-income black families in urban areas. For example, many manufacturing jobs moved overseas.

The public housing policy paradigm shifted in the past two decades and is now concerned with deconcentrating poverty. A growing concern with the concentration of poverty in urban areas was the catalyst to this shift. In this policy paradigm, traditional high-rise public housing developments are demolished. Then they are redeveloped into mixed-income housing, with a loss of affordable units. Those who do not or cannot return are given housing vouchers to secure housing in other neighborhoods, or live in scattered-site developments. These policies, HOPE VI and the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8), focus on the effects of concentrated poverty rather than its structural causes. The result is a spatial solution to a structural issue. These policies fail to take residents’ constructions of place into account and what place, including their social networks, mean to them. Furthermore, Vale points out several parallels between this new paradigm and the original public housing, neither of which housed the absolute poorest. This new era of affordable housing only takes the traditional high-rise public housing project model into account in its solution to concentrated poverty. However, several other historical and structural factors contributed to the concentration of poverty in cities.

From the outset of this new housing policy paradigm, community members, activists, housing advocates, policy makers, private developers, and planners debated the merits of poverty deconcentration by demolition. According to empirical studies that address this question, results are mixed. It appears people feel safer in these new developments—is crime on the move? People have more aesthetically-pleasing dwellings that are not in a state of disrepair. However, this process physically and socially displaces residents of the former projects. This process disrupts social networks that are essential to their well-being. When these projects are torn down, constructed place and history are also demolished. These new developments also have the
potential to raise surrounding property values, which opens areas up to gentrification. This can cause more displacement.

Some studies evaluate former public housing residents’ satisfaction with their new living situations in either mixed-income housing or section 8 voucher housing, their perceptions of their new neighborhoods, and the overall costs and benefits of displacement and relocation (McCormick, Joseph, and Chaskin, 2012; Barrett, 2013; Brooks et al., 2012; Goetz, 2013; Lucio & Barrett, 2010). As far as benefits go, the results are mixed. For example, there is no effect on employment and employment opportunities.

Other literature focuses on the constructions of place and space, home, and community/social networks of low-income public housing residents (Tester & Wingfield, 2013; Owens, 2012; Graves, 2008). There is also literature on public housing residents’ political struggles and resistance against public housing redevelopment, especially in New Orleans, and the intersections of race, poverty, and public housing in the context of Katrina and recovery (Luft, 2007; Long, 2007; Green et al., 2013; Arena, 2012).

There has also been extensive research delineating the historical processes that created the current situation in public housing policy, such as the history of public housing policy, racism, the legacy of slavery, economic restructuring, demonization of the poor, and the influence of neoliberal ideology on policy and development (Finger, 2011; Graham, 2012; Vale & Freemark, 2012; Vale, 2013; Goetz, 2013).

Not much has been published on ways to develop without displacing low-income people of color from their social networks. And, while many times the residents are invited to talks that planners hold about impending redevelopment of their neighborhoods, their suggestions and dissent are rarely put into practice. Likewise, there are a lack of published studies on community-led redevelopment of distressed urban areas or how planners might go about facilitating this.

There have been several cycles of urban decline and redevelopment, from slum clearance, urban renewal, urban revitalization, and the current era of new urbanism. Each of these cycles inflicted multiple injustices on low-income people of color, the biggest being loss of place and social networks, and not much improvement in their lives. Policy keeps shifting, but poverty, joblessness, and lack of means to escape poverty and the conditions that come with it continue. Low-income communities of color in urban areas are still subject to rampant violence, racial profiling by police, and overall poor and inequitable conditions. Policy so far is ineffective—it
continues to address the undesirable effects of inequality when they spill over into mainstream life, instead of addressing systematic inequalities. If policy makers, activists/advocates, planners, academics, and the communities themselves want better conditions for the poor, the way we do policy must be questioned and reformed accordingly.

This study attempts to contribute to the knowledge base of urban policy so we may better understand the importance of subaltern systems of knowledge and begin to take them into account when making major planning and policy decisions in our efforts to alleviate poverty and inequality in the United States. The purpose of this case study is to understand the context that led up to the demolition and redevelopment of the former Magnolia projects/C.J. Peete development (now Harmony Oaks) in New Orleans. It also takes a look at former residents’ experiences with displacement. It places former Magnolia residents at the center of the narrative and situates these narratives within multiple layers of context—social inequalities, Hurricane Katrina, public discourse on low-income people of color in urban areas, and housing issues among low-income people of color in the United States.
Theory

Public housing is a complex, multi-faceted issue. Public housing residents are at the intersections of race and class. A large proportion of the heads of household in public housing are single women. Therefore, structural racism, classism, and gender discrimination shape their realities. They are also at the center of citywide and national debates on space, such as public housing redevelopment. Redevelopment often results in the demolition of low-income housing and the displacement of its residents. In this section, I explore race theories, urban poverty theories, and urban redevelopment situated in the larger context of how historical, economic, and political forces and structures shape the built and social landscapes of cities, especially public housing.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) aims to situate discussions of racial oppression in an intersectional framework to create a deeper understanding of racial oppression. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), it builds upon feminist theory’s ideas of the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, and the invisible forces and patterns behind patriarchy and domination (5). It is also in line with the more modern feminist tradition in its demand that discussions of race not be separated from class, gender, and sexuality, as these identities work together to create our experiences of domination and oppression. This is to say, critical race theory calls for intersectionality in racial analyses (Creswell, 2013: 32; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001: 10). It seeks to challenge the dominant discourse on race, often told from a white perspective, through presenting stories of discrimination from the perspective of people of color (Creswell, 2013: 31). Intersectionality in CRT is especially pertinent to the discussion of urban poverty and public housing. In line with this theoretical perspective, race enters the conversation about public housing and urban poverty, and class and gender are also touched on when discussing race and racism. It follows that a multi-dimensional issue like public housing necessitates a multi-dimensional analysis.

This theoretical framework seeks to explain race, racism, and power by taking “economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and feelings in the unconscious” into account (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001: 3). Some movements in the past sought to make gains in
the way of racial equality by working within the established social, political, and economic system, but critical race theory calls the system itself into question (3). This is because it has its origins in legal scholarship and activism in the early 1970s as they were responding to what they saw as the changing nature of racism after the Civil Rights Movement made significant gains. Delgado and Stefancic state that critical race theorists argue racism had taken on a subtler form, undermining these gains. For example, favorable court decisions like Brown v. the Board of Education tend to “deteriorate over time” as lower court decisions and interpretations are made that chip away at this progress (3-5). Though Brown v. the Board of Education worked toward fighting one form of racism, in the larger context it did not fully address the issue. White families upset about integration pulled their children out of the integrated schools, in effect re-segregating schools and defunding public schools where children of color went.

The basic principles of critical race theory are as follows. Racism is “ordinary” in so far as it is embedded in our social structure. Put another way, it can be expected to play a role in anything that is sociologically examined: education, interactions in neighborhoods, the spatial organization of cities, healthcare, and so on (7). Because of its “ordinariness,” it is difficult to address and eradicate (8). The next principle is that racism is not without a rationale. It serves particular purposes that benefit whites, especially those in positions of power (7). Because of its benefits to the dominant class (white elites as well as the working class, in varying degrees), there is little incentive to get rid of it. Even policy decisions that appear as concessions to racial equality may in fact be serving a hidden agenda of self-interest (8). Omi and Winant (1994) illustrate this idea, explaining the 1989 tax exempt foundation called Fairness for the 90s founded by the Republican National Committee. This foundation would provide monetary assistance to black and Latino political organizations trying to create legislative and congressional districts with majorities of blacks and Latinos. This came at a time when there was anticipation of redistricting occurring after the 1990 census. Omi and Winant assert that the Republicans did this to segregate the minority voters into their own districts, dividing white and non-white democrats to make it easier for the Republican Party to secure seats in white districts (77).

This illustrates the critical race theory principle that group- and self-interest are major facets of subtle racism. Critical race theory also rejects the essentialist notion of race, arguing that race is fluid and socially-constructed, and conceptions of race change over time to serve
specific political purposes (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 8). The last two principles that are relevant to my inquiry are that race is not declining in significance as some theorists might claim, and that poverty is racialized: “black families have, on average, about one-tenth of the assets of their white counterparts” (11-12). This means that poverty is experienced differently by race. If a white family suddenly faced financial issues, in theory they would have more assets to sell off and get by than their black counterparts. These assets act as a safety net. These structural issues matter because they have power over peoples’ life chances, like getting out of poverty. This line of thought illustrates how looking at poverty as racialized enriches discussions of poverty, and also shows how critical race theory approaches race from an intersectional standpoint.

Critical race theory takes an intersectional approach to analyzing race. It can be used to inform the methods of this study and provides a useful analytical framework for interpreting the results. Its goal of challenging dominant narratives of race by focusing on marginalized narratives is partially accomplished in this study by focusing on public housing residents’ narratives of displacement via interviews. These narratives can then be emphasized during analysis and interpretation. Critical race theory also takes a critical approach to analyzing race and racism. This means that seemingly innocuous systems, institutions, and policies (like ones that claim to work toward equality) are placed under scrutiny. The pervasiveness and “ordinariness” of racism that CRT discusses means racism likely exists in these systems, institutions, and policies. Omi and Winant’s (1994) theory of racial formation demonstrates considering race in a similarly critical fashion. Their theory can be thought of as a critical race theory that is more specific in its focus, as it focuses on the formation of racial categories.

**Racial Formation in the United States**

Omi and Winant’s (1994) theory of racial formation is in line with many principles of CRT, however, they explain race in greater detail and create a deeper understanding of race relations in the United States. They define racial formation as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” for example, the whitening of eastern and southern European immigrant groups throughout United States history (55). For Omi and Winant (1994), race has structural and cultural aspects, and although it is a contradictory construct with uncertain parameters at times, it constitutes “a dimension of human representation
rather than an illusion” (55). Much like critical race theory, race is seen as a symbol of social conflict and interest. But it has a physical aspect in that these struggles over definition refer to “different types of human bodies” (55). The theory of racial formation in the United States contributes to this discussion of public housing in that the political struggles (social conflict and interest) of race in America mirror struggles over physical and social space (public housing). Additionally, because most public housing residents are black, political struggles over race are also political struggles over controlling the spaces people of color are allowed to inhabit, like public housing.

The race theories explored reveal what urban poverty theories reveal: race and class are linked in the United States. These race theories provide a context for thinking about public housing residents and unique struggles they face as a result of systemic white supremacy. Like critical race theory, urban poverty theories discuss race but explore explanations of urban poverty in greater detail, which is a component of the conversation on public housing.

**Theories of Urban Poverty**

In the urban poverty literature, both demographically and theoretically, race is intertwined with poverty as well as policies that address it. Below, I draw on Wolf’s (2007) categorization and discussion of some of the most influential sociological theories on urban poverty, which have had major impacts on poverty policy and public housing. She organizes the literature into four distinct categories, although there are significant overlaps: social stratification, lack of access to social capital, cultural and value norms, and social policies (41). She frames all of these as coming from the increasing concern with the concentration of poverty in central cities since 1970, as the concentration of poverty and number of concentrated poverty neighborhoods rapidly increased (41-42). Social ills like overcrowding, chronic unemployment, and racial segregation proliferated in inner cities across the country, and still do today. Wolf claims the key to understanding poverty and implementing successful policy to alleviate it lies in “a multi-level understanding of how these communities became poor and how related social problems impact future generations” (42). This is accomplished by critically examining the four veins of the literature she outlines.
Social Stratification

Social stratification theories are the most widely cited category of urban poverty theories (Wolf 2007). These theories are characterized by a focus on the social isolation of the inner city poor, and attribute urban poverty to important structural economic changes in the United States. A subset of this category refers to the history and structures of racial residential segregation in America (43). Wolf maintains that theorists that fall into this category see racial residential segregation as a cause and consequence of urban poverty (45).

According to Wolf, Harrington discussed how increasing racial segregation in inner-cities is a product of “structural and cultural racism” and that it perpetuates the intergenerational transfer of poverty. It follows that the conditions in these poor, black inner-city neighborhoods are caused by social forces like structural and cultural racism. These neighborhood conditions are racial residential segregation, social disorganization, dilapidation due to disinvestment, violence, and diminished educational and employment opportunities. He claimed the black urban poor develop a sense of hopelessness and lose sight of ambitions as a consequence of living in these conditions. Because of this, he argued access to resources like education alone would be ineffective in alleviating urban poverty in the black community (44). This is because for Harrington, the sense of hopelessness and lack of aspirations the urban poor develop in these conditions must also be overcome (45). However, Wolf does not cite an instance where he delineates how to go about this.

Wolf then cites Kain who builds on this argument that racial residential segregation helps explain black inner city poverty. He argues that economic and physical restructuring of metropolitan areas following WWII (the growth of the suburbs and the movement of jobs to the suburbs) made it more difficult for inner city blacks to secure employment. He found statistical links between housing segregation and black unemployment. According to Wolf, this phenomenon was later named “spatial mismatch theory” and Kain argues it intensified poverty and social isolation in poor black neighborhoods in cities. This theory shows how racism in the form of housing segregation works with structural economic forces to create and intensify poverty (45). Holzer built off of Kain’s ideas. However, Holzer included factors that limited job opportunities for poor blacks living in central cities and found that transportation, racism, and time were factors preventing them from accessing suburban jobs (Wolf 2007: 45).
According to Wolf’s review, Wilson is the first in this set of theorists to discuss behaviors and norms of the black urban poor. He examined the effects that concentrated poverty had on these communities, while agreeing with the above theorists that structural and economic factors are the main causes of concentrated poverty. He saw the social isolation that concentrated poverty creates as fostering what he called an “urban underclass” characterized by pervasive criminal activity, drugs and violence, and single parenthood. He argues that these represent the norms and values of this “underclass” but maintains that the origins of these issues and behaviors are rooted in social isolation, not a “culture of poverty.” He builds on the spatial mismatch theory, recognizing that economic restructuring disproportionately affected urban blacks and also noted the exodus of working and middle class blacks from inner cities between the 1970s and 80s. This worsened the social isolation experienced in these neighborhoods, slashing community resources and support, leading to deterioration of schools and churches. Last, he argued that economic and structural factors were most important in explaining urban poverty in the black community, rather than the racism of residential segregation (Wolf 2007: 46).

A subset of the social stratification poverty theorists focused more heavily on racial segregation’s influence on urban poverty in the black community. Wolf cites Massey, Gross, and Shibuya as arguing racial segregation was more important than class segregation to explain the concentration of poverty in urban black neighborhoods. Race, for urban blacks, is a good predictor of what kind of neighborhood they will live in. They found that blacks of any status were much more likely to live in a poor black neighborhood than a white non-poor neighborhood. They do focus on economic and structural factors as well in explaining poverty, but unlike Wilson, they do not refer to the behaviors or norms of the poor (48).

Wolf claims that Gould differs from the rest in that he places importance on current “structural and cultural racism” as major threats to black socioeconomic mobility. He explains that mainstream institutions are governed by mainstream cultural values that can at times be at odds with those of blacks living in concentrated poverty. He argues the social isolation that concentrated poverty creates contributes to a lack of exposure to mainstream norms, leading to exclusion from important institutions and opportunities (48).

Social stratification theories focus on structural explanations of urban poverty. They are useful for examining the origins of concentrated urban poverty in black communities, which public housing is a part of. They help explain why poverty became concentrated in inner cities
and how racial residential segregation is intrinsically tied to this phenomenon. They also explain how racial residential segregation and other structural factors perpetuate poverty. Theories that explore access to social capital in poor neighborhoods add to this conversation at the neighborhood level.

**Lack of Access to Social Capital**

This set of theories focus on black families and communities living in concentrated poverty and the intergenerational transfer of poverty via lack of access to resources, social capital, and strong social networks in these communities. Wolf cites Loury as theorizing that family poverty is a barrier to social mobility because of a lack of access to education and other resources. He refuted the idea of the American “meritocracy,” finding that success was handed down from generation to generation via family wealth and access to important resources like education and employment opportunities (49).

Coleman builds on this in more detail by discussing social capital and human capital. He argued that capital is not about access to education and wealth, but refers to the social structure of families and neighborhoods. He defined social capital as “the strength and trust of interpersonal relationships within families and neighborhoods.” To him, education and wealth are elements of human capital. These ideas can be connected back to Wilson’s ideas about social isolation in that the more black families are isolated in poor areas with less access to jobs and educational opportunities, and where crime and violence proliferate, the less social and human capital there will be to draw upon as resources (49).

Finally, Rankin and Quane also discussed lack of access to social capital and added lack of access to “high-status individuals” to their analysis of social isolation of blacks living in high-poverty areas. They found that even in high-poverty areas, there was still a lot of social interaction, meaning social capital theories do not fully explain poverty. However, they found that individually, exposure to “high status individuals” could result in better chances of social mobility (50).

Wolf ties all the theories together in a chart, shown below (see table 1). She explains that racism is the origin and bottom line of this model of urban poverty. Residential segregation and limited job opportunities stem from racism in this model—the segregation contributed to the lack
of job opportunities in inner city neighborhoods, but racism in itself also contributed to the lack of job opportunities. The lack of jobs drove the working and middle class black families out of the inner city and contributed to the social isolation the poor there experience. This also led to decreases in human and social capital, and social isolation itself also limits access to important social networks (53). The isolation from these networks in turn changed values and norms over time in these neighborhoods as responses to deteriorating conditions, and in turn these values and norms can contribute to the perpetuation of poverty in these areas (53-54).

Figure 1: Wolf (2007)

Urban poverty theories help explain the roots and effects of concentrated urban poverty. However, it is also useful to examine urban renewal theory as it helps explain housing, policy, and redevelopment in the context of low-income urban communities of color.

**Urban Renewal**

Zipp (2013) explains, “understanding the full history of urban renewal requires showing how it was shaped both as policy and idea.” He links urban renewal to slum clearance and the building of modern housing. He argues that planning, profit, and reform idealism created a “‘modernist ethic of city rebuilding’” in which getting rid of blight and restoring property values are main goals (366).
The ideas that eventually shaped urban renewal and gave rise to public housing start with slum clearance in 19th century New York City during the industrial era. In this period, New York City was notorious for its overcrowded tenement houses. As the city grew rapidly during this time, its upper classes became concerned with the behavior of the poor. Their reactions to perceived urban ills were based on the idea that poverty was caused by “character defects and moral failings”—much later on this idea would gain ground ideologically as the “culture of poverty” theory (368). The fear of the so-called urban ills of impoverished areas spilling over into mainstream society prompted early housing reform. Early housing reform had little to do with a concern for the poor themselves. Dominant groups in the city believed that the tenement house “incubated immorality and vice,” threatened family structure, and spread disease. In the end, housing reform was largely unsuccessful and conditions in the slums worsened as population density in New York City grew. Eventually, reformers decided tearing the slums down would be more successful than improving social services and housing stock, but it wouldn’t be until the 1920s that this process proliferated (369).

By the 1920s it was clear that the private market could not provide housing for everyone and that the government would have to intervene in the form of public housing construction (370). Eventually, slums were cleared just because they were slums and the land was often relegated to “higher uses” of private development. The poor were to be located on the fringes of downtown areas in public housing. Zipp argues the 1920s era of slum clearance was more about land grabs for profit than housing the poor, and a “’discourse of blight’” was used to strengthen this policy. Fear that any signs of blight would prompt the deterioration of entire neighborhoods was used to justify the mass displacements this kind of development caused (371). Developers and planners had to abide by “the racial boundaries established by the city’s informal version of Jim Crow,” resulting in displacement and racial segregation and thereby contributing to racial inequality (372).

Urban renewal is traced back to the Housing Act of 1949. In this policy move, city officials and professional urban planners supported downtown business interests in using public money to fund private investment. In an effort to bring white, middle class consumers and residents back downtown, business interests took over the rebuilding movement and cleared slums to place the poor in public housing (Zipp 2013: 366). Federal policy during the Cold War “weakened public housing” and ensured that urban renewal would be a policy that resulted in the
displacement of people of color and an increase in racial segregation (366-367). Contrary to its goals of restoring downtown affluence, urban renewal resulted in the disinvestment of inner cities while the suburbs experienced a boom (367).

Zipp’s explanation of slum clearance and urban renewal directly relates back to social stratification theories of poverty. To reiterate, these theories discuss racial segregation and structural factors that produce and perpetuate inner city poverty in communities of color. Zipp moves the analysis forward by demonstrating how not just policy, but ideas, influence processes that change the urban landscapes and affect social structures.

Public housing residents, predominantly black, nominally poor, and increasingly characterized by female heads of household, are particularly marginalized. This is where critical race theory proves useful. It calls systems of power into question, addresses social justice and inequality, and elevates traditionally silenced voices. In examining public housing, policy, and redevelopment, the exclusion of the poor becomes apparent. Through the multiple failed eras of subsidized housing (including the current one), the poor are still not included in the planning process and bear the brunt of policy decisions and planning that they often have little say in. This process seems to be guided by principles rooted in tradition rather than what works in each community. This is why exploring critical race theory, racial formation, theories of urban poverty, and theories of urban renewal is important to this project. In order to understand the situation of those in need of subsidized housing, these elements of their lives need to be understood.
Review of the Literature

Looking at public housing changes in New Orleans involves understanding race, urban poverty, housing policy and the role of Hurricane Katrina in catalyzing public housing redevelopment in New Orleans. In this section, I review the literature on urban poverty, covering connections between poverty and race, the concept of concentrated urban poverty and its characteristics and geographical movement. Then I discuss literature on public housing policy and redevelopment, discussing a few critical analyses of housing policy, ideas behind mixed-income housing, and studies on mixed-income housing redevelopments. Finally, I review public housing redevelopment in the context of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and cover topics such as demographic shifts and other consequences of disaster and public housing redevelopment.

Urban Poverty: Background

Urban Poverty & Race

In the theory section, I discussed connections between poverty and race, especially black experiences of poverty in the United States. I also discussed the concept of concentrated urban poverty. Here, I go into more detail with history and statistics as well as analyses to provide context for the urban poverty literature I discuss. Around 1945, there was greater spatial class integration among blacks. (Wilson 1996: 124). In 1959, less than one third of the poor in the United States lived in central cities. By 1991, this figure rose to 50%. Black neighborhoods were disproportionately affected by this increase (121). To illustrate this racial divide more completely, Curley (2005) reports that between 1970 and 1980, the percentage of poor blacks living in areas where poverty was concentrated rose 164%, versus 24% for poor whites (97).¹

Many scholars refer to economic restructuring in the United States when explaining the origins of concentrated urban poverty (Goetz 2000; Massey & Denton 1993; Wilson 1996; Wolf 2007). The most referred to phenomenon is the shift of the United States economy from industrial and manufacture to a financial services and tech-oriented economy. The demand for

¹ There are a few disputes in the literature, but the general consensus about what defines a neighborhood or census tract as having concentrated poverty is 40% or more of the population living below the poverty line (Goetz 2000: 159).
unskilled labor decreased, as many operations either moved to the suburbs or out of the country to cut costs. As a result, concentrated poverty in central cities rapidly increased (Massey & Denton 1993: 44-45). As growth moved to suburban and non-metropolitan areas, inner cities became economically obsolete—at the same time, the poor in the inner cities did not have the means to leave in search of better opportunity. This is known as the “spatial mismatch hypothesis” (Goetz 2000: 158). The black urban poor were essentially trapped in areas where there were no legitimate employment opportunities.

Concentration of Poverty

This phenomenon of the black urban poor becoming increasingly trapped in the inner cities of America partially due to economic restructuring fueled the concentration of poverty literature. This literature is part of the “neighborhood effects” urban poverty theory category. It examines urban poverty at the neighborhood level. As the concentration of poverty grew in cities, especially in black communities, literature focused on its effects. According to Wilson (1996), concentrated poverty results in social, economic, and spatial isolation of the urban poor (122). In the absence of working and socioeconomically mobile “role models” in these neighborhoods, residents turn to a set of “pathological” behaviors which then reproduce themselves in absence of said role-models (Goetz 2000: 158). The non-poor, especially whites, and middle-class blacks, fled from the mixed-income areas adjacent to black, high-poverty neighborhoods. This contributed to the concentration of poverty and further promoted suburbanization and racial residential segregation. These changes left post-industrial central cities socially and economically devastated, in a state of public and private disinvestment thus perpetuating the social problems associated with central city poverty (Wilson 1996: 122). Wilson refers to this as the “‘new urban poverty’”—spatially concentrated, segregated poor black neighborhoods with a majority of the residents unemployed or not participating in the labor force (123).

Wilson argues that joblessness is one of the most important contributors to the character and issues of poor neighborhoods. High rates of joblessness “trigger” the social problems that are known to affect these areas—violence, crime, gang activity, the breaking apart of families, and limited educational opportunities. He also states that as unemployment rises in these areas,
“social organization” decreases, further perpetuating these issues: “As informal controls weaken, the social processes that regulate behavior change” (124). Wilson further illustrates the importance of joblessness in thinking about concentrated urban poverty. At the time of the crack epidemic (1985-1992), the rate of male-perpetrated homicide rose sharply (contributing to moral panic about urban poverty), tripling among black males 14-17 years old. But when employment was controlled for, there were no significant differences between black and white male homicide rates (124-125). Violence is another factor that decreases the social organization of a neighborhood and is also a symptom of this disorganization.

Wilson defines “social organization” as “the extent to which the residents of a neighborhood are able to maintain effective social control and realize common goals” (124). There are three major dimensions of “social organization.” The first is the nature of social networks in the neighborhood. How prevalent, strong and interdependent they are determines the level of social organization. Examples of informal networks are neighborhood friends, acquaintances, co-workers, and family ties. Next, related to social networks, is a kind of community vigilance in the form of “collective supervision.” The extent that residents exercise this and how much they feel it is their personal responsibility to address neighborhood issues contributes to the social organization of a neighborhood. The third dimension of social organization is organizational involvement of residents in both formal and voluntary settings. Examples of formal institutions are churches and political party organizations. Examples of voluntary organizations are block clubs and parent-teacher organizations (124).

Though the literature on concentrated poverty remains a popular influence on social research and policy, it is not without problems. Crump (2002), in his analysis of poverty theories, argues that the way concentrated poverty is operationalized (census tract or neighborhood with 40% or more living below the poverty line) is problematic. This is because any tract that fits this description can then qualify as an “urban ghetto,” ignoring the racial and historical processes that created true urban ghettos and ignoring racial composition and historical roots of the tract. This in turn leads to a false belief that areas of concentrated poverty are created by the presence of the poor, leading to the demonization and displacement of the poor via public housing demolition. Furthermore, literature that problematizes the concentration of poverty claims the poor are isolated, they do not interact with the rest of society. While the poor in these areas are less mobile, they do venture beyond their tracts. To illustrate this, Crump points to a study of
residents of the Cabrini-Green projects in Chicago in 1999, which shows they are familiar with the geography of Chicago and often venture out from the neighborhood (584).

Discussing the relationships between urban poverty and race, and the conceptual background of the concentration of urban poverty provide a framework for understanding empirical studies on urban poverty. Empirical studies focused on concentrated urban poverty highlight patterns and illustrate how poverty in urban areas changes over time and what it looks like. This enriches the discussion of public housing, since traditional public housing represents concentrated urban poverty. However, public housing can also be seen as both a consequence and proposed solution to concentrated poverty. Below, I discuss various studies conducted on urban poverty, starting with literature that focuses on the neighborhood level. Then I discuss some quantitative studies on the movement and magnitude of poverty in United States metropolitan areas before moving on to the section about housing policy aimed at the urban poor.

**Literature on Urban Poverty**

**Concentrated Poverty at the Neighborhood Level**

Yvette Alex-Assensoh (1995) explored the concentration of poverty literature’s assertions about social isolation and diminished social capital. Instead of questioning the merits of this research, she worked within its confines by operationalizing social organization and isolation in much the same way as the existing literature. She tested whether the neighborhood effects of concentrated poverty are in fact race-based, or are the same for blacks and whites living in racially-segregated, concentrated poverty. She analyzed survey and census data on a high-poverty black neighborhood and compared it to data on a high-poverty white neighborhood (6). She argued that if it is indeed structural conditions creating the plight of the urban poor, then they should affect black and white urban poor alike (16). However, she ignores the effects the history of racism has on urban blacks, which creates experiences of oppression unique to African-Americans (10). Her findings refute Mead and Murray’s suggestions that welfare dependency is somehow attributable to poor blacks. She finds that there is no statistical difference between poor black and white dependence on welfare (10).

She also found high levels of social isolation in both racial groups, but that whites experienced more isolation than blacks because whites in her sample were less involved in
community organizations and political activities (14-15). However, this does not change the fact that concentrated poverty in urban areas is experienced by a far higher proportion of people of color than it is for whites. In addition to being a very specialized case of concentrated white urban poverty, these results on social isolation also warrant an examination of both the operationalization of social isolation and to what magnitude other aspects of poverty affect experiences of poverty. Moving beyond the neighborhood level analysis of concentrated urban poverty and examining it at a more macro level to track the movement of high-poverty neighborhoods is another way to examine it. It can show trends at the national level and give a general overview of changes in concentrated poverty over time, between places, or both.

Geography of Concentrated Poverty

The next strand of concentrated urban poverty literature discusses the movement of poverty tracts both within and between metropolitan areas and the growth and decline of high poverty tracts in regions of the United States. Cooke and Marchant (2006) define high poverty tracts as census tracts in which 30% or more of the population is living in poverty (1977). Since public housing is located in poverty tracts, this is relevant to the discussion of public housing. Cooke and Marchant (2006) highlight the fact that poverty concentration in urban areas is both a cause and consequence of social and economic issues (1971). They assert that previous research on poverty in metropolitan areas assumed that high poverty neighborhoods were located in the central city. However, recent research shows that the location of high poverty neighborhoods has been shifting to inner-ring suburbs in the past 30 years (1971). The issue with the poor moving to inner-ring suburbs is that they have outdated infrastructure, housing, school systems, fragmented government, declining income and rely heavily on property taxes. Because the inner-ring suburbs used to be well-off, policy in the past ignored the inner-ring and focused on the inner city and outer-ring, exacerbating the situation (Cooke & Marchant 2006: 1973).

Cooke and Marchant used census data with refined definitions of inner city, inner-ring, and outer-ring suburbs to more accurately measure changes in the amount of high poverty tracts in each from 1990 to 2000 (1977-1978). They did not find an overall increase in poverty tracts in United States metropolitan areas in this time frame. Instead they found increases in poverty tracts by region. Los Angeles, the California Central Valley, some Sunbelt metro areas, and old
industrial cities in the North East experienced these increases (1981). A rise in poverty tracts in the urban cores of old industrial cities in the North East was associated with economic stagnation and fragmentation in political jurisdictions. The rise in poverty tracts in suburbs of Los Angeles, the California central valley, and Sunbelt metro areas was tied to rapid population growth and immigration. They note these increases were mostly in the inner-ring suburbs. They found no evidence of concentrated poverty tracts increasing in inner-ring suburbs (1981-1983).

This analysis highlights the regional variance of the movement and changes in the amount of high poverty tracts in metropolitan areas based on social and economic factors. This means that how concentrated poverty presents in different regions and cities varies. In the case of state-sponsored housing for the poor, this means different regions and cities may have different needs. Some policies may work better or worse in different places. What Cooke and Marchant do not discuss, however, is race in relation to changes in the locations of poverty tracts.

Timberlake and Howell (2013) add race to examining the movement of high poverty tracts in United States metropolitan areas, from 1980-2010. This research examines the various factors influencing poor blacks, Latinos, whites, and Asians move to move to the suburbs. They tested the strength of relationships between movement of the poor of different racial and ethnic to the suburbs and various factors. These factors were: housing supply, affordability, and employment demand in the suburbs (84-85). Poor non-Latino whites and Asians have high rates of suburbanization in metropolitan areas with higher suburban unemployment rates. Higher suburbanization rates among poor blacks and Latinos are associated with the availability of affordable suburban housing (79).

In the context of public housing redevelopment, mixed-income developments can decrease (and have in New Orleans) the affordable housing stock in the city. In turn, this has the potential to push the urban poor to the suburbs. This can be a problem because the poor in suburban areas have more difficulties accessing social services than they do in inner cities. For example, Timberlake and Howell state: “In many suburbs the low-income health care infrastructure is underdeveloped and the spatial location of service providers requires significant travel, both of which can be a burden on the poor” (Timberlake & Howell 2013: 94). Finally, they also point out that the affluent are moving to central cities, which may re-concentrate poverty in the suburbs instead if trends continue in the direction they are moving. This brings to mind the displacement that comes along with HOPE VI redevelopment of public housing
projects. Since not every resident gets to come back, there is a possibility that the concentrated poverty HOPE VI hoped to eradicate will repeat itself elsewhere.

The discussion of urban poverty includes concepts of race and its relation to poverty and the idea of concentrated poverty. There are several different facets of concentrated poverty: its history and origins, its general characteristics at the neighborhood level, what perpetuates it, and how it moves within and between metropolitan areas at the macro level. Race is also intrinsically tied to this concept because it has been shown that people of color disproportionately experience concentrated poverty in urban areas. The suburbanization of poverty is another major facet of this discussion. Both concentrated poverty and the suburbanization of poverty can be related to federal housing policies directed at the poor. Many of these policies came about as responses to conditions created by concentrated poverty, and public housing demolition could be tied to the suburbanization of poverty in that it displaces many residents.

**Background: Housing Policy Targeting the Urban Poor**

The current era of housing policy aimed at the poor is linked to the literature on the concentration of poverty, which focuses on behaviors of the poor and spatial explanations and solutions to social issues. The idea that the main problem with poverty is the spatial concentration of it directly drove public housing policies like HOPE VI and Section 8. The implication here is that the concentration of poverty leads to social isolation, which drives and perpetuates the “urban ills” like violence and diminished life chances of the poor. In this section, housing policy aimed at the poor is discussed, with a special focus on mixed-income housing development outcomes and the underlying assumptions of income-mixing as a solution to the problem constructed by concentrated poverty scholars.

**Critical Analyses of Housing Policy History**

Marcuse (1986) argues that academic analyses of government policy too often work from the unquestioned assumption of a “benevolent state”—“that its policies represent an effort to find solutions to recognized social problems, and that government efforts fall short of complete success because of lack of knowledge, countervailing selfish interests, incompetence, or lack of courage” (248). Further, he argues the term “housing policy” perpetuates the myth that the
government is responding to the social problems of housing when it passes regulations or slates redevelopment (249). Whether referring to the ventilation and sanitation regulation of New York’s 1867 Tenement House Act or the 1937 public housing act, public policy is more about safely containing the poor than housing them equitably in the hopes that they will rise out of poverty (Marcuse, 1986: 249, 254). If housing policy aimed at the poor is meant to improve their lives, then it should become more efficient over time. However, this has not been the case. Instead, there have been several eras of demolition and redevelopment, and each time the social issues of the poor are reproduced and the poor are displaced (254). Marcuse finds that these revitalization projects are more about the government priming the land for private development—strengthening devalorized downtown areas by removing blight to turn a profit for private developers (255).

Goetz (2012) provides a more contemporary public housing policy analysis. He finds that from 1985-2011, 260,000 units of public housing were demolished by local public housing authorities. Some were replaced by mixed-income developments, thousands were converted to tenant-based subsidy units, and some were not rebuilt into housing for the poor at all (452). By the 1980s, expansion of public housing had virtually stopped, with few new projects started (452-453). Goetz notes that although the 1980s “were a period of innovation in affordable housing policy, with the rapid expansion of community-based nonprofit organizations,” public housing began to experience neglect and was in competition with other programs for HUD funds each year (453). The old buildings continued to age and suffer from “declining social conditions in and around many developments” (453). Social issues worsened, especially when crack cocaine hit the streets in 1985. Many public housing authorities dealt with these problems through demolition, but section 18 of the Housing Act of 1937 required housing authorities to provide evidence that demolition was absolutely necessary (453). One for one replacement of demolished units was required by a 1969 amendment to the Housing Act of 1937, and in order to get around it, housing authorities had to provide extensive documentation (452). Public housing authorities found ways to get around these laws intended to mitigate demolition. One way of doing this was allowing projects to deteriorate through neglect and the refusal to rent out vacant units. Some authorities even went as far as “refusing to spend HUD-allocated funds for modernization and improvement” (453). According to Goetz, this gave rise to higher vacancy rates and vandalism,
allowing further decline of the projects. This helped public housing authorities get demolitions approved (453).

Thus, public housing demolition became common practice in the 1980s. Partial demolitions in which some units were demolished and others kept up and running constituted most of these demolitions (Goetz 2012: 453). The one-for-one replacement regulations were lax. Housing authorities were allotted up to six years to replace units, but this was not consistently enforced. By the end of the 1980s, the amount of deterioration in and around the still standing projects contributed to a growing concern that public housing and inner-city neighborhoods “were home to a marginalized underclass that constituted a threat to the cities in which they were embedded” and that these neighborhoods were “cancers that threatened the viability of entire districts within central cities” (454).

This gave way to Congress establishing the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing in 1989. It was intended to study these “severely distressed” public housing projects and make recommendations to alleviate these issues by 2000 (Goetz 2012: 454). The Commission’s report, which came out in 1992, led up to the HOPE VI program. The Commission estimated about 6%, or 86,000 units fit their criteria for being designated “severely distressed.” In the report, the Commission stressed the importance of keeping most of the projects intact and not letting demolitions detract from building more; the distressed projects were seen as constituting only a small percentage of the public housing stock. Nowhere do they recommend dismantling public housing (454-455). The Commission even went as far as condemning the “de facto demolitions” (letting projects deteriorate to get around strict demolition laws): ‘noting the “serious effect on residents’ psyche’ of the deterioration in living conditions induced by the practice” (455). Overall, the Commission argued for the preservation of public housing and the rehabilitation and modernization of it rather than demolition (455).

The HOPE VI program did not adhere to the Commission’s original vision. Goetz attributes this to policy shifts, political shifts, a new urban planning paradigm, and economic shifts. In this time period, “urban poverty became increasingly framed as an issue of concentrated poverty” (Goetz 2012: 456). This resulted in two housing policy ideals: mixed-income housing and mobility. Mixed-income housing was meant to break up concentrated poverty by redeveloping projects in such a way that residents from mixed socioeconomic backgrounds lived in these new developments. Mobility was in the form of Section 8 vouchers,
giving voucher users their “choice” in neighborhood, thereby also deconcentrating poverty, in theory. The Commission’s designated of a small amount of public housing projects as “severely distressed,” and recommended preservation of most public housing, renovation, and expansion (454-456). However, HOPE VI resulted in fewer “project based, permanently affordable units” available for the poor in need of housing (452) This in part comes from a series of political shifts in the 1990s that threatened the existence of HUD and an economic boom in many central cities, giving way to public-private partnerships and renewing private investment in inner city neighborhoods (452). This ultimately resulted in the displacement of many public housing residents.

Darcy (2010) further states the discursive strategy of deconcentration politics centered around mixed-income housing. He argues that policy directed at the deconcentration of poverty may seem like its goal is alleviating poverty, but is actually part of a neoliberal agenda to turn a profit. Furthermore, he argues that housing reform fails to address the connections between housing and social disadvantage (1).

Assumptions about Mixed-Income Housing

In her assessment of a mixed-income development, Graves (2011) refutes many of the theoretical underpinnings of income mixing. The major underlying belief that income-mixing will help the poor comes from the concentration of poverty literature. It specifically stems from the concept of the social isolation of the poor. The idea is that poverty is perpetuated by social isolation because generations of the poor grow up without non-poor, working, educated role-models. So the assumption is that if the poor interact with or simply live among higher-income households, they will somehow escape poverty merely as a result of class integration. Another facet of this ideology is the supposed lack of role models who exhibit normative behaviors and are upwardly mobile in concentrated poverty areas. However, there is little evidence regarding adult-to-adult higher-income role models having such an effect; there is some evidence of successful high-income adult-to-low-income child role modeling (144). She also makes the point that role modeling cannot address macrostructural issues of poverty.

Another presumption of income mixing is that the presence of higher income households will bring better institutions and services to a previously distressed neighborhood. Graves found
little evidence that higher income households in these areas are “exert[ing] political pressure for the provision of shared resources” (144). Another argument for income mixing is that people with more resources are more successful in promoting social control in these communities. Evidence is inconclusive, pointing to the fact that management practices have the greatest impact on social control (rules and regulations of the property) (144). The last assumption she explores is the idea that people will interact across class boundaries in mixed-income developments, leading to diverse social networks that will give lower-income residents access to resources beyond their traditional networks. She found that there was little cross-class interaction (144).

**Literature: Public Housing Redevelopment**

**Mixed-Income Housing: Outcomes**

The development of mixed income housing assumed that middle class individuals and families would enrich the lives of former public housing residents. In mixed-income developments, there is a mixture of market rate units to be owned or rented, affordable units, and public housing units. In the studies below, mixed-income developments face problems attracting middle-class families; class antagonisms between residents in mixed-income developments arise; interaction between classes at these developments is uncommon; the pros and cons of this kind of redevelopment are explored; the concept of displacement is explored; and how displaced and returning residents of mixed-income developments fare is explored. Varady, Raffel, and Sweeney (2005) found that none of the sites they examined specifically marketed to middle class families. However, one in Louisville ended up being the most successful in attracting them because of an integrated effort of the school district, housing authority, and city government. The element of education is added because studies have shown income mixing in education helps lower-income children do better in school (149-150). They also found that most of the sites were mainly concerned with housing the poor and creating self-sufficient families; attracting middle-income families was not the main priority (155). They examined a Cincinnati development that attracted childless singles and couples to the market rate units while low-income families with children lived in the subsidized units. This was due, in part, to the concern for safety in the neighborhood, making it unlikely middle-income families with children would want to move
there. There were no efforts to facilitate interaction between the class groups in the Cincinnati development (159).

In the Louisville development, the most successful one, class antagonisms between renters and homeowners remained. Although crime was virtually eliminated from the area, class integration was not successful due to conflicts during neighborhood group meetings—homeowners tended to monopolize the conversation with their complaints about their home construction, pushing larger neighborhood issues of low-income renters to the side (159).

In the Baltimore project most low-income people were pushed out because moderately low-income families bought up the market rate homes (incomes below $40,000). This left little room for cross class interaction (159). In all, there was little to no class interaction at these mixed-income developments.

Tach (2009) explores the goal of facilitating interaction among classes in mixed-income developments. She found that higher-income newcomers in fact avoid forming social ties with the low-income, long-time residents of a redeveloped project (285-287). In addition, she found that the lower-income former public housing residents were more involved in forming neighborhood-based social ties, providing and receiving social support, and enforcing social control than the new, higher-income residents (269). Another study by Chaskin and Joseph (2011) also reports low to moderate levels of cross-class interaction at two mixed-income developments (217). In a 2013 study, they found many tensions and competing expectations over the use of space and appropriate normative behavior between low-income residents and higher-income residents (480). While the lower-income residents feel it is safer than before, crime is a major concern of the higher-income residents. Most complaints come from homeowners and market-rate renters about the public behavior of the lower-income residents and their children: youth fighting in the park, presence in public space like parking lots, streets, doorways, swearing, drinking in the park, and so on (490-491).

This leads into literature on the stigma public housing residents face at these new mixed-income developments, whether they previously lived at the site before redevelopment or not. McCormick, Joseph, and Chaskin (2012) find that while stigma of public housing residents related to physical living conditions is alleviated, other stigmas intensified in several ways. Not only are the returning residents singled out by the Housing Authority’s exclusionary screening and rule enforcement, they are differentially treated based on housing status by their neighbors as
well (285, 295). In order to qualify to come back, they must be compliant in their current lease, pass a drug test, a criminal background check, a credit check, and employment verification (295). This leads to the exclusion of public housing residents or other low-income people who are not public housing residents from these new developments. Joseph’s (2008) study on residents’ initial experiences upon moving into a new mixed-income development in Chicago finds high satisfaction levels with the housing across income levels. Despite this, there were limited social relations across income levels. He attributes this to the physical design of the development, stigma and assumptions about class and housing status, and segregated associational structures (229).

The next subset of literature on mixed-income developments explores the how relocated public housing residents perceive their new homes and environments. Goetz (2013) finds that perceptions and attitudes toward relocation are complex and that they change over time according to economic, social, and housing dimensions (248). He also finds that the benefits of mixed-income housing are mixed and inconsistent for displaced families. He finds that resident perceptions of relocation are strongly connected to their view of neighborhood restructuring, whether or not they directly benefitted from it (235). Though their sense of safety is higher, previous health problems show no improvement.

Brooks, Lewinson, Aszman, and Wolk (2012) compare former public housing residents who returned to a new mixed-income development to those who kept their section 8 vouchers and decided not to return. They found that residents who returned were highly satisfied with their housing, had fewer material hardships, and had a positive perception of their economic well-being when compared to those who kept their vouchers (10). Some of this could be due to the fact that the sample was not necessarily representative of most public housing residents—they were mostly older, without children (15). When focus groups were conducted, however, there were complaints about the new facilities. Voucher users were at an extreme disadvantage, reporting utility bills three times as expensive as their mixed-income counterparts (15). The authors admit the limited generalizability of this study (16). Lucio and Barrett (2010) also conducted a study on satisfaction in mixed-income developments. They found that perceptions about the quality of the new neighborhood have to do with residents’ sense of satisfaction and “collective efficacy.” Though there was some satisfaction with the housing, residents felt place was very important—they missed being downtown and felt cut off/isolated in the new
development. Amenities of central city locations like entertainment, police stations, and transportation were lacking at the new development (403, 420).

Brazley and Gilderbloom (2007) report similar results in resident satisfaction. About 80% of the public and non-public housing residents they surveyed in a mixed-income development were satisfied with the housing, location, safety, and recreation programs in the neighborhood but they were not satisfied with the lack of shopping and access to entertainment. It is important to note that less than 5% of those living at this development are relocated public housing residents (437-438). Further, they find that the development does not appear to improve the residents’ quality of life (438).

Economic self-sufficiency is one facet of the quality of life of residents in these developments. Van Ryzin, Ronda, and Muzzio (2001) find that the presence of children, work experience, and car ownership are the most significant variables related to family economic self-sufficiency in a distressed public housing community (57). Barrett (2013) conducted another study related to economic self-sufficiency, this time focusing on African-American women’s work attitudes, aspirations, and workforce participation. She finds that public housing residents are no different in their attitudes toward work from non-poor Americans, but when they move to higher-income neighborhoods, they imagine themselves in more satisfying careers (135). There was no evidence of neighborhood income levels having an effect on employment or education (151).

Displacement and loss of place are major consequences of public housing demolition and redevelopment. The last subset of literature on mixed-income developments I explore examines former residents’ perceptions and experiences of loss of place when a project is demolished and redeveloped. Sullivan and Lietz (2008) interviewed adolescents living in a mixed-income development that replaced the project where they grew up. They found the teens perceived the new housing positively, but also exhibited attachment to place and a deep sense of loss (133, 141). Because only sixty of the four-hundred families returned, there was a loss of people, of friends, that was difficult for the teens (142). They also were aware of income differences between themselves and market rate tenants, referring to them as “rich” and perceived the market rate tenants as judging them (143). However, the findings were not generalizable as the sample was very small (152). Keller (2011) also explored loss among relocated public housing residents,
this time among immigrant refugees. She also found that the residents felt a profound sense of loss, sadness, and nostalgia for their old home (150).

Examining housing policy shows what factors led to public housing in the first place, and later on, the widespread demolition and redevelopment of public housing into mixed-income developments. Reviewing the empirical studies on conditions in these new mixed-income developments and the effects of redevelopment provides context for studying such a development. The next section focuses specifically on how these policies affected public housing and redevelopment in New Orleans.

**Setting: Public Housing Redevelopment & Disaster in New Orleans**

Public housing redevelopment in New Orleans presents a unique situation because of the role Hurricane Katrina played in influencing it. Nearly a year after the storm, in June 2006, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced its plan to demolish the “Big Four” public housing projects in New Orleans: St. Bernard, C.J. Peete (Magnolia), B.W. Cooper, and Lafitte. After demolition, these sites would be redeveloped into mixed-income housing, opening them up to market rate renters and buyers and setting aside a few affordable and public housing units (Graham, 2012: 466). The “Big Four” was comprised of over 5,000 public housing households. In 2011 after redevelopment had taken place, the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) reported 2,192 public housing units were occupied, and about half (1,512) of the pre-Katrina “Big Four” households had returned to New Orleans. About 7% of the original families of the “Big Four” (238 households) had returned to the redeveloped sites. (Finger, 2011: 327-328).

These data mark both a loss of affordable homes in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, as well as a loss of black residents. Finger (2011) reports that in addition to the overall 29% population drop in New Orleans from 2000-2010, the neighborhoods that contained public housing complexes were among the neighborhoods that lost the most residents.

The storm also altered the racial and gender make-up of New Orleans. The black population dropped from 67% to 60%, while the white population increased from 28% to 33% (328). Pre-storm, the majority of public housing residents were black women and their families. 77% of public housing households were headed by black women. The overall decrease from of
women and girls in New Orleans from 2000 to 2010 was from 54% to 52.1%, but the black women and girls’ population decreased sharply, from 47.2% to 37.3%. Finger argues that returning home was difficult for black women and girls in need of affordable housing because of gender discrimination and other gender inequities, and argues that this may account for the overall decrease in poverty among women and girls in New Orleans (329).

HUD’s plans to demolish and redevelop the “Big Four” were met with resistance from public housing residents as well as from community development corporations and other activist groups and non-profit organizations. In December 2007 when the New Orleans City Council voted on HUD’s proposal, protestors and police clashed outside and inside of City Hall. Following HUD’s initial announcement, a coalition of legal advocates filed a lawsuit against HUD and HANO on behalf of the public housing residents. There was also a push for federal legislation to require evidence-based redevelopment plans and the promise of one-for-one replacement of demolished units. However, the tenant plaintiffs lost the lawsuit and the federal legislation was stalled (Graham, 2012: 466). Both Graham and Finger state that this shows how public-private partnerships were at the core of HOPE VI redevelopment of post-disaster public housing in New Orleans, and that the state abandoned its responsibility to house low-income communities to the private sector (2012: 467; 2012: 330). To illustrate the profit motive of this redevelopment, Finger points out that the St. Bernard projects could have been repaired for 41 million dollars and modernized for 130 million dollars, while demolition and rebuilding a mixed-income development at the site cost 197 million dollars. She argues the more expensive project was taken on because it would open the housing market at the site to more profit and prime the area for more investment (332).

According to Finger, a major outcome of the closure, demolition, and redevelopment of the “Big Four” is increased reliance of former public housing residents on the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8). When HANO opened its section 8 waiting list in 2009, about one in five New Orleanians (30,000) applied for housing vouchers, and over 17,000 vouchers have been distributed. Like public housing residents, the majority of voucher subsidized units in New Orleans are headed by black women. And with the surge in voucher users, habitability and quality control have been major issues with subsidized units, as the demolition of affordable housing units exacerbated issues (332). Another issue with the voucher program is that although recipients are technically supposed to be able to use them anywhere, there is evidence of
discrimination against voucher users. Finger states that 82% of landlords either refuse to accept vouchers or add requirements that are impossible for voucher users to fulfill.

Both Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent public housing demolition and redevelopment highlighted racial, class, and gender inequalities in New Orleans. Many residents of the Big 4 were organized and vocal in their opposition of HUD’s and HANO’s plans for public housing in New Orleans. The results of this redevelopment are loss of place, displacement, a stressed Section 8 voucher system, and an overall loss in affordable housing in New Orleans.

Gaps in the Literature

The housing of the poor is a complex issue with multiple actors and institutions involved. Preoccupation with the concentration of poverty in both theory and research has generated a distinct way of thinking about and providing services for the urban poor. While there are many social problems connected to the concentration of poverty, policy focused on eliminating it can be problematic and detrimental to the lowest-income families seeking affordable housing. An example of the influence of the concentration of poverty literature is the HOPE VI program, which is responsible for the widespread demolition and redevelopment of traditional public housing complexes across the nation into mixed-income developments.

There does not appear to be much research on what happens to those who either drop out of the subsidized housing system or cannot come back to mixed-income developments because of unemployment or the presence of a felon in their household. More research needs to be done on the most severely poor who have not been able to return after the public housing they were living in was demolished, because they are especially vulnerable.

Because there is not much research on those who do not come back to mixed-income developments, I wanted to explore and compare experiences of those who return and those who do not return. This study sought to shed light on residents’ experiences of redevelopment and displacement. It also set out to detect differences in the hardships they faced, because in the literature those able to return to the mixed-income developments fared better. As such, my research questions are: What were Magnolia residents’ experiences with temporary and permanent displacement, and the ultimate decision to demolish and redevelop?
Research Design

Case Study Design

This study uses a case study design to explore experiences with displacement and the context of redevelopment at the Magnolia projects. Yin (2009) states that a case study examines a “contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (18). In addition, this design deals with inquiries where there are more variables than data points. As a result, it involves the triangulation of multiple forms of data. Because of this, it may be necessary to develop “theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (18). It can be used to explore a phenomenon or issue by using a case as an example of it. There is some scholarly debate about whether it is a methodology, a “choice of what is to be studied,” or a research strategy (Creswell, 2013: 97). Creswell views it as a methodology. For the purposes of this project, that definition will be assumed.

Major characteristics of this design are that it explores a “bounded system” or systems (cases) by collecting a variety of data types like interviews, observations, archival documents, and audiovisual data to garner an in-depth understanding of the case or cases (97). The data are then compiled and analyzed to write a case description, which includes case themes. This methodology has its origins in anthropology and sociology.

The case study methodology is appropriate for this research because it allows an in-depth look at an issue—housing the poor, the displacement of subsidized housing residents upon revitalization projects—within its larger context, which could provide best practice insights and an overall better understanding of the effects of displacement on vulnerable populations. Because it allows for such a wide variety of data forms, it enables participants to speak for themselves. Connections between their experiences of the issue and the issue’s context can then be made.
Qualitative Research

A qualitative inquiry is appropriate for this research project since it deals with everyday lived experiences in the context of redevelopment and displacement among subsidized housing residents. Qualitative research is conducted in a “natural setting”: data are collected about and within the specific spaces that participants occupy, and data collection is characterized by direct interaction with participants and the space they occupy. Rather than a survey instrument, the qualitative researcher is an instrument. They are the one collecting data and interacting with participants and the setting. Qualitative research involves collecting a wide variety of data; including interviews, observations, archival documents, and audiovisual data. The nature of data analysis in qualitative research is both inductive (at the beginning) and deductive (at the end). Specific data are condensed into interrelated, general themes. These themes are then used to look back on the data to gather more pertinent information and evidence. This research emphasizes gleaning the meaning that participants give to their experiences of whatever issue or subject matter is being studied. As for the design of qualitative research projects, while it is outlined in detail before conducting research, it evolves throughout data collection; it is an “emergent design.” The researcher also participates in this process by questioning their role, how their identity and personal history shapes the project. Finally, a general goal and characteristic of a completed project is that it provides a “holistic account” of the research problem by employing multiple data sources and perspectives within the data (Creswell, 2014).

Methods

Interviews

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) write, “the qualitative research interview is “to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (1). Its purpose is to produce knowledge. Through this interaction between researcher and subject, “every day knowing and systematically tested knowledge” is produced via “conversations of daily life” and “professional conversation” (2). This is to say that though this process is scientific and systematic, it is not rigidly structured. Conversations of every day life can give off a casual notion, but they are focused conversations with structure and purpose (3). It takes a considerable amount of skill,
learned through practicing the craft of interviewing, to design and carry out interviews: “the closeness of the research interview to everyday conversation may imply certain simplicity, but this simplicity is illusory” (15). In this research, I conducted what Kvale and Brinkman call “semi-structured life world interviews”: “an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (3).

Focus Groups

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) define a focus group interview as a “group interview where a moderator seeks to focus the group discussion on specific themes of research interest” (324). Focus groups usually have six to ten subjects who are led through a “non-directive style of interviewing” by a moderator. The main point is to evoke a multitude of viewpoints on the subject for the group. The moderator attempts to facilitate the expression and exchange of these various “personal and conflicting viewpoints,” and is tasked with creating an atmosphere that encourages this interchange. According to Kvale and Brinkman, they are appropriate for exploratory studies (150). In this project, I chose a loose interpretation of the focus group, as I had the opportunity to interview two friends simultaneously. I introduced my questions like topics in a focus group and asked for their viewpoints on these topics.

Relational Content Analysis

The purpose of content analysis is to “determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts” (Busch et al 2015). “Researchers quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such words or concepts,” then speculate about the “messages within the texts.” The definition of “texts” here is broad. A text can be any instance of “communicative language,” such as newspaper articles, books, essays, speeches, and so on. To conduct a content analysis on a text, the researcher breaks it down into manageable chunks, like “word[s], ...phrase[s], sentence[s], or theme[s].” After this step, one of two content analysis methods is used: conceptual analysis or relational analysis.
I chose relational analysis to analyze newspaper articles because it “identif[ies] concepts present in a given text” and, unlike conceptual analysis, follows up by “exploring the relationship between the concepts identified.” I chose the newspaper articles used because of their content. I was not concerned with quantifying the identified concepts in the text, but understanding the meaning of the concepts in relation to one another.

**Visual Analysis**

Saldaña (2013) calls the analysis of visual data “a slippery issue for some” because there is no set way to do it (52). Visual data can be photographs, websites, videos, and so on. Saldaña suggests a holistic approach to analyzing visual data rather than a preconceived framework. This includes analytic memo writing about the visual data viewed, and analyzing those analytic memos after repeated viewings and memo writing (52). This approach, he claims, “permits detailed yet selective attention to the elements, nuances, and complexities of visual imagery, and a broader interpretation of the compositional totality of the work” (53-54). Saldaña points out that there are multiple ways to interpret visual images. No two researchers will interpret a visual image quite the same way. The researcher’s “background experiences, values system, and disciplinary expertise,” all influence the processing of visual images (54).

**Researcher’s Role**

I am connected to this subject matter through my educational focus on race, place, poverty, and social justice. Conflict theory, critical race theory, and the feminist perspective have all influenced me throughout my formal education to be wary of power structures; that they are embedded and reproduced in every institution of our every day lives, that vulnerable populations are constantly oppressed in ways that I may not readily see as a white-presenting woman with access to higher education and an upper-middle-class upbringing.

Between my value system based on a social justice principle, the above theoretical paradigms, and my privileged identities, there are a number of push-pull factors that may help balance one another out in the context of how these things may influence my interpretations of data. However, I must still be wary of my privileged position in society, both because of my education and identities. Therefore, I must continually check in with myself throughout the
research process to make sure I am not extending my interpretations beyond their reach. This can be accomplished through valuing participants’ interpretations as the center of this research. I must also be careful not to side with participants or the institutions I am examining, as I am critical of hegemonic housing policy and its proponents.

In addition to these measures, I also filed the appropriate human subjects paper work with the institutional review board at UNO. This meant drafting informed consent forms used in the process of recruiting participants in order to protect them against coercion and harm.

**Data**

This research focuses on the past and present. Therefore, the setting is both abstract and concrete. The setting spans the old Magnolia projects and the Harmony Oaks mixed-income development that took the projects’ place. For example, interviewees were asked about their childhoods and later life (if applicable) within the Magnolia projects before their demolition. Interviewees were also asked about their experiences with Hurricane Katrina, evacuation, relocation, and displacement brought about by the closure of the Magnolia projects. The focus group touched on the same topics. Newspaper articles I collected via database searches spanned from articles about public housing in New Orleans in general throughout the decades, to the Magnolia projects and its residents in particular, including musicians. The YouTube videos and photographs I collected offered yet more angles on these issues. Some videos were political in nature, decrying the city’s decision to demolish its public housing. Other videos, like the photographs, were more autobiographical in nature and depicted scenes of friends and neighbors in the area. Below, each data type is explained in greater detail.

**Interviews**

There were a total number of 5 semi-structured qualitative interviews. Three of these interviewees were living in the Magnolia projects when Hurricane Katrina hit. The other two were displaced in 1998. Participants were recruited using the snowball method. However, because of my status as an outsider to public housing, contacting and locating potential participants was difficult. I tried making connections with people with loose affiliations to this community, such as people who worked with Magnolia residents before and people who knew
employees of Urban Strategies, a non-profit that runs the Harmony Oaks community center. This did not connect me to participants. Finally, I drafted flyers explaining the study and the interview process to give to the front office of the community center at Harmony Oaks (the mixed-income development that replaced the Magnolia projects, also known as C.J. Peete) in order to recruit participants. I was able to secure two participants, a mother and her daughter that same day. The mother connected me to her friend. However, after the interview with her friend, I was unable to find another participant. So, I dropped off more flyers at the community center. Though the next participant didn’t live at Harmony Oaks, someone must have told her about the flyer, and she in turn connected me with her son, who I also interviewed. Last, a pair of friends living together, also off site, got ahold of one of my flyers and I conducted a focus group with them.

Participants had a wide range of backgrounds and experiences with disaster, displacement, and redevelopment. I did not specifically ask participants their ages, but learned their approximate ages from context. There was a wide age range in the participants, which allowed for a wide range of perspectives, timelines, and experiences. Two of them were fairly young—Janae is in her early 20s (she started high school right before Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005) and Lenny is in his early 30s (he was about 18 when Hurricane Katrina struck). Eva, Janae’s mother, is in her mid-50’s. Henry is in his 70s, Jerry is in his early 60s, and his friend of 30 years he now lives with, Marie, is 56. Nadine is in her 40s.

Focus Group

I conducted a focus group with Jerry and Marie, who were displaced in 1998. I used the same guide I used in my interviews. As we sat on their porch, I posed the questions and asked each of them to talk about the main topics of each question, following up if one had a longer answer than the other.

Newspaper Articles

In addition to the interviews and focus group, I collected and coded 56 newspaper articles spanning from Magnolia’s beginning, all the way through Harmony Oaks’ opening. I used a purposive sampling technique. To find articles spanning from 1939 when construction on the Magnolia projects began, to the mid 1990s, I searched the America’s News database provided by
the University of New Orleans’ library website. I used various search terms, such as “CJ Peete projects,” “Magnolia projects,” “Magnolia development,” and “CJ Peete development.” I supplemented these articles by searching similar terms on the Times-Picayune website to find more recent articles from the 2000s and 2010s.

**YouTube Videos**

I collected 25 YouTube videos about the Magnolia projects and the state of public housing in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. I found these videos by searching YouTube with the same search terms I used in my search for newspaper articles. Some videos were “homemade” and virtually unedited or edited in an amateur fashion. Examples are videos where a cameraman would walk around the housing complex or surrounding neighborhood, pointing out sites, talking about the neighborhood, and encountering neighborhood acquaintances and friends. Things like the names of friends in text and background music are added, but the editing is minimal. Then there are still rather “homemade” or independent videos that are edited a bit more, scene by scene. Some is merely raw footage, like a short video of a second line jazz funeral for the demolition of the Magnolia projects. Last, there are more heavily edited videos put out by advocacy groups meant to protest and raise awareness about the events that took place around public housing immediately following Hurricane Katrina. These videos had background music, panels of text explaining events, and scenes of protests in them.

**Photographs**

Within two of the videos from YouTube I collected, I found slideshows of 60 photographs of residents and the projects. They appear to be someone’s personal collection of photos from the mid 90s to the early 2000s, judging by the dates on memorial posters contained in the slideshows.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Once I completed the interviews and gathered the other forms of data, I prepared each data set for coding. To prepare the interview transcripts for analysis, I read through them and broke up the text into meaningful segments and left large margins for hand-coding. While
general coding techniques were used to code the interviews, the audiovisual data and newspaper article data required slightly different techniques. According to Saldaña (2013), coding visual data is a “slippery issue” (52). Saldaña suggests approaching visual data analysis holistically rather than following pre-existing frameworks for this. Saldaña also suggests using a “holistic, interpretive lens guided by intuitive inquiry and strategic questions” (52). In addition using short phrases and words to code audiovisual data, I also reflected on the images and videos by interweaving my transcripts of them with analytic memos as Saldaña suggests (52). This involved inferring what might be happening in the photos, what gestures might mean in the photos and videos, considering who made the videos and how this influenced the information provided, and in general tried to look beyond what was happening and being said on the surface level. Saldaña explains:

Repeated viewings and analytic memo writing about visual data documented in field notes or maintained in a repository are more appropriate approaches to qualitative inquiry because they permit detailed yet selective attention to the elements, nuances, and complexities of visual imagery, and a broader interpretation of the compositional totality of the work (53-54).

Saldaña further illustrates the complexities of analyzing audiovisual data in qualitative work. No two researchers will code audiovisual data the same way:

Each of us [researchers] brings our background experiences, values system, and disciplinary expertise to the processing of the visual, and thus our personal reactions, reflections, and refractions (54).

When coding newspaper articles, I drew connections between codes. This is a form of relational content analysis. Busch et al (1994) explain content analysis as a “tool used to determine presence of certain words or concepts with texts or sets of texts.” In order to do this, the texts are first broken down into codes and then, in my case, examined by relational analysis. Relational analysis “examin[es] relationships among concepts in a text.” In this method, meaning is a product of relationships among the concepts.

I coded the data starting with pre-determined codes from the literature and looked for emergent codes.
In accordance with the case study methodology, the data was used to provide a rich description of the context and participants. I then condensed the codes by first identifying sub-codes, clustering codes and sub-codes into meaningful groups, and formed themes. Throughout this process, I continually revisited the data to discern more information and provide more evidence for the existence and accuracy of the themes. After identifying, honing, and checking the themes, I examined them together and drew connections between them, advancing my case description. In the results section, I make use of tables and matrices to convey the meanings and interconnectivity of the themes and to show where they are in my dataset. Finally, after I discuss interpretations of and connections between themes, I conclude by drawing connections between my findings and the literature and pose additional questions generated by the research.

**Validity**

A qualitative study’s validity is determined by the accuracy of the researcher’s findings (Creswell 2014: 201). Demonstrating validity involves implementing certain procedures, like triangulation, rich descriptions, clarifying the researcher’s bias, and presenting evidence that contradicts assertions about themes (201-202). This case study uses the triangulation of multiple data sources in its design. This means “themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants,” and it increases the validity of the study (201). Rich descriptions of data in the findings section also increase the validity of a qualitative study. This validity procedure is also part of the case study method, and I use it in my findings. According to Creswell, this “rich, thick description” can “transport readers to the setting” and conveys “an element of shared experiences” (202). Rich descriptions illuminate multiple
perspectives about themes, make results “more realistic and richer,” and add to the study’s validity. This is consistent with the way I wrote my findings. Another way to add to a study’s validity is through the self-reflection of the researcher. In this procedure, the researcher examines and clarifies the bias they bring to the study. In this “open and honest narrative,” the researcher discusses how their background shapes their interpretations of the findings (202). This is addressed in my “researcher’s role” section. Finally, I present “negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes” (202). This is used in the discussion of themes, and the researcher shows evidence that challenges their “general perspective of the theme” (202). This is important because in “presenting this contradictory evidence, the account becomes more realistic and more valid.”

Reliability

Reliability in a qualitative study is about the consistency of the researcher’s approach across different researchers and projects (Creswell 2014: 201). Researchers can check for reliability by documenting “the procedures of their case studies” and documenting “as many of the steps of the procedures as possible (203). I have done so in my methods and data sections. Other procedures for ensuring reliability include checking transcripts for errors, checking for a “drift in the definition of codes or “a shift in the meaning of the codes during the process of coding,” and comparing data with codes and writing memos about the codes and their definitions. I kept a detailed list of codes and subcodes throughout the coding process, slowly grouping them together and narrowing them down with each data set I coded. Eventually, some subcodes were absorbed into main codes to ensure consistency across data sets, and I made sure to keep a list of codes not being used anymore under the code they were changed to.

Additionally, I started off with a set of deductive codes based on themes from my literature review.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>When displaced</th>
<th>Return to Harmony Oaks?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview1</td>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>yes, for a short time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview2</td>
<td>Janae, 24</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>yes, for a short time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview3</td>
<td>Henry, mid-70s</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview4</td>
<td>Lenny</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview5</td>
<td>Jerry and Marie</td>
<td>1998, 1998</td>
<td>no, no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview6</td>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>no</td>
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</tbody>
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**Table 2: YouTube Videos and Photographs**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video ID</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date Uploaded</th>
<th>Date accessed</th>
<th>User</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YTV 1</td>
<td>“Lil Wayne, Juvenile &amp; Birdman in the Magnolia Projects (Rap City August 1999) <em>RARE</em>”</td>
<td>2/11/11</td>
<td>1/31/15</td>
<td>DJCottonHere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YTV 4</td>
<td>“MAGNOLIA PROJECT”</td>
<td>11/23/07</td>
<td>2/1/15</td>
<td>Magnolia TOLEDANO</td>
<td>Music: “Magnolia” by DJ Dow Jones, DJ EF Cuttin, Soulja Slim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YTV 5</td>
<td>“MAGNOLIA BREED DOCUMENTARY”</td>
<td>5/2/08</td>
<td>2/1/15</td>
<td>Jerkaman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YTV 6</td>
<td>“Magnolia Boyz in da Hood”</td>
<td>9/1/11</td>
<td>2/1/15</td>
<td>MagnoliaBoyz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YTV 7</td>
<td>“Straight From The Projects 3rd Ward New Orleans Part 2”</td>
<td>12/26/08</td>
<td>2/1/15</td>
<td>rebelfromthesouth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YTV 8</td>
<td>“New Orleans’ Magnolia R.I.P. Gone but Not Forgotten”</td>
<td>1/7/08</td>
<td>2/3/15</td>
<td>SneakinSal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YTV 10</td>
<td>“HANO to demolish New Orleans Public Housing”</td>
<td>12/2/07</td>
<td>2/4/15</td>
<td>Edward Holub</td>
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<td>YTV 11</td>
<td>“New Orleans* City Council Shuts Down Public Housing Debate”</td>
<td>12/21/07</td>
<td>2/5/15</td>
<td>bignoisetactical</td>
<td>*[sic]</td>
</tr>
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<td>YTV 12</td>
<td>“The Battle Over New Orleans Public Housing”</td>
<td>12/18/07</td>
<td>2/5/15</td>
<td>bignoisetactical</td>
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<tr>
<td>YTV 13</td>
<td>“New Orleans Housing Projects”</td>
<td>4/17/12</td>
<td>4/7/15</td>
<td>813flawdaboy</td>
<td>Slideshow of pictures of Magnolia project buildings, used in analysis of photographs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YTV 14</td>
<td>“M-11 in the New Magnolia Project”</td>
<td>5/14/10</td>
<td>2/7/15</td>
<td>M-11 Spita</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YTV 15</td>
<td>“MAGNOLIA BYRD GANG”</td>
<td>3/11/11</td>
<td>2/8/15</td>
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<td>YTV 16</td>
<td>“QUARTERKEY IN THE MAGNOLIA AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA”</td>
<td>1/5/12</td>
<td>2/8/15</td>
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<td>YTV 17</td>
<td>“CJ Peete Project 3 08 after demolition”</td>
<td>8/23/12</td>
<td>2/7/15</td>
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<td>“RACE AND CLASS IN THE BIG EASY”</td>
<td>5/21/09</td>
<td>2/8/15</td>
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<tr>
<td>YTV 19</td>
<td>“NEW ORLEANS’ BRICKS &amp; SCATTERED SITES”</td>
<td>12/1/13</td>
<td>2/9/15</td>
<td>JLJHD504</td>
<td>Slideshow of pictures and text of Magnolia project buildings, used in analysis of photographs.</td>
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42
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<th>Source</th>
<th>Page(s)/section</th>
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<td>“Three Low-Rent Housing Projects Started in 1939”</td>
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<td>12/31/39</td>
<td>Times-Picayune</td>
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<td>NA2</td>
<td>“Van of 5000 Local Families Move Into Low-Rent Projects”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1/15/41</td>
<td>Times-Picayune</td>
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<td>NA3</td>
<td>“An Urban Cancer: Projects, Crime Synonymous with Little Chance for Change”</td>
<td>Lovell Beaulieu</td>
<td>1/8/80</td>
<td>Times-Picayune</td>
<td>1, 11, section 1</td>
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<td>NA4</td>
<td>“Rape Booklet Is Available from Coroner”</td>
<td>Lovell Beaulieu</td>
<td>5/13/80</td>
<td>Times-Picayune</td>
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<td>NA5</td>
<td>“Uptown: A Neighborhood Afraid”</td>
<td>Millie Ball</td>
<td>12/14/80</td>
<td>DIXIE</td>
<td>20, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 62, 64, 66</td>
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<td>NA6</td>
<td>“HANO puts major emphasis on preserving what it already has”</td>
<td>Lovell Beaulieu</td>
<td>1/31/82</td>
<td>Times-Picayune</td>
<td>14, section 8</td>
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<td>NA7</td>
<td>“Lawmakers to tour projects’”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>10/30/82</td>
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<td>NA8</td>
<td>“Fireman pulls baby from fire”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>8/15/84</td>
<td>Times-Picayune</td>
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<td>NA9</td>
<td>“Program helps housing project tenants”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>6/14/85</td>
<td>Times-Picayune/The States-Item</td>
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<td>NA10</td>
<td>“Lead poisoning causes kids pain, mom grief”</td>
<td>John McQuaid</td>
<td>7/7/86</td>
<td>Times-Picayune/The States-Item</td>
<td>A-1, A-8</td>
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<td>“Police on outside, crime on inside of city’s projects”</td>
<td>John McQuaid</td>
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<td>Times-Picayune</td>
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<td>“Urban Squad’s calming effect missed in projects”</td>
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<td>“Suit seeks removal of lead paint by HANO”</td>
<td>John McQuaid</td>
<td>4/1/87</td>
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<td>NA14</td>
<td>“HANO gives director vote of confidence”</td>
<td>Frank Doze, Joan Treadway</td>
<td>3/26/88</td>
<td>Times-Picayune</td>
<td>B-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA15</td>
<td>“Two tenants picked to lead HANO board”</td>
<td>Joan Treadway</td>
<td>4/15/88</td>
<td>Times-Picayune</td>
<td>B-1, B-2</td>
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<td>NA16</td>
<td>“HANO will test for lead-based paint in projects”</td>
<td>Steve Cannizarro</td>
<td>4/28/88</td>
<td>Times-Picayune</td>
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<td>NA17</td>
<td>“2 firms to install smoke alarms”</td>
<td>Joan Treadway</td>
<td>12/24/88</td>
<td>Times-Picayune</td>
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<td>NA18</td>
<td>“Project residents attack proposal to aid homeless”</td>
<td>AP</td>
<td>1/21/90</td>
<td>Sunday Advocate (Baton Rouge, La.)</td>
<td>3E</td>
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</table>

Table 3: Newspaper Articles

YTV 22 | “HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan: NO is not just coming back, it’s breaking new ground” | 10/21/13 | 2/9/15 | |
YTV 25 | “Hurricane Katrina: The fight for housing in New Orleans 2” | 12/20/06 | 2/13/15 | |
| NA19 | "HANO endorses spending plan for federal grant" | Joan Treadway | 8/29/90 | Times-Picayune | B-4 |
| NA20 | "Raps to Riches - It's another up-from-the-ghetto success story, but Cash Money is following its own path" | Keith Spera | 11/5/99 | Times-Picayune | 1.24 |
| NA21 | "Rappers haven’t bought housing complex" | staff reports | 2/26/00 | Times-Picayune | B1 |
| NA22 | "For certain, Surtain’s got it covered" | John DeShazier | 1/12/02 | Times-Picayune | 1, sports |
| NA23 | "Up from the street - As Cash Money's Bryan 'Baby' Williams makes his way from entrepreneur to artist, he remains in touch with the neighborhood and the life he left behind" | Keith Spera | 12/22/02 | Times-Picayune | 1, Living |
| NA24 | "Bouncing back - Juvenile, the homegrown rapper who helped launch the 'bounce' music movement, has spent as much time in the past two years in courtrooms as in recording studios. Now, Terius "Juvenile" Gray says he has grown up, and he's hoping a new CD and a new attitude will reverse his musical fortunes."

Bob Herbert | 1/7/04 | Times-Picayune | 1, Living |
| NA25 | "Evacuees find humiliation, not help" | Bob Herbert | 9/15/05 | Times-Picayune |
| NA26 | "Demolition approved for New Orleans' public housing" | Gwen Filosa | 9/21/07 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA27 | "Council seems ready to approve demolitions" | Gwen Filosa | 12/19/07 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA28 | "Living the dream *** Ohio State's Abdallah returns home for title game" | Joseph Schiefelbein | 12/29/07 | The Advocate (Baton Rouge, La.) |
| NA29 | "No place like Dome: Several Tigers, Buckeyes call N.O. home" | Joseph Schiefelbein | 1/7/08 | The Advocate (Baton Rouge, La.) |
| NA30 | "Ground broken for new St. Bernard housing complex" | Katy Reckdahl | 12/9/08 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA31 | "Federal audit raises serious questions about Housing Authority of New Orleans" | Katy Reckdahl | 12/15/08 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA32 | "Subcontractors sue over unpaid work in C.J. Peete demolition" | Katy Reckdahl | 2/3/09 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA33 | "Audit: Feds haven't helped HANO; Landrieu calls for officials' resignation" | Katy Reckdahl | 4/9/09 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA34 | "New designs hope to avoid past problems in public housing complexes" | Katy Reckdahl | 5/12/09 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA35 | "HANO financial chief guilty; stolen money went for mansion, fancy cars" | Katy Reckdahl | 9/23/09 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA36 | "HUD sending in turnaround team to tackle problems at HANO" | Katy Reckdahl | 10/6/09 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA37 | "Housing voucher office opens in Algiers amid criticism" | Katy Reckdahl | 10/7/09 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA38 | "HANO's new leader tried novel approach: listening" | Katy Reckdahl | 12/15/09 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA39 | "HUD issues scathing assessment of Housing Authority of New Orleans" | Katy Reckdahl | 2/18/10 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA40 | "New Orleans public housing complex gets new life as Harmony Oaks" | Katy Reckdahl | 2/24/10 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA41 | "HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan cuts ribbon at St Bernard redevelopment, tours 'Big Four'" | Katy Reckdahl | 4/12/10 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA42 | "New Orleans' Public Housing Slowly Evolving" | Pam Fessler | 8/28/10 | NPR |
| NA43 | "Iberville public housing redevelopment grant sought" | Katy Reckdahl | 9/9/10 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA44 | "Iberville public housing residents want say in redevelopment" | Katy Reckdahl | 9/24/10 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA45 | "New Orleans still lacks affordable housing for its poorest people, report says" | Katy Reckdahl | 11/24/10 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA46 | "Thousands mourning N.O. rapper - But cops won't confirm she's victim in N.O. East shooting" | Alison Fensterstock and Katie Urbaszewski | 12/21/10 | Times-Picayune A1 |
| NA47 | "HANO subsidies may be driving up rental rates in New Orleans" | Katy Reckdahl | 1/9/11 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA48 | "New Orleans was a pioneer in public housing" | Doug MacCash | 2/13/11 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA49 | "Rats expose problems in HANO Section 8 inspections" | Katy Reckdahl | 2/21/11 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA50 | "Homeless population in New Orleans rises 70 percent since Hurricane Katrina" | Katy Reckdahl | 6/2/11 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA51 | "New C.J. Peete complex is solid, shiny -- but not as social, some residents say" | Katy Reckdahl | 8/21/11 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA52 | "1941: The first public housing complexes are built in New Orleans" | n/a | 11/14/11 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA53 | "Public housing: The Times-Picayune covers 175 years of New Orleans history" | Katy Reckdahl | 1/29/12 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA54 | "3-N-G street gang members linked to 10 killings in 30-count racketeering indictment" | Ramon Antonio Vargas | 6/13/13 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA55 | "New Orleans City Council approves special economic district for Magnolia Marketplace" | Richard A. Webster | 10/10/13 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
| NA56 | "Magnolia Marketplace, 10 years in the making, opens in Central City" | Katherine Sayre | 3/13/15 | Times-Picayune/NOLA.com |
Findings

Case Description

On the last day of 1939, the Times-Picayune reported in “Three Low-Rent Housing Projects started in 1939” that “the St. Thomas and Magnolia street projects were the first projects approved by the United States housing authority in the United States.” It states, “the project in the most advanced stage of construction is the Magnolia street project, for negro tenants” (6). Then in 1941, a Times-Picayune headline reads, “Van of 5000 Local Families Move Into Low-Rent Project,” alluding to the opening of the Magnolia projects (2). The tone is positive:

One of the greatest demonstrations ever witnessed in New Orleans occurred at the Magnolia project last Sunday when several furnished display units were opened for public inspection for the first time. From before 9 a.m., although the official opening hour was 10 o’clock, the seemingly endless throng of visitors began arriving at the site, and by sundown, when the weary staff finally showed the last of the interested spectators through, it was estimated that more than 25,000 persons had been present.

Later on in the article, Colonel L. Kemper Williams, recently retired New Orleans Housing Authority head and “pioneer” in the field says about this development:

Aside from the incalculable good that will come from the razing of some of the most blighted areas of New Orleans and the construction upon such sites of decent, comfortable dwellings for thousands of families of low income, we must consider also the attendant benefits that will accrue as a natural consequence. We feel that the program of the housing authority of New Orleans will have a salutary effect upon all of the land values in the vicinity of the of the various projects. An incentive to improve and renovate will be provided. Neighborhood blight will be retarded and scant encouragement will be offered in time for the creation of new slum areas (2).

A more recent Time-Picayune article confirms the Magnolia projects’ trailblazing role in New Orleans and United States history as the first approved project built on bulldozed slums.
(MacCash 2011). MacCash reports that the Magnolia projects, along with other public housing built in the same era, were by design purposely cut off from their surrounding neighborhoods. The idea was to create “residential oases” separate from the city. He writes, “For good or ill, that half-century of architectural separation led to a sense of neighborhood identity.” In the 1950s and 1960s, the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) added 2000 apartments to various existing projects, including the Magnolia projects (Reckdahl 2012). Over time, the projects in New Orleans started to be perceived in a negative light. In 1986, an article titled “Bright origins tarnished over time” in the Times-Picayune recalls New Orleans public housing history. It claims that the projects had “evolved into centers for chronic social problems of poor blacks…the Housing Authority of New Orleans has let many projects deteriorate” (McQuaid 1986). McQuaid explains that they had been deteriorating over the “last 20 years,” or since the late 1960s. McQuaid notes that the changes began with the expansions in the 50s and 60s, “HANO used cheaper materials and a more monotonous, barrackslike [sic] design.” At Magnolia later on, this created an important spatial distinction for the residents I interviewed. The original buildings were called “the new side” and the additions were called “the old side.” The “new side” was considered more violent and its residents were younger. The “old side” was perceived as safer, as having an older population, and contained sturdier structures. The expansion influenced community life and spatial distinctions at Magnolia. McQuaid confirms some of this by noting in 1986 that buildings which were part of the expansion were dangerous and in a state of deterioration (McQuaid 1986).

McQuaid’s analysis shows how the 1965 desegregation and the Brooke Amendment that Congress passed in 1970 were key to the projects’ decline. White public housing residents were “more upwardly mobile” and relocated. Their leaving further concentrated poor black residents in the projects, which by 1975 were predominantly African American. The Brooke Amendment to the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1969 “was intended to protect the poorest public housing residents by lowering rents,” and guaranteed rent-free housing to those with no income. This cut HANO revenues, made it harder to evict residents, and according to McQuaid’s quote of Robert Becker², made housing intended to be temporary more permanent.

These conditions of deterioration brought about partially by the Brooke Amendment led to a proposal to tear down the projects. HUD recommended that HANO tear some of the projects

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² Executive director of the New Orleans City Planning Commission, 1986.
down but did not provide a plan to place displaced tenants. To this, Becker responded, “That’s easy for the feds to say. ‘We built it, now let’s tear it down.’ But it’s never that simple” (McQuaid 1986). This points to earlier struggles over space in public housing, and the roles policy, disinvestment, and institutional racism (poor but upwardly mobile whites able to leave) play in public housing demolition and displacement.

Events in 1990 show the continued decline of public housing in New Orleans as a result of disinvestment. HANO “reluctantly” accepted “a federal plan describing how the agency should spend federal money” (Treadway 1990). In order to secure this funding, HANO, ran by a private management team at the time, had to quickly accept the offer according to HUD. HANO received much less funding than requested, and could not cover work on all of New Orleans’ projects. “The management team said the plan reflect[ed] HUD’s priorities, including home ownership programs and tenant management.” The plan favored some sites over others, and one of those left out was the Magnolia project. This illustrates the downward spiral of public housing in New Orleans and shows how the Magnolia projects were at a particular disadvantage.

Undoubtedly, the continued decline of the Magnolia projects led to the 1998 displacement of residents of half of the Magnolia projects pending demolition of the 1950s expansion. This was funded by HOPE VI grants. The redevelopment intended to follow this never happened. Yet the fact remains that residents were displaced. As a consequence, less than 100 families lived at Magnolia when Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005; 600 empty apartments had been shuttered for nearly a decade. Though the brick buildings withstood many hurricanes, they were in a state of disrepair, including backed-up sewage, rats, cockroaches, and lead paint (Reckdahl 2013).

Initially, the residents who remained were pushed out by Hurricane Katrina. Their displacement changed from temporary to more than likely permanent amid the closing down of New Orleans public housing across the city afterwards, with talk of demolition and redevelopment. Reckdahl states in her report on the redevelopment of the Magnolia projects:

So, after Katrina, displaced residents as a whole weren’t opposed to the idea of eventual demolition—the housing authority had been moving in that direction anyway. But many were desperate to move home for a while first, to find their footing and stabilize their families.
Some former Magnolia residents were open to the idea of redevelopment. However, they also voiced their desire for a phased development that would give them more time. They also criticized HANO for not including residents in the planning process. So, even former residents who were not opposed to demolition and redevelopment were still opposed to the way HUD and HANO went about this, especially because of the housing hardships many faced years after Katrina as talks continued without formal decisions being made or construction starting. Reckdahl reports that twin sisters Gloria Williams and Bobbie Jennings who previously lived at Magnolia had to move six times from 2005 to 2007. Gloria provided testimony at a Congressional field hearing in 2007, stating that despite support from Section 8 vouchers she and her sister experienced significant financial burdens in the form of high utility bills. This illustrates residents’ nuanced experiences of displacement as well as housing hardships they faced in this process despite the measures taken to soften the blows of disaster and displacement for public housing residents.

Amid talks of demolition, residents became suspicious that HUD was exaggerating the buildings’ conditions to more easily justify tearing them down. Reckdahl points out that William Thorson, a HANO federal receiver, admitted in e-mails that per unit repair costs appeared to be low and told his employees to “take photos of the worst of the worst.” This evidence was uncovered by lawyers defending the residents (Reckdahl 2013). Despite resistance and protests on the part of residents and allied activists, the City Council unanimously voted in favor of demolition in December 2007. In January 2009, ground was broken at the old Magnolia site, re-named Harmony Oaks which opened in 2012.

The themes from the analysis of the data are: The Paradox of Living and Dying in the ‘Nolia; The Storm: “Weren’t nobody comin’”; Displacement: “Dismantling Communities”; and “Ain’t Nothin’ Changed”: the Paradox of Opportunity. Each theme name was inspired by direct quotes from the data. Below is a table of the themes with their respective codes, and a table showing what themes showed up in each dataset.

**The Paradox of Living and Dying in the ‘Nolia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avenues to opportunity</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Memories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blight</td>
<td>Consequences of inequality</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Neglect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>Displacement</td>
<td>Prison-industrial complex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This theme contains the widest range of codes because it refers to residents’ lived experiences at the Magnolia projects, as well as perspectives from the outside looking in. Residents’ accounts reflect nuanced narratives of life in the Magnolia projects, touching on ideas of positive aspects of the community, the risks and dangers of life there, place and culture, earlier redevelopment, and bureaucracy.

**Community**

Disrupting normative narratives of public housing that focus on common urban “ills,” residents interviewed recalled a vibrant community life. Their accounts referred to positive memories, their strong connection to place and community, and the reciprocity of their fellow neighbors. Residents were hesitant to recall negative experiences. Some asked me if I meant “good” or “bad” memories, showing that they perhaps predicted what an outsider such as myself might think of life in public housing projects. Participants described a community in which “everybody knew everybody”—this exact phrasing was used by several participants, and many also related this familiarity to the term “family,” denoting a strong community bond. Eva, a former resident, who still works at the community center at Harmony Oaks, said:

> Family. Even though I didn’t know everybody personally, but to me it still felt like family, because most of us been there for years, or we know somebody momma, whomever, or they had a cousin lived around the corner, but somebody knew somebody. She framed her memories of life there around this notion of community and closeness:

> …I think we had a closer relationship. Even though we wasn’t, like, bosom-buddy close, I don’t know how to explain it—we was close, but we wasn’t close. We was close, ‘cause we knew when something happened, we knew what family member it was, or who to go talk to.

This notion of closeness and community also play a role in her account of first moving back to the Magnolia projects when she had her daughter: “When I moved in that building, all my neighbors in that building, we was all close. So I felt good there.”

Henry also recalls this notion of community: “…everybody knew everybody. It was like family, one big family.” Every time I asked him to touch on what life was like for him as a child
in the Magnolia projects, he had something positive to say: “Life was great,” “…it was really good,” “It was good, it was great,” “My friends were wonderful. I mean, we supported each other through hard times.” Henry returns over and over to the idea of family: “…we were like family, you know, back there…you gain, what I would call memories. Memories that can’t be replaced.”

Some of the videos, the mostly unedited homemade ones, also touched on these notions of community and familiarity. In these videos, men are seen greeting their friends and acquaintances in the Magnolia projects. In one short video titled, “Magnolia Breed Documentary,” a man known as Jerkaman goes around talking to residents and locals in the area, introducing them, and giving them a chance to say a few sentences³. He focuses his camera on someone named “1 Legg James,” who says, –“Magnolia 1 Legg. All y’all know me, it’s still all gravy, baby. Come and holla at me!” Another video titled, “Magnolia Boyz in da Hood,” uploaded in 2011, seems to be part music video, part greeting friends and acquaintances in the neighborhood like Jerkaman’s video. The main narrator in the video is seen at the end greeting and hugging friends, and holding his nephew.

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³ This was likely shot after Magnolia was closed, because the video starts with a fake, photoshopped newspaper called “Magnolia News” with the headline, “Magnolia Under Construction.”
The photographs analyzed also show community life and interaction, with a focus on friendships. The photos’ subjects are overwhelmingly male and young—mostly men who appear to be in their teens, 20s, and early 30s. The fact that the overwhelming majority of these pictures are of groups or pairs of men hanging out together illustrates this aspect of friendship and community. Some are photos of men sitting in fold-up chairs and on the steps of their stoops together. Some make more serious faces, some have big smiles on their faces—most photos have a mixture of this. Enjoyment and togetherness were subcodes that fell under community, and those two subcodes appear
together elsewhere in the data, for example, Janae’s and Lenny’s childhood accounts.

Eva’s daughter Janae talks more from the perspective of being a child since she was only there until about age 15. She framed her experiences more in terms of playing games with friends, which she was very detailed about. The other interview participant from her generation, Lenny, left during the 1998 redevelopment. He also framed his experiences and memories in this way, with a lot of talk of recreation and playing with the other kids. Their accounts about community were framed in a similar way to the older participants. Janae, when asked what it was like there for her: “…just the fact that I was with family and friends. That maybe was like the best experience.”

The notion of family being an important and a positive aspect of community life also showed up a few times in the photos. Though there is no way to confirm whether or not the residents in these photos are relatives, it still plays off of this idea of “family” (friends local to the Magnolia projects) and family.

Figure 5: source - https://youtu.be/0Bve92TfI_s
Both of the younger participants used the word “fun” over and over to describe their experiences in the Magnolia projects. For example, Lenny says, “…it was fun. We had fun back there. Every day. Every day there was some’n to do, some’n to see,” “It was always some’n for us positive to do and stuff, so, that’s why it was like extra fun.” They also spoke of the many friends they had there in several instances. Friends were part of what Janae missed the most from those days. Lenny described his closest friend there when he was young, explaining he felt especially close to him because they both each had a little sister and a little brother: “So we just clicked and got along, like family, I guess…” Older residents also talked about friends there as “family.”

In the dataset, community and familiarity appeared alongside the concept of safety. Newspaper articles, resident
accounts, videos and photographs all described how the Magnolia projects alongside New Orleans’ other projects became known for violence around the 1980s. However, the residents involved in this project reported feeling safe. In the data, instances coded as familiarity and community were related to these feelings of safety.

Interviewees provided several examples of this sense of safety. Eva explains that while she worked two jobs and was raising her young daughter, her neighbor would “look out for [her daughter],” indirectly by keeping an eye out by making sure nobody entered or left the apartment. However, she noted how this changed as the project emptied out:

I felt safe until it got toward the end. We all had to move and transfer somewhere else, I think myself and one more family was left in that court-way. But aside from that, I felt safe. Unfortunately, I got used to the bullet shots. When they start shootin’, what you do, you hit the floor. I mean it’s not the way to live, but, I guess you get immune to it, if you be around it enough.

This illustrates how complex community is and how the relationship between safety and community is nuanced. In addition to this, another one of Eva’s safety strategies regarding her daughter was a sort of cautiousness, maybe even hyper-vigilance—she explained several times that she only trusted her family members to watch her daughter, would not let her daughter have sleepovers or sleep over at friends’ places, and was not babysat by the neighbor that kept an eye on her while Eva was at work. Eva stated: “I didn’t trust nobody watchin’ my child.” This seems contradictory, as she let family members watch her daughter. However, she might have meant that she didn’t just trust just anybody and she had to know them very well in order to trust them.

Henry reminisces about his sense of safety there in the sixties: “It was really good back then, I’m talkin’ like, ‘60s, I mean it’s like you could sit with your door open, and everybody knew everybody.” “[Y]ou could sit with your door open” indicates a sense of safety—in some contexts, “door open,” means unlocked. But a door that’s open is also a sign of trust that it is safe. Since this appears next to “everybody knew everybody,” it indicates that safety and familiarity are related, and familiarity is part of community. He also recalls safety in his memories of big parties that he and others in the community would have:

It was safe, you know, because the police got involved. If you wanted to throw a party, they didn’t really sweat you about the permit, and if you went to them, they would pass around just for the safety, you know.
Similarly, Lenny, who was young when he lived there, recalls feeling safe while telling me all of the fun things there were to do there as a kid, “y’ain’t got to watch ya back, and do this—maybe ‘cause nigga was a child, but still. It’s comfortable livin’ like that, you know, y’ain’t got to look over your shoulder.” Janae also noted a sense of safety when she lived there, and perhaps age had something to do with feeling protected by adults in the projects as Lenny suggested.

In a 2006 video, “Hurricane Katrina: The fight for housing in New Orleans 2,” Gloria Williams, a former Magnolia resident standing in a vacant living room remembers, “I used to sit in here every day with my door open. I didn’t have to worry about lockin’ that door. Because everybody around knew me, knew us, me and my twin sister.” Safety and the familiarity of a long-time community are related in this instance.

Another element that created a sense of safety for participants that’s related to the community code is what I called “watchfulness,” or vigilance along with the perception of it. For example, Janae explains, “…I was used to bein’ protected or bein’ safe…a parent used to always be sittin’ on the porch somewhere…” This photo from my dataset illustrates the notion of watchfulness, especially in the context of children playing.
Though this woman is looking off into the distance in the opposite direction, she appears to be ‘watching’ the neighborhood. The ideas of community and familiarity among residents at the Magnolia projects worked together to create a sense of safety. Similarly, the idea that residents thought they were being looked out for by other residents also created a sense of safety. But this does not necessarily mean that it was safe. While a sense of safety existed, a very real sense of fear and danger existed because of violence and the threat of untimely death at the Magnolia projects.
“Pray that we make it to twenty-one”

The main image of public housing projects the general public is shown, it seems, is that of warehouses for the poor with rampant violent crime and drug problems. This image appears in several articles I collected, as well as videos, residents’ accounts, and photos. An article from 1980 in the Times-Picayune, “An Urban Cancer: Projects, Crime Synonymous with Little Chance for Change” about public housing in New Orleans illustrates this point. It states that crime is the number one concern among residents in all 10 New Orleans housing projects. Police statistics show project dwellers are the most likely victims of crime, yet residents complain of a lack of police protection (Beaulieu 1980).

Just like vigilance played a role in residents’ sense of safety, it also played a role in residents’ fear of violence. One St. Thomas resident in the article explains “things got so bad” that she had to watch her children at all times and could not let them out of her sight, but that it was difficult to be able to always keep an eye on them. Injury and death are not the only risks in this case: “Another mother said her son couldn’t sleep for a week after watching a man hold a gun to another man’s head and pull the trigger repeatedly. The gun didn’t fire.” This hints at the psychological effects of violence, but that is beyond the scope of this project. This illustrates the effects that crime has on public housing residents. Residents are often victims of and witnesses to the violent crime that occurs in the projects. While the popular image of public housing imagines it as overrun with criminals, it often fails to humanize residents by pointing these effects out.

Residents’ understandings of their lives reflect the contradictions of the urban poor—there is a sense of community amidst the struggles of their lives. While participants perceived safety because of community vigilance and familiarity, they also recalled instances in which something compromised their sense of safety. Crime and violence are often cited as reasons for closing traditional public housing projects down. Some place blame on the built environment of public housing projects as contributing to the crime problem—“In the eyes of HUD officials and many experts…their passé design contributed to the complexes’ struggles with crime” (Reckdahl 2009). Others examine government disinvestment/neglect and social inequalities like poverty

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4 A line from Kendrick Lamar’s (popular rap artist) song, “Chapter Six” on his album, “Section 80.” Section 80 is a play on Section 8 housing policy and the black generation born in the 80s who face the lasting effects of the Ronald Reagan administration’s assault on welfare and other social policy intended to guard against the effects of poverty and inequality.
and racial-residential segregation in these communities and their role in the prevalence of crime (Wilson 1996; Massey and Denton 1993). However, resident accounts of project life add richness to this discussion, as well as often ignored narratives. Their narratives are often left out of policy discussion, perpetuating a one-dimensional, damning narrative of public housing. This in turn can lead to the destruction of these communities via demolition and redevelopment.

Eva demonstrated how people who live in the communities that social scientists study often have their own sociological understanding of their surroundings and experiences. This is called indigenous knowledge in feminist perspective literature. The feminist perspective emphasizes elevating indigenous knowledge to counter dominant narratives of marginalized groups (Creswell 2013). Sometimes she would stop and talk to the drug dealers at the Magnolia projects on her way home from church on Sundays. She talked to them about

…why they was doin’ what they was doin’, not knockin’ ‘em, just tryin’ to understand what mind frame, what made ‘em wanna do that. ‘Cause like some of ‘em been in the military 4 and 8 years, so, why would you get out of the military, come in here and sell drugs? And then he was explaining to me, “would you rather work for 7 dollars, or you rather make 500 dollars an hour?” I said well wait, hold up, he had me thinkin’. This account demonstrates the limited options and resources available to the urban poor, particularly the urban poor of color living in public housing. With limited options for advancement and employment, disinvestment in education, and limited housing options, some may turn to dealing drugs which is also tied to violence, early death, and the prison industrial complex (Krivo & Peterson 1996).

The three male participants witnessed violence and death first-hand. Henry was with his friend when his friend got shot and killed in front of him. He says his friend was doing heroin and robbed his killer for drug money. When he mentioned he lost a lot of his friends to violence, I asked how many. There were so many that he did not have an exact number—he estimated 30. Lenny recalls people running after one another with guns in the courts when he was young. He also told me about his memory of finding a dead body under one of the buildings while playing hide-and-go-seek with friends. Jerry told a story about a time when a man was being chased down his hallway by a gunman, ordered to strip, and then shot. Another time, Jerry had his young niece with him in his living room, and a stray bullet came through the window and barely missed her. Yet all their accounts include a sense of safety in the Magnolia projects at some
point. While Jerry and Marie separate a sense of safety and danger by specific time frames, the rest of the participants report feeling safe even though events occurred that compromised their safety or others’ safety. Perhaps this appears paradoxical only from an outsider’s normative perspective on safety and violent crime.

The sets of photographs referenced violence and death frequently. Memorial flyers, funeral programs, and memorial collages of deceased, young black men were distributed throughout the slideshows. For birth and death dates, memorial flyers used “sunrise” for birth and “sunset” for death. Memorial flyers also referenced the deceased’s given names and nicknames they were known by in the community.

There were also many pictures of men with their guns. These can be coded as symbols of violence and death. Alternatively, they can be seen as safety measures or precautions these men took as part of living in danger and fear of violence. For example, one of the articles on crime in the projects in New Orleans mentions a Fischer resident who “never [left] his apartment without a loaded pistol tucked beneath his shirt” to keep himself safe (Beaulieu 1980).
The idea of a black man living in a high-poverty urban area making it past his 21st birthday as novelty can be conceptualized as cultural knowledge. Throughout inner city urban America, there is local knowledge that understands the fragility of young black men in America. In the footnote on the subtitle of this section, I noted “pray that we make it to twenty-one” came from a Compton rapper’s track. This phenomenon was also mentioned in one of the videos. This video is somewhat of a homemade documentary, and cuts from live-action scenes of a man from the Magnolia projects walking around the courts, greeting friends and talking. At one point, the group of friends enters a unit and everyone sits on the couch as a white man with a clipboard is talking to the older woman who presumably lives there. It is explained that he is a life-insurance agent and that life insurance agents make rounds of the projects and sell policies to parents on their young children. The man who the camera follows around says, “Mothafuckas down here get insurance on ‘em, like, age of 12, 13.” The video then cuts to a black man in a suit in a dimly-lit studio setting, seemingly acting as the documentary’s narrator. He explains:

These projects are no joke, one of the coldest things I noticed when we went in these projects, that the life insurance man is there, gettin’ life insurance on 12-year-old kids, okay? 500 dollars you can get a life insurance policy on your child. I don’t know how many people out there gettin’ life insurance when they’re 12 years old. It’s cold-jack. This is the Magnolia projects.

Later on in the video, there’s a cut scene of a hearse pulling up to a funeral home. Then the video cuts back to
the narrator, who says, “You made it to your 21st birthday, you got a lot to celebrate about.”

The knowledge created through the everyday living of public housing residents is invaluable to the conversation about life there. It supplements and enriches mainstream accounts that reach those in the general public who have never experienced life in the projects. Not only that, but I argue residents’ accounts should be at the center of analysis, since they are the ones who know the projects inside and out. While Magnolia residents were in danger of becoming victimized by the violence that occurred there, they were also subjected to it as a product of living there. This had multiple negative effects on them, and they did not receive the same police attention or security that better-off neighborhoods did. This points to racial and class disparities, an overarching theme in this research project that prevails over the lives of public housing residents and the urban poor in general. That is to say, both the heightened risk of victimization or witnessing of violent crime, and the lack of protection from it, are evidence of racial and class inequalities that Magnolia residents and public housing residents in general experienced and continue to experience.

The next dimension of life at the Magnolia projects to explore is residents’ connections to it as a place and also meanings they assign to this place and places within it. Places with longstanding communities and shared histories also give way to place-specific cultures in which there are shared memories and senses of belonging. Below, the concepts of place and culture within the Magnolia projects as they came up in my data are explored.

*Place and Culture*

Place, space, and culture all tie together to tell the story of the Magnolia projects. Place, the Magnolia projects, was and is a very important part of former residents’ identities. This is so prominent that in some videos, people out in the neighborhood continue to refer to Harmony Oaks as “the Magnolia” and use it to identify themselves. For example, some of their nicknames had “Magnolia” in them, or said things like, “Magnolia for life!”

*Figure 14: source - https://youtu.be/Uz-1Y9e8Wv4*
In YouTube user Jerkaman’s video, one friend he walks up to states, “Magnolia’s a way of life, it’s not just a project, nigga!” This illustrates culture, place attachment, and place identity. Similarly, A 2011 article highlights this aspect of place. Referring to Shantrelle Lewis⁵, who filmed an oral history project of the Magnolia:

Lewis said she recently ran into a group of young men from Central City who were looking admiringly at the new Harmony Oaks development. They’d dubbed the new buildings “Magnolia mansions” (McCash 2011).

The article also noted how two native Magnolia rappers incorporated this identity into their monikers: Magnolia Slim (later Soulja Slim) and Magnolia Shorty. A few photographs also illustrated this place identity and attachment:

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⁵ Director of the George and Leah McKenna Museum of African American Art
Regional music, local to the Magnolia projects, illustrates the local culture. Second lines were part of residents’ memories as they often came through the Magnolia projects and residents took part in them. Later on in the 90s, New Orleans bounce and rap music were born in and around the public housing projects in New Orleans. Rappers Juvenile, Turk, B.G., Soulja Slim, and Magnolia Shorty were all from the Magnolia projects, widely praised by residents, and very much a part of their collective memories. Juvenile is credited with popularizing New Orleans bounce music nationally with his hit song, “Back that Ass Up.”

Many interviewees stated that local rappers threw big parties for residents and shot music videos in which younger residents participated. The two younger participants, Janae and Lenny, had the most specific accounts. Janae states that local rapper Birdman shot a music video using doves, and gave those doves away to the kids afterwards. She kept one but was too young to know how to care for it. Afraid it might bite her, she kept it in a shoebox with holes and doesn’t remember what happened to it. It was a fond memory for Janae because she laughed about it as she told me.

Specific places within the Magnolia projects held significance for residents. Many told of a historic school within there named Thomy LaFon Elementary. Eva expressed dismay at the demolition of the school during post-Katrina redevelopment, “because that was the school I attended, my sisters went there…and I went there. That’s the only memory I have. They had good teachers there.” Eva and Janae lived by the school, and though her daughter didn’t attend, she remembers it well because she and her friends used to play there. Lenny also remembers playing there with his friends as a kid. He also used it in our conversation as a landmark, using it to orient himself when explaining where he lived. He explained that “everybody” went there.

Space, place, and culture within the Magnolia projects tie the community of residents together via collective experiences and memories. From residents’ reports of large and lively communal celebrations, local musicians’ presence and activities within the projects, and landmarks tied to childhood memories, connections can be drawn between generations of Magnolia residents. It illustrates both the importance of place through place history and memory.

Figure 17: source - https://youtu.be/0Bve92Tlf_s
and the social aspects of physical landscapes, like the Magnolia housing complex. It supports the idea that this was more than just a set of deteriorating buildings before it was vacated and demolished. Place matters.

The nature of the community that once occupied this place along with its positive and negative aspects, residents’ memories, and culture are all part of the narrative of its ultimate demolition and banishment from the physical landscape of New Orleans. However, there are events in its history that further complicate and explain this story. Understanding former residents’ experiences of demolition and redevelopment necessitates a discussion of the Housing Authority of New Orleans’ previous attempt at the redevelopment of the Magnolia projects in this late 1990s.

**Pre-Storm Redevelopment**

Many Magnolia residents were displaced before hurricane Katrina. In 1998, half of the Magnolia projects were shut down for redevelopment that did not occur. Therefore, over half of the interview participants were displaced in 1998. This subset of participants framed their experiences of displacement differently. Those who left in 1998 continue to live in central city, most very close to the former Magnolia projects.

Jerry and Marie, long-time friends who now live together and were displaced by the 1998 redevelopment, were even under the impression that the whole project was shut down at this time. However, Eva, Janae, and Henry all attest that they were living there up until Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Lenny even provided an inconsistent timeline about when the projects were torn down, sometimes referring to them being torn down before the hurricane. Again, this may be due to the fact that he and his family were displaced during this period of proposed redevelopment.

The participants who left during the 1998 closures were all placed in homes with the help of HANO before they moved out and left willingly. They were under the impression that this half of the projects was being renovated and they thought perhaps they would eventually return. However, nothing much was done with these plans (Reckdahl 2013). Hurricane Katrina hit in August of 2005, starting the process of demolition and redevelopment of the Big Four (Magnolia/C.J. Peete, Calliope/B.W. Cooper, St. Bernard, and Lafitte).
Bureaucracy


In the newspaper article dataset, HANO’s failures and shortcomings were frequent topics. Two articles in the Times-Picayune in 1986 and 1987 detail lead poisoning of children living in New Orleans public housing projects (McQuaid 1986, 1987). From the 1980s to when one article was written in 1987, 356 cases of lead poisoning were reported in 8 of the 10 public housing projects HANO oversaw. According to the article, lawyer and activist Bill Quigley filed a lawsuit ordering HANO to immediately remove the lead paint. The previous September, in 1986, federal legislation passed that ordered housing authorities to notify public housing residents of the presence of lead paint and test residents for poisoning. As of April 1987, HANO had not done so. However, that March, HANO applied for federal grants to fund efforts to rid the projects of lead. The article also notes St. Thomas residents requested that HANO be investigated for “possible criminal violations” regarding HANO’s past handling of the lead problem. The article states, “The letters say HANO may have violated federal and state laws by failing to remove the paint when it was found. Records show it has taken months for the agency to remove lead paint from apartments after it is found” (McQuaid 1987: B-3).

Another way HANO endangered lives of public housing residents was an issue with smoke detectors being installed in the late 1980s. In March 1988, there had been a fire at the Desire projects. After the fire, HANO admitted it already had the smoke detectors they had intended to install at the time of the fire, but had not yet installed them. Even though the federal funds were available, executive director of HANO at the time, Jessie Smallwood, said she
“couldn’t find qualified installers.” The decision to install the detectors was made after a 1986 fire in the Magnolia projects that killed one person (Donze & Treadway 1988).

Depicting life at the former Magnolia projects is complex. It is multi-layered, and residents’ experiences were affected by several factors—conditions in the projects themselves, local institutions’ neglect and incompetence, and the nation-wide issues of social inequality. The same inequalities factored into their hurricane Katrina experiences.

The Storm: “Weren’t Nobody Comin’”

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They say they gon’ rebuild New Orleans. You can’t rebuild New Orleans. New Orleans is dead. And shit don’t be like it was before it’s gone. But, we gon’ try, and if, if the black people come back, you know what I’m sayin’, they should, come home, you know what I’m sayin’. It’s New Orleans, that’s where you was born, come back and help us, you know what I’m sayin’.

-- unidentified male Magnolia resident cleaning debris in the video “Quarterkey in the Magnolia after Hurricane Katrina.”

The same social inequalities that shaped the Magnolia residents’ experiences in the projects also shaped their experiences with Hurricane Katrina. Many did not evacuate and attempted to shelter in place. The way they experienced this disaster has many parallels with their experiences living in the Magnolia projects. They relied on one another through difficulties as public housing residents during their years at the Magnolia projects and did the same during Hurricane Katrina. Another commonality between their Hurricane Katrina experiences was the theme of death. The last parallel is that the same neglect residents experienced from the local and national government at the projects, they experienced during Hurricane Katrina.

While those who were stuck in New Orleans for Hurricane Katrina suffered through immense traumas, those who were able to evacuate ahead of time faced hardship as well. The only participants who planned ahead and evacuated before the hurricane are Eva and her daughter. Fortunately, Eva had her own vehicle at the time and was able to evacuate with her daughter and friend to Baton Rouge. They stayed in a shelter for some time, eventually finding
housing with a voucher and staying there for a few years. Eva was able to find employment in Baton Rouge, but it was unstable. She left her employment over interpersonal conflicts and burnout. She attributes this to her emotional experience of the disaster—she recalls being angry and feeling traumatized. “I think I had so much anger with me too ‘cause like I said, I just had all this death, then I had to leave where I felt secure at, so it was just a lot of emotions goin’ on with me too.” She also touches on place attachment in the context of disaster evacuation when she speaks about leaving where she “felt secure at.”

Eva recounted the multiple stressors occurring in her life at the time of the storm and how they compounded with the stressful events of disaster and evacuation and her desire to return home. She explained that upon evacuating, she thought herself and her daughter would be able to return a few days after the storm passed. But when they tried to enter the city, they were turned away. She recalls, “I just wanted to come home ‘cause during that time it was very traumatic to me.” She lost her aunt that June, her mother that July, and her deceased aunt’s daughter that August. Because of everything going on with the storm, she says she “didn’t get a chance to mourn.”

At the same time that Eva and her daughter were refused entry to New Orleans after the storm, others remained trapped in what has been described as third-world conditions. The rest of the participants stayed in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. Henry states:

I was taught, sadly, to stay. I was taught to ride out the storm from my mom, you know, we stood, we rode out Betsy, you know, and we rode out Camille, you know. Katrina was quite devastatin’ because it was like the Federal government forgot about us. Because Henry, Eva, and Janae were the only participants who were at Magnolia up until Hurricane Katrina, and Eva and Janae evacuated, Henry is the only participant who experienced the storm in the projects. He notes, as other participants and data sources do, the structural soundness of the brick buildings of the projects and their ability to withstand Katrina’s damaging winds. The only damage to his unit on the third floor was a broken window. He describes the storm being mostly wind, not so much rain, and that after the storm, “the sun was shinin’, ‘bout 8, 8:30 that mornin’.” “Everything was fine until the water came…it was literally comin’ down Washington like a tidal wave,” he recalls. The water was so high that it was able to come up the steps and over the porches of the brick buildings and into the first floor units.
Henry pooled resources with two neighbors and waited, but the reality for left-behind New Orleanians was this: “no help came, no help came.” Confusion and chaos ensued—“by word of mouth we heard to go to the Superdome…but it was such deplorable conditions [there].” They were then told to go to the Convention Center, but conditions were similar to the Superdome, so they went onto the Crescent City Connection Bridge at the Tchopitoulas exit. They did not know when the buses would come, but they hoped and waited. “We were hungry, we were dirty, we were tired, you know. We were just tired.” They stayed on the bridge three and a half days. At one point, Henry and his neighbors tried to cross the bridge on foot to get into Jefferson Parish. The National Guard drew guns on them: “it was horrifyin’…But I wasn’t afraid because I got to a point I just didn’t care. I didn’t care if I lived or died.”

Lenny also had a gun pulled on him at one point in the days after the storm, while trying to leave Rite Aid with some supplies. This time, it was a plainclothes man and he was not sure whether he was a police officer. The man pulled up to the scene in a Taurus and ordered him and his group of friends to drop the stuff they had taken from Rite Aid. Lenny notes that there were many other people doing the same thing too. He would go to Rite Aid to get ice, drinks, cigarettes, rubbing alcohol, and bleach so people could clean themselves off.

The concept of community cooperation played out in the actions of the participants who stayed in New Orleans during and after Hurricane Katrina. This is especially apparent in Henry’s and Lenny’s Katrina narratives. Henry rode out the storm and its aftermath with two neighbors. Lenny and his friends found a boat and rescued some stranded survivors. Henry and his neighbors struggled together in the aftermath. They “shared what [they] had,” trekked to shelters together, to the Crescent City Connection Bridge together, faced hostile National Guards together, and got on buses out of the city together.

Lenny’s account of rescuing stranded residents in a Central City neighborhood has parallels with an account detailed in the Times-Picayune newspaper. In a September 2005 article, “Evacuees find humiliation, not help,” Herbert tells the story of two sisters from the Magnolia projects. JoAnn Kelly and her sister Nicole recalled standing on their fire escape “waving white towels, pleading for someone to help us,” when they saw helicopters overhead. Later on, “men from the neighborhood began showing up in stolen boats and trucks. The elderly and small children were the first to be evacuated.”
Those who were in the city at the time witnessed death and destruction all around them. This is significant because it shows how social inequalities play out in different scenarios, like disaster, which served to exacerbate these inequalities. Death was visible and frequent in the Magnolia projects as part of the larger phenomenon of Black mortality rates in the United States.

Drowning was not the only cause of death in the casualties of Hurricane Katrina, and the flooding was not necessarily fully caused by the storm itself. Some deemed as “looters” were shot at by authorities and white vigilante groups, according to articles written in the New York Times and the LA Times in 2010 (Lee 2010; Solnit 2010). In this context, “looter” was a racially-coded coded word that meant any black person finding and gathering commodities from abandoned, storm-damaged stores. A side-by-side comparison of captions paired with photographs comes to mind, in which a photograph of a Black man carrying items was called “looting” and white people carrying items was called “finding” them on the Yahoo News website in 2005. Perhaps the most famous act of violence against black Katrina survivors during this time period was what happened on the Danziger Bridge. Lenny recalled seeing it on the news and recognizing one of the indicted police officers, who he referred to as “Flat Top,” referring to his hair style. He remembers “Flat Top” harassing young men around his neighborhood before Katrina—evidencing a history of state violence toward low-income black New Orleanians long before the storm. This sheds more light on the fact that events during Hurricane Katrina reflected and exacerbated deeply engrained social inequalities that already existed in New Orleans.

Hurricane Katrina was more than a storm, more than flooding. It was also about survival in the face of exacerbated social inequalities. Finger (2011) points this out in her discussion of post-Katrina demographic shifts. She notes the decrease in the number of public housing households as of 2011: 2,956. Only about half of the former residents of the Big 4 had returned at the time, and that

problems with availability of and access to affordable housing have particularly burdened African American New Orleanians who, in large number, struggled to return home following hurricane Katrina (238).

Finger also states that the Big 4 and their surrounding neighborhoods had some of the greatest population losses, in large part due to the massive loss in affordable housing with the closure and redevelopment of the housing projects.
Dismantling Communities: Displacement

For public housing residents of New Orleans, the devastation was not over after the flood waters subsided. What few Magnolia residents were left after the 1998 partial closure were not allowed to return home. In their attempts to return to their homes, they found they were locked out by HANO. After a period of uncertainty, talks about tearing down the Magnolia projects along with the other “Big Four”—Calliope (later known as B.W. Cooper), Saint Bernard, and Lafitte projects, began. This was immediately met with opposition from the displaced public housing residents, as well as allied activists and academics around the city and nation. A strong resistance movement ensued, with protests, direct action, and legal action. Yet a unanimous city council vote in favor of demolition and redevelopment on December 21st, 2007, over 2 years after Katrina, quieted that resistance. Residents and their allies tried to ensure residents’ return to the new developments, and secure a voice in the planning process. One of the interviewees, Henry, was a part of this participatory planning. He was on a community board that worked with the non-profit that oversaw the redevelopment. He, like countless others, spoke of broken or half-held promises:

See, I sat down, when I was with resident council on Saint Charles, in Lee Circle, in the K and B buildin’. When we picked a contractor to rebuild, Harmony Oaks and all, they said one thing and did another. Just to get the contract.

He then explains that McCormack and Baron, who were “chosen by HUD to do the redevelopment of the Big Four,” “wooed” the resident council by taking them to St. Louis to tour mixed-income developments they built. Then, sitting in their meeting at Lee Circle,

[When we worked out the rules, it wasn’t the same as when management came in…We worked out the rules where everybody was guaranteed, mostly guaranteed, a spot back in Harmony Oaks when it was rebuilt. We worked out a situation where one strike would be sufficient enough on the drug issue. You know what I’m sayin’? All that was worked out and signed by our president of the resident council. We just had votes as members. Okay, they offered her a job with them. She works with them now. And she sold us out.
This also illustrates interpersonal tensions and disjointedness in the former Magnolia resident community.

Eva gave a similar account, likely referring to the same person on the board. She describes working for the resident council (“board”) at Harmony Oaks while she was living there as “stressful” and “too much drama.” She cited favoritism, conflicts of interest, and self-serving behaviors as the reasons for quitting: “…when I talk to you about servin’ leaders, and self-servin’ leaders, there was one on the board who was very self-servin’. Selfish as hell. And she still selfish.” When asked what the woman’s self-serving behavior led to, Eva responded, “Them givin’ her a promotion.”

Like Henry, Eva was under the impression more residents would be able to come back: …I was under the impression that everybody was gonna be able to come back. But then when they rebuilt it and it was open, they was doin’ background checks, hell, you know people had records before they came here, y’know, so.

She mentions a profit motive:

It’s all about, to be honest, the bottom line is all about a green dollar. And the people, you can’t bring them a green dollar, people don’t wanna be bothered witcha. If they can’t make no money witcha, cut and dry. That’s just how it goes.

When asked if it was HANO attempting to profit from the demolition and redevelopment of public housing, Eva places the blame on private interests:

I don’t think it’s HANO, ‘cause HANO, mm-mm [no]. It’s the private companies…it’s the private companies who makin’ money, HANO ain’t makin’ no money off them!

HANO is just overseein’ make sure those persons in public housing is being treated fairly.

Henry’s and Eva’s accounts show how multidimensional the issue of planning and redevelopment was. Besides conflict of interest between residents opposed to demolition and the developers and HANO, there were also significant rifts within the community of residents.

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6 According to Eva, the board is part of Urban Strategies, the non-profit that manages Harmony Oaks. McCormack Baron Salazar and Urban Strategies are partners, but it is unclear in this interview who owns the land: “McCormack Baron Salazar are those persons that own that property. Or leasing that land for a hundred years…[Urban Strategies] rent[s] to McCormack Baron Salazar.”
The videos and newspaper articles gathered highlighted this resistance against the redevelopment plans for the Big Four, and interviews supplemented this as they focused on the experiences of displacement and what was at stake for the now displaced residents. Part of the reason interviews focused less on the resistance against redevelopment may be that most participants were displaced from the Magnolia projects during the 1998 closures for redevelopment. At the time, these residents thought they would be returning when redevelopment was completed. This made their displacement less controversial. The 1998 partial closure for redevelopment also occurred in a vastly different context. It was not the result of a hurricane, but of the perceived need for improvements. Also, in theory, residents would be allowed to return, and since it was merely for repairs and improvements, the implication was that it would be a one for one replacement of units. Therefore, it was likely thought of as temporary displacement that residents would eventually benefit from. The latter closure and redevelopment of the Magnolia projects following Hurricane Katrina occurred in a larger context of shutting down the four most prominent public housing projects in New Orleans simultaneously. This left many more public housing residents without homes, all at the same time. In addition to this, a one for one replacement of units was not promised—hinting at a mass public housing shortage in the city. Last, this occurred at a devastating time for New Orleans public housing residents. Thousands of people had perished in the floodwaters and thousands more were left without homes in a storm-torn city, or in a foreign city, eager to return home. These factors seemed to have politicized this proposal for redevelopment, prompting a large resistance movement.

Residents’ experiences with displacement, demolition, and redevelopment demonstrate their strong connections to place. However, their experiences are incredibly nuanced. Residents had many mixed feelings about the process and its results. Janae stated that her mother took two bricks from the remains of the Magnolia projects as mementos: “…really I remember I would never see the bricks again…I can’t really see it again, the bricks and the fact that I lived there.” These were her initial thoughts when moving into Harmony Oaks, the new development, with her mother. Despite this, she still had a lot of positive things to say about the new development. While residents mourned the loss of their community, many also pointed out things they liked about the new development. Even though she went on about how “different” the new development was, Eva stated:
Felt like home. Because I’m so used to being in that environment, and then that—that particular area, I mean all my life I’ve been right there. You know. Um, so it just felt good…Felt like I was where I was supposed to be, I don’t know how to explain it any more than that.

This shows the complexities of attachment to place. Even though Eva had an attachment to the physicality of the original Magnolia units, she was also attached to Magnolia’s location. This also demonstrates the nuanced nature of residents’ experiences of displacement and redevelopment. There are a multitude of different perspectives and experiences with varying degrees of agreement and disagreement with the events that unfolded regarding the Magnolia projects after Hurricane Katrina.

With redevelopment and examining governmental failures in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as it relates to public housing, different narratives emerged. This project centers on the narratives of the public housing residents. On the outer layer of analysis are the “official” narratives—mainstream narratives fed to the general public by politicians, leaders such as HUD and HANO officials, planners, and developers. Finally, there are activist narratives, though these are not mutually exclusive with residents’ narratives. Some activists were also academics and professionals, so though they were outsiders to residents’ experiences, but insiders as well in that they were fighting for residents to have a say in redevelopment.

The official narrative about public housing in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is reminiscent of past eras of urban renewal, revitalization, and slum clearance. The words of Colonel Williams upon the opening of the first projects in New Orleans are haunting here:

Aside from the incalculable good that will come from the razing of some of the most blighted areas of New Orleans and the construction upon such sites of decent, comfortable dwellings for thousands of families of low income, we must consider also the attendant benefits that will accrue as a natural consequence. However, disaster helped make this redevelopment possible in its own way, independent from typical rhetoric employed to redevelop areas where residents are resistant to it. One way disaster aided and abetted the demolition, redevelopment, and mass displacement were official inspections of the Big Four units claiming damage to such a point they were all deemed unlivable and irreparable (guhdee 2007). YouTube user “guhdee” published a video (2007) in
which MIT professor and technical expert John Fernandez reports while standing in the closed-down Magnolia projects as a woman cleans her unit:

It’s really frustrating for me to review the reports that have been done by consultants hired by HANO, and to literally have an apartment that is listed as unlivable, and then to walk in, and it would be like in this condition [clean, intact room]. And for me there’s a huge, huge gap between the noted condition of the apartment and what I saw (guhdee 2007).

The livability and assessment of damage to the Magnolia projects was a major talking point among proponents of redevelopment as well as its opponents throughout the interviews, newspaper articles, and videos. Proponents claimed the brick buildings were damaged beyond repair and that it would cost more to renovate than to demolish and redevelop. Finger (2011) refutes the claim that it would cost more to renovate. She states the St. Bernard projects7 could have been renovated for $41 million, modernized for $130 million, and that the proposed demolition and redevelopment, which would have much less affordable units, would cost $137 million. She goes on to argue that:

More profit was possible through demolition, displacement, and redevelopment than rebuilding. Profit for some has come at the expense of others with less access to power. Naomi Klein explained that disasters “provide windows into a cruel and ruthlessly divided future in which money and race buy survival” (332). This points to a potential profit motive for the mass redevelopment public housing underwent in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. This is in line with neoliberal principles. Neoliberal principles value profit above all else when it comes to things like redevelopment. This in turn is at odds with the goals of residents that redevelopment is supposed to be “for” and calls into question who the redevelopment is for and who it benefits. Former residents maintained that despite first-floor flooding of the Magnolia projects, damage was minimal. Henry notes that the only damage to his third-floor apartment was a busted window.

Some residents were suspicious of the motivations behind the closure and redevelopment of the Big Four as reflected in the interviews, videos, and newspaper articles. New Orleans public housing residents’ resistance movement against displacement, demolition, and redevelopment showed up most in video and article datasets. Multiple videos showed protestors

7 One of the Big Four
using call-and-response slogans, marching, a short-lived occupation of HANO headquarters, and residents voicing concerns and demands at various hearings on the fate of the Big Four. They demanded inclusion, and officials agreed to hear them out as an act of inclusion. Yet there were several instances of exclusion. For example, in one video on the final hearing on the decision to demolish in December 2007, chaos and police use of force ensued following the locking out of a large crowd of residents and allies opposed to demolition. It appears in the video that security at the hearing were asking dissenting residents and allies to leave before the meeting started. Several people can be heard shouting that there was plenty of room for them. One man, after stating this and continually yelling, “What is wrong with y’all? Let those people in!” started a unified chant of “Let the people in!” At this point, security and police started dragging men out, and scuffles between security and police and the protestors occurred.

Other videos show that lawsuits were filed on behalf of the residents opposed to demolition, as well as residents taking the matter to the federal government. In one video, titled “Save Public Housing in New Orleans,” (2007) Sharon Jasper, a displaced St. Bernard resident, states, “We will be in Washington next week to let ‘em know, this is an ongoing struggle ‘til the finish. And we continue—we are willing to fight for our families so we can come back home!”

Another video, titled, “Race and Class in the Big Easy,” uploaded in 2009, notes, “Residents have filed a lawsuit to block demolition and end the lock out that has kept thousands from coming home.” Another video, from 2007, “Black New Orleans Fights to Return Home,” states, “Congresswoman Maxine Waters introduced a bill this year. H.R. 1227 would re-open 3,000 public housing units and provide replacement housing for the rest.” The Gulf Coast Hurricane Housing Recovery Act of 2007 appears to have passed Senate, but not every part of the bill was implemented (like one-to-one replacement of demolished public housing units).

It took three years after hurricane Katrina to finally demolish the Magnolia projects and even longer to complete the mixed-income development called Harmony Oaks. This process displaced the majority of previous Magnolia residents.

“Ain’t Nothin’ Changed”: the Paradoxes of Opportunity

| Community | Space/place |
| Housing | Violence |
| Neglect |
This last theme is about how residents fared after disaster and redevelopment. Is this your It functions, in part, as a reflection on the goals and implications of HOPE VI (and other programs based on the same principles), and the actual outcomes of the redevelopment. The redevelopment of the Magnolia projects and the rest of the Big Four drastically reduced the amount of affordable housing in New Orleans; consequently, there is a greater reliance on Section 8 vouchers and scattered-site developments. The quote “ain’t nothin’ changed” refers to former Magnolia residents’ (and other displaced public housing residents’) continued struggle with housing issues and other inequalities despite changes to public housing policy and development. However, when asked about then and now, participants continually noted how it was “just different” at the new Harmony Oaks development. So, while the projects themselves changed physically, many issues tied to housing inequality and racial inequality remain for the former residents.

After evacuation, relocation, and redevelopment, former Magnolia residents sought less temporary living situations. Participants’ experiences varied with respect to the length of time spent outside of New Orleans during this relocation period. However, since coming back to New Orleans, they have all dealt with some degree of housing instability.

Eva and her daughter stayed in Baton Rouge for about a year after Katrina, until Eva found a job in New Orleans. Eva’s narrative and obstacles about housing show the uncertainty surrounding affordable housing in post-Katrina New Orleans. Upon returning to the city, she did not have a place to stay yet, because she didn’t have any assistance. So, she stayed with a friend until she found a place with her Section 8 voucher. Six months later, HANO notified her they were going to take her off Section 8 assistance so she moved to a scattered-site development around 2012. Finally, she moved to Harmony Oaks when they were tearing that scattered-site down. She left after a year because she only qualified for a market-rate apartment there, and her rent kept increasing because of her income. Describing her ordeal at Harmony Oaks with rent increases: “Well I didn’t want no one keep goin’ up on my rent like that, I said, you know what? I’m not tryin’ to buy this. Hell, I’m just tryin’ to find somewhere decent to stay.”

After contacting HANO about her troubles paying rent at Harmony Oaks and waiting a year, she was finally able to move to a scattered-site development where she lives now. She notes other difficulties she faces now in her current living situation, “…I have some struggles, I went from salary to hourly, that’s how I lost my car, my SUV…” When I asked her what having
to move around so much was like for her, she said, “Frustrating. ‘Cause when you move a lot, you lose a lot.”

Video footage of former Magnolia residents also illustrate the housing hardships former residents faced in post-Katrina New Orleans. In a video from 2006 titled “Hurricane Katrina: The fight for housing in New Orleans 2,” Gloria Williams, a displaced Magnolia resident who later moved into Harmony Oaks:

This situation I’m livin’ in now, I don’t think I’m’ on make it. Because, my rent is 1,128 dollars. The voucher. But I have to pay 409 outta my income. Plus, my light bill be 423 like that. And I just can’t live like that. My medicine be like, 125. And for housin’, to put us out like they did, it was wrong. And I wanna come home, because I can’t live like this. She begins to cry as she stands in an empty Magnolia project living room. This sheds light on the residents’ experience of displacement in the context of disaster and redevelopment and the despair it created for them.

Newspaper articles tell a similar story. A Times-Picayune article by Katy Reckdahl from 2010 also touches on housing instability—“New Orleans still lacks affordable housing for its poorest people, report says.” While “commissioners fear that the New Orleans rental market has been overbuilt,” “available apartments aren’t affordable to those who need them.”

The Housing Authority of New Orleans was ill-prepared to handle the sheer volume of those in need of affordable housing following a drastic reduction of public housing units. In addition to this supply issue, more HANO failures and incompetence continue to make life harder for those left on the margins by the Big Four’s redevelopment and subsequent displacement. Voucher users have been hit particularly hard. In 2009, Reckdahl reported that section 8 voucher users were having difficulties accessing HANO’s Section 8 office when it moved to the West Bank. The office was reportedly disorganized and turned people away. She also reports in this article that the amount of voucher users had just about doubled since Katrina, to 16,000, attributing this to the Big Four displacements and others’ moves from FEMA trailers. Another article by Reckdahl, in 2011 showed that HANO was overpaying rent (landlords were overcharging) for section 8, driving up rental rates, thus making living outside public housing even harder. Part of this was due to HANO’s outdated system for determining rents at these section 8 properties. Moreover, anything that affects New Orleans’ voucher users has a large effect, since, “HANO currently [2011] subsidizes almost 25% of the city’s renters”
Hurricane Katrina and the redevelopment of the Magnolia projects split the community apart, whether former residents returned to Harmony Oaks or not. Interviewees and former residents appearing in the videos and newspaper articles all note the changes this made in their lives. Some interviewees are friendly with some of their neighbors in their current living situations, but they do all note less interaction and closeness than when they were in the Magnolia projects.

Table 4: Themes and Data

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Paradoxes of Living and Dying in the ‘Nolia</th>
<th>The Storm—“Weren’t Nobody Comin”</th>
<th>Dismantling Communities: Displacement</th>
<th>“Ain’t Nothin’ Changed”: the Paradoxes of Opportunity</th>
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<td>Interviews &amp; Focus Group</td>
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<td>Newspaper Articles</td>
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Analysis

Conversations with residents about community, safety, and crime at the Magnolia projects revealed counternarratives to dominant, mainstream narratives about public housing. This is important because dominant narratives shape public opinion and public housing policy decisions. In turn, this directly affects the lives of residents. Part of the dominant narrative on public housing—that traditional public housing complexes are riddled with crime and misery and should be done away with—come from the literature. For example, Wilson’s discussion of social isolation and diminished social capital of high poverty neighborhoods (Wilson 1996). Another part of the dominant narrative on public housing which influenced HOPE VI is the idea that poverty is a spatial issue—much of the literature implied that if poverty were not so concentrated in these areas, they would be better off (Alex-Assensoh 1995; Wilson 1996; Wolf 2007). Thus, HOPE VI sought to break communities up as a means to deconcentrate poverty.

However, conversations with residents provided an alternative to examining these issues as an outsider and brought counterarguments to light. Residents offered nuanced accounts of
community life in the Magnolia projects. Residents’ sense of safety existed independently alongside actual criminal activity at the Magnolia projects. At some point in the Magnolia projects’ history, crime became more of an issue for residents, but senses of safety as residents described them were situational and changeable. Sometimes it was a broad sense of safety related to being in familiar surroundings and knowing many other community members. Other times this sense of safety was related to adapting to unsafe conditions. And still other times, witnessing violent crime compromised this sense of safety. To some of the residents, it was violent and safe at the same time.

The dominant narrative on public housing is one-dimensional and mostly constructed by those who have never lived in public housing. The narratives presented by residents in this study are what is missing from policy and policy discussions. The bonds residents cultivate over time are important to their well-being and getting by in life. This brings to mind Carol Stack’s (1976) work on how kin networks in a poor, black community in a small city are essential to the community’s survival. Similar to conversations I had with residents, she “found extensive networks of kin and friends supporting, reinforcing each other—devising schemes for self-help, strategies for survival in a community of severe economic deprivation” (28). I argue that it takes many years to forge these kind of beneficial bonds again, and that it requires staying put in one place. Yet the residents I interviewed move around frequently. If these concerns were taken to heart in policy discussions, policymakers might be able to alleviate the negative effects of redevelopment and displacement. But first, they would need to understand why these communities and places are important to public housing residents. For example, Stack argues the situation of poverty itself necessitates the sharing of goods and services among community members because their individual incomes are not enough to subsist on (29). This shows that splitting up the poor (deconcentration of poverty) may have unintended negative effects. If the poor were to live among those who were not as poor, their new neighbors may not be as cooperative in sharing and exchanging goods and services.

Race is also an essential part of this discussion. Though discussions of race did not explicitly come up in the data more than a few times, it pervades this entire project. Public housing policies and other social policies in cities disproportionately affect people of color. This has to do with the history of racial residential segregation and the racialized nature of poverty in urban areas in the United States. If policies are disproportionately affecting a racial group, then
it follows to pay attention to race in the analysis. In other parts of the country, public housing has significant populations of non-black people of color. But overwhelmingly, both the reality and popular image of public housing is that most residents are black. This is especially true of New Orleans. Both critical race theory and racial formation theory discuss political struggles over race in the United States, hidden agendas of “benevolent” policies, and the subtle racism that occurs. The assault on public housing in New Orleans is about race and class (critical race theory also uses intersectionality). Locking public housing residents out of their homes and preventing them from returning to New Orleans in various subtle ways effectively reduced the low-income black population in New Orleans, and exacerbated housing issues for those who did get to return. Those who were able to return were locked into an inferior and unstable system of housing assistance—section 8 vouchers. The section 8 system in New Orleans is stressed, so many in need of housing assistance are on the long waitlist. This means they are not receiving housing assistance. In addition, those fortunate enough to get into section 8 housing usually live in deplorable conditions. This is a reproduction of the inequalities low-income black folks already faced living in New Orleans prior to hurricane Katrina.

The process of applying for housing in mixed-income developments in New Orleans is intrinsically wrought with assessments of applicants’ worthiness of housing based on social factors. These social factors are employment, criminal record, and so on. Employment and criminal record are not only related in that it is much harder to find employment with a criminal record, but also in that they are both indicators of social standing and hardships one may be facing. For example, a person who is unemployed and in need of housing assistance is likely worse off than a person who has a job and is in need of housing assistance. Both people in this situation need housing. It is a basic need. However, the requirements for residents to live in public housing units at these mixed-income developments inherently values the person in need with a job over the one who does not have a job. Not only that, but based on statistics from the Data Center of New Orleans, black residents were displaced from the Central City neighborhood (where Magnolia once stood) at a higher rate than from New Orleans in general, and the opposite was true for white residents. From 2000 to 2010, there was a 14.7% decrease in the black population in Central City. From Orleans Parish in general, there was only a 7% decrease. This is a population loss over 50% higher than the rest of Orleans Parish. In the same time frame in Central City, the white population increased by 7.4%; city-wide, the white population increased
3.9%. Central City also experienced a greater general population loss of all races than Orleans Parish. Central City lost 41% of its population while Orleans Parish lost 29%.

Another issue I have touched on in this research is the particular risk single African-American women (female householders) with children were and are for displacement and difficulties returning. In Central City from 2000 to 2010, there was a 10.3% loss in this subset of the population. At the same time, Orleans Parish lost 4% of its single, African-American mothers. In addition, Central City lost 7.8% of its population living in poverty, compared to 0.7% for Orleans Parish from 2000-2012. New Orleans’ black and poor, especially women, were effectively displaced through a combination of the effects of hurricane Katrina coupled with public housing demolition and reduction in units. This supports earlier fears voiced by residents, activists, and academics alike. Central City has become more white and affluent, even if only slightly, since the redevelopment of the Magnolia projects.

The forced exodus of poor, black residents, especially women, illuminates the ways in which issues of race and class pervaded the redevelopment of the Magnolia projects and the rest of the Big Four. It can also be seen as a power struggle—in this struggle, the private sector (in search of profit) and the public sector (working with the private sector for profit) sought to control the spaces the black and poor inhabited for their own gain. This directly relates to the principles of critical race theory and racial formation in the United States.

The structural explanations of poverty, which also take into account racism and the black experience of urban poverty, also explain the difficulties public housing residents face (Wolf 2007). For example, the fact that the worst off of Magnolia residents and other public housing residents were excluded from redeveloped mixed-income sites on the basis of selection criteria. For these residents in need of housing, being jobless or having a criminal record excluded them from these new developments. Just like joblessness in the inner city worsened conditions in those neighborhoods, the selection criteria for these new developments has the potential to worsen conditions for those at the very bottom of the public housing spectrum. Through section 8 housing, this can perpetuate disinvestment and high concentrations of poverty in other poor neighborhoods.

Furthermore, the Magnolia projects (along with public housing in the United States in general) were systematically neglected by the state through policy and cutbacks. The projects were essentially run into the ground until government agencies could deem them irreparable.
This state neglect is part of the structural explanation of urban poverty and gave rise to a second wave of slum clearance across the nation.

**Conclusion**

As is the case with research, this project is not without its limitations. It is not generalizable to all public housing residents or even former Magnolia residents, because of the small sample size of interview participants. Newspaper articles collected were not randomly sampled, and were not an exhaustive collection of all matters having to do with the Magnolia projects, public housing in New Orleans, and section 8 users in New Orleans. The same goes with the videos and photographs. Despite this, the study provided an alternative framework to understand public housing residents’ experiences with displacement, disaster, and redevelopment.

HOPE VI principles of the deconcentration of poverty in public housing, in this case at the Magnolia projects, were meant to improve the lives of public housing residents. However, displacement was inherent in this process, and the benefits of safety and new, fully-functioning facilities were only guaranteed at the mixed-income developments, like Harmony Oaks. Because of selective policies, like requiring employment and criminal background checks, which is detailed in the literature review, the worst off of Magnolia residents were weeded out. In the literature review, section 8 voucher users were often worse off than their mixed-income dwelling counterparts, facing greater financial hardship and less satisfaction with where they were living. This brings to mind how Vale (2013) draws parallels between the initial public housing projects and HOPE VI mixed-income redevelopments. The first public housing projects in the United States only served the top of the “bottom third” and were built on slum clearance. Similarly, HOPE VI mixed-income developments also only served the better-faring of the poor, and were built on the demolition of often dilapidated public housing—like slum clearance. He states that:

Early public housing, just like HOPE VI developments that have replaced it, offered the promise of new urban centers in lieu of marginal communities. Each project represented a significant act of territorial control, a reclamation from unruly behavior. At the same time, since replacement of housing also entailed displacement of communities, public
housing authorities and their partners sorted through those marginal populations with a curious mixture of engagement and mistrust. This directly relates to the Magnolia projects’ history of being built on slum clearance and its later demolition after being designated as a slum, although it was couched in terms of disaster and disrepair. The sorting of the poor in this case comes in the form of the rigid rules and regulations pertaining to who can live at Harmony Oaks, who can visit Harmony Oaks, and what is allowed in the open space at Harmony Oaks. Requirements that applicants expunge criminal records and be employed to live there serve to exclude potential residents who need housing the most.

The merits of this new era of public housing, one geared toward privatization via opening parts of new developments to the private market, seem questionable if subsidized housing is supposed to help the poor. The merits of the Section 8 program can also be called into question. Rather than allowing voucher users to “choose” a place to live in a desirable area where (in theory) they will flourish, it relegates them to other areas of concentrated poverty. These findings are consistent with the literature on the outcomes of deconcentration of poverty efforts like HOPE VI and Section 8 (Brooks et al 2012; Goetz 2013; Graves 2011). Those who get to return to HOPE VI redeveloped properties fare better than voucher users; there is a hierarchy of subsidized housing that is not serving the most vulnerable of the poor.

Through the literature, it becomes apparent that HOPE VI redevelopment has some unintended consequences for the most vulnerable residents of public housing. This begs the question of what should be done if HOPE VI cannot live up to its promises, and what the long-term effects are. Further research should attempt to track the diaspora of former residents of traditional public housing complexes that have been redeveloped. Because crime (or the perception of how bad it is) also seems to disappear from these redeveloped areas, it may be useful to track the changes in locations of high-crime areas.

Finally, HUD introduced a new public housing redevelopment program, called the Choice Neighborhoods Program (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2015). It attempts to mitigate some of the negative effects of HOPE VI redevelopment. It aims to be more locally inclusive and comprehensive in its efforts to redevelop distressed neighborhoods containing subsidized housing and includes “local leaders, residents, and stakeholders, such as public housing authorities, cities, schools, police, business owners, nonprofits, and private
developers” in its efforts (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2015). Like HOPE VI, it replaces public housing with mixed-income housing. The difference is a promise of one-for-one replacement of public housing units. However, since construction can take years, residents are still displaced, even if it is temporary. Housing is an immediate need in order to function in society. So, if construction takes years, residents may have to find housing elsewhere and it may be too difficult to move back once construction is complete. This process still displaces residents and breaks up communities that take generations to build. Further research should be conducted on the outcomes of this new policy, and how it compares to HOPE VI.
References


Appendix

University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research  
University of New Orleans

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator:    Pam Jenkins
Co-Investigator:         Gabriella Garza
Date:                   November 11, 2014
Protocol Title:          “Housing Revitalization in New Orleans: Experiences of Permanent and Temporary Displacement”
IRB#:                   03Nov14

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 2, due to the fact that any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project.  
Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair  
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
Vita

Gabriella Garza completed her B.A. in Sociology at San Francisco State University in California in December of 2012 and hopes to work for a housing justice non-profit after completing her M.A. in Sociology at the University of New Orleans in Louisiana.