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Working Towards the Sustainability of New Orleans' African American Indigenous Cultural Traditions

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Working Towards the Sustainability of New Orleans' African American Indigenous Cultural
Traditions

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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Housing and Community Development/ Economic Development

By

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ABSTRACT

New Orleans indigenous cultural traditions such as Mardi Gras Indians, Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and second line parades were born out of the disenfranchisement of the African American community. Though the practices have existed for over a century and provide social benefits, they have faced hostility from the police department, indifference from elected officials and city planners, as well as economic exploitation, denying them the ability to thrive. With a restructuring of public policy and outside assistance, these cultural traditions will be able to help revitalize the economically depressed areas where they continue to be practiced.

Key words: Mardi Gras Indians, Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, second lines, Master Plan, Cultural Planning, economic development, cultural exploitation

I. INTRODUCTION

Standing on the corner of Claiborne and St. Bernard Avenues, the faint sound of a trumpet sounds in the distance. Slowly coming closer, it is joined by a tuba, a trombone, some drums. Suddenly, rounding a corner several blocks away, a mass of people begins to appear. Out front is a group of older gentlemen, all extremely well dressed in matching purple suits and dancing, covered in sweat and waving what appear to be signs covered in yellow ostrich feathers. The crowd continues to swell as it draws near—first it looks to be a few hundred, then close to a thousand. They are young and old, men and women. The majority are black, but a second glance shows a number of white faces. As the crowd approaches the intersection, a young man, shirtless, climbs on to the roof of the vacant Circle Food Store, dancing thirty feet off the ground while onlookers shout encouragement and snap photos. The band stops under the I-10 overpass, using the elevated highway like an amphitheater, and the spectacle reaches a crescendo. Hundreds of people sing along, shouting out lyrics to “I’ll fly away” in unison as traffic has been forced to stop in all directions. It is a second line in New Orleans, and there is nothing else quite like it.

New Orleans exists in a unique confluence of architecture, cuisine, music, culture and historical events, all of which combine to create a city that seems to be an anomaly in the modern era. While this may have made the city into a mecca of both creativity and tourism, it has also come at a price. A unique confluence of circumstances aligned to create a city like no other, but they also led to a legacy of widespread disenfranchisement and unequal access of opportunity, particularly among the African-American population. Nowhere is this more apparent than when looking at the true culture bearers of New Orleans, those that have created a vibrant, usually

street-based, indigenous culture, exemplified by Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and their annual second line parades, Mardi Gras Indian tribes, jazz funerals, and related practices. Born out of marginalized African-American neighborhoods, these traditions evolved as a response to the racist and repressive policies of the white elite. Even now, over a century removed from Reconstruction and fifty years from the Civil Rights era, practitioners continue to struggle. Institutional support remains elusive, and one hundred years of cultural practice has failed to create significant economic gains for either practitioners or their neighborhoods, despite being present in a city heavily dependent on tourism as an income source.

Yet, just because the traditions stem from ‘back-of-town’ areas of the city does not mean that they have not been heavily studied. A number of books and journal articles have been written specifically about these practices, chronicling the history and cultural significance, and many other volumes—particularly those about New Orleans’ music or Mardi Gras—also devote space to the topic (Turner, 2009; Smith, 1994; Regis, 2001; Mitchell, 1995; Kennedy, 2010, etc). Much of this work takes an anthropological bent, drawing links between Mardi Gras Indians and second line parades with African and Afro-Caribbean cultures in other parts of the globe. Indeed, this level of attention is often frustrating to the culture bearers themselves, as they receive nothing back after submitting themselves to research. With renewed interest in New Orleans post-Katrina, several journal articles were written about the resiliency of the cultural community in New Orleans, mainly dealing with the immediate, post disaster state of the culture. Though certainly a pressing issue, the research once again missed the major issue—what is needed to ensure the long term sustainability of the culture? The history and struggles of these marginalized groups have been, and continue to be, documented by a number of historians and anthropologists, and the effects and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina on the cultural community

has also been well recorded. Though the story of the marginalization of these groups has been well told, solutions to this problem have seldom been presented. This research begins to fill that gap.

This paper largely, though not exclusively, focuses on the post-Katrina era, discussing a number of ongoing issues—some of which have persisted for decades, others which have just emerged. First, I look at the multitude of planning processes undertaken post-storm, an undertaking that still continues nearly seven years later. Beginning with the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, I examine each plan, up through and including the current Master Plan and Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. This examination exposes that, despite a number of suggestions made to support the culture bearers in earlier plans, most references were systematically removed as the planning process lengthened and have now been virtually eliminated from the Master Plan. It has also become readily apparent that New Orleans has no cultural plan—in trying to address culture, the city often seems off balance, tending to make the exact wrong decision before pivoting towards a more palatable one. I also discuss ongoing permitting problems, both in regards to temporary occurrences, such as second lines and Mardi Gras Indian activities, but also those affecting place based institutions such as bars and live music venues. Unfair regulations, ingrained systemic roadblocks and exploitation from outside groups remain common themes amongst the cultural community, who in general just want the same opportunity to carry out their traditions as the rest of the population.

In the next section, I turn to issues of economic stability, which remains a large concern, particularly as both Mardi Gras Indians and Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs continue to spend thousands of dollars a year to construct their suits and parading outfits—money which is almost exclusively spent outside of the cultural community and is not recaptured. That, coupled with

the fact that most participants are from working class backgrounds, puts many on a financial razor's edge. Steps are being undertaken to try to recapture some of this monetary outflow, and some outside groups have begun to assist, but the problem remains persistent. Though the history of disenfranchisement these cultures have faced cannot be erased, careful planning and sustained effort can right this historic injustice, allowing the cultural community equal access to the formal civic and governmental process, as well as the ability to control their own image, finances and future.

II. A CULTURE BORN OUT OF DISENFRANCHISEMENT: HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

EARLY HISTORY

The region that is now known as New Orleans has long been a hub of activity. Native American tribes used the bayous between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain as a trade route, finding the land in-between to be an ideal portage ground giving them easy access to the Gulf of Mexico (Campanella, 2007). The French, too, saw the importance of the area, and on May 7, 1718, Jean Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville founded New Orleans on the banks of the Mississippi. Ideally located to serve as an economic center, the French soon brought over a sizable number of enslaved Africans to help build the colony and, by extension, their own fortunes.

Life in the early days of the colony was incredibly harsh, and “both the French settlers and the African slaves depended on the native Indians for food supplies and other basic needs, and different ethnic groups came to live closely with one another.” (Smith, 1994, p. 21). Intermarriage was common between African slaves and Native American women, particularly because the vast majority of the Africans brought by the French were men (Smith, 1994). Additionally, many escaped slaves would flee into the surrounding wilderness and often found refuge, and ultimately acceptance, with the Native American tribes in the area. This intermingling led to several uprisings against the French, most notably the Natchez Revolt, in which 280 Africans joined forces with the Natchez tribe in an attempt to prevent the French from capturing their sacred lands. (Smith, 1994). The French, partially in response to this association, passed the Code Noir (which translates literally to ‘Black Code’) in 1724. Subtitled ‘The

Collection of Edicts, Declarations, and Decrees Concerning the Discipline and Commerce of Negro Slaves of the Islands of French America', this was an attempt to draw African slaves into the French Colonial culture. One of the most notable aspects of this code is that it excused slaves from work on Sundays, holidays, and for funerals in an effort to help instill Catholic values. These 'off' days allowed slaves to freely gather amongst themselves and instead maintain their own cultural traditions, ironically having the exact opposite effect the code was designed to produce (Turner, 2009).

Though there were several of these gathering points throughout the area, Congo Square emerged as the most important. Originally, the site was primarily a market where slaves could buy and sell goods, but in 1808, after the Louisiana Purchase put the territory into the hands of the Americans—who feared another slave revolution similar to the successful one in Haiti—the Municipal Council passed a law limiting slave gatherings “except on Sundays, at such places only as may therefore be appointed by the mayor, and nowhere else” (Crutcher, 2010, p.27). This new level of restriction essentially eliminated all other gathering sites, leaving Congo Square as the only place where such gatherings were allowed, elevating the importance of the ritualized drumming and dancing practiced there as forms of cultural retention. This set the stage for “the birth of jazz and its related second-line and Mardi Gras Indian performance traditions”, as it created a defined and concentrated space where disguised political and cultural resistance were frequently practiced (Turner, 2009, p. 20).

BIG CHIEF BECAME TO BIG CHIEF TOOTIE: MARDI GRAS INDIANS HISTORY

Of all the cultural traditions to emerge from the ‘incubator’ at Congo Square, the Mardi Gras Indians best exemplify the ingrained spirit of resistance carried down through the generations. (It should be noted here that the term ‘Mardi Gras Indians’ is not universally preferred by all cultural practitioners, and some refer to themselves as simply ‘Black Indians’. However, for clarity’s sake, the term Mardi Gras Indians will be used throughout this document.) Though the exact origins of this practice are lost in the fog of history, it is widely thought that the first Indian tribes appeared during the mid to late 1800’s. Some point to a number of traveling ‘Wild West shows’ that were popular in New Orleans at that time as a strong influence; others say it was purely a way to honor the assistance given to slaves by Native Americans (Smith, 1994; Kennedy, 2010). The influence of Haitian immigrants and the practice of the voodoo religion are also cited as a factor, particularly in regards to the practice of masking for carnival (Turner, 2009). This link to voodoo, or ‘voodoo’ can be problematic, as many of New Orleans culture bearers are Catholic or Christian and see the idea of their actions as having a basis in voodoo as offensive—particularly when thought of in the pervasive image of spells, hexes and the like (Regis, 2001). Regardless, the similarities between the masking and cultural practices of Mardi Gras Indians (as well as in second lines) bear a striking similarity to others throughout the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora.

Whatever the tradition’s major influences, direct ties can be made between the emergence of the Mardi Gras Indians and the rampant discrimination and disenfranchisement faced by African-Americans in New Orleans during the late nineteenth century. As Reconstruction—a period which led to great gains in the rights and political representation of African Americans throughout the South—ended, the racist white elite quickly moved to restore what was once the

status quo, a process that ultimately led to the passage of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which legalized segregation, which, in turn, was followed by the implementation of a number of other discriminatory ‘Jim Crow’ laws. Mardi Gras, too, became a venue for exclusion. The white elite consolidated their control, pushing the lower-class street celebrations off to the side streets and excluding African-Americans from all but the most menial tasks, such as holding the torches that lit the parades (Smith, 1994).

It was somewhere around this time—the 1870’s and 1880’s—that oral histories point to the emergence of the first recorded Mardi Gras Indian tribe, the Creole Wild West, organized by Chief Becate, a man of mixed Native American and African descent (Mitchell, 1995). By the turn of the twentieth century, a number of other tribes had appeared. In the increasingly marginalized back street neighborhoods, resistance to societal disenfranchisement simmered and, occasionally, would boil over into violence. Though most of the African-American carnival celebrations were found only in ‘back-of-town’—a term for the economically depressed areas populated almost entirely by low-income African Americans—rarely venturing into the city center, in 1908 a confrontation was reported between a Mardi Gras Indian tribe and a group of white youth. It is impossible to know exactly what happened—reporting was decidedly prejudicial during this period—but ultimately, all of the Mardi Gras Indians were arrested and small scale ‘race riot’ occurred in response (Mitchell, 1995).

Despite this, much of the violence of the early Mardi Gras Indian tribes was directed at rival tribes. Old grudges could be nursed for months in anticipation of the opportunity Mardi Gras presented for revenge, and most Indians carried some form of weapon as they made their rounds (Bragg, 1995). It was not lost on members of the Mardi Gras Indian community that this violence was a problem, and by 1933 efforts were being made to unify the tribes (Kennedy,

2010). It took another 40 years before this started to bear significant fruit, with success largely due to the efforts of Allison ‘Tootie’ Montana, widely credited with pushing the tradition towards ritual confrontations fought with words and costumes rather than guns and hatchets, often ending in a hug or handshake. The last major violent incident between tribes was recorded in 1981 when Big Chief Larry Bannock was shot in the thigh by a jealous rival (Bragg, 1995).

Despite this, the association between Indians and violence did not disappear, particularly among members of the law enforcement fraternity. On St. Joseph’s Night, 2005—one of the most important dates on the Mardi Gras Indian calendar—the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) converged on the day-ending celebration at A.L. Davis Park in Central City. Driving at high speeds and with sirens wailing, members of the police force broke up the celebration, cursing at participants and forcing them to remove their costumes. Though no violence was reported at anytime in the day, the NOPD maintained they were responding to resident’s complaints and that the Indians had no permit for the gathering, making it illegal (Reckdahl, 2010, Mar 8). In response to this confrontation, a special session of the City Council was called. The first speaker was ‘Tootie’ Montana, legendary Chief of Chiefs. While at the podium, he began to get more and more agitated as he described the harassment he had endured by law enforcement over the years. As he spoke, he suddenly fell to one side, collapsing to the chamber floor. Montana suffered a massive heart attack defending the culture he loved so dearly, and died surrounded by his friends, family and fellow Indians (Katzman, 2007).

Several months later, Hurricane Katrina scattered tribe members across the country. As many faced severe economic challenges even before the storm, they often struggled to return—and still have not. Yet, as early as Mardi Gras in 2006, Indians began to take to the streets once again, a symbol of the resilience of the people and the perseverance of the city. For several years

it seemed the tribes were finally granted a reprieve from the police harassment of the past, but on Mardi Gras Day 2010, an incident occurred with remarkable parallels to the one 5 years earlier. Once again, NOPD squad cars raced through the gathering of tribes at high speeds, sirens blaring, this time for a full fifteen minutes. Once again, officers were abusive, cursing at participants and hurling epithets. The explanations by the police, too, were quite similar—there was no permit for the event, and they had received calls complaining of Indians with guns (though no guns were ever found) (Reckdahl, 2010, Mar 8). Again, on Mardi Gras Day 2011, Indians reported of a ritualistic meeting between tribes being broken up by police (Reckdahl, 2011, Mar 18). Though progress has been made since that occurrence, it seems that even after well over a century, Mardi Gras Indian tribes continue to face disenfranchisement and persecution from those who are supposed to serve and protect.

TAKING BACK THE STREETS: SECOND LINE HISTORY

Much like the activities of the Indian tribes, second lines are “black cultural responses to a segregated city.” (Porter, 2009, p. 601) In addition to the more confrontational practices of Mardi Gras Indians, widespread disenfranchisement of African-Americans post Reconstruction also led to the creation of Black ‘secret societies’, which provided opportunities for social contact and public assistance. The first of these clubs, the Perseverance Benevolent Aid Society, was started as early as 1783 by free blacks in order to provide assistance to the black poor (Goldfield, 1997). It took almost another hundred years before these clubs became widespread, as the much more repressive laws post-Reconstruction shut African-Americans out of traditional forms of opportunity, forcing them to create alternate means of support. These benevolent and mutual aid societies relied on donations from members to “give pharmaceutical, medical and

financial services to the sick and provided burial service” (Turner, 2009, p. 109). This created a form of insurance to the black poor, building a safety net that would otherwise be unavailable.

Around the turn of the 20th Century, the benevolent and mutual aid societies were largely supplanted by Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs (SAPC), which combined charitable aid with social events and parties. This not only kept the fragile and well-needed support system intact, but it also helped transmit and revitalize a sense of shared cultural memory amongst the African-American community, one that began in Africa, passed through the Caribbean, paused in Congo Square and was now moving into the back streets of New Orleans. One of the major elements of a second line parade is the ability, albeit temporary, to ‘take back the streets’ from all oppressors, be they criminals, the white elite, or even a crushing lack of opportunity (Regis, 1999). In tandem with the rise of second lines comes the emergence of the brass band tradition, and the two fed off each other to create the modern second line parading tradition. This tradition was also an important early incubator for jazz, and a number of the musical form’s first major stars, including Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet and Jellyroll Morton, count the parades as major influences.

Though the number of Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs waxed and waned over the ensuing decades, the tradition has remained a strong force in many of the city’s most economically depressed neighborhoods. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina put the future of many of the Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs—and by extension, second lines—in doubt, just as it did the Mardi Gras Indian tribes. Though there is some disagreement as to when the first ‘official’ second line was held after the storm (the Black Men of Labor held a parade on November 26th 2005, but were largely bankrolled by Spike Lee for the documentary *When the Levees Broke*), the first parade financed the traditional way was held by the Prince of Wales Social Aid and Pleasure Club on

December 10th, 2005 (Dinerstein, 2009). These two parades—regardless of financing—combined with the strong social networks fostered in the Social Aid and Pleasure Club community, served as a siren call, letting residents know that New Orleans and its cultural traditions were not dead, and that it was okay to return to the city (Dinerstein, 2009).

Unfortunately, this cultural rebirth was not without incident. On January 15, 2006, over 20 Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and over 8,000 people participated in the All Star second line, an event organized to send a strong message that New Orleans endured. Tragically, part of this message was lost, as three individuals were shot in close proximity to the event. This shooting was used as an excuse by the NOPD to raise escorting fees for second lines by over 300 percent—from \$1,200 to \$4,445 (Troeh, 2006). Ultimately, the ACLU mounted a successful challenge to this increase, proving it to be discriminatory, but, had the fee increase stood, many SAPC's would not have been able to afford their yearly parade. Law enforcement would have succeeded in killing off what Hurricane Katrina and the ensuing levy failure could not.

Of course, a single legal victory did not put an end to police harassment. In late 2007, an impromptu jazz funeral for tuba player Kerwin James was stopped by 20 squad cars, and two musicians—Derrick Tabb and Glen David Andrews—were arrested for disturbing the peace. According to the NOPD, residents had been complaining that the parade lacked a permit and was therefore illegal. However, prior to this instance, impromptu funeral processions had never been disrupted (Reckdahl, 2007). In response to these developments, the city formed the Social Aid and Pleasure Club Task Force in an attempt to start an ongoing dialogue between SAPC members and law enforcement, one that continues today.

EMPOWERMENT IN THE FACE OF OPPRESSION

These historic, indigenous African American cultural traditions are more than simply a celebratory parade or Mardi Gras revelry. Not only do these practices help establish a strong sense of shared identity, they also provide a number of important benefits to a community that has been marginalized for centuries. Most participants may not own their own housing, run a business, and may not even be employed, but when they join a second line or mask Indian, for a time, they ‘own’ the streets. For once, they are the dominant citizens. It is a way to fight against entrenched racialized patterns of poverty that have persisted in New Orleans, and all that participate are granted power, dignity, and self reliance for the duration of the activity (Regis, 1999).

Many second line ‘route sheets’—usually photocopied announcements distributed by the sponsoring Social Aid and Pleasure Club listing the time, date and route of a parade—include messages of peace such as “Please leave all your problems at home and enjoy yourself” found on a sheet from the Money Wasters Social Aid and Pleasure Club, or “Leave your guns and attitudes at home!!!” from the Prince of Wales (Bruenlin & Lewis, 2009). These events are explicitly for the unification of the community and also an anti-crime measure. During a second line, ‘turf’ has no meaning, and communities that may be seen as hostile are connected. This is especially important in a city like New Orleans, which prides itself on its well defined, often fairly small, neighborhoods—areas which can be further subdivided by internal conflicts. A single second line parade can travel four or five miles throughout its four hour duration, passing through parts of Tremé, the 7th Ward and the Marigny, for example. This accessibility extends beyond just the residents of the neighborhoods along the parade route. Attendance at a second line is open to all; there is no need to be affiliated with any club or neighborhood. This

essentially opens up communities often seen as ‘no-go zones’ by residents from the rest of the city, assisting in breaking down long standing race and class barriers.

These traditions also help strengthen the cultural fabric of the community. Decades of disenfranchisement, disinvestment and racist, exclusionary policies have left little or no access to the formal power structure or established forms of economic opportunity. The media—and some politicians—tend to portray working class African Americans as lazy and selfish at best, criminals at worst. Therefore, it is up to the community members themselves to recognize their accomplishments and laud their own community leaders.

Each Social Aid and Pleasure Club will nominate a king and queen to preside over their yearly parade. The men and women chosen are community leaders and spend the day of the parade being honored for their accomplishments. They are given champagne to drink, usually adorned with a crown or some other royal finery, toasted, and driven at the head of the parade in a convertible or elevated on a float. Though the king and queen may never be honored by the mayor, city council or any other government entity, the community ensures that they get their due. In addition, second line parades will stop at the homes of influential community members, as well as local businesses, highlighting their importance and showing respect. Recently deceased community members are honored as well; parades will often play a dirge in remembrance and recognition in front of the home of a well regarded resident who had recently passed (Regis, 2001).

Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, Mardi Gras Indian tribes, second line parades and other cultural traditions also play an extremely important role creating continuity—not only throughout a community, but also across generations. Perhaps most importantly, in a city with an extremely high murder rate—a particularly acute problem among young black males--a

number of new, positive African-American role models are created. These role models are not just athletes, entertainers and politicians, but actual community members that young people can interact and engage with. They could be a parent, an uncle, aunt, friend or just the person who lives on the next block. These are the same people who are honored as Kings and Queens of a second line parade—people a child could well run into at the corner store the day after seeing them waving from a throne.

But one does not have to be selected and ‘crowned’ to be noticed, as masking in a Mardi Gras Indian tribe commands a certain level of respect no matter what the position. (Each tribe consists of the Big Chief, who is the leader of the tribe; often there is a Second Chief as well as a Third Chief; the Spy Boy, who acts as a scout, looking for a rival tribes; the Flag Boy, who alerts the rest of the tribe members to another tribe’s presence; and the Wild Man—always recognizable by the pair of horns affixed to the suit—who performs crowd control and protects the Big Chief. Larger tribes may also have Second Spy Boys, Second Flag Boys, etc, as well as a Medicine Man). Big Chiefs are more than just leaders of their tribe, they also play the role of ‘neighborhood elder’, and are treated with respect, and are referred to as “Big Chief” no matter if they are masking or not.

The community leadership exhibited by a Big Chief can often extend into larger scale community assistance, exemplified by the efforts of Victor Harris, Big Chief of the Mandingo Warriors, and Cherice Harrison-Nelson, Big Queen of the Guardians of the Flame. For 27 years, Big Chief Harris, along with the Committee of Fi-Yi-Yi, has been holding a back to school picnic which includes free school supplies, refreshments, games and health screenings (Big Chief Victor Harris, Spirit of FiYiYi, 2011). Similarly, since 2005, Big Queen Harrison Nelson has helped organize ‘The Big Chief and Big Queen Book Project’, which has given out nearly

30,000 books to school children in New Orleans (Harrison-Nelson & Woods, 2009). The involvement of Mardi Gras Indians in the school system is not a new phenomenon. In fact, members of Indian tribes have been visiting schools since at least the mid 1980's, teaching children traditional Indian songs and customs, as well as providing lessons in such areas as conflict resolution (Harrison-Nelson & Woods, 2011).

Schools are not the only venue where traditions are passed down. Despite a common misconception that each Indian creates his or her own suit, the creation of a suit is actually a communal effort. Family members, friends and other community members all pitch in to help ensure that a suit is ready for its unveiling on Mardi Gras Day. Working in such close quarters over an extended period of time ensures that the traditions will be passed from one generation to the next, as elders teach the younger participants the skills needed to assist. At the same time, this has also allowed the elders to pass down morals and a code of conduct needed to 'be a man'. Creating an Indian suit, as well as masking for the first time, is very much seen as a rite of passage (Harrison-Nelson & Woods, 2009).

Other cultural groups, such as the Bone Gangs—groups who dress as Skeletons and patrol the streets on Mardi Gras morning, often waking up or scaring neighborhood children—also have the welfare of young people on their minds. The Bone Gangs take a different tact, displaying sayings like 'You Next' or 'Drugs Did This to Me' on their costumes as warnings. According to Ronald Lewis, member of the North Side Skull and Bones Gang, "...we talk about violence in the streets. We tell the kids, 'If you're messing with drugs, there's a good chance you're next. You will be a skeleton if you don't do the right thing'" (Bruenlin & Lewis, 2009, p.187). Indeed, community leaders will create cultural organizations simply as a way to engage

youth and keep them out of trouble, such as jazz musician Danny Barker's Fairview Baptist Church Brass Band and activist Jerome Smith's Tambourine and Fan (Burns, 2006).

Surprisingly, it is this level of community empowerment that may be one of the reasons for the long standing tensions the cultural community has with law enforcement. By taking control of the streets, even temporarily, Mardi Gras Indian tribes and second liners have usurped the police department's authority, a position that is most likely found untenable by some members of the NOPD. This is particularly acute as most activities are centered in working class African American neighborhoods, which are often associated (justly or not) with heightened levels of crime and violence. By disrupting or dispersing second lines and Mardi Gras Indian processions, particularly those without permits, law enforcement is able to reestablish their dominance and restore the 'normal' power structure (Porter, 2009).

Indeed, in some instances, this disruption can take place before an event even occurs. On Lundi Gras, 2008 (the day before Fat Tuesday, the last day of Mardi Gras) a two hour second line was scheduled to begin and end at Armstrong Park, located on the edge of Faubourg Tremé, across the street from the French Quarter and containing Congo Square. This was to be the third 'unified' parade to occur post Katrina, organized by several Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and sponsored by the Social Aid and Pleasure Club Task Force. The route was specifically designed to both temporarily reclaim the streets near the tourist-centric French Quarter, a space that many working class African Americans are usually excluded from except as service industry workers, and also to showcase the rich cultural traditions of New Orleans neighborhoods—which many tour guides and published guidebooks tell visitors to avoid. Details about the date and route were worked out with the NOPD, and a permit was issued in August of 2007, a full six months in advance. But just two weeks before the parade was to take place, the police attempted to cancel

the parade, citing traffic and crowd control concerns. The ACLU ultimately had to intervene, and a federal judge ruled that the parade could take place as scheduled (Porter, 2009).

Though the animosity between police and culture bearers has history that extends back nearly a century, it seems that concrete progress is finally being made. On February 6, 2012, Mardi Gras Indian chiefs, NOPD brass, and city government officials, including City Council members, met at a convening of the New Orleans City Council's Governmental Affairs Committee. Discussions centered on the ongoing harassment tribe members felt at the hands of the NOPD, particularly the informal 6 P.M. curfew, a practice where officers would swoop in and force tribe members off the streets of their own communities. Though at first non-committal on the issue, NOPD deputy superintendent Kirk Bouyelas eventually admitted that "there is no 6 P.M. law, no 6 P.M. rule", and after prodding from Councilmembers Susan Guidry and Kristen Giselson Palmer, the only committee members who attended the hearing, all NOPD officers present agreed that they would end the practice (Maldodano, Feb 6, 2012).

Permit requirements for Mardi Gras Indians were also addressed. Several of the chiefs present stated that forcing Indians to follow a set route would destroy the nature of the cultural practice. The chiefs found a champion in Councilwomen Guidry, who declared "There will be no permit. There's never been a permit", effectively ending the debate (Maldodano, Feb 6, 2012). In addition, police also agreed to stop using their lights and sirens to corral Indian tribes, to give chiefs more autonomy in policing their own tribes, to identify a point person in the department to handle Mardi Gras Indian issues, and to allow chiefs to educate members on the force about Indian traditions, rather than use NOPD officers who did not fully understand the practices. The NOPD seems to have kept to their word at least through the summer of 2012, as no incidents were reported on either Mardi Gras Day or St. Joseph's Night. While there was a

significant police presence on both days, officers simply watched the proceedings take place while manning barricades and diverting traffic.

REBOUNDED AFTER CATASTROPHE

While issues with law enforcement, city government and the permitting process have long been problematic, the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina and the ensuing federal levee breaches created the largest challenge the viability of these cultural traditions has yet to face. Many of the neighborhoods settled primarily by working class African Americans—who remain, almost exclusively, the cultural bearers behind these practices—were particularly hard hit. Some areas, such as the Lower Ninth Ward, were almost completely devastated, while others remained flooded for weeks. Inhabitants were (eventually) evacuated and scattered throughout the country. A return to the city seemed questionable for many, let alone the resumption of cultural tradition. However, it turned out to be the resumption of these traditions that helped many displaced residents return home. The formal and informal networks created, whether through a Social Aid and Pleasure Club, Mardi Gras Indian tribe, or some other communal activity, served as a way for community members to keep in touch and pass along information amongst each other. The New Orleans Social Aid and Pleasure Club Task Force was especially important in this regard, not only in providing outreach, but also by organizing the first “All Star” second line roughly four and a half months post Katrina. At that second line, it is estimated that as many as half of the Social Aid and Pleasure Club members were still displaced, and though many were not yet able to move back, they were able to symbolically stake their claim and show their intention to return—as well as send the clear message that the culture was not dead (Porter, 2009).

Indeed, the culture bearing community has proved resilient. By 2010, eighty percent of musicians, Social Aid and Pleasure Club members and Mardi Gras Indians had returned to the New Orleans metro area, largely due to existing social connections and aided by the work of a number of non-profits. Yet, there are a few caveats. First, just as it has in the rest of the population, this return rate has leveled off. It is unlikely that, now over six years out, a significant number of those still displaced will return to the city. Even for those that have returned, over half are now living in different neighborhood, greatly disrupting historic cultural and social connections (Sweet Home New Orleans, 2010). Still, early signs point to a cultural rejuvenation. Social Aid and Pleasure Club membership is currently at ninety two percent of pre-Katrina levels, suggesting that--since the return rate stands at eighty percent--there has been an influx of new members (Sweet Home New Orleans, 2010). Even more encouraging is the increase in youth involvement. Participation of young people in second line parades is up eleven percent since Katrina, and the number of youth involved in Mardi Gras Indian activities has increased a whopping twenty six percent post-storm (Sweet Home New Orleans, 2010). In addition, Social Aid and Pleasure club members have been shown to be “more civically active, service-oriented, and trusting than even the rich and well educated.” (Sweet Home New Orleans, 2010, p. 32)

III. NO PLACE IN THE PROCESS: LAND USE, ZONING AND GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Officials in New Orleans' have long recognized and paid lip service to the importance culture plays in the rebuilding, resilience and character of the city, yet cultural traditions and culture bearers continue to be ignored in the planning process. Because activities like second lines and Mardi Gras Indian rituals do not conform to well known and easily defined uses of public space, they have largely been ignored in formal city plans. This is quite unfortunate, as even though these cultural practices involve both locational and temporal shifts, their health is directly tied to a number of physical spaces.

Finding a place for these traditions will not be as simple as placing them in an existing planning category. These cultural practices were developed away from the formal power structure, sometimes in direct opposition to it, and are often spontaneous in nature—Mardi Gras Indians processions follow no set route, for example, and impromptu second lines can 'spring up', particularly after a funeral; forcing many of the traditions to formalize would destroy the nature of the activity. In addition, many practitioners feel that being forced to adapt to a system that has long rejected them and apply and for permits (or be restricted to a certain area) to carry out their tradition is a violation of their cultural rights.

So, how does one allow for the continuation of a set of living, indigenous, cultural practices? Permitting, the current practice, works fairly well for large, well planned and structured events with a long lead time, such as many of the larger Social Aid and Pleasure Club sponsored second line parades, which are held almost exclusively during a set time frame on Sunday afternoons and usually fall on the same weekend year after year. Yet the fees for both

the permit and required police escort, while providing the city with much needed income, can be prohibitive for some organizations, particularly in light of the fact that many participants come from the most impoverished neighborhoods in the city. Moving the events would be absolutely unacceptable, as the traditions are deeply rooted in the neighborhoods in which they take place; separating the tradition from the neighborhood would divorce the cultural practice with its reason for existing. While finding a solution to this dilemma is not easy, it can no longer be ignored as New Orleans continues to move forward.

SQUEEZED OUT: CULTURE IN POST-KATRINA PLANNING

Following Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans embarked on an unprecedented city planning process consisting of a number of consecutive plans dependent of varying levels of public input. Each of these plans makes a point of mentioning the important role culture plays in the recovery and ongoing health of New Orleans. However, with each new plan, though the importance of culture continues to be stressed, fewer and fewer concrete recommendations are made to support its ongoing vitality. This has resulted in a blueprint for the city's reconstruction and long term future that fails to make allowances for cultural activity—even though that activity has proven to be a major factor in the city's rebirth. In a poignant echo of the traditions' beginnings, New Orleans indigenous culture has once again been left at the margins, disenfranchised from the formal power structure.

The Bring New Orleans Back Commission, largely recognized as the first major city wide planning effort post Katrina, was instigated by then Mayor C. Ray Nagin in late 2005. While controversial, in part because of the top down approach to planning, it is the only planning process to include a Cultural Committee. Though there was some disappointment over the

committee's membership—one Social Aid and Pleasure Club leader referred to it as “too elite, not street”—it contained a number of references to New Orleans indigenous traditions (WWOZ, 2006). Perhaps most importantly, it acknowledges that “The social aid and pleasure clubs, Mardi Gras Indian tribes, brass bands and second line companies—arguably the heart of community traditions that nourish our City's unique musical and visual culture—have been shattered by the storm”, as well as the fact that “4,000+ members of the cultural community were forced to leave and, at present [2006] are unable to return” and went on to state that “Financial losses for social aid and pleasure clubs, Mardi Gras Indian tribes, [and] second line companies are conservatively estimated at over \$3 million” (Bring New Orleans Back Commission, 2006, p.8-9).

Though the committee was created to respond to the immediate needs of arts and cultural communities in New Orleans, it makes suggestions about not just short term regeneration, but also long term sustainability. Of the five major objectives that make up the report's overarching plan of action, two—“support community based cultural traditions and repair and develop cultural facilities” and “teach our arts and cultural traditions to our young people” are directly and immediately applicable to the development of street based cultural traditions. However, the report is rather damning in its analysis of the level of investment in the city's culture, noting that in 2003 the State of Louisiana and the City of New Orleans spent only \$2 million to develop arts in culture in the city, far less than other cultural capitals such as San Francisco (\$56 million) and Montreal (\$350 million) (Bring New Orleans Back Commission, 2006).

Using those distressing figures as a jumping off point, the report makes a case for a marked increase of investment in New Orleans cultural economy, suggesting that a relatively small amount of funding would not only revitalize ‘the soul of the city’, but also create a financial windfall. To that end, the study lists a number of steps that could be taken, including

providing loans and grants to cultural workers, partnering with schools with local cultural organizations, as well as creating a comprehensive clearinghouse of information that lists artists, cultural organizations/businesses, and Social Aid and Pleasure clubs, while also cataloguing their losses (Bring New Orleans Back Commission, 2006). Of course, this report was but one piece of the Bring New Orleans Back plan, which itself was generally rejected by the populace. This rejection stemmed from two major factors—a general distrust of a top-down process that many residents felt did not represent their needs, as well as the now infamous ‘Green Dot Map’, a map published on the front page of the Times-Picayune that visually suggested low-lying, primarily—though not exclusively—African-American areas could be turned into open space. The combination of the two was enough to convince many residents that they would not be allowed to return under the plan, and they rebelled against it (Nelson, Ehrenfeucht & Laska, 2007).

In response to the pushback against Mayor Nagin’s Bring New Orleans Back Commission, the City Council took a different approach, bringing in architects Paul Lambert and Sheila Danzey to oversee the creation of the New Orleans Neighborhoods Rebuilding Plan—commonly referred to as ‘the Lambert Plans’—a collection of 46 separate documents each presenting a plan for a particular heavily flooded Orleans Parish neighborhood (those that were spared the deluge were not included in this planning process). As spearheaded by the New Orleans City Council, the Lambert Plans ended up being the most democratic of all the post-Katrina planning processes. Plans were created at the neighborhood level, with efforts made to gain feedback directly from neighborhood residents themselves. To facilitate this, local architects and planners were hired and assigned to different neighborhoods. Though the sheer amount of work made this necessary, it led to varying degrees of citizen participation and,

ultimately, an unequal quality of work in the final documents. Not surprisingly, this also led to varying levels of community satisfaction with the plans (Hackler, 2010).

Because of the nature of the process, references to arts and cultural activities vary from plan to plan but, surprisingly, very few mention New Orleans indigenous cultural traditions. Central City has always been one of the cultural ‘hot spots’ of New Orleans, yet the Central City Plan only twice references Mardi Gras Indians, once in relationship to A.L. Davis Park, the other as part of a plan to create cultural tours as a way to stimulate economic development. Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and second lines are never directly referenced, though there is a mention of the ‘spring parading season’ (Central City Neighborhood, Planning District Two, 2006).

In contrast, the Tremé/Lafitte/6th Ward plan highlights the City’s cultural traditions far more substantially. The Tremé neighborhood has long been considered the birthplace of Jazz and contains Armstrong Park, which itself holds historic Congo Square, and, indeed, the planning document makes note of the importance of the role the neighborhood played in the development of the city’s cultural heritage. This includes references to both Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and Mardi Gras Indian tribes, even going so far as to mention Tambourine and Fan and the Krewe of Zulu by name (6th Ward/Tremé/Lafitte Neighborhood Plan, 2006). One of the key recommendations of the plan is to assist in the regeneration of the cultural arts as a redevelopment engine of the community and even explicitly states that “...Land Use and Zoning are highly critical. The framework provided by architecture and culture could be easily disrupted by overdevelopment and inappropriate development.” (6th Ward/Tremé/Lafitte Neighborhood Plan, 2006, p.13) Ultimately, the Lambert Plans, though received more positively than the Bring New Orleans Back Commission’s plan, were not officially adopted, due in large part to the fact that they did not include the entirety of the parish—a requirement to receive funds from the

Louisiana Recovery Authority, one of the premier sources of disaster recovery dollars for several years post-Katrina (Hackler, 2010).

While the Lambert Plans failed to become the official blueprint for the rebuilding of New Orleans, they did lay the foundation for the ensuing parish wide recovery plan—the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP), as many suggestions made in the Lambert Plans were incorporated into the new document. Informed by the mistakes of past efforts, UNOP was localized—grouping neighborhoods into their planning districts—but also included a citywide plan (the borders of New Orleans and Orleans Parish are coterminous, therefore the requirements of the Louisiana Recovery Authority were satisfied). The vast majority of the UNOP plan was concerned with the physical reconstruction of the city, and most of the references to cultural traditions are tied to established spaces or objects. In Planning District Four, which includes both Tremé and the 7th Ward, the plan suggests creating a ‘cluster of cultural amenities’ for both residents and tourists along the historic Bayou Rd. corridor, the redevelopment of Hunter’s Field in the Tremé (a traditional Mardi Gras Indian gathering point), and the creation of a Mardi Gras Indian museum in Gert Town (Unified New Orleans Plan, 2007).

In the recovery plan for Planning District Two, which includes Central City, a much more revolutionary idea is presented. Here, a suggestion is made to ‘Organize and Fund an Arts and Cultural District Council’. Mirroring some of the ideas put found in the report generated by the Bring New Orleans Back Cultural Committee, this council would not only work to research the history of New Orleans’ cultural traditions, it would also form partnerships with the city, local universities, historic preservation organizations and schools throughout the city, creating a strong web of support. The plan goes on to develop these ideas further, advocating for the creation of two unique programs. The first, the NOLA Culture Restored Program, would invest in “the

return of cultural organizations, artists and cultural traditions” and also “assist with displaced artists travel cost and/or housing, as well as pairing culture with education in school based programs” (Unified New Orleans Plan, 2007, p.121). The other, the NOLA Rebuilds Culture Program, focused on physical infrastructure needs and “would be overseen by a Cultural Community Development Corporation. Its major function would be to document and coordinate housing and workspace and administer a fund to support uninsured damage to cultural facilities” (Unified New Orleans Plan, 2007, p.120). Though presented as a part of the District Two recovery plan, these two programs reappear in the citywide plan, which includes a short section detailing suggestions to address the post-disaster needs of New Orleans’ cultural institutions. Though this is essentially a ‘catch all’ category, lumping indigenous cultural traditions with culinary arts, festivals and even buildings such as Gallier Hall, it rates the idea of investing in ‘New Orleans culture’, which must be assumed to include traditions such as Mardi Gras Indians and second lines, as a medium priority, higher than the expansion of arts districts or the creation of a downtown theatre district (Unified New Orleans Plan, 2007).

The Unified New Orleans Plan, like the Lambert Plans and Bring New Orleans Back Commission before it, primarily focused on the immediate and immense recovery needs of the city. Several years removed from the disaster, it became clear that it was time to create a long term vision for the city’s development. This vision ultimately developed into the New Orleans Master Plan and Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance, the culmination of the years long planning process. Split into its two components, the Master Plan was officially adopted by the New Orleans City Council on August 12, 2010 with a 6-0 vote (Eggler, 2010, Aug 12). As of early summer 2012, the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance is still under development, with another round of public meetings expected to take place by the end of the year.

Now an official city document, New Orleans Master Plan is divided into a number of chapters, each tackling a specific aspect of the city's development, such as 'Neighborhoods and Housing' 'Historic Preservation' or 'Transportation'. The plan sprinkles occasional references to culture throughout various sections of the document, such as when it notes the importance of 'maintaining New Orleans' cultural identity', though in different sections of the document the term 'cultural identity' is used in reference everything from architectural style to neighborhood tradition. There are several instances in which the Master Plan seems to be making an explicit reference to cultural practices, most notably when it describes the city's neighborhoods as "crucibles of culture and cuisine and networks of family roots" and, in a two sentence long paragraph labeled *Cultural Preservation Linked to Historic Preservation*, "these historic neighborhoods are the birthplaces of Jazz (Tremé and others) and cultural traditions that are integral to New Orleans identity" (City of New Orleans, 2010, p. 6.6). The section of the Master Plan dedicated to neighborhoods and housing does manage to elaborate slightly more about the importance of cultural practice in neighborhood identity, noting that "the preservation and encouragement of culture and tradition is an important aspect of neighborhood preservation in many parts of New Orleans" (City of New Orleans, 2010, p. 5.3). The remainder of the chapter goes on to discuss issues such as small business development, blight reduction and Main Street programs and does not elaborate on this statement.

Tellingly, while the preservation of community based indigenous cultural traditions merits a few brief mentions in the Neighborhoods and Housing chapter, the only place where it receives an extended discussion is within the chapter regarding Economic Development. Throughout the section, though there is an acknowledgement that cultural practices are an important factor in quality of life, culture is viewed as a product, a marketable and money

making commodity rather than a form of expression or identity. Indeed, of the four major ‘culture related’ suggestions contained in the Master Plan, the first is to “Recognize its critical role in New Orleans’ economy”, going on to suggest a cultural economy working group to develop public-private partnerships. The suggestion that follows relates the importance of the city taking a role in securing funding for cultural activities, and each of the other two major recommendations also includes a piece on funding (City of New Orleans, 2010).

Ensuring a level of financial stability for cultural bearers and cultural practices is vital to their continued viability. However, placing issues of financing front and center—particularly a piece on creating public/private partnerships—in a section already related to economic development suggests that the powers that be are more interested in what benefits these cultural practices can offer the city, rather than how the city can provide assistance to guarantee the continuation of its unique cultural heritage. There is a mention of ensuring that zoning codes allow joint living and working situations—a suggestion more in line with visual art than an active, performance based culture—and the importance of affordable housing for artists is also mentioned (though artist is not defined, and it is unclear if cultural traditions count as ‘art’ in this instance). The most important of the four major suggestions, the creation of a ‘Cultural Commission focused on neighborhood based arts’ is presented last. It is suggested that this be modeled after the San Francisco Arts Commission, which invests in neighborhood based cultural resources and provides ‘Cultural Equity Grants’ to artist and neighborhood led cultural initiatives (City of New Orleans, 2010). Despite this recommendation, no mention is made of either the Bring New Orleans Back Commission Cultural Report or the recommendations made in the Unified New Orleans Plan, both of which take a much more holistic approach to the issue. Clearly this lack of attention is not due to a lack of public input, as during at least one planning

meeting citizen participants indicated a strong interest in the preservation of New Orleans cultural practices--when asked “What should we preserve if we are preserving the historic character and neighborhoods of New Orleans?”, ‘Cultural Traditions and Socio-cultural Diversity’ was marked with high frequency (City of New Orleans, 2008).

As of the spring of 2012, the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (CZO) barely mentions cultural practices at all (it should be pointed out though, that as the ordinance is not yet finalized, this could still change). The explanation for this omission seems to be that it is the Master Plan that “lays out the vision for the future of New Orleans and the policies the City should use to achieve that vision”, while “the [Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance] contains rules, requirements and standards that guide and direct the uses of structures and land, and the form and location of structures, in a way that carries out many policies of the Master Plan” (New Orleans City Planning Commission, 2010). In an effort to enhance the sustainability of New Orleans, the Master Plan includes a number of suggestions for items to be considered while drafting the Zoning Ordinance, including an effort to “increase access to healthy food at a lower environmental cost by supporting the production, processing and distribution of locally grown food” (New Orleans City Planning Commission, 2010, p. 15.34). While healthy foods merit a mention, the preservation of New Orleans unique cultural heritage was wholly omitted.

Zoning designations play an important role in the development and sustainability of culture in all cities, and New Orleans in particular, which makes their omission in the CZO quite unfortunate. Many of New Orleans’ indigenous cultural traditions are both street based and neighborhood centric. Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and the second line parades they sponsor make it a point to showcase and honor both respected community members and important local businesses along the same route, often in close proximity to one another. Not only does this help

create continuity in the community, it also provides many businesses with an economic boost. This mixture of residences and neighborhood scale commercial activity can only be achieved at any substantial scale within areas designated as Mixed Use districts. A second line parade in an all residential area is possible, but loses much of its ability to function as a catalyst for community development. A second line in an area that is entirely commercial loses its meaning all together—once divorced from its neighborhood context, it is simply another parade in New Orleans, another fun event held for the benefit of the spectators, not the participants.

ALCOHOL, LIVE MUSIC AND POLITICAL POWER

In New Orleans, existing entertainment-based businesses and related cultural practices continue to struggle, particularly those that involve live music and alcohol. The emphasis of city government seems to be on finding ways to make existing cultural traditions conform to ordinances and initiatives previously created by the city rather than developing new, innovative ideas that allow culture to thrive. This is further complicated by the inherent imbalance of power in the formalized decision making process, particularly acute at the neighborhood level. The complaints of a few well connected residents can outweigh the desires of a less powerful minority far too easily and, in some cases, the well connected may prevail before there is even a chance for a conversation to take place. Somehow, what should be considered some of New Orleans' greatest assets, live entertainment and cultural activities, are constantly on the defensive—every venue, particularly ones found within a neighborhood—is seen as potential nuisance until it can be proven that they are, in fact, a community asset. Of course, in some areas, particularly those that are already marginalized, this can be exceedingly difficult. If this

continues to be the case, the shuttering of local music venues and bars will begin to have a ripple effect, harming related institutions, including the cultural traditions that call these spaces home.

These struggles are particularly acute in the Tremé, which, ironically, is the birthplace of New Orleans' most famous export—Jazz. Most of the problems entertainment venues face in the Tremé, and throughout the city, tend to be related to restrictive zoning ordinances, as well as the difficulty in obtaining a permit that allows for live music performances. Rampart Street, long the dividing line between the French Quarter and the Tremé, used to abut the famous Storyville District, the legendary (and now defunct) neighborhood that served as a crucial incubator for early Jazz. Today, live music has been virtually extinguished from the area--the closing of Donna's in August of 2010 silenced the last music venue on the once famous strip. Despite a zoning ordinance that does not allow for new live music venues to open without prior approval from the City Council, Donna's was one of the venues that was 'grandfathered' in—allowing live music (or any other legal activity that a property was historically used for) to continue despite new restrictions, as long as there is no longer than a six month gap between operational periods. However, for Donna's, that half-year period has long since passed, virtually guaranteeing the demise of the space as a music venue. In early 2011, a new owner tried to reopen the venue, but neighborhood complaints quickly shut the new venture down, and as the grace period had expired, the live music permit was pulled from the location (Ramsey, 2011, Mar 16). A similar club located just down the street, the Funky Butt, closed in 2005, and attempts by a new owner to revive the location as a music club were denied (Ramsey, 2010, Aug 20).

The situation on Rampart Street helps to showcase the inherent inequity in the zoning process as it currently stands, particularly in the area of public participation. In 1994, French

Quarter residents formed the French Quarter Residents for Preservation of Residential Quality (FQRPRQ). In 1999, a survey of interested residents indicated that their number one concern was the noise level of the neighborhood. Members of the FQRPRQ, whom tend to be wealthy, white and well connected, have been able to use their influence to force the creation of the two restrictive entertainment districts in the French Quarter—one on Bourbon Street, the other on Decatur, close to Canal Street—and, as a rule, oppose all live music of any sort outside of their confines, including on Rampart Street (Reckdahl, 2006, Dec). Long a musical hub for the African-American community, residents from the Tremé also claim Rampart Street as part of their neighborhood. In fact, Congo Square, the nexus of black culture in New Orleans, is visible from the former locations of both Donna's and the Funky Butt. Yet, due to the fact that Rampart Street provides one of the borders of the French Quarter, no new live music venues will be permitted, as the neighborhood association has a fear “that Burgundy and the side streets leading up to Rampart will become residential dead zones” (Reckdahl, 2006, Dec).

Across the dividing line, in the Tremé, zoning for live music is also an issue, though the controversy is the mirror image of that in the French Quarter. In July of 2010, the New Orleans City Planning Commission gave approval for the rezoning of 20 formally commercial properties (restrictions had since limited them to residential use only) back into limited commercial use with the creation of a Residential Diversity Overlay district. Though neighborhood residents by and large supported the change, some were concerned that the zoning change did not go far enough, as the buildings would only be able to be used for businesses such as small grocery stores, coffee shops or bakeries. Live music, restaurants and bars would not be permitted under this zoning change, which seemed to some to be a blow to the heart of a neighborhood whose history and culture is so intertwined with the musical culture of the city (Eggler, 2010, Aug 18).

Ultimately, the Planning Commission did not allow live music to be held at any of the 20 properties, but pointed out that it would be possible for businesses to apply for variances in the future.

Currently, within the confines of the Historic Tremé neighborhood (its borders defined as Rampart Street, Orleans/Basin Street, St. Bernard Avenue. and Claiborne Avenue), there is precious little of this musical heritage left. Only one bar remains that offers live music in the neighborhood—the Candlelight Lounge. The Little People’s Place, a popular, if very small, club on Barracks St. has been shuttered for a number of years due to complaints and an ensuing lawsuit, largely thought to come from a small group of residents who moved into the community from other parts of the city (fieldnotes, 2011). Joe’s Cozy Corner, another popular bar, music club and second line stop once located on the corner of North Robertson and Ursulines Street, closed under unfortunate circumstances close to a decade ago. While the Little People’s Place could still feasibly reopen if zoning laws were changed, Joe’s Cozy Corner has since been converted to a private residence, its viability as a cultural hotspot forever gone. If the Candlelight goes out of business and another club does not reopen at the same location within six months, then all live music venues in the neighborhood that served as a cradle of New Orleans culture will be gone.

In the Marginy, Frenchmen Street in particular, live music found a more welcome home. There, an ‘arts overlay’ district has allowed for a number of restaurants to also offer live music, provided they comply with a number of restrictions, including that the band be three pieces or less and play only acoustic music, that the full restaurant menu be offered during performances, that there is no permanent stage and that the performance must be finished by 11PM on weeknights and 1AM on Friday and Saturday (Reckdahl, 2006, Dec). This overlay, in

combination with a number of actual music clubs found along the same strip, has created what is undoubtedly the most vibrant live music scene presently found in the city. However, the current Master Plan and proposed Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance make it extremely difficult for other areas to receive this same type of overlay, particularly when there is any sort of resident opposition.

The difficulty facing live music venues poses a problem for the sustainability of New Orleans indigenous cultural traditions. Though these practices find their deepest roots in resistance to an unjust system, they are also supported by a strong musical tradition. Each second line parade is led by one or more brass band, a practice that has been in place since the practice's inception. While these bands can certainly play in larger, more tourist oriented clubs (or even clubs that cater to a local, though usually much whiter, audience) as a source of income—many of the more well known bands, such as the Rebirth Brass Band or the Soul Rebels Brass Band have a residency, playing in the same club on the same night every week—it is the neighborhood clubs that serve as a musical incubator. Most of these clubs do not advertise in the major music or alternative news periodicals, such as *Offbeat* or the *Gambit Weekly*, which cater to a largely white audience. Advertising is done instead by word of mouth or in the neighborhood. While outsiders are welcome, these clubs are community gathering spots, and performances are more free form, and often musicians simply show up to join in. Music plays an extremely important role in Mardi Gras Indian rituals as well, and there is an entire lexicon of traditional Mardi Gras Indian songs, such as “Indian Red” and “Big Chief Got a Golden Crown”. Several Mardi Gras Indian tribes are also well regarded musical acts, such as the Wild Magnolias and the Wild Tchoupitoulas. By removing music venues from their traditional neighborhoods,

not only is the cultural context lost, but so, too, is an opportunity for the development of the culture.

The restrictions put on Alcoholic Beverage Outlets (ABO's) are also problematic. Many neighborhood bars found in culture bearing communities, whether or not they have live music, serve an important function, often as a meeting ground for Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, Mardi Gras Indian tribes or other groups. Many second line parades begin and end at these neighborhood establishments, and may stop at several additional bars along the way. A number of bars throughout the city are well known to be supporters of these cultural traditions, such as the Sportsman's Corner in Central City, the Rock Bottom on Tchoupitoulas, and Sydney's Saloon in the 7th Ward. Other bars, though less well known, serve as a 'home base' for cultural groups as well, and many have a sign or banner inside, proudly displaying which group the bar is affiliated with. On Sunday evenings, Mardi Gras Indian tribes will use many of these same bars to stage Mardi Gras Indian practice, where the tribes gather to sing traditional songs and rehearse for upcoming cultural events. Once again, a space is created to facilitate the transference of traditions to a younger generation, ensuring the sustainability of the culture.

Despite their cultural importance, live music venues and ABO's are consistently subject to strict oversight and stringent regulations. Recently, for example, the City Council passed an ordinance creating an interim zoning district that prohibited the issuing of new or the renewal of live music and ABO licenses along the entirety of the now in development Lafitte Corridor Greenway, a 3.1 mile long park and pathway that will run from Armstrong Park to Canal Boulevard, passing through Tremé, Mid City and Lakeview. Not only does this encompass the narrow strip that will eventually become the Greenway, but also extends to Canal Street on one side and to Orleans Avenue on the other. This ordinance was created to assuage the fears of

several neighborhood groups who believe that such uses may be incompatible with the new project. The ordinance was passed without public comment and very few people, including neighborhood groups in the Tremé area, were aware of its existence before it became law. While it does not ban such establishments, it does create an additional level of bureaucracy that will have to be navigated in order to open any type of adult oriented entertainment venue within the catchment area. This is especially concerning to a number of Tremé residents, as it casts doubt on statements that were made that the city would work with community members to find acceptable locations for entertainment venues within the neighborhood. Ironically, one of the selling points of the Lafitte Corridor project was that it would serve as a boost to culture related businesses and cultural practices in its surrounding area (fieldnotes, 2011).

HELP OR HINDERANCE? THE ROLE OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

The election of the city's sixty-first mayor, Mitchell J. Landrieu, in early 2010 was seen as a positive development for the sustainability of New Orleans indigenous cultural traditions by many culture bearers. Landrieu, in his previous role as Lieutenant Governor—where he ran the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism—had long expressed his appreciation of New Orleans unique cultural practices. As part of his transition, Landrieu created seventeen task forces charged with examining key challenges faced by the city, one of which focused on the cultural economy. While the final report of the cultural economy task force contains suggestions ranging from creating a cabinet level position coordinating the development and support of cultural programming, to facilitating an increase in branding opportunities, several are directly related to land use issues. These include ways to “evaluate methods by which the arts community could revive blighted properties, secure abandoned properties and participate in

neighborhood/ downtown redevelopment” as well as “explore ways to support neighborhood-level cultural centers and organizations including historical preservation sites” (Burgess & Davis, 2010). Also suggested was the removal or streamlining of legal obstacles such as the permitting process or restrictive noise ordinances.

The report was an encouraging sign that the City of New Orleans finally recognized the role cultural practices have in the physical and economic development of the city. Soon after swearing in, Landrieu took what seemed to be a large step in implementing one of the report’s findings and suggestions, and created the Mayor’s Office of Cultural Economy. This office has proven to be rather controversial, as it seems to be more focused on regulating and formalizing cultural practices under city control than it is about ensuring cultural authenticity and long term viability. While this may be in line with the vision outlined in the Master Plan, this approach runs in opposition to, or at least does not support, many of the suggestions made by the mayor’s own task force, the findings of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, and the documents found in the Unified New Orleans Plan.

Though the efforts of the Office of Cultural Economy have proven to be underwhelming, several elected officials have made pointed efforts to address and assist the cultural community, including Mayor Landrieu, who often pays public homage to the culture bearers. In early 2012, he went so far as to visit the Montana household on St. Joseph’s Night, as well as making a show of walking part of the Super Sunday parade route unattended by any security or staff (though it has to be pointed out that there were many police officers on duty all along the route). In addition, Councilmembers Susan Guidry and Kristen Giselson-Palmer have both taken it upon themselves to learn about and, in some cases, protect traditional cultural practices, exemplified by their work with the Mardi Gras Indian tribes. While it is easy—and sometimes prudent—to

be cynical of the actions of any elected official, the consensus seems to be that this public support is welcome or, at the very least, not seen negatively. The cultural community seems to be hopeful that this will lead to further positive developments, but remains guarded, waiting to see if additional concrete actions follow up these public gestures (Harrison-Nelson interview, 2011, Zulu interview, 2012).

The skepticism of the cultural community is understandable, as even with the support of the mayor's office, as well as Councilmembers Guidry and Palmer, new threats are emerging from City Government. Most notable of these is an ordinance proposed by Councilwoman Jackie Clarkson in early 2012 that would bar young adults under the legal drinking age of twenty one from entering into establishments that sell alcohol as their primary business, except as owners or employees. Bars that allow eighteen to twenty year olds 'upon or around' their premises could face fines, a suspension of their liquor license, or, in some cases, revocation (Krupa, Feb 28, 2012). Though Clarkson states that she drafted the ordinance simply to create another tool to ensure the safety of young people, the long term effects of the ordinance's passage could be quite damaging to the sustainability of cultural traditions.

Local bars have long served as important 'cultural incubators' providing a welcoming spot in a neighborhood where people can gather, share ideas, perform and practice. These neighborhood establishments also create an extremely affordable, accessible and inclusionary venue for multiple generations to be exposed to cultural practices, music in particular. These are not the sometimes highly priced clubs of Frenchman Street or the Central Business District, with cover charges and expensive drinks. Rather, they are spaces where a trombone player from around the corner can meet up with a trumpet player from down the street and the two of them can hold an impromptu performance. They are places where Mardi Gras Indian practice can spill

into the street and neighbors can come and watch. This proposed ordinance—particularly the ill defined language barring eighteen to twenty year olds from being ‘upon or around’ the premises—could drastically alter this dynamic, putting the recent resurgence of youth in these cultural traditions at risk. Young musicians would be denied a chance to perform with their elders and, indeed, could not even watch most live performances. Hazy language defining what constitutes an employee—it is unclear if a band that is being paid for their performance qualifies—means that a brass band consisting of nineteen to twenty year olds may not be able to perform in clubs at all, and it is certain that their peers would be unable to enter. Mardi Gras Indian practices would be off limits, as would participation in Social Aid and Pleasure Club events that take place in these bars. Even attendance at second lines would be cast into doubt, as there is no clarity what constitutes being ‘around’ an alcohol related business. A stop at the Sportsman’s Corner, for instance, could put everyone under twenty one in violation of the law (McCreary interview, 2012).

While this proposal would clearly be damaging to New Orleans’ traditional culture, its effects would likely be magnified by several other recent developments. In the summer of 2010, soon after the appointment of Ronal Serpas as the new police chief, the NOPD began actively enforcing a long on the books noise ordinance prohibiting the playing of musical instruments in public rights of way between the hours of 8PM and 6AM. One of the groups most impacted by this move was the To Be Continued Brass Band, a group of young men who had been performing near the intersection of Bourbon Street and Canal Street since 2001. Performances generally began around 7 o’clock and lasted several hours, netting each band member roughly eighty dollars for their efforts (Coviello, Jun 17, 2010). These performances coincided with peak hours of activity on Bourbon Street, and often served as a tourist’s first exposure to traditional

New Orleans music and culture. Enforcement of the ordinance disrupted the band's decade long tradition, forcing them to play earlier for fewer people, which in turn limited the amount of money they could earn each night. While the band members are now all over twenty-one, many of them began performing when they were still in their teens and, under an ordinance like the one proposed by Councilwoman Clarkson, would have been prohibited from performing or even entering a bar. Coupling that with an aggressive enforcement of the noise ordinance, a band just beginning their career in the same mold of the To Be Continued Brass Band would be left with few, if any places to play.

To add yet another barrier, in January of 2012, the New Orleans City Council passed a curfew ordinance prohibiting minors under the age of sixteen from being in the French Quarter and part of the Marigny (including Frenchman Street, a live music hub) without the presence of a guardian, exempting those “ ‘on a reasonable errand’; going to or from work; ‘involved in an emergency’; on the sidewalk in front of their home or that of a next-door neighbor; attending official school, religious or other recreational activities; or ‘exercising First Amendment rights ... such as the free exercise of religion, freedom of speech and the right of assembly’” (Carr, Jan 5, 2012). Similar to Clarkson's proposal, the reason cited for the ordinance was to protect young people from the hazards related to the large number of adult oriented businesses in the area. Reaction to the passage of the ordinance was mixed—some members of the city's African-American community were strongly opposed, saying it clearly targeted Black youth and invited racial profiling—but nevertheless a citywide expansion has now been proposed. If the curfew is expanded as it is currently written, it could have profoundly negative effects on cultural sustainability, as there are no explicit exemptions made for cultural activity. It remains unclear

what constitutes an ‘official’ activity. Under this ordinance, a fifteen year old could be violating curfew if they mask as Mardi Gras Indian on St. Joseph’s Night.

If both the citywide curfew and the ordinance prohibiting eighteen to twenty year olds in bars are adopted in addition to the already stepped up enforcement of the noise ordinance, the avenues in which young people could become involved in indigenous cultural activities would be greatly reduced. Not only would this create fewer positive options for youth in a city where these opportunities are already scarce, it could also deny young people the ability to become the next generation of culture bearers and begin to cast the long term sustainability of these traditions into doubt.

THE SHORTSIGHTEDNESS OF CULTURAL PLANNING

The idea of a city actively planning for culture is not a new one, yet New Orleans, one of the only cities in the country with a unique and vibrant street culture, has never been able to incorporate—or even accommodate—these cultural practices into its planning process. Many decisions made to supposedly support culture in the city have had devastating effects on the culture bearing communities. Currently, New Orleans follows the lead of most other cities, lumping ‘arts and culture’ together, and often focuses on the ‘art’ as opposed to the culture, favoring physical space over activity. The focus remains on art galleries, concert halls or other large structures rather than to trying to incorporate the much wider range of human choices and cultural activities into a plan. Big-ticket items, such as Reinventing the Crescent, a grand plan to redevelop the waterfront along the Mississippi River including some cultural amenities; or ‘mega-events’, like the 2013 Superbowl to be held in the Superdome, are given clear precedence and receive millions of dollars of support, while smaller scale items such as local musicians or

neighborhood music venues are excluded. In many ways, the entire process is exclusionary, as it applies a top-down approach to a cultural identity that may have taken decades, even centuries to develop organically. With only a select few individuals able to decide what forms of cultural expression are to get official support, there are bound to be winners who share in the spoils, and losers further banished into the margins, perhaps even denied the legal permission they require to survive.

To provide support for culture, the solution in New Orleans (and most other cities) has largely been to create a ‘cultural district’ which, in theory, allows culture to thrive with fewer impediments than found elsewhere in the city. These same districts are often also seen as economic development tools, serving as a catalyst for investment in a depressed area, more likely than not a decaying downtown or other inner-city space. But whose idea of culture is actually being promoted by these districts? The concept of a ‘cultural district’ is itself a very Eurocentric one, and can be traced as far back as ancient Rome, where important communal and civic buildings were placed near major cross roads (Evans, 2001). This clustering of buildings by function—putting a theatre next to a museum next to an art gallery—continued throughout the development of cities in Europe, and is even found in such urban planning ideas such as Ebenezer Howard’s Garden Cities. The lineage of this strategy also means that culture is narrowly defined as so-called ‘high culture’—opera, theater, renaissance paintings, etc.—artistic expressions that white people of means tend to enjoy. Because of this, rebranding an area as a ‘cultural district’ often ends up serving the same purpose as many of the most egregious urban renewal programs of the 1950’s and 60’s—uprooting a certain population branded as undesirable or ‘unmarketable’ in the name of progress.

New Orleans itself has a history of this, ironically found within the Tremé—the neighborhood that is considered New Orleans’ cultural incubator. Following the destruction of the French Opera House by fire in 1919, it was decided that New Orleans needed a new public civic center. Rather than rebuilding at the now vacant parcel on Bourbon Street where the Opera House once stood, the City instead decided to place the new edifice in Tremé, and so the Municipal Auditorium was constructed, opening in 1929. To facilitate its construction, the Globe Hall, one of the City’s most important dance halls for African-Americans was razed—the first of what would be many sacrifices in the name of ‘culture’ and ‘progress’ (Crutcher, 2010). It was further decided that the area surrounding the new Municipal Auditorium was ripe for expansion into a civic and cultural center that would help attract conventions and tourists. By the mid-1960’s 122 families had been relocated from the project footprint, bound by Rampart Street, North Villere Street, Basin Street and St Philip Street, their homes and business destroyed (Crutcher, 2010).

While the Mahalia Jackson Theater was soon built, problems with financing led to the abandonment of the remainder of the project. The land lay vacant for another decade before it was decided to turn the area into what is now Armstrong Park. Hundreds of people were displaced and a number of landmarks were destroyed in what was already New Orleans’ most culturally vibrant neighborhood in the name of ‘cultural advancement’. The cultural practices found in Tremé were not deemed important, because they were, quite simply, the ‘wrong’ form of culture, practiced by the ‘wrong’ people. New Orleans own experience shows that it is extremely important that, if a city is looking to create a district known for its culture, it must put its primary focus on attracting or retaining the culture bearers. Clearly the process that led the creation of Armstrong Park did not do that.

A quick look at the Seventh Ward, Central City or the Tremé shows an area and residents that are already in a different sort of ‘cultural district’. Second lines, Jazz, Mardi Gras Indians, jazz funerals and brass bands have all originated from these neighborhoods. Many of those involved in the creation of these same cultural traditions have expressed a strong desire to reinvest in the neighborhoods where many have family that extends back generations. These cultural practices are not merely entertainment, but instead a form of community building, of shared memory and way to maintain dignity and hope. It is also a way to maintain influence over the development and activities present in a neighborhood. It is a grassroots community development strategy. But, instead of a helping hand, these same traditions and practitioners find themselves under attack. Police regularly harass parades and Mardi Gras Indian gatherings. Zoning laws and powerful, well connected neighborhood organizations have been slowly whittling away at the number of venues where musicians are able to perform. A reversal of this policy—providing assistance instead of opposition—would allow these practices to continue to serve their function as community change agents, strengthening both the culture and the city in the process. Massive arts and entertainment complexes are not needed to support an already vibrant and expressive culture.

IV. IN SEARCH OF A FAIR SHARE: THE ECONOMICS OF NEW ORLEANS INDIGINOUS CULTURE

ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION?

It is no secret that New Orleans' major culture bearers come from working class backgrounds. It is also no secret that the elaborate suits worn by Mardi Gras Indians are quite expensive to create—averaging somewhere between four and five thousand dollars or, in some cases, such as Corey Rayford's 2011 eight thousand dollar, one hundred fifty pound dragon suit, substantially more (Reckdahl, 2011, Mar 8). Social Aid and Pleasure Club members must buy a new outfit each year for their annual parade, as well as pay permitting fees and hire the brass bands. Other traditions, such as Skull and Bone Gangs and Baby Dolls must also pay for their own materials. Despite the financial hardship this often creates for participants, there is no expectation of financial reward—it is simply done out of a love of community and tradition, ensuring the practices live on from one from one generation to the next. However, this does not mean that there is no money to be made, a fact that the New Orleans city officials know all too well. Herein lies the problem—city government and private business seem more than willing to capitalize off the hard work and creativity of some of the New Orleans' most disenfranchised citizens, yet simultaneously discourage these same practices as well as avoid investing in the neighborhoods where the culture originated.

Though there has been a long history of conflict between the City of New Orleans and practitioners of street culture, city leaders have not been shy about using elements of this same culture both as a promotional tool and as an economic driver for the city. Marketing campaigns, particularly those geared towards attracting tourists, abound with images of second lines and

Mardi Gras Indians. The Official New Orleans Tourism Website often prominently features images of second lines in its promotional advertising, such as 2010's 'Christmas New Orleans Style' campaign, or a 'banner' picture promoting the annual Po' Boy Festival in 2011 clearly showing a second line winding its way through the crowd. Indeed, an entire section of the website features information about various aspects of New Orleans street culture, including information about where to find Mardi Gras Indians, as well as such 'helpful' text as "Second Linin' is another great New Orleans musical tradition that you will surely want to experience in your visit to the city. Remember, it requires no pre-qualification other than the "wish to have a great time'" (The Official Tourism Site of the City Of New Orleans, 2010).

Instead of pointing visitors in the direction of one of the many Social Aid and Pleasure Club sponsored second lines that occur most Sundays throughout the year, the city sponsors its own second lines during many of the special events and festivals the Tourist Board helps to fund or develop. It should also be noted that the featured picture representing second lines on the website shows an all white brass band leading what appears to be an all white crowd through the streets of the French Quarter. The only African Americans in the picture are the two well dressed gentlemen clearly hired to dance in front of the parade. This picture alone speaks volumes about the level of respect the City has for these traditions, let alone the traditional culture bearers. Jazz Fest incorporates a number of second lines that parade through the Fairgrounds, encouraging festival goers to wave their handkerchiefs and 'do what they wanna', and the symbol of the Jazz and Heritage Foundation, who organize the festival every year, is an image of four figures clearly 'second lining'. Satchmo Summerfest kicks off with a second line that travels from St. Augustine church and leads participants several blocks to the festival itself,

which is usually held at the old U.S. Mint. Even the Creole Tomato Fest in 2010 started each day with a second line, where the parade was led by several individuals dressed as tomatoes.

The city government and festival promoters are not the only groups that sponsor their own second lines. Increasingly, private groups have been relying on second lines as a promotional tool. In August of 2010, a short second line was used to publicize the unveiling of the 2011 Saintsations Swimsuit Calendar (WWOZ, 2010). One month later, the Heaven's Pets Cremation and Bereavement Center sponsored a second line in memory of deceased pets (The Times-Picayune, 2010). Protesters have begun to use second lines to draw attention to their issue of choice, including an attempt to call for the reopening of Charity Hospital (The Times-Picayune, 2010). Each of these second lines, though featuring at least one brass band, as well as a group of people following behind creating the 'second line', were lacking many of the key ingredients that make up a traditional second line parade. Gone were the local vendors, selling food, beer and other refreshments. Gone were the community members, the friends of the band and the neighborhood residents, waiting on their porches for the parade to pass. Interestingly, gone, too, was much of the police escort, a sharp contrast to the NOPD's post-Katrina claim that an increased presence was necessary to keep participants safe.

While the accessibility of second lines has led to a wide spread appropriation of their use, Mardi Gras Indians, too, have been used as marketing tool, often as a way to provide a New Orleans 'flavor' for an event or advertisement. Each year, the NFL organizes a concert in the hometown of the previous year's championship team to kick off the upcoming football season. As the Saints were the victors in 2010, in 2011 the concert was held in New Orleans' own Jackson Square. During the final minutes of a performance by the Dave Matthews Band, a cadre of musicians, Social Aid and Pleasure Club members and Mardi Gras Indians were invited on

stage to join in, giving the event a New Orleans ‘feel’ (Filosa, 2010). Similarly, a Mardi Gras Indian is also conspicuously present in a 2010 advertisement showcasing the start of the Hornet’s basketball season, and the accompanying band performs a traditional Indian song.

Sports teams have not been the only organizations using Mardi Gras Indians as shorthand for ‘authenticity’. The official, city sponsored commemoration of the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina began with a number of Mardi Gras Indian chiefs performing traditional Indian songs together, an event that was billed as ‘the first of its kind’ (at least in public view, anyway). Ironically, just several years before, many of these same men were struggling to return to the city with little or no assistance, repopulating neighborhoods that had long been neglected by the same government that was now celebrating them as a symbol of resilience. On April, 11th, 2010, popular media also got into act with the premiere of HBO’s *Treme*. One of the main characters of the show is a Mardi Gras Indian chief, and he appears in full regalia in the first episode. Subsequent episodes of the series follow the character as he attempts to bring his gang back together in preparation for Mardi Gras. Not surprisingly, this show has led to an increase in interest in traditional New Orleans street culture, as well as the Tremé neighborhood where many culture bearers reside. Even with this new, national attention, the city of New Orleans continues to send mixed messages, as horse drawn tours through parts of Tremé have been accompanied by several squad cars, and hotel staff continue to tell visitors that any neighborhood north of Rampart Street is unsafe.

INFORMAL ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

Though support from the city remains scattershot and sporadic, there are still a number of ways these traditions can not only remain viable, but actually provide their parent communities

with an economic benefit. Already, ‘authentic’ second lines attract a multitude of street vendors, selling food, water, beer, even clothing. These vendors follow the parade the entire route, dragging their wares along with them, or, if they are motorized, driving ahead of the procession and parking at each of the pre-publicized stops. Though many of these vendors are not licensed, for years the City looked the other way and allowed them to sell their wares unmolested.

Non-enforcement does not necessarily constitute approval. Just before the start of the fall 2011 second line ‘season’, the City of New Orleans announced that it would be issuing citations to any unlicensed vendors selling at second line parades. Very few, if any, of the vendors had ever held a license. As it turned out, despite the over century long history of the tradition, the city had no permit it could issue that would fit the activities of the second line vendors. The city has vending laws for “Jackson Square artists; peanut and candy sellers; Mardi Gras parade hawkers, who can't sell either silly string or stink bombs; and people who sell precious metals and stones in temporary quarters, who require permits signed by ‘three property taxpayers of the city stating that the applicant is of good moral character.’ Also, an entire section is devoted to people who sell cut flowers from pushcarts” (Reckdahl, 2011, Aug 26).

The problem arises because second line vendors move with the parade, some pulling a large cooler stocked with ice and chilled drinks while walking with parade participants, others selling barbeque from trailers pulled by pickup trucks, and, in at least one case, from the back of a bicycle. While permits exist for vendors selling during Mardi Gras parades, they must stay two blocks ahead of the parade. Second line vendors almost invariably trail behind, allowing ‘second liners’ easy access to their products while the parade follows unimpeded. And while permits exist for selling from the back of motorized vehicles, the vehicles must remain stationary and must also be equipped with running water—neither of which would allow the current model to

continue (Cotton, 2011, Aug 28). Food trucks can cost tens of thousands of dollars, well beyond the reach of most part-time, working class vendors. Instead, many vendors resort to using pick up trucks with large grills either in the back or towed on a trailer, a cheaper, though technically illegal alternative. These trucks and other food vendors follow the parade, acting as participants as well as entrepreneurs (the trucks drive ahead of the parade and set up at each stop, while smaller scale vendors actually walk with the parade). Indeed, many vendors are well known and sought after by ‘second-liners’, their food as much a part of the experience as the band or the Club sponsoring the parade.

Many of these vendors sell only at second line parades or related events as a way to supplement their income. Other vendors use their profits to help fund the activities of their own Social Aid and Pleasure Club. Large fines or permitting fees quickly add up, making the traditional vending practices unprofitable and forcing out vendors without significant startup capital. Permitting fees alone quickly become cost prohibitive for many small scale vendors, who may make less than a hundred dollars of profit over the course of a parade. The inherent difficulty in managing the bureaucracy of City Hall is another barrier. Realizing the impending threat to a major piece of second line tradition, the Social Aid and Pleasure Club Task Force engaged the City—most notably the City’s Advisor on the Cultural Economy, Scott Hutchinson—and negotiated a suspension of enforcement for an undetermined amount of time.

Vending is not without its share of controversy, even within the second line community, particularly the selling of alcohol. Beer is sold by most of the ‘micro-vendors’, particularly those not preparing food. Some go so far as to set up mobile bars on the back of pickup trucks, selling mixed drinks in addition to the usual beer, soft drinks, Gatorade and water. While this may be a large money maker for these vendors, it is also the most problematic practice. While selling beer

without a permit is technically illegal, New Orleans (and much of Louisiana in general) has long had relatively lax set of liquor laws—24 hour bars and drive through daiquiris, for example—and has a tendency to look the other way for minor infractions. Setting up a mobile bar raises several additional issues, and the Social Aid and Pleasure Club Task Force recognizes that it is a problem. I.D.s are virtually never checked by vendors, leaving it up to the individuals discretion whether or not to sell to a patron. While the idea of minors having unrestricted access to beer is troubling, the idea of teenagers buying Jack Daniels at will is much more so.

Street alcohol sales have already served as a flash point that, in at least one case, has led to tragedy. On January 18, 2004, the Jazz funeral for celebrated musician Anthony ‘Tuba Fats’ Lacen made an unscheduled stop at Joe’s Cozy Corner, a popular bar in the Tremé neighborhood. Outside, vendor Richard Gullette began selling beer to parade goers, raising the ire of bar owner ‘Papa Joe’ Glasper. Glasper, visibly upset, confronted Gullette, accusing him of stealing the bar’s business. The confrontation, according to Glasper, turned physical and, feeling both angry and threatened, Glasper retreated into his bar, only to reemerge with a Magnum .357, which he used to shoot Gullette once in the stomach, fatally (Crutcher 2010). As a result of the incident, the bar lost its liquor license and closed soon after. ‘Papa Joe’ Glasper died in Orleans Parish Prison of heart failure while awaiting sentencing. Glasper, prior to the shooting, had been known as a peacemaker and often spoke of his dislike of guns and violence (Reckdahl, 2004, May 18).

Though the events that occurred at Joe’s Cozy Corner that January afternoon are both tragic and regrettable—a rare and extreme example of violent conflict between participants—it is important to note that the disagreement was fundamentally one about money. Many small businesses accrue concrete financial benefits when a cultural event takes place in their area.

Businesses along a parade route, particularly groceries and bars, see a marked increase in traffic as participants duck in to make purchases along the way. In fact, many second lines begin and end at a bar or other local institution that serves as the unofficial headquarters for the group that is sponsoring that particular day's festivities—not only helping sales that particular day, but ensuring stronger neighborhood support throughout the year. The Sportsman's Corner, located on the intersection of Second and Dryades streets in Central City, serves as the headquarters for at least four Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs—the Divine Ladies, the Ladies and Men of Unity, VIP Ladies and Young Men Olympian. In addition, the bar is also a major stop for Mardi Gras Indian tribes on St. Joseph's Night, drawing a crowd of onlookers who use the location as an informal base of operations for the night.

The relationship between the bar and the cultural community is clearly a symbiotic one. For Social Aid and Pleasure Club members, the bar serves a gathering point, a place to hold meetings, have parties and plan events. It is both a social and civic space. For the bar, the activities of the social aid and pleasure club members guarantee there will always be a customer base, and events held near to or in conjunction with the bar serve as a form of free advertising. Virtually all of the bars affiliated with traditional cultural activities are local, neighborhood bars—they are nowhere near the tourist circuit and, in some cases, don't even have a sign above the door. Second lines and, to somewhat lesser extent, Mardi Gras Indian practices and activities, not only help bring in crowds, they also help give bars notoriety—which is essential when the bars rely almost exclusively on word of mouth to attract customers. Many establishments will proudly display a banner proclaiming which club or tribe calls the place 'home', not only showing their loyalty, but also establishing a 'cultural brand'. Without these cultural activities, these bars would simply be another local watering hole most likely barely

squeaking out a profit on whatever drinks they can sell on a Friday or Saturday night. With them, they become neighborhood institutions, not only as places of entertainment, but also as informal community centers and gathering points.

STEPS TOWARD ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

During a neighborhood second line, most money is spent locally, usually from one community member to another. This is for the most part a closed circuit—money changes hands within the community, though little additional money is added—but it does serve as a way to help ensure the tradition, as well as some community business, stay economically viable. A second line may draw a thousand people or more, and many second liners are also members of other Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, simultaneously participating in the culture they love while they show solidarity with their peers. Money spent in one neighborhood will be reciprocated when another club holds their annual parade in a different part of town. (Of course there are also some attendees who are not affiliated with any group nor live in the traditional culture bearing neighborhoods who also patronize vendors and other businesses, just as there are residents who attend and spend no money at all. For the purposes of this study, these are assumed to cancel each other out).

Mardi Gras Indians, on the other hand, do not have the same schedule of activity as Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs do, and therefore face a different set of challenges. For years, there had been discontent within the Indian community over the use of their images and the profits that are subsequently generated. A number of photographers have taken, sold and made money from pictures of Mardi Gras Indian suits and performances. While there are no illusions that anyone is getting wealthy off such practices, each Mardi Gras Indian makes substantial

investments of time and money in the creation of every suit. The Indians, already facing a number of economic challenges, pay the entirety of the cost themselves and reap no significant economic benefit.

To see others, particularly those of better means, benefit off images of their work is not only insulting, it is disrespectful. A notable example of this exploitation can be found on the cover of the first edition of Chris Rose's *One Dead in Attic*, a collection of essays published in 2006. Meant to be a graphic representation of the resilience of the City, the cover shows a house devastated by Katrina. Next to the door, under the ubiquitous Katrina 'X', is nailed a piece of a Mardi Gras Indian suit. Both the house and the suit belonged to Big Chief Al Doucette, and the picture was taken without his permission. In fact, Doucette was unaware that it was even taken until he saw a copy of the book for sale. Feeling that his work was being exploited for the financial benefit of others—the image was on the cover, clearly chosen to increase the book's marketability—Doucette eventually retained an entertainment lawyer to explore his options, hoping to eventually receive compensation for his contribution (Bury the Hatchet panel discussion, 2011).

There has been a growing push for Indians to copyright their suits each year, ensuring that a portion of all proceeds from sales of an image of a particular suit would return to the suit's creator. Though the idea of copyrighting suits is not new—Tootie Montana had copyrights on several of his creations—the current process began in earnest in 2006, largely due to the efforts of Ashlye Keaton, an attorney who works with Sweet Home New Orleans and the Entertainment Law Legal Assistance Project. In order to be eligible for copyright, Indian suits must be classified as works of art rather than simply costumes, which have been ruled ineligible (Robertson, 2010). Though the financial will likely be slight, the legal process has had led to

many in the Mardi Gras Indian community to become more aware of their rights, an important step in avoiding exploitation (Zulu interview, 2012).

The copywriting of suits is a positive step as Mardi Gras Indians look to take control of their own legacy, both culturally and financially. But it is only the beginning. The raw materials needed to create an Indian suit—feathers, beads, canvass, etc.—are expensive and not always readily available. Currently, shopping is done at six separate shops throughout New Orleans and Metairie, and some materials are bought wholesale from as far away as New York (Kickstarter, 2010). The shops that do carry the items primarily cater to the large Mardi Gras krewes, and while they are happy to take business from Mardi Gras Indian tribes, they do so as an afterthought. The shop owners are not necessarily versed in Mardi Gras Indian culture, nor do they know the sometimes idiosyncratic needs an Indian may have. This can create problems for the Indians, particularly if there is not enough of a certain material on hand. Feathers are dyed a certain color, and each batch can vary in shade. If another batch needs to be reordered at a later date, the hues may not match. As each suit is meticulously planned, including color scheme—and one of the driving ideas in the culture is to have the ‘prettiest’ suit—mismatched colors could lead to disaster. Furthermore, the thousands of dollars each Indian may spend on a suit every year is not recaptured in the community. It is simply profit for someone else—often someone who does not see the deep value of the cultural tradition.

To rectify this, Shaka Zulu, Third Chief of the Yellow Pocahontas, and his wife Na’imah opened the Golden Feather, a Mardi Gras Indian restaurant and gallery in April 2011 on Rampart Street, just across from Congo Square. The business includes a gift shop and, ultimately, will also contain the projects lynchpin: a bead and feather shop that caters directly to the needs of Mardi Gras Indian tribes and Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs. When the shop opens, it will be the

first time that an actual culture bearer will be able to service the needs of his peers. Though the reasoning behind the project is sound and the allure obvious, that has not directly translated into support from the financial community. So far, Zulu's only major backer has been NewCorp Inc., a local community development financial institution that provides assistance to small, minority and women owned businesses. NewCorp's services include technical assistance, which Zulu participated in before receiving financial support from the organization (Spera, Feb 16, 2012). Through their assistance, Zulu was able to open the restaurant portion of his business, but backers for the bead and feather shop have remained elusive—both banks and other non-profits have so far declined to provide assistance. Tour groups often pass through the shop, but organizers do not pay Zulu for the use of his business or for his time spent answering questions. The only money he makes off the tours comes from any products he sells out of his gift shop.

Despite this, Zulu knows that there is a solid customer base for his shop when it does open. Each Indian must make a new suit every year, and each suit will cost several thousand dollars. If only twenty Indians buy exclusively from Zulu the first year—which is less than the membership of his tribe—he would make \$60,000, more than enough to cover his first shipment of supplies. Furthermore, as he understands the specific needs of the culture, he would be able to provide a level of service that is currently unavailable anywhere else, as well as employing several members of the culture bearing community. Though the idea and business plan are sound, Zulu is concerned that a larger entity with ready access to capital may co-opt his idea and open a shop of their own, making the bead and feather shop at the Golden Feather no longer financially viable. Once again, even though the actors may mean well, the profits and control of the culture would be out of the hands of the culture bearer themselves and they would have to

continue to rely on an outside organization for the supplies they need to keep the tradition alive (Zulu interview, 2012).

THE ROLE OF OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE

The cultural community continues to face substantial economic pressure, particularly as the U.S. economy continues to struggle. Because of the expenses associated with the culture—expensive materials, exorbitant permit fees, etc.—it is often extremely difficult for members of the cultural community to cover the costs they need to participate each year. While the opening of the Golden Feather is a way for money to be redistributed back amongst the culture bearers themselves—as well as a step forward for culture bearers who are trying to solidify control over the future of their own practices—it is only a start. For the foreseeable future, outside assistance will be needed.

In an effort to help fill this longstanding gap, in 1994 Norman Dixon Sr. joined in a partnership with Festival Promotions Inc. to create the Norman Dixon Sr. Annual Second Line Parade Fund. As part of the agreement, Festival Promotions Inc. helps raise needed funds while also providing financial management services, such as bookkeeping and fund disbursement, pro bono. Since 2003, the Norman Dixon Sr. Fund has been a registered 501c3, and donors have included the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, the Essence Music Festival, the City of New Orleans, Putamayo and the National Park Service/New Orleans Jazz Foundation. Originally created to help only with parade fees, post Katrina the fund expanded its efforts to include purchasing and distributing materials for the construction of Mardi Gras Indian suits, including dyed ostrich plumes and matching marabou feathers. In 2010, the most recent statements available, the Fund paid a total of \$54,000 towards parade fees (each club that was

eligible received \$1,500) and donated \$50,000 worth of feathers to various Mardi Gras Indian tribes (Norman Dixon Sr. Annual Second Line Parade Fund, 2011). In the future, the Fund plans on expanding its contributions, including the donation of beads for the creation of Mardi Gras Indian suits.

In addition to the financial assistance provided by the Norman Dixon Sr. Fund, Sweet Home New Orleans provides much needed social and legal services. Recognizing the important role cultural traditions continue to play in New Orleans' post Katrina recovery, but also seeing the immediate and sometime immense needs of many the culture bearers themselves, Sweet Home New Orleans (SHNO) formed in 2006 to provide assistance to the cultural community. Since that time, the organization has provided over \$3 million worth of assistance to over 4,000 individuals, including at least 850 culture bearers and their households (Sweet Home New Orleans, 2010). To qualify for services, one must have been an active musician, Mardi Gras Indian or Social Aid and Pleasure Club member for a certain number of years depending on age—at least 5 years for those over 50, 4 years for those between 30 and 50, or 2 years for persons under 30 (Sweet Home New Orleans, 2010). Upon referral to SHNO, applicants are given assistance based on their needs, including help finding affordable housing, medical and mental health services, financial management, assistance finding employment and legal services, with health care and legal assistance constituting fifty percent of all referrals between August 2009 and August 2010 (Sweet Home New Orleans, 2010). While clients are not provided with ongoing financial assistance, financial goals are set and case managers are assigned to assist individuals. In some cases, program participants are referred to third parties who can provide further service (Sweet Home New Orleans, 2010).

POPULAR CULTURE OFFERS OPPORTUNITY (AND MORE EXPLOITATION)

While long linked with the rise of Jazz, New Orleans' street based traditions were largely unknown outside of the city for much of the twentieth century. Things began to change with the emergence of several Mardi Gras Indian bands the mid nineteen seventies, providing opportunities for some culture bearers, but also opening them up to exploitation from unscrupulous promoters and businesses with deep pockets. Music has always been a crucial element of Mardi Gras Indian culture and many tribe members are also accomplished musicians. Some tribes have gone so far as to form bands and occasionally record albums. By the far the most famous of these is the Wild Magnolias, who released their first full length album, *The Wild Magnolias* in 1974. That same year, their single *Smoke My Peace Pipe (Smoke it Right)* reached #74 on the Billboard Black Singles Chart and, at the height of their success, the group even played Carnegie Hall.

However, critical and popular support never led to substantial financial benefit. Arguments over financial compensation for band members became an issue in 2001, when Big Chief Monk Boudreaux—a vocalist in the band close friend of Bo Dollis, the band leader—asked to see financial records for performances, claiming to have been paid only \$160 to \$200 per gig regardless of attendance or venue. Glenn Gaines, the manager of the band since 1996, refused to show the documents to Boudreaux, claiming he was simply a band member, and therefore not entitled to see financial information. Gaines stated that all business information was to be handled solely by Bo Dollis and himself, despite the fact that the Wild Magnolias were incorporated as an LLC in 1999 with Gaines, Dollis and Boudreaux all listed as members/managers (Jordan, Nov 6, 2001).

In response, Boudreaux, suspicious that he was not getting his fair share, quit the band causing a rift to develop between himself and Dollis, who backed Gaines instead of his old friend. It turns out Boudreaux was not alone in his suspicions. Soon after his departure, Rita Barras, Dollis' common law wife, also began to believe Gaines was treating band members unfairly and promptly quit touring with the band. As it turns out, Dollis himself did not even know what the Wild Magnolias made per show, instead letting Gaines handle all the financial matters. As long as Dollis was making money, he was okay with the result. Finally, in 2008, Dollis realized that Gaines may have been less than honest with band members. In October of that year, he and the rest of the band parted ways with Gaines, though Gaines claimed to have signed a binding contract—a fact Bo Dollis disputes. Since the firing of Gaines, Dollis and Boudreaux have resolved their differences (Spera, April 18, 2009).

Though the Wild Magnolias are the most well known Indian band, a number of other bands and Mardi Gras Indian tribes are also able to make small amounts of money at cultural performances throughout the year. Some of these shows may be in barrooms, where a Mardi Gras Indian funk band may perform their versions of traditional Indian songs—with or without suits. Others take place at one of the multitude of festivals and fairs held throughout the year in the Greater New Orleans area. The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival is the largest of these, drawing audiences from across the country for two extended weekends of music. Well known Indian bands such as the Wild Magnolias or 101 Runners can usually be found performing at some point during the festival, and other Mardi Gras Indian tribes and Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs are employed both as performers and to parade around the festival grounds.

At Jazz Fest, performers are all paid for their time, though compensation varies depending on the type of performance as well as the expected 'draw. This is not true of all

events, and there is currently a widespread discrepancy as to what promoters and organizers feel that an appearance or performance by one of these cultural organizations is worth. While ‘name’ bands tend to be paid just as any other act, other cultural performances are treated as if they have less value. The reasoning seems to be that a promoter should not necessarily have to pay a group to do something they would otherwise be doing for free. At times, there can also be a fundamental lack of respect for the performers, such as failing to provide separate dressing rooms for male and female participants (Harrison-Nelson interview, 2011).

This situation is exacerbated by differences in opinion of the culture bearers themselves, as some feel that, just as was suggested, they do not need to be compensated for practicing their traditional culture. Many others feel that since, at these events, they are essentially ‘putting on a show’ for attendees, they should be paid just as every other performer is. This lack of consistency exposes the cultural community to exploitation by less-than-honest promoters, some of whom continue to use cultural performances as a low or no cost way to boost attendance (Harrison-Nelson interview, 2011).

By far the most visible manifestation of Mardi Gras Indian and second line culture in the mainstream media is found on HBO’s *Tremé*, a show spearheaded by David Simon, critically acclaimed creator of *The Wire*. The show’s premiere was watched by over 1.1 million viewers (Walker, 2010). Though viewership has declined since the series debut—the first episode of the second season drew just 605,000 viewers, roughly half that of the first episode of the show—it has been renewed for a third season, which will air in the fall of 2012 (Gorman, April 26, 2011). While viewership has been quite small in comparison to most other shows (though repeat airings and DVD sales greatly expand this number), it has generated considerable interest in both the traditional culture and the titular Tremé neighborhood, as people want to experience what they

have seen depicted on television. This interest has translated into modest financial gains for a few of the musicians highlighted in the program. The Tremé Brass Band, for instance, has seen a large increase in attendance in their weekly performances at the Candlelight Lounge—even including some tour groups—which has led them from charging no cover before the show’s debut to, as of Spring 2012, ten dollars per attendee. Both Kermit Ruffins, who stars as himself in a number of episodes, and John Boutte, who sings the show’s theme song, have also seen a marked increase in attendance at their gigs as well as an increased profile.

The show, in addition to hiring some local crew members and actors, also hosts the annual ‘My Darlin’ New Orleans’ benefit, the first two of which raised over \$175,000 (Walker, March 29, 2012). Proceeds from these events were donated to a number of New Orleans cultural charities, including The Roots of Music, which provides academic assistance and musical training for local youth, the New Orleans Musician’s Clinic and Assistance Foundation, which assists musicians and culture bearers with their healthcare, as well as Sweet Home New Orleans (Walker, March 29, 2012). Through these efforts, HBO has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars that would not have otherwise been raised, as well as boosting the profile of New Orleans and its unique culture.

Still, there is debate as to whether this is actually a net-positive. Besides the services provided by the non-profits funded by the annual benefits, most culture bearers have seen few benefits. Though no one expects *Tremé* to be a panacea, many would like to see more from a company who is making money off and marketing their history and culture. The spotlight the program shines on the communities it celebrates can often be problematic. The Tremé neighborhood has seen a large increase of individuals looking to move in to what is now the new ‘hot’ zip code, many of whom are not familiar with the culture of the neighborhood (Reckdahl,

2010). It is still unclear what the ultimate impact of the show will be. Some culture bearers have decided to embrace the program—though often tentatively—appearing and episodes at attending related events; others choose not to be associated with it, seeing HBO as another in a long line of cultural exploiters. Regardless of individual feelings, traditional New Orleans culture is receiving a level of attention it has never seen before.

In theory, government policy should offer equal protection and opportunity to all people. Of course, this is usually not the case, and policy that creates true equity is exceedingly rare. An even cursory glance at the history of New Orleans shows a system that was, built on massive inequity, and even after a century of efforts to reverse this dynamic, the results have been decidedly mixed. This is true in all facets sectors of New Orleans society, but is especially notable in the cultural community. Yet, despite many barriers, from both overt and institutional racism to unprecedented natural and man-made disasters, traditional culture in New Orleans continues to persevere. Post Katrina, a number of young people have become involved for the first time, and a growing support system has developed. Due to the attention of HBO, the culture is even finding itself under an international spotlight. But a number of long standing problems remain. Many of the practitioners are still struggling economically. Though recent efforts have been made to change this dynamic, the City continues to exploit a culture it does not know how to actually assist. Yet, no matter if outside support disappears, no matter if the spotlight dims, the culture will endure. The true strength of the culture lies in the hearts of the people. Whether living in New Orleans or Houston, rich or poor, young or old, their cultural identity does not change. The question is, why should they continue to be made to struggle when it is possible for them to thrive?

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: City officials, led by the City Council, must create an ‘Indigenous Culture Advisory Committee’ consisting of government officials, NOPD representatives and culture bearers.

Creating this commission will help address two major issues. First, it will create a venue for constant dialogue between the city, the NOPD and the indigenous cultural community. For far too long, both the City government and the NOPD have decided that they will craft and/or undertake an initiative, ordinance or enforcement strategy without first outreaching to the communities that they will impact the most. This committee will allow that dynamic to change, as culture bearers would have a venue to address grievances with current and proposed policies and ordinances, as well as create a venue for the cultural community to explain the importance of their practices and express their needs. Secondly, this committee would begin the process of ‘institutionalizing’ progress. Politicians, District Captains and Mardi Gras Indian Chiefs will not be in the same positions forever. Unless an actual cultural policy is adopted and adhered to, a change in leadership could easily lead to retrograde movement, and the old problems could rise again. Having an ongoing committee with a strong institutional memory will help prevent this from happening.

For this committee to be successful, it is imperative that it have the right members. At least half of the committee members must be practicing culture bearers who are well respected in the cultural community. At minimum, there should be at least two Social Aid and Pleasure Club Members, two Mardi Gras Indians, one brass band musician and one culture affiliated entrepreneur (preferably either a vendor or bar owner). Ideally, some degree of consensus would be reached amongst culture bearers as to who their representatives would be, which would help

give the committee added legitimacy. Representatives from the city should include one from the Mayor's Office, one from each of the City Council Districts (which could also be culture bearers), two from the NOPD, including preferably at least one District Captain, and one member from the planning department. It is important that this process is led by the City Council, rather than the Mayor's Office, as it will not only make the process seem more democratic, but also ensure the viability of the committee even if a less sympathetic mayor is eventually elected.

Recommendation #2: New Orleans must create a cultural plan for the city.

New Orleans has a unique, living, participatory culture, one that demands specialized planning considerations. The lack of a formalized plan—even though the idea of a formalized city process might at first seem antithetical to the nature of traditions such as the Mardi Gras Indians—has been quite harmful to street based traditions, leading to massive levels of inconsistency in enforcement. To ensure that the plan fits the needs of all involved, this process must be done in conjunction with the cultural community, not for it. Already, there is a base of material to draw from, particularly the recommendations found in the Bring New Orleans Back Plan and the Unified New Orleans Plan. However, this plan cannot be created using the typical top-down approach with carefully managed citizen participation. Instead, a true 'community plan' must be developed, which will involve extended interaction between planners and culture bearers over an extended period. Ultimately, once developed to the satisfaction of all sides, this cultural plan must become a part of the official Master Plan and be legally enforceable. In addition, the City Planning Commission should have at least one member on staff at all times that is well versed in the cultural issues of the city.

The specifics of this plan would be decided in the community planning process. Whatever is decided, the process needs to chart a path away from the current approach of regulating culture, which falls along the lines of ‘no activity is permitted until a special exemption is given’. Instead many culture bearers would like to see the opposite; ‘Activities are permitted unless there is a specific reason or regulation prohibiting them.’ One possible, though perhaps controversial, compromise would be to establish ‘Cultural Zones’ in various areas of the city where activities such as second lines, Mardi Gras Indian practices, etc. could occur with loosened regulation. The boundaries of these areas would have to be drawn in conjunction with the culture bearers themselves for them to be politically palatable within the cultural community, but the city could also draw from a wealth of data they should have from previous permit applications, citations, etc. With these zones in place, the indigenous cultural practices would not only have some protection—a spontaneous second-line could not be broken up and musicians hauled off to jail, for example—but also have an assurance that their rights and culture would continue to be protected. Even with the establishment of these zones, it is crucial that activities be allowed to continue outside the boundaries; these areas would just offer an increased level of protection. Until this cultural plan is created, however, the city should continue a policy of ‘selective non-enforcement’, allowing traditions such as second line vending and Mardi Gras Indian rituals to continue uninhibited.

Recommendation #3: The permitting and enforcement policy for bars and live entertainment must be revised.

There are two major issues creating the bulk of the problems for bars and music clubs—the first a lopsided complaint and permitting process, the other being owners having difficulties

maintaining a property's non-conforming use status. Currently, a small group of residents, even a single individual, can file complaints that result in the shuttering of—or at least curtailing of activity at—a popular bar or nightclub, even one that has been a responsible neighbor and member of the community. Once a complaint is made, the onus is on the bar owner to disprove it, rather than the forcing the accuser to produce any evidence. This is especially damaging to owners in marginalized communities, who often lack the resources to carry out any required upgrades, or may not be able to weather even a short closure.

A drawn out permitting process is also problematic, especially as any opposition can delay a decision to a point where applicants without substantial financial backing and experience navigating bureaucracy often withdraw. In particular, the six month window a venue has to maintain its non-conforming use between closing and reopening must be lengthened. This would help create more equity in the development process, as it would allow a greater amount of time for culture bearers, who tend to come from working class neighborhoods, to create plans and raise the necessary funds for redevelopment. It would also help stem the net-loss of cultural venues that has occurred in many culture bearing neighborhoods since Hurricane Katrina, many of which are in need of extensive repairs.

Recommendation #4: The NOPD must place a cultural liaison in every Police District.

While creating a formal committee where NOPD members and culture bearers can interact will be extremely beneficial, there must also be a way to quickly deal with day to day issues. These cultural liaisons would be employed by the police department and practice a form of community policing, working directly with members of the cultural community. Indeed, as there are several officers already familiar with many of these cultural practices, these positions

could be filled from the existing ranks, avoiding the expenses of developing new recruits or hiring from outside the force. Though ultimately all districts would have a liaison, implementation could be phased, beginning with Districts 1 and 6, which contain the Tremé and Central City, respectively. These liaisons would not only serve as a first point of contact for the cultural community, they would also serve as ‘cultural interpreters’ to other member of the force, working with the cultural community to train other members of the NOPD on the basics of New Orleans’ cultural traditions.

Recommendation #5: Financial and institutional support must continue for the cultural community, coupled with a push towards self-sufficiency.

Continued support is still needed to ensure long term viability. This is particularly important for organizations that have been created by the culture bearers themselves, most notably the Mardi Gras Indian Council and the Social Aid and Pleasure Club Task Force. These groups have the first hand knowledge needed to specifically pinpoint how policies are impacting their practice, and their experience will be crucial in creating development strategies. Currently, organizations such as Sweet Home New Orleans and the Norman Dixon Fund help to fill in the financial and social gaps. These service providers are in essence providing a ‘crutch’, mitigating some negative externalities and allowing the cultural community to continue to make progress advancing their agenda while also carrying out their usual activities.

However, this model must shift from the current one of charity to one of philanthropy. Support organizations should be working with culture bearers to strengthen their own internal support system, allowing them to ultimately build their own agencies take over the activities of the outside non-profits. Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs could eventually be able to provide many

of the social services currently undertaken by Sweet Home New Orleans, for example, just as a Mardi Gras Indian could practice copyright law for his or her peers. In addition, as culture bearers develop their own non-profits, it will be possible to cut out at least one layer of ‘pass through’ organizations, resulting in a greater percentage of donations reaching the cultural community. Large scale donors must also re-examine their portfolios, as many programs funded to help artists obtain self-sufficiency, such as arts based affordable housing complexes, do not benefit the traditional culture bearing communities. As this is a medium to long term initiative, it is imperative that efforts to develop the capacity of the cultural community proceed as quickly as possible.

Recommendation #6: Culture bearers must be fairly compensated for their activities, and small business development must be supported.

The city benefits greatly from the images and activities of the cultural community, perhaps best exemplified by the number of images of Mardi Gras Indians, second lines, etc., found in tourism advertising. While it is extremely difficult to put an exact dollar amount on the amount of income these ads generate, the city can begin to compensate by creating equal access to opportunity, and allowing culture bearers to continue what they have been doing without interference. As a part of this process, the cultural community must come together and decide how much they should be compensated for the use of their images, as well as a fair rate for contract appearances. Presenting a unified front will greatly enhance their bargaining power. Particularly important is direct access to the tourism dollar, as it allows for an inflow of capital into communities that continue to struggle economically. But culture bearers must be able to participate and compete on their own terms. Currently, most cultural tours are routed through a

third party that not only controls the interpretation, but also pocket the lion's share of the profits. Instead, support should be found for businesses such as a tour company, staffed and managed by culture bearers that lead culturally appropriate tours to important sites such as the Backstreet Museum, Second and Dryades, and Congo Square, and allows culture bearers to tell their own story.

The emergence of the Golden Feather is a positive sign, yet the difficulty they have had in finding a financial backer shows there are still significant hurdles to overcome. While influencing the lending practices of banks may not be possible, non-profits need to increase the availability of micro-loans and small business training to the cultural communities. The development of a small business community rooted in indigenous African American culture will not only allow for further growth, but will also allow culture bearers to avoid those that are trying to exploit their efforts for personal gain—while also providing a greater level of control.

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APPENDIX:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Orleans' indigenous African American culture traditions are jewels of the city, each a totally unique and vibrant art form found nowhere else. Though their importance to the vitality of the city has long been recognized, few benefits have trickled down in to the culture bearers and their communities, which remain some of the most marginalized areas in the city. In fact, the cultural community continues to face a number of barriers, the majority of which stem from either controversial city policy (including an often overly confrontational police department) or economic hardship.

Born out of widespread disenfranchisement, traditions such as Mardi Gras Indians and second line parades have roots dating back to the founding of New Orleans in the early eighteenth century. Formed through the intermingling of African slaves, Native American tribes and French settlers and closely intertwined with the rise of Jazz, both Mardi Gras Indians and Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs truly emerged in recognizable form in the post Reconstruction era, when segregation was at its peak.

Indeed, both of these traditions are a cultural response to the practice of segregation and resulting disenfranchisement. Mardi Gras Indians, with their elaborate suits and ritualized confrontation stem from the exclusion of African Americans from formal carnival celebrations. Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs emerged as a form of community assistance, helping pay burial fees and providing insurance to the marginalized African-American population. Both traditions continue to provide important social functions in their parent communities, including reinforcing

a strong sense of shared cultural identity, creating strong and visible role models in often troubled communities, as well as providing positive activities for young people.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Since their earliest history, these traditions have been shaped by government policy, from the decree limiting the gathering of slaves, to the legalization of segregation, all the way up to the present policies of the NOPD. Of all the various departments and processes that can affect New Orleans' traditional culture, one of the most important is city planning. A close look at the intersection of planning and culture post Katrina reveals the following:

- Of all the planning processes, the Bring New Orleans Back Commission dedicates the most space to culture, including the creation of a Cultural Committee, which analyzed New Orleans historic approach towards traditional culture, as well as making recommendations for its recovery.
- Both the Lambert Plans and the Unified New Orleans Plan make specific recommendations for the revitalization of indigenous culture post-storm, though on a targeted, site or program specific, basis.
- The Master Plan, now the official blueprint for the city's development, only references culture under the auspices of economic development, and then only briefly. The Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance ignores it completely. The suggestions offered in previous plans are not referenced.
- Permitting and zoning restrictions on live entertainment venues and alcoholic beverage outlets continue to be problematic. The process is too easily influenced by well connected individuals and is skewed towards those in opposition.

Restrictions on reopening non-conforming use businesses are a challenge to members of the cultural community, who do not often have the capacity to reopen in the allotted time.

Though the planning processes may have the greatest influence over cultural practices in the long term, enforcement of—or changes in—other policies, ordinances and proposals have the capacity to create a more immediate impact, both positive and negative. Examples include:

- The New Orleans Police Department’s long history of antagonism with the cultural community, much of which stems from permitting issues.
- The City Council, council members Guidry and Gisleson-Palmer in particular, using their positions to facilitate a dialogue between Mardi Gras Indians and NOPD brass, resulting in the end of many of the NOPD’s antagonistic policies—a clear showcase of how government can help the culture progress.
- Curtailing efforts to enforce ill fitting permitting rules on second line vendors and allowing the practice to continue until a suitable alternative is found, which has allowed the culture to continue unchanged and vendors to continue to make much needed income.
- The renewed enforcement of a long dormant noise ordinance, which has limited performance opportunities for young musicians.
- Proposals to create a citywide curfew for youth, and to bar 18 to 20 year-olds from being ‘in or around’ a business that sells alcohol, which would greatly curtail opportunities for young people to be involved in or be exposed to cultural traditions.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

With the majority of culture bearers hailing from marginalized communities, access to economic opportunity is also an ongoing concern. While there is growing awareness of traditions such as second lines and Mardi Gras Indians—including widespread use in marketing campaigns—very few benefits trickle back to the culture bearers themselves. Ongoing economic issues include:

- The City of New Orleans regularly uses images of brass bands, Mardi Gras Indians and second line parades in its tourism advertising, helping bring in revenue to the city. However, as the city benefits, many city policies prove detrimental to these same cultural practices and their parent neighborhoods remain marginalized.
- Photographers and other media providers (including HBO's *Tremé*) profit off images of culture bearers without providing significant compensation.
- Unscrupulous promoters take advantage of cultural 'acts', not paying on a universal scale and, in some cases, not providing the performers their fair share.

Despite this lack of support, the cultural community has developed its own small scale economy and is beginning to implement its own economic development strategies and initiatives, often with some degree of outside assistance. These include:

- Small, often unlicensed vendors that follow and participate in second line parades, selling food, drink (including alcoholic beverages) and other goods to supplement their personal incomes.

- The Golden Feather, a Mardi Gras Indian restaurant and gallery, recently opened on Rampart Street, will eventually include a bead and feather shop selling the raw materials to create Indian ‘suits’, though finding additional investors remains difficult. When the shop opens, it will be the first time a culture bearer will be selling these necessary materials to their peers.
- Mardi Gras Indians have begun copyrighting their suit designs to ensure that they will receive a share of all profits made off of their image.
- Several support agencies have emerged, including Sweet Home New Orleans, which provides social services and financial planning to culture bearers, and the Norman Dixon Sr. Annual Second Line Parade Fund, which assists in paying permit fees for second line parades.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Though there are some encouraging signs that there some long standing issues are starting to be addressed, there is still much that is needed to be done to ensure the sustainability of these cultural treasures.

- An ‘Indigenous Culture Advisory Committee’ needs to be created, consisting of various members of the cultural community as well as city officials (including at least one city planner) and NOPD officers. This would allow for a direct and sustained conversation between all parties, and provide opportunities to air grievances and vet new ordinances for possible effects on traditional cultural practices.

- The City of New Orleans must also develop a cultural plan in conjunction with the cultural community and attach it as an addendum to the Master Plan. This will not only provide a blueprint for moving forward, but also ensure that changes are institutionalized and will survive changes in administration.
- Permitting and enforcement strategies regulating bars and live music venues must be revised to create additional equity in the process, and the window between the closing of a venue and the loss of its conditional use as an ‘amusement place’ (as defined by New Orleans’ Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance) must be lengthened.
- To help avoid further conflicts between the NOPD and the cultural community, the police department should install a ‘cultural liaison’ in every district, who would serve as point of first contact for the culture bearers.
- Outside support must continue for the cultural community, but it should be done with an eye towards self-sufficiency. Funders and service providers must pivot from a charitable model to a philanthropic one. Instead of simply granting money or providing assistance, there should be a concerted effort towards capacity building.
- Small business support and development support is urgently needed. In order for the cultural community to be able to claim fair compensation for their activities, they must first have the infrastructure to do so. Right now, there are not enough organizations offering technical assistance and there is an overwhelming lack of startup capital available.

VITA

Ethan Ellestad is originally from Madison, Wisconsin and has been working with communities for close to fifteen years. Initially, his work centered around youth and youth programming, and he has served as a youth worker, coach, mentor, tutor, counselor, afterschool program coordinator and advocate, with a focus on narrowing achievement gaps and addressing disproportionate confinement of minority juveniles. While working with young people considered 'at risk', Ellestad examined the root causes of the struggles these youth faced day to day and developed community-level solutions to address these issues. His passion for community development led him to a three-year stint in Peace Corps Jamaica, where he developed and ran the Ewarton Life Skills Training Centre in the town of Ewarton, St. Catherine. While in Jamaica, Ellestad became interested in the role culture could play in community development, and particularly why culturally rich areas often remained physically impoverished. Upon returning to the U.S., he relocated to New Orleans, where he has served as the Community Outreach Coordinator for the Lafitte Greenway and worked on several small business assistance and economic development projects in various neighborhoods.