“The East:” A History of New Orleans East and the Retail Redlining of Black Middle-Class Suburbs

Charles Miller

University of New Orleans, New Orleans, camille6@uno.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td

Part of the Race and Ethnicity Commons, and the Urban Studies and Planning Commons

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Dissertation in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Dissertation has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.
“The East:”
A History of New Orleans East and the Retail Redlining of Black Middle-Class Suburbs

A Dissertation

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

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Urban Studies
Sociology Concentration

by
Charles Miller
B.A. Tulane University, 2011
M.A. University of Georgia, 2013
M.A. University of New Orleans, 2017

August 2023
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my sincerest gratitude and recognize those who have supported me throughout this worthwhile endeavor. My advisor, Dr. Vern Baxter, has intellectually guided and challenged me every step of the way, and this project would not have been possible without his knowledge and counsel. I am forever grateful to my parents, Troy and Carolina, and brother, Alec, who have encouraged me every step to pursue higher education and have been my students, learning and challenging their own views of the world throughout this process. I want to thank my college roommate and dear friend, Derrick Toups, for his help during the editing stages, providing indelible feedback to elevate the quality of my work from good to exemplary. I am indebted to my closest friends who started this journey with me, stood by my side and lent their emotional support when I took time off during the pandemic, and were my loudest cheerleaders all the way to the finish line. This project is a culmination of years of hard work, passion, and determination, and my family, friends, and cat, Thibby, have kept my spirits high, motivation undeterred, and sanity in check. Lastly, I would be remiss in not thanking the members of New Orleans East Matters for letting me into their lives and allowing me the humble opportunity to tell their stories. This dissertation is dedicated to you all and your steadfast perseverance to bring positive change to your community. I hope I have done The East justice.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: CITY-WITHIN-A-CITY</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: LITTLE WOODS</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: NEW ORLEANS EAST, INC.</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: LAKE FOREST</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5: “THE EAST”</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 6: HURRICANE KATRINA</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 7: POST-KATRINA: 18 YEARS LATER</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW ORLEANS EAST MATTERS: ROADMAP TO REVITALIZATION</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Map of New Orleans East, 1959
Figure 2. Lake Forest Advertisement, 1973
Figure 3. Front Page Headline, *The Times-Picayune*, April 23, 2021
Figure 4. New Orleans East Racial Transition, 1970-2020
Figure 5. New Orleans East 2020 Racial Demographics, Block Group Level
Figure 6. Photo of New Orleans East Matters Coalition, 2022
Figure 7. New Orleans East Neighborhoods, 2020
Figure 8. New Orleans Neighborhoods, 2020
Figure 9. New Orleans East, Inc. Advertisement, 1963
Figure 10. Lake Forest Advertisement, 1972
Figure 11. New Orleans Redlining Map, 1939
Figure 12. Map of Michoud Plantation, 1883
Figure 13. Map of Edgelake and Faubourg de Montluzin, 1926
Figure 14. Edgelake Deed Restriction, 1926
Figure 15. New Orleans East Proposal, 1959
Figure 16. Lake Forest Neighborhoods Map, 1974
Figure 17. New Orleans East Renaissance Plan, 2004
Figure 18. Map of Hurricane Katrina Floodwaters, 2005
Figure 19. Neighborhood Rebuilding Strategy, 2006
Figure 20. The Green Dot Map, 2006
Figure 21. Parks and Open Space Plan, 2006
Figure 22. Map of Target Recovery Areas, 2007
Figure 23. Big Green Easy: A Park and Recreation Vision Plan for New Orleans, 2007
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. New Orleans East Racial Demographics, 1970-2020
Table 2. New Orleans East White, Black Racial Transition, 1970-2020
Table 3. United States Racial Wealth Gap, 2020
Table 4. Little Woods Population Demographics, 1970-2020
Table 5. Village de L’Est Population Demographics, 1970-2020
Table 6. NOPD Crime Trends, 1996-2003
Table 7. Louisiana Largest Cities, 2020 Census
APPENDIX

Appendix A. Map of Edgelake, 1926
Appendix B. Edgelake Advertisement, 1926
Appendix C. Entrance Park Advertisement, 1926
Appendix D. Faubourg de Montluzin Advertisement, 1927
Appendix E. Lincoln Beach Advertisement, 1953
Appendix F. Lincoln Beach Advertisement, 1955
Appendix G. Lincoln Beach Proposed Redevelopment, 2004
Appendix H. New Orleans East Proposal, 1959
Appendix I. Pontchartrain New Town in Town Rendering, 1972
Appendix J. Pontchartrain New Town in Town, Editorial Cartoon, 1972
Appendix K. Orlandia Advertisement, 1975
Appendix L. Orlandia Advertisement, 1975
Appendix M. Bayou Sauvage Proposal, 1988
Appendix N. Lake Forest Advertisement, 1967
Appendix O. Lake Forest Estates Advertisement, 1973
Appendix P. News Article, *The Times-Picayune*, Sunday, August 14, 1983
Appendix Q. Eastover Advertisement, 1985
Appendix R. Newspaper Photo of Lake Forest Plaza Mall, 1974
Appendix S. Lake Forest Plaza Mall Advertisement, 1972
Appendix T. Lake Forest Mall Advertisement, 1976
Appendix W. New Orleans East Economic Development Foundation Ad, 1997
Appendix X. Jazzland to Six Flags Transition Infographic, 2002
Appendix Y. Photo of Proposed New Orleans Hornets Arena, 2003
Appendix Z. Photo of Lake Forest Plaza Mall, 2007
Appendix AA. Renaissance Town Center Rendering, 2007
Appendix BB. Map of Renaissance Town Center Rendering, 2007
ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a case study of New Orleans East, a collection of diverse suburban neighborhoods that comprise the easternmost part of New Orleans. This interdisciplinary research study chronicles the growth and decline of “The East” to more generally understand the challenges facing Black middle-class suburbs. Decades-long mischaracterizations and overstated negative perceptions of The East persist, unjustly and unceasingly detracting from economic development and prosperity and exacerbating the inequities that have long plagued the city’s Black residents. Findings from this dissertation uncover how, in metropolitan New Orleans, residents, city officials, and local news media have effectively stigmatized and written off the entirety of New Orleans East as a figurative and literal microcosmic dumping ground of all the city’s social ills, from poverty and blight to battles over section-8 housing and economic decline.

First, with the 1980s oil crash and then Hurricane Katrina in 2005, New Orleans East has maintained an exaggerated narrative of suburban decline that masks and overshadows Black wealth, economic potential, and plentiful natural resources. According to the middle- and upper-income Black residents who reside in New Orleans East, the area’s disinvestment and decline are due to their race, despite the spending power they possess. They decry how The East’s economic suffocation disproportionately distresses their communities, contributing to blight, low property values, a lack of job creation, an absence of shopping and restaurants, areas of concentrated poverty, and crime (or perceptions of it). Residents have become frustrated that they are forced to shop even for their most basic needs in neighboring parishes, which causes the city to lose millions of dollars in tax revenue annually. Decades-long political neglect and economic disinvestment of The East exacerbate the city’s racial wealth gap and further decrease access to the economic stability and mobility of the “American dream” for the city’s Black middle class. This dissertation seeks a paradigm shift in how New Orleans residents, realtors, private developers, and city and state leaders conceptualize “The East.” New Orleans East has become the forgotten neighborhood in “the city that care forgot,” but it deserves much more.

Keywords: Black suburbs, racial segregation, urban decline, suburban decline, the Black middle class, retail redlining.
“I have stacked twelve or thirteen history-telling books about New Orleans…I have thumbed through each of these, past voluminous sections about the French Quarter, the Garden District, and St. Charles Avenue, in search of the area of the city where I grew up, New Orleans East. Mentions are rare and spare, afterthoughts. There are no guided tours to this part of the city, except for the disaster bus tours that became an industry after Hurricane Katrina, carting visitors around, pointing out the great destruction of neighborhoods that were never known or set foot in before the Water, except for their residents….In one of these piled books that describe the suburbs, New Orleans East is not included, but Jefferson Parish, which lies outside city bounds, and several cemeteries are. Cemeteries, as far as I know, cannot be counted as actual neighborhoods even though local lore describes aboveground tombs as houses of the dead. On a detailed city map once given to me by Avis Rent a Car, the French Quarter has been shaded in light turquoise, magnified in a box at the bottom of the page. New Orleans East is cut off, a point beyond, a blank space on someone’s mental map. This is perhaps a practical matter. New Orleans East is fifty times the size of the French Quarter, one-fourth of the city’s developed surface. Properly mapped, it might swallow the whole page. What the Avis map does not tell you is that to travel the seven miles from the French Quarter to the Yellow House in which I grew up, you would take Interstate 10 heading east. When this portion of the interstate opened in 1968, hundreds of great oaks along Claiborne Avenue, the black shopping district for my mother and grandmother, had been chopped down, their roots evicted. One hundred fifty-five houses were demolished to make way.”

Figure 1

*Map of New Orleans East, 1959*

*Note.* Original outline showing 32,000 acres of marshland purchased by New Orleans East, Inc.
Lake Forest Advertisement

It's Lake Forest in eastern New Orleans—the quiet of open space but with a difference—full city conveniences. It's the ideal place to raise a family. Why? Because it has all facilities to fit your family needs and combines suburban living with city conveniences.

You can live just the way you want to—in a single family home with a large yard, a town house or an apartment. Thousands of acres in the area are professionally planned and zoned. There are paved streets, big yards, new churches, new schools, a new hospital, a new branch library, convenient shopping centers, and plenty of recreational areas.

Lake Forest, like other parts of eastern New Orleans has all city services, too—police and fire stations, subsurface drainage, sewerage, garbage collection, utilities, paved streets, high-intensity street lighting, and underground electric distribution wires.

Drive through the beautiful new neighborhoods of eastern New Orleans and see for yourself. For more information about the advantages of living in eastern New Orleans, or for a free map of the area, call Public Service (529-4545, Extension 262). Or see your realtor.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a case study of New Orleans East, a collection of diverse suburban neighborhoods that comprise the easternmost part of New Orleans. Until the 1950s and 1960s, this undeveloped part of the city was, to many natives, a geographic extension of Gentilly or the Ninth Ward. The official designation “New Orleans East” dates to 1959 when a corporation named New Orleans East, Inc. formed and bought 32,000 acres of swampland for $30 million from Colonel R.E. E. de Montluzin, a wealthy businessman who had owned the tract since 1922. New Orleans East, Inc. set into motion an audacious, even hubristic, plan to conquer nature and reclaim cypress swamps to build a modern, expansive suburban “city-within-a-city” consisting of several residential neighborhoods, commercial shopping centers, offices, industrial parks, and an abundance of green spaces, all fifteen minutes from downtown.

Today, local parlance often refers to New Orleans East simply as “The East” to describe anything on the other side of the Inner Harbor Navigational Canal, which also has a shorter nickname, the Industrial Canal. Historically, this was not always the case. The moniker “The East” dates back not to its 1959 origins but to the 1980s, a decade characterized by dramatic demographic and economic changes in the area stemming from the decade’s oil crash. The ‘80s global oil crisis wrecked the city and state’s economy and housing market, with thousands of jobs disappearing nearly overnight. New Orleans East saw particularly damaging effects as many of the area’s new middle-class homeowners worked in the oil and gas industry and lost their jobs. The East never fully recovered, and residents have tried in vain for decades to shake its negative reputation. Now, eighteen years after Hurricane Katrina, the area has conspicuously lagged in economic revitalization compared to the rest of the city. New Orleans East remains
disinvested and underdeveloped, and the area’s perception is marred by what drivers see from Interstate 10 (I-10). Eastern residents protest that they are the city’s stepchild, long forgotten and left behind as other neighborhoods grow and prosper. Many firmly believe it is by design. So, how did The East get here? What happened? How did a suburb with so much promise decline into disrepair?

New Orleans East is understudied and misunderstood compared to the city’s more historic, famed neighborhoods. Pierce Lewis’ seminal book, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape* (1976), devoted a section to the new suburb, and recent works have studied aspects of N.O. East, including urban studies and sociology (Baxter, 2000; Souther, 2008), geography (Campanella, 2008; Colten, 2006), and literature (Broom, 2019). On the surface, the likely narrative you will hear from locals is that this once-promising suburban frontier of the city has dramatically declined. Indeed, if one judges The East based solely on what they see along I-10 – urban blight, run-down apartment complexes, and endless stretches of post-Katrina vacant lots – that characterization certainly appears accurate. However, New Orleans East’s story is much more nuanced than what is visible from the interstate and long precedes the hurricane. The East is a tale of two suburbs molded into one imaginative geography. The area is simultaneously home to the city’s (and Louisiana’s) largest concentration of Black middle- and upper-income residents and some of the city’s poorest Black residents. Through interviews and archives, this project recounts the whole story of New Orleans East from its inception to the present day.

Drawing from urban sociology, history, and geography, this interdisciplinary research study chronicles New Orleans East’s growth and decline to more generally understand the challenges facing Black middle-class suburbs. Decades-long mischaracterizations and overstated negative perceptions of The East persist, unjustly and unceasingly detracting from economic
development and prosperity and exacerbating the inequities that have long plagued the city’s Black residents. This study started with three primary research questions:

1. What happened to New Orleans East? Despite ambitious plans to build an expansive suburban “city-within-a-city,” what kind of political, economic, and social processes explain the growth and decline of N.O. East? How is the history of “The East” unique and similar to other cases of U.S. suburban decline?

2. Why do blight and disinvestment continuously beset New Orleans East despite its large concentration of Black middle- and upper-class residents?

3. In what ways does race explain the decline of N.O. East that class forces cannot.

A 2010 newspaper headline in *The Times-Picayune*, the city’s 185-year-old daily newspaper, captures the essence of the problem facing the East: “Mystery of the East: The Middle-Class Residents of Eastern New Orleans Have Returned in Great Numbers, So Why Do the Commercial Corridors Remain Blighted?” Five years post-Katrina, The East’s population returned to 65,000 residents. However, the retail did not. Bruce Nolan describes the puzzle:

The apparent disconnect between supply and demand has left residents baffled and angry. Some neighborhood and community leaders see evidence of a de facto conspiracy by bankers, planners, nonprofits and, at times, city officials – no matter the administration – to promote the recovery of other areas of [post-Katrina] New Orleans over the interest of eastern New Orleans…The conundrum even baffles many professionals. The most common answer: perception. Under this widely held theory, eastern New Orleans is haunted by its pre-Katrina reputation as a community overburdened by a disproportionate share of unkempt, federally subsidized apartment complexes that blossomed after the crippling oil crash of the early 1980s. By Katrina’s arrival in 2005, dense low-income housing, lax code enforcement, and the crime those conditions bred had blighted what once had been a robust and diverse bastion of middle-and upper-income New Orleanians. Moreover, the pre-Katrina reputation seems to be validated behind the windshield if a tour of the area is confined to its major commercial arteries of Interstate 10, Lake Forest Boulevard, Read Boulevard, Morrison Road and others, where shuttered and under-used strip malls are the norm (*The Times-Picayune*, 2010).

A front-page news story eleven years later reveals that not much has changed (Figure 3):

Jackson is one of many [N.O. East] residents who lament that the area, once a hub of retail and entertainment destinations that bragged of being ‘a city within a city,’ has become the stepchild of the city’s otherwise substantial recovery in the decade
and a half since Hurricane Katrina. Still, the reasons for underinvestment in the area are more complicated. The East has indeed struggled since Katrina, but its troubles predate the storm. The loss of population and underinvestment goes back much further, to the 1980s oil bust and the White flight endemic to many U.S. inner-ring suburbs…For many residents, the biggest complaint remains among the most mundane: Why hasn’t the city been able to attract stores, restaurants, and other businesses to the East like it has in other areas of the city? (Williams, 2021)

**Figure 3**

*Front Page Headline, The Times-Picayune, April 23, 2021*

![Looking East](image)

*An old sign remains where the Lake Forest Plaza once stood in New Orleans East. Lake Forest Plaza was a 130-store shopping mall built in 1974 at Read Boulevard and Interstate 10. It was the largest mall in the state at the time of its construction. Despite promises, New Orleans East lacks a retail base and economic engines.*

*Note. Source: The Times-Picayune, Friday, April 23, 2021.*

The decline of The East is not a mystery to middle-class and upper-income Black residents who have called the area home since the 1970s and 1980s. For these homeowners, The East never reached its full potential precisely because it transitioned from what was initially intended to be a white suburb into a Black suburb, despite their high socioeconomic status,
homeownership rates, and education levels. Residents are acutely aware that perceptions and stigmas of The East are built on racialized false exaggerations and gross overgeneralizations of urban decline, crime, and poverty – often masked through coded language – that perniciously conceptualize the entire city east of the industrial canal as a distressed suburb. This stigma dates back to the ‘80s oil crash and then Hurricane Katrina.

This project builds upon the research of the challenges facing Black middle-class suburbs and fills a gap in the literature by arguing that New Orleans East – and Black middle-class suburbs in general – function as “precarious spaces” that symbolically link past racism and housing discrimination practices, such as institutional redlining, with a more contemporary de facto phenomenon of economic disinvestment known as retail redlining. Rozario and Williams (2005) define retail redlining as a spatially discriminatory practice among retailers, particularly chain stores, of not serving certain areas based on their ethnic-minority composition rather than on economic criteria, such as the potential profitability of operating in those areas. Consumers in these areas often find themselves “vulnerable” because no other retailers will serve them, or they are exploited by other, often smaller, retailers who charge them higher prices or offer them inferior goods. The decades-long perception problem plaguing N.O. East aligns with research findings that middle-class residents of Black suburbs experience “status disequilibrium” because the commercial and retail establishments that do exist, such as a proliferation of dollar stores and fast food restaurants, do not culturally reflect their social status as middle-class consumers and paints an overstated portrait of decline to outsiders.

Findings from this dissertation uncover how, in metropolitan New Orleans, residents, city officials, and local news media have effectively stigmatized and written off the entirety of New Orleans East as a figurative and literal microcosmic dumping ground of all the city’s social ills,
from poverty and blight to battles over section-8 housing and economic decline. First, with the 1980s oil crash and then Hurricane Katrina in 2005, New Orleans East has maintained an exaggerated perception and racialized stigma that historically has not matched empirical reality. This overstated narrative of decline masks and overshadows Black wealth, economic potential, and plentiful natural resources. According to the middle- and upper-income residents who reside in N.O. East, the area’s disinvestment and decline are due to their race, despite the spending power they possess. They decry how The East’s economic suffocation disproportionately distresses their communities, contributing to blight, low property values, a lack of job creation, an absence of shopping and restaurants, areas of concentrated poverty, and crime (or perceptions of it). Residents have become frustrated that they are forced to shop even for their most basic needs in neighboring parishes, which causes the city to lose millions of dollars in tax revenue annually. This conundrum perplexes many area homeowners who claim that the city’s leaders know this, so why don’t they want their money? In a news story comparing The East to the southwestern part of Atlanta, where most of the city’s Black middle class lived and also was devoid of retail, Elie writes:

A Pulitzer Prize-winning series by The Atlanta Journal-Constitution concluded that the color of the residents, not the quantity of money in the area, was responsible for the paucity of businesses there. I would like to think that economics, and not race, is responsible for the fact that businesses that have flocked to most suburban areas have avoided this part of our city (The Times-Picayune, 2003).

At the core of this research is the central argument that race plays a primary role beyond the influence of just economic and class forces to explain the decline of New Orleans East, which in 2020 was 3% white and 84% Black (Tables 1-2; Figures 4-5). These demographics are in stark contrast to 1970, when New Orleans East was 84% white and 15% Black. A dearth of retail and economic investment precludes the city’s eastern half from growing and prospering
and the city’s Black professionals from living in a thriving community. Decades-long political neglect and economic disinvestment of The East exacerbate the city’s racial wealth gap and further decrease access to the economic stability and mobility of the “American dream” for the city’s Black middle class. Outsiders view The East as nothing more than a suburban ghetto, while insiders mourn how the area has fallen victim to racist ideals and policies that have undermined grandiose plans to develop it into a thriving suburb.

**Table 1**

*New Orleans East Racial Demographics, 1970-2020*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N.O. East Pop.</td>
<td>44,526</td>
<td>77,047</td>
<td>91,120</td>
<td>96,363</td>
<td>64,306</td>
<td>75,223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orleans Parish</td>
<td>593,471</td>
<td>557,515</td>
<td>496,938</td>
<td>484,674</td>
<td>343,829</td>
<td>383,997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>37,509</td>
<td>41,826</td>
<td>26,869</td>
<td>10,410</td>
<td>2,932</td>
<td>2,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6,793</td>
<td>30,470</td>
<td>57,820</td>
<td>78,091</td>
<td>54,475</td>
<td>63,323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4,035</td>
<td>5,771</td>
<td>5,978</td>
<td>4,910</td>
<td>4,540</td>
<td>4,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2,147</td>
<td>2,601</td>
<td>1,624</td>
<td>2,120</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>2,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>1,135</td>
<td>2,628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>1,204</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>1,135</td>
<td>1,135</td>
<td>2,435</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Table 2**

*New Orleans East White, Black Racial Transition, 1970-2020*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N.O. East Pop.</td>
<td>23,435</td>
<td>44,526</td>
<td>77,047</td>
<td>91,120</td>
<td>96,363</td>
<td>64,306</td>
<td>75,223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orleans Parish</td>
<td>627,525</td>
<td>593,471</td>
<td>557,515</td>
<td>496,938</td>
<td>484,674</td>
<td>343,829</td>
<td>383,997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East %White</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East %Black</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish %White</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish %Black</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Source: 2020 U.S. Census Data; Social Explorer, 2023.*

**Figure 4**

*New Orleans East Racial Transition, 1960-2010*
New Orleans East Racial Transition

1960

1970

1980

1990

2000

2010

Percent of Total Population:

- % White
- % Black
- % Asian
- % Hispanic


Figure 5

New Orleans East Racial Demographics, Block Group Level, 2020
When examined more granularly, N.O. East conjures three different imaginative geographies for three distinct groups of people. The primacy of race and the geography of housing in all three perspectives unites their otherwise disparate interpretations. To outsiders, The East has deteriorated into an impoverished, crime-ridden wasteland of blight and section-8 apartments scattered along I-10. For many of the city’s poorest Black residents, N.O. East represents an area they have been steered towards, starting well before the hurricane. The city embarked on a long-term plan starting in the 1990s to tear down old public housing developments in downtown neighborhoods and replace them with mixed-income housing. The city used the hurricane’s devastation to expedite the demolition of the flooded projects, pushing former dwellers – disproportionately poor and Black – to the outskirts of the city, primarily Algiers and The East. The post-Katrina gentrification of historically redlined inner-ring neighborhoods has hastened the displacement of the city’s Black underclass to the urban fringe. Finally, for the city’s Black middle class, New Orleans East represents the American suburban
dream that became a mirage. According to homeowners, race lies at the center of its persistent and unyielding decline and consequential retail redlining.

This case study of New Orleans East methodologically draws from the prominent work of W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois incorporated data visualization such as maps, infographics, and illustrations into his research, a novel and strategic method for conveying social problems and generating patterns of knowledge to the public when he was writing at the turn of the twentieth century. Like DuBois, I contend that maps, newspaper archives, advertisements, and other visualizations are as integral as the written text in chronicling The East. Battle-Baptiste and Rusert (2018) describe a Du Boisian research methodology that guided my thinking and writing:

Du Bois eschewed ahistorical accounts because he believed that an understanding of people resulted only from examining them in their historical contexts…The achievement of *The Philadelphia Negro* was that it was steeped in empirical data with charts and graphs, which enabled Du Bois to chronicle and analyze the experience of Black Philadelphians at the turn of the 20th century. Along with a general approach used to describe the black population nationally, Du Bois employed the case method…the case method relies on the in-depth study of a single case to reveal details and nuances of phenomena not attainable in a general study. The case method has become commonplace in sociology and anthropology because it allows the analyst to provide specificity to accompany macro-level analysis. (pp. 34-36)

The dissertation incorporates a mixed-methods approach: quantitative analysis of U.S. Census data, content analysis through archival research, and semi-structured interviews. Data were collected and analyzed at the neighborhood scale, which involved subdividing New Orleans East into smaller-scale neighborhoods at the census tract and block group levels from 1960 to 2020. I examined and analyzed descriptive statistics from the census to provide a quantitatively rooted analysis of the study area, including data on race, income, education, employment, housing, and population growth. The data was collected using Social Explorer, an online research database that aggregates and provides historical census data and demographic
information from various sources, including the Decennial U.S. Census and The American Community Survey (ACS). Additional census data came from The Data Center, a New Orleans-based independent nonprofit organization that provides data-based analyses on a range of economic, housing, and social issues in southeast Louisiana.

Qualitative data for this research project comes from various primary sources, including newspaper archives, city planning documents, maps, and interviews. A considerable amount of data comes from archives of The Times-Picayune. Newspaper archives are cultural artifacts and powerful storytelling tools that provide a window into the social, economic, and political realities of a particular time and place. Sarah Broom (2019), author of The Yellow House, a personal memoir of growing up in New Orleans East, writes, “The newspapers fell hard for New Orleans East. Here was a story with possibility for high drama involving men and money and wetlands, dreaming and draining, and emergence and fate. Not so different from the founding tale of New Orleans itself: unlikely impossible city rising from swamplands, waging guerilla war against the natural order of things…” (p. 55). We cannot understand New Orleans East today without first chronicling its history. To gather more in-depth insight into current issues affecting present-day New Orleans East, I have been working with a non-profit organization called New Orleans East Matters Coalition (Figure 6). I have attended weekly meetings, advisory board meetings, and master planning forums alongside these members and have taken field notes during all events. A relatively young organization, N.O. East Matters spearheads revitalization projects, tackles blight, and provides representation at city economic development meetings. Coalition members work tirelessly to combat the negative reputation locals and the media portray when they unfairly stigmatize this part of the city. N.O. East Matters focuses on what they call their “Big Three” redevelopment priorities: the revitalization of historic Lincoln Beach, the reopening of the
shuttered Six Flags, and recreating Read Boulevard and I-10 (the former site of the Lake Forest Plaza Mall) into the commercial and business core and town center of New Orleans East.

I interviewed a total of twenty-two current residents of New Orleans East to hear their first-hand accounts of the area’s transformation over the decades. Eighteen of those interviewed were members of New Orleans East Matters. Demographically, most members of this organization are middle-aged, college-educated, middle- and upper-class Black women who moved to N.O. East in the 1970s and 1980s in search of the suburban dream. The following additional characteristics describe those interviewed for this project: three were men, all were homeowners, and all but a handful moved to The East before the 1990s. The remaining four residents I interviewed were directed to me by the coffee shop’s owner and through snowball sampling, where one member would direct me to the next member. The interviews for this research project spanned from April 2022 to February 2023 and took place at PJ’s Coffee on Read Boulevard. All interviews were recorded and transcribed; most lasted between two and three hours, and I took hand-written field notes during each one. The interview questions were open-ended and focused on the growth and decline of New Orleans East and their interpretations of the area’s decline. Interview data used in the dissertation such as quotes will be kept anonymous and correspond to when the conversation occurred (e.g., interview 1, date, etc.)

In the analysis stage of the project, I engaged in the following sequence of stages to validate the accuracy of the data, as proposed by Creswell (2009): transcribed the raw data; organized and prepared the data; read the data, and categorized my findings to uncover common themes as they related to my research questions. The next stages involved an iterative process of coding the data – (1) categorizing the data, (2) developing a matrix based upon such categories, (3) synthesizing the work into data displays such as tables and charts, (4) tabulating the
frequency of different events, (5) creating a chronology from the data, and (6) pattern matching. I created a set of systematic codes (variables, themes) for the interviews and field notes to analyze the texts. Recurrent words and phrases were then coded into larger themes and patterns, which were then interpreted – working through the data, moving through and beyond what participants say, and trying to get down to the underlying meanings.

This research will be ongoing and will evolve. I will continue to work alongside New Orleans East Matters members as they persevere to revitalize their community. One of the first major events spearheaded by the organization was the inaugural “New Orleans East Matters Festival” held in Joe W. Brown Park in September 2022. Tangee Wall, a longtime advocate of rebuilding New Orleans East since Katrina and President of New Orleans East Matters, encapsulates how residents of The East feel about the pejorative stigma it has long held and the symbolic importance the festival represents:

They don’t want that image [of crime] Uptown. It’s not that it’s not happening in other neighborhoods because it is; it’s that it’s not advertised and publicized. It happens everywhere else in the city, but it’s disproportionately highlighted in New Orleans East. We matter. New Orleans East matters just as much as downtown and Lakeview. We are the last frontier for development in the city. Yet, the city continues to frame us as one big entity. It creates a total image and downside to our entire area, a blemish. But it does start with us. If we don’t care about our community from within, then why would we expect those on the outside to care? We care about the blight, trashing, and dumping. We are frustrated by the lack of progress. We are frustrated that we have to travel to other parts of the city and Metairie, yet they don’t come here. We deserve to be a destination. We are the largest geographic part of the city. We have some of the highest rates of homeownership. We spend money. But we are battling our negative image that is created and perpetuated. This festival is a branding issue. If we can successfully pull this off, that will boost our image. It’ll show the rest of the city that we support our own. I am invested in this. At the end of the day, we want what all the other neighborhoods in New Orleans want – an overall better quality of life. So, it’s time we rebrand (N.O.E. Festival, September 17, 2022).

Figure 6

Photo of New Orleans East Matters Coalition, 2022
The dissertation is divided into eight chapters that recount and analyze the suburban growth, decline, and disinvestment of New Orleans East. Chapter 1 introduces The East as a sociological and geographic suburban case study. The first half of the chapter provides a general demographic and historical overview of the area, and the second half contextualizes New Orleans East within the larger history of U.S. race and housing policy. Chapter 2 begins by chronicling the oldest part of N.O. East – Little Woods – while the latter half of the chapter tells the story of Lincoln Beach, a historically Black beach along the furthest stretches of Little Woods during Jim Crow segregation. Following desegregation, multiple redevelopment attempts have tried and failed to bring Lincoln Beach back, and it remains abandoned decades later. At the time of this writing, there is a current proposal (the latest iteration in a long line of past plans) to
revitalize this historically and culturally significant site in N.O. East.

Chapter 3 tells the story of New Orleans East, Inc., a company formed in 1959 by two Texas oil tycoons to develop 32,000 acres of marshland into suburbia. Between 1959 and 1985, New Orleans East, Inc. proposed four different plants to drain and urbanize the area: New Orleans East, Pontchartrain New Town in Town, Orlandia, and The Villages of Oak Island (1981). Their plans would face many obstacles, including skepticism from investors to develop, huge environmental barriers, an increasingly Black city, and the 1980s oil crash. Chapter Four recounts the area’s second and more successful developer, Lake Forest, Inc., who, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, developed 5,000 acres of reclaimed marshland into the suburban New Orleans East that most residents inhabit today. Chapter 4 pays particular attention to the racial transition and white flight of New Orleans East during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, as the city’s emerging Black middle class moved eastward in droves and rapidly integrated neighborhoods. The chapter ends with a detailed look into the rise and fall of the once-popular and thriving Lake Forest Plaza Mall, showcasing how the mall’s deterioration was symbolic of The East’s steady overall economic downturn.

Chapter 5 analyzes themes of image and perception and narrates the decline of The East during the 1990s and early 2000s. During this time, city and state leaders introduced several major initiatives to revitalize New Orleans East: 1) the rehabilitation of dilapidated apartments along I-10 accompanied by a plan to limit the spread of subsidized housing in the area; 2) the rebranding of the Almonaster-Michoud Industrial District (A-MID) that included a failed plan to build an auto speedway; 3) a broken promise to locate the New Orleans Hornets professional basketball team’s practice and training facility to the East; 4) the opening and eventual bankruptcy of Jazzland Amusement Park, which was then rebranded into Six Flags; and 5) the
city’s adoption in 2004 of the “New Orleans East Renaissance Plan.”

Chapter 6 focuses on Hurricane Katrina and its devastating impacts on the city and N.O. East. This chapter analyzes how race and class were central to understanding the storm’s disparate levels of devastation and the city’s hotly debated recovery plans. Chapter 7 describes New Orleans East’s post-Katrina reconstruction, or lack thereof, eighteen years later. Still, New Orleans East remains dramatically underinvested in and undeveloped compared to the rest of the city, especially considering its population and sizable middle-class population. To conclude, the dissertation looks to the future, arguing that by learning from the past, the time is now to break the cycle and finally bring about the area’s renaissance. In collaboration with N.O. East Matter coalition members, this chapter provides a 25-step roadmap to revitalize New Orleans East.

This dissertation seeks a paradigm shift in how New Orleans residents, realtors, private developers, and city and state leaders conceptualize “The East.” New Orleans East has become the forgotten neighborhood in “the city that care forgot,” but it deserves much more. Taking pride in where they live, residents demand respect after years of empty promises and failed plans from across multiple city and state administrations. N.O. East Matters members persevere in the face of adversity to bring community investment to their part of the city that has little to show after decades of decline, neglect, and disinvestment. Many passionately expressed that the only way to move forward is to conclusively “get the story right” and dispel falsities. This dissertation aims to do just that – to tell the factual history of New Orleans East. I hope I have done it justice.

CHAPTER 1: CITY-WITHIN-A-CITY

“The New Orleans East Biggest Thing in Years: Plenty of Action Set for Vast Area”

–The Times-Picayune headline, Sunday, January 31, 1960
Compared to the rest of the city’s older, historic neighborhoods, New Orleans East is characteristically suburban in appearance. N.O. East’s landscape does not contain the city’s quintessential architecture, such as shotgun houses and Creole cottages. Instead, most homes in New Orleans East are single- and two-story suburban ranch houses that date back to the 1950s through 1970s. Newer, gated communities emerged closer to Bullard Avenue in the 1980s and 1990s as developers built cul-de-sac neighborhoods centered around lakes, luscious green spaces, and even a prestigious golf course. Long a source of debate and controversy dating back to the 1970s, multifamily apartment complexes and cheaply built townhomes are also prolific throughout the area, with many of the largest ones visible from I-10.

Neighborhoods in New Orleans East include Pines Village, Plum Orchard, Little Woods, West Lake Forest, Read Boulevard West, Read Boulevard East, Village de L’Est, Venetian Isles, and Lake Catherine (Figures 7-8). N.O. East is geographically isolated from the rest of the city by the Industrial Canal. It is surrounded by water on all sides, bounded by the Industrial Canal, Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Borgne, and the Rigolets, a long deepwater strait connecting the two lakes. Interstate 10 splits the area nearly in half, and local vernacular refers to the part that goes over the Industrial Canal as the “highrise.” Major streets in The East include Chef Menteur Highway, Read Boulevard, Bullard Avenue, Michoud Boulevard, Hayne Boulevard, Lake Forest Boulevard, Downman Road, Crowder Boulevard, Dwyer Road, Morrison Road, Old Gentilly Road, Bundy Road, and Almonaster Avenue. New Orleans East represents 65% of the city’s total land area, and as of the 2020 census, it is home to approximately 75,223 residents, accounting for 20% of the city’s population. If it were its own municipality, New Orleans East would be the sixth-largest city in Louisiana.

Figure 7
New Orleans East Neighborhoods, 2020

Note. Source: The Data Center, 2022.

Figure 8

New Orleans Neighborhoods, 2020
As eastern New Orleans grew in population, so did the area’s economy. Economic drivers in New Orleans East include the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Michoud Assembly Facility, which dates back to the 1940s, and Folgers Coffee, one of the first businesses to open after New Orleans East, Inc. announced their ambitious plans for the new suburb. Today, New Orleans East is also home to the 1930s Art Deco New Orleans Lakefront Airport, Faubourg Brewing Company, Crescent Crown Distributing, the USDA National Finance Center, and the New Orleans Regional Business Park. A notable characteristic of N.O. East is its abundance of green spaces, including Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge, Audubon Louisiana Nature Center, and Joe W. Brown Park. Despite significant economic drivers and
plentiful natural resources, the area’s conspicuous blight overshadows and dominates the imaginative geography that residents think of when asked about “The East” – the shuttered Six Flags theme park, long-abandoned historic Lincoln Beach, and a vast landscape of vacant lots along I-10 where bustling offices, shopping centers, and Lake Forest Plaza Mall once stood.

Between 1959 and 1985, New Orleans East, Inc. proposed four plans to develop the 32,000 acres: New Orleans East (1959), Pontchartrain New Town in Town (1971), Orlandia (1975), and The Villages of Oak Island (1981). A significant hurdle in developing New Orleans East was draining the low-lying land and protecting it from flooding and hurricanes. For decades, local and state politicians, developers, bankers, real estate agents, and investors operated as a city growth machine that visualized the potential economic value of a new, modern suburb built in the landlocked city (Logan & Molotch, 1987). Referred to as the city’s “suburban frontier” and “city of the future,” New Orleans East was initially envisioned to be the city’s solution to white flight by enticing the growing white middle class – and the economic tax base that came with them – to stay in Orleans Parish. To slow white flight, New Orleans East, Inc. and city officials set out to duplicate the successful 1960s suburbanization of neighboring Jefferson Parish, and vast sums of money were invested in making the plan a reality.

Public interest and expectations were high for New Orleans East, and newspaper advertisements heavily marketed the burgeoning area to the growing white middle class (Figures 9-10). Note the contrast in Figure 10 between the striking imagery of an early 1970s advertisement depicting an idyllic white middle-class suburban lifestyle. As N.O. East racially tipped toward more Black residents during the 1980s and 1990s, the city’s perception of the area radically changed. “The East” has become so commonplace and widely understood in contemporary metropolitan New Orleans that just saying the name alone evokes an image of
decline from people who do not live there but know of it through what they hear in the media or judge it by what they see along I-10. Former white residents who fled as their neighborhoods transitioned remember the area for what it was versus what it became. Stated more simply, “The East” is simultaneously a colloquial moniker for residents who live there and call it home and an epithet for outsiders to describe all that is bad – crime, poverty, and blight. New Orleans East residents, particularly the Black middle- and upper-income families who reside here, feel that outsiders undeservingly stigmatize the entire area. Consequently, investors do not want to invest in The East because of the negative narrative that has been locally ingrained into the city’s subconscious. The perception of The East is its greatest obstacle.

Figure 9

New Orleans East, Inc. Advertisement, 1963

![New Orleans East Advertisement](image)

BEGINNING THE MOST EXCITING CHAPTER IN NEW ORLEANS’ HISTORY

Multiply him by the thousands. That’s how many hard hats, welders’ hoods, and safety helmets are involved on this new fifty square mile development! New Orleans East is more than a job to these workers. It’s practically a career! Because, before this unique “city within a city” is finished, most of them will have spent countless thousands of hours on the job! New Orleans East is a big project. In fact, one of the biggest area development projects in modern history! Only 12 miles northeast of downtown, New Orleans East will provide many of the nation’s most outstanding new industrial, commercial and residential sites, and open an exciting new era in the life of the South in the South’s most exciting city.

NEW ORLEANS EAST

32,000 acres, comprising 50 miles within the city, and currently being developed in a program of scope and size without precedent. Twelve miles northeast of downtown, New Orleans East, adjacent to NASA-Michoud plant, will provide many of the nation’s most outstanding new industrial, commercial, and residential sites. 10,000 acres of industrial and commercial areas will offer economical land cost; sensible parceling and zoning; and direct routes by rail, highway, and barge, including deep water access to international ports. 22,000 acres under development for residential use will ultimately house 250,000 people, in a series of small “neighborhoods” and luxury waterfront homes in Venetian-like waterways, interspersed with churches, parks, schools, recreational facilities, and shopping centers. New Orleans East is the beginning of the biggest chapter in the city’s history. For information write 1112 American Bank Bldg., or phone 522-5119, New Orleans 12.

Note: Source: The Times-Picayune, 1963.

Figure 10

Lake Forest Advertisement, 1972

Ultimately, New Orleans East, Inc.’s decades-long plans to reclaim unprotected swampland and build a suburban city-within-a-city did not come to fruition. Aside from the
company’s original two subdivisions constructed in the mid-1960s – Village de L’Est and Venetian Isles –, all four proposals were costly, colossal failures. By 1985, the global oil crisis wrecked the local economy, and New Orleans East, Inc. declared bankruptcy, officially ending the planned development of the remaining 23,000 acres. One year later, the federal government purchased the land to create the nation’s largest urban wildlife refuge, Bayou Sauvage, elevating environmental preservation over ballyhooed and unchecked suburban sprawl. Today, remnants of the proposed New Orleans East include Village de L’Est, Venetian Isles, NASA Michoud Assembly Facility, Bayou Sauvage, and Six Flags Amusement Park, which flooded during Hurricane Katrina and remains untouched eighteen years later.

Adjacent to New Orleans East was a 5,000-acre tract of land between the Industrial Canal and Paris Road owned by a corporation called Lake Forest, Inc. Between the late 1940s and mid-1960s, developers built the postwar neighborhoods of Seabrook, Plum Orchard, Pines Village, and Sherwood Forest near the Industrial Canal and off parts of Chef Menteur Highway (also known as U.S. 90). Meanwhile, Jim Crow segregated “colored-only” areas emerged in the early 1960s near Old Gentilly Road and Chef Menteur Highway as many of the city’s Black working-class families began migrating to the city’s eastern section. In 1964, Marvin Kratter, a New York real estate developer, formed the LaKratt Corporation and purchased the 5,000-acre tract between these postwar neighborhoods and New Orleans East for $20 million from the heirs of Joe Brown, a prominent local businessman who bought the land in 1954 before he died in 1959. Unlike New Orleans East, Inc.’s failure to fully develop New Orleans East, Lake Forest, Inc., a subsidiary of LaKratt Corporation, successfully developed the then-dubbed “Lake Forest” into a more traditional middle-class suburb.
During the booming oil economy of the 1970s, Lake Forest was hot real estate, at first appealing to many white middle- and upper-income professionals, many of whom worked in the oil and gas industry. In 1970, the city’s eastern section – Lake Forest and New Orleans East – combined was 84% white and 15% Black. Lake Forest reaped the benefits of the oil boom, and developers rapidly built new houses, apartments, condos, shopping centers, schools, offices, business parks, and the popular Lake Forest Plaza Mall. By the late 1970s, Lake Forest was racially integrating as upwardly mobile Black middle-class families, many from the city’s Seventh Ward, Central City, and Tremé, moved eastward in search of the American dream. The heyday of Lake Forest and New Orleans East was short-lived. By 1980, just ten years later, N.O. East’s population transitioned to 54% white and 40% Black, becoming one of few racially integrated neighborhoods in an otherwise segregated metropolitan area (Ciardullo et al., 2018).

The effects of the 1980s oil crash on the local housing market ushered in a dramatic transformation and racial and class transition in the city’s eastern half. Upper-middle-income whites who lost energy- and oil-related jobs fled neighborhoods in droves once they reached a racial “tipping point,” creating a recession-linked white exodus of N.O. East (Lauria & Baxter, 1999). American economist Thomas Schelling coined a “general theory of tipping” in a 1971 paper to describe racially integrating neighborhoods and the threshold whereby white people feel comfortable having Black neighbors until too many move in. Through his research, he found that white people are tolerant of neighborhood racial integration “up to some limit” and that once the minority share in a neighborhood exceeds a “tipping point,” white flight happens *en masse* (Schelling 1971). Between 1980 and 1990, the white population in New Orleans East decreased from 54% to 30%, while the Black population increased from 40% to 64%. During the 1990s and 2000s, an influx of lower-income Black residents, many from the city’s older public housing
developments, moved into the area’s numerous federally subsidized apartments. White flight to St. Tammany Parish and other neighboring parishes was pronounced, and by 2000, the 1970 racial composition was completely reversed, and N.O. East was 81% Black and 11% White.

Beyond the white-black racial binary, New Orleans East has long been home to a sizable Vietnamese enclave. Village de L’Est was built in the mid-1960s as a deed-restricted neighborhood to house workers at the nearby NASA Michoud Assembly Center. The community had fallen victim to a population exodus and decline not even a decade after it opened as investment in the Space Age waned, and jobs and production significantly decreased at Michoud. Combined with subsidence issues that caused cracked foundations, depreciating property values, and crooked sidewalks and streets, the original residents left, many for the Northshore. Village de L’Est racially transitioned as whites moved out, and the Associated Catholic Charities (ACC) helped relocate thousands of Vietnamese refugees who fled their country following the fall of Saigon in 1975. At first, most refugees settled in the Versailles Arms garden apartments on Chef Menteur Highway, a 402-unit apartment subsidized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Over time, Vietnamese immigrants repopulated the nearly empty neighborhood, and the intersection of Alcee Fortier Boulevard and Chef Menteur Highway became the economic epicenter of Vietnamese businesses and commercial establishments. Over the next decades, Village de L’Est grew into a self-sufficient community geographically and culturally distant and distinct from the rest of the city. Post-Katrina, the area has diversified with a growing Hispanic and Black population and a decreasing Vietnamese population.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
This dissertation uses the frameworks of critical race theory (CRT) and the sociological concept of the racialization of space to analyze the decline of N.O. East and answer why the area chronically suffers from a lack of significant economic development and the ill effects of racial and class hypersegregation. Empirical studies on Black suburbanization indicate that suburban life costs Blacks more but delivers less in services when compared to even lower-income white neighborhoods (Cashin, 2004; Patillo, 2005a; Wiese, 2004). This robust body of research challenges the erroneous conjecture that because they have attained middle-class status, Black professionals have escaped the social ills of segregation. It has become sociological canon that pervasive residential segregation in U.S. cities functions as the “structural linchpin” of racial stratification, urban poverty, and class inequality (Anderson, 1990; Charles, 2003; Pettigrew, 1979). In their groundbreaking analysis of race and segregation in U.S. cities, sociologists Massey and Denton (1993) write:

Residential segregation is not a neutral fact; it systematically undermines the social and economic well-being of blacks in the United States. Because of racial segregation, a significant share of black America is condemned to experience a social environment where poverty and joblessness are the norm…where educational failure prevails, and where social and physical deterioration abound. Through prolonged exposure to such an environment, black chances for social and economic success are drastically reduced…The effect of segregation on black well-being is structural, not individual. Residential segregation lies beyond the ability of any individual to change; it constrains black life chances irrespective of personal traits, individual motivations, or private achievements. (p. 2)

The race-class duality has long been a cornerstone of the social sciences, dating back to the origins of sociology. *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) by W.E.B. Du Bois, for example, is a seminal sociological analysis of the daily lives, social structure, and organization of inner-city African Americans. Du Bois argued for the importance of an explicitly racial framework that a class-based analysis cannot capture because there is an inherent “problem of the Negroes” that no other race experiences in the United States (1899, p. 5). Du Bois’ methodology and scientific
approach using mapping and census data strayed from other primary texts of the late nineteenth century in its central focus on race. It was not until recently that sociology itself acknowledged the primacy of W.E.B. Du Bois’ writings as foundational to the discipline’s origins, particularly the subdiscipline of urban sociology (Morris, 2015). To explain the unyielding persistence of U.S. racial inequality, contemporary scholars focus on race and how racism operates as a dynamic set of institutional forces that intermingle but are independent of class dynamics (Conley, 1999; Oliver & Shapiro, 2006; Wilson, 1978; Wilson, 1987). The reduction of race to class or culture and the promotion of a colorblind ideology conflicts with well-documented historical evidence that racism has structured U.S. institutions over centuries and created barriers for racial minorities in housing, education, and jobs, regardless of class status.

Critical race theory is an analytical framework that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s to examine the interplay between U.S. law, race, and power (Collins, 2000; Feagin, 2006; West, 1993). Grounded in the Civil Rights Movement and social activism of the 1960s, CRT challenges the longstanding conception that the law is race-neutral. Instead, CRT scholars argue that historically and in the present day, racial minorities – mainly Blacks – do not experience equal treatment under the law. Early scholars examined how U.S. legal precedents such as the landmark Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) failed to create change due to delays, cultural resistance, and narrow lower-court interpretations. In fact, progress has been undone, as U.S. public schools today are now more segregated than before Brown (Lockhart, 2019). Drawing heavily from critical legal studies (CLS) and disciplines such as sociology, feminist theory, and literary theory, CRT posits that racism is systemic and goes beyond the individual. Unlike traditional civil rights, which stress incremental progress, CRT questions the very foundation of legal reasoning, including equality theory and
neutral principles of constitutional law, arguing that the law is imbued with inherent social biases created and enforced by the elite to preserve their power. Critical race theory offers a race-based critique of U.S. legal institutions and pursues social justice and equity by transforming oppressive structures that perpetuate racial stratification. CRT scholars are committed to dismantling systems of oppression that subordinate racial minorities.

A fundamental tenet of critical race theory is that racism and disparate racial outcomes in America have resulted from intricate, evolving, and often subtle institutional and societal dynamics rather than explicit and deliberate individual-level prejudices. CRT contends that contemporary racial inequality in the U.S. stems directly from historic racist laws, policies, and systems that were neither race-neutral nor race-blind. Evidence to support the idea that racism is institutional and structural includes the race-consciousness laws of American slavery, Jim Crow laws, separate-but-equal laws, redlining, the War on Drugs, and mass incarceration. CRT scholars examine how post-1960s and 1980s neoconservatives switched from explicit racial ideology to a more subtle far-right discourse, often using coded language, so-called “colorblind” or “post-racial” neutral terms, or dog-whistle politics (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Haney López, 2015). Examples of this coded language include “ghetto,” “inner city,” “crackheads,” “tough on crime,” “the projects,” “welfare queen,” and “section 8.” Now that critical race theory has entered the mainstream lexicon, the battle over how to teach America’s past is deepening, either by downplaying America’s history of structural racism or by keeping it entirely out of textbooks.

Another significant component of critical race theory is elevating the historically-marginalized voices of racial minorities through counterstorytelling and the use of counternarratives. Counternarratives collectively provide valuable and valid insight into the plight of Black Americans via their histories, perspectives, and the experiential knowledge which
“brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism” and connects individual experiences to broader patterns of racial inequality (Delgado & Stefanie, 2012, p. 10).

Counterstorytelling serves two primary functions: to reveal that non-white racial minorities face similar experiences, thus establishing the salience of racism in America and legitimizing people of color’s assertions, and to help bridge the gap of understanding between the realities of white and Black America. I include the counterstorytelling of N.O. East residents to challenge the prevailing master narrative, generalizations, and perceptions of whites that have long driven and framed the narrative of New Orleans East’s decline.

Richard Rothstein’s *The Color of Law: The Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (2017) dispels the enduring myth that white and Black Americans live separately by choice. His research chronicles the unrefuted history of racist housing laws and policies enacted by the Depression-era Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) that defined where whites and Blacks could live until the last quarter of the twentieth century. These practices spanned between the 1910s and 1960s and included racial zoning ordinances, restrictive deed covenants (racial covenants), redlining, blockbusting, steering, and single-family and exclusionary zoning laws. Additional tactics that created a racially bifurcated America included urban renewal, interstate highway construction, public housing, planned shrinkage, and predatory lending (Freund, 2007; Jackson, 1985; Rothstein, 2017). A similar phenomenon called sundown towns has proliferated for decades in hundreds of small towns and suburban municipalities across the country. Sundown towns – which get their name from signs like “Whites Only Within City Limits After Dark” – used segregationist practices like exclusionary zoning laws and municipal ordinances to keep racial minorities from moving in. Sociologist and historian James Loewen, who has spent years
studying these towns, shares that while the number of sundown towns is officially decreasing, many unofficially still exist as ‘recovering’ sundown towns, where organized resistance to Black residents has ended but the racial divide can remain wide (Sullivan & Nasir, 2020).

Housing scholars have meticulously documented the FHA’s powerful and far-reaching influence in shaping the U.S. housing market. Archival research by urban scholars proves that FHA policy “in fact sought to expand such biases as a primary goal of its operation” (Kimble 2007, p. 400). An increased examination of the FHA *Underwriting Manual* of 1938 and the updated 1947 version indicates that the FHA was more than just complicit in condoning racist private practices in the market from the 1920s through the 1960s. Instead, the FHA actively undermined civil rights reforms in housing, even deflecting blame onto the private market (Hirsch 2000a; Sugrue 1996). Mounting research by urban historians reveals how a “conscious and deliberate choice for segregation lay at the heart of national policy” and that the FHA elevated “the centrality of race to [its] vision of the market” (Hirsch 2000a, p. 207; Kimble 2007, p. 400). FHA policies called unequivocally for the containment, isolation, and urban ghettoization of Blacks, equating their presence as neighbors with risk, community instability, and declining property values (Hirsch, 1983; Jackson, 1985; Kimble, 2007; Sugrue, 1996). This dissertation draws a direct lineage from past racist housing policies and practices, particularly redlining and racial covenants, to the modern-day disinvestment of New Orleans East.

U.S. segregation is not a natural process, nor solely the product of individual housing preferences and interpersonal prejudices, nor even “purely involuntary consequences of impersonal market activity,” but rather is a result of racist federal housing legislation and

---

1 Increasingly, universities are studying these various racist mechanisms, particularly redlining and racial covenants. See: “Mapping Inequality” at The University of Richmond, which provides a national database on HOLC redlining maps, and “Mapping Prejudice” at The University of Minnesota and “Racial Restrictive Covenants Project” at Washington State, both of which archives racial covenants.
discriminatory real estate practices that - in turn - played into and exacerbated racist and prejudiced beliefs of working and middle-class whites (Hirsch, 2000a; Jackson, 1985; Kimble, 2007, p. 421; Rothstein, 2017). In 1908, the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) was formed as the nation’s first organization of builders and real estate agents. The organization advocated for private-sector financing of segregated suburban housing. They disseminated textbooks, pamphlets, and periodicals “that warned real estate firms that racial minorities threatened property values and that neighborhoods should be racially homogenous to maintain their desirability” (Gotham 2002a, p. 34). The real estate industry and federal government operated jointly and inflamed racial prejudices and stereotypes by propagating a segregationist ideology that linked social structure (housing and neighborhoods) to particular meanings of race. This racist propaganda socialized white homeowners into believing that racially integrated neighborhoods were unnatural and that having Black neighbors would lead to significant neighborhood decline. Racist ideologies effectively associated Black people with an inherently pathological and deviant subculture, contributing to deteriorating neighborhoods and exacerbating social problems like crime, poverty, and poor schools (Gotham, 2002b; Lipsitz, 2011). The institutional interlinking of race and culturally specific behavior to place of residence in the city became an “important impetus and justification for the exclusionary real estate practices designed to create and maintain the geographic separation of the races and control metropolitan development” (Gotham, 2002, p. 23).

Research by sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994), George Lipsitz (2011), and Kevin Gotham (2022a) on the racialization of space and neighborhood change sheds light on the paradox that despite The Fair Housing Act of 1968 ending *de jure* housing discrimination, cities continue to experience high rates of *de facto* segregation that
disproportionately traps Black into cycles of poverty. Before the 1900s, “no U.S. city had evidence of concentrated minority poverty, racial isolation, or residential segregation that are the hallmarks of the contemporary metropolis” (Gotham 2002a, p. 27). To understand contemporary segregation and its consequences, Omi and Winant theorize the concept of racialization – a framework for analyzing the role of the federal government and real estate interests in the origin, development, and perpetuation of racist housing policies that led to racial residential segregation in U.S. cities (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Feagin, 2012; Gotham, 2002; Omi & Winant, 1994).

Racialization refers to the myriad ways racial categories and understandings change within specific historical circumstances, reflecting the racial ideologies of a time and place. Racial projects refer to an interconnected network of processes whereby racist beliefs are structurally codified into laws and policies rooted in the naturalizing, or essentializing, of racial categories (Omi & Winant 1994). One example is the “Own Your Own Home” campaign administered by NAREB between 1917 and 1921. To combat growing fears of communism and promote capitalism, the federal Department of Labor encouraged white Americans to purchase houses in racially-segregated neighborhoods as an act of patriotic duty. Urban historian David Freund (2007) describes how white suburbs across America maintained a solid commitment to racial exclusion and defense of segregation “by invoking the amorphous language of ‘rights,’ which enabled them to cast racial exclusion as a defense of hard-earned, and presumably nonracial, privileges, be it as homeowners, working people, consumers, citizens, or loyal supporters of the New Deal state” (p. 6). As such, “federal promotion of homeownership became inseparable from a policy of racial segregation” (Rothstein, 2017, p. 63).

The same year NAREB formed, Los Angeles passed the first comprehensive municipal zoning ordinance in the United States, separating residential zones from industrial zones in
specific parts of the city. The Residence District Ordinance, and its accompanying Industrial District Ordinance, contained an explicit racial component, confining Chinese-run laundromats to industrial zones to keep Chinese citizens out of white communities. Two years later, Baltimore passed the country’s first racial zoning ordinance, stipulating where in neighborhoods people could live based on race and requiring that developers segregate all new housing developments by race. Seven years later, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled in Buchanan v Warley that racially-restrictive zoning ordinances were unconstitutional and violated the freedom of contract. However, racism was not at the center of the ruling; instead, the court’s reasoning focused on property rights should a white family desire to sell their property to a Black family in the future.

In 1919, St. Louis adopted a zoning housing ordinance whereby specific neighborhoods could only contain detached single-family homes, effectively pricing out poor Black residents. The zoning law did not include race as an explicit variable, setting a precedent that paved the way for similar “race-neutral” single-family zoning ordinances across the country. By 1924, The U.S. Department of Commerce scaled up these laws by standardizing zoning regulations when it passed “The Standard State Zoning Enabling Act,” leading to 19 states passing zoning laws based on the recommended guidelines (Freund, 2007; Gotham 2002a, Hirsch 1983; Kimble, 2007; Rothstein, 2017). New Orleans considered but did not immediately enact racial zoning ordinances. A 1909 real estate booklet for Gentilly Terrace, the precursor to N.O. East suburbs, made clear that Chinese laundromats would be restricted from opening businesses in the neighborhood. However, the mechanism was a private contract, not a municipal ordinance. By 1921, New Orleans secured zoning authority “to evade the [Buchanan] ruling of the Supreme Court” (Silver, 1997). In 1923, New Orleans created the first City Planning Commission in the South. One year later, a commission passed a “segregation ordinance” that stipulated “Blacks
could not occupy a house in a White block or a White person in a Black block unless the prospective occupant obtained written permission of a majority of the residents already in the block” (Silver, 1997). The city ordinance was sustained by a lower court, overturned by the Louisiana Supreme Court, and then went up to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court ruled in Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co., 272 U.S. 365 (1926) that municipal zoning ordinances in Euclid, Ohio, were constitutional, establishing legal precedent for local control of “comprehensive” zoning laws in U.S. cities. In New Orleans, the city attorney contended that the segregation ordinance, a “race-based occupancy by permission slip zoning arrangement,” was legal because of the decision upheld by Euclid. The city further argued that zoning and comprehensive planning should “join the host of [other] legal Jim Crow strategies being employed to transform the racially segregated Southern city into a bifurcated racial world” (Silver, 1997). The Supreme Court struck down the ordinance in 1927. That same year, the city hired Harland Bartholomew and Associates to create a citywide master plan; Bartholomew would later draft the original proposal for New Orleans East in 1959.

Once racial zoning was deemed illegal, it was replaced by restrictive deed covenants. Also known as racial covenants, these were stipulations written into housing contracts forbidding white homeowners from selling their houses to members of other races to promote neighborhood stability, protect local property values, and preserve racial homogeneity. Restrictive covenants were a requirement for federal housing loans; the FHA mandated that all new residential developments implement covenants and would not insure mortgages in racially integrated areas (Kimble, 2007). Throughout the 1920s, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) launched several unsuccessful court challenges against racial covenants. Corrigan v. Buckley, 271 U.S. 323 (1926) affirmed the legality of restrictive deed
covenants, ruling that covenants constituted “private action” not subject to the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Not only did Corrigan v Buckley invalidate the purchase of the house made by the Black family with which the case was specifically concerned, but it also sanctioned racial covenants to proliferate from the 1920s to the 1940s. The mere existence of covenants communicated to white buyers that living in racially-mixed neighborhoods was a risk to their home values. In 1947, Levittown opened as the first U.S. mass-produced suburb financed by the FHA and VA and built for returning white veterans during the postwar housing crisis. Located on Long Island, New York, Levittown employed covenants prohibiting homeowners from selling their homes in the future to non-whites. As of the 2020 census, Levittown is 80% white, 16% Hispanic, 9% Asian, and 2% Black (U.S. Census).

The landmark Supreme Court case Shelley v. Kraemer, 334 U.S. 1 (1948) unanimously ruled that racial covenants denied non-white homebuyers equal protection under the law (a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment) and therefore were legally unenforceable by the courts. The amicus curiae submitted to the court by the U.S. Attorney General and Solicitor General excoriated racial covenants as so wide-ranging in scope and effect that they were “responsible for the creation of isolated areas in which over-crowded racial minorities were confined, and in which living conditions are steadily worsened” suggesting that they essentially functioned akin to “racially restrictive housing legislation” (FHA 1938c, p. 8; Kimble 2007, p. 414). Private covenants extolled by the FHA for their effectiveness “to protect [the homebuyer’s] investment and assure him a better community in which to live” simultaneously “contributed powerfully to the ghettoization of African Americans in neighborhoods doomed by a dearth of available capital” (Kimble 2007, p. 414). One year later, the FHA officially ended its policy of insuring properties containing deed restrictions and withholding home insurance in racially-integrated
neighborhoods. Once ruled unconstitutional, covenants were soon replaced by the practice known as blockbusting, where real estate agents used fear-mongering tactics to convince white homeowners to sell their homes below market value in transitioning neighborhoods. In turn, agents sold the houses at inflated prices to Black families, exploiting and exacerbating racial segregation. Real estate blockbusters were integral in provoking anxiety surrounding racially transitioning neighborhoods and further fueled white flight to the suburbs.

The spiraling effects of the Great Depression on the housing market were severe, as 50% of the nation’s mortgages were in default by 1933. To stymie a collapse of the housing industry, the federal government intervened by creating The Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) under the New Deal to assist the private sector in refinancing mortgages and preventing foreclosures. President Roosevelt then signed the National Housing Act of 1934 into law, establishing the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation (FSLIC) to federally insure mortgages made by private lenders (U.S. HUD, 2022). In 1938, Congress established the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) to further stimulate homeownership through amortized, federally-backed, low-cost loans that lowered down payments from 30% to 10%. The FHA’s primary function was to revitalize the depressed market by eliminating all potential elements of risk that could destabilize the housing economy. To accomplish this endeavor, the HOLC created 239 “Residential Security” and 250 “Real Property Inventories” to appraise neighborhoods and determine which areas were suitable for investment and which were at risk. These maps were based on HOLC’s “City Survey Files,” which contained real estate maps for population statistics.

Out of these maps came the most pernicious, far-reaching, and well-documented examples of institutional racism in housing: redlining. Redlining was the process of delineating
on city maps (through the use of red lines) areas where the federal government legally authorized banks to deny mortgages, loans, and services to “hazardous” and “risky” communities, i.e., Black neighborhoods (Sugrue, 1996; Thomas, 1997; Wiese, 2005). Residential security maps methodically color-coded city neighborhoods using the area’s racial composition as a primary indicator of risk for investment: green lines were “Best” (white), blue “Still Desirable” (majority white), yellow “Definitely Declining” (racially transitioning), and neighborhoods that were redlined were labeled “Hazardous” (Black). FHA guidelines, which frequently appropriated social Darwinist language and ecological metaphors, defined declining neighborhoods as those areas deemed at high risk for defaulting on loans because of the “invasion” and “infiltration of inharmonious racial or nationality groups,” and “negroes and undesirables,” which would “depress real estate values” (Gotham, 2002a). While redlining did consider other variables like density and land use patterns, “race trumped all other factors in predicting the trajectory of a city and its neighborhoods” (Kimble, 2007, p. 403). These practices were designed to establish stable, homogenous communities of white homeowners. Areas populated by African Americans and, to a lesser extent, enclaves occupied by Jews, Catholics, and Asian immigrants were deemed undesirable, unfit for investment, and redlined. Gotham writes:

During the 1930s and later, the pathological, disorganized, and deviant image of black neighborhoods, which had been an integral component of the segregationist ideology of the real estate industry since the turn of the century, now began to be associated with an anti-urban rhetoric and belief in the superior qualities of suburban residential life. In this new rhetoric, used by the FHA and real estate industry elites, race became coded as culture, racialized space with ‘cultural homogeneity,’ and defense of racially discriminatory actions with maintaining the ‘security,’ ‘stability,’ and ‘integrity’ of living space (2002b, p. 24).

The G.I. Bill of 1944 guaranteed returning veterans low-interest, fully-amortized mortgages and loans to buy single-family houses in new suburban developments. However, these mortgages were denied to Black veterans because they were forced to live in segregated, redlined
neighborhoods. It was not until 1947 that the FHA dropped explicit racial language in their manuals. However, by the early 1950s, the FHA and VA were insuring half of the nation’s mortgages, but neither agency would approve financing for Black applicants regardless of credit risk nor would they guarantee loans in any neighborhoods providing housing for Blacks. Real estate agents were so effective at coercively propagating the idea that housing value depended on the occupant’s race that even Black families with financial means could not access housing in the private market. For New Orleans, “this meant that returning GI’s of any race could not get federally backed mortgage credit in ‘Central City, the Irish Channel, the Lower Garden District [or] the older sections of the city with historically racially mixed population patterns’ (Ciardullo et al., 2018, p. 5). An anti-redlining 1953 editorial in the *Louisiana Weekly* pointed out that 98 percent of private home financing in the city went to whites, “which left blacks to purchase homes abandoned by whites” (Baxter & Casati, 2020, pp. 211-212).

By 1954, the FHA and VA had insured at a total value of $33 billion an estimated 3.5 million homes and 650,000 rentals, the vast majority of which were in white suburbs. In contrast, the FHA insured only 205 new developments and 146 small projects in racial-minority communities, which “amounted to less than 1 percent of those benefiting from the FHA’s mortgage insurance program” during the agency’s first two decades of operation (Kimble, 2007). Although the HOLC went defunct that same year, redlined maps put the federal government on the historical record deeming Black people as intrinsically poor risks for capital and investment. Redlining transcribed racism onto maps and ensured that these newly-created institutional safety nets went to whites only. It recast overt racism into structural racism by driving the newly-emerging postwar white middle class to the suburbs while intentionally excluding Blacks from the same opportunities and mainstream financial support to accumulate capital and become
homeowners. Between 1934 and 1968, 98% of federally subsidized home loans – $120 billion in
government housing subsidies – went to white families and 2% to non-white families (Legal

President John F. Kennedy issued an executive order in 1962 mandating an end to
housing discrimination. However, his executive order was not immediately enforced. His
mandate left enforcement up to the individual local housing and funding agencies, which led to
noncompliance in cities and states with long histories of racial segregation. It was not until
mounting pressure following the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968 that
the U.S. Congress passed the Fair Housing Act (Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968),
which Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law, effectively abolishing redlining and prohibiting
housing discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, and sex (Glass, 2008). By this
point, it was too late. For over four decades, Black Americans were entirely shut out of the
postwar suburban housing boom, denying generations of Black households access to the same
legal and financial capital that created the white middle class. Homeownership is the primary
instrument of intergenerational wealth creation and accumulation in the United States, and the
structural denial of access to it for Black Americans is the foundation upon which the racial
wealth gap exists today.

Redlining’s consequences have perpetuated a permanent underclass that
disproportionately traps Black Americans into cycles of poverty in urban ghettos. There has
never been an equivalent government practice to undo the decades of damage. Research
conducted by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC) compares HOLC
redlined maps from the 1930s to modern-day census data to show how three out of four
neighborhoods redlined over 80 years ago continue to be plagued by concentrated poverty and
are much more likely than other areas to be inhabited by lower-income racial minorities. Conversely, the research indicates that 91% of areas classified as “Best” in the 1930s remain middle-to-upper-income today, and 85% are still predominantly white (Jan, 2018). New Orleans’s Lakeview neighborhood illustrates the connection between history and today as it was rated “Best” on the city’s redlined map (Figure 11). As of the 2020 census, Lakeview is 86% white and 3% Black (The Data Center, 2022).

**Figure 11**

*New Orleans Redlining Map, 1939*

![New Orleans Redlining Map, 1939](image)

*Note. Source: University of Richmond, 2022.*

Other racial projects worked alongside redlining and covenants to perpetuate racial segregation in America, including urban renewal, slum clearance, public housing development, and the construction of the interstate highway system. The Housing Act of 1937 established the
U.S. Housing Authority to administer inner-city slum clearance programs and provide federal funding for new public housing while shifting control to locally-created public housing agencies. That same year, The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) was established, becoming the first municipal housing agency to receive federal funding to demolish derelict yet racially-integrated housing and, in turn, develop new segregated public housing. The Housing Acts of 1949 and 1954 greatly expanded the federal government’s role in public housing investment through eminent domain tactics to clear city slums and build modern public housing in the name of “urban renewal.” By the mid-1950s, New Orleans had 3,000 public housing units designated for whites and 7,000 public housing units designated for Blacks. But by 1970, white residents all but completely moved out, and the city’s poorest Black residents populated public housing almost exclusively (Ciardullo et al., 2018).

In 1956, President Eisenhower signed the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act – also known as The Federal Highway Act – into law, and it became the country’s most significant public works investment in history. The law allocated $25 billion over 10 years for interstate construction. For decades, the government disproportionately built interstates through poor, Black neighborhoods, exacerbating the social ills of poverty, urban decay, and crime in these communities. In New Orleans, the construction of the Claiborne Expressway in the 1960s destroyed Tremé, one of the country’s oldest Black neighborhoods and historically the economic and cultural epicenter for the city’s Black and Creole middle class. Once a grand boulevard of Black-run businesses shaded by majestic oak trees, Claiborne Avenue was destroyed once the interstate was built. The overpass split the neighborhood, uprooted families, and forced mass displacement, unraveling the social fabric of a once-thriving community of Black wealth. Consequently, Tremé fell into urban decline, a similar fate that befell Black communities
nationwide during this time. By the 2000s, Tremé was gentrifying as wealthier whites moved in and displaced long-time residents. Post-Katrina, Tremé’s gentrification and racial displacement has intensified and is ongoing. The Claiborne overpass is now at the center of discussions on how to remediate a historical wrong and reconnect the intentionally destroyed neighborhood.

Research on race, housing, and inequality in the U.S. reveals how race and property are intimately linked and how “at all income, occupational, and educational levels, black families on average have drastically lower levels of wealth than similar white families” (Conley, 2009, p. 5). The history of racist housing policy underscores the salient role of race as a foundational underpinning of the U.S. housing market and subverts ideas of meritocracy and the preference theory of neighborhood choice. In reality, the FHA generated an incredible system of unearned government housing incentives for white Americans while establishing the building blocks for U.S. residential segregation. By legally granting the postwar white middle-class structural advantages in homeownership while simultaneously creating structural disadvantages for Blacks, the federal government effectively gave white Americans a head start on wealth and prosperity. Decades later the U.S. racial wealth gap is worsening (Table 2). According to a 2020 Brookings Institute Report, white households (~60% of the U.S. population) held 84% ($94 trillion) of the total household wealth in the U.S. compared to just 4% ($4.6 trillion) for Black households (Moss et al., 2020). When Congress passed the Fair Housing Act in 1968, the median household wealth for white families was $70,786 and $13,024 for Black families. As of 2020, the median household wealth for white families is $188,200 and $24,100 for Black families, a wealth rate nearly eight times higher for whites.

While *de jure* discrimination in housing ended in 1968, *de facto* discrimination continues and is well-documented. A recent article by the *New York Times* reveals how a Maryland
appraisal company valued the Baltimore home of a Black history professor at Johns Hopkins University at $472,000. After conducting a “whitewashing experiment” wherein he removed indications of blackness and had a colleague – a white professor – stand in, the appraisal returned at $750,000. The article reports, “Dr. Connolly said he knew why: He, his wife, and three children, aged 15, 12, and 9, are Black. A professor of history at Johns Hopkins University, Dr. Connolly is an expert on redlining and the legacy of white supremacy in American cities, and much of his research focuses on the role of race in the housing market” (Kamin, 2022).

**Table 3**

*United States Racial Wealth Gap, 2020*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Wealth</td>
<td>$188,200</td>
<td>$24,100</td>
<td>$36,100</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$70,843</td>
<td>$43,674</td>
<td>$54,632</td>
<td>$91,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeownership Rate</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Research on Black middle-class suburbs reveals that, unlike middle-class white suburbs, “suburban blacks are as segregated as their central city counterparts; their suburbs are part of a contiguous set of black neighborhoods that are, collectively, the ghetto, differentiated only by the status as the ‘best, mixed, and worst areas,’” which in turn presents a “dilemma” and “in-betweenness” of the black middle-class residential experience (Alba et al., 2000; Cashin, 2004; Charles, 2003, p. 197); Patillo, 2005a; Wiese, 2004). Sociologist Mary Patillo, author of *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class* examines how "Groveland," a black middle-class neighborhood on Chicago's South Side, suffers from high rates of social problems despite their class status. Patillo writes, “Although more advantaged than poor blacks, middle-class blacks live with more crime, more poverty, more unemployment, fewer college
graduates, more vacant housing, and more single-parent families than similar whites, and indeed than much poorer whites. Moving to the suburbs makes life a little more comfortable, but it does not erase the racial disadvantage” (2005b, p. 323). Legal scholar Sheryll Cashin, author of The Failures Of Integration: How Race and Class Are Undermining the American Dream, adds in her research on Prince George, Maryland, a Black middle class suburb of Washington D.C., “Waves of black suburbanization have been fueled by the desire to escape the social distress of ‘the hood,’ including its crime and weak schools. But within the space of a decade, most black suburban movers will find that the social distress they sought to escape has migrated to them…the (racist) rules of the housing market are set against them” (2004, p. 135).

New Orleans East, much like "Groveland" and Prince George, unequivocally exemplifies the social problems plaguing America’s Black middle class. In one of the interviews I conducted during my research, a member of New Orleans East Matters made a poignant statement that summarizes the struggle facing area residents. She said,

The bottom line is the city doesn’t care about New Orleans East. They’ve forgotten about New Orleans East. It’s racial. N.O. East is black. That’s just the way it is. We are an afterthought. The politicians might say they care, but the bottom line is they do not care. I mean look at the Claiborne Shopping Center. For heaven's sake, they put a Starbucks at Washington and Claiborne. In the heart of the ghetto. Then, I couldn’t believe they were also building a PJ’s Coffee. Just observe; it’s so obvious. Even though they know they would make money, they won’t build because of the demographics. You know damn well chains like Starbucks and Chick Fil A would make it in The East, but because it’s Black, they’re not going to. It’s racism. When you have money, but it’s rich Black people with money, and they still decide not to build, that makes it racist. And look, this is historic. These systems were by design, created, and cultivated. It is no coincidence why this persists in Louisiana, especially the New Orleans metro area. They know that people like us are going to go into other communities and spend our money there. They know New Orleans East residents will spend money, but rather than dealing with us directly, they force us to drive to other places. They know what they’re doing. This is all by design, I can’t say it any clearer. History and decades-long research are on my side. They know where we live, and they have our demographics and addresses. Let me be clear about that—it’s not about making money. They’re making money. They don’t want to nor
have to deal with us, so they do it from afar. Something needs to change. It doesn’t have to be this way (interview 3, May 18, 2022).

I agree – something needs to change. Eighteen years of no redevelopment in New Orleans East since Katrina, on top of two decades of decline predating the storm, is unacceptable. It does not have to be this way and the city has an opportunity to reimagine what this community could be. Throughout my research, I have asked residents if they could focus on one thing, what would it be? The answer overwhelmingly is the redevelopment of the former Lake Forest Plaza Mall. In interview after interview, residents voice incredible frustration that the city is losing millions of dollars in tax revenue annually as Orleans Parish residents, particularly the city’s middle-class tax base, drive to suburban shopping corridors such as Clearview in Elmwood, Veterans in Metairie, Manhattan on the West Bank, and Fremaux in Slidell. Those interviewed believe the city can retain those tax dollars by recreating suburban shopping in N.O. East. It was always meant to be suburban, so make it that way.

CHAPTER 2: LITTLE WOODS

“Are You Going to Little Woods?”
– *The Daily Picayune* headline, Saturday, June 18, 1887

This chapter chronicles the lineage of two tracts of land that would become modern-day New Orleans East: 32,000 acres of marshland purchased in 1959 by New Orleans East, Inc. and
an adjoining 7,500-acre tract of land developed by Lake Forest, Inc. throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Particular attention will focus on the oldest section of eastern N.O. – Little Woods. The planned suburbanization of Little Woods dates back to the 1910s when speculative investment along the lake skyrocketed following the construction of the Industrial Canal. In 1926, Edgelake Lands, Inc. formed to build a wealthy suburban villa called Edgelake, which enforced racial covenants, mandating “none but whites allowed to purchase” to “protect the future values of the real estate” (*The Times-Picayune*, 1926). This neighborhood would become much of present-day Little Woods – everything north of Morrison Road and east of Downman Road. The latter half of this chapter documents the history of Lincoln Beach. This culturally-historic segregated beach opened in 1954 along the farthest edges of Little Woods, in an area home to a small but notable population of Black residents who had settled there during the Jim Crow era. Lincoln Beach shuttered in the mid-1960s following federal desegregation, and since then, multiple efforts have failed to revive the site. This chapter points to the salience of race that historically connects Edgelake’s initial vision in the 1920s to Lincoln Beach’s continual failed revitalization.

Historically, the geographic precursor to New Orleans East was an expansive ecosystem of marshland, lagoons, bayous, and cypress swamps catering to hunters, anglers, trappers, and shell collectors. Archaeological research of ancient shell mounds east of New Orleans, such as Big Oak and Little Oak islands, unearths how indigenous human settlements long occupied the precolonial bayous and swamps, including the Choctaw and Tchefuncte people, almost 2,500 years ago. In 1699, nineteen years before the official founding of New Orleans, French explorers and brothers Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville and Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville

---

2 Investigations of these mounds were conducted during the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration and Louisiana State University and then between 1972 and 1985 by The University of New Orleans. Both mounds were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971.
colonized Louisiana by establishing Fort Maurepas in present-day Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

Bienville landed on one of these historic shell mounds near the far eastern reaches of the Rigolets while searching for a safe passage from Fort Maurepas to the mouth of the Mississippi River. Bienville named this mound *Petit Coquilles* (Little Shells).

The first recorded purchase of this undeveloped marshland took place in 1763 when New Orleans merchant Gilbert Antoine de St. Maxent acquired a French Royal land grant from Louisiana governor Louis Billouart, Chevalier de Kerlérec, to develop *Chantilly*, a 32,000-acre “tract of land near the capital of New Orleans” that was geographically bounded by a “tract held by duFossat to a point called Chef Menteur” (Samuel, 1959, p. 31). St. Maxent turned the tract into a plantation, one of three that he owned. Upon his death in 1796, the estate was sold to Lt. Louis Brognier de Clouet, who in 1801 sold the tract to Barthélemy Lafon, a Creole architect, engineer, city planner, and surveyor. Lafon was responsible for early street layouts in some of the city’s oldest neighborhoods, including today’s Marigny neighborhood and the Lower Garden District, where he adopted Greek street names like Terpsichore, Calliope, and Melpomene. In 1793, Lafon was commissioned by Louisiana’s Spanish governor to design Fort *Petit Coquilles* near Lake Catherine and the Rigolets in the far reaches of eastern New Orleans.

Lafon eventually went bankrupt, and upon his death from yellow fever in 1820, creditors were ordered to sell lots within the St. Maxent/Chantilly estate. Lafon’s son and daughter inherited the tract, keeping it intact and selling it in 1827 to Antoine Michoud, who was described as an eccentric recluse in many accounts. Michoud owned a sugar cane plantation and refinery at Chef Menteur Pass between Lakes Borgne and Pontchartrain, near present-day Venetian Isles. Under Antoine Michoud’s ownership, the forerunner to Chef Menteur Highway was built along the Gentilly Ridge, serving as the primary ingress and egress to the city’s eastern
part until the early twentieth century. Chef Menteur Highway initially required filling in the
surrounding bayou. It is still some of the highest and driest land in New Orleans East today.

Following the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, when New Orleans became an American city,
the U.S. quickly realized the need for fortification because of its strategic location at the mouth
of the Mississippi River. Under Michoud’s tenure, two brick masonry forts, Fort Pike and Fort
Macomb, operated on the city’s eastern edge as part of a national defense strategy to shore up
coastal defenses following the War of 1812. In 1819, the U.S. replaced Fort Petit Coquilles with
Fort Pike. During the Civil War, Union forces took control of Fort Pike, and in 1864 the site
became one of many training grounds for the United States Colored Troops – former Southern
enslaved people turned soldiers – for the U.S. Army to fight the Confederacy. The U.S. Army
abandoned the defense site by 1890. In 1822, Fort Macomb was built as a second defense
location on the western shore of Chef Menteur Pass. Originally named Fort Chef Menteur and
then renamed Fort Wood in 1827, the site was renamed a third time in 1851 to Fort Macomb.
The barracks caught fire in 1867, and the U.S. army abandoned the fortress.³

Antoine Michoud died in 1863, and his nephew and heir, Jean Baptiste Michoud,
inherited the plantation. However, Jean Baptiste lived in Lyons, France, and never saw the
plantation. Through his attorneys in New Orleans, he sold a right-of-way through the land to the
New Orleans, Mobile, and Chattanooga Railroad Company, later renamed the Louisville and
Nashville Railroad Company. During the 1870s, workers laid railroad tracks above Old Gentilly
Road heading out east, and in 1875, workers built the Pointe Aux Herbes Lighthouse at the
furthest eastern edge as a landmark for sailors. After Jean Baptiste Michoud died in 1877, his
son, Alphonse Michoud, acquired the 32,000-acre tract (Figure 12).

³ Lying outside the city’s levee system, Fort Pike and Fort Macomb suffered extensive damage from Hurricane
Katrina’s storm surge, and the historic structures still remain damaged years later.
Under Alphonse Michoud’s tenure, he sold a small portion of the land to the New Orleans and Northeastern Railroad Company and a right-of-way to the American Telephone and Telegraph Co. The plantation barely remained intact until Alphonse sold it in 1910 to local businessman John Stuart Watson for $410,000, who immediately sold the land to his firm, the
New Orleans Drainage Company. Watson failed to drain and reclaim the marshland, eventually defaulting on a loan from Continental and Commercial Trust and Savings Bank of Chicago. In 1922, Colonel R. E. E. de Montluzin, a wealthy local developer whose prior work included developing Gentilly Terrace, bought the 32,000-acre Chantilly/Michoud tract for an estimated $1 million and renamed it “Faubourg de Montluzin.” He would become the “owner of the largest area of city property in the world,” a data point commonly touted in newspaper advertisements (The Times-Picayune, 1928). Between 1763 and 1922, the Maxent-Lafon-de Clouet-Michoud-de Montluzin tract would stay intact but remain undeveloped.

In the intervening years, the adjoining tract of land between Gentilly and de Montluzin’s faubourg developed much earlier, dating back to the 1880s, as New Orleans developers started venturing eastward, searching for land along the lake to turn into resort getaways for city dwellers. An 1884 newspaper clipping in The Daily Picayune, the precursor to The Times-Picayune, announced plans by local developers, Messers, Barber, and Allen, to build a lakeside resort in an area called “Petit Bois,” or Little Woods (“Queen and Crescent Park”). An article from 1887 describes the new development as “a new suburban resort located on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain, twelve miles from the city, by the Northeastern Railroad, a pleasant ride of only twenty minutes…‘Little Woods’ is destined to become one of the most popular nearby resorts” (“It is Bound to Become Popular”). Following the resort’s opening, the area became home to boating facilities, railroad section houses, and several small camp communities. Camps stretched from West End in Lakeview eastward to Little Woods along present-day Hayne Boulevard, which parallels the lake and runs the entire length of the neighborhood. By the 1920s, census workers canvassed the area for the first time, recording a sizable Black population.

---

4 “Faubourg,” French for neighborhood, has long been a part of New Orleans vernacular.
Historical accounts reveal how a few of the resorts along the lake were popular for local Black and Creole jazz musicians to play, and some even moved into the area. In an autobiography about his life in New Orleans, Louis Armstrong recounts how he would play jazz music in the Milneburg and Little Woods areas along the lake (Armstrong, 1952).

As the city’s population increased and expanded outward in the early twentieth century, land speculators anticipated Lake Pontchartrain as the natural direction of residential growth. Land and real estate speculation catapulted when the Industrial Canal was constructed between 1918-1923 as a shipping channel shortcut between the river and the lake. However, investors were skeptical about developing the vast swampland of eastern New Orleans, lest the city devise and implement a comprehensive plan for draining and protecting the area. In response, by 1890, the Louisiana state legislature established the Orleans Levee Board (OLB) as a state entity controlled by the governor to streamline efforts to build a city-wide levee and floodwall system to protect the expanding metropolis. By 1899, the New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board (S&WB) formed and became responsible for draining the city and creating a modern sewage and tap water system. The S&WB dug miles of canals, built an extensive pumping and levee system, drained the basin, and reassured hesitant developers of the area’s flood protection. Between 1897 and 1915, $27,000,000 was spent on constructing water, drainage, and sewer facilities (Samuel, 1959, p. 37). Simultaneously, the Orleans Levee Board privately sold and developed land to raise capital to build levees. \(^5\)

Forecasting a population explosion, The New Orleans Lake Shore Land Company was one of the first companies to pursue development east of the Industrial Canal. Former cotton merchant Frank Hayne formed the New Orleans Lake Shore Land Company in 1908 and, along with Robert Downman, Paul Jahncke, and M.L. Morrison, embarked on an

---

\(^5\) This method of levee construction and flood protection lasted until Hurricane Betsy in 1965, after which Congress directed the Army Corps of Engineers to design and construct federal levees.
ambitious plan to drain and suburbanize the land. Their two-part scheme included selling parcels for commercial orange groves and truck farming and selling 1,200 five-acre parcels to 800 wealthy northerners and midwesterners to build a “beautiful suburb of orange groves” called Citrus. The plan was to create a community of upscale villas south of Hayne Boulevard, which would become a grand boulevard fronting Lake Pontchartrain. N.O. Lake Shore Land Company built roads and two pumping stations, and dug 30 miles of canals and 1.5 million feet of ditches to reclaim 7,500 acres of swampland along Lake Pontchartrain (Baxter, 2014).

Following a 1915 hurricane, two harsh winters, and the effects of World War I, the New Orleans Lake Shore Land Company went bankrupt in 1918 and was impelled into receivership, forcing the investors who bought into the project to foot the bill. Between 1919 and 1921, multiple lawsuits were filed, and several owners came down to the city to regroup, forming Citrus and Realty Company, which later rebranded as Northern States Realty Company. They planned to sell and develop “spacious suburban estates…into one of the most attractive residential parks in the country” to former investors and wealthy locals seeking to escape the crowded city (*The Times-Picayune*, 1921). By 1924, proposals by Citrus/Northern States Realty Company to develop the 7,500-acre tract failed to materialize, and they, along with six other corporations and 21 individuals, merged with and were subsumed under the New Orleans Industrial Canal Land and Harbor Development Company, which itself had formed in 1922. Former N.O. Lake Shore Land Company founders Frank Hayne and Paul Jahncke served on the New Orleans Industrial Canal Land and Harbor Development Company board as Vice President and Treasurer, respectively. Instead of building residential subdivisions, the company changed course and streamlined operations to focus on industrial and harbor development along the canal. The corporation struggled to garner interest and declared bankruptcy by the early 1930s.
In 1926, speculative investors formed Edgelake Lands, Inc., a $4 million venture, to sell upscale lakefront lots north of the undeveloped New Orleans Industrial Canal Land and Harbor Development Company tract. Edgelake’s boundaries comprised everything north of Morrison Road and stretched the entire length of Hayne Boulevard from Seabrook to Little Woods (Figure 13; see Appendix A). Edgelake invested heavily in the tract’s infrastructure and street grid, including drainage, water, electricity, and landscaping in anticipation of its first subdivision, Entrance Park – “New Orleans’s Most Beautiful Subdivision” – consisting of 121 lots at the intersection of Dowman Road and Lake Pontchartrain. Curran Boulevard was planned as “one of the most alluring residential streets in the South…patterned after Gentilly Boulevard, and will be the principal thoroughfare…with broad sidewalks, and trees and shrubbery on both sides” (The Times-Picayune, 1926). That same year, De Montluzin announced a planned development of a 1,000-acre tract adjacent to Edgelake, hoping its success would spill over into his new faubourg. De Montluzin’s plans included extending Curran Boulevard and Lakeshore Drive into the tract. The Orleans Levee Board also promoted its long-term plans to spend $27 million developing and beautifying the lakefront, eventually adjoining Hayne Boulevard to Lake Shore Drive in West End. To ease concerns about the tract’s accessibility, Edgelake often advertised the completion of the Watson-Williams bridge – now the Maestri Bridge – which finished construction in 1928 and connected eastern New Orleans to Slidell. Most of all, Edgelake advertised the area’s long-term investment. A 1926 Times-Picayune advertisement states:

The lakefront is where everybody will ultimately want to be. It offers ideal conditions and facilities for wholesome American life. Edgelake will someday be the superior suburb of New Orleans. The lakefront, the surrounding terrain, wide boulevards, short paved roads to the city along the lake shore all will mean the ready sale of home sites to hundreds of people who will want to live in a residential community of exceptional beauty and charm. Everywhere the pioneers, the men who have had vision and belief in water property, have profited.
Countless newspaper ads promoted Edgelake, Entrance Park, and Faubourg de Montluzin as sound investments for developers and wealthy homebuyers (Appendix B-D). Often using animated and hyperbolic language, de Montluzin marketed the area to prospective buyers for waterfront estates, manufacturing factories, and country clubs, with ads describing newly-paved roads and the eastward expansion of electricity, water, and telephone services. Other de Montluzin ads focused heavily on what he foresaw as the natural population growth along Chef Menteur Highway and the Gentilly Ridge high ground. Slogans included “New Orleans’s
greatest speculative opportunity,” “the last great undeveloped section of the city,” “virgin section of the city,” and “the only direction in which the city can expand.”

Edgelake Lands Inc.’s President was Meyer Eiseman, who at the time was also Vice President of the National Association of Real Estate Board (NAREB). As discussed in Chapter One, NAREB orchestrated the foundations of the real estate industry’s racist housing practices. An amendment added to NAREB’s code of ethics in the 1920s reads, “A realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood…members of any race or nationality…whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood” (Helper, 1969; Gotham, 2002, pp. 35). As President of NAREB, V. P. of Edgelake Lands, Inc., and as a developer seeking to profit off prime lakefront land, Eiseman ensured that Edgelake would embody current best – and racist – real estate practices. Edgelake Lands, Inc. envisioned the neighborhood as wealthy and white, so the company legally decreed the area as a racial covenant community to protect that investment. Edgelake’s covenant, titled “Wise Restrictions,” states, “It is agreed and understood that any deed to be made by the Edgelake Lands, Inc. to the purchaser shall, as a part of the consideration, contain the following restrictions: 1. No sale of said land, or any part thereof, shall ever be made to any other than a person of the Caucasian race” (Figure 14). Edgelake’s racial covenants demonstrate how race was foundational to the suburbanization of New Orleans East. These racist deed restrictions put the company on the historical record for its prewar intentions to make desirable lakefront land exclusive to whites. One of Edgelake’s covenants in *The Times-Picayune* read, “A set of restrictions has been drawn up to protect the future values of the real estate. The most important clauses are: No commercial establishments in the residential district; none but whites allowed to purchase…” (1926).

**Figure 14**
Edgelake Deed Restriction, 1926

Note. Source: The Times-Picayune, 1926.

Edgelake Lands, Inc. failed to suburbanize Edgelake because of a lack of interest, the Great Flood of 1927 that exposed its flooding proclivities, and a worsening economy. Entrance Park never got past site infrastructure improvements, except for a few scattered properties bought and built. A 1928 newspaper story indicates that Shoreland Development Company and State Realty Co., two local real estate companies that sold Entrance Park lots went into debt because of “a depressed real estate market” (The Times-Picayune). Creditors and stockholders filed a lawsuit against State Reality, alleging fraud, mismanagement, and misrepresentation. Edgelake Lands, Inc. officially declared bankruptcy and became wholly insolvent by the end of 1929 when they transferred all their land holdings to the New Orleans Industrial Canal Land and Harbor
Development Company, which itself declared bankruptcy a few years later. De Montluzin’s proposal also fell through because of Edgelake’s failure next door.

Companies’ efforts to suburbanize pre-WWII Little Woods could not overcome the environmental and economic hurdles of the time. A combination of developer skepticism, hurricanes, and the economic fallout of the Depression proved too strong of obstacles to build waterfront marinas and housing for white people. De Montluzin kept his adjacent 32,000-acre property intact during the depression. He sold rights-of-way for power and telephone lines and permitted the government to build 7.5 miles of the Intracoastal Waterway through the vast parcel. During WWII, the federal government selected 1,000 acres of de Montluzin’s land as the site of a $30 million shipyard, Higgins Aircraft Plant. The plant experienced many delays during construction because of the swampy ground, which required extensive pile-driving and earth fill-in. After the U.S. Maritime Commission nearly abandoned the project, the partially-built shipyard-turned-plant was dedicated in 1943. The Higgins Plant included a 1.8 million square foot main manufacturing building and several office buildings. Higgins Industries made plywood C-76 cargo planes, landing crafts, and, most importantly, Higgins Boats, which were instrumental in transporting Allied Forces in amphibious landings during World War II. The War Assets Administration took over the facility in 1945. During the Korean War, Chrysler Corporation leased the facility and spent millions renovating it to produce tank engines. The Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans leased the site for 15 years until NASA purchased it in 1961 and created the manufacturing hub, Michoud Assembly Facility, which still operates today.

By the mid-1930s, businessman Samuel Zemurray was acquiring parcels within the bankrupt 7,500-acre Lake Shore Land Company/Edgelake tract through tax sales, seeking out the
former owners and paying them fair cash prices for the sites. Over the next few years, Zemurray amassed a 5,000-acre tract from the lake to Dwyer Road and Downman Road to Paris Road. In 1937, a developer proposed to build a “suburban subdivision development of modest price bungalows,” but the project never got off the ground (The Times-Picayune, 1937). Five years later, Harry Latter, president of local real estate firm Latter & Blum, asked Zemurray to sell him 2,000 acres of the easternmost portion of his 5,000-acre tract so that he could build a “small city” for employees who worked at the under-construction Higgins Plant. The development would include 5,000 homes at an estimated cost of $10 million and would “be among the largest ever attempted by a private company” (The Times-Picayune, 1942). Zemurray’s project never made it past the drawing board and is mentioned in just one news story published on April 5, 1942. The FHA “had been ordered to discontinue Title VI… ‘until further notice’ due to exhaustion of the original $600,000,000 appropriated for [war-related] home building under that title. The budget bureau…is reported to be studying a proposal for a new appropriation of $1,000,000.” (The Times-Picayune, 1942). Samuel Zemurray would sell his 5,000 acre parcel to oil guru Joe Brown in 1954 for an estimated $3 million. Joe Brown died in 1959, and that year, his wife donated 163 acres to open the eponymous Joe Brown Memorial Park in the Read Blvd West neighborhood.

The suburbanization of Little Woods exploded after World War II as New Orleanians fled older neighborhoods in search of newer suburban housing. Sky-high postwar housing demand and lucrative federal incentives for the white middle class, like the GI Bill, led to a population explosion and rapid suburbanization of Little Woods. The neighborhood doubled between the 1960 and 1970 census, from 5,924 to 10,280, and then tripled between 1970 and 1980, from 10,280 to 31,010. At first majority white, Little Woods’ racial transition started in the 1970s and accelerated once the neighborhood reached a racial tipping point during the 1980s oil
crash as the white middle class moved out and the Black middle class moved in. The area’s racial transition was dramatic, and Little Woods became majority Black by the 1990 census. Between 1970 and 2000, the last census before Hurricane Katrina, the racial demographics flipped from 98.8% White and 0.6% Black in 1970 to 10.2% White and 86.8% Black in 2000. Little Woods has become one of the most racially hypersegregated neighborhoods in the city and remains over 90% Black. As of the 2020 Census, Little Woods is 2.2% White and 92.9% Black, entirely antithetical to what developers intended it to be (Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Little Woods Population Demographics, 1970-2020*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>10,280</td>
<td>31,010</td>
<td>40,950</td>
<td>44,311</td>
<td>31,698</td>
<td>36,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Households</td>
<td>2,986</td>
<td>10,453</td>
<td>14,487</td>
<td>15,761</td>
<td>11,591</td>
<td>13,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>10,164 (98.9%)</td>
<td>19,930 (64.3%)</td>
<td>13,456 (32.9%)</td>
<td>4,539 (10.2%)</td>
<td>1,086 (3.4%)</td>
<td>817 (2.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>59 (0.6%)</td>
<td>10,452 (33.7%)</td>
<td>26,632 (65.0%)</td>
<td>38,464 (86.8%)</td>
<td>29,565 (93.3%)</td>
<td>33,855 (92.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>394 (1.3%)</td>
<td>510 (1.6%)</td>
<td>407 (0.9%)</td>
<td>249 (0.8%)</td>
<td>234 (0.7%)</td>
<td>234 (0.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>404 (3.9%)</td>
<td>996 (3.2%)</td>
<td>1,112 (2.7%)</td>
<td>710 (1.6%)</td>
<td>738 (2.3%)</td>
<td>1,008 (2.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
<td>57 (0.6%)</td>
<td>296 (0.6%)</td>
<td>288 (0.7%)</td>
<td>263 (0.6%)</td>
<td>352 (1.1%)</td>
<td>414 (1.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>587 (1.3%)</td>
<td>397 (1.3%)</td>
<td>1,059 (2.9%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Historic remnants of Edgelake’s failed scheme remain visible in modern-day Little Woods. Curran, Hayne, and Morrison are still major streets that run through the area, albeit not the grandiose boulevards Edgelake laid out. Today, Curran Road runs through the 1960s- and 1970s-built Kenilworth subdivision as a residential street and is home to Kenilworth Playground and Mildred Osborne Charter School. Curran Boulevard is a residential street that starts and stops three times throughout various parts of Little Woods and ends at Paris Road next to Bayou
Sauvage. Today’s houses in Little Woods are not upscale lakefront villas like those first proposed by Edgelake Lands, Inc., but are single- and two-story postwar suburban ranch houses. As of 2020, Little Wood’s population is just shy of 40,000, and its geographic borders encompass several diverse neighborhoods ranging from working-class subdivisions to high-income gated communities. Eighteen years later, however, economic development remains scarce. Pre-Katrina shopping centers still have not returned and remain blighted, and the neighborhood’s most prominent landmark, Lincoln Beach, still sits abandoned after shuttering nearly 60 years ago.

LINCOLN BEACH

“Work Underway at Lincoln Beach: Park to Be One of Finest in Nation”
–The Times-Picayune headline, Sunday, April 22, 1951

In 1938, Samuel Zemurray deeded the city a 2.3 acre lakeside tract at the farthest edges of Little Woods to build a racially-segregated beach for Black New Orleanians – the forerunner to Lincoln Beach. The Orleans Levee Board (OLB) purchased the land and opened a small beach one year later with a few amusement park rides. Indeed, OLB did not build Lincoln Beach for altruistic reasons but to keep Blacks out of Pontchartrain Beach in the West End neighborhood. Lincoln Beach’s development exemplified the “separate-but-equal” dogma of the Jim Crow era – a first-rate, whites-only beach closer to the city center and a subpar, “colored-only” beach in the most geographically-remote location of the city. Yet, Lincoln Beach’s development helped spur residential construction. In 1941, a camp was erected at Lincoln Beach with “500 permanent facilities and 500 temporary facilities…for Negro soldiers in Louisiana and Mississippi” (The Times-Picayune 1941). Despite Lincoln Beach’s allure, NAACP officials contested that the city’s Black residents had no input in its location, that it was deliberately far beyond the edge of
city services, and that the water was contaminated and unsuitable for recreational swimming (1949a). Additionally, the beach was difficult to access because it was located across the New Orleans and Northeastern Railroad tracks.

Facing mounting criticism, the Orleans Levee Board embarked on a project in 1951 to enhance the small beach and make it “adequately” comparable to the West End “whites-only” Pontchartrain Beach (The Times-Picayune, 1951). OLB invested upwards of $1 million to improve the beach’s facilities so that it would be “one of the finest and most complete Negro amusement resorts in the nation” and would include “picnic grounds, bathhouses, fresh-water swimming pools, a midway, thrill rides, and ample parking space for automobiles” (The Times-Picayune, 1951; Appendix E & F). At one point, the Orleans Levee Board sought further beach expansion by reclaiming 1,600 acres of the lake between Lincoln Beach and the Lakefront Airport, which it also owned. Their proposal, which never materialized, included building a segregated yacht harbor and subdivision of roughly 400-500 lots next to Lincoln Beach. Though geographically distant and subpar to Pontchartrain Beach, Lincoln Beach officially opened in 1954 as a small-scale version of Pontchartrain Beach, complete with its own rides, restaurants, and other activities. By 1955, city officials formally designated the beach as “colored-only.” The site was immensely popular, and residents interviewed fondly recalled childhood memories along the lake.

Pontchartrain Beach was desegregated after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 legally ended “separate-but-equal,” and the city stopped maintenance of Lincoln Beach until it fell into disrepair and shuttered one year later. Residents fought to have the beach reopen but to no avail. Lincoln Beach Corp., which leased and operated the recreational area, was forced into foreclosure once the beach closed but won a lawsuit against the Orleans Levee Board and
demanded compensation for site improvements and equipment. In the late 1960s, the Orleans Levee Board put Lincoln Beach up for bid to lease. By 1968, they awarded a 15-year lease contract to Lake Island Realty Corporation to recreate the site as a marina and boat launching facility. With financial backing from Texas investors, Lake Island Realty Corporation planned a $4 million marina complex and “resort island.” One member of the OLB board was staunchly against the project, publicly lambasting it as nothing more than a money scheme since Lake Island’s president, A.S. Lee Fernandez, was a close political affiliate and former aide to then-New Orleans mayor Victor Schiro. In a self-fulfilling prophecy, not even one year after the lease was awarded, Lake Island Corp.’s project collapsed due to widespread allegations of corruption, political infighting, and lack of financing.

Lincoln Beach sat untouched until renewed efforts to revitalize it the next decade. In 1973, Lake Forest, Inc., which was reaping the benefits of the successful suburbanization of the adjacent Lake Forest subdivision, submitted a proposal to the Orleans Levee Board to redevelop Lincoln Beach into a marina. Site progress and battles over land titles and insurance dragged on for years, and the project faded by the decade’s end. In 1980, the city proposed a five-year $8.63 million plan using federal money to renovate the site, but that too failed to materialize, and the site continued to deteriorate. By the mid-1980s, Lincoln Beach succumbed to nature, symbolizing a “pitiful relic of segregation – scarred by graffiti, overgrown with weeds, littered with rusting junk and pockmarked with swimming pools filled with scummy water. Urban ruins. Every city has them; New Orleans, its share” (Mulvihill, 1983).

In 1986, after years of multiple failed attempts to revive Lincoln Beach, the Orleans Levee Board sold it to New Orleans Canal, Inc., a local real estate firm, as part of a complex state-approved land swap deal. The firm’s efforts to turn the beach into an amusement park failed
in 1988. In 1992, OLB proposed a $200 million plan to dredge the lake and build an island by manufacturing man-made wetlands from West End to Little Woods. However, the project faced massive opposition from Save Our Wetlands, Inc. and other environmentalist groups and failed to get off the ground. By the mid-1990s, anger and frustration over Lincoln Beach’s blight reached a boiling point. Many Little Woods residents demanded the city clean up the eyesore that reduced their quality of life and made “a prison out of an eastern New Orleans neighborhood” (Persica & Warner, 1994). Throughout the 1990s, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation conducted multiple tests that repeatedly showed Lincoln Beach to have some of the cleanest water anywhere in the lake. Beach advocates and residents cited those results as a compelling reason and key selling point for redeveloping the beachfront, and Mayor Marc Morial promised to prioritize Lincoln Beach’s rehabilitation during his second term in office.

Hopes of finally revitalizing Lincoln Beach arrived in 1997 when the Orleans Levee Board, who had regained site ownership, announced a renewed effort to solicit bids to return the beach to life. Then-City Councilwoman Ellen Hazeur-Distance, who represented the district and sat on the OLB board, led the efforts to bring back the beach. After months of claiming to be cash-strapped, by February 1998, the OLB “had a change of heart” and reluctantly agreed to spend $1.5 million to restore Lincoln Beach. The S&WB also committed an additional $2 million. In an about-face not even five months later, OLB reneged on the financial commitment by a vote of 5-3, and in July 1998, the board announced their withdrawal of the $1.5 million earmarked for Lincoln Beach’s restoration because they claimed they did not own the property. Their controversial decision stemmed from an incident four years prior when the city regained site ownership after acquiring the property from a private Houston company, CAMAC Holdings, Inc. The three members who voted against defunding the project were the only three with ties to
New Orleans East: City Councilwoman Hazeur-Distance, city Chief Administration Officer Marlin Gusman, and Patricia Harris, an associate of Senator Jon Johnson, who represented N.O. East. The other five members, all of whom were appointed by the governor since OLB was technically a state entity, had no direct connections to New Orleans East and were all white, which overtly flamed racial tensions.

The Orleans Levee Board cited financial instability, unpaid taxes, and contention over land and title ownership as the primary reasons redevelopment could not move forward. Their move angered Little Woods residents, Councilwoman Hazeur-Distance, and All Congregations Together at St. Simon Peter Catholic Church, a religious community coalition that for years coordinated Lincoln Beach volunteer restoration efforts. Many residents of the community argued that the board was playing racial politics, claiming “that while the board has spent millions of dollars on improvements to the Western [whiter] end of the lake, the eastern section has been largely ignored [making it] the biggest eyesore in New Orleans East” (Donze, 1998).

Immediately following the controversy, All Congregations Together asked then-Governor Mike Foster to remove board members or provide money to Lincoln Beach from the state’s capital budget. The following is an excerpt from an op-ed by a member of All Congregations Together:

Lincoln Beach is a treasure that all of New Orleans should be fighting for. Unfortunately, the Levee Board – being an appointed body – seems to have no obligation to the citizens of New Orleans. Or should we say to those citizens who are perceived as not white enough or wealthy enough of note. Previous Levee Boards have spent our money like drunken sailors. Where have they spent it? They have spent it on the west end of Lake Pontchartrain…This levee board makes promises it has no intention of keeping. When they were unable to ride our coattails during the last fiscal session of the Legislature, they reneged on the commitment to us…Members of this Levee Board have proven themselves incompetent to solve the problems they are faced with. The fact that they are also divided along racial lines compounds the problem (The Times-Picayune, 1998).
Fed up with what she repeatedly saw as deliberate neglect and disinvestment in eastern New Orleans, City Councilwoman Ellen Hazeur-Distance introduced legislation to dissolve the Orleans Levee Board, but her efforts failed to galvanize momentum. After backroom bickering, rescinded votes, and heated threats, plans moved forward in 1999 to redevelop Lincoln Beach when Hazeur-Distance announced a master plan whereby the State Bond Commission approved selling $5.1 million in bonds as part of the state’s capital outlay budget. However, the beach was designated in the lowest priority category, and the bonds were never raised, stalling the project yet again. Then-City Councilmember Oliver Thomas – who, 23 years later, is the current Councilmember representing New Orleans East – decried how without state or federal financing, the project would never get off the ground: “Good plans are great. Good ideas are great. But money makes it real” (Donze, 1999). Following legal proceedings over land ownership, the city regained complete control of Lincoln Beach in 2000 when then-Mayor Morial formed the New Orleans Building Corps to develop, lease, and operate city-owned abandoned properties. Other than working with the S&WB on a $1.8 million wetland restoration project, the Corps failed to redevelop Lincoln Beach, and requests for proposals went nowhere.

Officials announced one final plan in early 2004, enlisting local, renowned African American sculptor and artist John Scott to help in the project’s design stage (Appendix G). Scott was born and raised in New Orleans’s Ninth Ward and was awarded the prestigious MacArthur Foundation “Genius Grant " in 1992; some of his major pieces were installed in various parts of the city. As part of the plan to restore Lincoln Beach, an $8 million grant – a combination of local, state, and federal funds – was endowed to Scott “to preserve its rich history through art…throughout the revitalized facility, with custom gates, bronze shelters, and floating sculptures in Lake Pontchartrain” that would serve as “an honorable remembrance…a cultural
attraction that would enshrine the cultural and social history that that place was” (Carr, 2004). A lawsuit over the bidding contract and problems with rising costs that put the project $800,000 over budget delayed demolition and renovation.

After decades of failed renewal attempts, long-neglected Lincoln Beach deteriorated further into the urban wilderness until Hurricane Katrina dealt the final blow in 2005. Lincoln Beach’s story is integral to the history of Little Woods, and New Orleans East wants it reopened. Residents interviewed lament its severe deterioration and decades of broken promises and repeated reneged redevelopment plans that have precluded full-scale rehabilitation. Shuttered and barricaded since the mid-1960s, Lincoln Beach has repeatedly failed to revitalize, and many residents firmly believe that race has been the primary factor hindering its redevelopment. New Orleans East Matters members frustratingly acknowledge, and this chapter has clearly shown, that history keeps repeating itself and is not on their side whenever a new proposal comes forward. Yet, they persist, and 18 years post-Katrina, community activists are still fighting to redevelop it.

Undoubtedly, the Little Woods of today differs from what Edgelake Lands, Inc. foresaw. It was not until after WWII that Little Woods suburbanized into the neighborhood residents know and inhabit today, first for white residents and then, following a racial tipping point in the 1980s, for Black residents. It remains majority Black today. Present day Entrance Park exemplifies the radical differences between Edgelake’s plan and today’s reality. It did not become the exclusive lakefront neighborhood that Edgelake Lands, Inc. envisioned; instead, it opened in 1950 as a postwar GI-funded subdivision that retained Entrance Park’s name. The $325,000 development was bounded by Downman Road, Wales Street, Alabama Street, and Curran Boulevard and comprised 42 single-family dwellings selling for $9,050 and $300 down,
with monthly payments of $47.51 (The Times-Picayune, 1950a). Once Entrance Park opened, other postwar subdivisions started popping up in Little Woods en masse. Today, the 2020 U.S. census block group to which Entrance Park belongs shows that the area is 94% Black, has a median income of $28,549, a family poverty rate of 15%, is 80% rentals, and has a median house value of $151,800.

Edgelake’s racial covenants exist only on paper now; still, they serve as the historical precedent to New Orleans East, Inc. and Lake Forest, Inc.’s ambitious efforts to transform New Orleans East into a white suburban utopia. Chapters Three and Four will shift focus on examining these two companies’ efforts to suburbanize New Orleans East into a modern city-within-a-city between the 1960s and 1980s. With significant backing from city leaders, New Orleans East, Inc. and Lake Forest, Inc. looked to the city’s eastern section as the panacea for mitigating the city’s white flight to Jefferson Parish. By 1970, New Orleans East was flourishing as thousands of white middle-class families, many of whom worked in the booming oil and gas industry, moved into the numerous newly built subdivisions and townhomes in search of the American Dream. By 1980, it was racially integrating as the city’s emerging Black middle class sought the same suburban dream. Chapters Three and Four will center on race to demonstrate that as neighborhoods reached a tipping point during the 1980s oil crash, which hastened the area’s preexisting white flight, so began The East’s precipitous disinvestment and decline.
CHAPTER 3: NEW ORLEANS EAST, INC.

“The Model City’ is Seen for N.O.: Plans for Eastern Sector Explained”
—The Times-Picayune headline, Wednesday, July 27, 1959

The story of New Orleans East, Inc. dates back to 1959 when two Texas developers, Clint Murchison, owner of the Dallas Cowboys, and Toddie Wynne, an oil and real estate tycoon, formed New Orleans East, Inc. and bought the 32,000 acre De Montluzin tract for approximately $30 million. This chapter documents their audacious, decades-long endeavor to drain the swamp and build a suburban city-within-a-city. Between 1959 and 1985, New Orleans East, Inc. proposed four different ventures to develop the city’s last frontier: New Orleans East (1959), Pontchartrain New Town in Town (1971), Orlandia (1975), and The Villages of Oak Island (1981). They designed New Orleans East as the city’s solution to white flight by recreating neighboring Jefferson Parish within city borders. The company’s racialized vision to create a suburban utopia for white people never materialized as it confronted huge environmental barriers, an increasingly Black city, and the 1980s oil crash. New Orleans East, Inc. declared bankruptcy in 1985, and one year later, the federal government purchased the land to create the nation’s largest urban wildlife refuge, Bayou Sauvage, elevating environmental preservation over unchecked suburban sprawl. With the creation of the wildlife refuge came the official end of trying to suburbanize the original 1700s Chantilly tract. In chronicling New Orleans East, Inc.’s unflinching yet hubristic efforts, this chapter underscores how race, specifically the area’s impending racial transition, fundamentally altered the vision of the emerging suburb.

From the beginning, New Orleans, particularly New Orleans East, has maintained a precarious relationship with its geography. The city has operated for over 300 years as an “unnatural metropolis,” never able to win its constant battles against flooding, hurricanes, and subsidence (Colten, 2006; Earle, Jr., 1975). Geographer Gilbert White (1945), “the father of
hazards research,” argued early on that the more the U.S. spent on flood protection, particularly the “levees only” approach, the higher the subsequent costs of flood damage (Freudenberg et al., 2009). His pioneering dissertation differentiated between floods as “acts of God” and flood losses as “acts of man” (White, 1945, p. 2). He concluded that man-made flood control structures are paradoxical because they exacerbate flood damage in the long run, a lesson learned all too well after Hurricane Katrina’s devastation. By the 1950s, New Orleans officials and private developers begrudgingly recognized the environmental challenges that would constrain the city’s suburbanization in ways that its aspiring competitors would not have to face. They were determined to conquer the swamps of eastern New Orleans and transform them into suburban sprawl. Baxter (2014) describes the most significant drainage expansion in the city’s history:

Urban expansion into the swamps of eastern New Orleans has historically reflected tension between economic demands for port expansion and new housing, and the huge investments required to extend drainage and levee protection necessary to increase the supply of habitable land. Early efforts of land speculators to de-water and develop eastern New Orleans did not adequately resolve this tension and instead revealed the need for public intervention to construct even marginally adequate drainage and flood protection.

Flood mitigation projects by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers date back to 1936 with the passing of the Flood Control Act, which permitted the federal funding of levees, dams, and other flood mitigation engineering projects that local governments would then maintain afterward. Locally, federal levee construction began in 1955 when Congress authorized the Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project, which took place alongside the dredging of canals and other waterways. Between 1958 and 1965, the federal government funded the construction of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MR-GO) in eastern New Orleans as a shortcut between the port and the Gulf of Mexico. Political turmoil surrounded MR-GO from the beginning, pitting economic interests against environmental concerns. Freudenberg et al. (2009)
write, “[It] is sometimes referred to…as ‘Mr.Go,’ and sometimes as ‘the hurricane highway.’ It is the most prominent – and in the clarity of hindsight, perhaps the most dangerous – of all the projects ever imposed upon New Orleans by the Growth Machine” (p. 13). Over time, worsening erosion and intensifying land subsidence required the construction of additional levees, which allowed saltwater intrusion into more than 10,000 acres of wetlands. Almost immediately, engineers realized the environmental consequences of MR-GO when Hurricane Betsy hit the city in 1965. The storm’s damage exposed how MR-GO contributed to wetland erosion and effectively erased natural storm surge barriers like cypress forests that protected the city’s low-lying eastern half. In fact, N.O. East was the only portion of the city where public officials issued a mandatory evacuation. However, the hurricane’s flooding of 6,500 homes in eastern N.O. did not deter developers, and land speculation continued to drive the vision to suburbanize the marshland.

After WWII, a severe U.S. housing shortage led to the rapid construction of mass-produced suburbs outside of cities. Massive government housing programs such as the GI Bill subsidized a new middle class of homeowners nationwide, and white flight from the city to the suburbs occurred by the millions. This postwar housing boom legally excluded African Americans. A 1953 study by the local chapter of the Urban League reported that less than 1,000 of the 48,000 new homes built in the city since 1945 were for African Americans (McPherson, 1953). Next door, Jefferson Parish was drawing middle-class white New Orleanians by the thousands. Two factors helped spawn the growth of Jefferson Parish. The first was the passage of the 1956 Federal Highway Act signed by President Eisenhower, which paved the way for constructing I-10 and facilitated white flight to the newly-built suburbs of Metairie and Kenner. The second catalyst was the 1958 opening of the first Mississippi River Bridge – eventually the
Crescent City Connection – which connected downtown to the West Bank of Jefferson Parish, opening up the suburbs of Algiers, Gretna, Terrytown, Harvey, and Marrero in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1960, New Orleans hit its peak population of 627,625, and it declined in every subsequent census mainly because of white flight to Jefferson Parish between the 1960s and 1980s and then the Northshore, specifically St. Tammany Parish, in the 1990s and into the twentieth century. School integration in the 1960s helped hasten white flight from the city. By the 1968-69 school year, public school enrollment of white students began a steep decline after holding strong at roughly 40,000 in the 1960s. Simultaneously, black enrollment grew twice as large to 70,000 (Lewis, 2003).

To stymie the middle-class exodus to the metro area’s suburbs, city officials and private developers looked toward the undeveloped eastern section of the city as their panacea and operated as an urban growth machine capitalizing on the desires of the city’s growing middle class to live in a white suburban utopia. Indeed, most white New Orleanians had little desire to intermix racially during the age of Jim Crow. Many desired to leave behind the city’s historical racial checkerboard housing patterns in the twentieth century and not extend the practice into twenty-first-century suburbs. During this time, Pontchartrain Park opened in Gentilly in 1955 as one of the country’s first suburban developments built exclusively for Blacks during Jim Crow.

The construction of Pontchartrain Park was controversial from the start. White residents did not want to live next door to the subdivision, and the NAACP fought for racial integration over segregation. Then-Mayor Chep Morrison “pleaded with FHA to insure a subdivision for middle-class black professionals” and had to promise that Pontchartrain Park would not integrate (Larino, 2019). About 1,000 houses were built as white residents in nearby Gentilly Terrace loudly protested the development, espousing fears that an invasion of Blacks would lower their
property values and decrease their quality of life. A Gentilly Gardens Improvement Association member stated, “I don’t think it makes good sociological sense to bring colored people into a white area – When the colored man goes in, values go down” (The Times-Picayune, 1950b). Urban historian Arnold Hirsch (2000a) argued that Pontchartrain Park represented the “apotheosis” of Jim Crow that upheld the principles of 1950s racial residential segregation. Just as developers did not build Lincoln Beach for altruistic reasons, Pontchartrain Park served as a racial compromise during a time of legally sanctioned segregation. The subdivision provided much-needed housing for the city’s small but growing postwar Black middle class during a time when legally sanctioned segregation was challenged by Brown v. Board of Education (1954) but was not overturned in practice for many more years. But, at the same time, it was designed to contain and keep those same families out of white subdivisions, particularly in nearby Gentilly.

In 1957, de Montluzin hired the preeminent St. Louis urban planning firm, Harland Bartholomew and Associates, to craft a master plan for the East after struggling for over two decades to garner interest from speculative buyers with the necessary capital to drain and develop the low-lying and flood-prone land. Upon purchasing the land two years later, Murchison and Wynne asked the firm to revise the master plan and commissioned a historical study of the site, which became a book titled “To a Point Called Chef Menteur: The Story of the Property Known Today as New Orleans East, Inc.” The master plan refers to N.O. East as “one of the most unusual real estate stories of this country. It is the largest single holding by any one person or company within corporate limits of a major city” (Harland et al., 1959, p. 4). The following excerpt, slightly hyperbolic in language, reveals the grand vision:

[New Orleans East, Inc.] is mindful of the historic responsibility inherited with this important property…[they] realize this this property has observed the growth of New Orleans from the sidelines as the settlement became a town, the town
became a city, and the city became one of the world’s great commercial centers. Now it is the turn of New Orleans EAST to assume its role in the area’s march of progress. If ever the future can be studied from the past, New Orleans, augmented by its last remaining section, is surely destined for a tomorrow that neither the facile pen of the journalist nor the measured phrases of a lawyer can express. Posterity will certainly look upon it one day and say, ‘What hath God wrought.’” (Samuel, 1959, p. 31).

Harland Bartholomew’s updated master plan called for a three-pronged project: a new city-within-a-city, a resort-style development along the lake, and an industrial park along the Intracoastal Waterway. To protect from flooding, the plan called for a “lagoon-lake system” consisting of an extensive series of canals, lagoons, pumping stations, and other drainage projects, a method drastically different from the city’s older sections. Murchison and Wynee hired a Massachusetts firm, Sasaki, Walker, and Associates, to study how to make the waterways aesthetically pleasing in ways that modeled the park designs of renowned nineteenth-century landscape architect Frederic Law Olmstead (Souther, 2008).

Murchison and Wynne proposed an audacious plan to create a planned city of 175,000 people between the lake and the Intracoastal Waterway, interspersed with wide boulevards running perpendicular to I-10 (Figure 15; Appendix H). The original plan encompassed 33 subdivisions for white middle-class and upper-middle-class families, with schools, playgrounds, parks, shopping centers, churches, marinas, and golf courses. Offices, commercial zones, and high-density housing, such as townhomes and low-income multifamily garden apartments, were to be clustered along I-10, forming a new town center. Further east and along the lakefront would be a “Florida-type development” with luxury homes on the water and a lakeside resort with hotels and condos on the easternmost tip.⁶ New Orleans East, Inc. was undeterred by nature’s obstacles and viewed marshlands as temporary hurdles to be drained, tamed, and developed. A

⁶ President Lyndon B. Johnson’s wife, Lady Bird Johnson, was one of the investors in New Orleans East by the mid-1960s (Souther, 2008).
1959 interview records Wynne stating, “...The people of New Orleans can be assured that the planning and development will not be haphazardly done. We’ll get the best planners possible and make the fullest use of this property. In fact, our development may help the growth of New Orleans so that it will keep its population lead over Dallas.” (The Times-Picayune, 1967).

**Figure 15**

*New Orleans East Proposal, 1959*

Between 1963 and 1964, New Orleans East, Inc. began construction on their first two (and what would end up being their only) neighborhoods, Venetian Isles and Village de L’Est. Both communities were deed-restricted to protect the area’s investment and built for workers at the nearby bustling Michoud Assembly Facility. Petersen (1969) writes, “Restrictive covenants accompany titles to all property in New Orleans East…In a single-family area, the act of restrictions provides that only single-family dwellings can be built…unless all residents of the section agree to permit such construction” (The Times-Picayune). The first of their two neighborhoods, Venetian Isles, was described as a “precedence-setting Florida-type waterfront development constructed on a series of man-made lagoons” surrounded by Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Borgne, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast (The Times-Picayune, 1967). Located along Chef Menteur Pass, the company marketed the neighborhood to homeowners seeking recreation, sporting, and fishing access. In 1964, Centex Construction Company, Inc., a Dallas-based construction company, reclaimed 2,500 acres of land to build the second residential subdivision, Village de L’Est, at the intersection of Chef Menteur Hwy and Michoud Boulevard (Figure 30). A news story described the neighborhood as “just 12 miles from downtown, you and your family will enjoy a wonderful world of fully planned conveniences. From playgrounds and parks to the softly curving, child-safe streets” (The Times-Picayune, 1967). Reflecting population growth, a 750-student public elementary school opened in 1969 at the intersection of Granville and Cannes off Michoud Boulevard. The Archdiocese of New Orleans also announced plans to build a 20-acre complex with a new school and church.

The success of New Orleans East was contingent not just on successfully convincing the white middle class to move there but also on attracting economic development and industrial job growth. Harland Batholomew and Associates’ original proposal states, “Of particular importance
are the 6,600 acres zoned for industrial purposes. This is in addition to the 2,750 acres zoned for industry south of the Intracoastal Waterway, and can be a major influence in attracting important industries within the city” (Harland et al., 1959, p. 1). The 1959 plan called for two major employment areas – the industrial area south of Chef Menteur Highway and an office area along I-10 – and Chef Menteur Highway would serve as the boundary between residential and industrial tracts. Recognizing that eastern New Orleans was the only remaining undeveloped land in the parish, each city administration during New Orleans East, Inc.’s existence (1959-1985) vowed to prioritize industrialization and manufacturing job creation to propel the city’s economy forward and surpass its rival Southern cities.

By the 1960s, deindustrialization was afflicting American cities, New Orleans included, and The Big Easy lost around 8,600 manufacturing jobs between 1958 and 1961 (Souther, 2008). In 1959, New Orleans East, Inc. announced its first two major economic development projects: the 290-acre “Michoud Industrial Center” for light and heavy industry and a $2 million Folgers Coffee processing plant on Old Gentilly Boulevard, “the largest, most modern plant of its kind in the United States” (The Times-Picayune, 1959). Two years later, NASA took over Michoud and rebranded it as Michoud Assembly Center. Benefiting from the increased NASA budget during the height of the space age, The Michoud Assembly Facility grew and ballooned to roughly 11,000 workers between 1962 and 1964, eventually becoming the site where The Boeing Company, who had transferred more than 5,000 employees from Seattle to New Orleans, built Saturn V rocket boosters for the Apollo space mission (Souther, 2008, p. 202).

In 1966, Port d’Industrie announced its opening as the area’s first industrial park located directly across from the Michoud Assembly Facility on Old Gentilly Road. New Orleans East, Inc. promoted it as “the largest planned industrial park in southern Louisiana” (The Times-Picayune, 1966).
Local investor Lloyd Gaubert formed Michoud Industrial Complex, Inc. and bought 52 acres next to Port d’Industrie to build a second multimillion-dollar “modern, parklike industrial complex” (*The Times-Picayune*, 1967). Gaubert was convinced that eastern N.O. was primed to compete with industrial parks in Houston and Dallas because of its vast undeveloped land and access to the Mississippi River, port, two rail lines, major highways, and I-10. However, the expansion of N.O. East’s industrial parks were slow through the 1960s and 1970s and never met the expectations envisioned by the city and New Orleans East, Inc. Other area employers included Lockheed Martin, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Finance Center, and the Sears Finance Center. On top of struggling to develop the industrial area, New Orleans East, Inc. experienced its first significant hindrance in 1969 when Murchison died, and Wynn halted development to spite city officials for blocking his proposed downtown hotel.

Despite early setbacks, and even though the city was losing population, New Orleans East was growing. Compared to the 1960s census, the 1970 census recorded Orleans Parish population at 593,471 (-5.4%), Jefferson Parish at 337,568 (+61.7%), and N.O. East at 44,536 (+52.6%, up from 23,435 in 1960). While only mildly successful in the 1960s, New Orleans East, Inc. entered the 1970s seeking to reap the economic fortunes of Louisiana’s oil boom. Between 1970 and 1981, Louisiana’s per capita income jumped from 44th in the nation to 31st, and the state’s population grew by almost 16%, outpacing the national growth average (*Thompson*, 2015). Concurrently, in 1970, U.S. Congress passed The Urban Growth and New Community Development Act, informally known as Title VII, which directed the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to subsidize privately-developed, self-sufficient “new-town-in-town” projects. The combination of new federal incentives and the
city’s oil boom led New Orleans East, Inc., whose original layout design included many aspects of new town principles, to try a second time to build a city-within-a-city.

New Town projects were modeled off early 20th-century English urban planner Ebenezer Howard’s “garden city” satellite towns that aimed to contain proportionate areas of residences, industry, and agriculture and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal-inspired “greenbelt towns” that advanced the idea of incorporating “sociological engineering” into carefully-planned neighborhoods with mixed housing, commercial and industrial land uses, and surrounded by radial green spaces. New Town projects appealed to real estate developers, corporations, and city, state, and federal officials who hoped a public-private partnership would help address the criticisms of 1960s suburban sprawl that led to rampant racial segregation and urban decay. A central component of the New Town’s objectives was to purposefully create a racially-integrated and socioeconomically diverse (mixed-income) community, which in the 1970s was not yet a cultural value yet desired by white Americans.

Between 1971 and 1972, New Orleans East, Inc. and then-Mayor Moon Landrieu, a huge proponent of new town projects, worked with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to secure a $50 million federal loan to build a $250 million new town project called Pontchartrain New Town in Town (Appendix I & J). Pontchartrain was proposed to occupy an 8,400 acre portion of the 32,000 acre New Orleans East tract., and its vision was, like the original 1959 plan, audacious: the community would be an “urban laboratory” that would “provide solutions to problems not just for New Orleans residents but for city dwellers everywhere” (Souther, 2008, p. 205). The proposal sought to merge urban social heterogeneity with suburban living standards, building for a population upwards of 90,000 in 30 years. The project comprised pre-planned communities with modernist architecture, open plazas, green
spaces, and diverse housing. Following federal guidelines, the city formed the New Community Development Corporation (NCDC) to serve as the liaison between HUD and New Orleans East, Inc., who subsequently formed the syndicate Pontchartrain Land Corp. to administer the program locally. By the end of 1973, the NCDC purchased the tract from Pontchartrain Land Corp. for $15.6 million, controversially bringing the project under city oversight.

Determined for Pontchartrain New Town to succeed, New Orleans East, Inc. hired a San Francisco firm to conduct a project feasibility study. The firm’s report indicated that the new town’s objectives – diversity of housing and racial and income groups – were at odds with the desires of the white middle class and that the project would not work. They unambiguously stated that image and perception were critical to Pontchartrain’s success. The report further warned that if Pontchartrain was marketed as a new town, “residential dissatisfaction will be sharp” and instead should be pitched simply as a more conventional suburb (Souther 2008, p. 205). Often using coded language alluding to race rather than explicitly naming it, the firm advised that the success of the project hinged on buy-in from white middle- to upper-income residents and argued that “the presence of a large percentage of low and moderate-income housing is a significant impediment to the capture of this market–especially during the early image-creating phase of a project’s development” (Souther 2008, p. 206). The firm proposed constructing over 35,000 housing units between 1977 and 1994, with low-income housing never exceeding 30% of the stock and not built until later stages so as not to deter affluent whites from first moving in and making them “as socially acceptable as possible,” such as housing for the elderly, mixed-income rather than low-income housing, and limiting expansive, large-scale projects (souther 2008, p. 206).
New Orleans East, Inc. then sought expertise from Texas developers who built The Woodlands, a successful new town project in Houston. This firm recommended that Pontchartrain follow a similar plan as The Woodlands by carefully integrating the development with the natural surroundings. As such, the proposal seriously considered environmental concerns, dedicating 55% of the tract to an intricate system of canals, lagoons, and green spaces as geographic borders. However, the project faced a significant setback because federal guidelines stipulated that all New Town projects were subject to their “100-year” flood insurance plan, which required completed hurricane protection before construction, something the city failed to do and that Title VII did not fund. In September 1974, HUD mandated that the Pontchartrain project be cut in half from 8,400 to 4,500 acres, leaving the second half undeveloped until a complete levee system was in place. The project stopped entirely in 1975 when HUD announced it was issuing a six-month moratorium on all New Town projects nationwide, including a second Title VII project for Algiers called Lower Algiers New Town in Town. Ultimately, only 13 New Town projects came to fruition nationwide, and the government permanently stopped funding such developments.

Not long after Pontchartrain came to a halt, New Orleans East, Inc. shifted gears, and instead of a city/federal government/private enterprise venture, they decided to privately finance the project themselves. By June 1975, the company, again with significant backing from Mayor Landrieu, pitched a third plan: Orlandia (Appendix K & L). Orlandia was proposed as a privately-financed 28,000 acre mixed-use suburb to replace the defunct Pontchartrain new town project. This latest iteration to suburbanize the swamp was modeled off Wynnewood, one of Toddie Wynne’s planned suburbs in Dallas, and would combine industrial sites with “three villages” comprised of walkable neighborhoods. The villages would be turned over to
“subdevelopers” to create neighborhoods marketing a lifestyle of people living with water. Referred to as “The Newest New Orleans,” Orlandia was projected to have a population of 155,000, over 50,000 homes and apartments of all income ranges, shopping centers, wide boulevards, abundant green spaces, and office parks.

Environmental concerns led to Orlandia’s failures. The City Planning Commission forcefully came out against Orlandia because it would have required destroying more than 20,000 acres of wetlands. A showdown between “ecological considerations and economics” culminated in 1976 when Save Our Wetlands, Inc. (SOWL) and other activist organizations successfully secured an injunction to halt construction, citing evidence that the Corps failed to submit an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which was legally required by the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) to proceed with construction. Although the injunction was short-lived after the judge dropped the case, Orlandia nevertheless failed to garner much interest. Over time, New Orleans East, Inc. tried to auction parcels of land next to Michoud for industrial use and undeveloped land in Venetian Isles and Village de L’Est for residential development. However, investors were wary of flooding and subsidence, and displeased at the lack of uncompleted infrastructure improvements between Chef Menteur Highway and I-10, and Orlandia fizzled out. Visible relics of Orlandia include a prominent concrete sign, “NEW ORLEANS EAST” along I-10 just past the Michoud Boulevard exit, which was supposed to be the entrance to Orlandia, and two expensive pairs of I-10 exit ramps built by the federal government, now overgrown with weeds and heaps of illegally-dumped tires.

By 1978, the City Planning Commission’s Coastal Zone Management (CZM) proposed that the city buy the land slated for the Orlandia development, but New Orleans East, Inc. declared they had no plans to sell. That same year, Ernest “Dutch” Morial became the first Black
and Creole mayor of New Orleans (1978-1986). Mayor Morial gradually increased the number of Black professionals in City Hall, continuing the racial integration of City Hall leadership positions that started under his predecessor, Mayor Moon Landrieu. Recognizing the weaknesses of relying solely on tourism, which had significantly expanded under Landrieu, Morial established the city’s first professionally-staffed Office of Economic Development to diversify the city’s economy by creating a robust manufacturing sector. At Morial’s urging in 1979, the Louisiana State Legislature established a 43-square-mile special-tax zone called Almonaster-Michoud Industrial District (A-MID) in New Orleans East to attract and promote jobs and sell bonds to finance infrastructure improvements. Morial believed that a regional manufacturing economy was the only long-term hope to lift the city’s Black underclass out of poverty and to make the city economically competitive with ascending Sun Belt cities.

Mayor Morial could not robustly develop A-MID as state and federal government spending reduced dramatically during the 1980s. Morial sought federal grants to build A-MID, but federal funding for cities markedly decreased during Reagan’s presidency. Additionally, Morial’s mayorship experienced ongoing population and tax base loss from white flight, reduced state and federal funding, and the oil recession of the 1980s. Between 1979 and 1989, annual city revenue fell from $304 million to $271 million, state funding was slashed from $27.3 million to $5.1 million, and federal funding decreased from $24,127,510 to a meager $680,074 (Collins, 2021). Never given economic priority by the state, the A-MID district struggled to grow into a major industrial park and was hindered by poor soil conditions, a confusing web of land ownership, and constant illegal dumping. One of A-MID’s most significant failed projects was a plan to build a regional food distribution center predicted to generate over 2,000 blue-collar and unskilled jobs. The project collapsed because New Orleans East, Inc. did not fulfill site
improvement and street construction contractual obligations and because prospective tenants felt that the site was too far from commercial areas.

Pontchartrain New Town in Town and Orlandia ultimately failed for environmental, racial, and economic reasons. First, both proposals hinged on attracting a critical mass of middle-class whites to the area, and developers did not anticipate the racial integration accompanied by reactionary white flight. The East’s racial transition then hastened after the oil crash when an influx of low-income Blacks moved in. Second, land had to be drained, and then levees had to be constructed. Such a massive undertaking would require considerable financial involvement across all levels of government. To be profitable, Pontchartrain and Orlandia had to get buy-in from the intended demographic — middle and upper-middle-class white people. As the 1973 feasibility study unambiguously indicated, renters, low-income residents, Black people, and other racial minorities were not part of that equation. Be that as it may, the 1970s saw a growing Black population in the city’s eastern half.

Racial uncertainty worried developers, who heeded the feasibility study’s recommendations, which strongly recommended against the principles and missions of New Town projects because they conflicted with the desires of aspiring white middle-class homeowners and New Orleans East, Inc. making a profit. The influx of Vietnamese refugees into Village de L’Est by the mid-1970s illustrated this tension. By the early 1970s, the once-thriving neighborhood had fallen victim to decline and a population exodus after jobs at Michoud decreased significantly. Orlandia aimed to revitalize the area, which additionally had suffered from soil subsidence, creating a landscape of cracked sidewalks, buckled streets, and foreclosed houses with severed foundations. However, The War in Vietnam altered Orlandia’s plans, partly because of the neighborhood’s changing demographics that were not part of the developers’
original plans. Village de L’Est racially transitioned as whites moved out because of depreciating property values, and the Associated Catholic Charities (ACC) helped relocate over 1,000 Vietnamese refugees who fled the country following the fall of Saigon in 1975. At first, most refugees settled in the Versailles Arms garden apartments on Chef Menteur Highway, a 402-unit apartment federally subsidized by HUD, and then eventually moved into the vacant houses, repopulating Village de L’Est.

In just a few years, Village de L’Est became known for its Vietnamese enclave (Table 5). The community imprinted its culture onto the city by modifying the landscape and converting the area’s drainage canals into traditional Vietnamese gardens, which were initially meant to be park-lined lagoons. Ironically, residents of Village de L’est formed, geographically and culturally, its own city-within-a-city that New Orleans East, Inc. failed to create. The weekly Versailles open-air market, Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church, and Village de L’Est Elementary School became anchor institutions in the neighborhood. Additionally, the intersection of Alcee Fortier Boulevard and Chef Menteur Highway became the economic epicenter of area businesses and commercial establishments. Though distant and often neglected by the city, the Vietnamese population flourished and created a sense of community and civic involvement that New Town projects failed to deliver. Post-Katrina, the area has diversified with a growing Hispanic and Black population and a decreasing Vietnamese population.
Table 5

Village de L’Est Population Demographics, 1970-2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Village de L’Est Census Demographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>4,907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Households</td>
<td>1,478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>4,813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


After three failed plans to become a city-within-a-city, N.O. East remained a distant and misunderstood part of the city, and suburbanization failed to take off as envisioned. By 1980, New Orleans East was still a vastly underdeveloped 32,000-acre tract of land with nearly 20,000 acres of levee-protected wetlands and 12,000 acres of unprotected wetlands.\(^7\) That year, Clint Murchison, Jr. acquired all of New Orleans East, Inc.’s stocks, previously owned by Wynne and Murchison Interests. Murchison, Jr. and several new investment partners retained the company’s name. As the city continued to reap the benefits of the oil boom between 1981 and 1982, New Orleans East, Inc. announced renewed attempts to replace the ill-fated Pontchartrain New Town in Town and Orlandia plans. New Orleans, the 34th largest city in the country then, was booming and became an important regional center for the petroleum industry as many modern office

---

\(^7\) Newspaper articles would often alternate the numbers.
buildings rose along Poydras Street in the city’s Central Business District. The city became home to over 400 national and local oil-related firms and many savings and loan institutions, proudly boasting its status as the world’s largest offshore oil port. The state became the country’s number one natural gas producing state, accounting for 98.5% of all the producing oil wells in the Gulf of Mexico.

New Orleans East, Inc.’s newly-revised city-within-a-city would be developed over 25 years at a total cost of $5 billion, eventually adding upwards of 200,000 people to the city’s population. The project was split into two concurrent developments that would experience a “major economic breakthrough similar to the development of Jefferson Parish in the 1960s and 1970s” (Katz, 1981a). It would contain four self-contained “residential villages,” with names like Explorers Landing Village, and over time would include 6,000 single-family homes, 11,000 apartments and condos, office buildings, schools, a 187-acre lake called Lake Orleans, a golf course, riding trails, a tennis and swimming club, and “commercial shopping villages.” Described as the city’s “largest planned community,” the plan called for land to be donated for “green, landscaped buffer strips along I-10” and for residents to pay a mandatory $120 neighborhood association fee “to assure preservation of the master plan of the community” (Hardy, 1981). Newspaper articles and editorials lauded the project as “the most ambitious undertaking in New Orleans’ 263-year history, and, whether it is successful, will shape the direction of the city for the 21st century,” suggesting that, unlike Pontchartrain and Orlandia, The Villages had the most potential yet to succeed (Katz, 1981c).

Phase one of New Orleans East, Inc.’s updated, and once again audacious, plan included developing a 4,800-acre tract bounded by Paris Road, I-10, the Maxent Canal, and the Intracoastal Waterway for a planned community of 50,000 people called The Villages of Oak
Island. New Orleans East, Inc.’s new president Barton Higgs, a renowned Australian planner, informed city officials that the first phase would take a decade to complete and would “create as many jobs as possible within the framework of a carefully planned urban community” (Hardy, 1981). The plan included donating land to the city for green space and mass transit and donating a 12-acre site called Oak Island to the National Park Service. Higgs enlisted Stephen Villavaso, former city planning executive and future urban planning professor at the University of New Orleans, as the suburb’s planning and environmental affairs director. Villavaso would oversee master planning, site planning, land use, transportation, and zoning of the new suburb.

Phases two and three would include draining 9,800 acres of the undeveloped 20,000 acres of protected wetlands to make way for a $750 million community that would eventually be home to 130,000 people. The community would include a regional park “on par [with] Joe Brown Park, Audubon Park, and City Park” centered around Blind Lagoon, a 200-acre lake and wildlife habitat (Katz, 1981b). Chef Menteur Highway would bisect the tract and separate the residential and commercial areas from the industrial space. New Orleans East, Inc. planned to reinvigorate the industrial park, which was to be called the Michoud Industrial Center. They predicted that by the late 1980s, it “will have more than doubled in occupancy and the jobs it provides for the New Orleans economy” (Katz, 1981a). Higgs asked state legislators to approve $20 million in revenue bonds to help private companies finance the industrial area's streets, water, sewerage, and drainage lines, but the state denied the financing, and the industrial park struggled to attract robust development and expansion.

Besides constructing 200 homes in the Oak Island subdivision, Higg’s iteration of building a city-within-a-city did not materialize. Between 1982 and 1983, a precipitous years-long global oil supply glut wreaked havoc on the economies of the city and the state, sending
them into a downward spiral. The 1980s oil crisis resulted from a combination of factors, including reduced global oil demand, increased production, political and economic unrest in the Middle East, and plummeting petroleum prices that lasted for years. Consequently, it became too costly for Louisiana to sell petroleum on the global market, and the state could not remain competitive with lower production costs and oil prices charged by the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The city and state did not initially feel the full brunt of the oil crash, but as the price of oil stayed down for years, it severely impacted the local economy, revealing the pitfalls of relying on a single boom-and-bust industry like oil and gas. Falling fortunes from the oil crash and widely-publicized articles about Murchison Jr.’s failing health detracted developers from investing in The Villages. Second, activists who were part of the growing environmental movements at the time vehemently opposed the project. Save Our Wetlands, Inc. argued that the proposed development echoed the Orlandia plan years earlier by destroying the wetlands. SOWL threatened a lawsuit, arguing that the project was a get-rich scheme for developers who neither fully understood the geography’s challenges nor who were fully invested in the area since they lived elsewhere. Third, political disagreements over creative control of the project helped bring the project to a standstill, with Higgs arguing for the company to have complete oversight while others wanted private developers to purchase large parcels and bear the financial burden of site development.

Murchison’s plan was in jeopardy of total collapse by mid-1984 as New Orleans East, Inc. laid off 20 of its 40 employees, including Higgs. Creditors closed in with over $77 million in lawsuits over outstanding debts involving oil and real estate deals nationwide. Steady revenue loss from the oil crash financially ruined Murchison, and he ran out of money for the residential villages project. By the end of the year, four companies that had invested in New Orleans East,
Inc. filed lawsuits in Civil District Court, with Merrill Lynch filing the most expensive suit, at 
$25.8 million, against the company for refusing to pay back a loan. Amid the worsening oil bust, 
creditors tried to force Murchison into involuntary bankruptcy proceedings to pay off his debts, 
and New Orleans East, Inc. officially filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 1985. Murchison liquidated all his assets, including selling the Dallas Cowboys for $60 million and his 50% interest in the 4,800-tract to Michoud Land, Inc. for $41 million. South Point, Inc., a subsidiary of Merrill Lynch, acquired the 20,000-acre tract from Murchison.

The oil bust hit rock bottom in 1986, and half of the city’s savings and loan institutions went bankrupt. The city’s housing market collapsed, and the state’s unemployment rate was the country’s highest at 15%, more than double the national average (Souther, 2008). Many petroleum companies in the city shuttered and relocated to Houston or Dallas, leading to a massive middle-class exodus from the city when around 66,000 white-collar oil and gas jobs disappeared nearly overnight (Campanella, 2008). New Orleans never recouped the jobs, forever altering the local economy and housing market, which took years to rebound. The oil bust produced the first net population losses for the entire metropolitan area, with an estimated 90,000 people leaving during the seven years after 1983 (Souther, 2008). Despite the depressed economy, South Point, Inc. announced one final proposal to develop 12,000 acres “for homes, business, and industry,” to donate 6,000 acres “for public use,” and to preserve 5,000 acres for wetlands that would “balance environmental concerns with New Orleans’ needs for economic growth” (Hall, 1985). This final proposal, which yet again did not materialize, marked a critical turning point for this once-advanced ballyhooed project of converting wetlands into suburbs.

In 1988, the undeveloped tract of land became federal property after Louisiana state representatives John Breaux and Lindy Boggs passed legislation to create Bayou Sauvage
National Wildlife Refuge as “the nation’s largest urban wildlife refuge”. Wetland preservation won out over “concrete lots,” and the wildlife refuge project came to fruition after feverish conversations involving city and state officials, developers, creditors, and two prominent environmental groups, the Conservation Fund and Nature Conservancy. All entities agreed to create a wildlife refuge and invert the tract’s ratio by preserving 20,000 acres for wetlands and developing 5,000 acres across I-10 from the sanctuary. Half the refuge would become freshwater wetlands surrounded by levees, and the other half bordering the lakes would remain brackish saltwater marshes. The Federal Resolution Trust Corp. bought the 5,000 acres from South Point, Inc. as part of the deal. Pending approval from the Army Corp of Engineers, the tract would be immediately ready for commercial development rather than potentially waiting for years.

Bayou Sauvage became mired in a political spat when a new controversy emerged around repairing a five-mile-long levee called the Maxent Levee. From the beginning, then-Mayor Sidney Barthelemy only begrudgingly supported the refuge, suggesting instead that New Orleans East be the site of a new international airport to replace the older MSY airport in Kenner. He postured that the cash-strapped city would not make up the difference. Failing to fix the levee, which separated the proposed wildlife refuge from the developed areas, would result in the federal government withdrawing $8 million for the project. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials informed the city that the agency would only buy the tract if they fixed the leaking levee. Merrill Lynch and other private interests offered to pay part of the estimated $4.8 million costs. An editorialist wrote on the political squabble at the time, “The Orleans Levee Board, though it asserts ‘exclusive jurisdiction,’ won’t touch it with a barge pole…When the administration casts its eyes on the eastern wetlands, it does not see a teeming wildlife…It sees billions of federal dollars for hiring builders, architects, engineers…who will make an airport
rise on the refuge's northern boundary” (Gill, 1988). The dragged-out process eventually ended with a compromise, the federal government agreeing to pay half of the $5 million repair cost and the city, OLB, and private landowners agreeing to front the other half (Appendix M).

Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge was officially established in 1990 and contains a variety of wildlife habitats, lagoons, canals, and natural bayous which are critical to the state’s natural resources preservation efforts. In 1994, lawyer and local casino developer John J. Cummings, III bought a 3,000-acre portion of the 5,000-acre tract from Resolution Trust Corp. for $2.5 million, the most significant land sale to a private individual in the city since 1965. Cummings was heavily involved in local real estate, including owning expensive properties in the Warehouse District and 14 acres of land on Bullard Avenue in N.O. East. In purchasing the tract, Cummings acknowledged the repeated failed plans over the decades, stating, “I’m not unmindful of the fact that the people who went before me went bankrupt, but I don’t plan to fail. We’re going to do it. This could be the absolute rebirth of New Orleans East” (Meitrodt, 1994).

As of 2023, the 5,000 acre-tract remains undeveloped marshland.

New Orleans East, Inc. embarked on four grandiose plans spanning four decades to reclaim 32,000 acres of marshland and convert them into a modern city-within-a-city. Each project – New Orleans East, Pontchartrain New Town in Town, Orlandia, and The Villages of Oak Island – was a colossal failure. New Orleans East, Inc. persisted with the hubristic belief that suburban growth was unlimited and modern drainage projects could conquer nature. Beyond environmental obstacles, New Orleans East, Inc. faced an increasingly racially-integrating eastern city that was explicitly not part of their vision. The 1980s oil crash proved too great an obstacle, and the company declared bankruptcy in 1985, after which the land became Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge. While New Orleans East, Inc. struggled to suburbanize the
marshland, Lake Forest Inc., the second major developer in the area, was much more successful in suburbanizing an adjacent 5,000 acre tract that most eastern residents inhabit today. The next chapter tells their story as they turned Lake Forest into a more conventional suburb. By the mid-1970s, Lake Forest was booming in construction, racially integrating, and experiencing unprecedented levels of economic investment. The 1980s oil crash would alter course as middle-class neighborhoods racially tipped to majority Black and low-income Blacks moved into the now-deteriorating apartments and townhomes. Following the racial turnover, New Orleans East became “The East,” and economic investment turned into suburban decline.
CHAPTER 4: LAKE FOREST

“Lake Forest Becomes Boom Place for In-City Residents”
–The Times-Picayune headline, Sunday, June 18, 1972

Unlike New Orleans East, Inc.’s failure to build its city-within-a-city, a second corporation, Lake Forest, Inc., successfully carried out its vision to turn an adjacent 7,000 acres next door into a suburb called Lake Forest. While New Orleans East, Inc. only built two neighborhoods, Lake Forest, Inc. constructed well over a dozen, and these neighborhoods are where the bulk of eastern residents reside today. This chapter details how starting in the late 1960s, Lake Forest successfully drew thousands of white middle-class families who opted to stay in the city and eschew the suburbs. By the mid-1970s, the neighborhood was racially integrating as the city’s emerging Black middle class, many from Central City and the Seventh Ward, were drawn to the suburbs of Lake Forest over Jefferson and St. Tammany for various reasons, including its proximity to the CBD, the need for parish residence for those who worked for the city; and because they felt more racially welcomed in N.O. East than across parish lines. This chapter provides firsthand accounts from New Orleans East Matters members who racially integrated Lake Forest. The final part of the chapter focuses on the decline of Lake Forest Plaza Mall. Bustling during the oil boom, The Plaza experienced a rapid decline following the 1980s oil crash that never reversed and powerfully symbolized The East’s decline.

In 1961, Joe Brown’s heirs, who owned the property at this point, hired engineers Gandolfo, Kuhn, and Walker to study the undeveloped 7,000 acre tract that would eventually become Lake Forest, concluding that the area was uninhabitable for residential development and that canals would provide inadequate protection. Against their advice, the engineers drafted a detailed proposal to decrease drainage and site preparation costs by creating a lake-as-reservoir
system to mitigate flooding. The Sewerage and Water Board approved the estimated $12 million plan one year later. In 1964, Marvin Kratter, a New York real estate developer, turned his syndicate, The LaKratt Corporation, into the first publicly-traded real estate investment corporation and purchased the 5,000-acre tract from Joe Brown’s heirs for $20 million (Figure 40). Kratter proposed paying half the cost to construct and maintain the lakes-as-reservoirs through deed covenants. That same year, the City Planning Commission approved the now officially-dubbed Lake Forest’s street plan, a planned city-within-a-city of 75,000 people spread throughout 26 lake-centered subdivisions. Housing options would be diverse, ranging from apartment complexes to luxury townhomes and single-family homes.

Lake Forest nearly failed to come to fruition as Kratter struggled to navigate city politics, eventually coming down to the city to address then-Mayor Victor Schiro directly. Vocally critical, he described City Hall as inefficient, understaffed, and parochial. Kratter warned the city that he would walk away if they did not agree to his terms, threatening that “money is green in any other city and any other state” (Baxter, 2014). Kratter demanded that City Hall address four specific concerns: 1) increase the city’s bonding borrowing power and extend the limit of current bonds; 2) amend city zoning laws to speed up the process for the development of subdivisions; 3) update the City Planning Commission’s 1951 land use map for eastern N.O., accept Lake Forest, Inc.’s street plan design, and pledge $1.25 million to pave them; and 4) urge S&WB to build more pumps in the area (Gillis 1965, 22). Mayor Schiro called an emergency meeting at the end of 1965 to address Kratter’s concerns. Illustrative of how lucrative Lake Forest was predicted to be, a cross-section of the city’s growth machine rarely seen together were all in attendance – all

---

City Council members, all members of the Sewerage & Water Board, the entire City Planning Commission, four local banks, the local Chamber of Commerce, a representative from the Louisiana Governor’s Office, and representatives of the AFL-CIO. Schiro even banned Kratter’s opponents from attending the meeting – East New Orleans Civic Council, Board of Liquidation, and City Debt, which issued bonds and had oversight of city finances. By New Year’s Day 1966, the city agreed to Kratter’s demands, and Lake Forest’s construction would soon begin.

Following Lake Forest’s formal approval, the City Planning Commission updated the city’s comprehensive land-use plan to guide future growth and development, particularly for the new frontier of the city’s eastern section. The commission approved half of Kratter’s 26 proposed subdivisions and amended several zoning ordinances to increase the parcel’s commercial land use by 200 acres. In a sudden turn of events, Kratter abandoned the lakes-as-reservoirs system plan. Although more scenic, it cost too much money, and Kratter opted for canals and pumps instead. Voters approved a special 3-mil drainage tax and the financial restructuring of the S&WB, who approved a $28 million drainage plan – the largest drainage improvement project in the city’s history – to construct three new pumping stations and widen and deepen existing canals within Lake Forest. The last-minute change of plans led to a years long S&WB funding crisis.

In 1967, the new Seabrook Bridge, which replaced drawbridges that served as the only means of crossing the water to the city’s eastern section, opened and paved the way for the first residential subdivision within Lake Forest, Kenilworth. The Kenilworth subdivision included 700 houses, an elementary school, churches, a NORD playground, and strip mall shopping centers. In 1968, the 181-bed, 22-acre Pendleton Memorial Methodist Hospital opened on Read Boulevard across from Joe W. Brown Memorial Park. Lake Forest’s population nearly doubled
from 22,85 in 1960 to 42,000 by the decade's end. In 1970, the Kenilworth Mall opened as the city's only air-conditioned enclosed shopping center, featuring a landscaped promenade with over 30 businesses, restaurants, and cinema. Lake Forest, Inc. constructed dozens of neighborhoods with bucolic names like Lake Barrington, Spring Lake, Huntington Park, Somerset Park, Wimbledon, and Eastshore Village (Figure 16). Many of these subdivisions were demarcated by signs at entrances along major corridors that, upon entering, revealed idyllic suburbs with winding tree-covered streets centered around lakes and other green spaces. Lake Forest’s most upscale subdivision, Lake Forest Estates, opened in 1973 as “the only true estate area in Greater New Orleans, a truly prestige neighborhood” with spacious homes centered around a 40-acre lake with wide boulevards, landscaped neutral grounds, private tennis courts, and an exclusive country club (Appendix N & O). Lake Forest Estates was hot real estate, first appealing to middle- and upper-income whites, many of whom worked in the booming oil industry.

Figure 16

*Lake Forest Neighborhoods Map, 1974*
An early threat shared amongst new homeowners moving to Lake Forest was multi-family housing and apartment construction. As early as 1967, residents of Pine Village rallied to protest “against the threat of multiple family dwellings around them” (Voelker, 1967). In 1969, the East New Orleans Civic Council, representing 13 civic associations, opposed the city’s proposed comprehensive zoning law changes that would encourage multi-family dwellings, and their efforts “mainly aimed at preserving single-family residences near established subdivisions” (Cotter, 1969). A.P. Gallinghouse, then-Orleans Registrar of Voters and a representative of East N.O. Civic Council once said, “I have never seen such unified opposition among individuals and civic groups as against the new zoning ordinance…East New Orleans residents are so disturbed about the new ordinance that they have started a petition to oppose adoption of the new law” (Cotter, 1969). However, both Lake Forest, Inc. and New Orleans East, Inc. countered the East N.O. Civic Council by arguing that the area was about to experience “impending growth” and that the zoning changes were needed because “the existing anachronism [of our] current law is
impeding [growth]…New Orleans is looking for progress. Going forward with this ordinance is an important step to it” (Cotter, 1969). Zoning in New Orleans East would remain a continual conflict between residents and developers for decades.

By the 1970s, apartment complex construction was outpacing middle- and upper-middle housing construction, and homeowners feared that new, high-density apartment complexes along I-10 might one would bring with them an undesirable population, particularly low-income Blacks. In 1974, Congress passed the Housing and Community Development Act, which established the Section 8 housing program, whereby low-income families pay a certain percentage of their income on rent, with federal subsidies covering the remaining portion (HUD, 2022). That same year, a coalition of area homeowners spearheaded opposition to Lake Forest, Inc.’s plans to rezone 74 acres bounded by Paris Road, Chef Menteur Highway, Dwyer Boulevard, and Bullard Avenue from residential and general business to general commercial. Outraged, residents formed an organization called “Committee to Oppose Overdevelopment of Lake Forest,” imploring, often through coded language, the City Planning Commission to limit any further overcommercialization or high-density apartments that would lead to “the future ghetto of I-10” (The Times-Picayune, 1974). Because of so much opposition, the then-president of Lake Forest, Inc., Norman Zucker, withdrew all ten zoning requests.

Multi-family apartment construction would continue unabated throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In 1977, Lake Forest Estates residents loudly protested a proposed subdivision of multifamily apartments next to them. Residents feared cheaply-built and unsightly piecemeal and hodgepodge apartments that “would not foster a neighborhood that is compatible with the wide-lot, luxury-type dwellings of the adjacent subdivision,” and would attract the same “urban” problems they escaped (DuBos, 1977). One resident said, “We have invested, in some cases,
hundreds of thousands of dollars in our lots and homes, and now you’re threatening the values of our homes by permitting this kind of subdivision” (DuBos, 1977). In 1983, Lake Carmel residents waged an equally vocal campaign against a 588-unit apartment complex. The City Planning Commission approved both developments, angering eastern homeowners and eliciting protests from surrounding neighborhood associations that sought to preserve the area’s quality of life, property values, and racial homogeneity. Others protested by moving out.

The scale of U.S. Black suburbanization in the post-Civil Rights era was nowhere near the magnitude of white suburbanization, and Black families’ options were often severely limited due to large-scale white opposition against racial residential integration. According to the 1980 census, in the 38 metropolitan statistical areas with populations of 1 million or more, the number of Blacks moving to the suburbs grew from 2.3 million in 1970 to 3.7 million in 1980, a 60% increase that accounts for just 6.5% of total suburban population growth (Herbers, 1981). When Blacks did move to the suburbs, they often experienced discrimination in securing home loans from historically white-serving banks and savings and loans institutions. To combat post-Civil Rights *de facto* racism in the housing market, Black institutions would fill these voids. One such vital institution in New Orleans was Liberty Bank and Trust Company, which formed in 1972 when a group of white and Black investors put up $2 million to start the city’s – and one of the Deep South’s – first minority-owned banks. Norman Francis, then-President of Xavier University and the group’s chairman, asked Alden McDonald, Jr., one of the first Black bankers in the city’s history, to run Liberty Bank. Liberty Bank was integral in helping the city’s emerging Black middle class become homeowners as well as providing essential seed funding to “would-be shopkeepers, restaurant owners [such as Leah Chase in 1982] and other entrepreneurs in the black community” (Rivlin, 2015a). Residents interviewed described how many families
moving to Lake Forest had careers as engineers for chemical companies, manufacturers at Michoud, post office workers, educators in the city’s public school system, or working offshore as longshoremen. McDonald described the mecca that The East became for Blacks: “[For] the first time in New Orleans history, the African-American community had seen significant wealth creation that they could hand down to the next generation” (Rivlin, 2015b, p. 95).

Between 1970 and 1980, the population of N.O. East soared 73%, from 44,526 to 77,047 residents (Figure 40). Drawing middle class families by the thousands, the number of families in N.O. East doubled from 11,209 to 21,116; married couples comprised almost half of the households, compared to 32% citywide; and 56% of residents owned their houses, compared to 40% citywide. The population increased so much that the U.S. Census Bureau expanded the number of census tracts in N.O. East from seven to 13. Lake Forest’s population explosion differed from other parts of the metro area because it was racially integrated. Starting in the mid-70s and accelerating rapidly during the 80s oil bust, the residential integration of Lake Forest’s subdivisions drastically flipped the area’s racial composition. Between 1970 and 1980, the white population grew by 4,217, but the share fell from 84% to 54%, holding a slight racial majority. The Black population increased by 23,677, but their share increased from 15.3% to 39.%. Stated simply, Lake Forest was booming, but the racial composition was flipping; as more middle-class Blacks moved in, middle-class whites moved out (Appendix P).

As many New Orleans East residents interviewed indicated, when they moved in, many were the first Black family to buy a home on their street, forcing them to navigate racial suspicions from white neighbors. In one interview, a resident described how New Orleans East “represented a certain lifestyle. Back then, it was like to be Black and to move to the East [sic] that meant you’re making some money. Okay, I’ve made it!” (interview 2, April 28, 2022). She
described how “for sale signs went up everywhere almost overnight” (interview 2, April 28, 2022). Another resident shared how when she – the first Black person to move into the Donnavilla subdivision within the two-block span – moved in 1976, she would frequently receive threatening phone calls. She shared, “I didn’t think it would have been a problem when I first moved in because I worked like them, took care of my house and lawn like them. At the time, I really believed that my class and education should have mitigated the race thing, but it didn’t matter. They moved out anyway. I know it’s race; I just don’t want to believe it. Sometimes, white families stayed and realized, ‘oh, they’re just like us.’ But, when a neighborhood got too Black, that’s when the last holdouts fled too” (interview 2, April 28, 2022).

White and black residents viewed the racial integration of New Orleans East through different lenses. For white residents, many felt that the introduction of Black residents meant the neighborhood was on its way down. A 1993 *Times-Picayune* years-long six-part series on race relationships in New Orleans titled “Together Apart: The Myth of Race” sheds light on the previous decade’s racial transition. A former resident who moved to the Northshore wrote the following on the East’s transformation:

I have found that one of our problems is that I used to live out in New Orleans East…I am white and things were pretty calm and peaceful there for approximately eight years that I lived out there. As times grew, or changed as I should say, I noticed the continued move-in by the blacks, and as I did, I continuously saw problems that I did not see when I had predominantly, if not a majority, of white people in the neighborhoods. I had my truck stolen, I had my house burglarized several times and I just saw no peace at all. And I wanted to move out of the city; in fact I moved to St.Tammany Parish to get away from the crime and what have you that the city represents (*The Times-Picayune*, 1993).

In response to the same *Times-Picayune* series, another resident stated on the intersection of race and class in New Orleans, “I don’t know, I think that people confuse being black with being poor. I don’t think there is as much prejudice against black people as…against poor people. It’s
just that black people just happen to be poor.” (The Times-Picayune, 1993). In contrast to how white families reacted to integration, many middle-class Blacks moving to Lake Forest felt conflicted and caught between assimilating into the white middle-class suburban lifestyle while maintaining ties to their old neighborhoods through work, families, friends, religious services, and social events. They remained mindful of the problems facing the city’s poorer Blacks, who could not flee the poverty and crime of the neighborhoods they themselves moved away from when they moved to The East.

The racial transition of New Orleans East also impacted local politics. A 1982 editorial titled “Focus on New Orleans East” written by Iris Kelso, a prominent and highly respected journalist for The Times-Picayune, reports that eastern N.O. would have a new City Council representative for the first time in 16 years. Then-Councilman Philip Ciacco resigned after multiple terms representing District E, which included the Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans East, and the Desire housing projects. Howard Beck, president of Lake Forest, Inc., served as interim City Council representative until the election. Keslo describes the N.O. East at the time as “an area that is developing [dramatically]…The housing industry may be at a standstill nationally, but not in eastern New Orleans. It looks like Jefferson Parish in the ’60s and ’70s” (The Times-Picayune, 1982). Kelso argues that New Orleans East’s development “certainly rivals in importance the building of the new hotels and office buildings in the Central Business District” while also deriding the downside, which “is that some of the apartment buildings are horrendously ugly. A few look like the slums of the future.” She writes:

‘The East’ has become the place to live for middle-class blacks, especially young business and professional couples. The sons and daughters of old Creole families from the Seventh Ward live there. So do the second generation of the families who built Pontchartrain Park, the first black middle-class subdivision. So it happens that the [voter] registration in District E, which includes the Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans East, and the Desire project, is now just a shade over 50%
black. Registration in Hickey’s assessment district is 54% black. And so it happens that seven blacks and six whites are seeking [Philip] Ciaccio’s council seat. Both Hickey’s opponents are black, with Wells, director of the city’s housing rehabilitation program, offering the most serious challenge (Kelso, 1982).

The implications for the 1982 elections – a new City Council representative and assessor – were not to be underestimated, as Keslo’s op-ed urges the reader to pay particular attention to these two races and what they mean for the city’s future growth. As the city became blacker and the suburbs whiter, city government began to reflect these demographic changes, with N.O. East exemplifying the city’s racial transition at large. That year, the race for District E came down to a white candidate, Wayne Babovich, and a Black candidate, Sherman Copelin. Copelin was a leader of the Southern Organization for Unified Leadership (SOUL), a prominent Black political organization based in the 9th Ward and New Orleans East, and was part of the professional Black migration to The East. Keslo concludes, “Even if you don’t live in the East, pay attention to what the candidates are saying. For they are talking about the future of New Orleans” (*The Times-Picayune*, 1982).

Babovich won the 1982 city council seat by 54%, compared to Copelin’s 46% (Massa 1982). Had Copelin won, it would have tipped the racial balance on the seven-member City Council, creating a majority-Black legislative branch for the first time. Babovich dramatically resigned three years into his term while under federal investigation for corruption. A federal grand jury found Babovich and former City Planning Commission member Nelson Chatelain guilty of violating zoning improprieties by pressuring landowners into selling land for healthcare facilities in eastern New Orleans. The two were also under a second investigation, along with former governor Edwin W. Edwards, involving racketeering and fraud charges over state approvals of healthcare facilities (McQuaid, 1985). Babovich pleaded guilty under a plea bargain
deal. In 1986, Johnny Jackson, Jr. – who was also a member of SOUL and was the third Black state legislator when elected as representative back in 1971 – won the election to replace Babovich on the City Council, becoming the first Black person to represent District E and eventually serving two terms.

The racial transition of New Orleans East accelerated following the oil crash as upper-middle-income whites who lost energy- and oil-related jobs fled neighborhoods in droves once they reached a racial "tipping point." Many interviewed residents defined the tipping point as a neighborhood reaching greater than fifty percent Black. The recession-linked white exodus of N.O. East, or as McDonald called it, “round two of white flight” occurred quickly, with white families of every socioeconomic status, from working and middle-class residents to wealthy white-collar professionals, moving out of New Orleans East (Rivlin 2015a). As these families moved out, middle-class and upper-income Blacks moved in, followed not soon after by working-class and poor Blacks during the recession and its aftermath. Rivlin (2015a) writes:

When the ratio of black-to-white households in a subdivision hit roughly 50-50, McDonald and others say, the white residents started to move away. There still remained black lawyers and accountants and junior executives commuting each morning to downtown office towers, but by the late 1990s, the East was a black community, and a prosperous African-American community is not always perceived the same way as a prosperous white one. The Plaza, the area’s upscale mall, became a dumping ground for clothes and other merchandise department stores couldn’t sell at their other outlets. Landlords started renting units to federally subsidized, low-income Section 8 tenants. Check cashers, payday lenders and dollar stores followed….Eventually, an area with nearly 100,000 residents was without a single white-tablecloth restaurant.

Urbanist Mickey Lauria (1998) analyzed housing foreclosures between 1985 and 1990 to better understand the racial transition of New Orleans East. Within those five years, 4,321 houses were sold at foreclosure in New Orleans; 1985 and 1986 both had less than 50 each, but the number of foreclosures rose to 247 in 1987 and then spiked to over 1,000 per year between 1988-
1990. Many of these homeowners had little equity in their homes and sold their houses at a loss – “outmovers” – which in turn opened a large inventory of affordable housing to the aspiring black middle-class – “inmovers” (Lauria, 1998). While the white population of New Orleans East decreased from 41,826 to 26,869 between 1980 and 1990, the Black population increased from 30,470 to 57,820 (Lauria, 1998). Thus, despite the net loss of whites who lost their jobs in the oil crash, Blacks made up for those losses, raising The East’s total population from 77,047 to 91,120 by 1990. In a related study, Lauria and Baxter’s (1999) findings indicated that housing foreclosure played a significant role in the racial succession of middle-class eastern N.O. neighborhoods. Lauria and Baxter (1999) write:

Economic shocks reduced home values, and that may well have interacted with negative racial stereotypes about the perceived effects of further racial integration on home values to accelerate the relocation decision of some white residents. Recession in the core of the local economy reduced housing prices and opened up declining middle-class suburbs (e.g., New Orleans East) to poorer people who, in New Orleans, were also black. Negative racial stereotypes were incited, and a segregated housing market already existed to intensify racial transition and the concentration of poverty (p. 778).

From 1987 to 1989, Liberty Bank posted three straight losses, the first in company history (Rivlin, 2015a). Yet, McDonald also realized an opportunity in the struggling economy – the steep fall in home prices made it possible for those who had not lost their jobs to afford the monthly payment on a home loan but couldn’t afford the down payment. Liberty experimented by offering loans for down payments as low as three percent. Liberty’s program “proved so effective at increasing black homeownership that officials from Fannie Mae, the government-backed mortgage company, brought McDonald to Washington so they could learn from his experience” (Rivlin, 2015a). Apartment complexes fared no better. By 1989, Lake Forest, Inc. started liquidating its properties “to gradually rid itself of more than 5,000 acres it once owned in New Orleans in the 1960s,” including listing the 17-year-old, 461-unit Lake Kenilworth
Apartments for $10 million (Plume, 1989). However, due to the one-two punch of the economic recession and the “flood of foreclosures in the residential market,” one out of every seven apartments in eastern New Orleans was for sale, amounting to 15% of the more than 9,000 apartment complexes in the area (Plume, 1989).

Anticipating that the effects of the oil crash would be short-lived, in 1985, then-President of Lake Forest, Inc., Donald Pate, announced plans for the most affluent planned community to be built in New Orleans East – Eastover Country Club (Appendix Q). Unlike Edgelake’s failed plans to build an upscale neighborhood for the wealthy in the 1920s, Eastover successfully came to fruition and remains the premier gated community in New Orleans East and one of the most exclusive gated communities in metropolitan New Orleans. Eastover Country Club is located off the Bullard Avenue exit and is bounded by Interstates 10 and 510, Dwyer Road, and Bullard Avenue. Originally proposed as “the Uptown of eastern New Orleans,” Eastover was initially pitched as a $750-million, 858-acre residential and commercial development with a mixture of 1,250 homes (about 590 single-family homes and the remaining 660 split among multi-family dwellings, villas, and townhouses), offices, tennis courses, a swimming pool, lagoons, and jogging and bicycle paths (Brumfield, 1985).

Long-term plans for Eastover comprised 250 acres each for housing, commercial, and open space. Housing would include several residential neighborhoods centered around many small lakes that ultimately would, as Pate stated, “...be a great help in keeping people in the city who might otherwise leave” (McQuaid, 1985). Eastover was designed “to help the city compete with surrounding parishes by offering country living in New Orleans” and was anticipated to contribute an estimated $1.3 billion to the city’s economy over two phases (Brumfield, 1985; The Times-Picayune, 1987a). After securing “the largest single rezoning in New Orleans history,”
Eastover broke ground in 1986 as “the largest planned residential community in Orleans Parish” (Pope, 1985; Young, 1987). One resident explained why she sought Eastover over Uptown – where she grew up – when she moved back to the city following graduate school. She settled in Little Woods in 1987 and moved into Eastover in 1996 because it offered “a diverse living environment that offered luxury, convenience, and a relaxing lifestyle of leisure.” She explains:

    Eastover represented a certain lifestyle and the American Dream. It was always my thought to want the white picket fence and big yards and natural beauty. Although I loved my home where I grew up Uptown, I still wanted to have the experience of the suburbs. And New Orleans East, especially Eastover, was a fresh and new environment. It was centrally convenient to everything, and all of that was very appealing at the time. And there was the shopping possibilities at Lake Forest Plaza Mall as opposed to Canal Street. I thought of Jefferson Parish, but somehow it just didn’t feel like me, and it didn’t fit my personality. [The East] was diverse and I like the thought of diversity because that’s the real world. It was kind of like the best of both worlds, suburbia within the confines of the city, but with the natural environment of lakes, woods, and green space. Moving to Eastover meant you could have it all (interview 1, April 13, 2022).

To guarantee profitability and a return on investment, Eastover instituted protective covenants, “something similar to a zoning ordinance that goes with the act of sale [to] assure the quality of the development” (The Times-Picayune, 1987b). All single-family residences were required to be a minimum of 3,000 square feet, and renderings needed to be reviewed and passed by an architectural review board. Additionally, realtors called Eastover’s walled protection the “foremost selling feature” for residents and potential buyers, providing literal and psychological safety that could not be bought in other neighborhoods in New Orleans East or the city (Mullener, 1993). Further illustrating the idea of psychological safety, the article states that “all guests must be approved by a security guard and accompanied by residents at the entrance gate,” giving credence to the statement that “there has never been a crime reported” in Eastover. Although crime was nonexistent within Eastover, the psychological buffer it provided to its residents was “paramount” to protecting their investment and providing tranquility, effectively
eliminating racial fears that the East typically experienced; residents “were thankful for the man at the gate” (Mullener, 1993).

Eastover held its grand opening in late 1987. One of the gated community’s biggest draws was its new 18-hole golf course. The 1989 Golf Digest Magazine named Eastover the best new private golf course in the country (The Times-Picayune, 1989). The par 72-course was designed by renowned golf course architect Joseph Lee, who built some of the country’s most exclusive golf courses, including Disney World (Young, 1987). Eastover’s golf course was the site of many PGA competitions, served as the home of the University of New Orleans golf team, and was chosen by the Louisiana Golf Association to become the premiere site for major championships in the state. Eastover also brought economic development to New Orleans East. Speculative investment along Bullard Avenue skyrocketed once the gated community broke ground. John. F. Schwegmann, owner of the local Schwegmann grocery chain, announced plans “on his single largest project – a 60-acre, $30 million shopping center-office development in eastern New Orleans to be known as Schwegmann Plaza East” to be located at Bullard Avenue and I-10 (Anderson, 1986). Banking on Eastover’s lure, the shopping center would include “six anchor stores, 12 moderate-sized stores, banks or restaurants, and about 100 small-store tenants spread over 15 buildings,” as well as a possible office complex (Anderson, 1986).

The recession of the 1980s inhibited the country club from meeting sales projections, selling only 78 lots in its first two years. In 1988, Tom Winingder replaced Donald Pate as President of Lake Forest, Inc. By the end of 1989, Lake Forest, Inc. was reporting a net loss of $3.4 million due to “sluggish cash flow” and a “weak local real estate market” (Plume, 1990). Eastover alone lost $1.5 million in 1989 and was expected to lose an additional $1.5 million the following year (Plume, 1990). By this time, Rockwood National Corp., the parent company of
Lake Forest, Inc., based in Jackson, Mississippi, had invested $33 million in developing the country club. Rockwood struggled to navigate the sluggish economy, and the company “began to sell smaller lots and houses, many priced below the $300,000 mark while continuing to push the larger homes and lots priced at $400,000 and higher” (Plume, 1990). The company additionally announced that they were slashing by 15% the average price in their Lake Bullard subdivision, also in N.O. East, next to Eastover. Boulard writes:

Eastover ran headfirst into Louisiana’s oil recession, which saw higher-priced real estate plunge as upper management and executive-level residents left the city in search of jobs elsewhere…That recession hit everyone hard. But it was particularly hard on developments like Eastover. We lost 66,000 jobs in two years in New Orleans, and it was the kind of loss that went from the bottom up—people who were in 60,000 homes couldn't buy houses at the $100,000 level, and people with $100,000 homes couldn’t sell their homes and move up to say, the $200,000 level. So the chain stopped; it broke up before it even got to Eastover (The Times-Picayune 1991).

In 1990 Rockwood hired a Los Angeles-based broker to find a joint-venture partnership for Eastover. Winingder announced that “an undisclosed portion” of Eastover would be partly sold to Dallas-based developers Club Corp. of America (Plume, 1990). After negotiations, Rockwood sold the country club for $2.2 million – less than a third of what they initially invested – to a buyout group called Eastover Properties, Inc., to be headed by Donald Pate. At the time of the sale, the housing market was in the early stages of a turnaround, and half of the lots for Phase I had been sold. As a sign of commitment to Eastover’s success, Eastover Properties, Inc. bought the remaining undeveloped lots for $4.9 million and was in early discussions to purchase the undeveloped lots of the second and third phases from Rockwood for $1.5 million. Although Eastover did not complete any commercial deals in 1988 or 1989, the company had closed commercial deals totaling $2 million in the first four months of 1990. Touting its proximity to Methodist and Humana Hospitals, the soon-to-open I-510 exchange, and
the 300 acres of undeveloped prime real estate on both sides of I-10 along Bullard Avenue, Winingder argued that Eastover had “finally turned around” (Plume, 1990).

As both an anomaly of predominantly Black New Orleans East neighborhoods and one of the most exclusive subdivisions in metro New Orleans, Eastover offers particularly keen insight into the nuanced functioning of race and class in New Orleans East. What made Eastover a sociological anomaly was not its racial segregation but rather its economic segregation. Early 1990s Eastover defied the American norm then, becoming one of, if not the only, affluent interracial gated communities in The United States. So unique a case study was Eastover that The Times-Picayune featured the private country club as its own feature story in 1993 “Together Apart: The Myth of Race” series referenced earlier. The newspaper series reveals that the first three families to move into the gated community were wealthy white, Black, and Asian families, highlighting Eastover’s economic, rather than racial, segregation from the surrounding neighborhoods. Mullener (1993) vividly illustrates the private country club community:

Inside, 60 houses are sprinkled sparingly over the satin-smooth private streets, some of them lined up on the winding main road, some of them tucked away in cobblestoned cul-de-sacs. Each house backs either onto the golf course or onto a lagoon with a sprouting fountain. In and around the houses, the woods are lush and dense…The houses, all of them still in the blush of newness, are set back at a stately distance from the road to allow for generous front lawns. The average house has about 4,300 square feet and is valued at about $325,000. The average lot is about a third of an acre…What makes Eastover different from all the other walled country-club communities that are springing up across the nation is its racial mix: 45 percent black, 45 percent white, and 10 percent Asian. And it’s been that way from the get-go. This is not a neighborhood in transition, on its way from white to black. This is not a neighborhood divided, with one section for black people and another for white. These are not people who are stuck, would like to get out but can’t. These are not idealists, determined to prove a point or forge a utopia. This is a neighborhood where people with all the choices in the world have made a choice to live together. And among country club communities, it may be unique in all America.
Eastover Residents interviewed for the series reveal a fascinating insight into the atypical interracial dynamics behind the gated walls. Some residents interviewed had heard stories of “people [who said] they’d like to move to Eastover but didn’t because there were too many black people,” but, as one Black resident bluntly put it, “It’s a money issue. Black people with money and white people with money have a lot in common. At Eastover, black and white people know each other, and so the walls come tumbling down. You have walls on the outside instead of the inside” (Mullener, 1993). One resident, who the newspaper describes as one-half of “a white couple with a thriving engineering firm on Bullard Avenue [who are] conservative Republicans,” stated matter of factly:

It’s not like we were in a white neighborhood and black people started moving in. We knew there were black people there and we knew there were going to be more black people there. We moved into Eastover for the security of it, the beauty of it, the convenience of it. There is a form of segregation at Eastover. It’s economic segregation. You’ve got to be able to afford to buy a lot.

Another resident, a Black dentist in his early 40s at the time, shared his perspective:

To me, it just seems normal. All the kids are always over at each other’s houses. A white family lives across the street from us, and our kids are always there…I think it’s good for their self-esteem and competitive drive to live in an integrated environment. It helps them understand that everyone isn't prejudiced…And that helps them to intermingle, interact, to cope with interracial situations, to broaden their contacts with a variety of individuals.

A third resident, a 47-year-old Vietnamese-American doctor who was building a new house in Eastover at the time, shared a third point of view:

I feel more comfortable with a mix than just one race. I don’t want it all black or all white—or all Vietnamese, either. Because with a mix, when people look at you, they have no strange feelings. When you are the only one, the uncommon species, people are curious about that. It makes you not have privacy. It’s an invasion. Mixed is better.
Adding a level of legitimacy to Eastover as a distinctive sociological case study is the fact that The Times-Picayune interviewed prominent scholars in sociology and urban studies at the time, including Douglass Massey at The University of Pennsylvania and Kenneth Jackson, who back then was a Professor of Urban History at Columbia University. Jackson is considered the preeminent scholar on the history of U.S. suburbanization, having published Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States in 1985. In describing Eastover, Jackson declares, “I have never heard of a walled community that was so integrated. Until now, blacks have not had those options, even when they had the money. So it’s a positive thing that the residents of this community have looked beyond that. In the end, African-Americans are going to be accepted for the color of their money.” (Mullener, 1993). Dowell Myers, a professor of urban planning at The University of Southern California, was also interviewed. Analyzing Eastover, Myers stated, “Color itself is virtually meaningless, but it’s associated with characteristics. White people are afraid of racial integration when they see it as an indicator of decline. The higher the house prices, the less worried white people are about integration” (Mullener, 1993). Douglas Massey added, “One of the reasons integrated neighborhoods are unstable is because white people fear they’ll become a minority. But if these houses are in the upper 10 percent of the market, neighborhood changeover is not likely” (Mullener, 1993).

When The Times-Picayune series was released, Eastover was six years old and overcoming its initial struggles from opening at the tail end of the recession. In that time, “only five or six” of the total 60 houses built had been resold, “and all of those appreciated in value” (Mullener, 1993). While unique in many regards, Eastover emerged when gated communities were increasing nationwide. Jackson described them as “the next stage of suburbanization,” stating, “It’s almost as if you’ve come across a medieval city, but it’s made up of only the
comfortable and affluent. We’ve had invisible walls for a long time. Between New Orleans and Jefferson Parish is an invisible wall. Everybody knows it’s there but you can’t see it. Now we’re putting real walls where invisible walls aren’t good enough anymore” (Mullener, 1993). During this period, other gated communities were opening around the metropolitan area, including Stonebridge Country Club in Gretna, English Turn in Algiers, and Beau Chêne in Mandeville. The article ends with a relevant question for this research study: “So is Eastover a fluke or is it the future? Does it portend something about the way people will group themselves in the 21st century – by social class rather than race?” (Mullener, 1993). Kenneth Jackson speculates:

I hope it’s the future. But it’s hard to predict it is, considering that it’s so much at variance with the American experience right now. Residential integration is critical. Without it, Americans will never come together as one people. As long as we're separated geographically, we’ll never be a healthy society…Being neighbors helps us to see one another as individuals and human beings…Ultimately that leads to greater tolerance and greater understanding and greater harmony (Mullener 1993).

Has Eastover maintained racial integration decades later? The answer is no – white people have nearly completely moved out, accounting for less than 3% of the population, a striking statistic that underscores The East’s pronounced racial transition. According to the 2020 Census, Lake Forest and Eastover combined – Census Tract 17.47 with a population of 3,599 residents and 1,523 households – are 1.7% white, 72.4% Black, 21.5% Asian, 2.1% Hispanic, 3.3% two or more races, and 1.0% some other race. No longer the uniquely racially integrated community it once was, Eastover Country Club, like the rest of New Orleans East, is now majority Black with a sizable Asian population that has grown steadily. Still, this area is where New Orleans East’s wealthy residents concentrate. Officially part of the Read Boulevard East neighborhood, Census Tract 17.47 has the highest concentration of homeownership rates (93.4% vs. 48% citywide), median household income ($86,886 vs. $45,594 citywide), average household
income ($103,223 vs. $76,715), median family income ($132,125 vs. $67,602), and average family income ($136,979 vs. $104,894) in New Orleans East (Social Explorer). Primary commercial corridors include Lake Forest Boulevard, Bullard Avenue, and Read Boulevard, but driving down these streets reveals a glaring paradox eighteen years after Katrina: owner-occupied, middle class and upscale gated communities surrounded by shuttered strip malls, overgrown lots, and unkempt neutral grounds. Residents have money to spend, but the deteriorated landscape indicates otherwise. As one member declared during an interview:

If Lake Forest Estates and Eastover Country Club were white, Read, Bullard, and Lake Forest Boulevard would not look the way they do. We can’t even get a Rouse’s [grocery store] out here. All this coded language is no longer rational. I’ve tried to rationalize this every which way, and I can’t seem to come to any other conclusion why we are held hostage when it comes to development out here. Perception is trumping reality for these people, and this is what has sunk into their subconsciousness when they think about The East. It’s like I want to tell these companies that keep bypassing us: I’m not going to change your mind, but what I can do is speak to you in dollars, and we have a lot of dollars we want to spend…in our community, not Metairie, Uptown, or Slidell. Let’s just call it what it is – this is redlining in another form, all this disinvestment. History is repeating itself; think about Black Wall Street in Tulsa and Tremé back in the 1960s. Now don’t get me wrong, I blame us to a certain extent because we need to change our own mindset about our community and not bash it on social media. I recognize we spend our money elsewhere, but we don’t have a choice but to leave this area. This is deliberate and by design, and I’m mad (interview 5, June 10, 2023).

LAKE FOREST PLAZA MALL

“Lake Forest Plaza is Opening Today”
–The Times-Picayune headline, Thursday, October 18, 1973

Central to the Lake Forest planned suburb would be commercial development along Read Boulevard between I-10 and Lake Forest Boulevard. Designated the “downtown” and “town center,” I-10 and Read Boulevard became the site of Lake Forest Plaza Mall, a $40 million, one-million square foot regional shopping mall that opened on September 19, 1974. Schneider (1974)
writes, “Here lies a growing medical complex spawned by the Methodist Hospital and cropping up banks, savings and loans, office buildings, and a new hotel along I-10. Also on Read are the public library and fire and police stations. It’s downtown for Lake Forest.” (The Times-Picayune). Original plans had the mall located at Michoud Boulevard and I-10, but developers ultimately decided to place the mall next door to Lake Forest Estates. As white flight hastened from the city into the suburbs, the Canal Street department stores, such as Godchaux’s (1840-1986), D.H. Holmes (1842-1989), and Maison Blanche (1897-1988), followed suit by opening new anchor stores in the enclosed malls. When it first opened, Lake Forest Plaza was a more modern, even experimental, mall compared to the older ones of Jefferson Parish. A news story titled “Maison Blanche’s Largest Suburban Store Opens Today in Lake Forest Plaza,” describes how Sears and Maison Blanche closed in the Gentilly Woods Shopping Center to relocate into the massive new mall in New Orleans East (Range, 1974).

Lake Forest Plaza was a big draw not just for New Orleans East but regionally, and long-time residents and members of New Orleans East Matters fondly recall the mall, longing for the role it played as an economic powerhouse in the city and New Orleans East. It was marketed as the “largest enclosed mall shopping center in the Mid-South” and included 130 stores, several sit-down restaurants, Plaza Cinema 4, and an enormously popular ice skating rink at the center of its four-leaf clover design (Appendix R, S, & T). The mall opened to significant fanfare from city leaders, state officials, and even celebrities, including several soap opera stars at the time, the Sesame Street muppets, and second-season cast members of “Saturday Night Live” John

---

9 Lakeside Shopping Center opened in Metairie in 1960, and Oakwood Mall opened across the river on the West Bank in 1966.
10Morrison’s Cafeteria, a popular New Orleans cafeteria restaurant, opened at Lake Forest Plaza Mall in 1975. Piccadilly, another cafeteria chain based in Baton Rouge bought Morrison's in 1998 for $46 million. By 2001, the only remaining local Morrison’s was at Lake Forest Plaza (Price, 2018). As of 2023, New Orleans East Matters Coalition has been petitioning to get Piccadilly to open in N.O. East.
Belushi, Gilda Radner, and Bill Murray when they were in town for Mardi Gras 1977. Lake Forest Plaza Mall soon became a destination in and of itself, and by 1980, the mall was so prosperous that it accounted for 25% of the city’s sales tax revenue (Thomas, 2003a). Scott describes Lake Forest Plaza’s heyday: “From the beginning, the Plaza was envisioned as more than just a shopping center. It was also envisioned as a catalyst for residential development in the city's eastern suburbs...subdivisions and apartment complexes sprung up all around it. The Executive Plaza office tower went up across the street” (The Times-Picayune, 2017).

The late 1980s and 1990s marked a dramatic transformation for Lake Forest Plaza Mall as it fell victim to the economic fallout of the oil crash. The mall declined as stores shuttered, department store quality sharply decreased, and crime increased. Rising crime – or the perception of it – became a growing problem for the mall. In early 1984, a teenager was shot in the mall’s arcade, and in 1987, a Sears security guard director was shot and killed by two men. The security guard’s family filed a $10 million lawsuit in Civil District Court, which noted “knowledge of an increasing and alarming crime rate at the shopping center” (Finch, 1988). Gradually, Lake Forest lost clientele and stores to other newer malls, such as Belle Promenade on the West Bank (1983) and The Esplanade Mall in Kenner (1985). To prevent any further decline, remain competitive, and draw customers back in, developers remodeled the mall by the decade’s end, replacing the ice skating rink with a food court, updating the 1970s interior, opening a new Mervyn’s department store, and rebranding as “The Plaza.” By 1990, around 90 percent of the mall was leased, including the four-screen cinema and its four anchor department stores: Maison Blanche, Sears, Mervyn's, and Dillard’s (which acquired D.H. Holmes in 1989). The late ’80s and early ’90s were the last of the Plaza’s good days as many of the mall’s original tenants closed or went out of business.
Residents interviewed discussed what they described as the forced decline of Lake Forest Plaza Mall compared to other shopping centers in the metro area. Over time, unlike other mall locations, Lake Forest’s department stores became designated collection sites of marked-down and lower-quality merchandise. Sears opened “The Last Stop Shop,” and Maison Blanche introduced the “Finale Shop,” which was described as where “items accumulated at all MB and Godchaux’s stores are sent to be sold quickly and inexpensively” and “merchandise is from broken assortments, but all first-quality goods, normally found at the [other] department stores” (Covert, 1984). In 1993, Sears announced it was closing its location at the Plaza, dealing a “serious blow to the comeback of the retail and office markets in eastern New Orleans,” as the city began to recover from the oil crash (King, 1993). Worried, The New Orleans East Economic Development Foundation (NOEEDF) hired ADV Associates in 1996 to study retail trends in The East. NOEEDF formed a Retailing Committee “to encourage a broader shopping experience in eastern New Orleans…[and] to discuss ways to encourage more residents of the area to shop near their homes” (Miller, 1996a). The report’s findings indicated that despite the data showing “household income levels in the area are solidly middle class, a sign of development potential,” New Orleans East was, paradoxically, in a state of economic decline, and “the biggest problem it faces is [its] deteriorating public image” (Miller, 1997b). The study indicated four explanations, sometimes with coded language: 1) retailers in The East were losing customers because of a lack of merchandise variety; 2) many area residents traveled elsewhere to shop because they believed stores in The East either catered to “younger shoppers” or lower-priced clothing lines; 3) expensive clothing lines were not selling well at stores; and 4) residents and consumers had perceptions of crime, “although crime rates in the area are below those in some other parts of the city” (Miller, 1996d). The study suggested three solutions: 1) to develop a “restaurant row” to
draw family and upscale dining establishments; 2) to build an office park near the Plaza; and 3) to prioritize family recreational venues to attract new businesses.

When Dillard’s announced it would close its Plaza location in 1996, a public battle ensued, with Mayor Morial pleading with the department store not to shutter its last remaining store in Orleans Parish. Morial criticized the closing, stating, “There’s been an emerging renaissance in New Orleans East” (Jensen, 1996). Dillard’s responded that they were losing money because of the surrounding area’s perception as crime-ridden and declining. A task force was then created that included Mayor Morial, the city’s Chief Administrative Officer Marlin Gusman, City Councilwoman Ellen Hazeur-Distance, and Senator Jon Johnson “to take any and all actions necessary” to keep Dillard’s open, whose economic value to the city at the time was estimated at $23 million annually (Jensen, 1996; Miller, 1997a). Morial sharply criticized Dillard’s for deliberately allowing the store to deteriorate over the years, saying, “These neglectful strategies, which I believe are tantamount to redlining, included poor quality merchandise, skeletal staff, inadequate creative marketing, and other such tactics which led to the purposeful decline of Dillard’s New Orleans East store” (King, 1998). Shortly after Dillard’s shuttered, Mervyn’s and the original cinema closed. By 1999, Maison Blanche closed, but Dillard’s relocated and took over the space, reestablishing its presence at The Plaza and becoming the last and only anchor.

In the years leading up to Hurricane Katrina, the Plaza Mall became a conspicuous eyesore along I-10 that city leaders and residents of the East desperately wanted to return to commerce. The Plaza’s decline proved irreversible, and it became a shell of its former glory days, leaving behind massive, empty buildings and weed-ridden parking lots. In 1999, Metairie real estate investor Gowri Kailas formed Lake Forest Plaza, LLC and bought the mall for $8.6
million with aspirations to invest $40-$50 million in redeveloping the site into a mixed-use facility that would “lead to a revitalization in the eastern part of the city” (Judice, 1999). Kailas was known in the local real estate industry as a bold investor with a track record of turning around troubled office buildings and vacant shopping centers. At the time, he also owned Executive Plaza on Lake Forest Boulevard across from the mall and several properties downtown. Other Lake Forest Plaza, LLC members included wealthy local developer Joseph Canizaro, chairman of First Bank and Trust, and Alden McDonald, Jr., President and CEO of Liberty Bank. Both banks had enormous stakes in the mall’s success. Kailas took out a high-interest, six-month loan from First Bank and Trust to leverage additional capital or land large tenants lest the bank forecloses on the property. McDonald worked with eastern business owners for years to fight the area’s stigma and champion its potential. Rivlin (2015) writes:

> On Wednesday nights in the early 2000s, local residents gathered in a Liberty Bank conference room to talk about fighting back against the decline. McDonald thought his role would be that of host, but he often ended up playing ambassador. He would meet with businesses to try to attract them to the East, armed with a study funded by the bank showing that there was more discretionary income in the East than any place outside Uptown. (Another Liberty-funded study revealed the challenge he faced: The area was home to 40 percent of the city’s Section 8 housing.) ‘We were very close to getting some national restaurants out there,’” McDonald says. ‘’Then Katrina hit’’ (The New York Times, 2015a).

The same year Kalais purchased the Plaza, the New Orleans City Planning Commission released the “New Orleans Land Use Plan: New Century New Orleans,” a comprehensive master land use plan to guide the city’s economic and residential growth in the new millennium. The plan reiterated that the potential for the East was there but that its main obstacle was perception. Key findings indicated that despite being considered “the logical growth corridor of the City,” blight, specifically low-quality apartment complexes and vacant commercial centers, function as “the conditions [that] contribute to the negative images of New Orleans East as a whole” (New
Orleans Land Use Plan, 1999, p. 220). Their recommendations placed the onus on the city to launch a rebranding campaign to fight the East’s stigma and to invest in a large-scale revitalization to attract residents, business owners, and development. The report states:

The city’s only regional commercial center outside of the downtown area is located in this planning district (The Plaza Shopping Center). New Orleans East contains the largest concentration and largest total available land for industrial development in the city, and most of it is served by all forms of transportation infrastructure…No other area of the city has as much acreage devoted to natural and recreational use…None of the three [planning districts] experienced as great a population decline as that of [the rest of] the city…and household income remains above the city’s average. Nonetheless, all three districts have experienced some areas of residential or commercial decline and, since several of these areas are along the I-10 corridor and highly visible, the passing visual impression is more negative than statistics and the actual development activities indicate (p. 219).

The stakes to redevelop The Plaza were high. Thomas (1999) writes, “The Plaza represents more than just a risky deal for Kailas. A turnaround at the 1.1 million-square-foot shopping center could change the badly bruised economic reputation of eastern New Orleans” (The Times-Picayune). Two proposals emerged immediately but failed to materialize – a $10 million 14-screen Magic Johnson Theatre and a 120,000 square-foot expansion of Pendleton Memorial Methodist Hospital. In 2001, developers for the Magic Johnson Theatre project backed out, and the AMC Palace Theatre announced it would open, only to fall through as well. A third attempt at opening a movie theater succeeded in 2002 when Kailas opened the $10 million 12-screen Grand Theatre at the former Sears in an effort “to bring economic revitalization and returning buying power to New Orleans East” and a “resurgence of first-class efforts to return to its former glory” (Miller, 2002a). The theater, half of which was financed through a HUD loan administered through the city, was never really profitable and fell into debt, fueling speculation that nothing economically viable could make it at The Plaza. Two months before Katrina, the theater was struggling so much that City Council, at the urging of then-Mayor Ray Nagin,
approved a cooperative endeavor agreement under which the city would loan the theater $1 million in federal Urban Development Action Grant money.

In 2003, two local management consultants and the Urban Land Institute (ULI) released the findings of a $300,000 study funded by the state legislature titled “New Orleans East Comprehensive Plan for Economic Development.” The study included a three-day survey and tour of N.O. East and interviews with local politicians, merchants, bankers, and community members. The report confirmed what many suspected for years – a mismatch between the demographic data and New Orleans East’s perception. Thomas (2003a) writes, “Eastern New Orleans’ image has been bruised over the years, but a recent study says the area’s demographics will support retailers at a reconfigured Lake Forest Plaza Mall” (The Times-Picayune). The study recommended demolishing 800,000 of the 1.2 million square feet of the outdated Plaza Mall, referring to it as “the main impediment to the rebirth of the east…The mere sight of an underused mall in a conspicuous site can be off-putting” (Thomas, 2003a; Appendix U). In its place, the study advised building a new-urbanism mixed-use development, including commercial, office, and civic tenants.

Reiterating the need for Read Boulevard and I-10 to function as “a town center” and “the actual and symbolic heart of the new downtown for New Orleans East,” the ULI study concluded that if a comprehensive, planned redevelopment of The Plaza took place, then The East could reverse its decline and poor outside perception, leading to the area’s renaissance. Kailas was reluctant to demolish the mall as he clung to the idea that it could be saved rather than razed (Appendix U). He envisioned turning the mall “inside out” and creating the “New Orleans Retail, Sports, and Entertainment Center” by having the storefronts redesigned and face outward. Kailas floated many ideas: a movie and video production studio, an IKEA, a hotel, a health and fitness
complex, and big-box development that required large lands, of which “the Plaza is one of few sites meeting that standard in the area’s land-starved market” (Thomas, 2003a). He also offered to donate part of the land to build a practice and training facility for the newly recruited Hornets professional basketball team.

In one last-ditch attempt to redevelop the Plaza, Kailas lobbied the state legislature in 2003 to turn the mall into a tax increment financing (TIF) district, a designation that would characterize The Plaza and the surrounding area as an “urban renewal district,” allowing local taxing bodies to jointly raise the necessary capital for redevelopment and revitalizing the area by diverting future property tax revenue to stimulate private investment. In turn, financing for public infrastructure improvements would come from using anticipated tax dollars for targeted development. Although Kailas got approval from state legislators, Mayor Nagin and City Council refused to approve the district’s creation unless Kailas reached a level of investment that would meet 75% of the redevelopment cost. Kailas was unsuccessful at securing the necessary capital, and the mall continued to deteriorate as thousands drove past it along I-10. The Plaza’s revitalization never materialized, and Hurricane Katrina flooded the mall just months later.

The 1970s up until the mid-1980s was, by all accounts, the heyday of eastern New Orleans, which experienced tremendous population growth and saw a suburban building boom of neighborhoods, strip malls, office parks, and a thriving Lake Forest Plaza Mall as the rest of the parish lost population. However, N.O. East’s prime was short-lived and never quite lived up to the lucrative potential that developers and city leaders boldly envisioned. Following the 1980s oil crash and savings and loan crisis, New Orleans East dramatically transformed into a suburban landscape that little resembled the grandiose city-within-a-city first proposed decades prior. Many developers left behind fragments of half-built streets and subdivisions, and with an
absence of effective zoning, planned suburban development of the area ceased. Buyers scooped up properties at bargain prices and “built a rag-tag-and-bobtail assemblage of cheap houses, apartments, and strip-commercial buildings, a far cry from the original scheme” (Lewis, 2003, 81). Three simultaneous urban processes characterized this period of New Orleans East: rapid white flight to the Northshore, the accelerated repopulation of subdivisions by upwardly mobile middle-class Black families, and an influx of poor Black residents to the numerous section-8 apartment complexes along I-10. The end of the 1980s signified how race, class, and economic conditions combined to drive The East’s perception that created the building blocks for steady disinvestment over the coming decades. What would ensue are countless plans of revitalization that, tried as they might, repeatedly failed to fulfill the promise of creating a flourishing city-within-city and instead lead to the creation of an economic, geographic, and psychological marginalization of New Orleans East from the rest of the city.

The next chapter describes the decline of The East in the 1990s as the suburb became majority-Black, demonstrating how a significant obstacle to reviving New Orleans East was the ingrained negative stigma and perception it held among metro area residents, despite data to the contrary. To combat the area’s pronounced decline, city leaders and developers embarked on several initiatives to bring about the area’s renaissance. These proposed developments played out in the public arena for years and were, to various degrees, the subject of controversies and political infighting, criticized for endless delays and lack of funding. The proposals included: 1) the rehabilitation of dilapidated apartments along I-10 accompanied by a plan to limit the spread of subsidized housing in The East; 2) the rebranding of the Almonaster-Michoud Industrial District (A-MID) that included a failed plan to build an auto speedway; 3) a broken promise to locate the New Orleans Hornets professional basketball team’s practice and training facility in
the East; and 4) the opening and eventual bankruptcy of Jazzland Amusement Park, which was then rebranded into Six Flags. The fifth and most tangible of the proposals to revitalize N.O. East was the city’s adoption in 2004 of the “New Orleans East Renaissance Plan,” which sought to create a “downtown” core area by redeveloping the Plaza Mall into a mixed-use development with civic and commercial land uses. Ultimately, none of these plans would materialize because of Hurricane Katrina in August 2005.

CHAPTER 5: “THE EAST”

“Image Burnished for Eastern N.O.”
–The Times-Picayune headline, Sunday, May 18, 1997

New Orleans East’s image of decline has become deeply ingrained in the minds of New Orleanians since the oil crash and subsequent racial tipping of N.O. East neighborhoods throughout the 1980s. Once the East fell victim to the deleterious effects of recession and a depressed housing market, the area never fully recovered. The stigma of The East deepened during the 1990s and carried over into the new millennium. A resident of N.O. East powerfully summarized the area’s downturn:

Around the early 90s, things started changing. You started to notice the area’s decline and the lifestyle it represented. There was an influx of a concentration of development that was multi-family housing that came into the area, and the oil industry bottomed as well – this was all happening simultaneously, and we became inundated with an undesirable population when the city hauled poverty out of the inner-city and steered them to the East because we had the land. And we all know what happens then – poverty generates crime. I don’t say that to be condescending; it’s just truthful. And the political powers that beat the time were making decisions that were not in the best interest of the suburbs of the East. It
became the, oh, we can move everybody out of the inner-city…out there, and get rid of the undesirables, if you will, because of the changing population like gentrification, old St. Charles Avenue money, the downtown offices. And they picked the East because it had the land. The quality of life, of housing, went down. I believe it was because more African Americans had a sense of wealth and leisure. There was an envy to it to a large extent. And I think that, as opposed to capitalizing and continuing to capitalize on the sales-tax volume that existed, they chose to put everybody concentrated of a certain racial group in an open area. So, developers began to get tax credits and all these things for housing, and it didn’t matter what kind of quality, or lack thereof, was the housing. It became a hodgepodge, a greed of federal dollars that were earmarked for housing. Now, I don’t think it was ever supposed to be substandard, poor, or unmaintained, but when you have out-of-state folks who do not have a vested interest in living in a community other than just the dollars, and they figure the more people I can get piled into this highrise, the more density, the more money I can get – sure money. (interview 10, August 11, 2022).

To combat New Orleans East’s decline, local and state leaders founded the New Orleans East Economic Development Foundation, Inc. (NOEEDF) in 1989 to stimulate economic and workforce development. NOEEDF was the product and vision of then-state Senator Jon Johnson, City Councilman Johnny Jackson, Jr., and local area businessmen Joe Wink and Sam Scandaliato. Between 1989 and 1995, NOEEDF held the New Orleans East Extravaganza at prominent sites to promote the area. In 1993, NOEEDF launched the “Image Steering Committee” to focus exclusively on imaging and rebranding New Orleans East (Figure 54). NOEEDF President Don Pellisier stated, “This dance of self-image and the perception of others has been an on-going problem with eastern New Orleans residents” (Bergeron, 1994b). In another interview, he reiterated, “We fight an unjust negative image problem all the time. The stereotype is that only poor people live here amidst high crime, but actually, income demographics prove that east of Read Boulevard, average household income is at least $40,000 and that’s great” (Miller, 1996c). Pellisier “made it the goal of his presidency to spread the word that the East has been given a bad rap…[especially from] real estate agents from Kenner and Metairie who warn people looking at houses not to move to eastern New Orleans” (Clayton,
Dale Tynes, who moved to N.O. East in 1963 and who later became President of NOEEDF, stated:

We also [as a committee] had strong feelings that the appearance of New Orleans East is important not only to residents but to tourists as well. Thus, a beautification committee was formed to clean up the area...Our priority this year will be our image and promotional aspect of New Orleans East...We feel the negative publicity we get is not appropriate. The figures and facts do not support that we are any more crime-ridden than other parts of the city.' said Tynes, who insists there is a major discrepancy between the reality of life in eastern New Orleans and the area’s perceived image” (Bergeron, 1994a).

NOEEDF’s Image Steering Committee launched a rebranding campaign that focused heavily on the beautification of New Orleans East, coordinating a two-pronged approach focused on the interstate and The East’s major commercial corridors. One of the committee’s first initiatives was establishing the New Orleans Visitor Information Center in 1994 on Paris Road near the junction of I-10 and I-510. Signs promoting the center were erected along I-10 in partnership with the city’s tourism industry, and the center focused on attractions in New Orleans East. One of the committee’s most effective programs included the Clean & Green project, which focused on intersection litter, such as “the eyesore off Crowder Road and Lake Forest Boulevard Intersection” (Bergeron, 1994b). Using their own money and donations, committee members placed 30-gallon Clean & Green trash cans throughout New Orleans East to combat the area’s widespread and overt “city neglect” (Bergeron, 1994b).

The clean-up of Interstate 10 was the chief concern for NOEEDF. The organization partnered with the state to clean up and landscape I-10 between Read Boulevard and Crowder Boulevard and with area businesses as corporate sponsors that privately funded the maintenance of intersections and interstate exits. The Bullard and I-10 intersection was funded by Shell Oil, Schweggman’s, Eastover Corp., and Lakeland Medical Center; Read and I-10 was maintained by Methodist Hospital; and Crowder and I-10 was adopted by Exxon Corporation and Chevron
Another major endeavor to clean up The East’s image involved the state transportation department, who, through the use of federal funds, led a multi-million dollar beautification of the I-10 neutral ground dubbed “Gateway to New Orleans/Gateway to Louisiana,” which in turn would be managed by the Regional Planning Commission (Williams, 2002). Then-Governor Mike Foster’s wife, Alice Foster, touted the project’s importance by stating how I-10 in N.O. East “is the first impression visitors see when driving into the city, and these improvements will encourage businesses to relocate” (Hernandez, 2003).

The revitalization of Chef Menteur Highway was another critical priority for NOEDF. During the 1990s, they spearheaded the Revitalize the Chef (RTC) program, for which nearly 40 businesses on Chef Highway each paid $120 a year to keep the grass in the median cut in order to “improve the highway’s appearance…[and] become attractive to businesses again” (Warner, 1994b). The state department resurfaced Chef Menteur Highway, and the city declared a two-mile stretch where Old Gentilly Road meets Chef Highway as an “enterprise zone, which offers certain tax advantages to areas that clean, improve, and maintain their properties. Enterprise zones also qualify for loans up to $50,000 at three percent interest” (Greenberg, 1997). However, momentum waned, prostitution – an ongoing and recurring problem as the highway started going downhill once I-10 opened in the 1970s – resurged, and Chef was once again “neglect[ed] by government agencies,” perpetuating its stigmatized image as “a quirky hodgepodge, a stretch of car repair shops and trucking yards, empty lots, convenience stores and struggling motels… abandoned, blight buildings and a few massage parlors… along with a few churches and homes at the edge of residential subdivisions” (Warner, 1994b). In 2001, efforts were again underway to clean up Chef Menteur Highway – its trash and image – when neighbors and businesses formed a merchants association. The city planted over 200 trees on the neutral ground between Peoples
Avenue and Read Boulevard and successfully transferred its grass maintenance from the state, which had performed “poorly,” to the Department of Parks and Parkways (Russell, 2001). Other clean-up undertakings came from religious organizations such as St. Paul the Apostle Church and All Congregations Together, who partnered to fight the drugs and prostitution that frequently occurred at the many motels along the highway (Warner, 1994b).

In addition to NOEEDF, another group integral to reviving New Orleans East was “United Neighborhoods in The East” (UNITE), which formed in 1994 “to fight an image problem that seems to plague eastern New Orleans” (Warner, 1994a). While many residents “concede[d] that the area’s housing market was battered in the wake of the oil bust, and that many families moved away as crime increased…[they] have had their fill of criticism…sick and tired of everybody being down on New Orleans East. You hear the negatives. You never hear the positives” (Warner, 1994a). The group aimed to “impress area businesses and elected officials with the importance of presenting a clean, beautiful front” to attract investment (Bergeron, 1994b). UNITE publicly declared that its top priority was to address problems connected with subsidized housing. Then-President of UNITE, Don Stansbury, stated, “That’s the top problem according to most New Orleans East residents. Some of our once-luxury apartment complexes have literally been trashed just in the last few years” (Laun, 1994). Apartment complexes that “were the hippest places to be” in the 1970s “became the crack dens of the late 1980s” that were owned by out-of-state slumlords who cared little about the community and attracted an undesirable population antithetical to the suburban way of life the middle class sought in moving eastward (Thomas, 2001).

The never-ending debates over the inordinate amount of subsidized apartments in New Orleans East date back to the oil crash of the 1980s. In 1990, The United States Department of
Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) launched a plan in 1990 to convert apartment complexes into subsidized housing for a maximum of three-year leases. HUD and HANO disproportionately targeted N.O. East for housing vouchers over other parts of the city because of the area’s exceptionally high number of foreclosed properties. Several apartments were rehabilitated as part of this plan. Examples of significant projects during the decade included Volunteers of America renovating five of the larger apartment complexes to expand affordable housing in the city; the transformation of Gulfway Terrace and Convent Towers into affordable senior living; and the renovations of The Willows, Lakewind East, and Wind Run into mixed-income housing. Notwithstanding, N.O. East residents, particularly homeowners, remained skeptical. Nancy Ramsey, then-director of the city’s apartment rehabilitation program, addressed residents’ concerns, saying, “They thought we were going to be taking people from the projects and moving them into the apartments. That’s not true. Our residents must be employed and have income” (Foster, 1995b). Nonetheless, residents voiced loud opposition. Treadway (1989) explains:

A proposal to sell and renovate the 400-unit Wind Run apartment complex has sparked an intense debate among eastern New Orleans residents…At the heart of the controversy is a disagreement over whether the proposal will mean more or fewer subsidized renters in the area. There is a general agreement, however, on trying to discourage the flow of tenants with federal rental subsidies to eastern New Orleans…Residents say subsidized tenants, who often come from housing projects, tend to bring crime, trash, and noise with them (The Times-Picayune).

The scattered proliferation of lower-income housing over time outnumbered mid- and higher-range single-family housing, and because a large number of Section 8 was located “in the most visible locations in The East,” it created a false perception that all of New Orleans East was impoverished. Neighborhood organizations and civic groups repeatedly and vigorously opposed federally subsidized housing in N.O. East, decrying how they were discriminatorily burdened.
compared to the rest of the city. Bridges writes, “State Sen. Jon D. Johnson said many of his constituents in eastern New Orleans have complained that the crime and drugs they hoped to leave behind in the inner city have followed them” (*The Times-Picayune*, 1991b). Homeowners of the area’s more upscale subdivisions were angered when city officials rezoned I-10 and portions of Chef Menteur Highway for multi-family and federally-subsidized housing, which paved the way for a massive influx of former public housing residents into The East. During the 1990s, State Representative Cynthia Willard-Lewis made Section 8 housing a focal point of her election campaign. She stated:

We do need to provide affordable housing for lower-income families, but it should be spread out. Section 8 housing should be available throughout the city and not focused on one pocket or another. There are a disproportionate number in New Orleans East and Algiers. What happens is the tenants become victims. They are forced to live in substandard housing and the neighborhood becomes blighted by the structures. People feel very strongly about this in New Orleans East. Housing is a municipal concern and there must be dialogue with the local government, the mayor, and the housing authority. Section-8 can be an effective tool when it is used within a holistic citywide housing strategy (Vayda, 1994a).

During the mid-1990s, the city’s Desire, Florida, and St. Thomas housing projects closed down, and many of the residents used Section 8 vouchers primarily directed toward The East. Between 1980 and 1990, the population of the Desire housing development, one of the city’s more notorious projects, fell by more than half, from 8,599 to 4,089, with many of its residents relocating to the 70s-era apartments built by Lake Forest, Inc. (Bridges, 1991a). HUD’s disproportionate reconcentration of former public housing residents to New East essentially transformed this suburban part of the city into the new “inner city,” with run-down apartment complexes taking the form of “little projects” (Treadway, 1989). The city and HANO created what Gotham (2002) describes as a “destabilizing effect” that merely recreated new pockets of poverty by steering residents from public housing developments in downtown neighborhoods.
into N.O. East apartment complexes. He writes, “the market-centered, locally implemented, and
decimalized nature of HUD’s housing subsidy programs reinforced and buttressed the
discriminatory actions of private real estate developers” (Gotham, 2002, p. 25).
Residents viewed the apartments as eyesores and public nuisances that brought down residential
property values and drove businesses out of New Orleans East. In one interview, I asked a
resident, “Relocating the former Desire residents was intentional but was the decline
intentional?” She responded, “Look, urban planners know what happens. They're certainly not
dummies. They know that when low-income residents move in, it will decline. And then because
of the demographics that they created pre-Katrina – because it wasn't always this way –
anywhere you put a certain demographic in larger numbers, we know problems will arise. This
was deliberate. This was planned” (interview 11, February 7, 2023).

Housing conditions deteriorated so severely due to absentee landlords and lax code
enforcement that by 1994, the Morial administration announced that three of the East’s largest
and most blighted apartment complexes owned by HUD – Oakbrook, Shelly Arms, and Green
Tree Place – would undergo a $25 million renovation using state bonds (Appendix V). Oakbrook
and Green Tree were described as former “meccas for young adults and professionals in the late
1970s and early 1980s…a social center for people living in eastern New Orleans…The oil bust
and [the] tax reform law of 1986 gave owners little incentive to keep properties up” (Thomas,
1996). HUD repossessed the complexes in 1995 and “pushed open drug-dealing and crime out of
both complexes” (Thomas, 1996). The city bought the three foreclosed complexes from HUD for
a symbolic $1 and, to spearhead the redevelopment, established a working partnership with
private Miami developer Paul Kapelow and three local non-profit organizations – Greater St.
Stephen Full Gospel Baptist Church, The Black Economic Development Council, and Christian
Faith Ministries Church (Miller, 1996b). Passersby along I-10 would be able to see the renovations taking place, and while it was not the solution residents desired per se (they’d much rather have them torn down), the positive perception it created, going from boarded up to renovated, was a symbolic win.

As part of the partnership to redevelop the apartments, Kapelow would become the general contractor and property manager for five to seven years “to change the social fabric of the area as well as the condition of the apartments,” while the three organizations would each be associated with a complex to offer social services, child care, job training, drug counseling, and a neighborhood health clinic (Thomas, 1996). Kapelow, who successfully turned around a neighborhood of apartment complexes in Algiers a few years earlier, would train the three non-profits in property management, setting them up to buy him out after seven years. By 1997, controversy ensued when then-City Councilwoman Hazeur-Distance and Senator Johnson learned that Kapelow had sought state credits “which would have required restricting the apartments to low-income tenants” (Anderson, 1997; Miller, 1997c). An incensed Hazeur-Distance responded, “Kapelow needs to go back to the drawing board and come back with something else such as 80% unrestricted, 20 percent low-income” (Miller, 1997c).

As plans evolved, Oakbrook was bulldozed. Green Tree Place was redeveloped into Windsor Village and was “financed by Whitney National Bank at market rates and rentals are market rates. No government financing was involved” (Allesandra, 1998). Tearing down derelict housing in New Orleans East did significantly dent the area’s blight, and between 1990 and 1996...
2000, the residential vacancy rate in N.O. East was cut in half, from 13.5% to 6.5%, while Orleans Parish decreased from 16.6% to 12.5% (Renaissance Plan, 2004). Thomas writes:

The days when huge, blighted complexes greeted motorists on I-10 are gone, as are most of the slum-like conditions and symbiotic crime that residents and neighbors endured. The 700-unit Oakbrook apartment complex…was often the only image I-10 travelers had of eastern New Orleans. Thousands of apartments have been renovated during the past seven years, restoring quaint middle-class communities in areas that were once little better than slums (The Times-Picayune, 2001).

Controversy arose in 2003, however, when U.S. marshals seized Green Tree Place from Kapelow when Fannie Mae, a lender on the project, foreclosed against him, suing for a total unpaid debt of $16.7 million. Kapelow, who had invested close to $7 million into the property’s rehabilitation, was unable to find a lender to accept Christian Faith, the organization that was supposed to take over as owner and operator, due to their lack of experience and necessary capital. As a result, the rest of the plans fell apart. The social services and training programs were short-lived, and Kapelow was unable to turn the property over to them, which “put a black eye on Kapelow’s otherwise sparkling development career spanning more than 50 years” (Thomas, 2003c).

The battle against Section 8 came to a head in the new millennium. From 2002-2005, City Council placed a three-year moratorium on city permits for any “new construction or expansion of two-family or multifamily dwellings” in District E, which includes New Orleans East and the Lower Ninth Ward. The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center and other local housing advocates fought against the moratoriums, saying they “had a discriminatory effect on African-Americans citywide” because the restrictions “prevent the construction of the only type of housing that a large percentage of the city’s population can afford” (Eggler, 2005). By early 2005, the Housing and Civil Enforcement Section of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights
Division informed the city that it was in violation of the federal Fair Housing Act by enacting city measures “restricting the construction, conversion, renovation, or expansion of group homes, adult day-care centers, two-family dwellings, and multiple-family dwellings” (Eggler, 2005). Throughout the investigation, Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis, who spearheaded the moratorium, defended her stance and called for other parts of the city to have their “fair share” of low-income and subsidized housing rather than concentrating it in the East. In August 2005, just three weeks before Katrina, the Justice Department forced the city to cease the moratorium.

With The East’s stigma in mind, NOEEDF kicked off its most significant initiative in 1997 – a $113,000 rebranding campaign consisting of billboards, print ads, and radio spots that carried the slogan “New Orleans East, It’s Great Living” (Miller, 1997b; Appendix W). Partners who contributed to the campaign included Hibernia National Bank, Lakeland and Methodist Hospitals, The Plaza, Folgers Coffee, and the city’s Division of Economic Development, led by Eugene Green, Jr. N.O. East businesses had considerable stakes in the rebranding’s success. Green, a current City Council member representing Gentilly, said, “The view of New Orleans East [that] you see from the window of an automobile while traveling the interstate [isn’t representative of the whole]…New Orleans East is much more than interstates and service roads. It has gracious homes and acres of natural beauty. That’s the image we want to use to educate the masses about the positive aspects of the area” (McIver, 1997).

The campaign built off the area’s modest economic recovery by the mid-1990s. Foster (1995a) writes, “Demand, price, and occupancy for residential, commercial, and industrial property in [N.O. East] have risen to their highest levels in ten years” (The Times-Picayune). Between 1998 and 2000, new single-family residential development increased significantly, including 138 new homes in McKendall Estates, 88 homes under construction in Fairway...
Estates, 54 in Crowder Oaks, 30 new homes in Bullard Park, and 84 homes planned for Eastover (Renaissance Plan, 2004). Sandy Stein, then-Executive Director of NOEEDF, described the campaign, stating, “You have to remember New Orleans East was developed as a dreamland. It was to be a suburb within a city, a haven. Through various circumstances, a significant part of the population left the area in the 1980s, and what were once decent properties became blighted” (Greenberg, 1997). Echoing the same sentiment on the campaign’s impact, then-City Councilwoman and NOEEDF’s co-chairwoman Ellen Hazeur-Distance declared, “The message really is that City Hall recognizes the economic potential and achievements of the East. We’ve made great strides from a business standpoint, as well as quality of life. I believe New Orleans East has seen its worst days. We are improving and will continue to improve” (Miller, 1997b).

A crucial part of the rebranding campaign was to put The East “finally and literally on the map” because “most maps discriminated against [this] part of the city, hindering its development (Miller 1997d; Eggler, 2000). NOEEDF worked with a company to draft an official map inclusive of New Orleans East and prominent sites like The Audubon Nature Center, Bayou Sauvage, Bally’s Casino, and the soon-to-open Jazzland. In 2000, the foundation released the final version “that shows all of the city, from West End to Fort Pike” (Eggler, 2000). In response, City Council passed a resolution urging map companies to adopt the new version as their standard city map. The irony that it took decades to put New Orleans East on official city maps symbolically embodies the social, economic, and political negligence that has long plagued the area. Geographically separated from the rest of the city by the Industrial Canal and psychologically ridden off as a place to drive through rather than to, New Orleans East has had to fight for representation at every level, including literally being placed on the city’s map.
The same year the campaign launched, Senator Jon Johnson, co-chair of NOEEDF, filed Senate Bill 1077 to establish a special taxing district called the “New Orleans East Economic Development District” to combat the area’s decline and attract business. Eastern N.O. business representatives, city officials, and legislators would oversee the special taxing district, bounded by Almonaster Avenue, one mile south of Hayne Boulevard, and from the Industrial Canal to the Orleans-St. Tammany parish line. The bill, which ultimately passed in the Senate but failed in the House, called for up to a 10-mil tax for a maximum of 50 years, subject to voter approval, to help eastern New Orleans improve its image of a high-crime area and help it revitalize after key businesses closed during the 1980s and 1990s. Today, New Orleans East Matters members insist that a special taxing district – akin to the city’s Downtown Development District or the Bioinnovation District on the CBD’s edge – would be a tangible solution to restore the Plaza Mall site.

While improving the image of New Orleans East and cleaning up the area’s housing was paramount in the 1990s, city leaders equally recognized the need to spur new economic investment in the area after the disastrous economy of the 1980s. In the 15 years preceding Hurricane Katrina, local and state officials joined forces to bring about economic redevelopment in New Orleans East. Leaders sought to build on the success of projects already underway in the area, such as Pendleton Memorial Methodist Hospital’s $21 million renovation to add a new East Tower and the creation of the Audubon Louisiana Nature Center – a merger between The Louisiana Nature and Science Institute and Audubon Nature Institute. Specifically, public officials embarked on four significant economic initiatives they viewed as panaceas for The East: 1) the rebranding of the Almonaster-Michoud Industrial District (A-MID) and a plan to build an auto speedway; 2) efforts to locate the New Orleans Hornets professional basketball team’s
practice and training facility to the East; 3) the opening of Jazzland Amusement Park; and 4) the city’s adoption in 2004 of the “New Orleans East Renaissance Plan.”

In 1996, the Almonaster-Michoud Industrial District (A-MID) rebranded as The New Orleans Business and Industrial District (NOBID). That same year, a commissioned study concluded that the industrial park had failed to attract port-related heavy industry for decades and recommended that the park shift focus from “luring industry to luring development linked to the area’s growth sectors, including tourism and medicine” (Thomas, 2000b). A significant loss to the park came in 1997 when Huntsville, Alabama, beat out Michoud in New Orleans East to win a proposal to build a highly-anticipated space station (Greenberg, 1997). Decades-long political negligence was the root cause of NOBID’s failure. What was once envisioned as “a mecca for manufacturing and distribution companies in a city starved for vacant land,” by the 2000s, “had become a dumping ground for illegal debris and a nightmare for agencies charged with cleaning it up…a mess of monstrous proportions…a great embarrassment and an environmental nightmare” (Thomas, 2000b). One broker rebuked NOBID as a “tough sell,” describing how “the bad in New Orleans East is worse than the bad elsewhere” (Thomas, 2000b). Because of the complex web of laws that granted multiple agencies authority and oversight over controlling illegal dumping, enforcement was non-existent, and “no single agency or leader has taken charge and no one has tried interagency coordination for enforcement…Dumping in the east is well ingrained. Even government agencies do it” (*The Times-Picayune*, 2000b).

To this day, news articles every few months condemn illegal tire dumping in eastern New Orleans, a constant source of frustration for residents who say it brings down their property values and perpetuates the area’s trashed image. It is a persistent, decades-long problem that neither abates nor resolves. Significant portions of the illicit dumping occur in the never-built
subdivisions and streets that abruptly stop, a glaring reminder and direct consequence of the failed plans by New Orleans East, Inc. Thomas (2000b) explains:

Five subdivisions exist on paper and the tax rolls, but dozens of streets that would have given owners access to their property were never built. Now, the area is a dumping ground for construction debris, abandoned cars, and household trash. A fire official estimates that a dozen illegal dumps operate in the district. Despite previous crackdowns, operators of illegal dumps have financial incentives to continue the practice because fines are low and enforcement is lax (*The Times-Picayune*).

A second major challenge is bureaucratic red tape from the tangled web of land ownership; unfinished streets and subdivisions make it hard to track down the lineage of who owns what sites. These problems continually detract potential developers from investing in the park. Government institutions charged with enforcing dumping laws are many and include the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD), the New Orleans Fire Department (NOFD), the state Department of Environmental Quality, the state police, the state Department of Motor Vehicles, and the city’s Department of Public Works, to name a few. Blame comes from all sides. Developers criticize both city and state agencies for playing politics and not tackling illegal dumping; the city blames the state for not prioritizing the area for state funding; and the state criticizes NOBID for failing to deliver on promised infrastructure improvements.

Though never growing into the expansive manufacturing mecca that it was envisioned to be and despite a tarnished reputation held by many, NOBID did have a few successful bright spots in the years leading up to Katrina. Folgers Coffee Plant underwent a $150 million expansion and renewal project in 2001, and in 2002, the burned-down MacFrugal facility was finally redeveloped when Crescent Crown Distributing, LLC built a new $12 million regional beer distribution facility on half the site’s acres.\(^\text{12}\) NOBID’s president at the time was Eugene

---

\(^\text{12}\) A massive fire occurred at the MacFrugal distribution center along I-10 in 1996, leaving in its behind a massive eyesore.
Green, Jr., who publicly expressed frustration with the lack of interagency coordination for enforcement that hindered development, foreshadowing, “We’re either going to have an industrial district, or we’re going to have a landfill…We may be talking about this 20 years from now” (Thomas, 2000b). The irony of his statement two decades later is telling. In 2005, a few months before the storm, NOBID rebranded once more as the New Orleans Regional Business Park and adopted a more regional approach to spur development. At the time of the revamp, the park recorded 12,000 employees, 104 companies, and a $1.2 billion annual economic impact.

During the late 1990s, a $50 million auto speedway was proposed within NOBID on a large tract abutting Bayou Sauvage. Funding from the project would be split: $30 million in state bonds approved by the legislature, partial financing by a hotel-motel sales tax in Orleans Parish, and $15 million from taxpayer subsidies. The racetrack would be owned by NOBID, who would lease the site to a developer. Controversial from the start, the speedway pitted state and city officials against each other, with some calling the proposal a fraudulent scheme that would benefit only a handful of politicians and others skeptical of the project’s success altogether. The focal point of the controversy centered around the two politicians who represented the eastern part of the city at the time – State Senator Jon Johnson and State Representative Sherman Copelin. Copelin, along with another stakeholder, local developer John Cumming, was part of a syndicate that partially owned the 500-acre site. Copelin’s involvement created a conflict of interest that then-state representative David Vitter argued violated the state’s ethics laws (Cooper, 1998). Though Copelin initially argued that he invested in the tract long before the speedway proposal, he begrudgingly divested from the project once criticism became widespread.
Senator Johnson vocally opposed the speedway project, making matters more complicated for Copelin. Johnson insisted on an alternative privately-financed speedway and pushed the state not to fund the project, insisting that NOBID focus on redeveloping properties within the industrial district, especially the burned-down MacFrugal site. He exclaimed, “…the fact that [NOBID] has bumpy roads and illegal tire dumps and junk cars everywhere, that tells me their priority needs to be getting the district cleaned up” (Cooper, 1998). In the 2000s, Copelin became president of the New Orleans East Business Association while Senator Johnson concurrently was the figurehead for NOEEDF, pitting the two economic groups against one another (Thomas, 2002). Despite ultimately gaining Johnson’s approval, the racetrack never got past the drawing board and fell victim to political infighting and lack of funding. The project collapsed in 1998 when NOBID failed to meet state land and title ownership deadlines. Between 2000 and 2002, the mayor, governor, local legislators, and NOBID formed a task force to revive the speedway. The second go-round sought to make the project a public-private venture financed by grants and low-interest loans; but, once again, the auto track fizzled out due to political squabbling over land and title ownership.

One of the most significant and pronounced pieces of blight in New Orleans East is the Hurricane Katrina-ravaged, still-abandoned Six Flags Amusement Park. The history of how Six Flags came to be is a tale of political theater, multiple delays, financial debt, bankruptcy, rebranding, and ending with Katrina’s floodwaters – a figurative rollercoaster that is a fitting descriptor for the blighted theme park. Coincidentally, Murchison and Wynne, the original owners of New Orleans East, Inc., owned the Six Flags in Texas, bringing the N.O. East project full circle. In early 1991 former Louisiana governor Buddy Roemer announced his support for $10 million in seed money from the state legislature for a proposed $65 million, 220-acre jazz
theme park at the I-10/I-510 exchange in N.O. East. Lauding the project, Governor Roemer declared, “I think New Orleans can be helped by a theme park. It means jobs. It means economic development” (Cooper, 1991). The $10 million from the state would cover infrastructure improvements, including paving the access roads and providing sewerage.

Developers initially planned to open Jazzland in 1994, covering over 100 acres with six main theme attractions – Jazz Square, Cajun Country, Plantation Area, Lafitte’s Landing, Mardi Gras, and the French Quarter. The other 120 acres would be used for developing hotels and amphitheaters. In a nostalgic nod to local culture, plans also included restoring the former Zephyr roller coaster from Pontchartrain Beach. Prominent local developer Thomas Winingder spearheaded Jazzland, spending years working to gain political backing and capital from state legislators, the city’s Chamber of Commerce, eastern N.O. business leaders, and the governor. Winingder modeled Jazzland off Opryland, U.S.A., an amusement park in suburban Nashville “[but] with jazz as a theme” and predicted more than one million visitors annually, thousands of temporary construction jobs, hundreds of permanent jobs, and an annual economic impact of $125 million. James J. Coleman, Sr., a wealthy local developer who had successfully developed several downtown buildings in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the Hilton New Orleans Riverside Hotel, Windsor Court Hotel, and three Poydras Street towers, (and who happened to also be Winingder’s in-law) invested $6.5 million upfront for Jazzland.

By 1995, Jazzland was barely off the ground. Coleman pulled out of the dormant project, and “in local real estate circles, it’s [become] known as the project that will never get built” (Meitrodt, 1995). That year, Mayor Morial’s administration applied for a $15 million HUD loan – the same loan used to help finance the Grand Theatre at the Plaza Mall – for what was now an estimated $75 million venture. Called the HUD Section 108 program, the loan was explicitly
created “to eliminate or prevent slums and blight” by providing capital for rehabilitating public housing and municipal facilities in distressed urban areas (Meitrodt, 1995). The HUD loan, which was to be under the city’s purview, was one of many moving pieces that Winingder was navigating to turn Jazzland into a reality. Securing financial support was painstakingly slow, but consultants cautioned Winingder that the park would be competing against an increasingly crowded amusement park market and, almost as if foreshadowing what was to come, that its “best chance at a successful future rests with it being a part of a family of parks, rather than a stand-alone regional park…Jazzland would be much better positioned to handle adversity with a big corporate partner” (Meitrodt, 1995).

By 1997, city leaders, state officials, and private developers formed two new companies, Jazzland Development and Jazzland Management, to oversee the project, fueled by the promise that Jazzland would be the economic elixir to combat The East’s decline. The theme park would help spawn other development, including hotels, resorts, restaurants, new subdivisions, and commercial and shopping centers, making New Orleans East a family-friendly tourism draw compared to the adult-oriented French Quarter. Jazzland finally broke ground in the summer of 1998 after City Council approved the park’s complex public-private financing scheme. Ogden Entertainment, a Fortune 500 company, agreed to invest in Jazzland and become the park’s corporate partner. The final funding package came from $25 million in low-interest loans from the HUD Section 108 program, $30 million in first mortgages from banks, a $10 million grant from the state for infrastructure work, and $15 million from the Winingders and Ogden. Morial praised Jazzland as “the single most important economic development project in New Orleans East in a generation, or two, or three” (Donze, 1998). Councilwoman Hazeur-Distance extolled the theme park and its anticipated impact, saying, “To all those that said New Orleans East was
dead, we have once again proved you wrong” (Donze, 1998). Anticipating increased usage from the spillover effect of Jazzland, Eastover underwent an $8 million renovation in 1999, expanding the golf course from 18 to 36 holes. State senator Jon Johnson described the anticipated boon Jazzland would bring to the East:

> The economic impact of Jazzland is going to be phenomenal. It will have a far-reaching impact on the region, considering the number of jobs and ancillary jobs that will be created. This is exactly the project we needed to start tuning New Orleans East around. Many years ago if we could have gotten the space station, that would have been the economic engine that would have started to reverse the trend we saw happening. Jazzland has become that engine. When you look at New Orleans East, you see clear indications of positive things that have happened in our community. You hear little or nothing about federally subsidized section-8 housing here anymore. We’ve knocked down the dilapidated apartment complexes and renovated others. There is going to be a revitalization of the Plaza…This is an upper-middle class community with enough space to accommodate anyone who wants to live here. There are well-paying jobs here and all types of housing so people can successfully live and work in a community closely situated to downtown New Orleans (Greenberg, 1999).

Rodney Greenup, then-realtor for Latter & Blum’s Lake Forest Boulevard Office, expanded on the optimistic outlook leaders had for Jazzland saving The East in the late 1990s and early 2000s:

> The eastern New Orleans area’s reputation as a decaying, crime-ridden corridor has been exaggerated by the media. New Orleans East has had a reputation as a totally safe area. Right now New Orleans East is reaping the benefits that St. Tammany and East Jefferson did five to 10 years ago – everything is coming back up. Jazzland is going to be a tremendous asset to this neighborhood because of the creation of new jobs, which leads to new housing. We have the potential of an eastern New Orleans economic renaissance field by the tourism dollars generated by Jazzland. I can’t see any downside to Jazzland – it’s a win-win situation. Just look at what happened to Orlando after the construction of Disney World (Gaffney, 1999).

Jazzland opened on Saturday, May 20, 2000, symbolizing New Orleans East’s rebirth. At a final cost of $110 million, Jazzland included 30 rides spread throughout five themed parks – Jazz Plaza, Cajun Country, Pontchartrain Beach, Mardi Gras, and a Kids’ Carnival. Not soon after it opened, Winingder inexplicably sold his share of the project, and not soon after that,
Ogden Entertainment sold its theme park division to another company, Alfa Smart Parks, a Greek holding company with no experience with theme parks. Still, Winingder tangentially remained attached to the project when he announced in November 2000 that he wanted to build a 300-room resort hotel on Lake Forest Boulevard near Eastover and the park’s front entrance, but his plans never came to fruition. After year one, the park performed on par with estimates, and “since the park opened, family-style and casual service restaurants, the same ones that used to [say] that eastern New Orleans was not ready for them, are calling to say they are interested in exploring options in the new neighborhood. The area also has a new hotel and might have another on the way” (Mowbray, 2000). However, by year two, Jazzland performed poorly, failed to meet projections, and was not the cure-all for the East that officials thought it would be. Jazzland missed its attendance projections by 40% in its second year of operation, going from 1.1 million in 2000 to just 560,000 in 2001. As a sign that the park was failing, it cut back on the number of employees, failed to deliver new rides – an industry standard – and shortened its operating hours and fall season. This move alienated many season-pass holders who felt they were not getting their money's worth.

In February 2002, Jazzland filed for bankruptcy reorganization, reporting $50-100 million in debts and less than $50 million in assets. Jazzland’s bankruptcy made the city legally liable for paying back the HUD loan, which was ridiculed as “one of the largest Section 108 loans to ever go bad in the 25-year history of the program” (Mowbray, 2003). After months of federal court hearings, Six Flags Amusement Park announced it would take over Jazzland, signing a 75-year long-term lease (Appendix X). Under the bankruptcy agreement, the city’s Industrial Development Board (IDB) would assume ownership of the park and issue bonds to Six Flags for site operation and improvement. As part of the lease arrangement, Six Flags and the
city would split the $25 million HUD loan repayments until it was paid in full by 2017. Six Flags would pay the IDB annual rent of $1.4 million instead of paying property taxes. In turn, the city would use Six Flags’ lease payments and front the additional $1 million. While the reorganization plan saved the city from a complete economic black-eye, critics balked at the city losing revenue by having taxpayer money front the bill for a failed venture.

Additional fallout from the Jazzland failure came in 2004 when a HUD audit revealed that the Morial administration misspent $7.7 million of the $25 million HUD Section 108 loan (Russell, 2004). Auditors with HUD’s Office of Inspector General alleged poor management, lax oversight, and a failure to follow the loan’s requirements. HUD demanded that the city promptly pay back $1.3 million and provide documentation explaining its use of another $6.4 million. The audit also accused the city of failing to monitor the NOLA Economic Development Corp. This Morial-created nonprofit oversaw “loosely specified urban development initiatives” primarily targeting grants and workforce development in N.O. East (Mowbray, 2002). Instead of paying property taxes, Jazzland allocated a certain percentage of its revenue to the newly-created private nonprofit. Once Jazzland went bankrupt, the NOLA Economic Development Corp. dissolved. *The Times-Picayune* reported that the nonprofit mismanaged the $866,623 it made in its first two years by spending “more on salaries and overhead costs than on economic development of public benefit” (Mowbray, 2002). Their sole accomplishment was spending $96,000 on a weeklong “Celebrate New Orleans East Week” in 2001, and many insiders claimed the corporation was nothing more than a political kickback. The audit confirmed the newspaper’s findings and stated that “contrary to its purpose, it did not award any grants” (Donze, 2004a).

HUD’s audit on Jazzland uncovered even more political incompetence when findings revealed that city officials and developers knowingly submitted unrealistic attendance
projections, inflated job numbers that failed to meet HUD criteria, and failed to ensure the project was financially feasible. Part of the original HUD loan agreement was that the money should be used for construction and development costs, “provided that most of the construction jobs would go to low-income workers;” however, “of the $15.1 million in spending reviewed by auditors, 42% was questioned” (Russell, 2004). Originally as part of the partnership, Jazzland agreed to “34 percent participation by minority or women-owned firms for construction of Jazzland; 17 percent participation in all professional services” (Greenberg, 2000). While HUD did not suggest anything criminal occurred with the loan, it did cite the Morial administration for “sloppy oversight” to document whether most of the construction jobs went to low-income workers or instead went to “preferred contractors” and “vendors who inappropriately gained from the project” (Russell, 2004). By now, Ray Nagin was mayor of the city and pleaded with HUD to forgive the debts. To minimize the city’s risk and prevent future similar failures like Jazzland and the Grand Theatre, Mayor Nagin implemented more stringent policies that all but eliminated the city’s ability to apply for HUD’s Section 108 loans in the future.

Six Flags invested around $24 million in upgrades and officially rebranded and reopened in 2003, a turnaround quicker than the company would typically do, signifying their belief in the project’s rebound. During Six Flags’ first year in operation, attendance returned to around one million, and the theme park made a modest turnaround and profit. Plans were even in the making to add a water park component much in line with other nationwide locations, though a timetable was never formally provided. Nonetheless, Six Flags’ success was short-lived, and a few months before Hurricane Katrina, there were warning signs that the park was beginning to lose steam. Management announced plans to delay the upcoming season opening, cut operating hours by 10%, and replaced two rides with green space. Six Flags’s final day of operation was Sunday,
August 21, 2005. Eight days later, Katrina inundated the theme park, and it sat under four to seven feet of water for a month and was declared a total loss. Eighteen years later, Six Flags sits vacant, the rides overtaken by the urban wilderness – yet another blighted property that reminds us of the consistent lack of investment in New Orleans East.

The explanations for Jazzland and Six Flags Theme Park’s poor performance were many, including first-year hiccups and the second-year “sophomore slump,” high staff turnover and thus unreliable management and poor community relations, and regional competition from Baton Rouge’s Blue Bayou Waterpark, which had opened an adjacent theme park called Dixie Landin’. The park conducted customer exit surveys indicating that the heat, irregular hours, and the frequent breakdown of rides as complaints most often cited. After year one, Jazzland planted 250 additional trees, put shade over waiting areas, and installed mist machines throughout the park. By the time Six Flags took over, similar complaints arose; for many, the novelty had worn off. After Katrina, Six Flags claimed in their report that “the marketplace never embraced the park” even before the flood (White, 2009). However, the elephant in the room never spoken aloud was that Jazzland was in New Orleans East. It is reasonably expected that The East’s stigma dissuaded some residents in surrounding parishes and communities from going simply because it was in The East. In truth, four years after Katrina, Dennis Speigel, then-President of International Theme Park Services, a Cincinnati firm that studied the industry, said the silent part out loud:

  It's a very difficult market in which to operate a theme park. I say that based on the history and not just a gut feeling. It was an ill-conceived concept in the wrong location and it just should not have been built. It's just one of those things you ought to bury it and let it go. They were predicated on tourists visiting the park. Those people never came to the park. To regenerate a theme park on that site is going to be almost impossible. I was never personally sold on that location for the Six Flags theme park and the Jazzland Theme Park. "It's on the wrong side of the city. It just doesn't look like that was the way that the growth was going” (White, 2009).
The economic black eye of Jazzland occurred alongside a second saga that, once again, made a mockery of The East and reaffirmed to residents its stepchild status. Rather than an amusement park, this time the saga concerned basketball. In May 2002, New Orleans acquired the Charlotte Hornets NBA basketball team. Demonstrating a spirit of public unity not typically seen, a range of city and state leaders came together, overcame old-school parochial politics, and triumphantly lured the team by crafting “an unbeatable incentive package by putting aside regional, business, racial, and political differences” (Yerton, 2002). Duncan writes, “Landing the Hornets was a major [victory]…it changed the perception of the city and vaulted [it] as one of 30 American cities with two or more pro teams. It was a very big win at the time to snatch a business asset away from Charlotte. It was a civic victory, not only from a sports standpoint, but from a business and a confidence-building standpoint” (The Times-Picayune, 2022). Despite the fanfare generated, this massive win for the city became a detriment of New Orleans East.

Three years earlier, city and state officials constructed an arena downtown next to the Superdome to land a second major professional sports team and create a sports and entertainment district. The new arena was vital in securing the team, but the state also needed to prove that it had a steady revenue stream that could subsidize the arena’s operations and make the deal lucrative for Hornets ownership. City and state leaders proposed a deal to steer $8 million annually from the city’s hotel-motel taxes, which had grown into significant surpluses by the 1990s, to the Hornets, Saints, and Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. However, for this deal to go through, leaders would have to reallocate that tax revenue from its original intended purpose – development projects in New Orleans East. The revenue was earmarked to build the speedway, keep the New Orleans Visitors Information Center on Paris Road open, and fund NOBID. Once the speedway deal fell through, the Louisiana Legislature united behind financially backing the
sports and convention district at the expense of New Orleans East, and then-Governor Foster signed into law the reallocation of funds. Then-state representative and future mayor of New Orleans Mitch Landrieu commented on the funding scheme, “Without the New Orleans legislative delegation rising to the challenge and agreeing to give up these funds, the Saints and Hornets would not be here. It could have stopped the thing dead in its tracks if they had not agreed to do that” (Yerton, 2002). What was a watershed economic win for the city and downtown was an additional psychological loss and economic scar in a growing list of blemishes for The East. However, even more considerable controversy over the Hornets' training and practice facility would play out over the next two years.

Four months before city and state leaders announced that the Hornets were relocating from Charlotte, George Shinn, co-owner of the Hornets, publicly committed to building the team’s $11 million basketball training and practice facility in New Orleans East, bringing “some long-awaited respect for the Big Easy’s stepchild community…affirm[ing] a belief that eastern New Orleans was on the brink of a renaissance” (Donze, 2004b). In February 2002, Shinn informed over 100 members of the New Orleans East Economic Foundation “that the exclusive Eastover Estates subdivision, and eastern New Orleans in general, would be a perfect place for members of the National Basketball Association team to buy homes. That means eastern New Orleans would make a convenient location for the team’s training facility” (Thomas, 2002). Donald Pate, general manager of Eastover at the time, stated that Joe W. Brown Park was being eyed as a potential site for the training facility and expected Eastover to boom from residential buy-in from team and staff members relocating to the city and searching for housing. Once that site was ruled out, the Hornets worked with Gowri Kailas, who publicly supported the project, saying he would gladly donate land at The Plaza Mall to build a practice and training facility.
Cynthia Willard-Lewis, State Senator Jon Johnson, and State Representative Cedric Richmond worked to bring the Hornets training facility to the East. In unison, the three of them made clear that their support to fund the downtown sports, entertainment, and convention district hinged on N.O. East securing both the Hornets and the speedway. Between 2003 and 2004, Hornets team owners reversed course and announced they were considering a downtown site for the practice and training facility, angering eastern New Orleans residents and representatives who felt deceived. Their belief in the project was so strong that renderings had been drafted of what Read Boulevard and I-10 would look like (Appendix Y). When Shinn reneged on his public commitment, political tensions mounted. Both sides tried to balance collaborating with the Hornets’ demands and keeping the owners to their word on selecting N.O. East as the facility’s site. In a 2004 editorial on the two competing sides, Meeks pointed out:

> It is blatantly unfair for Willard-Lewis to claim that Shinn deceived anyone in the practice facility debate. What he did was what any NBA owner would do: he supported a plan until a much better one came along. And the city’s role here, quite frankly, is to do what it said it would do when the team was being romanced, not hold it hostage because it doesn’t want to practice at a boarded-up shopping mall. We cannot lay out an incentive package to attract a team and then fail to live up to it for political reasons. I submit the vast majority of Orleans taxpayers would say it makes a lot more sense to keep the sports complex all in one place (The Times-Picayune, 2004).

By mid-2004, the Hornets officially announced that the training and practice facility would be located downtown next to the arena and Superdome on a tract of land that was not initially available. Hornets officials cited economic logic for locating the facility in a centralized location like downtown because it would dramatically increase the likelihood of the city’s hosting NBA all-star games within a growing sports district. In an effort to hold the team accountable for reneging on their promise, Councilwoman Cynthia Willard-Lewis successfully adopted a unanimous city council resolution reaffirming its support for having the facility in
demanding the team keep its publicly-made promise. Willard-Lewis threatened to
revoke the City Council’s appropriation of $6.5 million for the project and instead redirect the
money to economic development projects in The East. In defense of his position, Shinn argued
that developers failed to live up to their end of the deal to launch the Plaza’s redevelopment.
Shinn also changed tune and indicated that “his players have no interest in living in the East,
which was a key consideration in deciding to build the facility there” (Donze, 2004b).

Ultimately, in early 2005, the city and team owners struck a behind-closed-door deal
whereby the Hornets would get the allocated $6.5 million. In return, Shinn committed to raising
$2.5 million toward constructing a $10 million multipurpose community center adjacent to Six
Flags. Subsequently, Mayor Nagin allocated $3 million to build an access road east of Michoud
Boulevard, which “will motivate and encourage Six Flags to continue its expansion, including a
waterpark” (Donze, 2005). Neither the multipurpose venue nor the practice and training facility
opened because of Katrina’s landfall. Following the storm, the rebranded New Orleans Pelicans
opened neither in New Orleans East nor downtown. Rather, they opened a state-of-the-art
practice facility on Airline Drive in Jefferson Parish.

As the Hornets and Jazzland sagas played out, the very first “State of the East” report was
released by the New Orleans East Economic Development Foundation in November 2003. The
report affirmed the lopsided and, at times, contradictory economy of New Orleans East,
revealing some key facts about the area: its population grew 5.75% between the 1990 to 2000
census, increasing to 96,363 residents; the area's total population growth offset the city’s slower
growth rate of 2.5%; and racially, N.O. East gained 20,000 Black residents and lost 16,500 white
residents. The report noted how N.O. East was “the neighborhood of choice for African
American middle and upper-class professional…[and has] higher homeownership rates
compared to the rest of the city (55% to 47%) and higher per capita incomes than the rest of the parish ($32,772 compared to $27,133)” (Thomas, 2003b; Grace, 2003). The report discussed the challenges facing the area at the time, including uncertainty over NASA’s Michoud Plant, the closing of the Sears Finance Center, the lack of middle and upper-income range single-family housing, and state funding cuts that forced the closure of the Visitors Information Center. In discussing the overall sentiment echoed by the report, Thomas (2003b) writes, “Business and civic leaders…lament the growing deterioration of neighborhoods and apartment buildings constructed during eastern New Orleans’ halcyon days of the 1970s” (*The Times-Picayune*).

The “State of the East” report focused heavily on the debates and progress in combating crime. Despite crime data to the contrary, the report indicates that The East has maintained an unshakable perception of decline and safety concerns. In 1996, city officials announced the establishment of an Orleans Levee District C.O.P.S (Community-Oriented Policing Services) unit and substation on Hayne Boulevard in Little Woods, “the city’s first community-oriented policing substation that is not in a public housing development” (Miller, 1996d). Then-Police Chief of the Levee Board, Richard Lewis, applied for and secured a federal grant “specifically for community policing [which] has worked successfully in other cities, but in the New Orleans area has been used only in public housing developments” (Ross, 1997). Mayor Morial stated at the ribbon-cutting of the substation, “This is what happens when the city and the Levee Board work together” (Ross, 1997). As part of the grant, ten officers staffed the substation around the clock, “implementing several aggressive measures,” such as regular police patrols and a quality-of-life officer who assisted the community in tackling blight and other public nuisances. These early efforts proved fruitful and with indisputable results. Two years later, crime was down 70% in Little Woods, “a dramatic turnaround due to officers’ high visibility, interaction with residents
and enforcement of the law” (Ross, 1999). In fact, all of New Orleans East recorded a seven-year downward trend in crime within NOPD’s 7th District (Table 6).

**Table 6**

*NOPD Crime Trends, 1996-2003*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>-16%</td>
<td>-12%</td>
<td>-13%</td>
<td>-0.6%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Crime – or, instead, the perception of crime – is a chief priority for residents of New Orleans East; crime was discussed in every interview. When residents bring up crime, they often focus on three things: neighborhood boundaries, policing the interstate, and splitting the police district into two. In 1995, then-NOPD Superintendent Richard Pennington took the public stance that N.O. East, the largest district in the city in terms of land mass, should be split into two police districts (Bergeron, 1997). That same year, NOEDDF worked to get the state police to patrol I-10. These two debates have never been resolved and continue to this day. The following quote by a resident captures the frustration best:

> When a crime occurs somewhere in New Orleans East, the media simply says that the shooting, or whatever it is, happened in The East. The last time I checked, The East is the largest landmass in the city, and we have many different subdivisions and neighborhoods. The news does not treat the other neighborhoods in the city this way, and when people think of us, they only think of the apartments. When a crime occurs in Uptown, they specify which neighborhood in Uptown. They never specify the neighborhood here. We keep calling and emailing them to stop doing that. It isn’t right. Some of the news channels have gotten a little better, but we still have to correct them. It also doesn’t help that the recent uptick in interstate shootings – they also report as always being in The East. It’s not in The East; it’s passing thru the East. Crime is in every part of the city, not just here. They just focus on it here more.

Neighborhood boundaries play a critical role in how outsiders view the area. Because of the sporadic placement of apartment complexes – many directly next door to higher-end
subdivisions – census tract boundaries have effectively penalized wealthy enclaves because of their proximity to poor neighborhoods. In 2003, State Senator Cedric Richmond stated, “The same census tract that includes Eastover includes Little Woods. Therefore Little Woods’ numbers are inflated high and Eastover’s numbers are decreased to a certain extent” (Elie, 2003). Judy Dawson, then-president of NOEEDF, stated, “I think everyone is wondering why we haven’t had a real push for economic development in the east, even though the indicators say it’s prime for revitalization and investment” (Russell, 2003). New Orleans East Matters members raise the issue of neighborhood and subdivision boundaries at nearly every meeting, especially on how the Census draws neighborhood boundaries, why certain areas are grouped into specific neighborhoods, and how the media lumps any crime that occurs east of the Industrial Canal as being in “The East,” despite New Orleans East having dozens of neighborhoods and subdivisions. These discussions date back to pre-Katrina. In a 2003 op-ed, a homeowner responds to a news story The Times-Picayune did on the 2000 Census and neighborhood demographics. The author expresses how the newspaper was biased in profiling a part of The East that “has the lowest percentage of homeownership and the greatest concentration of apartments and low-income housing units” rather than “any other neighborhood of New Orleans East,” and had he done so “the result would be the complete opposite of your January 19 story” (The Times-Picayune, 2003).

The “State of the East” report concluded what residents of New Orleans East already knew – that despite a solid middle-class population with high incomes and education rates, New Orleans East’s problem was perception-based. The report states that the area “is burdened by a disproportionate share of federally subsidized housing” and “despite relative affluence, and in a city known worldwide for food, the East has a notable shortage of restaurants, and a new,
modern movie theater is underperforming in part because there are no amenities nearby” (Russell, 2003; Grace, 2003). The decades-long perception problem plaguing N.O. East aligns with Cashin’s (2004) findings that middle-class residents of Black suburbs experience “status disequilibrium” because the commercial and retail establishments that do exist, such as dollar stores and fast food restaurants, do not culturally reflect their social status as middle-class consumers. Mayor Nagin, a former Cox Communications executive who ran on an aggressive pro-business platform, stated, “There’s so much available green space in New Orleans East for economic development, a diverse population, and some high-income areas. Companies are now starting to take another look at New Orleans East for business expansion, and that’s good” (Miller, 2002b).

The most tangible prospect of a rebirth of N.O. East arrived in 2004 when the City Planning Commission published the “New Orleans East Renaissance Plan.” The plan was the final result of a three-year, $100,000 study conducted by the local planning group Villavaso and Associates. Villavaso was no stranger to the area since Barton Higgs hired him in the early 1980s to oversee the master planning of the failed Villages of Oak Island project by New Orleans East, Inc. The New Orleans East Renaissance Plan was only the second of its kind in the city. City policy dating back to 1994 allows neighborhood residents to take an active democratic role in the city planning process by creating “strategic renaissance plans” within a designated “renaissance district.” The Lower Garden District performed such a process in 1997 when the Planning Commission and City Council approved their plan. The City Planning Commission, the New Orleans East Economic Development Foundation (NOEEDF), and the New Orleans East Business Association (NOEBA) collaborated in gathering public input, noting that citizen
participation was vital to ensure that residents would be major stakeholders in the East’s revitalization.

The Renaissance Plan’s initiatives hinged on three parts: 1) conduct 6-8 meetings with neighborhood organizations, homeowners associations, faith-based groups, and other essential community stakeholders; 2) coordinate the plan with the 1999 Land Use Plan; and 3) integrate the plan with the city’s master planning and comprehensive zoning process. Much of their findings reiterated earlier studies' statistical conclusions on housing, income, and economic development: perception did not match reality. The Renaissance Plan concluded that revitalization of The East hinged on redeveloping I-10 because of how “highly visible” the “unpleasant images of empty stores, blighted apartment complexes, widespread crime, illegal dumpsites and miles of suburbia that bear little resemblance to the rest of the [city] and create a negative impression of the whole section” (Eggler, 2004). Much like in the “State of The East Report,” the crime data-perception mismatch was a critical issue addressed in Renaissance Plan:

Crime continues to cloud peoples’ judgment of New Orleans East, especially auto burglaries and auto theft, which account for over half of the crime committed in [the area]...New Orleans East needs to rebuild its image. In recent years, [it] has suffered with an inaccurate perception of high crime. Lack of street lighting, speeding cars in subdivisions, and minimal enforcement of city codes and ordinances contribute to the poor image of safety and welfare of the community” (Renaissance Plan, 2004, pp. 115 & 120).

One major recommendation the Renaissance Plan made was to update the 30-year-old zoning classification for the core area – which the report identified as bounded by I-10, Dwyer Road, Read Boulevard, and Crowder Boulevard and included The Plaza, Methodist Hospital, and a few mid-rise ’80s office buildings – into a mixed-use/town center zoning classification (Figure 17). Within this core area, the most critical component was to completely reimagine Lake Forest Plaza Mall and create “what is essentially Downtown New Orleans East” with a “recognizable
identity and clustered development of compatible land uses” on the mall’s site (Renaissance Plan, 2004). The town center would include a “City Hall Annex, a community center, a civic auditorium, extensions of courts, safety departments and other city agencies…one of the things we need to bring together is a ‘one-stop shop for jobs’ at I-10 and Read, the Plaza’s site, which has suffered in recent years and created a negative perception that needs to be overcome” (Covert, 2003). The report emphasized, “The shopping center at Read and Lake Forest Boulevards is the core of the area, and if it is not developed, the area will not have a sense of community or self-identity.” (Thomas, 2003b).

Figure 17

_New Orleans East Renaissance Plan, 2004_
While the Renaissance Plan was short on specifics for what the “town center” would look like, it was more specific regarding housing. The report states, “New Orleans East now contains more than its ‘fair share’ of the region's multifamily, high-density housing (40%)… and a lack of higher-end homes with a value above $250,000” (Eggler, 2004). The report indicated that while the city’s demolition of high-density public complexes in the ’90s was intended “to decentralize poverty in New Orleans, [it] has served to, in the short run, centralize Section 8 (government subsidized low-income housing) in New Orleans East, with 40% of local Section-8 housing program participants living in that section of the city” (Eggler, 2004). Liberty Bank funded a similar study showing “there was more discretionary income in the East than any place outside Uptown. (Another Liberty-funded study revealed the challenge he faced: The area was home to...
40 percent of the city’s Section 8 housing)” (Rivlin, 2015). The Renaissance Plan also advised that while neighborhood associations fostered a sense of civic duty, there were too many, ultimately working against one another rather than providing a unified homeowner and neighborhood association representing the interests of all N.O. East resident and businesses communities. The following passage summarizes the main problem facing the area:

Not only is New Orleans East rich in expanse of public recreational and natural areas and in future development sites, it is also among the most stable areas of the city. New Orleans East has not experienced a population decline as has the city and has exhibited growth from 1980 to 2000. Nonetheless, New Orleans East has experienced some areas of residential or commercial decline and, since several of these areas are along the I-10 corridor and highly visible, the passing visual impression is more negative than statistics and the actual development activities indicate (Villavaso & Associates, LLC, 2004, p. 7).

City leaders and developers greeted the plan with broad enthusiasm and agreed to act expeditiously. In 2004, the N.O.East Renaissance Plan won formal approval from the City Planning Commission and City Council, and the area was finally on the verge of a breakthrough. Then-state representative Cedric Richmond stated, “No administration has made eastern New Orleans a priority. There has been vision for the East but none of the vision in any of the city administrations has gone past the planning stage” (Gaffney, 2004). That same year, a new business alliance was formed between the New Orleans East Economic Development Foundation (NOEDF), New Orleans Business and Industrial District (NOBID), and New Orleans East Business Association (NOEBA) with the promise to streamline multiple overlapping interests and “with the goal of presenting to local officials and state lawmakers a unified voice” for the entire eastern New Orleans business community (Gaffney, 2004). NOEDF expanded its board to include representatives from NOBID and NOEBA. The alliance envisioned collaborating and pooling resources to bring jobs and investment into the area by drafting one economic development agenda for the state legislative session. Despite early promises, the alliance could
never fully get off the ground because of Hurricane Katrina. The great Shakespearean tragedy of New Orleans East is that, just as the area was indeed on the verge of a renaissance, “Hurricane Katrina put the nail in the coffin for the East. They wanted us to leave, and mother nature solved it for them”, and the plan’s recommendations were never implemented” (interview 11, February 7, 2023). Now sitting on a bookshelf in the city’s archives, The New Orleans East Renaissance Plan became the culmination of decades of failed attempts at making N.O. East a suburban mecca within the city.

The hurricane dealt the final blow to the East, and eighteen years removed from the storm, redevelopment still has not taken place, and residents are still waiting for a suburban renaissance. Post-Katrina, residents, businesses, and neighborhood leaders are incensed with their prolonged second-class status compared to the rest of the city. Interestingly, historical amnesia contributes to a familiar yet erroneous analysis of New Orleans East. Many New Orleanians incorrectly attribute The East’s deterioration to Hurricane Katrina, which is untrue. This chapter has demonstrated that The East was in decline long before the storm. Whereas the ’80s oil crash marked the transition from growth to decline, the storm marked the transition from decline to disinvestment. The remainder of this dissertation focuses on the political negligence and racism that has afflicted post-Katrina New Orleans East and continues to keep it hostage and in a permanent state of decline. What was an opportunity to rebuild post-Katrina has instead manifested into a recurring failure. Chapter Six chronicles Hurricane Katrina and the first year of immediate recovery, focusing on the infamous green dot map controversy that brought history, geography, race, and class to the forefront of the rebuilding debate.
CHAPTER 6: HURRICANE KATRINA

“Some of Eastern N.O. Still Underwater”
—The Times-Picayune headline, Tuesday, September 13, 2005

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in southeast Louisiana and devastated New Orleans, southern Mississippi, and the surrounding Gulf Coast communities. A 2023 National Hurricane Center report indicates that Katrina remains the costliest storm in American history, estimated at $125 billion in storm damages in 2005, which, when adjusted for 2022 inflation, totals nearly $190 billion, and retains its rank as the third-highest death toll from a hurricane in recorded U.S. history, with 1,392 deaths officially recorded (Schleifstein, 2023). Years-long federal investigations by the Department of Defense concluded that the Army Corps of Engineers improperly built numerous floodwalls along the city’s major drainage canals and that this structural failure resulted in 80% of the city’s flooding. Eighteen years after Hurricane Katrina, the Army Corps of Engineers has completed an impressive $14.5 billion flood protection system that includes the world’s largest pumping station; a two-mile steel wall built on the eastern side of the city to protect New Orleans East, the Lower Ninth Ward, and Chalmette from storm surges; several hundred miles of newly rebuilt levees and floodwalls; the rebuilding of over 70 pumping stations; and a series of massive gates to seal off waterways during impending hurricanes (Rivlin 2015b, 387; Smith 2022). The state-of-the-art flood protection system was built to withstand a “hundred-year” storm.

This chapter examines Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath through the lens of New Orleans East. Notwithstanding Lakeview and neighboring St. Bernard Parish, the neighborhoods that bore the brunt of Katrina’s wrath were poor and Black. Historical racist housing policies and practices have long relegated Black New Orleanians to the city’s lowest-lying, and thus most vulnerable, neighborhoods. When Katrina hit, widespread images of human suffering on
television and the front pages of newspapers thrust the city into the international spotlight for weeks. Nonstop footage of tens of thousands of poor, Black residents stuck in squalid conditions during August heat at the Superdome and Convention Center exposed the legacy of racism and poverty that have long afflicted the city. It took three days for relief to fully make its way to the thousands of stranded storm victims, arriving in the form of law enforcement, transport vehicles, fresh supplies of food and water, and other vital emergency resources. Numerous claims of racism and classism would be made that the inadequate response by all levels of government was because the majority of the evacuees were poor and Black (see Hartman and Squires, 2006; Dyson, 2006; Brunsma et al., 2007 for the debates). President George W. Bush teetered on calling out racism in his many news conferences. In one, he stated, “The storm didn’t discriminate, and neither will the recovery effort” (Varney & Nolan, 2005). In a later interview, one in which he “traced the [city’s] poverty to the legacy of racism,” he exclaimed, “We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action. Let us rise above the legacy of inequality” (McQuaid, 2005). In an interview two weeks after the storm hit, Mayor Nagin stated:

Definitely class and, the more I think about it, definitely race played into this. How do you treat people that just want to walk across the bridge and get out, and they’re turned away, because you can’t come to a certain parish?... If it’s race, fine, let’s call a spade a spade, a diamond a diamond. We can never let this happen again. Even if you hate black people and you are in a leadership position, this did not help anybody (Russell, 2005b).

While it would take over a month to fully drain the city of the fetid, standing water, with parts of The East the last to be drained, residents are still unpacking the enduring impact of Katrina’s structural and psychological toll, often using phrases, such as “pre-Katrina” and “post-Katrina” or “before the storm” and “after the storm,” as a way to frame their lives.

*The Times-Picayune* mentioned the storm for the first time on Wednesday, August 24, 2005, stating, “A tropical depression that flared up in the Bahamas on Tuesday could hit Florida
as early as Thursday as a tropical storm, forecasters said. The storm would be named Katrina. It appeared to aim for southern Florida and into the Gulf of Mexico” (2005a). Two days later, the National Weather Service still had the five-day track headed for the Florida panhandle after making landfall in Miami. But, by that night, the storm’s path shifted abruptly, with New Orleans as the bullseye and Katrina predicted to be a dangerous category four, potentially five, hurricane. Governor Kathleen Blanco declared a state of emergency for Louisiana. Before Katrina, evacuations had always been voluntary for the city, but as leaders prepared for the worst, Nagin declared a mandatory evacuation for the first time in the city’s history. What that specifically entailed was a source of confusion for residents. Part of this declaration included activating “contraflow” on I-10 – making both sides of the interstate outbound from the city, which led to massive traffic jams the entire day before the storm made landfall. Many residents left at the last minute, and roughly 100,000 did not evacuate, choosing to ride out the storm. Mayor Ray Nagin exclaimed at a press conference, “Ladies and gentlemen, this is not a test. This is the real deal” (Nolan, 2005a). He then deemed the Superdome a special-needs shelter of last resort. A news story indicated that by Sunday evening, an estimated 10,000 residents, many of whom were some of the city’s poorest residents and did not have the financial means or transportation to evacuate, had sought refuge at the Superdome (Filosa, 2005). The crowd would eventually swell to around 45,000, suffering in deplorable conditions in the immediate aftermath.

*The Times-Picayune* captured the angst felt by residents and local and state officials that this was “the big one” and “the worst case scenario” that residents have always feared, stating that Katrina would be “worse than Hurricane Betsy and Camille” from the 1960s. Saturday’s front page headline read, “Katrina Puts End to Lull: Storm’s Western Path Puts N.O. on Edge;” and the Sunday paper, simply, “Katrina Takes Aim.” One journalist painted a dire picture of the
expected devastation predicted less than 24 hours from landfall, writing how Katrina “was still on track to hit the New Orleans area as a devastating Category 5 hurricane as its eye comes ashore this morning. A computer model estimate of storm surge…indicates that even without waves, a Category 5 storm would flood most of eastern New Orleans, the Ninth Ward, Mid-City, much of downtown…levees likely will be topped” (Russell, 2005a). On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made its second landfall around 6:30 a.m. between Grand Isle and the mouth of the Mississippi River. Katrina reached peak strength as a category five hurricane with winds of 175 miles per hour but slightly weakened as it neared the coast. It ultimately made landfall as a strong category three storm with sustained winds of 125 miles per hour, with some areas reporting wind speeds of 140 miles per hour.

Hours after landfall, initial news stories indicated that the city was largely spared from the storm’s floods. However, later that day, reports were coming that the city’s 17th Street, London Avenue, and Industrial Canals were overtopping and breaching, inundating large swaths of the city with water. Public officials, engineers, and meteorologists widely blamed MR-GO and the Intracoastal Waterway for creating a “funnel effect” for storm surges from the Gulf of Mexico that led to over two days of catastrophic, rising floodwaters from Lake Pontchartrain. New Orleans East, Lakeview, The Ninth Ward, and St. Bernard Parish experienced the worst of the flooding, with many neighborhoods receiving upwards of 20 feet of water that lasted for several days after the storm moved out of the area (Figure 18). Eastover, particularly, sustained significant flood damage from Katrina as it is the lowest-elevated part of New Orleans East. Emergency response agencies nationwide came to New Orleans to engage in search and rescue operations during the immediate aftermath. Rescue teams would spray large “X”s on dwellings, indicating the house had been checked and with each quadrant signifying what was found there.
Hurricane Katrina revealed the full scope of MR-GO’s decades-long disastrous and permanent repercussions. Environmentalists accurately predicted as far back as 1957 that the channel “would cause an ecological disaster” (*The Times-Picayune*, 2006b). The death toll from the floodwaters would be high for the modern day. In an interview almost a week after the storm hit, New Orleans Police Captain Timothy Bayard shared that a search and rescue team discovered roughly 90 bodies in the Sherwood Forest subdivision in The East, declaring, “We’re going to see a lot more bodies out of New Orleans East than we anticipated” (*Thevenot*, 2005). In a post-Katrina staff editorial, *The Times-Picayune* adamantly insisted MR-GO close once and for all and listed a litany of reasons: “The channel’s usage peaked in 1978 and has declined 86 percent since then; as of 2004, it was used by an average of four ships per week;” and “the
channel wiped out 27,000 acres of marshland...that once stood between St. Bernard and Lake Borgne” (*The Times-Picayune*, 2006a). Arguing that “this shipping shortcut failed to live up to its billing,” the editorial concluded by saying, “but most of all, [by closing MR-GO] it will send a strong message that people weighing their futures need to hear” (*The Times-Picayune*, 2006a).

After four years of passionate debate, MR-GO was closed in 2009.

The immediate days after Katrina’s landfall were unprecedented and chaotic. Blame came from local, state, and federal levels, and ten days after the storm hit, FEMA Director Michael Brown resigned following the agency’s controversial mishandling of the aftermath. Mayor Nagin declared martial law in Orleans Parish and, in partnership with state and federal officials, deployed hundreds of state troopers and thousands of National Guard soldiers to help restore law and order to the city (Anderson, Perlstein, & Scott, 2005; Purpura, 2005).

Widespread reports of looting and anarchy dominated headlines and news channels, exposing Katrina’s devastation worldwide. An editorial published by *The Times-Picayune staff* on September 1 stated:

> The lawlessness was intensifying to horrific levels Wednesday. Some residents said armed gangs were terrorizing people up and down Chef Menteur Highway in eastern New Orleans. There were reports of rapes and murders. In other parts of the city, looters became more and more brazen...Not all looting was so mercenary. Some people were taking only essentials: food, water, dry clothes. The lack of law enforcement is stunning. It is apparent that no one – neither New Orleans Police Chief Eddie Compass nor state and federal officials prepared for what would come after Katrina had passed through (2005b).

Six days after the storm made landfall, police officers responded to a call for help on the Danziger Bridge, a small overpass over the Industrial Canal that connected Gentilly and N.O. East. During the encounter, police officers shot and killed two unarmed civilians and wounded four others and then tried to cover it up by pinning the blame on one of the people they shot at. After a high-profile trial, 11 officers were indicted on charges ranging from obstruction of justice
to manslaughter. It was not until June 2023 that Louisiana’s police oversight board formally revoked the credentials of five of the former New Orleans police officers involved in the Danziger Bridge shooting; the six others convicted of dishonesty charges still have not had their credentials permanently revoked 18 years later (Cranney, 2023).

Once the immediate crisis of the first two weeks abated, attention shifted toward short- and long-term recovery efforts. One of the first meetings focused on the city’s rebuilding was convened in Dallas on September 10. A group of around 60 of the city’s top business people and public officials met in what would become “an early lesson in the difficulties [that lie ahead] facing those who seek a consensus on a plan for the future” (Scott, 2005). Race was at the center of rebuilding debates from the inception. Jimmy Reiss, a white businessman whose family was part of the city’s old money and Mayor Nagin’s Regional Transit Authority Chief, helped organize one of the first meetings. Part of the city’s power-elite, Reiss unapologetically stated in an interview with The Wall Street Journal, “Those who want to see this city rebuilt want to see it done in a completely different way: demographically, geographically, and politically. I’m not just speaking for myself here. The way we’ve been living is not going to happen again, or we’re out” (Cooper, 2005). Acknowledging that not rebuilding the hardest-hit areas would inevitably result in fewer Black residents, Reiss added, “We understand that African Americans have had a great deal of influence on the history of New Orleans” (Cooper, 2005). Reiss’ comment incensed Black state lawmakers and the city’s powers-that-be. When asked to reassert his stance, he backtracked via an op-ed, clarifying his position, “We all shared the same objective: Make New Orleans a prosperous city that provided jobs and a high quality of life for all of its citizens and preserving the diverse cultural and ethnic heritage that makes us special” (Reiss, 2005).
At that meeting, Wynton Marsalis, one of the city’s eminent trumpeters and composers, pointedly declared that the city must prioritize economy and culture while reconstructing the city. Scott (2005) writes, “...Marsalis’ message struck deeply, according to people who attended the Dallas meeting Sept. 10. One huge concern is the potential loss of a disproportionately large number of African Americans whose neighborhoods endured some of the most damaging flood waters and whose low incomes hinder their return” (The Times-Picayune). During this meeting, Nagin proclaimed that he would appoint “a racially balanced task force dedicated to planning the city’s revival” (Scott, 2005). For many, the city was a tabula rasa – a disaster disguised as an opportunity to start anew without the endemic social ills that historically plagued the city before the storm. For others, fears of “social engineering,” displacement, and permanent resettlement elsewhere instilled anxiety that the city would fundamentally change, with many “predict[ing] that if the diverse peoples of New Orleans do not return, its distinctive neighborhoods, musical inspirations, and culinary traditions probably won’t, either” (Scott, 2005). Following this meeting, Mayor Nagin created and implemented a staggered – and eventually delayed – reentry plan, allowing four unflooded and unscathed parts of the city to reopen and repopulate: parts of Uptown, Algiers, the Central Business District, and the French Quarter.

New Orleans East residents felt neglected and forgotten. On September 18, 2005, Jarvis DeBerry, an editorial writer for The Times-Picayune, wrote an op-ed focusing on the plight of the city’s Black middle class (Figure 50). He writes, “Despite its devastation, the area known as New Orleans East, the other part of the 9th Ward, hasn’t gotten much attention since the storm. There are probably multiple reasons for that.” (The Times-Picayune). DeBerry speculates that the reasons are the area’s inaccessibility due to its widespread devastation and the media’s attention on poorer parts of the city. He then digs deeper, claiming, “Despite the wealth, fame or stature of
many of its residents, for too many people now covering New Orleans, the area simply doesn’t exist. It’s not a place they ever think about.” Part of the op-ed includes details of an interview DeBerry had with Critty Hymes, a gynecologist who lost her practice when the floodwaters destroyed Methodist Hospital. DeBerry explains how Hymes heard a rumor that the city was “planning to bulldoze New Orleans East, which, to her, sounded like a plan to throw dirt over the city’s black middle class” and how she was angry that “the East took a backseat to Lakeview.” She laments, “It’s like we are forgotten out there. I’m well-educated, and we were just left. Left like we didn’t exist.” Wondering if bulldozing refers to actually tearing down houses, DeBerry conjectures, “Or does ‘bulldoze’ mean the demolition of an idea? The idea that upward mobility and neighborhood stability are as attainable for black New Orleanians as they are for other races. Does it mean the city will throw out the black middle class with the floodwater?”

DeBerry’s op-ed concludes with questioning the future – unsure who will return, what areas will rebuild, and to what extent the Black middle class will return and make the city home again or seek greener pastures elsewhere. Two days later, the paper’s front page story specifically focused on New Orleans East, indicating that his editorial worked effectively. DeBerry’s editorial powerfully captures the literal and figurative historical neglect of New Orleans East. The doctor’s reference to Lakeview, which was just as devastated by the floods as The East, foreshadowed the disparity between the recovery of the two neighborhoods. Other post-Katrina op-eds echoed how race and class were front and center in the rebuilding debates for city leaders and residents alike. One op-ed, this time from a white couple who had resided in The East and lost their house, unapologetically and matter-of-factly speaks to race’s decisive role in the city’s short-term and long-term recovery:

For more than 30 years, New Orleans East was a haven for the emerging black
middle class. It was the suburban ‘black flight’ neighborhood: as the central city and inner suburbs deteriorated, middle-class and educated black citizens went there seeking safer suburban lives, with better schools and houses with lawns. The relatively low housing prices in New Orleans East made this ideal affordable, and black families in this neighborhood did not face the racism they might have in white suburbs…The two of us can feel comfortable resettling anywhere in the metropolitan area. But for black families, the decision is not so simple. Many would rather not deal with racism in the white suburbs, some of which are also unaffordable for these displaced families. But how do we ask them to return to the central city areas that many worked so hard to leave? These are people who overcame the odds, played by the rules, broke out of the infamous ‘cycle of poverty,’ bought homes, built families, and enjoyed a taste of what Americans define as success. And they are being told that their community is not on the immediate recovery list (Howell & Vinturella, 2006).

A third op-ed published in *The New York Times* two years after the storm, penned by N.O. homeowner Susan Saulny drives the point home:

_Hurricane Katrina left most of New Orleans East in a shambles that way, although as a whole, it received less attention than needier black areas of equivalent white neighborhoods. In terms of size – both geographically and in population – it dwarfs the Lower Ninth Ward and Lakeview. It had close to 100,000 residents. As of May, about 30% of them were back…Katrina managed to shred the fabric of the black upper middle class living there, at a time when New Orleans desperately needs its black professionals to have a voice in the recovery process (2007)._  

Recovery debates resounded in every corner of the devastated city, from neighborhood restaurants reopening with paper-only menus to places of worship that operated in makeshift buildings as congregations rebuilt their edifices. From Algiers to West End and from the Holy Cross neighborhood to Lake Forest Estates, conversations by the thousands centered on the so-called “Great Footprint Debate,” which asked questions such as: Should the entire city be rebuilt? Or should the city reimagine its urban footprint, building on higher ground and returning low-lying, flood-prone subdivisions to nature? If so, what would be the methodology for making such decisions, and who would be responsible for executing them? Donze and Russell (2006) report, “The idea of ‘shrinking the footprint’ has been particularly unpopular among African-American leaders and residents, who made up nearly 70 percent of the city’s pre-Katrina
population and who were more likely than white residents to live in areas devastated by
flooding,” (*The Times-Picayune*). Mayor Nagin and Governor Blanco invited urban planning and
disaster experts worldwide to New Orleans to share their knowledge and guidance on rebuilding
the city, and out of the post-Katrina debates, various recovery and reconstruction plans emerged.
At the state level, Governor Blanco spearheaded the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) in
response to Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita, which hit southwestern Louisiana one month
after Katrina. While the LRA focused on the short- and long-term needs of rebuilding statewide,
local commissions focused on New Orleans.

The proposals on rebuilding New Orleans ranged far and wide in what became known as
“Plandemonium” (Campanella, 2008). For example, the City Council released the Neighborhood
Rebuilding Plan in 2006, led by Miami-based Lambert/Danzey consultants, consisting of 49
individual neighborhood-level reconstruction plans. In early 2007, the Unified New Orleans Plan
(UNOP) was released, unique in that the process was citizen-led, the product of more than a
dozen planning teams and input from thousands of residents. Additional, smaller-scale
independent district and neighborhood plans proposed by citizens, activists, neighborhood
organizations, universities, and grassroots organizations proliferated. Finally, geographic district
plans that targeted specific goals, such as economic development, included Reinvesting the
Crescent, which focused on redeveloping the Mississippi River, the New Orleans Biomedical
District, the Lafitte Greenway, and the Greater New Orleans Urban Water Plan. For New
Orleans East specifically, in 2009, the state legislature established the Eastern New Orleans
Neighborhood Advisory Commission (ENONAC) as a neighborhood advisory board for the
mayor, city council, boards, commissions, and local and state independent agencies for anything
N.O. East related. Their purview included zoning, neighborhood planning, housing density, economic development, traffic, parking, recreation, and street improvements.

The most notorious post-Katrina rebuilding blueprint came from the Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOBC), a 17-member advisory panel created by Mayor Nagin one month after the hurricane hit and that included two women and 15 men, seven of whom were CEOs and three of whom were bank presidents. The commission was led by Maurice “Mel” Lagarde, a white executive who lived on St. Charles Avenue, and Barbara Major, executive director of St. Thomas Health Services, a non-profit community health clinic, who lived in New Orleans East. Joseph Canizaro chaired the commission’s Urban Planning Committee. Canizaro hired The Urban Land Institute (ULI) – a non-profit land use and real estate research organization composed mainly of developers – as a consultant, and they worked at no cost to advise the BNOBC on a comprehensive rebuilding strategy. Critics of the commission argued that the panel lacked diversity and needed greater participation by ordinary citizens, small business owners, and neighborhood leaders. Yet, Nagin doubled down on supporting the BNOBC and its mostly-executive membership. The mayor and commission members would hold several neighborhood and citywide town halls, which increasingly became more hostile and inflamed, since BNOBC’s visions and decisions would become critical in how the city would move forward and set the foundation for a reconstructed and redeveloped post-Katrina city.

By mid-October 2005, Mayor Nagin was still undecided on whether to rebuild the entire city, suggesting the city’s western half be rebuilt first “and that questions still remain about what will happen with rebuilding in the Lower Ninth Ward and eastern New Orleans” (Alpert & Carr, 2005, p. A11). Refusing to be left out of the recovery process and determined to have a seat at

---

13 Canizaro was the past president of the Urban Land Institute before Hurricane Katrina.
the table, hundreds of eastern New Orleans residents began mobilizing a grass-roots effort, forming a group called East New Orleans United & Whole. The coalition formed in Baton Rouge, where many had evacuated, “as an expanding political bloc that aims to use its clout to garner aid and resources, repopulate, and rebuild [The East] quickly” (Hamilton, 2005). The coalition was integral in coordinating resources and helping residents navigate FEMA, insurance, and other critical needs. Anxiety surrounding the return of The East quelled when the BNOBC voted unanimously at a meeting on October 24 “for a resolution declaring that the city’s eastern sections, among the hardest hit by the flooding last month, will be fully involved in the rebuilding” (Eggler, 2005b). Barbara Major declared that the city must rebuild equitably: “The equity in your process will determine the equity in your outcome” (Eggler, 2005b). The resolution was proposed by City Council President Oliver Thomas, who “wanted the commission to take a public position on the issue” (Eggler, 2005b). Without explanation, Canizaro abstained from voting, and one day before the vote, Nagin altered his stance and publicly declared, “We will rebuild this entire city. We will rebuild New Orleans East. We will rebuild the Lower Ninth Ward” (Eggler, 2005b). Despite BNOBC’s initial vote, N.O. East homeowners were not convinced, and every town hall meeting escalated, with many residents crying out that the poorer, Black half of the city could not even get essential city services such as water and power while the whiter, western half was getting more resources and timely aid (Filosa, 2005). Many saw it as a deliberate attempt to force them out of the city.

After collecting data over several weeks, The Urban Land Institute released its first official recommendations in November 2005, calling for the city to “begin redevelopment equitably and without delay” (ULI, 2005). Carr (2005) reports, “In the most comprehensive recovery plan proposed to date, a panel of more than 50 specialists in urban and post-disaster
planning said New Orleans should concentrate its rebuilding efforts on the sections of the city that occupy the high ground, while securing lower-lying areas for potential long-term rebirth” (*The Times-Picayune*). The report did not explicitly call for *not* rebuilding certain parts of the city. It did, however, make clear that the best course of action for the city’s recovery would be to implement a phased strategy that prioritized “using [the city’s] original footprint, as well as lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina, as a guide in determining what areas are most logical for redevelopment” (Carr, 2005). The planned, sequenced stages of reconstruction were labeled the recovery stage, which would last through August 2006 and be followed by the rebuilding stage from 2006-2010 and the growth stage from 2010 to 2018, the city’s 300th anniversary.

The main roadmap offered by the ULI revolved around two entities that the state legislature would establish. The first was the “Crescent City Rebuilding Corporation” – a board appointed by President Bush, Governor Blanco, Mayor Nagin, and the New Orleans City Council – that would primarily be responsible for “financ[ing] redevelopment and guid[ing] neighborhood planning” (Carr, 2005). The second entity would be the “Temporary Financial Oversight Board,” which would possess broad powers over the city’s finances “to ensure integrity and oversight” of federal recovery funds coming into the city and oversee the city budget and major rebuilding contracts to ensure it didn’t go bankrupt” (Carr, 2005). This board would have a five-year timeline and include only seven members: three appointed by the President, two by the governor, and one by each the Mayor and the City Council. A third major component of ULI’s plans called for smart-growth urban planning principles and a reimagined and modernized citywide system of green spaces and flood-mitigation infrastructure, including parks, bike paths, greenways, wetland restoration, and inner-city levees along natural ridges. ULI’s grand plan included both social and infrastructure recommendations to encourage private
investment, such as restructuring the local property tax system, overhauling the city’s zoning and land-use processes, and cultivating a local economy beyond tourism that emphasized healthcare and the biosciences. Finally, their recommendations called for a regional approach to levee protection, transit, emergency response, and economic development.

Alluding to the earlier declaration that the city should use the “original footprint” of the city, the ULI’s plan hinged on categorizing the city’s neighborhoods into “investment zones” based on the extent of hurricane damage. Determining which areas fell into what zone was based on several factors, including “the extent and depth of flooding from Katrina-related levee breaches and storm surge as well as earlier storms…a neighborhood’s topography, the capacity of canals and pumping systems, nearness to open space, owner/renter occupancy figures, and the current condition of buildings” (The Times-Picayune, 2005). The first zone included the highest parts of the city – the French Quarter, CBD, and Uptown – which were ready for “rehabilitation immediately.” Zone two was identified as “midground” and included areas ready for “rehabilitation, [but] with some opportunities to put together parcels of land for green space or redevelopment” – parts of Mid-City, Tremé, the Seventh Ward, and the southern parts of Lakeview and Gentilly. The third zone comprised the hardest hit neighborhoods, including most of New Orleans East, the northern halves of Gentilly and Lakeview, and significant parts of the Lower Ninth Ward, the Desire, and Broadmoor.

The ULI suggested temporarily banning redevelopment in the third zone until more environmental tests and hurricane protection studies were conducted and analyzed. Nonetheless, the panel initially advised that areas in this zone would likely be better suited for “open-space allocations for wetlands, recreational parks, or open-water retention systems” (ULI, 2005). ULI’s professional opinion was unmistakable: not to rebuild parts of the city hardest hit, to learn from
the city’s history, and to rebuild wiser and greener in the age of global climate change. The ULI was blunt that the city must “shrink the footprint” and return urbanized areas that should not have been urbanized in the first place to marshland. Planning experts warned against what they deemed the “jack-o’-lantern effect,” that is, partially rebuilt and occupied streets and blocks that would lead to “scattershot redevelopment…in the worst-hit areas,” in which case “homeowners will begin to rehab houses on partially abandoned streets, creating shantytowns with little to no property value” (Carr, 2005). The report suggested that if buyouts were to occur, then homeowners should be compensated at the pre-Katrina housing value.

The post-Katrina rebuilding debate forced the city to look itself in the mirror and ask not what it was but what it could and should be. In answering this existential question, the ULI had to contend with balancing the human and sociological elements, such as place attachment, historic housing patterns, and the city’s culture and traditions, with physical geography, flood risk, infrastructure, and other more objective, measurable data. Permeating every conversation and recommendation – sometimes overt, sometimes covert – were the underlying themes of race and class, belonging and rights to the city, and preserving New Orleans culture. Not mincing his words, Canizaro stated, “Poor folks don’t have the resources to go back to our city…So we won’t get all the folks back. That’s just a fact” (Horowitz, 2020, p. 142).

To add pressure to rebuild all of New Orleans, City Council passed a resolution spearheaded by Councilmembers Cynthia Willard-Lewis and Cynthia Hedge-Morrell declaring, “It is the intent of this Council to ensure that all neighborhoods be included in the timely and simultaneous rebuilding of all New Orleans neighborhoods” and that “resources should be disbursed to all areas in a consistent and uniform fashion based on the needs of the community” (Eggler, 2005c). While not legally binding, the council’s resolution symbolized unison in their
intent to rebuild the whole city. Following the vote and a lengthy debate over ULI’s findings, former state representative and Eastover resident Sherman Copelin told the BNOBC commission, directing particular attention to co-chair Mel Largarde, “I don’t care what ULI said or what you vote for, because that foolishness is not going to get past the Legislature or the City Council” (Eggler, 2005c). At one of the town halls, Willard-Lewis exclaimed, “We are not going to be shoved to the back of the bus,” proclaiming ULI’s plan was a blatantly racist affront to the city’s Black residents and that their neighborhoods would not be converted into greenspace to protect white neighborhoods. Copelin stated, “Take out of the report that The East isn’t coming back. We don’t need permission to come back! We are back!” (Horowotiz, 2020, p. 142-143).

One particularly vocal group that vehemently came out against ULI’s recommendations were the Vietnamese residents of Village de L’Est. Homeowners wanting to return felt uncertain and dark about The East’s future, with many also reiterating the rumors that the government wanted to bulldoze the area and return it to marshland. District E Councilmember Willard-Lewis remained steadfastly committed to rebuilding Village de L’Est, prioritizing “inclusion and clarity” and “a sense of urgency and a complement of resources” for all residents of N.O. East. Reverend Vien Nguyen, pastor of Mary Queen of Vietnam Church in N.O. East, became a leading advocate on behalf of the Vietnamese community. Criticizing the ULI’s initial report that argued for the potential for mass buyouts and future green space, Reverend Nguyen chastised the BNOBC commission for failing to include Village de L’est residents in discussions, stating, “We were never invited to the table. Somehow, we need to be a part of this process…we have the right to be part of the community-driven process” (Williams, 2005). Other residents complained that overgeneralizations were inaccurately portraying The East as totally destroyed. One resident, who stated his determination to rebuild “even better than before,” poked holes in the false
perception of the total devastation of East: “Neighborhoods between Michoud Boulevard and Bullard Avenue were not as badly flooded as other parts of eastern New Orleans” (Williams, 2005). In fact, a February 2006 article indicates that “almost every business is open…[with] corridors of bustling economic activity along Alcee Fortier Boulevard and along Chef Menteur Highway” (Williams, 2006d). Another report from 2007 indicated that roughly one-fourth of New Orleans East had zero to one foot of standing water – 11,000 residents (11%) had zero feet and 14,000 (14.9%) had one foot or less (Williams, 2007).

Despite lower levels of devastation compared to other parts of The East, Village de L’Est would face other problems that hindered residents from a full recovery. In February 2006, Mayor Nagin issued a temporary emergency six-month permit for a dump site along the border of Bayou Sauvage. Residents of Village de L’Est were angry and rallied against Katrina waste being dumped in their backyard. In coordination with environmental activist groups, members of the neighborhood’s Mary Queen of Vietnam Church filed lawsuits and eventually got Mayor Nagin not to extend the permit after six months, forcing the city to look elsewhere to solve its trash problem as residents returned and rebuilt. Horowitz (2020) writes, “Post Katrina, approximately twenty-two million tons of debris had to be cleared from Louisiana alone, much of which ended up in this [N.O. East] landfill” (p. 134).

Another critical local player on the ULI commission who advocated heavily for The East was Liberty Bank President Alden McDonald, Jr. Liberty Bank, which had just relocated its new headquarters next to The Plaza before Katrina hit, was covered by The New York Times for its integral role in helping rebuild the city’s Black middle class (Rivlin, 2006). Katrina’s waters destroyed the new headquarters’s first floor and flooded six of its eight branches, several of which were looted after the storm. With the East one of the most devastated parts of the city,
Liberty’s success and the future health and prosperity of the Black middle class in the post-Katrina city were intertwined. Alden tried unsuccessfully to have Congress pass a law requiring the federal government to funnel a large portion of Gulf Coast redevelopment funds through smaller community banks like Liberty, which shrunk from around 35,000 customers to between 20,000 and 25,000 one year following the storm (Rivlin, 2006).

McDonald concurred with the ULI’s recommendation that the city should responsibly and equitably shrink its size and build up more protective green spaces, stating, “Realistically, the city can’t afford to hire 1,700 policemen. So the footprint itself is going to have to be condensed to what we are going to be able to provide services for” (The Times-Picayune 2005c). McDonald believed that residents would slowly warm up to the idea of eventually demolishing specific neighborhoods. Arguing to build higher and denser so that residents don’t end up “living on an island amid a sea of blight,” McDonald professed, “I would like to see the community begin debating these issues so that the community can help make decisions about how they are going to repopulate. I think we have to deal with it, not from an emotional point of view, but from a very realistic [one]. I am emotionally attached to my home, but when I think about it, will I be able to get flood insurance? Will I have any other neighbors?” (The Times-Picayune, 2005c). McDonald’s questions foreshadowed the uneven development that would take place over the next decade. Additionally, much was contingent on FEMA’s release of updated advisory floodplain maps and the federal government’s absolute commitment to construct a newer, more robust hurricane levee protection system. The possibility of prohibitively-expensive flood insurance rate increases would profoundly impact homeowners’ decisions to return to New Orleans and, thus urban resettlement patterns. When the maps did come out, the new FEMA
guidelines did not prohibit redevelopment in any part of the city and left intact the flood elevation requirements mapped in 1984.

By December 2005, the BNOBC endorsed one of ULI’s key recommendations: that the city’s most devastated and flood-prone parts should return to wetlands. Yet, simultaneously, BNOBC modified ULI’s proposal in ways that “would make it more palatable to homeowners who want to rebuild in the lowest-lying parts” (The Times-Picayune, 2005c). Canizaro’s proposed modifications would allow “the free market – not planners – [to] decide which areas ultimately survive,” enabling residents to rebuild in any section of the city, even the worst flooded parts, for the next three years (The Times-Picayune, 2005c). Canizaro declared, “At the end of three years, we’ll see who is there. And if a neighborhood is not developing adequately to support the services it needs to support it, we’ll try to shrink it then…We want to make sure that we don’t create slums” (The Times-Picayune, 2005c). Speculating what might occur, Canizaro replied, “I don’t envision the elimination of neighborhoods. I see the shrinkage of neighborhoods” (The Times-Picayune, 2005c).

An op-ed the following day by a Gentilly homeowner did not receive his proposal favorably, calling it unclear and criticizing, “Is Joe Canizaro seriously suggesting that we go ahead and rebuild our homes so that in three years the city can condemn our neighborhood and just boot us out? This is exactly the reason so many homeowners in the flooded areas are not rebuilding yet. We need to know the implications of every one of our options, and they need to be firm, not hypothetical” (Miller, 2005). As rebuilding debates went on, it was not until January 6, 2006, that Mayor Ray Nagin ended the city’s curfew for New Orleans East. This meant “almost all of the city is [now] open to residents displaced since Hurricane Katrina. The Lower Ninth Ward is open only for daytime ‘look and leave’ visitation” (Eggler, 2006a). Nagin
proclaimed, “New Orleans East residents have been waiting for this day for quite some time. This footprint will allow up to 96,291 residents to return to the city on a more permanent basis” (Eggler, 2006a).

The same week New Orleans East reopened for residents to return, the City Council voted to ban disaster tours of New Orleans East and the Lower Ninth Ward. Cynthia Willard-Lewis introduced the measure in response to the recently-launched tours, such as Gray Line Tour, which gave tours of Lakeview and Gentilly, and Tours by Isabelle, which gave tours of Lakeview and the Lower Ninth Ward. The measure prohibited “tours of compensation” in the part of the city east of the industrial canal, saying “the regular and leisurely passage” of disaster sightseeing buses could “adversely impact the ongoing reconstruction of…devastated parts of the city” and that “it is of paramount importance that these residents not be victimized again by having their ongoing suffering exploited and paraded for commercial gain, entertainment, or amusement” (Eggler, 2006a). While the Council did vote unanimously in favor, with two members absent, then-Councilwoman Jackie Clarkson later offered that letting visitors tour hard-hit areas could serve as an important function in raising awareness and support for the city. She argued exposure could lead to increased assistance and federal aid. In defense, Gray Lines showed how they donated $3 for each tour ticket to one of several nonprofit groups and provided bus riders with a form to sign and mail to their state’s congressional districts in support of rebuilding the city as well as signing a petition to get President Bush to rebuild the levees.

The post-Katrina rebuilding debate came to a head a week later, on January 11, 2006, when the Urban Planning Committee of the BNOBC commission unveiled its final recommendations. Titled “Action Plan for New Orleans: The New American City,” the 69-slide presentation included infographics, itemized lists of recommendations, and maps to
communicate their findings on how best to rebuild the city. The maps split the city into three designated geographic entities that would fall within thirteen official “Neighborhood Planning Districts”: “Immediate Opportunity Areas,” “Neighborhood Planning Areas,” and “Infill Development Areas.” All three “areas” corresponded to (and were essentially an updated version of) ULI’s three redevelopment zones proposed months earlier. Each Neighborhood Planning District would have four months to demonstrate its “viability” by coming up with a “neighborhood rebuilding strategy,” during which time there would also be a moratorium on building permits (Figure 19). One component of “viability” was determining whether an area “would be able to reattract ‘sufficient population’ to warrant investment in city services and facilities” (Donze & Russell, 2006). This plan was a catch-22, and residents, particularly from the most flooded neighborhoods, balked at the term.

**Figure 19**

Neighborhood Rebuilding Strategy, 2006
Logistically, ULI’s roadmap – and thus residents’ decision-making – rested on Congressional approval of a federal bill providing voluntary buyouts of flooded-out homes. Under a bill proposed by then-U.S. Representative Richard Baker, homeowners would be released from their mortgages and compensated at least 60% of their pre-Katrina home equity. Part of BNOBC’s plan included having the newly-created Crescent City Redevelopment Authority apply for and oversee federal Community Development Block Grants to make up the remaining 40%, thus providing residents with a fully-funded buyout option. Both programs would deduct homeowner’s insurance settlements from the buyout amount. However, the BNOB Commission went further when it called for using eminent domain to expropriate property “if the situation warrants doing so” (The Times-Picayune, 2006a). This recommendation fueled the fire, and residents across the city protested in impressive numbers to demand equitable rebuilding.
For some residents, the timeline was too long a time, and for many others, that was not
easily enough time to make such monumental decisions, especially when a significant number of
residents had not even returned to the city since the storm hit. The day after ULI’s plan came out
was Martin Luther King Jr. Day. On the steps of City Hall, Mayo Nagin, in one of his most
infamous speeches, declared, “We as black people, it's time, it's time for us to come together. It's
time for us to rebuild New Orleans, the one that should be a chocolate New Orleans. And I don't
care what people are saying Uptown or wherever they are. This city will be chocolate at the end
of the day” (Grimm, 2019). The next day, The Times-Picayune published a story about the
commission’s conclusions with a very long title, half of which was in all capital letters: “4
MONTHS TO DECIDE: NAGIN PANEL SAYS HARDEST-HIT AREAS MUST PROVE
VIABILITY; CITY’S FOOTPRINT MAY SHRINK; FULL BUYOUTS PROPOSED FOR
THOSE FORCED TO MOVE; New Housing to be developed in vast swaths of New Orleans’
higher ground”. The story contained a “PLAN FOR THE FUTURE” map and described “a $17
billion plan that calls for a vast reworking of the city’s neighborhoods and housing patterns. But
in the four-month period when the fine print is hashed out in 13 districts over who can build
where, all renovation will be halted in the flooded zone” (Donze & Russell, 2006).

In what would become the infamous “Green Dot Map,” the city map contained six solid
green line circles over large swaths of the city titled “approximate areas expected to become
parks and greenspace” (Figure 20). The six green dots were over Broadmoor, where Gentilly
meets Fillmore, the Lower Ninth Ward, St. Roch near Desire, and two over New Orleans East –
one between Read Boulevard and Crowder Boulevard and the second between Crowder
Boulevard and where the interstate curves. The “Green Dot Map” soon became part of the local
lexicon, and the controversy arguably arose because of discrepancies in cartography conventions.
The Times-Picayune’s map geographically depicted the dots differently in shape, outline, color, and description than the shapes portrayed in the BNOBC PowerPoint presentation, which were not solid green dots. Rather, BNOBC’s slide depicted six dashed-green line circles with no fill titled “areas for future parkland” (Figure 21). The mismatch between dashed green circles (the BNOBC presentation) and solid green circles (the version that made it onto the front page of The Times-Picayune) made all the difference in interpretation as residents interpreted solid circles as implying an “in or out” mental map. Whereas the dashed green circles by the BNOBC were tentative suggestions for areas that could become part of the proposed, long-term citywide stormwater protection system, the newspaper’s version with solid green circles symbolized and communicated to residents definitive greenspaces that would wipe out entire neighborhoods.

Figure 20

The Green Dot Map, 2006
That the public did not accept the plan well would be an understatement. The Green Dot map was politically dead and ignited a firestorm of protest across racial, class, and geographic
lines as residents passionately defended their right to return, directing their furor at the BNOB Commission, particularly Joseph Canizaro. For some residents, Joe Canizaro was known as “the man who built the tallest towers on Poydras Street and the grandest palace in Old Metairie,” while for others, he was the man who “is among that snobby Uptown crowd that dismisses that culture [of the city]” (Thevenot, 2006). Eastern New Orleans resident Harvey Bender infamously condemned Canizaro, stating, “Mr. Joe Canizaro, I don’t know you, but I hate you. You’ve been in the background trying to scheme to get our land” (Donze & Russell, 2006; Robertson, 2014). The frustration shared by this resident embodied the fears many Black residents felt about the city’s reconstruction, and whether or not it would include them or bulldoze their communities.

In an interview, activist Malcolm Suber of the People’s Hurricane Relief Fund claimed that Canizaro epitomized developers who had long sought to marginalize the poor and gentrify the city. Suber stated, “In developers’ minds, you hide the poor people, push them to the margins on the West Bank or New Orleans East. There’s no regard for the culture of New Orleans, which is made up of poor black men and women who work in the kitchens and hotels. The rich people who run this city could care less about that culture. They’re embarrassed by it” (Thevenot, 2006). Indeed, Canizaro was integral to the pre-Katrina demolition of the St. Thomas public housing development that local developer Pres Kabacoff converted into a mixed-income neighborhood called River Gardens. Residents blamed him for the subsequent scattering of its residents in order “to raise property values in the Lower Garden District, adjacent to Canizaro-owned land on which he made a fortune” (Thevenot, 2006). BNOB Commission co-chair Barbara Major responded to the attacks on Canizaro, stating, “He represented all of that history of rich, white, male developers in the city of New Orleans, and he took the rap for all that history…When that man said, ‘I hate you,’ that was years of stuff” (Thevenot, 2006).
Newspaper editorials had different takes on the Green Dot map. Offering an alternative perspective, longtime columnist Stephanie Grace referred to the Green Dot map as a “curse” and “a move that will go down as one of the great miscalculations of post-Katrina planning...contribut[ing] to a stunning level of public mistrust” (The Times-Picayune, 2007). She references City Councilwoman Cynthia Willard-Lewis’ dismayed response to the map: “The maps are causing people to lose hope” (Grace, 2007). A Times-Picayune staff editorial called ULI’s recommendations “a responsible plan” that called for a “realistic evaluation” of city neighborhoods and potential recovery. The op-ed reads, “The death of neighborhoods is an uncomfortable idea for many people, and understandably so, but it may be unavoidable in the aftermath of Katrina” (The Times-Picayune, 2006b).

In a second post-Katrina editorial, Jarvis DeBerry added to the footprint debate, challenging readers to recognize the differences between the size of the population and the size of the landmass by pointing out that the city’s population has steadily declined since 1960 yet has a larger footprint due to New Orleans East’s suburban growth that occurred post-1960. DeBerry poses the question, “If New Orleans had between 29 and 39 percent more people in 1960, before the advent of New Orleans East, how can anyone credibly argue that the only way to accommodate everyone’s return is to open up every area of the city?” (DeBerry, 2006). His op-ed suggests that part of the resistance to shrinking the city’s footprint “stems from the current expectation that the city ought to maintain its areas that look like the suburbs,” noting that while The East is within city limits, “the neighborhoods are much closer in character to those in Metairie or Harvey than...the Irish Channel” (DeBerry, 2006). DeBerry makes the case that the very residents who left the inner-city for the East – the former middle class Black dwellers of Central City, the Seventh Ward, and Tremé – “resent being told they should move [back] in
closer to the core of the city because they’re fundamentally opposed to… the higher density and the absence of cul-de-sacs that characterize the older parts of the city” and that “if it’s about the need for ranch houses, big back yards, and off street parking, people just ought to say that. For it should be obvious that everybody who was here in 2005 could easily fit in a smaller New Orleans. We know that’s true because so many more people fit in 1960” (DeBerry, 2006). DeBerry’s pressing questions needed to be confronted as the city potentially faced a smaller, denser version of its former self.

The Green Dot Map controversy resulted in a remarkable display of civic engagement unseen before. Grassroots neighborhood organizations were formed by the dozens, and in some cases, professional expertise partnered with neighborhood organizations, such as when the Broadmoor Improvement Association partnered with Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government to help rebuild their neighborhood. Within one week of the Green Dot map being released, eastern N.O. residents formed a recovery task force led by Sherman Copelin called the New Orleans East Business Association (NOEBA), which focused on economic development and urged a “market-driven” recovery for The East. The task force worked with Greg Rigamer, an urban planner, to act as a liaison with the BNOB Commission. NOEBA made expressly clear that “eastern New Orleans originally was envisioned as a modern suburban community: ‘a higher-end community with great stores and restaurants’” and that they desired “continuing in that direction” (Williams, 2006a). St. Martin Brown & Associates, a local planning firm hired by City Council, released a draft plan in August 2006. Williams writes:

The plan calls for three major bicycle paths, each stretching at least five miles; landscape buffers between homes and businesses; a French Quarter-style mixing of commercial and residential properties at most major intersections along the interstate; a revitalized Lincoln Beach; a family entertainment district…open-air, pedestrian-friendly town center for upscale shopping; and…a Main Street initiative on Chef Menteur Highway to upgrade the facades of buildings and a
zoning initiative that would limit dense apartment complexes…In Village de L’Est, the recovery plan calls for the business corridor [between] Michoud and Alcee Fortier boulevards to be redeveloped as an inviting, organized business district…installing sound barriers along the interstate highways; and improving the 7,000 acre New Orleans Regional Business Park (The Times-Picayune, 2006).

Accustomed to big promises that became nothing more, a resident at the town hall remarked, “I think it’s a good idea, but I think it’ll be forever before it’s in full swing” (Williams, 2006a).

Unsurprisingly, these plans did not come to fruition.

On the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, an estimated 28,000 of New Orleans East’s pre-Katrina population of nearly 98,000 had returned (Katz, 2006). In an interview for a first-year anniversary piece, Nagin shared his thoughts on the state of the area’s recovery: “New Orleans East is showing some signs [of recovery], but it’s vast. It’s going to hit the wall. There’s just such a big footprint, I don’t think they’re going to get the clustering they need. So I think you’re going to have little pockets in The East. I’ve been saying this publicly, and people are starting to hear it: low-lying areas of New Orleans East, stay away from” (Russell, 2006a).

During this interview, Nagin indicated that the city’s investments would be concentrated, much to the chagrin of eastern residents, west of the Industrial Canal, declaring, “We’re going to focus most of the resources in here” (Russell, 2006a).

One more high-profile recovery plan for the post-Katrina city came from Dr. Edward Blakely, a renowned professor of urban planning at the University of California, Berkeley, who Mayor Nagin appointed in late 2006 to develop a comprehensive rebuilding roadmap. Blakely led recovery efforts after Oakland’s 1988 earthquake and the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York City. Nicknamed “Recovery Czar,” Blakely was pointedly outspoken that an outside expert would more effectively make the hard but necessary decisions on how best to rebuild and “would be less likely to be influenced by historical, cultural, and political factors that can sway
the decisions of local residents on issues including which geographic areas, if any, should be
often limits to rebuilding” (Krupa, 2006). Blakely made his stance known when he declared,
“Everyone should be allowed to rebuild. But that does not mean everyone should be allowed to
rebuild in exactly the same place they built before” (Krupa, 2006).

When Blakely first started, he offered grand visions of remaking New Orleans into a
modern 21st-century gateway city and infamously promised to have “cranes on the skyline” by
the fall of 2007 (Eggler, 2009b). To this end, Blakely created the Office of Recovery and
Development Administration, which under his direction, oversaw nearly half of all City Hall
departments, including economic development, housing, and code enforcement. He called for
strict enforcement of blighted-property laws and placed great emphasis on creating a “modern
settlement pattern” to “improve the physical situation so a future disaster would be less likely,”
implying that perhaps the most flood-prone areas should be avoided or that the city should
embrace building higher and more densely (Russell, 2006b). By spring 2007, Blakely unveiled
his $1.1 billion blueprint, which focused on viable neighborhood clustering spread throughout 17
redevelopment zones across the city “chosen by science, and not politics” (Krupa & Russell,
2007). Blakely’s 17 zones were labeled “rebuild,” “re-develop,” and “re-new” and would be
funded through a massive influx of public and private dollars (Figure 22). Fourteen sites were on
the western side of the Industrial Canal, while three were on the eastern flank: The Plaza site at
Read Boulevard and I-10 (rebuild), the Lower Ninth Ward (rebuild), and where Michoud meets
Village de L’Est (re-new).

Figure 22

Map of Target Recovery Areas, 2007
For some residents, Blakely’s 17 zones, which were represented in the newspaper as more geographically generic numbered circles, evoked, though more subtly, the Green Dot controversy two years earlier. However, unlike the BNOBC and other previous plans, Blakely’s roadmap “aims to encourage commercial investment – and with it stabilize neighborhoods – rather than defining areas that are off-limits to rebuilding…the new plan instead emphasizes where a boost may help more viable areas take off” (Krupa & Russell, 2007). New Orleans East and Lower Ninth Ward homeowners saw “powerful significance in their inclusion in the plan, an antidote to long-standing fears and conspiracy theories that their neighborhoods might be closed altogether” (Warner, 2007). Krupa and Russell (2007) write, “Though 15 of the targeted zones include places already experiencing some revival, a big chunk of the money – $145 million over five years – is slated to be spent in two of the worst-ravaged areas: the Lower Ninth Ward and a swath of eastern New Orleans centered around the former Lake Forest Plaza Shopping Center, now a pile of rubble” (The Times-Picayune). Components of The Plaza redevelopment included a mixed-use “Renaissance Town Center,” streetscape and facade improvements, a District 7 police substation, and an extensive renovation of Joe W. Brown Park. It was clear to Blakely that, just like the Renaissance Plan pre-Katrina and Pontchartrain New Town in Town in the
1970s, the economic center and proverbial downtown for New Orleans East was the intersection of Read Boulevard and I-10. The economic comeback of The East hinged on rebuilding and transforming this prime intersection after decades of neglect and decline. New Orleans East residents were determined to use Katrina’s devastation as an opportunity to build the thriving city-within-a-city that had always been envisioned since 1959.

While Blakely’s plan started strong and sounded promising, it succumbed to politics. Incessant political infighting over control, poor communication among the different levels of government, and never-ending funding setbacks precluded Blakely’s vision from fully getting off the ground. Ambitious projects stalled, blueprints were shelved, and the city’s Recovery Czar departed after 31 months on the job. In his farewell presentation of final recommendations to the City Council’s Recovery Committee, he specifically urged to prioritize New Orleans East in two ways: reopen Pendleton Memorial Methodist Hospital as a public hospital district akin to Jefferson Parish’s two public medical centers and to “let people know we’re in the technology business” by promoting the Michoud Assembly Facility (Russell, 2009). Both a target of frequent criticism and a firm voice in making difficult but necessary choices about neighborhood rebuilding, Blakely left his mark via two tangible accomplishments: a large-scale overhaul and restructuring of City Hall operations and executing a citywide master plan called the “New Orleans Plan for the 21st Century.”14 Despite the compelling underlying logic that advised rebuilding higher, denser, and greener, the BNOB, ULI, and "Green Dot" maps and blueprints that emerged post-Katrina were resoundingly rejected, and Mayor Ray Nagin ultimately adopted a laissez-faire approach to recovery. Rather than taking action, the mayor essentially chose

---

14 In the fall of 2008, Orleans Parish voters approved a city charter amendment that coordinated the master plan, the city’s comprehensive zoning ordinance, the city’s capital improvement plan, the annual capital budget, and land-use processes to guide the city’s future growth up to 2030. The city formally adopted the master plan in August 2010 and amended it in 2018.
inaction after facing intense residential scrutiny and pushback concerning issues of race, class, history, tradition, and culture. His decision against shrinking the urban footprint, combined with planning fatigue, marked the official green light for residents of all parts of the city to move back and rebuild in place with no clear roadmap.

Although residents of The East could breathe a little bit easier knowing that their houses would not be outright bulldozed, neighborhoods east of the industrial canal would remain during the reconstruction years a precarious, in-between space of uneven development compared to the rest of the city. N.O. East was not a "blank slate" after the storm, and many of the pre-Katrina problems that plagued the area and which residents fought passionately against would return during the first five years of rebuilding. The Road Home Program, the post-Katrina federal program that gave homeowners money to rebuild their houses, exemplifies how the past and present are inextricably linked. The Road Home program led to citywide racial and class disparities in rebuilding: homeowners in white neighborhoods with higher property values, such as Lakeview, received more money to repair identical homes than homeowners in Black neighborhoods with lower property values, like New Orleans East and the Ninth Ward. This was true even when homes were of similar age, size, and levels of damage. By using pre-storm values, the old racial stratification of urban housing patterns came back to haunt Black New Orleanians as white homeowners returned and rebuilt at much faster rates. Within a year of Hurricane Katrina, an estimated 70% of long-term white residents returned to the city compared to only 42% of long-term Black residents (Larino, 2019).

A New Orleans East couple facing a $190,500 gap between grants and insurance settlements for their flooded house filed a lawsuit against the Louisiana Recovery Authority, the state entity monitoring the Road Home program, arguing that the state unjustly allocated the
money based on pre-storm home values, reinforcing racial segregation patterns. A study estimated that over time more than “20,000 African American New Orleanians have been adversely affected by the Road Home’s formula and that the reliance on pre-storm market values shortchanged these homeowners by over half a billion dollars” (Horowitz 2020, p. 154). A recent report says policy decisions made after the storm only “repeated or amplified” the racist underpinnings in local housing (Larino, 2019). In theory, the Road Home program was intended to provide families with federal funds to rebuild their flooded houses as well as a chance “to reverse centuries of racist housing practices that provided the framework for the entrenched segregation we still see in the city’s neighborhoods” (Larino, 2019). Systemic racism evident in the Road Home program led to disparate distribution of money and resources that would affect permitting, financing, and support for renewal as homeowners sought to rebuild their houses.

After years of court battles, in 2011, the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Center (GNOFHAC) won the Road Home lawsuit on the grounds that the fund disbursements were discriminatory and in violation of the 1968 Fair Housing Act. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the State of Louisiana settled for $62 million. However, it was too late because all but $148 million of the original $10 billion had already been spent (Rivlin, 2015a). In a 2015 New York Times interview, a New Orleans East resident criticized the discrepancies in the recovery of the two neighborhoods nearly a decade later: “Compare Lakeview to the East. It makes no sense. You tell me the difference between the two communities – Race. Of course.” (Rivlin 2015b, p. 408). Jeff Hebert, Director of Blight Policy and Neighborhood Revitalization from 2010 to 2012 under then-Mayor Mitch Landrieu, echoed this sentiment saying, “I look at the data out in the East. The high homeownership. The income numbers. The high levels of disposable income. And the answer I keep coming back to is race”
(Rivlin 2015b, p. 409). Both observations allude to the permanent and damaging consequences of past racialized government policies and how they loom large today.

Chapter 7 brings us to the present day and examines the state of New Orleans East in 2023. In short, little has changed. Negligible economic development has occurred, and significant parts of The East remain indistinguishable from the day after Katrina. Lake Forest Plaza still sits empty, run-down apartments along I-10 continue to frustrate homeowners, the redevelopment of Lincoln Beach has yet to come to fruition, and Jazzland remains conspicuously blighted and overtaken by nature. After years of political turmoil and financial wrangling, New Orleans East Hospital opened at Read Boulevard and I-10 in 2014, marking nine years before The East received the necessity of a fully-functioning hospital when it had two before the storm. Situated on the former Pendleton Memorial Methodist Hospital site, the new $130-million, 80-bed public hospital included a renovation of Pendleton’s East Tower but had about 300 fewer beds than the old hospital.\textsuperscript{15} Most stubbornly, the negative stigma of The East resolidified its chokehold post-Katrina, exemplifying the repetitive cycle that begrudgingly besets the area (Figure 75).

Two decades after Katrina, The East’s lack of reconstruction is flagrantly conspicuous compared to the rest of the city west of the Industrial Canal. To show just how much history repeats itself for N.O. East, during a particularly belligerent November 2005 town hall meeting post-Katrina, one resident angrily shouted at Mayor Nagin, “How come we don’t have lights? All these billions of dollars, and they can’t get some lights in New Orleans East?” (Varney, 2005). Residents are fighting the same fight 18 years later. At the time of this writing, lights are out along a significant portion of I-10 in The East, its darkness at night in stark contrast to the

\textsuperscript{15} Situated on the former Pendleton Memorial Methodist Hospital site, the new $130-million, 80-bed public hospital included a renovation of Pendleton’s East Tower but had about 300 fewer beds than the old hospital.
lights illuminating the rest of the city. Residents keep hearing the same responses over and over, yet the results – or lack thereof – demonstrate otherwise. As a New Orleans East Matters member declared, “For The East, the more things change, the more they stay the same.”

CHAPTER 7: POST-KATRINA: 18 YEARS LATER

“The Image Makeover: Real Estate Agents and Civic Leaders are Trying to Combat Negative Perceptions of New Orleans East”
–The Times-Picayune headline, Friday, March 18, 2016
By 2010, New Orleans East had recovered roughly two-thirds of its pre-Katrina population of 96,363, with the U.S. census recording 64,306 residents. By the 2020 census, The East’s population increased to 75,223. Since the hurricane, reconstruction has been agonizingly slow compared to the rest of the city, and New Orleans East remains in decline 18 years later. The reopening of the Louisiana Nature and Science Center adjacent to Joe W. Brown Park is a microcosm of the area’s dilatory recovery. It was not until 2017 that the center reopened after a $10 million FEMA-funded renovation. But, the redevelopment project was mired in years-long controversy, and “the center’s slow progress has raised eyebrows among observers including the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General’s Office, which in 2013 issued a report bashing the project’s pace” (Evans, 2017). Audubon Nature Institute officials at the time attributed delays to the prioritization of other Katrina-damaged facilities in the city, while Mayor Mitch Landrieu’s office noted a larger plan to overhaul Joe W. Brown Park called for putting the brakes on the center. The key word from the sentence above is prioritization – New Orleans East continues to be an afterthought, never a priority.

This project has chronicled the history of New Orleans East through newspaper archives, maps, interviews, and census data, and a particular methodological component was telling The East’s story through Times-Picayune editorials and op-eds. The editorials of the 1960s were of hope, vision, and endless opportunity to conquer the city’s final frontier. Op-eds of the 1970s and early 1980s lauded the booming growth of New Orleans East and how it represented the new, racially-integrated city. Following the oil crash and the racial transition of The East, editorials and op-eds took on a dramatically different tone, depicting a suburb in decline with rampant crime, growing poverty, and an influx of Section 8 housing. During and after Katrina, news pieces focused on the forgotten middle class and whether The East would be rebuilt at all,
centering race and class squarely within the debates. Editorials through the decades reveal a metamorphosis of how the metro area perceived the developing suburb. Simply put, when New Orleans East was white, it conjured up a thriving middle-class white suburban utopia, but when it racially tipped and saw an influx of low-income Black residents, the perception became that of a suburban ghetto.

I begin this chapter with one final op-ed. Dated December 24, 2005, four months post-Katrina, this editorial, titled “We need direction, not false choices,” comes from New Orleans East homeowner Nolan Marshall, III, who just a few months later, ran against incumbent Cynthia Willard-Lewis with nine other candidates to represent District E in a City Council race referred to at the time as “more candidates than full-time residents” (Filosa, 2006). Described as “the grandson of the civic and business leader whose name he carries on,” Marshall lost to Willard-Lewis, who represented the East for four additional years (Filosa, 2006).

Notwithstanding, Marshall’s op-ed is poignant and telling, almost ominous, knowing what The East is today, 18 years later. By all accounts, his piece is a prescient warning that has come true, revealing the systemic failure that has led to a 40-year decline and contemporary redlining of New Orleans East. Marshall powerfully and decisively encapsulates this failure:

But while the rest of the city rebuilds, the reality is that even before the hurricane, New Orleans East was dealing with post-Katrina conditions. A lack of services, retailers and restaurants, and uncertainty over whether the community would ever rebound to what it once was, plagued the community long before it was flooded. The council’s vow that no neighborhood be left behind is about 15 years too late for much of New Orleans East…Will it [The East] be exactly as it was before? Will that be acceptable to anyone? Who will lead the rebuilding and recovery? Will it be the same leaders who negotiated with the Hornets and couldn’t help revitalize the Plaza Mall or even attract an Applebee’s to the area? As residents of New Orleans, we are depending on the mayor and the City Council to create a vision and plan of action, not so that the city can just survive, but so that the city can flourish and rebuild stronger and more vibrant than before. Our leaders must have a vision and the courage to
articulate it. If they don’t have one, or lack the conviction to see it through, they shouldn’t wait until elections – they should resign immediately. I’m sorry; I know patience is a virtue, but mine has been used up by the insurance companies, the SBA, and FEMA” (The Times-Picayune, 2005).

The decline of New Orleans East and the noticeable lack of economic development post-Katrina is by design, and today’s dearth of retail, businesses, and restaurants in the area constitutes a modern form of de facto redlining. New Orleans East’s descent began when the area’s image wholly became racialized as poor and Black and was exacerbated by the harmful prejudices that come with the stigma. The negative image of The East became a self-fulfilling prophecy via the interstate, which prominently showcased the area’s decline. As Lincoln Beach remains blighted, Lake Forest Plaza sits vacant, and Six Flags looms ominously as passersby drive past it, residents and outsiders are reminded over and over again of The East’s inferior status. Ten years post-Katrina, the area's population largely rebounded. At this milestone, “about 80 percent of the residents of New Orleans East, where a good portion of the city’s African-American middle class, as well as a large share of the city’s black elite, lived, have returned” (Rivlin, 2015). Similarly, Liberty Bank also successfully recovered a decade later and played an integral role in helping families return to The East. A Washington Post article covering Katrina’s tenth anniversary titled “Left Behind, New Orleans’s Black Middle-Class Wonders: What Recovery?” discusses the area’s apparent lack of recovery compared to west of the Industrial Canal:

This is New Orleans East, once the ‘promised land’ for the city’s black middle class. Ten years after the storm, its prosperous, professional residents have come back in large numbers, but their neighborhood has been forgotten, they say, left out of the city’s broader economic revival. ‘We’ve been red-lined,’ said Stella Jones, 72, a retired doctor who lives in an immaculately restored five-bedroom home. ‘They say the city is back, but we’re not part of the city.’ (Phillip, 2015).
This article specifically, and this research project more generally, demonstrates how the race of the residents in New Orleans East supersedes economic logic and explains the scarcity of economic development and why businesses have deliberately eschewed this part of the city while building elsewhere in the metro area.

Members of New Orleans East Matters continue to fight for what they call their “Big Three” redevelopment priorities: the revitalization of historic Lincoln Beach, the redevelopment of the shuttered Six Flags, and the recreation of Lake Forest Plaza at Read Boulevard and I-10 into the commercial and business core and town center of N.O. East. Endless setbacks, political jockeying, and unfulfilled, ballyhooed projects characterize the post-Katrina community. As one member exclaimed, “The rest of the city is gentrifying and thriving; we’re over here still talking about the hurricane” (interview 14, March 18, 2023). During one New Orleans East Matters meeting, a member stated what was for him obvious, but for many others in the room, was a powerful realization: “I hate to break it to everybody in the room, and I’m sure many of y’all are still in denial, but the truth is the same 18 years later – they never wanted us back. But we did come back, so they had to give us the bare minimum, like a Walmart and a hospital. But they will not give us more than that.” His words were a reality check for some, a reminder for others, and a moment of truth and reckoning for the rest.

As New Orleans East members organize and push for change, they remain acutely aware of how the city views The East and how its tarnished image keeps their community redlined. During one meeting, one member commented, “We’re the wrong race in the wrong neighborhood. But we have money to spend. So, to the powers that be – what do you want us to do? Why are businesses so afraid to open one of their stores in The East? What do they think is going to happen? We’re more than just one neighborhood on the other side of the canal. This
stereotype is suffocating us.” (Saturday, October 22, 2022). Much of this stigma continues to be rooted in crime – or exaggerated perceptions of it. As of 2023, the city’s 7th District, which contains N.O. East, has the most crime and longest response times by police (Perlstein, 2023). But, New Orleans East Matters members firmly contend that these statistics are oversimplified, fail to consider the precinct’s large landmass, and that The East is not one monolith of crime. Data show that specific neighborhoods account for most crime, and residents often cite this statistic. Still, local media embellishes and worsens the stigma when it reports a crime as happening in “The East” rather than specifying the neighborhood. New Orleans East Matters has gone so far as to contact local news stations to agree to use specific neighborhoods and subdivisions when reporting crime. According to one member, the newspaper and news stations have been marginally better as of late. Solutions to combating N.O. East’s crime overgeneralizations continue to be the same rehashed debates since the early 1990s – split the precinct, build substations, and ask the state to help patrol the interstate. Members are frustrated with endless studies, commissions, and debates; they want action and implementation.

Limiting the unfettered expansion of multi-family apartment complexes remains the top concern for middle- and upper-income New Orleans East residents. In the years following the storm, N.O. East leaders and homeowners worked tirelessly to prevent the spread of subsidized housing that many believed led to The East’s downfall and which N.O. East officials successfully put a dent in before 2005. In the immediate aftermath of the storm, eastern residents fought the “apartment guarantee program,” which sought “to revive apartment complexes…by promising their owners rental income for 12 to 18 months” (Williams, 2006e). Residents and civic leaders were vigorously against the initiative, which was orchestrated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Apartment Association of Greater New Orleans,
and Greater New Orleans, Inc. and aimed to provide housing for displaced residents and essential workers aiding the city’s recovery. Protestors overwhelmingly dedicated their energy toward the area bordered by Mayo Boulevard, the I-10 Service Road, Bundy Road, and Lake Forest Boulevard, which the former President of the Lake Forest Estates Homeowners Association referred to in 2006 as “the real pocket, the core of the multifamily properties…[where] there’s not one single-family home, with the exception of some rented townhouses” (Williams, 2006e). Try as they might, Eastern representatives and area homeowners lost the fight against subsidized housing, as the seeds to rebuild multifamily were planted no less than two years after Katrina.

Conflicts and protests over housing, displacement, race, and poverty reached new frustration levels in the post-Katrina rebuilding years. Local and federal housing agencies envisioned the city rebuilding in a way that would eradicate the endemic social problems, such as crime and drug use, that had long plagued the city’s deteriorating public housing before the storm. City Council was adamant about not replicating social policy failures of the past that concentrated low-income residents in 10 traditional public housing developments and created pockets of deep urban poverty. City and state leaders often proclaimed bluntly that the storm provided a tabula rasa for an accelerated redevelopment of the city’s public housing projects, which controversially started before the hurricane when the former St. Thomas projects in the Lower Garden District were bulldozed to make way for a mixed-income community called River Gardens. Richard Baker, a state representative from Baton Rouge, said just after the hurricane: "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it. But God did" (Saulny, 2006).

---

16 HUD took control of the four complexes from the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) in 2002 because of accusations of financial mismanagement (Ouroussoff, 2007).
In the summer of 2006, displaced tenants of the city’s public housing developments and housing advocates filed a class action lawsuit to challenge HUD’s plans to drastically shrink the number of low-income housing units from 5,100 pre-Katrina to 2,000 units. In December 2007, City Council unanimously voted to give HUD the green light to demolish 4,500 low-income housing units from the “Big Four” (B.W. Cooper, C.J. Peete, Lafitte, and St. Bernard) and replace them with mixed-income housing. The new housing would allow only a fraction of former tenants to return. While the city voted to drastically reduce the number of public housing units, the number of housing vouchers more than tripled post-Katrina, making up the difference in how the city addressed affordable housing.

According to a housing report published ten years after the storm, 17,347 vouchers were used in Orleans Parish in 2010, up from about 8,400 in 2005 and 4,763 in 2000 (Seicshnaydre & Albright, 2015). The report revealed that 25 percent of the vouchers were used in 5 percent of the city’s census tracts (4,279 total vouchers used in nine tracts). Seicshnaydre and Albright write, “In each of these nine tracts, more than 300 vouchers were used, which is triple the amount that would be present if vouchers were evenly distributed across all tracts…Seven of the nine census tracts are located in New Orleans East; six of the nine tracts in this group are in high-poverty areas; and all of them are in neighborhoods with fewer than 25 percent white residents” (2015, p.3). The transition from public housing to housing vouchers merely recreated clusters of concentrated poverty and segregation in N.O. East. Whatever progress homeowners and District E leaders made before the storm to limit the disproportionate proliferation of subsidized housing was undone with the demolition of the Big Four and the displacement of the complex’s residents.

Sherman Copelin, Jr., who at the time was President of the New Orleans East Business Association, led The East’s post-Katrina endeavors to strictly limit poorly-run and crime-ridden
low-income housing that would turn their section of the city “into a ghetto under the guise of helping people” (Williams, 2006e). In early 2007, Council members Arnie Fielkow, Cynthia Willard-Lewis, and Cynthia Hedge-Morrell once again proposed a one-year moratorium on permits for the construction, expansion, or redevelopment of multifamily dwellings of three or more units for both New Orleans East and Gentilly. The vote pitted fair housing advocates against “middle-class homeowners flex[ing] political muscles to head off previous housing conditions they detested” (Williams & Warner, 2007).

Reminiscent of the pre-Katrina moratorium, housing activists cried foul, arguing that these efforts were a form of class discrimination and “attempts to halt or closely regulate multifamily developments…contrast with broad calls for quick rebuilding of affordable housing in the city” (Williams & Warner, 2007). In an op-ed, a resident decried, “Sherman Copelin and the New Orleans East Business Association seek to eliminate problems with multifamily housing by eliminating the housing itself. If they have it their way, many New Orleanians who can’t afford to buy homes will permanently lose their rental apartments and be prevented from ever returning to the city. This is economic cleansing in the name of urban renewal” (Rowland, 2006).

Passionately doubling down on her stance to curb multifamily housing, Councilmember Willard-Lewis penned an editorial in the paper in which she concludes, “The residents of eastern New Orleans feel as if they have no say in the process, even though their wishes have been put on record time and time again. It is time their voices be heard and acted on” (The Times-Picayune, 2007).

The moratorium to temporarily halt multi-family housing failed to pass due to backlash from housing advocates, and the struggle to limit recreating a pre-Katrina problem continued for eastern homeowners. As Willard-Lewis and Copelin fought subsidized housing at the local level,
Senator Ann Duplessis took up the matter with the state. Duplessis asked the chairman of the governing board of the Louisiana Housing Finance Agency, which assists in financing low- and moderate-income housing, to “put a hold on government-supported apartment complexes in eastern New Orleans – even some projects recently approved by the agency” (Williams & Warner, 2007). However, 14 multifamily housing complexes representing 1,195 units in The East had already received more than $230 million in federal tax credits to redevelop. Each project was required to set aside at least 20% of the units for low-income residents. Williams and Warner (2007) write,

The twin initiatives reflect hard feelings among homeowners toward concentrations of poverty, often found in high-density apartment developments that are associated with property neglect, crime, and boisterous conduct. Many homeowners, mostly African-American professionals, expressed fears in recent planning meetings that unwanted conditions from the past will be re-created as apartment developers are drawn to the east, in part by government tax credits. They cited bad memories of apartment developments with sloppy management that choked economic development east of the Industrial Canal (The Times-Picayune).

By 2018, 8,800 households (47 percent of the program) were concentrated in New Orleans East, the Lower Ninth Ward, or Algiers segregated census tracts and high-poverty neighborhoods (Ciardullo et al., 2018). In New Orleans, the not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) phenomenon is one in which The East consistently ends up on the losing end. In the same way that representatives called for other parts of the city to have their “fair share” of subsidized housing pre-Katrina, post-Katrina representatives of The East wanted to limit them altogether. NIMBYism presents a problem for the city’s underclass, who end up being pushed to the city’s outskirts – Algiers and The East – as the city’s more desirable, older neighborhoods on higher ground gentrify. The political clout of the city’s whiter, wealthier half and surrounding suburban
parishes have successfully limited multifamily housing in their communities, leaving few geographic options for the city’s low-income and working-class residents.

Within city boundaries, low-income housing has to go somewhere, and in New Orleans, that somewhere has been New Orleans East. Whether it is Lakeview or Lake Forest Estates, upper-middle-class homeowners exhibit NIMBYism by expressing how, while they support low-income housing in theory, they just do not want it in their backyard. The difference, however, is that for homeowners in The East, history has not been on their side, and they end up disproportionately burdened with the city’s undesirable housing. To exemplify the power of NIMBYism, Councilwoman Shelly Midura, who at the time represented District A (Uptown and Lakeview), stated in response to the one-year moratorium on multifamily housing in Gentilly and The East: “I’m concerned about the kind of pressure it’s going to put on the other council districts. We’re going to have to build that kind of housing elsewhere in the city” (Williams & Warner, 2007). Today, nothing has changed. Run-down apartments and townhomes continue to dominate the area’s main corridors, and many dilapidated complexes are just now being demolished in 2023.

The post-Katrina expansion of housing vouchers in New Orleans East directly correlates with the gentrification of the city’s more historic neighborhoods. Formerly redlined neighborhoods that relegated the city’s Blacks to the “backatown,” such as Tremé, are increasingly gentrifying and pushing out families that have lived there for decades to The East. From Black Wall Street in Tulsa to Grovelad in Chicago, Prince George, Maryland, and New Orleans East, the systematic disenfranchisement of prosperous Black neighborhoods continues to exacerbate the U.S. racial wealth gap as Black homeowners are unable to accrue wealth because their homes are located in economically depressed areas devoid of investment. The only
difference is the method by which this disinvestment manifests. For Black Wall Street in 1921 Tulsa, white residents literally burned it to the ground; for Tremé, the city’s growth machine built an interstate through its thriving commercial center, destroying the neighborhood’s physical and social fabric and driving it into decline. For The East, it is 40 years of disinvestment, a modern version of redlining. By not investing in areas such as New Orleans East, America’s racial wealth gap will continue to grow unabated, further decreasing access to the economic stability of the “American dream” for Black citizens. The great paradox of it all is that outsiders will blame The East for the creation of its own decline. Yet history reveals otherwise.

Just as nothing has changed with The East’s apartments, the same is true for the abandoned Six Flags, which remains in disrepair and has been reclaimed by nature. The still-abandoned theme park resembles a ghost town, and the rusted roller coasters and vandalized grounds are blighted, its looming presence an ominous reminder of the hurricane to everyone who drives past it along I-10 or I-510. Six Flags has been the source of documentaries, the backdrop to a few movies, and a post-apocalyptic playground for the superstitious who break into the park to investigate the eerie park. It was not until 2009 that the city terminated its 75-year lease with Six Flags, Inc., which was in the process of declaring Chapter 11 bankruptcy. As part of the agreement, the Industrial Development Board (IDB), an independent city agency, effectively became the park’s landlord. Speculations of what the ravaged site could be reimagined as, especially considering its past saga, ranged far and wide. Several proposed developments over the years promised a resurrection of the amusement park, only for them to falter. Once again, history repeats itself for The East, as the most recent proposal is nearly identical to one of the first redevelopment projects announced in 2009, bringing Six Flags back to where it started.
Two competing projects for the Six Flags location emerged in 2009. The first proposal came from Southern Star Amusement, a Baton Rouge startup company that wanted to rebuild the theme park as its first project. Southern Star had been in talks with Viacom, the parent company of Nickelodeon, about a potential licensing arrangement to build a Nickelodeon theme park. Southern Star lobbied to secure from IDB $100 million in Gulf Opportunity (GO) Zone bonds, “a program passed by Congress post-Katrina to help entice businesses to storm-ravaged areas by allowing private investors to take advantage of low government interest rates” (Donze & White, 2009). A second competing plan came from California-based Big League Dreams, who proposed turning the park into a multi-million, multi-stadium sports complex that would host everything from little league sports to high school tournaments, championships, and professional sporting leagues. City councilmember Arnie Fielkow and State Senator Ann Duplessis expressed the necessity of an experienced developer over a startup company with little pedigree. Fielkow urged, “We cannot afford to have another failed effort at the Six Flags Site” (White, 2009). As such, the duo led a delegation of city and state officials to Mansfield, Texas, a Dallas suburb, to see Hawaiian Falls Water Park in an effort to “bring economic investment to eastern New Orleans and the entire metro area,” saying that a water park could be an “opportunity to bring a different venue for families to New Orleans” (White, 2009). Both plans fizzled out.

After two years of stagnation, the IDB released a Request for Proposal (RFP) in 2011 to redevelop the property. A plan for an outlet mall emerged, but the developer withdrew after the Outlets at the Riverwalk were announced downtown. Several film production companies began using the property for movie production, bringing some maintenance and security revenue to the property, but the park continued to sit vacant. In 2014, IDB released another RFP for the property, but no proposals with solid financial backing emerged. To further complicate the
park’s redevelopment, Mayor Landrieu’s administration refused to recognize a 2009 agreement reached under Mayor Nagin’s administration that the city would be responsible for maintaining and securing the park and its grounds. The agreement was crafted and signed by IDB but was never given a final signature by Nagin, and Six Flags continued to sit dormant as neither entity wanted to deal with the eyesore. Landrieu “had no interest in taking possession of the land,” while the Industrial Development Board did not want to be forced to “act as property manager of a sprawling, remote piece of land outside the scope of the agency” (Sayre, 2016). By 2017, following an appraisal of the property, three bids came in: $3.26 million from TPC-NOLA Inc., who proposed a return of a Jazzland amusement park along with mixed-use retail and movie production facilities; a $4.55 million cash offer from local developer Frank Scurlock and Danny Rogers of Southern Star to create an amusement theme park, an adjoining waterpark, and a mixed-use city-within-a-city called Transformation Village; and a final $5.5 million bid from Henry Klein, an attorney and representative of a group called 30/90 Development, who, oddly, had no plans and left before the meeting ended. Ultimately, IDB rejected all three buyout offers, citing a lack of solid financial commitment.

Now back to square one, the Industrial Development Board handed over redevelopment responsibility to the Landrieu administration through a one-year Cooperative Endeavor Agreement (CEA) to determine a way forward, shifting the burden to the city to revive the site. The CEA was extended in both 2018 and 2019 when Latoya Cantrell became the first female mayor in the city’s 300-year-old history, allowing her administration time to examine the quandary. It was not until 2020 that Cantrell’s administration, via the Office of Economic Development, released yet another RFP for the ill-fated park. In October 2021, one year after putting out a call to bid, the city announced Bayou Phoenix, LLC as the winning team selected to
redevelop the abandoned Six Flags in New Orleans East. Headed by Troy Henry, a local
businessman and local political activist living in Eastover, Bayou Phoenix is partly reminiscent
of California’s Big League Dreams 2009 proposal. Henry’s vision for Bayou Phoenix includes a
sports complex, an indoor/outdoor waterpark, a hotel, a transportation hub, a logistics center, a
mega travel center, and the redevelopment of the Eastover Country Club. In July 2022, Bayou
Phoenix announced a delay in the project, citing issues over land transfer and ownership between
the city, the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority (NORA), and the IDB. Negotiations are
ongoing, and New Orleans East Matters members are holding their breath. In early 2023, music
composer Elvin Ross announced he would construct a movie studio within Bayou Phoenix.

The endless plans to revive Jazzland parallel the experience of Little Woods residents
who have become all too familiar with empty promises to similarly redevelop Lincoln Beach.
Abandoned by the city since the mid-1960s, Lincoln Beach’s dereliction distresses area
residents, who desperately want the historic landmark to reopen. After the storm, Mayor Nagin
proposed an $8 million rehabilitation of the beach, but environmental cleanups and a lawsuit
over the work stalled the project. Even with significant volunteer clean-ups occurring
sporadically, Lincoln Beach remains ramshackled, vandalized, and closed to the public. For the
past few years, a local band of community activists has taken matters into their own hands and
informally adopted Lincoln Beach, resigned to the fact that while big promises repeatedly have
led nowhere, they feel a deep connection to the space and believe it should be preserved at all
costs.

Cleanup efforts are led by New Orleans East resident Sage Michael, who frequently
attends New Orleans East Matters meetings. Sage has voluntarily spearheaded regular massive
beach cleanups, despite technically trespassing. The steady stream of volunteers recently
incorporated into a nonprofit group called New Orleans for Lincoln Beach. Their admirable labor has included clearing walkways and picking up trash, planting new gardens, adding seating on the beach, and creating makeshift drainage and irrigation systems. Because of their work, small recreational activity has resumed at the beach, with visitors entering at their own risk. Following a 2021 site assessment that estimated a $16 million renovation, Cantrell’s administration announced a $10 million phased redevelopment of Lincoln Beach that would first make it a “passive beach” without commercial additions. The city would clear the beach and parking of debris and vegetation, install temporary bathrooms, and build permanent seating.

Since Cantrell’s announcement in 2021, redevelopment of Lincoln Beach has not yet occurred, and maintenance of the beach is still primarily taken care of by Sage and fellow activists. In early 2023, Cantrell’s administration cheered a significant funding boost for Lincoln Beach, announcing $25 million from a combination of local bonds, federal grants stemming from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and FEMA reimbursements. Groundbreaking for the project is targeted for late this year. As City Hall pushes ahead with revitalizing the beach for public access, it will also soon hire a master planner to create a larger vision for what the area could eventually become, striking a balance between preserving its natural features with commercial activity to stimulate economic investment. Additionally, Lincoln Beach will soon be eligible for inclusion in the National Register for Historic Places, unlocking tax credits and other additional funding possibilities. New Orleans East Matters members are cautiously optimistic that this plan will finally revitalize the beach.

Accompanying the blight of Jazzland and Lincoln Beach is The Plaza, which still has not been redeveloped. The mall’s buildings were demolished in 2007, but as of 2023, the concrete slabs remain (Appendix Z). Lowe’s eventually opened on the site in 2008 as part of a long-term
plan “to resurrect a neglected site and bring a higher degree of commercial and residential activity in an area of New Orleans East that has suffered from disinvestment” (Eggler, 2006b).

At the time, Ashton Ryan, President of First NBC Bank, and Gowri Kailas, owner of Lake Forest Plaza LLC, publicly announced plans for a redesigned mixed-use pedestrian-friendly “Renaissance Town Center” with big-box chains, housing, retail shops, restaurants, the return of The Grand Theatre, and a hotel (Appendix AA & BB). Just like pre-Katrina, Ryan and Kailas once again controversially intended to make the former Plaza site a tax increment financing (TIF) district to spur redevelopment. The intractable battle to redevelop The Plaza picked up steam in 2007 as Ryan and Kailas’ project was languishing. Sherman Copelin, Jr. issued an ultimatum for the duo to hire an experienced developer, but the two insisted they could turn around The Plaza independently.

After two years of stagnation, Ashton Ryan bought out Gowri Kailas and recruited Cesar Burgos, local attorney and Nagin-appointed chairman of the Regional Transit Authority (RTA), as lead developer. To restart negotiations, Ryan assembled a new group of investors who agreed to pay back a delinquent Plaza-related loan from 2004 that they owed the city and build a new shopping mall. In return for the city getting its money back, Mayor Nagin agreed to pour public money into the redevelopment project by supporting the TIF district proposal. Ryan and investors announced updated plans for the “New Orleans East Marketplace,” a town center or “lifestyle center” anchored around Lowe’s, Walmart (which eventually opened in 2014 on Bullard Avenue instead), and ideally a Target or Kohl’s, with smaller shops, stores, restaurants, and a hotel and conference center surrounded by plentiful green space. The team hoped to “bring outlet stores to Lake Forest Plaza to lure shoppers not only from eastern New Orleans but from all across the city and its surrounding parishes” (Moran, 2009). According to an economic
impact study commissioned by Ryan and Burgos, the mixed-use lifestyle center would result in a
net gain of $144.4 million in sales tax for Orleans Parish between 2010 and 2030 and $83.6
million in new property taxes at the mall that would help the city “recapture retail spending from
other parishes” (Mowbray, 2009).

City politics and turmoil reared its ugly head a few months after the project’s
announcement. A usually unified coalition of eastern businesses and representatives became split
in their support of creating a TIF district, splitting Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis’
loyalties. The New Orleans East Business Association, led by Sherman Copelin, informed
council members that it opposed the Plaza TIF “though its email message gave no reasons for its
position” (Eggler & Donze, 1999). The non-partisan Bureau of Governmental Research also
strongly criticized the TIF, “saying it would give up public money to help developers pay off
private debts and would not obligate the developers to follow through on the ambitious plans
they have outlined” (Eggler & Donze, 1999). Dramatically, the week the proposal went to City
Council for a vote, Burgos learned that Willard-Lewis, who introduced the TIF ordinance, would
withdraw the bill due to a “better piece of legislation” at the behest of Nagin’s administration
that would delay the vote for two weeks. In an angry email response to City Council members,
Burgos responded, “Due to the undercurrents of the political agenda of the individuals that are
trying to kill this project, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the momentum that it
will need to become a reality. They know this and they are banking on it. Please don’t let them
win. If they do, in the end, it will be the community that will get hurt” (Eggler & Donze, 2009).

In an odd turn of events, the contentious meeting to approve the creation of a TIF district
around The former Plaza “divided allies and created some of the strangest bedfellows in
memory” (Eggler, 2009a). In a 6-1 vote, the New Orleans City Council approved the measure,
with Willard-Lewis ironically casting the lone vote against it “even though it bore her name as lead author” (Eggler, 2009). Attendees at the meeting raised eyebrows, perplexed as to why a Councilmember who outspokenly fought for the Plaza’s redevelopment for years and why Copelin, “usually one of [BGR’s] least favorite politicians,” were on the same side fighting against development in their district (Eggler, 2009). After Willard-Lewis cast the sole dissenting vote, the trio called the TIF “financially unsound” and a “bad deal” that was “terribly flawed and problematic” and provided no guarantee that the project would ever be completed as promised (Eggler, 2009). Councilmember Stacy Head agreed that while the proposed agreement was not perfect, “the city cannot afford to wait for perfection” in promoting economic development, especially building a new mall in Orleans Parish (Eggler, 2009). Imperfect as the TIF may have been, plans never got past the drawing board, and the town center never came into existence.

Nothing ever opened around Lowe’s, and the store shuttered in 2019. That same year, the battle over retail – or the lack of it – in The East escalated when the City Council approved a new ordinance restricting discount and dollar stores “created with the East in mind” (Williams, 2019). Under the city ordinance, no new discount store could open within two miles of another such store in N.O. East, Algiers, and parts of Gentilly; elsewhere in the city, it was one mile. A 2018 study by the City Planning Commission indicated that a proliferation of dollar stores in The East dissuaded full-line grocers from opening in the community. The report also showed that of the city’s 36 discount stores, a third were in The East (Williams, 2019). The city’s dollar store ordinance illustrates how problematic it is that New Orleans East has no retail. Or, the retail that does dominate the landscape does not accurately reflect the cultural markings of middle-class households, especially along Read, Bullard, Crowder, and Lake Forest Boulevards.
Years of free-market-driven development have led to the creation of nothing but dollar stores and section-8 housing, which ends up steering even more low-income Black people to the area. The East has repeatedly fallen victim to political incompetency, bureaucratic red tape, and endless setbacks to make Lake Forest or 6-Flags viable. Left unfettered to proliferate and concentrate in The East, low-quality retail and housing reinforce the cycle of decline. Instead of getting big-box stores, they get dollar stores; and instead of high-end retail, they get blight. Interviews revealed that many residents of The East want the ultimate marker of suburban middle-class status – a Target store. Sure enough, in August 2022, Mayor Cantrell announced Target would open on the site of the former Plaza Mall, a significant economic win after decades of failures. However, by the end of the day, Target corporate announced that no deal had been signed. To say that the local and social media response to the mishap was a mixture of disappointment, indignation, and incredulity would be an understatement. The saga was, unsurprisingly, the dominant topic at that Saturday’s meeting of New Orleans East Matters. One resident called the ordeal a “cruel joke” that was “comically symbolic of The East’s stepchild status” (Saturday, August 20, 2022).

Beyond a lack of retail, New Orleans East Matters members lament that they must travel outside their community for grocery stores. For the entirety of The East, there is one Walmart at Bullard and I-10 and a Winn Dixie on Chef Menteur Highway. During interviews and meetings, residents expressed vexation at how local supermarket chains deliberately avoid The East as they expand throughout the rest of the metro area and beyond. In particular, New Orleans East Matters members want a Rouses Market. Rouses, the largest independent grocer in Louisiana based in the Houma-Thibodaux region about an hour outside New Orleans, has been engaging with on-and-off propositions to build a location in the area for 15 years. After Hurricane Katrina,
Rouses expanded into the metro area, taking over the Sav-A-Center supermarket chains. A 2008 news story indicated that Rouses wanted to take over the former Sav-A-Center at Bullard Avenue and I-10. In 2010, Donny Rouse announced he was nearing a deal to place a supermarket at the former Circuit City, “only to find a neighbor’s title restriction had been blocked” (Nolan, 2010). In an interview, Rouse claimed that “the company would prefer to start with a relatively modest store, given high-insurance costs and a general worry that eastern New Orleans might not be sufficiently hurricane-proof for his company’s comfort” (Nolan, 2010). Residents of The East vehemently disagree and call this a red-herring, as Rouses has locations along the Gulf Coast in equally vulnerable areas. As one member put it, “go onto their website and look at their location map. They literally skipped over The East – all 75,000 plus – to go to Mississippi and Alabama. You know why they’re not here” (interview 12, February 9, 2023).

Considering its population alone, the lack of investment in New Orleans East is problematic. If The East were to secede from Orleans Parish, it would be the sixth-largest city in Louisiana (Table 7). The Renaissance Plan referenced this striking statistic. Despite over 75,000 people, N.O. East is is being economically suffocated. During an East New Orleans Neighborhood Advisory Commission (ENONAC) meeting in 2017, residents discussed the prospect of seceding from Orleans Parish, fed up with the area’s structural neglect and intentional disinvestment. Talks of secession remained just that, and momentum waned. Residents instead went an alternate route and tried new political representation, upending years of political incumbents winning elections. Later that year, Cyndi Nguyen defeated incumbent James Gray II in District E, becoming the first Asian American on the New Orleans City Council. This also marked the first time since the 1980s that a Black council member did not represent the East. Nguyen’s campaign focused heavily on aggressively tackling blight and
spurring economic development, and she won 60% of the vote. Nguyen became a one-term member and was defeated in 2022 by long-time city politician and former Councilmember At-Large Oliver Thomas to represent District E.

Table 7

*Louisiana Largest Cities, 2020 Census*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Louisiana Cities</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans</td>
<td>383,997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baton Rouge</td>
<td>227,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shreveport</td>
<td>187,593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lafayette</td>
<td>121,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Charles</td>
<td>84,872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans East</td>
<td>75,223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenner</td>
<td>66,448</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Beyond population statistics, other data underscore why officials should invest in New Orleans East. As of the 2020 census, the median household income in Orleans Parish was $43,258, while the median household income for The East was $31,698, a figure skewed by the disproportionately large number of residents – nearly 20% – who make less than $10,000. This disparity reveals the co-existence of two realities in The East. On one side, 25% of residents live below the poverty line; on the other side, nearly 40% of The East’s households, more than one out of every third, make more than the city’s median household income. Moreover, 22% of residents, almost one-quarter, make greater than $75,000 (Social Explorer). Another signifier of middle-class status is that 52% of N.O. East residents are homeowners, slightly above the 50% average for Orleans Parish (Social Explorer). Despite evidence of sizable disposable income that could sustain a typical middle-class suburban way of life, The East is bypassed by retailers, whoc
instead always opt for its suburban counterparts of Metairie and Slidell. As one member put it bluntly, “So long as New Orleans East has the perception of being Black, then New Orleans East will be this way” (interview 10, August 11, 2022). Vacant lots, blight, and run-down apartments have dotted I-10 in The East for decades, driving an incorrect perception that the entire city east of the Industrial Canal is like this. It is not, and the data show otherwise.

Despite the economic black eyes of Lincoln Beach, The Plaza, and Jazzland, New Orleans East is thriving in certain economic sectors that New Orleans East Matters members hope the city and state will capitalize on. In 2020, a new $30 million Dixie Brewing Company opened at the former MacFrugal warehouse in New Orleans East and was “pitched as an economic catalyst for a part of town that rarely gets the spotlight” (McNulty, 2019). Dating back to 1907 at its original site on Tulane Avenue in Mid-City, Dixie Brewery rebranded as Faubourg Brewing Company in 2021. New Orleans Saints and Pelicans owner Gayle Benson is the majority owner of the production and distribution facility, which includes a taproom and tavern kitchen, beer garden, various outdoor spaces, and a beer museum. Due to its vast, undeveloped tracts of land, The East is ripe for a potential local brewery ecosystem.

In addition to breweries, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) and the film industry are other arenas that, if executed properly, could prosper in New Orleans East. In early 2021, former Tulane University engineering professor Calvin Mackie announced plans for his non-profit organization STEM NOLA to build its $10 million hub in N.O. East. Mackie intends to expand on the organization’s significant growth and expansion in recent years, which has become widely acclaimed for successfully bringing science, technology, engineering, and math to students in underserved communities. The STEM NOLA Innovation Hub for Black Excellence will be located along I-10, near Read Boulevard, and will serve as the headquarters,
boasting specialized laboratory space, classrooms, and meeting spaces. In early 2022, Mackie’s brother Anthony, a Hollywood actor, announced his own plans to build a movie production studio on 20 acres of land off I-10 and Read Boulevard in New Orleans East. The project has been billed as an “end-to-end” facility that “would mark a new level for Louisiana’s film and television industry” (McAuley, 2022). These projects have in common the need for land to build large buildings, and in a city landlocked by water and with little room to build big-box retail, warehouses, and large manufacturing facilities, The East is the logical growth corridor.

Michoud continues to be an economic powerhouse for The East and local economy. Approximately 3,500 employees at Michoud work for NASA, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and other tenants. NASA estimates that the site has an annual economic impact of roughly $830 million. About a decade ago, when the Space Shuttle program ended, the Michoud facility took on more outside tenants, including Hollywood studios, which filmed portions of “Jurassic World” and other movies there. But now Michoud is back to building rockets — and the excitement is palpable. The Michoud Assembly Facility remains a crucial employment site for the city and state, functioning as a major manufacturing center for work related to the country’s space-related industry. Between 2007 and 2011, Michoud secured three major NASA contracts as part of their Constellation Program to manufacture the Orion Multi-Purpose Crew Vehicle. Work is underway by Lockheed Martin on the Orion spacecraft as part of NASA’s Artemis program, which is expected to land four astronauts on the moon by 2024. As of 2023, Michoud has debuted a new area dedicated to building the next generation of the Space Launch System, the most powerful moon rocket ever built by NASA to carry people and cargo to deep space.

Despite naysayers, New Orleans East residents have returned and believe in their community. A robust commitment came from residents in 2020 when the Krewe of Nefertiti
brought Mardi Gras back to The East for the first time since 1992, when the Krewe of Minerva dissolved. Parading one month before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Krewe of Nefertiti, an all-female organization, chose Lake Forest and Read Boulevard as their parade route, and for the past few years, has become a huge draw for families in the area who are glad to have Mardi Gras in their slice of the city. While residents work to uplift The East, they rely on city officials to spearhead the area’s renaissance, but they are mindful that history is not on their side. New Orleans East residents want the constant, repeated structural failures that keep their community depressed, devalued, and derided to end. Even when Mayor Cantrell won her second term, she publicly declared that economic development in New Orleans East would be a top priority, like all the administrations before her. Yet, The East sits derelict. It does not have to be this way. If intentionally prioritized, New Orleans East could thrive. The reality for New Orleans East is that perception has long trumped empirical data for far too long. The East has suffered tangible consequences, manifesting in decades of structural disinvestment in housing, retail, jobs, and economic investment. Still, leaders can change the narrative by redeveloping I-10 because what people see from I-10 drives the narrative. The renaissance of The East will be a call to action for current and future administrations who have the willpower to purposefully invest in the area and transform it into a flourishing city-within-a-city.
CONCLUSION

When I decided to write my dissertation on the history of New Orleans East, I started by driving through the area’s many neighborhoods. I would repeat this exercise frequently throughout my research, meandering through Pines Village and Lake Forest Estates; driving past Jazzland, The Plaza, and Lincoln Beach; cruising along Chef Menteur Highway and Hayne Boulevard; and winding through Spring Lake and Little Woods. One day, while driving through Kenilworth, I turned into a subdivision that uncannily resembled the neighborhood I grew up in in Terrytown. Architecturally, you could not tell the difference because they are the same mixture of 1970s and 1980s single-and two story ranch houses and identical and indistinguishable strip malls that typify suburbs. During this particular drive, it hit me: what separates Kenilworth from the suburbs of Jefferson Parish is that The East is racially hypersegregated, geographically isolated, and perceived as in decline, while the other neighborhoods are not.

Simply stated, had New Orleans East remained white and middle class as initially planned and never racially tipped with an influx of poor Blacks, it would not have been allowed to deteriorate to the distressed state it has over the decades. Contrary to public perception and false narratives, "The East" is not one monolithic neighborhood. The area bounded by Read Boulevard and Bullard Avenue reveals a glaring paradox eighteen years after Katrina: owner-occupied (some of the highest in the city) middle-class and upscale gated communities surrounded by endless blight, shuttered strip malls, overgrown lots, and unkempt neutral grounds. Residents have money to spend, but the deteriorated landscape indicates otherwise.
Alas, the audacious dreams of past developers have failed to materialize, and The East collectively has been written off and remains underdeveloped.

In 1994, Omi and Winant published their widely influential and seminal work on race and structural racism titled *Racial Formation in the United States*. In this text, the two authors argue that race is inadequately examined and has historically been reduced to paradigms of ethnicity, class, and nationalism. Omi and Winant define racial formation as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed…[it] is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (1994, 56). Racial formation is an ongoing and iterative process whereby racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed [through] historically situated racial projects” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 5-6). Omi and Winant’s theory critically examines why race itself still matters. They suggest that racial formation structures the everyday lives of Black Americans and that race is not merely reducible to class. They argue that to obfuscate racial inequality as class inequality, or even to promote a colorblindness ideology, fails to address the historically structured inequalities along racial lines that persist into the modern day, keeping communities like New Orleans East from thriving.

A fundamental element of racial formation theory is that race is situated within a historical context. Omi and Winant state, “Racial theory is shaped by actually existing race relations in any given historical period” (1994, p. 11). Today, with the free market-driven neoliberal agenda, “race” is masked as something else—class, welfare, post-racial. These misappropriations of race do not own up to the actual reality—historic *je dure* institutional racism and contemporary *de facto* racism that create barriers for racial minorities, particularly
African Americans, across all spheres of society. The law is full of contradictions and misinterpretations, continually placing Blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. The geographic boundaries between where people live, where investment takes place, and which communities grow and decline are not random, natural, or organic. They are structural, codified by law, updated, modernized, and coded with each new iteration, more subtle than the prior racial formations but each successive no less sinister. New Orleans East exemplifies the current iterative coding that keeps investment from happening and the community from prospering.

Achieving racial equity requires studying the past and making a generational commitment to the future. The tale of New Orleans East is about the historical lineage connecting the structural mechanism of historic institutional redlining and racial covenants with contemporary retail redlining, overall economic disinvestment, and political neglect of Black communities. For much of American history, \textit{de jure} and \textit{de facto} racist housing policies and practices have connected only certain residents to prosperity, leaving others beneath the poverty and flood lines. Society must consider whether our current policies, laws, practices, and decisions repeat history or offer a new blueprint to confront and remedy the past and create an equitable and fair future. Not only do we not teach this history, but there is an active movement in the U.S. to suppress the teaching of this history, leaving students ignorant and malformed. By not teaching U.S. history in its totality, white Americans will continue to reproduce racial essentialism – ignorantly but no less complicitly – by framing their understandings of racial inequality as individualistic and cultural rather than institutional and structural. The late philosopher Charles Mills (1997) said, “On matters related to race, the racial contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance…producing the ironic outcome that whites will, in general, be unable to understand the world they themselves made”
More contemporarily, sociologist Dearic Williams states, “Scholars of color having to convince people that racial inequality is not an individual level flaw before centering racism in their research is akin to physicists having to prove gravity exists” (Twitter, June 4, 2022). It is precisely the historical verifiability of critical race theory’s central arguments that unnerves those committed to a whitewashed version of American history.

Efforts to address structural racism are emerging, albeit slowly. In 2018, Minneapolis became the first U.S. city to change zoning laws to permit multifamily housing construction in neighborhoods previously reserved exclusively for detached single-family homes in a concerted effort to undo past disparities in housing. In 2023, Washington state passed the Covenants Homeownership Act, pioneering legislation that aims to compensate victims of housing exclusion and their descendants. State lawmakers carefully crafted the new law “to navigate the complicated issues facing reparations and race-based programs, potentially providing a road map for other states and localities” (Gregory, 2023). The new law “establishes that the state of Washington ‘was both an active and passive participant’ in discrimination that caused financial harm” and provides compensation “in the form of mortgage assistance (no-interest loans to be put toward a down payment on a home) for families excluded from equal housing opportunities in the years before the 1968 Fair Housing Act” (Gregory, 2023). With some progressive factions – often at the municipal level of progressive cities – finally addressing the structures that have upheld and preserved the powerful institution of whiteness, they fall just short of calling it what it is and then doing something about it because there exists a concerted effort to deliberately not teach these topics.

Emerging studies indicate that proposals to tackle the racial wealth gap head-on are both costly and politically divisive. Social scientists and policymakers specializing in housing and
wealth inequality argue that without comparable dedicated federal funds – the kinds of housing programs that enabled white families to build assets via homeownership – it will not be possible to shrink the racial wealth gap. Hard work and personal responsibility can only go so far until structural forces exert greater power. A recent Duke University study argues that compensating the descendants of slavery – who, through forced labor, built the nation’s wealth but did not benefit from the accumulation of that wealth – is the most direct and effective way to eradicate the racial wealth gap (Darity, Jr., and Mullen, 2020). Recently proposed programs that prove less politically charged but not as effective as direct reparations include asset-building policies such as those targeted to increase Black homeownership and reduce the racial gap in student debt. However, these propositions are politically controversial. Empirically and objectively, a government-driven policy is the only solution because if policy created the structure of inequality in U.S. housing, then policy must also eradicate it.

The geography of race and housing is critical to understanding New Orleans East. Dating back to the 1970s, debates over subsidized housing have become a never-ending battle and a significant source of conflict for the middle- and upper-income homeowners who moved to New Orleans East suburbs over other parts of the metro area. Low-income apartments pervade The East, often clustered in groups of townhomes adjacent to higher-end subdivisions. Residents have long contended that the disproportionate steering of pre-Katrina section-8 housing and post-Katrina housing vouchers to The East detracts from the suburban lifestyle they sought in escaping the city’s older inner-city neighborhoods like Central City and The Seventh Ward. The influx of section-8 housing disproportionately to The East compared to the western, whiter half of the city throughout the 1980s and 1990s occurred alongside a dramatic racial tipping of eastern neighborhoods from majority white to majority Black.
By nature of being in proximity to poor Black areas, the Black middle class who reside in the East effectively have become collateral damage, and the dearth of retail along the area’s major commercial illustrates the consequences of this disinvestment. Often through coded language, businesses like Rouses, a local grocery store that is conspicuously absent in The East and resentfully came up in countless interviews, provide roundabout answers of why they cannot or will not open in an area with a population of nearly 80,000, despite comparable suburbs having a location. So, when push comes to shove, businesses like Rouses instead write off not just part of The East but all of it. They say, “They can just come to our Gentilly location.”

The interstate’s role in perpetuating an exaggerated and erroneous narrative of decline that outsiders possess of the East is critical and should not be underestimated. Endless miles of conspicuous blight, stretches of vacant lots, and diffusion of dilapidated apartments along I-10 have created and perpetuated a self-fulfilling image of urban decline that obfuscates the area’s middle and upper-class suburban neighborhoods. The East’s stigma and the area’s inability to attract economic development have maintained a firm grip since the late 1980s despite continual efforts to revitalize the area. To say that New Orleans East residents experience déjà vu would be an understatement, and op-eds over the years demonstrate how history constantly repeats itself. A 1994 news article states: “Commuters on their way to Slidell have for years borne witness to the steady decline of four apartment complexes along the edge of Interstate 10 in eastern New Orleans” (Warner, 1994). In a 1995 op-ed about apartments coming to Jefferson Parish, a River Ridge resident wrote, “On Citrus Boulevard, acres of trees are coming down for another infestation of apartment complexes (a future New Orleans East-type slum?)” (The Times-Picayune, 1995). A news story that same year on a crime increase in St. Tammany Parish states, “In ten years we will be like New Orleans East, maybe sooner” (King, 1995).
The stigma associated with the I-10 apartments carried over into the 2000s. In a 2003 op-ed titled “East Has Waited Long Enough,” a pair of homeowners wrote, “Where is our beautiful wall to give privacy to our subdivisions from the interstate, like the walls Metairie and Kenner have?” (The Times-Picayune, 2003). In yet another news story published one year later discussing Slidell City Council’s attempts to regulate the construction of apartments in St. Tammany Parish, then-Councilman Landon Cusimano stated, “All you have to do is say or think (of the blight in) New Orleans East…I say the stricter, the better” (Bartels, 2004). In 2023, the narrative remains the same, crystallizing how residents have become stuck in a never-ending loop in which nothing changes, and progress is never made. City and state officials and countless developers have failed the East for decades, allowing the area to flounder by repeatedly delivering empty promises and dashed dreams. Plan after plan and administration after administration concoct schemes to revive parts or all of The East, never to materialize. The stubborn hold that the apartment complexes along I-10 continue to exert in perpetuating a negative stigma illustrates the frustrating and repetitive history that incessantly afflicts the area.

America is currently at an inflection point. No nation can fully undo the consequences of 345 years of institutionalized racism. It has only been 60 years since Civil Rights legislation outlawed explicit racial discrimination, but the period between the arrival of the first enslaved people on colonial shores in 1619 and the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 is entirely too extensive, the prejudices and discrimination too deeply entrenched, and the distortion of American society across race and class lines too established to create a magic elixir of legal, economic, and cultural reform and finally realize true American equality. But, we can start. As such, I propose a national model of directly and purposefully investing in historically-redlined neighborhoods. New Orleans could be at the forefront of this, and I challenge current and future
administrations to intentionally invest in the city’s past redlined neighborhoods and its
contemporary sibling – The East. The process has already started because of this dissertation.
New Orleans East Matters members are collaborating with the Mayor’s Office of Community
Assets, the Office of Economic Development, and the City Planning Commission on economic
redevelopment. As of June 2023, I have joined them in conducting two three-hour tours with all
three government bodies to document priority revitalization areas. We have narrowed our
priority focus to Read Boulevard and I-10, the site of the former Lake Forest Plaza Mall.

The epilogue will provide a 25-step roadmap to change course and revive New Orleans
East, affording it the respect and committed investment it deserves after city and state officials
allowed it to fall to the wayside for so long. New Orleans East Matters wants economic
redevelopment in The East, which has experienced a modern form of redlining for nearly four
decades. We can look toward history to learn how to move forward and turn N.O. East into the
city-within-a-city it was envisioned to be. The empirical basis for this roadmap comes from the
multiplicity of data collected for this project, particularly past plans, resident interviews, and
New Orleans East Matters meetings. Simply, residents desire what is often referred to in
meetings as low-hanging fruit -stores that already exist in every part of the metropolitan area but
are conspicuously absent in The East. Eastern New Orleans residents understand that businesses
have long hesitated to be the first to develop and invest, so everyone must come together for
collective buy-in. Residents want to bring investors, local and national developers, and venture
capitalists to the table, and, most importantly, they want these efforts to be intentional,
prioritized, and sustained. Residents of The East are also mindful of their precarious, low-lying
geography and desire a strategic redevelopment incorporating twenty-first-century green
infrastructure and playing to the area’s advantages of plentiful natural resources. I continue to
fight alongside these residents in hopes that this dissertation will, in a way, hit a reset button. New Orleans East matters, and we must change course.

NEW ORLEANS EAST MATTERS: ROADMAP TO REVITALIZATION

1. Prioritize and beautify the I-10 corridor, including the neutral ground, apartments, overgrown lots, and litter-ridden interstate exits.

The endless miles of run-down apartments, blight, and vacant lots, once home to a thriving mall, big box chains, and other markers of suburbia, have been proven to drive outsiders’ negative and erroneous perceptions of the area. Residents want to return Read Boulevard and I-10 to its roots and what planners have proposed since the 1970s – the economic core and town center of New Orleans East. City leaders must reimagine The East and what it can be, not what it is. The city is losing millions of dollars in tax revenue annually as Orleans Parish residents, particularly the city’s middle-class tax base, drive to Jefferson and St. Tammany Parish commercial corridors that the city does not offer. Orleans Parish can retain those tax dollars by recreating suburban shopping in N.O. East, which would draw residents from other parts of the city who would rather keep their tax dollars in Orleans Parish than drive the suburbs. If done correctly, this could lead to enormous sales tax revenue, as prior studies have indicated, such as the 2004 New Orleans East Renaissance Plan. Redeveloping and prioritizing Read Boulevard and I-10 reflects history because Lake Forest Plaza Mall was a regional draw; let’s return this intersection to its roots – a win-win for the city’s bottom line and eastern N.O. residents.

2. Clean Up – and maintain – the major commercial corridors in The East.

Residents want the never-ending guessing game of who maintains the commercial corridor’s neutral grounds to end. They want consistent I-10 maintenance, which includes grass
cutting, litter abatement, protective sound walls akin to Jefferson Parish (unlike the meager ones built in 2023), and properly working interstate lights. Beyond I-10, residents think of streets mainly in terms of “primary corridors” visible to outsiders (Read Boulevard, Bullard Avenue, Crowder Boulevard, Chef Menteur Highway, and Michoud Boulevard) and internal “secondary corridors” that they drive along in their everyday lives (Lake Forest Boulevard, Almonaster Avenue, Morrison Road, Bundy Road, Downman Road, Dwyer Road, and Hayne Boulevard). Residents want interstate ramp and intersection beautification and advertising along I-10. New Orleans East Matters members frequently point out the city is overlooking a huge opportunity to advertise Bayou Sauvage, Joe W. Brown Park, Audubon Nature Center, and Faubourg Brewery.

3. **Redevelop Read Boulevard and I-10 as a mixed-use town center.**

Original plans from the 1960s planned Read Boulevard and I-10 as the town center. Pontchartrain New Town in Town in the 1970s echoed this sentiment. The New Orleans East Renaissance Plan in 2004 reaffirmed it twice over. Residents of The East want the feasibility studies to end, political jockeying to cease, and construction to start. They want cranes in the sky. The neighborhoods bounded by Read Boulevard, Bullard Avenue, Lake Forest Boulevard, and I-10 are where your highest concentration of disposable income, homeownership rates, and median and average-income families and households reside. Crowder Boulevard and I-10 are also solidly middle class. Public officials should play to New Orleans East’s strengths – it has large tracts of land that the rest of Orleans Parish does not, making it the only geography within city boundaries ripe for large-size developments such as Buc-ee's, RaceTrac, IKEA, Ochsner and LCMC facilities, and distribution warehouse businesses like Amazon Fulfillment Centers. Past plans have also recommended the town center include a City Hall Annex to meet the population where
they are and not force residents to drive across the Industrial Canal for municipal needs. What types of commercial establishments do middle-class residents of New Orleans East desire?

- **Rouses grocery store**: Residents are frustrated that nearly every part of the metro area and the region has a Rouses except New Orleans East. The still-shuttered Schweggman’s grocery store at Bullard Avenue and I-10 is a prime intersection visible from the interstate. Donny Rouse himself considered the site back in 2010.

- **Chain grocery stores**: Canseco’s, Aldi’s, Robèrt Fresh Market, Sprouts Farmers Market, The Fresh Market


- **Local franchises**: Felipe’s, Copeland’s, Raising Cane’s, Walk-On’s, Theo’s Pizza, Reginelli’s Pizzeria, The Ruby Slipper, French Truck Coffee, CC’s Coffee, Zea’s

- **Fast-casual eateries**: Chick-Fil-A (three just opened in Orleans Parish), Panera Bread, Chipotle, Small’s Sliders (just expanded to NOLA Metro), Starbucks

- **National restaurant chains**: Piccadilly’s, Applebee’s, TGIF, P.F. Chang’s, Chile’s, Piccadilly, The Cheesecake Factory, Panera Bread, Cheddar’s, Outback Steakhouse, Smoky Bones, Olive Garden, Long Horns Steakhouse, and Bahama Breeze

4. **Reimagine and rebuild multi-family housing in New Orleans East.**
Research endlessly demonstrates that run-down apartments greatly hinder The East’s renaissance. City leaders should decisively end this ongoing debate and proactively develop a comprehensive plan to reenvision multifamily housing in New Orleans East. Residents are in unison that the apartments are unsightly and unmercifully contribute to a negative stigma. If you want to eliminate the stigma, get rid of the apartments. Residents stress the following: there is no shortage of vacant lots in The East, and it is more than feasible to rebuild – even at a 1:1 ratio – affordable housing in a city that desperately needs more. What is in short supply is the political will and determination to see this through. I recommend starting with the oldest apartments. For each dilapidated complex or cluster of townhomes, tear them down. Build new housing at a 1:1 ratio next to it, and once these open, convert the just torn-down complexes into greenspace. Leaders should standardize and incentivize this practice. Housing must be aesthetically pleasing and incorporate the latest design trends. Simply stated, multifamily serves a vital function for housing the city’s low-wage workers, but they do not have to appear unattractive.

5. **Launch a rebranding campaign while The East’s redevelopment is underway.**

For decades, residents and District E leaders have embarked on efforts to rebrand the East, only for those endeavors to lose momentum because they are not sustained. A strategic reimagining campaign of New Orleans East must be ongoing and simultaneous with all the other recommendations. As N.O. East redevelops, city leaders must reeducate New Orleanians on the area. One way to accomplish this goal is to establish billboards along I-10 that advertise the numerous subdivisions like Lake Forest Estates, Lake Bullard, Eastover, and McKendall Estates.

6. **Aggressively tackle blight.**

A theme echoed in every interview is how residents of The East find it unacceptable that there is still widespread blight eighteen years later, particularly those
blighted properties in conspicuous areas, such as along I-10, Chef Menteur Highway, and Lake Forest Boulevard. Persistent blight unnecessarily detracts from the area’s redevelopment. One recommendation is to partner with the city assessor to identify city-owned property for redevelopment, which is part of a larger plan to more aggressively address city-blighted properties by the current City Council.

7. **Split the 7th police district (New Orleans East) into two police precincts.**

Residents want to end the never-ending policing discourse once and for all. The city has eight police districts, and the should-it-or-shouldn’t-it be split debate has been ongoing since the early 1990s, but tangible changes never come from these discussions. The 7th District’s landmass (133 sq miles) is larger than all the other districts combined. While the precinct includes remote areas like Bayou Sauvage, residents are frustrated that the city takes a one-size-fits-all approach to how the city’s police districts are structured and how they operate.

8. **Build police substations, promote proactive community policing, and bring family services and non-profits to the most vulnerable neighborhoods.**

Many city services and non-profits, from police substations to food banks and shelters, remain on the other side of the Industrial Canal. Residents want these services to come closer to home and meet the residents where they are.

9. **Work with the state to get the state police to actively patrol I-10, I-510, and I-610.**

10. **Redraw N.O. East census boundaries.**

City leaders and state representatives should coordinate efforts to redraw New Orleans East census tracts to more accurately reflect the presence of the middle class instead of the current skewed boundaries that lump wealthy subdivisions with subsidized housing tracts. Past
leaders, like Cedric Richmond, also brought this suggestion up, indicating that geographical boundaries matter. This effort should be prioritized and completed before the 2030 census.

11. **Update the area’s numerous canals and build resilient infrastructure for equitable and environmental sustainability.**

The initial 1959 plans by New Orleans East, Inc., and Marvin Kratter’s original 1960s vision for Lake Forest, planned a reservoir-as-lake drainage system. However, both went for the alternative cheaper route – uncovered and unsightly canals. The city can tackle two birds with one stone by enhancing the channels while incorporating the latest design trends in green infrastructure, including bioswales, lagoons, native plants, vegetation, and so forth. The East could become a prototype of the larger city-wide “living with water” sustainability efforts.

12. **Redevelop Lincoln Beach.**

In many interviews, residents expressed, matter-of-factly, that Lake Pontchartrain is all one lake. Residents of New Orleans East want the false promises of reviving Lincoln Beach to end and instead want action and implementation. Lincoln Beach is a culturally and historically important local landmark that should be prioritized for redevelopment.

13. **Rebrand and revitalize Hayne Boulevard, taking advantage of its lakefront location.**

14. **Redevelop Jazzland once and for all.**

15. **Encourage small business development in New Orleans East.**

16. **Incentivize a local brewery system in The East by capitalizing on Faubourg Brewery – and the plethora of vacant undeveloped land in the area to build such facilities.**

17. **Build a multimodal transportation center and speed rail from N.O. East to the CBD.**

Many of the city’s lowest-wage workers rely on public transportation and live in the furthest reaches of the city. Residents want the commissioned studies to end and the
transportation hub and speed rail to finally come to fruition after years of proposals and renderings.

18. Expand and enhance offerings at New Orleans East Hospital.

New Orleans East went from two hospitals to one much smaller hospital post-Katrina that many residents often have referred to as a glorified clinic. Residents of The East desire a fully functioning hospital with an emergency room, women’s center maternal healthcare, and other robust healthcare services for a community of nearly 80,000 people. N.O. East Hospital should partner with Nunez and Delgado Community Colleges to establish a nursing school pipeline for students entering the medical profession.

19. Commit to workforce development programs and economic development.

Public officials should continue cultivating partnerships with high schools and area colleges, both community and four-year, on workforce development, playing to the area’s economic strengths, notably Michoud/NASA and STEM Nola.

20. Establish a system of early childhood education centers throughout The East.

City leaders and District E representatives should collaborate and work with Agenda for Children and New Orleans Public Schools. In 2022, voters approved a citywide 20-year, 5-mill tax to create 1,000 or more early childhood seats for low-income children. The new millage is expected to raise $20 million annually and include state matching. Considering its large population, New Orleans East would be ripe to benefit from this highly touted initiative.


Residents of New Orleans East demand the city clean up the industrial park once and for all. Public leaders must decisively figure out land and title ownership, develop short- and long-term solutions to the incessant decades-long illegal dumping, implement strict code enforcement,
and build the necessary infrastructure to attract investment to the Almonaster Corridor. Leaders must revitalize Chef Menteur Highway after decades of neglect.

22. **Combine the multiple civic groups and organizations in New Orleans East.**

   New Orleans East has an overabundance of civic groups and organizations, all working toward the same goal of redeveloping their community. The New Orleans East Renaissance Plan recommended a unified voice represented by one strong entity. What was demonstrated one year before Katrina was the necessity to have one strong coalition fight for New Orleans East. Perhaps, fold all community organizations into the East New Orleans Neighborhood Advisory Coalition (ENONAC), since it is a state agency – which itself should be restructured and reorganized from its 2009 mission and goals to more accurately reflect 2023.

23. **Create and implement a Master Plan for New Orleans East.**

   While there is a citywide masterplan, there should be a New Orleans East-centric master plan, updating the 1970s suburb to reflect 2023 realities.

24. **Recognize the worth and value that New Orleans East brings to the city.**

   For far too long, The East has played stepchild to the city. Residents want to feel equally valued because they are also part of New Orleans. New Orleans East matters.

25. **Implement the Park and Recreation Vision Plan recommendations for New Orleans East, recently released in 2023 (Figure 23).**

   The Big Green Easy is a citywide park and recreation vision plan for all of New Orleans. It aims to establish an inclusive park and recreation system tailored to meet the unique needs of the city’s communities, particularly those currently underserved. For The East, this means enhancing Joe W. Brown Park, Bayou Sauvage, and Lincoln Beach.
Figure 23


The Draft Plan calls for:

- New land conservation to bring Bayou Sauvage into the heart of the city;
- 125 miles of new greenway trails along levee, canal, rail, underline and other urban corridors; and
- 80 miles of new blueway trails to grow public water access along the city’s lakefront, river, canals and natural areas.

*Note.* Source: Office of Youth and Families, City of New Orleans.
REFERENCES


Concrete Poured for Soldier Unit. (1942, October 17). *The Times-Picayune*.


It is Bound to Become Popular. (1887, May 22). The Daily Picayune.


Lake Shore Sites Will Be Offered To Home People. (1921, October 9). *The Times-Picayune*.


Miller, R. G. (1996a, April 28). Stores are Urged to Upgrade Wears. The Times-Picayune, 2C.


National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. 1949a. Contamination at Lincoln Beach, April 14, NAACP Papers, MCC 28, Box 67. Louisiana and Special Collections, Earl Long Library, University of New Orleans.


Perlstein, Mike. (2023, May 23). New Orleans East has the Most Crime, Longest Response Times by Police - Residents frustrated.” WWLTV.


Queen and Crescent Park. (1884, June 8). The Daily Picayune. Retrieved from Readex America’s Historical Newspapers.


Scott, M. (2017, January 27). The Lake Forest Plaza: A Mall that was More Than a Mall. The Times-Picayune. https://www.nola.com/archive/the-lake-forest-plaza-a-mall-that-was-more-than-a-mall/article_c4eb8940-a729-5fce-ac1a-6d9cce9c70d2.html.


$105,000 To Be Spent Upon Edgelake. (1926, May 19). The Times-Picayune.


Where is the Cavalry? (2005, September 1). The Times-Picayune, p. 15.


APPENDIX

Appendix A

Map of Edgelake, 1926

Note. Source: Southeastern Architectural Archive, Special Collections Division, Tulane University Libraries.
Appendix B

Edgelake Advertisement, 1926

There Is Always a Safe and Sane Investment Somewhere

Today Edgelake offers just such an investment.

The thinking man will appreciate its possibilities and buy one or more squares today and sell in lots tomorrow.

It was in this manner—buying in squares and selling in lots—that many New Orleans fortunes were made.

SEE W. S. BENDER, 831 GRAVIER STREET, OR PHONE MAIN 8407

The present route - 1/2 miles longer - new route also will be paved most of the way - canal st. to curran boulevard is 15 minutes - drive out sunday!

Note. Source: The Times-Picayune, 1926.
Appendix C

Entrance Park Advertisement, 1926

Note. Source: *The Times-Picayune*, 1926.

Appendix D

Faubourg de Montluzin Advertisement, 1927

Note. Source: *The Times-Picayune*, 1927.
Appendix E

Lincoln Beach Advertisement, 1953

Note. Source: The Times-Picayune, 1953.
Appendix F

Lincoln Beach Advertisement, 1955

Appendix G

Lincoln Beach Proposed Redevelopment, 2004

Appendix H

New Orleans East Proposal, 1959

When New Orleans East, Inc., the tract along the Chef Menteur hwy., is developed, it is expected to look like this. The section between the proposed interstate highway and the Chef Menteur is mostly residential. The dark area along the Chef Menteur and Intracoastal waterway and along the interstate highway will be industrial. Along the Pontchartrain shore (top) will be a series of beach parks, motels and hotels, deluxe apartments and shopping areas. The area will be a city in itself with all community facilities.

Appendix I

Pontchartrain New Town in Town Rendering, 1972

Appendix J

Pontchartrain New Town in Town, Editorial Cartoon, 1972

Orlandia Advertisement, 1975

Orlandia welcomes Willowbrook to New Orleans East


Orlandia Advertisement, 1975

A fourth of a city is a lot of industrial, retail, office and home building opportunity. The name is Orlandia.

Appendix M

Bayou Sauvage Proposal, 1988

Appendix N

Lake Forest Advertisement, 1967

CONGRATULATES THE LEVEE BOARD ON THE OPENING OF THE NEW SEABROOK BRIDGE

Another sign of progress for the Lake Forest area

Appendix O

Lake Forest Estates Advertisement, 1973

Incomparable Lake Forest Estates

At Lake Forest Estates, living is what it's all about. Living in a community with its own 40-acre private lake. Living in a community with the lavish Lake Forest Racquet Club, complete with swimming pools, boat docks and tennis courts. Living in a community bordering Joe Brown Memorial Park, where you can enjoy 140 acres of natural beauty and recreation areas, including a golf course. Living just two minutes away from the proposed Lake Forest Marina, a seaside paradise on Lake Pontchartrain with 150 boat houses and 800 boat slips. Living minutes away from The Plaza, where 130 department and specialty stores make up the South's largest regional shopping center.

But most of all, living in Lake Forest Estates means living a life of leisure, where beautiful scenery and recreational opportunities make life a little more enjoyable. Everyday.

Another Quality Development of NEI CORPORATION

Appendix P

News Article

N.O. blacks are looking east for better life, census shows

Median income figures for households in eastern New Orleans census tracts were generally higher than citywide, where the overall median is $11,814.

About 60 percent of the area's 25,580 households were white in 1980. About 36 percent of the households were black, and 3 percent were Asian.

Median income figures for households in eastern New Orleans census tracts were generally higher than citywide, where the overall median is $11,814.

The highest income reported in any tract was $25,671, in the relatively affluent area around Broad Boulevard and Morrison Road.

Six other tracts in eastern New Orleans had median income figures in the $20,000 range. Only one area — along the lake east of Paris Road — fell below the city's median. There the median income was $9,609.

Note: Source: The Times-Picayune, Sunday, August 14, 1983.
Appendix Q

Eastover Advertisement, 1988

Gracious Country Club Living, right here in Eastern New Orleans

Eastover... a 1,000-acre planned residential community offering amenities and atmosphere unique in all New Orleans.

- Large rolling home sites overlooking an 18-hole championship golf course.
- A Country Club with exceptional recreational facilities for tennis and swimming as well as golf.
- 24-hour monitored security gate.
- Wide, gently curving private streets.
- Protective covenants to ensure quality construction and design, and to assure the value of your home.

Appendix R

Newspaper Photo of Lake Forest Plaza Mall, 1974

Appendix S

Lake Forest Plaza Mall Advertisement, 1972


Appendix T

Lake Forest Mall Advertisement, 1976

Appendix U

Front Page Headline, The Times-Picayune, October 12, 2003

Experts say razing the Lake Forest Plaza would revitalize eastern New Orleans, but the mall’s primary owner isn’t ready to let go.

By Greg Thomas
Real Estate Writer

Scrap it. Tear the Lake Forest Plaza mall down. Send it bolt by bolt, and clear the site.

That’s the prime conclusion of a $200,000 study financed by taxpayer dollars and conducted in part by the well-known Urban Land Institute.

If the overstated and underused mall were razed, the study says, it would allow new strip shopping to take root. Perhaps that would lure a Best Buy, a Target, a bookstore or a coffee shop. Perhaps a community center or city hall annex would move in.

In short, the study concludes, demolishing the bulging mall would go a long way toward allowing other services and assembly to take root in long-deprived eastern New Orleans, possibly allowing the area to develop its own “town center.”

And if a town center existed at Interstate 10 and River Boulevard — arguably the crossroads of eastern New Orleans — then eastern New Orleans could start to see its considerable potential realized. Finally.

There’s little argument from close observers that the mall is the main impediment to the rebirth of the east.

The site needs to be scrapped,” said Don Barden, a commercial real estate broker.

Just last week, Barden said he drove representatives of an unidentified national retailer through eastern New Orleans seeking potential retail sites. They were impressed with the demographics and other aspects of the area — up to a point.

“When they saw the mall, they were shocked,” Barden said. The mere sight of an underused mall in a conspicuous spot can be off-putting.

Appendix V

Front Page Headline, The Times-Picayune, September 28, 1994

ROAD TO RECOVERY

A sense of helplessness over the dilapidated condition of four big apartment complexes in eastern New Orleans is giving way to hope. Developers and city officials say that steps are under way to rehabilitate them.

By COLUMBUS WARD

Commuters on their way to 8th Street have for years borne witness to the steady decline of four apartment complexes along the edge of Interstate 10 in eastern New Orleans.

To many residents and neighbors, Oakbrook Village, Green Tree, Cedar Square and Britannia Court, built during the 1970s, the problem has been more than a fleeting concern. The deteriorating complexes, they say, have driven down property values in surrounding areas and subjected some tenants to dangerous and unhealthy conditions.

"They're the most visible locations in the past," said Lola Broussard, a retired elevator operator and vice president of UNITE, a coalition of neighborhood groups. "When people are passing through, coming to downtown New Orleans, they have to see it, and it gives a bad image."

But lately a sense of helplessness over the condition of the properties is giving way to hope. Developers and city officials say that steps are under way to rehabilitate them.

Facing pressure from UNITE and all Congregations Together, activities groups that focus on housing, Mayor Marc Morial's administration and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development are taking a harder line with private landlords, using code enforcement sweeps and threats of foreclosure to force improvement.

Change appears to be imminent for all four properties:

- Cedar Square soon will be converted into apartments for elderly people with modest incomes, owner Keith Howard said. The complex's front building will be torn down and replaced with a landscaped garden. Financing for the renovation is in place and the Archdiocese of New Orleans has been asked to manage the complex, Howard said.

- The Green Tree Place Apartments is repairing the buildings, city officials said. Owners are seeking modifications in a loan held by HUD that would secure $3 million for major repairs.

- Oakbrook, whose developer has been declared bankrupt, is ready to go under HUD control with the help of a bankruptcy judge. The developer-controlled board of directors is working with HUD to launch a rehabilitation effort.

- Britannia Court, built on tax-exempt property, has received a new owner, developer Kathy Jordan, who says she plans to rehabilitate the property.

A worker surveys burned-out rear buildings at Britannia Court Condominiums from atop the new roof on the complex's front building.

Appendix W

*New Orleans East Economic Development Foundation Ad, 1997*

*New Orleans East Has It All. With 80% of the city’s land area, we’ve got more than enough room to grow. And thanks to the efforts of our neighborhoods and businesses, we’re growing stronger every day. Professionals and families working, shopping and enjoying life together in one of the most culturally rich communities you’ll find anywhere. Now, that’s great living! For more information, just call the New Orleans East Economic Development Foundation (504) 246-5511.*

*Note. Source: The Times-Picayune, 1997.*
Appendix X

Jazzland to Six Flags Transition Infographic, 2002

Appendix Y

*Photo of Proposed New Orleans Hornets Arena, 2003*

Appendix Z

Photo of Lake Forest Plaza Mall, 2007

Appendix AA

Renaissance Town Center Rendering, 2007

Appendix BB

Map of Renaissance Town Center Rendering, 2007

Charles Miller grew up in the suburbs of New Orleans. He graduated with his bachelor’s degree in anthropology and sociology from Tulane University in 2011 and his master’s degree in geography at The University of Georgia. In 2013, he returned to New Orleans to pursue a Ph.D. in Urban Studies at The University of New Orleans and obtained a second master’s degree in sociology along the way. His research interests focus on race and residential segregation in cities and suburbs, history of U.S. housing policy, gentrification, and urban poverty.