

5-22-2006

Thirty Years of Change: How Subdivisions on Stilts have Altered A Southeast Louisiana Parish's Coast, Landscape and People

Kimberly Solet
University of New Orleans

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THIRTY YEARS OF CHANGE:
HOW SUBDIVISIONS ON STILTS HAVE ALTERED
A SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA PARISH'S COAST, LANDSCAPE AND PEOPLE

A Thesis

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

Master of Science
in
Urban Studies

by

Kimberly Solet
B.A., The College of New Jersey, 2001

May 2006

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research would not have been possible without the guidance, wisdom, patience and instruction of the coastal people of Terrebonne Parish, and it is to them that this thesis is dedicated. I also wish to thank my husband for his colorful stories of growing up in the marshes of Montegut, a magical place that seems to live forever in the hearts and minds of all who pass through, and for his passion for the United Houma Nation tribal people, who seem to find the silver lining in even the most impossible set of circumstances. Finally, I wish to thank my thesis committee members - Dr. David Gladstone, Dr. Shirley Laska and Dr. William G. Archambeault. - for their unique and valuable contributions to this research. I hope our efforts will make a difference.

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PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Caillou (Kie-you)

Chauvin (Show-van)

Cocodrie (Cocoa-dree)

Dulac (Dew-lack)

Dularge (Dew-large)

Falgout (Fal-goo)

Isle de Jean Charles (Eel-de-Zhon-Sharle)

Lafourche (Luh-foosh)

Montegut (Mohn-te-gew)

Pointe-aux-Chenes (Point-oh-shen)

Terrebonne (Tear-uh-bone)

Theriot (Tear-i-oh)

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ABSTRACT

In thirty years, the number of second homes for recreation fishers in coastal Terrebonne Parish has grown from 244 in the late 1970s to an estimated 2,500 in 2005. This thesis considers the ramifications of the tourism boom along the parish's historically isolated and undeveloped coastline. Four coastal communities are examined: (1) Montegut, Pointe-aux-Chenes and Isle de Jean Charles; (2) Cocodrie and Chauvin; (3) Dulac; and (4) Dularge and Theriot. The research question is twofold: Why has coastal tourism been allowed to develop in the fragile wetlands that protect residents from dangerous storms?; and What does tourism development mean for the indigenous American Indian and Cajun people who live along the coast? The author argues the proliferation of recreation fishing camps has had a serious dislocating effect on coastal Terrebonne's population, and the ongoing development of the tourism industry will devastate culturally rich bayou regions.

Chapter 1: Introduction: A Divided Coast

A drive down the winding, two-lane state highway that parallels Bayou Dularge is a lesson in contrasts. Acres of sugar-cane farms jut up to the road as modest cypress huts rest in the shade, surrounded by towering oak trees laced with Spanish moss. Green netting appears on the horizon of the dead-end road before the shrimp boats do. Floating in the water across the street from their owner's homes, the boats are modest, aging structures with names like Bayou Sunset and Cajun Paradise. The scene is bucolic, entrancing, a throwback to a time not too long ago when the fishers and trappers who made their living off the bounty of southeast Louisiana's coast also owned property and raised their families there.

A short drive away, however, the scenic horizon is interrupted by triple-decker homes on giant pillars, with luxury recreation boats floating in manmade backyard lagoons. The homes in Fisherman's Retreat, near Falgout Canal about 13 miles south of the City of Houma, are painted pastel colors with matching roofs; some have elevators, electronic boat lifts, pillars, columns and other decorative flotsam. But they all were built around the same time by a handful of developers, and they share similar floor plans and sky-high elevations to avoid flooding and comply with new federal building regulations for daring to construct in the wide-open sea.¹ The weekend "retreat" is sectioned off from the natural bayou by an iron gate and strategic landscaping. In order to enter, one needs a pass and a code.

Fisherman's Retreat is not an anomaly (see *Illustration 1*). An estimated two dozen gated or fenced-off neighborhoods of fishing camps have been constructed in the southernmost reaches

¹ Interestingly, most of the fishing camp developers are from out of town. Durham Properties, based in Hammond, La., for example, laid out and constructed much of the Southern Comfort subdivision in Dulac as well as an array of fishing camps in Cocodrie.

of Terrebonne, Lafourche and Jefferson parishes since the late 1980s,² bringing with them a level of development previously unmatched along the rural bayous of southeast Louisiana, which stretch like fingers reaching toward the Gulf of Mexico. Where once stood farms, fields and wetlands are sharply cut inlets designed for the easy and speedy navigation of recreational boats, whose owners are on a never-ending hunt for the perfect fishing spot. Corner stores have become token tourist joints, selling bait and Cajun-themed knick-knacks to vacationing families. Meanwhile, instead of inheriting their family's self-run business, the sons and grandsons of traditional fishers have more commonly taken to operating sophisticated charter-boat companies that cater to tourists by offering up "a real Cajun experience you'll never forget."³



Illustration 1: No Entry. The entrance to the Falgout Canal fishing camp subdivision in Theriot is blocked by an iron gate. (Author's photograph)

² This estimate is based on the author's research of communities in southern coastal areas including Grand Isle, and property tax information. The figure does not account for fishing camp settlements that are not located in gated communities, for they are nearly impossible to accurately tally. The Terrebonne tax assessor estimates 2,500 camps were on his rolls in 2005 alone.

³ The full advertisement was posted online at www.cajunbuck.com in February 2006.

This thesis will focus on the four southeastern Louisiana marsh communities other than Grand Isle that have been most impacted by the growth of recreational fishing and coastal tourism. The study area includes the linear chain of settlements that run down Terrebonne Parish's bayous. Such settlements have different names depending where they are located geographically on the bayou. The areas of study include (1) Dularge and Theriot on Bayou Dularge; (2) Dulac on Bayou Grand Caillou; (3) Chauvin and Cocodrie on Bayou Little Caillou; and (4) Montegut, Pointe-aux-Chenes and Isle de Jean Charles on Bayou Terrebonne and Bayou Point au Chien (see *Illustration 2* on the next page for a map of the coastal area in question).

The thesis posits that changes in land use along this region of the coast and development of the wetlands have fundamentally disrupted the traditional economy and culture of coastal people in southeast Louisiana. For decades, the region has displayed strong familial ties in a state with the largest non-immigrant-born population in the country.⁴ The development of the coast threatens the livelihoods of the full-time residents of coastal communities, who traditionally have lived in low-lying homes that are increasingly prone to dangerous flood and wind damage from even the mildest storms.⁵

The thesis will attempt to understand the changes southeast Louisiana's coast has seen over the past few decades, while building upon two theories related to the region's evolution from a network of scattered, close-knit fishing villages to a hub for second homeowners searching for a weekend retreat. The theories discussed also will help determine whether, because of the recent hurricanes and environmental degradation, there is a historical and social pattern that exists to help determine whether south Louisiana's coast will become a gentrified

⁴ U.S. Census, 2000

⁵ All coastal communities 50 miles inland are threatened by even the mildest coastal storms. See Tulane professor Oliver Houck's most recent essay, "Can we Save New Orleans?" *Tulane Environmental Law Journal* 19(1) Spring 2006: 42.

version of its former blue-collar self.

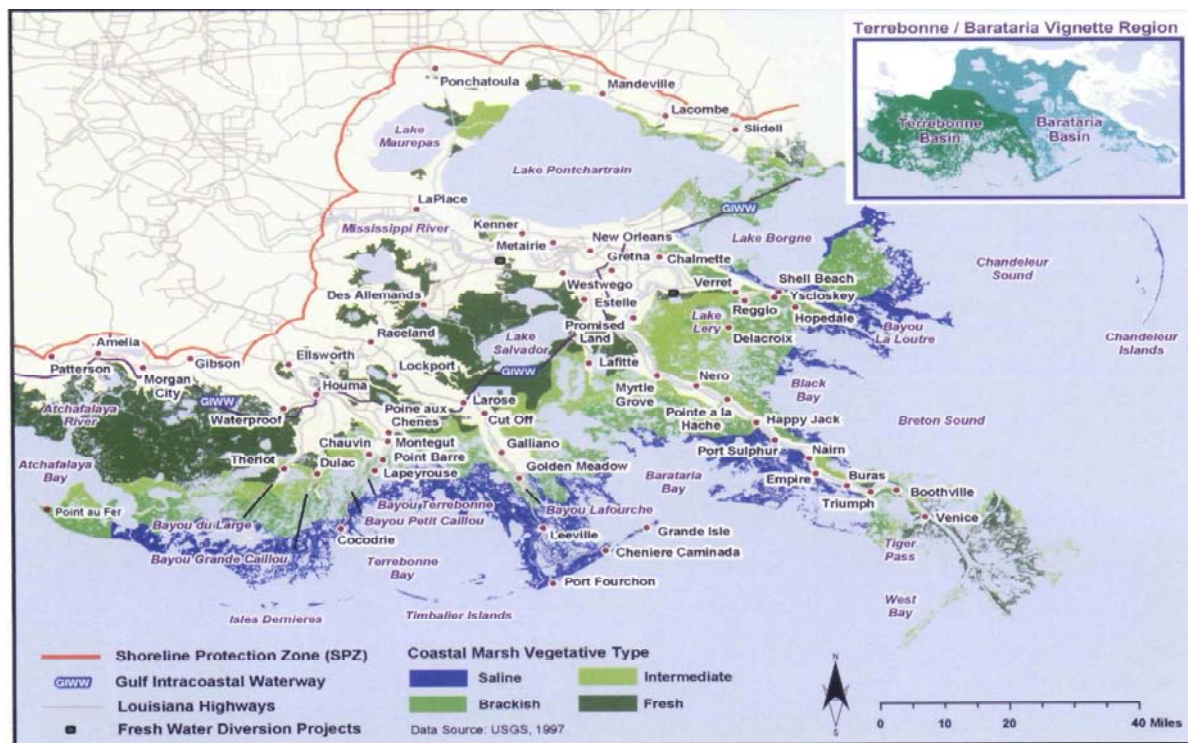


Illustration 2: The Southeast Coast. This topographical map provides a good visual indication of the linear layout of coastal Louisiana. The marsh communities included in this study are on the western edge, extending from Theriot on the far west to Montegut about twenty miles to the east. (Source: Laska, "At risk," 92)

The relationship between the coastal landscape and the new vacation high-rises did not develop overnight. Weekend fishing camps have existed along southeast Louisiana's shoreline for generations, as working families have sought an escape to the rural bayou swamps and wetlands where the fishing is said to be among the best in the country.⁶ Likewise, the transformation of the Terrebonne coastline into a haven for the affluent is not exceptional. Wealthy Americans, lacking public signs of high status that European nobility enjoy, have long

⁶ Various writers contribute their own takes on the state's fishing industry in the half-dozen monthly magazines in Louisiana that cater to the sport. Most recent is Catch Cormier, "La. is redfish capital of the world," *Louisiana Sportsman Magazine*, March 31, 2006. Accessed March 31, 2006 at <http://www.louisianasportsman.com/details.php?id=11>.

maintained social distance from the “common people” by withdrawing into upper-class enclaves designed exclusively for them. Fisherman’s Retreat, and the dozens of other similarly named subdivisions on the sea that were built over the past two decades in parishes with sought-after coastlines, continues this trend with its exclusively affluent clientèle. Parish tax records reveal the owners of these half-million-dollar second homes are overwhelmingly non-local. Most are wealthy city folk who venture down the bayou during the warm spring and summer months to play on their boats, catch salt and freshwater fish, hunt duck and deer, and party.⁷ Because loosely written state tax laws exempt second homes from most property taxes, the wealthy owners of these fishing camps pay almost nothing for their vacation homes by the sea.

Along with the camps owned by rich out-of-towners are the businesses that serve them, including restaurants priced higher than most locals can afford, invitation-only fishing rodeos, charter fishing companies, gas station tourist shops, marinas, and for-profit boat docks. Along Grand Isle, which census data shows has the highest concentration of recreational fishing camps among coastal communities in southeast Louisiana, tourist attractions proliferate, from souvenir shops and miniature golf to seasonal diners and summertime fishing competitions at the marina, with such names as “Serenity by the Sea” and “Redstick Flyfishers Rendezvous.”⁸

At a fundamental level, what this sudden growth of subdivisions and services for out-of-towners means to the indigenous local population of American Indians and Cajuns is disruption. Some of the disruption is in the form of weekend traffic congestion, marina tie-ups and other occasional nuisances. But the most serious aspect of the coastal development that fishing-camp subdivisions have spawned is disruption at a deeper level, in the form of rising housing and land costs that are beyond the economic reach of locals; increased competition between commercial

⁷ Based on property tax information available online at the Terrebonne Tax Assessor’s Web page, www.tpcg.org/Tax_Roll/TaxRoll_Main.asp.

⁸ As noted in the events calendar on Grand Isle’s tourism Web site, <http://www.grand-isle.com/events.htm>.

and recreational fishers; changes in the way of life for area families that have always called the bayou home; and, perhaps most disastrously, the loss of wetlands as a buffer against dangerous storms. When developers purchase valuable low-lying coastal land for second-home subdivisions, they cannot help but impact the surrounding wetlands and marsh, the acres of valuable vegetation that locals have relied on for protection from threatening weather for decades. Such disturbances of rural coastal lifestyles and land uses are both the result and consequence of coastal development and rural gentrification in south Louisiana's historically undeveloped bayou countryside.

After an international and local literature review in Chapter 2, I will present an analysis of the research methodology in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 includes a detailed look at how the four study areas have changed demographically and socially over the three decades examined in this research, followed by a summary of findings from forty-seven interviews with local residents. Finally, the thesis will conclude by arguing that the increased exploitation of the state's coastline and growth of the tourism economy have permanently altered and irreversibly damaged southeast Louisiana's indigenous settlement patterns and social legacies as well as its fragile but increasingly built-up wetlands. The conclusion also will consider the theoretical approach that is most relevant to understanding south Louisiana's coastal evolution and future. The theory advocated can be pursued, modified, honed, extended and enhanced by examining the state's unique and changing coastal landscape, thereby making a useful contribution to the science of rural gentrification and coastal tourism. Upon completing a research project, a need for additional research is often recognized based on gaps in understanding as well as new knowledge from the project. This thesis will end with a consideration of the research still needed to understand the scope and implications of coastal development of the wetlands.

At last, a final word. Although the bulk of this argument is based on scientific knowledge, the reader will see that *Thirty Years of Change* has an underlying viewpoint and is not value-free. To borrow from the late sociologist C. Wright Mills, “Throughout we have tried to be objective, but we do not claim to be detached.” This effort has been instigated by the obvious physical and social injustices prevalent in the conversion of fragile, vital and dying wetlands of coastal Louisiana into recreational retreats for the affluent, and what such policies mean for locals who must live with the effects of these developments. The appearance of triple-decker recreation fishing camps on rural coastal bayous has created a huge and obvious gap between rich and poor communities, adding another complication to the already embattled existence of coastal residents: economic segregation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

To understand what is happening along the state's coastline, and what could happen in the wake of recent hurricanes, it is useful to review the literature with emphasis on a couple theoretical orientations, and whether they help to make sense of the dynamic changes shaping Louisiana's shoreline. In writing this literature review, the purpose is to convey the assortment of ideas, sometimes contradictory, that have been established on the topics relevant to this thesis, and what their strengths and weaknesses are in terms of the issue at hand – the development of southern Terrebonne's vulnerable marsh communities.

The development, or "urbanization," of the coast has meant that local residents experience widely different living conditions than their wealthy recreationist neighbors, uneven access to amenities and opportunities and disparate levels of political influence. These disparities enable the rich who are invested in lower bayou communities to dominate the poor, and lobby for legislation that favors them in the case of organizations such as the Coastal Conservation Association, which push for protections for recreational angling at the expense of commercial fishing. The corrupting effects of concentrated wealth also have produced a system of geographically rooted income inequalities in Louisiana's coastal regions.

This growing spatial segregation means that as the wealthy gather in privileged places, their political power and social prestige is enhanced while poor and working people remain in places that lack political clout. This results in the development of "separate societies" for rich and poor. The most devastating consequences of this are the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes

and the transformation of the political terrain.⁹ This will be discussed through various lenses throughout this chapter, before the thesis considers the voices of local residents, for only they can best articulate their experiences living in this rapidly changing region of the state.

Selection of Focus Areas

The urbanization of the rural south Louisiana coastline can be viewed through a number of lenses. This section will outline the handful of theoretical approaches the thesis will discuss in an attempt to frame the discussion in a broader context. Some of the ways in which coastal changes in Louisiana can be viewed are through theories of *gentrification*, including Neil Smith's rent-gap theory and its relevance to the rural coastal setting. Although gentrification is usually considered an urban inner-city phenomenon, the influx of wealthy investors to the Terrebonne shoreline has resulted in a unique form of rural gentrification that has some of the same ramifications as in urban areas. The geography-of-gentrification approach will be discussed in the next section of this chapter as the dominant theoretical model in which to frame the discussion of coastal Louisiana development.

Theories of *rural tourism* are another useful orientation to consider when examining the likely future of the state's shoreline, with its myriad investors and stakeholders, because rural areas throughout the United States and the world are experiencing and have undergone change in similar ways as south Louisiana is currently experiencing. The link between rural places and tourism can help make sense of these changes in the countryside. The "rural" is being defined here as peripherality and inaccessibility, two characteristics that have historically defined the Terrebonne shoreline. Finally, the last section of the chapter will tie in the coastal element to the

⁹ Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf and Todd Swanstrom tracked this trend, the "art of separation" as noted by political philosopher Michael Walzer, in metropolitan regions in *Place Matters: Metropolitica for the Twenty-First Century, Second Edition, Revised* (Kansas City: University of Kansas Press, 2004): 31.

above theories in the context of the tensions that exist between the environment, natural resources and shoreline development.

Geography of Gentrification

Researchers tend to be split into two camps when it comes to theorizing gentrification: those who side with Neil Smith's 1979 supply-side analysis and those on the consumption side who think the rent gap is only a partial explanation of the gentrification phenomenon. Recent scholars have tended to side with the latter approach rather than the Marxist emphasis on capital, class, production and supply. This thesis also favors the latter approach, which views gentrification as a phenomenon that extends beyond the urban inner city and can have equal applicability and ramifications in the rural countryside, as in coastal Louisiana's bayou communities.

First, the rent-gap theory considers gentrification in the context of long-term shifts of investment and disinvestment in the built environment. The theory focuses on the relationships between land and property value, and in particular how disinvestment makes capital reinvestment possible. Neil Smith's work stresses the production of urban space in terms of the actions of producers - builders, developers, mortgage lenders, government agencies - as well as consumers.¹⁰ Smith argues that in the nineteenth century, most cities had a "classical land value gradient," with the highest land values at the center and the lowest values toward the periphery. Suburbanization, however, made land values in the inner city plummet and suburban property increase. The devalorization of the inner city, then, provided the basis for subsequent profitable reinvestment. This is the rent-gap theory, and according to Smith, gentrification can occur only

¹⁰ Neil Smith, "Toward a Theory of Gentrification: A Back to the City Movement by Capital not People," *Journal of the American Planning Association* (1979) 45: 540.

when the gap is wide enough to ensure a profit.¹¹

Other scholars have broadened the definition of gentrification in a way that better captures the changes occurring along coastal Louisiana's bayous. A useful definition for this thesis states that gentrification involves a change in the social composition of an area and its people as well as a change in the nature of an area's housing stock. Four aspects are key to understanding the gentrification process, including why gentrification is spatially concentrated; why it occurs in some areas and not others; who becomes the gentrifier and why; and the timing of gentrification.¹²

In contrast with Smith and important in the context of coastal urbanization in southeast Louisiana, Hamnett (1991) argues that the existence of a rent gap is not a sufficient condition for gentrification to occur.¹³ Instead, the existence of a pool of new middle- and upper-class *potential* gentrifiers is a necessary prerequisite for gentrification to take place. Another necessary component is a group of potentially gentrifiable homes or land where new properties can be built. The last two requirements for gentrification to occur include the existence of attractive environments and a cultural preference for a specific place. "Without these prerequisites, it is highly unlikely that gentrification will occur notwithstanding the actions of developers and the availability of mortgage financing," Hamnett argues.¹⁴ In place of Smith's supply- and consumption-side theories, Hamnett proposes an "integrated theory" of gentrification that discusses the process as not just a change in the social and spatial division of labor but a specific *locational* preference for a place.

¹¹ Neil Smith, 543.

¹² Chris Hamnett, "The Blind Men and the Elephant: The Explanation of Gentrification," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 1991 16(2): 239.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

In coastal Terrebonne, the pools of potential gentrifiers exist in the affluent suburbs of Houma and in nearby cities such as New Orleans and Baton Rouge, where tax records show most owners of recreation camps live. Since much of the bayou landscape has historically been rural and undeveloped, a group of potentially gentrifiable homes does not exist. The four marsh communities in this study are home to dozens of abandoned properties, most ruined by hurricane floodwaters, but they are not the kind of historic or architecturally valuable structures that gentrifiers typically favor. However, the bayou communities do have an abundance of waterfront land where new properties can be built, with the help of a sympathetic and development-friendly planning commission, coastal-zone advisory board and parish council. Aiding the transition from undeveloped bayou to subdivided fishing camps are landowners who have owned property along the coast for decades, if not centuries. In many cases, these so-called “legacy lots” were once plantations that cultivated sugar cane and other crops through the mid-twentieth century. Now, the land that has been controlled by family estates for generations is being parceled off to developers by landowners who are wise to the recreational fishing phenomenon and the increasing attractiveness of coastal living.

Other views of gentrification connect the phenomenon to the working class in the twentieth century. This approach states that gentrification is a striking example of the growth of the affluent at the expense of the working class. This argument can be adapted to suggest that gentrification is a manifestation of the antagonism between the new middle class and the working class in the neighborhood and workplace. Some scholars have sought to further expand the definition of gentrification beyond the two-class system of speculator-developer and inner-city residents (middle and working class) to include the redevelopment of vacant land, the former use of which provided employment or housing to the working class, involving a change of land

use to serve middle-class needs, from housing and employment to commercial uses.¹⁵ The argument is that the elements that define class occur before the gentrification process even begins.

Considering that reality, Bridge (1995) theorizes that gentrification is not a constant form of class structuration. “Indeed, the existence of structuring class forces outside the gentrified neighborhood and at earlier periods of time might form the basis of an explanation for the lack of working-class action against gentrification,” he argues, such as the weakening of working-class consciousness, separation of home and work, or the difficulty of achieving consciousness in the first place. This expanded view makes theoretical and empirical sense in terms of coastal Louisiana, and in particular Terrebonne Parish, where people who live close to the shore are generally poor commercial fishing families who have neither the time nor the means to resist tourism development in their back yards.

The concept of gentrification, then, must be interpreted as not exclusively an urban phenomenon but one that has rural socioeconomic parallels. Rural gentrification, some researchers have recently noted, is remarkably similar to the gentrification process that occurs in inner cities around the world. Phillips (1993, 2004), for one, argues that the mindset of urban and rural gentrifiers is similar in that they both abhor suburbs and they both strive to distinctly differentiate themselves from people who live in suburbia, “the landscape of despair.” In rural agricultural or fishing villages, for example, depopulation comes when occupational opportunities in rural areas are removed - such as, in the case of coastal Louisiana, when commercial fishing takes a downturn. This slump alters the housing situation, as the original

¹⁵ Gary Bridge, “The Space for Class? On Class Analysis in the Study of Gentrification,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series*, 1995 20(2): 242-43.

population exits and services are lost. Rural settings are ready for “gentrification investment” following this period of “de-investment and devaluation.”¹⁶

Phillips’s conclusion, and the argument is important to this thesis, is that the “spatial lens” of gentrification studies must be widened to include the rural setting. The theory that rural gentrification involves the same tensions as urban inner-city gentrification is relevant to the Gulf Coast, post-hurricanes, because of the impacts Katrina and Rita had on rural fishing villages and agricultural communities in Terrebonne and surrounding coastal parishes. Phillips discusses how disasters in the agricultural and fishing economies can spur rural gentrification because of their socioeconomic impacts on traditional lifestyles. This is a critical issue facing Louisiana in the aftermath of both storms, and this rural-gentrification approach is the most relevant in which to frame the discussion of the dynamics of coastal urbanization in southern Terrebonne.

Further, although some of the details are different, the phenomenon of coastal gentrification is not unique to southern Louisiana. Commercial fishers in Florida, for example, have been called an “endangered species” because decades of coastal development, tourism and federal rules have pushed them to the fringes of the state’s economy. Smith and Jepson (1993) argue that the recent influx of rural gentrifiers and second-home vacationers in coastal Florida has crippled fishers, and is threatening the extinction of a valuable contributor to the state’s economy, history and culture. The authors base their conclusion on interviews with seventy commercial fishing families as well as historical research and census data. Smith and Jepson couple their findings with telling anecdotes from their interviews. “Fishers told of being spit on as they fished near the beach with haul seines, having rocks thrown at them by property owners while traveling through residential canals, and being subjected to verbal abuse and angry stares

¹⁶ See Martin Phillips “Rural Gentrification and the Processes of Class Colonization,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 9(2) April 1993: 123-40, and Phillips, “Other Geographies of Gentrification,” *Progress in Human Geography* 28(1) February 2004: 5-30.

from recreational fishers as they moved from one fishing location to another.”¹⁷

Although it discusses the process of rural gentrification in a different corner of the world, the Florida example complements Phillips’s account of countryside development in that it follows the rural gentrification model he proposes. This approach is useful to understanding what has happened along coastal Louisiana in the decades pre-Katrina and Rita and also what could happen as evacuated locals struggle with whether to build anew or relinquish their communities to wealthy coastal developers. Rural gentrification is a relatively new field of study, and the literature is evolving, particularly in terms of coastal settings. In exploring rural gentrification of the wilderness, Darling (2005) argues that all rural spaces are not just different from cities; they are different from each other. Researchers, then, must treat them as such, all the while attempting to create models in which rural development trends can be understood. “If the city cannot teach us precisely what goes on in the countryside, it can, at the very least, inspire us to ask particular questions of it, and ultimately to inquire how far below the surface their conspicuous differences truly run.”¹⁸

Rural Tourism

When examining why lower bayou residents in Terrebonne Parish have not protested the development of fishing camps in their communities, it is interesting to consider the research on tourism development. One model theorizes that natives initially treat tourists hospitably, but as their numbers grow they become less welcome (Cohen 1982). Pressures then build to transform the guest-host relationship from a reciprocal exchange to one based on money. Wise to what is

¹⁷ Suzanna Smith and Michael Jepson, “Big Fish, Little Fish: Politics and Power in the Regulation of Florida’s Marine Resources,” *Social Problems: Special Issue on Environmental Justice* February 1993 (40): 39-49.

¹⁸ Eliza Darling, “The City in the Country: Wilderness Gentrification and the Rent Gap,” *Environment & Planning* June 2005 37(6): 1030.

happening in their communities, the locals seek to gain something from it, but sometimes too late. This is “frequently a slow and tortuous process,”¹⁹ but it has begun to some extent in lower Terrebonne with the recent emergence of charter fishing operators, who charge tourists hundreds of dollars a day for a ride through the coastal marsh and a bushel of fish.

The next stage in the rural-tourism model relationship between tourists and locals is unlikely to happen in coastal Louisiana, however, because the owners of fishing camps are usually fellow Louisianans, not visitors from another country, and less inclined to getting exploited. The next stage of the model is “predatory,” in which locals try to gain as much as possible from each encounter with tourists; this brings with it an increase in tourist-oriented discrimination, deviance and petty crime. A perception of mass tourists as separate in the locals’ consciousness from “normal humankind and debarred of their essential individuality and human qualities” legitimizes such exploitative behavior.²⁰ This gives rise to efforts to create and institutionalize, either on the part of tourist entrepreneurs or authorities, a professional tourist system whose motive is to preserve and enhance the area’s reputation. At this stage, the local-tourist exchanges are no longer neutral as tourists “play the natives” and local personnel provide the services they seek, a dynamic similar to the tourism culture in New Orleans and neighboring “swamp” communities.²¹

A rural tourism model more relevant to this thesis can be seen in Doxey’s (1976) evolutionary explanation of tourism as occurring in four stages: euphoria, apathy, annoyance and antagonism. This model is particularly useful in understanding the dynamics taking place when the socioeconomic and cultural differences between locals and tourists have been exasperated or

¹⁹ Erik Cohen, “The Sociology of Tourism: Approaches, Issues, and Findings,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1984 10: 380.

²⁰ Ibid., 381.

²¹ Ibid., 380-81.

when competition over scarce local resources has been stimulated.²² The result of such tensions is displacement and resentment. Importantly, sociologists largely agree that tourism has the most seriously dislocating effects and yields the smallest benefits for locals when large-scale, high-standard facilities - such as recreational fishing camps - are rapidly introduced by outside developers into an otherwise poorly developed area. The tourism mindset that follows this influx of newcomers pressures resources whose supply is inelastic, such as food, fish, and infrastructure. Thus, while tourism frequently benefits those locals who are directly involved in it, it causes hardships for the rest of the population.²³

In studying the making of Bar Harbor, Maine, Hornsby (1993) notes how seasonal resorts dramatically reshaped local economies and landscapes. Though an urban class, “the elite created a series of interconnecting social spaces in the countryside suburban estates, country clubs, prep schools, college campuses, and at the farthest remove, seasonal resorts. *Class segregation went hand in hand with spatial exclusion.*” The local population shifted from working in occupations such as farming and fishing to becoming laborers, teamsters and domestics. The visiting cottagers were east-coast elite, mostly doctors and bankers and lawyers. The elites created an exclusive enclave inspired by the English landscape. They bought waterfront and high ground overlooking the bay and mountains and laid out villas in landscaped parks. Frederick Law Olmsted, who planned Manhattan’s Central Park, even designed some estates.²⁴

In a particularly brutal move, the association had shacks belonging to Passamaquoddy Indians at Squaw Hollow, a site adjacent to the cottages, condemned on sanitary grounds and the

²² G.V. Doxey, “A Causation Theory of Visitor-Resident Irritants: Methodology and Research Inferences,” Proceedings of the Travel Research Association: 6th Annual Conference (San Diego, California 1975), 1976.

²³ Cohen, 384.

²⁴ Stephen J. Hornsby, “The Gilded Age and the Making of Bar Harbor,” *The Geographical Review* 1993 (83): 455-68.

inhabitants moved to the outskirts of town in an early version of slum clearance.²⁵ An interesting point is that while cottagers dramatically altered the village landscape, their presence also brought preservation attention to the island. For example, the association formed a charitable trust to preserve land, which later became the first national park east of the Rocky Mountains. Penetration of the elite into remote parts of the continent in search of an authentic experience amid nature, then, led to the pleasure periphery's rise.²⁶ Importantly, the rapid transformation of Bar Harbor into an elite resort during the Gilded Age anticipated the many larger tourism developments that have occurred across the country since the 1950s. Tourism, as we have seen, brings employment to peripheral areas, as well as conflicts over land use and services and amenities. The tourism industry also spurs inflated land values, often beyond the reach of local people. "The social and economic gulf between cottages and townspeople in Bar Harbor can still be found in tourism areas today. The power of urbanites to reshape landscapes, economies and societies of the rural periphery remains enormous."²⁷

Like their counterparts in Bar Harbor, the migrant tourists who flock to coastal Louisiana fishing communities have idealized perceptions of rurality and these may conflict with everyday practices in, and the values of, local communities. As Visser (2003) notes, such conflicts may be limited to personal disputes between neighbors or may spill over into community-wide political conflicts over issues such as development and landscape management. When that happens, local populations and in-migrants, whether temporary or permanent second-home owners, may occupy a shared but separate geographic space with substantial implications for local community

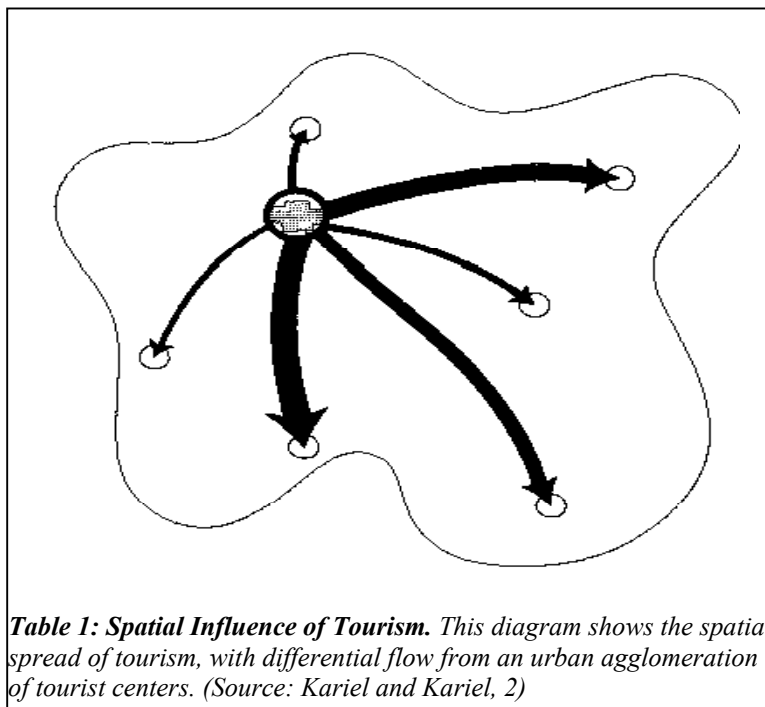
²⁵ Hornsby, 461.

²⁶ Emphasis in original. See Hornsby, 455.

²⁷ Ibid., 466-67.

institutions as well as environmental and political issues that relate to the area's long-term sustainability.²⁸

It is obvious that tourists - even tourists who own the properties in which they seasonally inhabit - have an impact on the places they visit. But when they own property in the areas in which they are "touring," their imprints are felt not only on the physical and cultural landscape but also on the social and cultural life of the inhabitants of the communities they visit.²⁹ One model, as seen in *Table 4*, depicts the spatial spread of the impact of tourism by those with and without property interests. The center of the figure is the area where tourists congregate. The fingers spreading from the middle is the impact these tourist hubs have on their surroundings.



²⁸ Gustav Visser, "Visible, Yet Unknown: Reflections on Second-Home Development in South Africa," *Urban Forum* October 2003 14(4): 385.

²⁹ Herbert G. and Patricia E. Kariel, "Social and cultural impacts of Tourism: An Example from the Austrian Alps," *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography*, Vol. 64, No. 1. (1982): 1.

The model demonstrates that even communities remote from larger central places where tourism originates feel the ramifications of tourism.

Living on the Edge

Tourism and infrastructure growth along Terrebonne's coast is related to a new field of research that attempts to connect migration and coastal ecosystems with the study of the environment. More than half the world's inhabitants live within thirty-seven miles of the coast, with two million in Louisiana's coastal zone alone, a trend that has been on the upswing since the 1950s. As counties within fifty miles of coasts gained 40 percent in population between 1960 and 1990, some forecasters began to predict that 70 percent of the human population would be concentrated in cities or densely packed agricultural areas near the coast by 2020. Curran (2002) attributes much of the coastal population growth to immigration and urbanization rather than natural population growth. When coastal ecosystems coincide with urbanization, as is occurring in coastal Terrebonne's bayou communities, they are at risk of greater pollution because of effluent dumping and industrialization. This is a real threat since half the world's coastlines are detrimentally impacted by development, according to the World Resources Institute, such as mangrove habitats, which cover 8 percent to 25 percent of the world's coastlines and have declined by 50 percent in fifty years, and coral reefs, the "tropical rainforests of the ocean."³⁰ Over the next century, global warming also threatens to impose dramatic constraints on land use as sea levels rise.

It is in this context that some researchers have tried to show the connection between migration and coastal ecosystems by exploring theoretical pathways about its effects. Key

³⁰ Sara Curran, "Migration, Social Capital, and the Environment: Considering Migrant Selectivity and Networks in Relation to Coastal Ecosystems," *Population and Development Review*, 2002 (28): 90-92.

questions in this field of study of the environment, coast and migration are: Which tourists with access to which resources? and, How do tourists use the ecosystem for their benefit?³¹

A growing body of literature examines the reciprocal relationship between migration and the environment, but Curran argues much of the focus has been on land-based ecosystems instead of coastal or marine ecosystems. The land-based literature defines migration³² as a varied and complex manifestation and component of equally complex economic, social, cultural, demographic, and political processes operating at the local, regional, national and international levels.³³ But the environment is even more complicated,³⁴ as human activities can and have changed the resiliency of coasts by altering their ability to recover from natural-disturbance events. As the landscape is homogenized, the coastal ecosystem suffers. Tourism is bound to bring even more changes with the construction of roads, dikes and buried pipes and sewer systems.³⁵

While researchers are beginning to acknowledge that rural gentrification can have the same ramifications as inner-city gentrification, there is still a gap in the literature about the various impacts gentrification can have on rural inhabitants, particularly those who live in fishing-dependent coastal areas. The rural tourism literature is more complete on the social, cultural and economic effects of development since so much of the world's coastal areas have become tourist meccas. But most tourism theories pertain to visitors who are not financially invested in the communities in which they tour. Little research has been done on how the impacts of tourism and gentrification differ when the tourists and gentrifiers own property in the

³¹ Curran, 89.

³² Curran defines "migration" as a relatively permanent change of residence that crosses jurisdictional boundaries measured in terms of usual residence at a prior point in time, typically one to five years earlier. See Curran, 102.

³³ Ibid., 91-93.

³⁴ Ibid., 93-94.

³⁵ Melissa Savage, "Ecological Disturbance and Nature Tourism," *Geographical Review* July 1993 83(3): 106-108.

communities in which they visit, as is the case in coastal Terrebonne Parish. That financial investment adds another layer of complexity to the tensions that, as the rural gentrification and rural tourism theories have shown, already exist between locals and visitors, and that tension is an interesting dynamic that must be fleshed out in the rural gentrification literature. More in-depth analysis and exploration of what is happening in coastal Louisiana, including Terrebonne Parish and the bayou communities in neighboring Lafourche, would be a useful place to begin.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will discuss the methodological themes of the thesis by explaining and defending the research decisions taken and then considering the strengths and weaknesses of the techniques chosen and their theoretical underpinnings. A qualitative approach was used to yield new understandings of the experiences of coastal residents who are living in a rapidly changing ecosystem, and this chapter will discuss why this methodology was chosen. The chapter is divided into five sections including the research participants; data collection methods; research tools employed; protocols and procedures followed in the data gathering and analysis process; and research design.

Research Participants

The human participants in this investigation included 47 permanent residents of the four marsh communities studied: 27 men and 20 women, aged 19 to 89, with a mean age of 53.5 years. The geographic breakdown of participants is as follows: 13 participants were from the Montegut study area, including seven men and six women; 9 participants were from Chauvin and Cocodrie, including seven men and two women; 15 participants were from Dulac, including eight men and seven women; and 10 participants were from Dularge and Theriot, including five men and five women. In addition to all owning homes in one of the four communities studied, the participants shared similar family, educational and work backgrounds. These traits were part of the inclusion criteria used for their participation in the research. Other inclusion criteria included a willingness to volunteer to be a part of the research project; availability to interview for longer than an hour and be open to follow-up questions; and a basic knowledge of southern

Terrebonne's geography. To protect the identities of the volunteers, none of the participants' names or other detailed distinguishing characteristics will be used when summarizing their interview comments.

The exclusion criteria for participants included age (the volunteers had to be adults); homeownership (renters were excluded for consistency); duration of stay in the communities studied (all participants had to be born and raised in the lower bayous of Terrebonne Parish); and independence from the coastal tourism industry to avoid conflicting interests. A diligent attempt also was made to include a pool of interviewees that represented the general demographic characteristics of the communities in which they live. Since the majority of lower bayou residents are of Cajun or American Indian descent, for example, those interviewed - 40 of the 47 participants - also overwhelmingly identified with these two cultural groups. Of the remaining seven, two were African-American and five simply called themselves "white," "Caucasian" or "mixed."

Of the 55 coastal residents approached for recruitment into the study, 50 agreed to participate, but three later asked to be excluded, yielding a response rate of about 85.5 percent. The open-ended interview technique was utilized. However, four other research participants were interviewed for this thesis in different capacities and they were asked a set of pointed, direct questions pertaining to their expertise. Of the four interviewed, three are public officials and one is a recreational fisher who also holds a leadership position with a prominent local lobbying organization. These four participants agreed to answer specific, direct questions on the record pertaining to the research. The trio of public officials who participated in the research has not been identified by their specific positions.

Data Collection Methods

The 1980s saw a rise in the use of interviewing as a method for research and now it is generally agreed in the literature that interviewing is a key method of data collection. There are many kinds of interviews, of course, but four are generally preferred, including the structured interview, the unstructured interview, the non-directive interview, and the focused interview. The in-depth, or unstructured, interview method was used when conversing with the 47 coastal residents who agreed to participate.

In-depth interviewing, also known as unstructured interviewing, is typically used to elicit information in order to achieve a complete understanding of the interviewee's point of view or situation; it can also be used to explore interesting areas for further investigation. This type of interview involves asking informants open-ended questions, and probing whenever necessary to obtain data deemed useful by the researcher. As in-depth interviewing often involves qualitative data, it is also called "qualitative interviewing."

When employing the guided interview approach for interviewing, a basic checklist is prepared to make sure relevant topics are covered, although the interviewer is still free to explore, probe and ask questions deemed interesting to the researcher. This type of interview approach is useful for eliciting information about specific topics, and that is why the technique was used.

Participants were selected for participation based on word-of-mouth as well as the author's knowledge of community leaders in the study areas. Most of the participants were contacted and approached while they were cleaning up their homes from the fall 2005 hurricanes, a slow and arduous process that allowed for enlightening, intense and emotional interviews. The interview process began in spring 2005. But it is important to note that the bulk

of the interviews took place after the fall 2005 hurricanes, which changed the scope and seriousness of the research project because of the extent of flood damage the coastal communities and the people interviewed in the study endured. Forty-three of the 47 interviews with coastal residents took place from August 31, 2005 through December 1, 2005, with follow-up interviews conducted in seven instances through April 2006.

Other primary data sources used in the research include tax records from the Terrebonne Parish Tax Assessor's Office, which are available online at the parish government Web site from 2000 to 2005; the U.S. Census demographic and housing reports for Louisiana parishes from 1980, 1990 and 2000, which were obtained at the federal documents depository at the University of New Orleans; the state Department of Labor unemployment and occupation statistics; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program; and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Secondary sources include an array of journal articles, books and reports as well as newspaper articles and photographs, most of which came from The Houma Courier, Terrebonne Parish's only daily local newspaper. The Courier's archives are kept at the Terrebonne Main Library on Civic Center Boulevard in Houma. Some of the secondary sources also came from the John P. Nelson papers, 1957-1974, at the Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, Box 4, Folder 9. Nelson, who retired in the 1980s but still lives in New Orleans and occasionally teaches law at Loyola University, donated his papers in 1978 to the research library. The Nelson collection includes extensive correspondence and historical material pertaining to the history of Terrebonne's bayou settlements and the American Indians in the region.³⁶

³⁶ Nelson is the attorney who helped 56 Houma Indian children from Terrebonne Parish successfully sue the public school system in 1964 because of its tripartite segregated schools. Before 1964, the school system had three sets of schools for whites, blacks and Indians.

Research Tools

In a qualitative research project involving interviews, it is important to describe the themes covered in an unstructured, in-depth interview. Each of the 47 coastal residents interviewed for this research was presented with the same set of general discussion questions, although the sequence of questions and follow-up questions differed according to how the conversation flowed with each participant. All of the interviews were tape recorded and transposed. The questions included:

- What are the most significant changes you have seen in your community since childhood?
- How have you or your family changed as a result?
- Have you ever considered moving and, if so, what has kept you in your community?
- Why do you think other people have not survived as long?

Protocols and Procedures

This section will describe exactly how the research was conducted, the nuts and bolts of the participant recruitment procedure. The key questions that will be answered include how people were contacted, how the author knew where to find them and how access was obtained. Participants were contacted at public meetings and community events, United Houma Nation tribal gatherings, hurricane evacuation shelters, and at their homes through door-to-door meetings. The linear layout of Terrebonne's bayou communities enabled relatively streamlined access to residents, who either live along the bayou or in a small handful of streets that run in back of it. Residents encountered at public meetings were told about the research project, given the author's contact information, and then asked whether they would be willing to participate in

an interview at their homes. Forty-six of the 47 resident interviews took place at people's homes or at a nearby location; one was conducted through an e-mail correspondence.

Community events that elicited resident contacts include the spring 2005 powwow at the Grand Bois campground in Bourg; events such as food festivals and fund-raisers at the Dulac and Montegut community centers; and neighborhood gatherings at the Little Caillou Fire Station in Chauvin. Residents met outside their homes were later contacted by the researcher and an interview time was arranged. Of the 47 coastal residents who participated in the research, 20 were first encountered at locations outside their homes, including the above sites as well as evacuation shelters set up at South Terrebonne High School and the Houma-Terrebonne Civic Center in the weeks following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in August, September and October 2005.

The remaining 27 residents were met through door-to-door walks through the four bayou communities in this study. Residents were introduced to the research project and asked whether they had time for an interview or whether they would be willing to participate in a tape-recorded interview at a later time. After a meeting time was agreed upon, the author briefed each respondent on the nature and purpose of the interview, being careful to be as candid as possible without biasing responses. Great pains were taken to make each respondent feel at ease, as some of the settings in which the interviews took place were not ideal. Nearly all the interviews took place either inside a flooded home or at a nearby location that flooded, such as a local shelter or neighborhood community center. Realizing that most residents had never discussed the issues brought up during the interview with a stranger, the author explained more than once the manner in which responses were recorded, and how the answers would be used. At all times, the interviewer strove to remember that she is a data collection instrument and tried to prevent her

biases, opinions, or curiosity from affecting the responses.

The interview technique is a crucial part of the information-gathering process. One essential element of all interviews, of course, is the verbal interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Asking questions is central to the interview, and this is achieved in qualitative research through “conversational encounters.” Truly open-ended questions, therefore, do not pre-determine the answers and always allow room for the informants to respond in their own terms and in their own way. Throughout the open-ended interview process, it was found that the best technique was to ask respondents first about their experiences and behaviors before delving into questions about their opinions and feelings about coastal changes. This approach helped set the context for the interview, and establish rapport between the researcher and the participant. This special kind of questioning technique is called “funneling,” which means framing research questions from the general to specific, the broad to the narrow. Each participant interviewed provided contact information for potential follow-up interviews, including home and alternate addresses, home phone numbers and cellular phone numbers. Follow-up questions were conducted in seven of the 47 interviews to clarify issues raised, fact-check and, in two of the cases, to deepen the response to a question and increase the richness of the data sought.

Defense of the Research Design and Data Collection Methods

In conducting this study, the author tried to be sensitive to the representativeness of the selected sample, realizing that if the sample is chosen in a biased fashion, the patterns of associations may be at odds with those found in a truly representative sample. The survey design attempted to “match” the participants to the demographics of their neighbors in the broader surroundings. The present study involved the study of a single group - lower bayou residents

who were born and raised in marsh communities and who own their own homes. It is useful to consider the methodological strengths and weaknesses of this design approach. One alternative way of conducting the study would have been to include interviews with the owners of fishing camps in order to compare the responses of the two groups. This approach, however, has some flaws because the majority of camp owners lives outside of Terrebonne Parish and knows little about the social, economic and cultural characteristics of the bayou communities in which it has invested.

An interview is, of course, essentially a conversation between the researcher and the research participant. The same issues concerning self-reports such as those used in census information gathering apply to the interview process because of the difficulty in verifying responses. The epistemological position adopted by most researchers using interview procedures seems to be that there is no verifiable external reality against which the participant's responses can or ought to be compared. However, in any interview, there is the recurrent problem of researchers imposing their agenda and perhaps their views upon the participants. Focus group discussions are less easily contaminated by an overly directive researcher. However, such a technique was not possible to use within the resources available. It is also doubtful whether a focus group could have been effectively put together considering the devastation each bayou community in this study endured during recent hurricanes.

The limitations of secondary data collection from documents and databases involve trust. The main issue associated with this method is data quality. It is important to question sources of information, double-check facts and figures and constantly ask how one can be certain that the information collected and presented is valid.

Finally, it was decided to use in-depth interviewing as the main method to collect data for the study since an interpretative approach, qualitative in nature, was adopted for the investigation. The “data” in qualitative inquiries is most often people’s words and actions, and thus requires methods that allow the researcher to capture language and behavior. In-depth interviewing has the distinct features of being an open situation, allowing new research direction to emerge through techniques such as follow-up questions. The in-depth interview provides for many factors which inevitably differ from one interview to another. To ensure success, the author strove to be sensitive to individual situations and allow flexibility in different interviewing circumstances. As a former journalist with “hands-on” experience with the in-depth interview form, the author found the in-depth interview technique most applicable to the type of data sought for this research, with conversations audio-taped and later transcribed for data analysis. Photographs also were used to document the participants interviewed and their surrounding communities.

The generalizability of the results obtained by the in-depth interview procedure used in this study is strong because the pool of coastal residents interviewed was representative of the demographics of the larger bayou communities from which they were drawn. The author discovered this by collecting information about the participants, such as age, occupation, family size and history, and then comparing this information with known characteristics of the wider population using census data. The participant selection method involved interviewing residents who were encountered during an array of situations. Those who tend to go to public meetings or community events were reached out to and included in the research process in addition to those who tend to stay at home such as the elderly and those who lack transportation.

In defense of the sample size, out of all the people who could have participated in the research, the author has generally selected a small number. The number can be justified, however, through logistics. The recruitment of a large number of participants into the present research proved to be difficult because of limited resources. To increase the sample size was not possible within the resources available.

Chapter 4: Historical and Contextual Background

Early Settlement

To grasp the longtime geographic isolation of American Indians and Acadian exiles from Nova Scotia in southern Terrebonne Parish through the 1960s and 1970s, and how that isolation has been pierced in recent decades with the building of roads, bridges and recreation camps, it is important to understand how “the good earth” was settled. Terrebonne’s shoreline was settled centuries ago by American Indians and, later, Acadian exiles who became fur trappers and fishers as they made their living in the nutrient-rich swamps and bayous of the coast. Though the way of life in coastal Louisiana has evolved over the past three hundred years, its people have enjoyed a constant relationship with the water around them, the endless water that fills the bayous and marsh with tons of shrimp, crab and oysters.

Terrebonne Parish was carved out of the southwest portion of Lafourche Parish in 1822 and named Terre Bonne for its abundance of seafood, lumber, alligator, snakes, mink and muskrat. One of the southernmost Louisiana parishes, Terrebonne today is comprised of 2,100 square miles, more than half of which is water; it is the second-largest parish in the state, located in the heart of “Cajun Country.” The parish’s town seat is Houma, which was incorporated in 1834 and named after the Indian tribe that had previously settled in the lower bayous that are the focus of this thesis.³⁷

French explorers first discovered the Houma Indians in the 1700s in plantation country along the eastern edge of the Mississippi River north of Baton Rouge,³⁸ more than one hundred

³⁷ For an early history of the parish, see, among others, Helen Wurzlów, *I Dug Up Houma/Terrebonne: Volume VII* (St. Star Printing: Houma, La., 1985).

³⁸ Baton Rouge was named from the Houma word for Red Stick, or “Istrouma.” See J. Ashley Sibley, *Louisiana’s Ancients of Man* (Baton Rouge: Claitor’s Publishing Division, 1967), 187.

miles northeast of the Terrebonne Parish coast. After losing a war to the Tunicas in 1706, and to escape the encroachment of white settlers, the Houma tribe headed south along Bayou Lafourche to more remote, undeveloped areas where they could trap, hunt and fish undisturbed. Eventually, the Houma Indians found their way to modern-day Terrebonne Parish. Historians recognize the tribe as one of only two native to Louisiana, and of a size and “purity” to warrant recognition; the other is the Chitimacha.³⁹

The Houmas’ first settlement was a camp on Ouiski Bayou on high ground northwest of present-day Houma. As European settlement of the area increased in the late 1700s and early 1800s, the tribe again shifted south to remote coastal swamps and marshes, on the remains of natural levees and barrier islands. Researchers have identified that by the mid-1800s more than one hundred natural resource harvest settlements were in the wetlands of the Deltaic Plain.⁴⁰ It is here, in these Gulf of Mexico settlements and on the banks of twisting, meandering bayous, that descendants of the Houma Indians and French colonists exiled from Nova Scotia continued to live through the 20th century. While these are the two dominant ethnic groups, the Indians and Cajuns, as the Acadian exiles came to be known, also have lived intermittently with Spanish, African, German and Anglo-Americans, and more recently with Yugoslavs, Haitians, Italians, Irish, Chinese, Filipinos, Croatians, and Vietnamese.⁴¹

The isolated nature of these marsh settlements has allowed the culture, up until very recently, to thrive. But however remote their villages were, the Cajuns and Indians of coastal Terrebonne could not escape the parish’s antebellum prosperity, nor could they stop the oil exploration in their back yards. Scores of developers and investors flocked to the low-lying

³⁹ Statement of Jack Campisi, “Houma Recognition Act,” 74.

⁴⁰ R. Gramling and R. Hagelman, “A Working Coast: People in the Louisiana Wetlands,” *Journal of Coastal Restoration*, Special Issue Number 44, Saving America’s Wetland: Strategies for Restoration of Louisiana’s Coastal Wetlands and Barrier Islands, Spring 2005 (44): 113.

⁴¹ Ibid.

parish throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At first, they were attracted to Terrebonne's sugar-cane industry, although other major pre-Civil War industries included seafood, fur trading, logging and shipping. By 1851, one-hundred ten plantations in Terrebonne were dedicated to the cultivation of sugar.⁴²

The transportation industry arguably had the most devastating impact on American Indian and Cajun villages before the Civil War, when developers cut major canals through marshes where the coastal people made their living. Like the newly laid railroad tracks that sliced through wetlands and hunting grounds throughout south Louisiana, the canals were considered shortcuts for shipping. The expansion of the railroad in 1872 cut travel times from Houma to New Orleans from three days in a boat to three hours in a railroad car. While these transportation developments helped Terrebonne Parish become more accessible to outsiders, canals, railroads and the increasing development of the coast also impacted the people living in isolated, primitive American Indian settlements. Traditional, French-speaking Cajuns and Indians were not accustomed to outsiders and found themselves unable to communicate with the rapidly modernizing world.⁴³

Years of Change

By 1900, Terrebonne Parish was south Louisiana's agriculture- and seafood-producing hub. The coastal parish also was one of the fastest growing in the Bayou State. In 1900, 24,464 residents lived in Terrebonne Parish, including about 1,000 American Indians, census and government records show. That number nearly tripled to 60,771, including an estimated 2,000 American Indians, by 1960, when rich land, natural mineral resources and productive waters

⁴² Wurzlów, 33.

⁴³ Jacques M. Henry and Carl L. Bankston III, *Blue Collar Bayou: Louisiana Cajuns in the New Economy of Ethnicity* (London: Praeger, 2002), 88-92.

helped name Houma one of the fastest growing cities in the United States.⁴⁴

Terrebonne's economic boom was almost entirely the result of oil extraction, although the expansion of the Intracoastal Waterway in 1934 and the Houma Navigational Canal in 1961 also increased the parish's significance as an inland port. These activities were important to the parish's development, but the most significant event that forever changed the way of life for American Indians living on the coast happened in the summer of 1929 when oil was discovered in the marshes below Terrebonne's southernmost settlements.⁴⁵

Because most petroleum activity took place south of the parish seat, coastal communities suffered the most from its development.⁴⁶ When oil was discovered in Terrebonne's coastal marshes, outsiders were suddenly attracted to once-isolated bayou areas. The post-World War II pressures of modernization were quickly made real to these remote Indian settlements, which found themselves competing for natural resources for the first time in their history as the oil and gas industry, recreational fishers and tourists entered and "developed" their communities.⁴⁷ The explosion of the oil economy alleviated the social, economic and psychological isolation coastal residents had historically experienced from mainstream society. Yet the industry also uprooted the tight-knit, insular, familial lifestyle and culture of the bayou in ways that foreshadowed the further intrusion of recreation fishing and tourism in the latter part of the twentieth century.

⁴⁴ Greg Bowman and Janel Curry Roper, *The Houma People of Louisiana: A Story of Indian Survival*. (Akron: Mennonite Central Press, 1985), 90.

⁴⁵ Anthony V. Margavio and Craig Forsyth, *Caught in the Net: The Conflict Between Shrimpers and Conservationists*. (College Station: Texas A & M, 1996), 19-22.

⁴⁶ Margavio, 23-24.

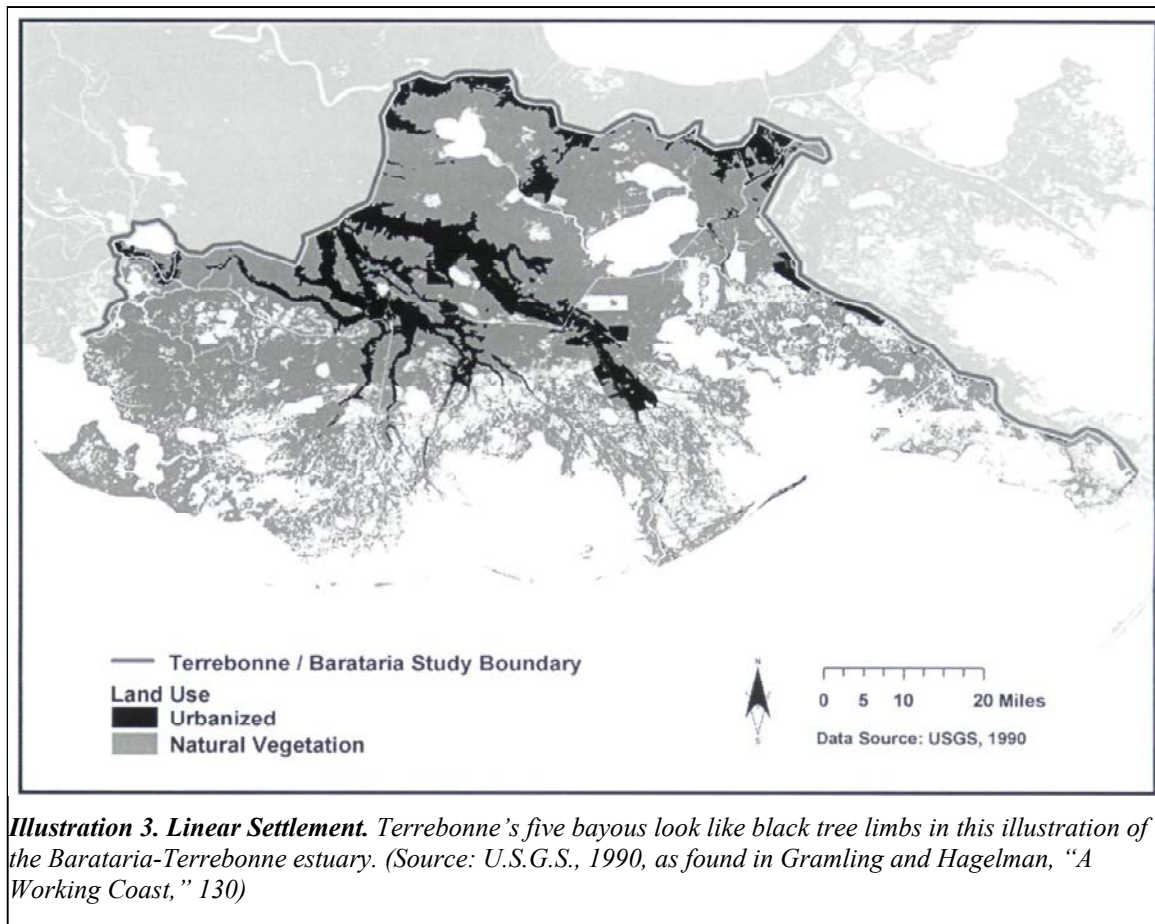
⁴⁷ Herbert R. Padgett, "Physical and Cultural Associations on the Louisiana Coast," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 59 (1969): 481-93.

Working in a Bountiful Land

The two large bays of the Barataria-Terrebonne estuary, Barataria and Terrebonne, and the natural levees that bisect them are the most heavily used and, outside the New Orleans metro area, are the most densely populated areas of the Louisiana coastline (see *Illustration 3*). The settlement pattern of the western segment of the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary complex, the area that forms the study area in this report, also is the most complicated. Located along the natural levees of five southward-flowing bayous — Dularge, Grand Caillou, Little Calliou, Terrebonne, and Pointe au Chien — the area sprawls outward into the marsh, inseparable from the ecosystem. Small settlements were built along these bayous hydrologically, in linear fashion according to earlier river paths. However much they share in common, however, each bayou in the Terrebonne estuary has its own distinct cultural identity and authentic sense of place.⁴⁸ Researchers studying this lush region note this feature most often. Writing in 2005, Gramling and Hagelman noted, “If the ecosystem is lost, this way of life will be lost, and the effects will be felt far beyond the borders of the state.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Gramling and Hagelman, 129.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 131.



Despite an array of challenges facing the industry, the primary occupation in the study area is still commercial fishing, and this fact helps explain why an estimated one fifth of all seafood harvested in the United States for human consumption comes from coastal Louisiana, with shrimp and blue crabs being the most coveted species.⁵⁰ Other primary coastal occupations also are focused on extraction activities, albeit for a different industry. Coastal Louisiana supplies about one-fifth of the natural gas produced in the United States. Some 3.8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas— or 19 percent of the 20.3 trillion cubic feet consumed in the United States

⁵⁰ Gramling and Hagelman, 117.

— come from coastal Louisiana.⁵¹

Unlike many other coastal regions, Louisiana did not oppose movement of petroleum activities into its coastal waters. Local acceptance of petroleum extraction was aided by the long history of exploitation of coastal resources in Louisiana.⁵² Because of this history, an estimated three-fourths of the 49,000 workers in Terrebonne Parish are employed in the state's \$65 billion oil and gas industry, the biggest economic driver in the region.⁵³ While some of the major oil producers - BP, Shell, ChevronTexaco and ExxonMobil - have operational hubs in the area, industries that support the oil giants are considered the backbone of Terrebonne's economy. Those support industries include the manufacturing of equipment needed in the drilling process, transportation of people and equipment, fabrication of vessels for transport, training, equipment rental and repair, product distribution, supply sales and labor. The Houma-Terrebonne Chamber of Commerce further reports that companies that construct parts and equipment for the oil-and-gas industry - "a seemingly unending list" - are one of the largest sources of employment in the coastal parish.⁵⁴ As a result, until Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated an estimated 10,000 to 12,000 homes and businesses and forced property owners to prioritize repairs, the area held the lowest unemployment rate in the state for more than 40 consecutive months.⁵⁵

Though the oil industry dominates the shoreline, since the early 1980s, and partly in response to the 1984 World's Fair in New Orleans, a new crop of jobs has emerged for a new kind of industry: tourism. Although swamp-tour owners and marina operators constitute a fraction of the increase, the rise of charter fishing has been the most critical in terms of coastal

⁵¹ Shirley Laska, G. Wooddell and R. Hagelman, et al., "At Risk: The Human, Community and Infrastructure Resources of Coastal Louisiana," *Journal of Coastal Restoration* Spring 2005 (44): 100.

⁵² Gramling and Hagelman, 121.

⁵³ Katherine Gilbert, "Oil and gas flows through community" *The Houma Courier* 17 February 2006, special annual section of *Living Here*.

⁵⁴ This information is on the chamber's Web site at http://www.houmachamber.com/local_info-industry.php.

⁵⁵ The state provides monthly employment statistics for the eight metropolitan regions in Louisiana on its Web site, www.laworks.net, over the past ten years.

urbanization and development. In 1997, the charter fishing fleet of the central and western Gulf of Mexico consisted of approximately 430 boats distributed throughout Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas, a fourfold increase from 1987. A more recent report puts the number of coastal fishing guides at 613.⁵⁶ In 2005, the state reported that the number of Louisiana charter licenses sold to guides peaked at 711 in 2005, more than a ten-fold increase from 1995.⁵⁷

Charter operations tend to cluster around major Gulf ports, with activity centers clustered in South Padre Island, Port Aransas, and Galveston-Freeport, Texas; Grand Isle-Empire-Venice, Louisiana; Gulfport-Biloxi, Mississippi; and Orange Beach-Gulf Shores, Alabama.⁵⁸ But the industry also has had a significant impact on Terrebonne Parish's relatively smaller-scale tourism fishing industry, with an estimated three dozen charter operations licensed to do business in the rural bayou communities, an increase from almost none in 1980.⁵⁹

Most charter-boat operators in Louisiana report former occupations as shrimpers and commercial fishers. In the late 1990s, Louisiana had one of the highest proportions of charter captains who had worked previously in commercial fishing (27 percent), in the oil industry (18 percent), or had been self employed (18 percent).⁶⁰ Further, 100 percent of charter-boat captains in Louisiana are first-time operators, compared to 75 percent in neighboring Mississippi. About 25 percent admitted they entered the business to make money, the highest percentage of any other Gulf Coast state. The reasons most cited in Texas, Arkansas and Florida included a love for

⁵⁶ Bob Marshall, "Growth of guides should have La. on alert," *The Times-Picayune* 24 July 2005: C10.

⁵⁷ "Louisiana Charter Fishing Fails to Recover Pre-Katrina Revenue," *Bloomberg News*, March 31, 2006. Article accessed April 1, 2005 at www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=10000103&sid=arZ2WhtWUiKw&refer=us.

⁵⁸ Stephen Sutton and Robert Ditton, et. al., "A Cross-sectional Study and Longitudinal Perspective on the Social and Economic Characteristics of the Charter and Party Boat Fishing Industry of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas," Human Dimensions of Recreational Fisheries Research Laboratory thesis # HD-612 (August 1999): 21.

⁵⁹ The 1980s figures were provided by the Houma-Terrebonne Tourist Commission.

⁶⁰ Sutton, et al, 22.

fishing and a desire to have a self-owned business.⁶¹

Another telling characteristic of charter-boat operators is that they belong to more organized fishing and lobbying organizations, such as the Coastal Conservation Association, than their counterparts in any other Gulf Coast state. This is an important point in the context of integrating charter boat operators into a local community that is dominated by full-time commercial fishers. The CCA is a lobbying organization that represents the interests of recreational anglers. It has been most instrumental in banning gill nets in state waters and establishing redfish as a gamefish in Louisiana. Members of Terrebonne's chapter, the Bayou CCA, are an active group of recreational fishers who hold family crawfish boils and barbecues at their weekend vacation camps and fund-raising dinners at invitation-only events in town. Most members of the group are doctors, attorneys, affluent oil executives and prominent business owners. No commercial fishers belong to the group.⁶²

With 90,000 members in fifteen states, including Louisiana, the CCA - nicknamed the "Coastal Coercion Association" by some pundits - has a national record of purporting to advocate for the future of the fishing industry while, as one editorial about the tension between recreationists and commercial shrimpers noted, "hell-bent on hammering ... commercial fishermen into non-existence."⁶³ The CCA's Louisiana constituents are most interested in a handful of sought-after species, including snapper, redfish, speckled trout, cobia, king mackerel, tuna, grouper, wahoo, amberjack, dolphin and billfish.⁶⁴ They largely view overfishing, pollution and the increasing competition between sportfishers and commercial fishers as the primary

⁶¹ Sutton, 23.

⁶² Based on a membership list provided by a Bayou CCA member in an interview with the author, Houma, Louisiana, 12 November 2005.

⁶³ Rob Holbert, "CCA tactics are going way overboard," *The Mississippi Press* 11 February 1996.

⁶⁴ Sutton, 50-51.

dangers threatening the future of recreational fishing (see *Table 2*).⁶⁵ These concerns, of course, are legitimate and important, and even in line with the views commercial fishers have toward the fishing industry. The tension between the two groups arises in how each reacts to commonly perceived problems. While the commercial fishers prefer a hands-off approach, allowing them the freedom to catch shrimp, crab and oysters as they have in the past, the CCA recreationists have become powerful Baton Rouge lobbyists with a narrowly focused agenda.

Reason for quality change	n	%
Quality increased		
Fisheries regulations	40	66.7
Commercial fishing	2	3.3
Number of charter/head boats	1	1.7
More Reefs	5	8.3
Electronics	1	1.7
Pollution	1	1.7
Quality decreased		
Overfishing	6	46.2
Number of sportfishers	1	7.7
Pollution	1	7.7
Competition between recreation and commercial sectors	3	23.1

Table 2: Is the Fishing Good? This chart lists the number and percent of charter boat operators in the four Gulf Coast states who reported an increase in fishing quality or a decrease in fishing quality from 1993-1997. (Source: Sutton, 65)

Years of lobbying has resulted in the growth of south Louisiana's recreational fishery and an increase in its power to shape policy in state and national governments. Commercial fishers contend this activism has threatened their livelihoods by exacerbating competition for limited natural resources. Other critics contend CCA members will do just about anything to protect their recreational angling interests, even if that means butting heads with commercial fishers who

⁶⁵ Sutton, 65.

for generations have made a living off the sea. In fact, the CCA has a long history of challenging the commercial fishing industry with stricter regulations. In one of the latest steps the group has taken over the past several decades, in March 2005 CCA members filed an emergency petition seeking to protect red snapper populations. The group asked the National Marine Fisheries Service, a branch of the Department of Commerce, to force shrimpers to reduce bycatch - the unwanted fish that get trapped in nets when trawling for shrimp - by 60 percent to 80 percent. The petition asked Commerce Secretary Carlos Guterrez to order emergency measures that would close some areas to shrimp vessels, shorten the shrimp season and use new devices to purportedly keep shrimp in nets but allow other organisms to escape.⁶⁶ CCA members claim juvenile red snapper are particularly vulnerable to shrimpers' nets because they live and grow in the same areas as shrimp. Only when red snapper mature do the fish stake out territory around underwater structures such as reefs, which offer more protection.

Since redfish (the local name for red snapper) were deemed overfished in 1989, quotas have been placed on commercial and recreational red snapper fishers, including a four-fish-per-day limit, and annual commercial and recreation harvests in the Gulf of Mexico are capped at 9.1 million pounds. The proposed new restrictions, however, would severely damage the Gulf of Mexico's most profitable fishery, with landings worth an annual \$500 million, shrimpers claim. "Everybody is in favor of conservation. But you just can't come in and wipe out a historical fishing community," A.J. Fabre, president of the Louisiana Shrimp Association, is quoted as saying.⁶⁷ The matter currently rests with the Gulf of Mexico Regional Fishery Management Council, the group that aids the federal government in managing Gulf fisheries. It voted in August 2005, several weeks before Hurricane Katrina struck, to begin working to address the

⁶⁶ Laura McKnight, "Red-snapper decline pits anglers against shrimpers" *The Houma Courier* 15 August 2005: A1.

⁶⁷ Matthew Brown, "Fishing group seeks to rein in shrimpers; Effort is to further protect red snapper" *The Times-Picayune* 30 March 2005: A3.

snapper's decline.

Table 3: Charter operations. The following is a list of licensed charter boat companies operating in the communities discussed in this thesis. The list only includes licensed charters in operation before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. (Source: Author's research)

Community	Charter Fishing Operation	Community	Charter Fishing Operation
Chauvin	Capt. Rusty's	Dulac	Boudreaux's Charters
		Dulac	Boudreaux Marina
Cocodrie	Bayou Guide Service	Dulac	Cajun Tours and Charters
Cocodrie	C&B Charter Fishing, Inc	Dulac	"Bon Ch��nce" Charters
Cocodrie	Capt. Blaine Townsend	Dulac	Cajun Bahama Marine Sightseeing
Cocodrie	Capt. Chad	Dulac	Camp Castaway, beachfront camp rental
Cocodrie	Capt. Cuda Scheer	Grand Isle	Cherece IV Fishing Charters
Cocodrie	Capt. Mike	Grand Isle	Different Drummer
Cocodrie	CoCo Marin	Grand Isle	Flipper Too Charters
Cocodrie	Cocodrie Charters	Grand Isle	H&M Fishing Charters
Cocodrie	Hugh's Cocodrie	Grand Isle	Hard Times Guide Service
Cocodrie	King's Cocodrie	Grand Isle	Moonshine Charters
Cocodrie	Last Frontier Charters	Grand Isle	Mirage Charters
Cocodrie	Point Cocodrie Inn	Grand Isle	Pair-A-Dice Charters
Cocodrie	Timbalier Charter Service		
Cocodrie			
Grand Isle	Pro Guide Service	Grand Isle	Cam-Lyn Charters, Inc.
Grand Isle	R.J. Guide Service	Houma	Craw Daddy Charters
Grand Isle	Rigs-N-Reefs	Houma	Custom Charters
Grand Isle	Sea Wolf Charters	Houma	Shallow Minded Guide Service
Grand Isle	Tucker's Folly	Houma	Sunshine Marina
Grand Isle	Abyss Charter Fishing Service	Houma	Coup Platte Hunting & Fishing
Grand Isle	Bayou Guide Service	Houma	Authement's Charters

Just as charter-boat operations are on the rise (see *Table 3* on the preceding page for a list of charter fishers in the study area who were in business before the fall 2005 hurricanes), so is recreational fishing, primarily for speckled trout and redfish. In 2001-2002, more than 280,000 Louisiana residents and 42,000 nonresidents bought saltwater fishing licenses,⁶⁸ which cost \$15 a piece.

The state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries similarly reports that fish and wildlife are big business in Louisiana, with retail and harvest sales related to fish, wildlife and boating topping \$5.1 billion per year.⁶⁹ This produces \$7.1 billion in economic impact and supports 77,688 jobs in Louisiana, with 29,245 of those jobs coming from commercial fishing, 22,471 jobs from recreational boating and 16,999 jobs from recreational fishing.⁷⁰ Along with the increase, however, has been a rise in tension between those who rely on the fishery for recreation and for profit. “Before, when my daddy was a shrimper, we didn’t have none of these camps and boats cluttering up the bayou and going to Baton Rouge to fight us for trying to make a living,” said a fifth-generation shrimper from Dulac. “But now everything is different, everything. It seems like every time I turn around I have more new laws I got to obey, and none of them benefit me. It’s all for the recreation guys.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ “Hunting, Fishing and Boating,” Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries report, 2004. Accessed July 14, 2004 at www.wlf.state.la.us/.

⁶⁹ See Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries report, “The Economic Benefits of Fisheries, Wildlife and Boating Resources in the State of Louisiana,” prepared by Southwick Associates, June 2, 2005. Available online at http://www.wlf.state.la.us/apps/netgear/clientFiles/lawlf/files/LEI%202003_4xfinal.pdf.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Dulac fisher, interview by author, Dulac, Louisiana, 19 November 2005.

Coastal Threats and Issues

However profitable developers and sports fishers have found the Terrebonne coastline, the area is on the front line of a gamut of environmental issues, including global warming, sea level rise, wetlands loss and increasingly damaging hurricanes. Some researchers have noted the phrase “working coastal zone,” though popular with oil-friendly lawmakers such as U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu,⁷² is a loaded expression because coastal land loss and wetland destruction is so intertwined with coastal land development. Nonetheless, developers are essentially allowed free reign of the marsh because of loosely enforced coastal development laws. Houck notes in a recent essay on the problem that the wetlands are allowed to be developed because planning in most towns and parishes in Louisiana happens “by default.” Nearly all parishes in the state lack zoning codes, including Terrebonne; instead land use is local and pressure driven. “People want to live where they always have, and as close to the water as possible.”⁷³ The result of this can be seen in *Table 4*, which shows that flood insurance payments for the coastal barrier island Grand Isle totaled nearly \$12 million from 1978 to 2000. Terrebonne’s total payments were nearly \$86 million, with the 5,915 residents filing claims living predominantly in low-lying coastal communities.

⁷² U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu frequently uses the term “working coast” when describing Louisiana’s amiable relationship with the oil and gas industry. Most recently, Congressman Charlie Melancon jumped on the bandwagon when he called southern Louisiana “a working coast, not a resort area.” See “AIA Conference Sets Stage for Rebuilding Planning; Immense task begins as Louisiana seeks help, unity,” *The Angle*, 3(26) 15 November 2005.

⁷³ Houck, 43.

Table 4: Flood Losses. This chart lists the National Flood Insurance Program FEMA flood loss claims for two parishes and the town of Grand Isle from 1978-2000. Lafourche Parish information was not available. (Source: Laska,, 98)

	<i>Population</i>	<i>Total Losses</i>	<i>Total Payments (\$)</i>	<i>% Filing a claim</i>
Jefferson Parish	455,466	44,142	469,064,822	10
Grand Isle	1,541	2,074	11,899,311	135
Terrebonne Parish	104,503	5,915	85,769,584	6

A physical example of the danger of the “working coastal zone” concept can be seen in the proposed Lafitte-Larose highway on La.1, which was estimated to cost \$840 million to construct before Hurricane Katrina. The project includes four lanes of elevated highway from Golden Meadow to Port Fourchon, with interchanges. Advocates argue the new highway would serve as “the gateway to the Gulf and the most significant infrastructure project probably to this nation’s energy supply.”⁷⁴ Critics contend the highway would cut through acres of valuable marsh in southern Lafourche Parish and its justification as an evacuation route for low-lying residents is unsupported because of the scant number of people who live full-time in the area. Houck writes that the real reason for the multimillion dollar highway is for “the people who are going to build down there.” That is, for the “golf courses and subdivisions and castles on the sea” in Grand Isle, where homes sold for a half million dollars and more before Katrina, and for the structures that will inevitably support the roadway: levees, drainage canals, pumping stations and dredge and fill.⁷⁵

In Terrebonne Parish, there is another major reason development of the coastline is allowed to continue. Luxury fishing camps are not taxed at their full value. Instead, owners of

⁷⁴ Statement of Ted Falgout, chairman of the La. 1 Coalition board of directors, in Katina A. Gaudet, “DOTD: La. 1 upgrade needs to continue,” *The Daily Comet* 20 October 2005: A1.

⁷⁵ Houck, 42.

these multi-story properties are taxed at a discounted rate because they are “second homes” and because the people who own them support the parish economy in other ways, such as purchasing fuel, ice, bait and supplies at local gas stations and groceries.⁷⁶ Terrebonne’s bayou communities cannot levy taxes of their own because they are unincorporated. The only incorporated town in the parish is Houma. Across the lower bayous of Terrebonne Parish, then, in all of the communities studied in this thesis, fishing camps, some used as permanent homes, others as weekend or vacation retreats, are routinely assessed at rates below their market value, tax records show. As a result, camp owners - some of whom live in Houma, but most of whom claim primary residence outside Terrebonne Parish - pay a fraction of the taxes they would if charged true market value. At the same time, camp owners receive the same basic services as full-time residents, including access to drainage infrastructure, fire and police protection.

The local tax assessor’s office has developed a simple formula for appraising these weekend retreats for tax purposes. A flat rate of \$25 per square foot is assessed to fishing camp owners. In this way, a \$200,000 fishing camp with 2,000 square feet of living space is commonly valued on the tax rolls for \$50,000. At the same time, a \$200,000 primary home in Houma or Montegut, by law, must be assessed within 10 percent of its market value, which ranges from \$180,000 to \$220,000, no matter its square footage.⁷⁷ And this is legal, according to the Louisiana Tax Commission, because no state law addresses how assessors should value coastal fishing camps.

In fact, for years Terrebonne did not even include coastal fishing camps on the tax rolls. For much of the 1990s, fishing camps were not included on the rolls at all, despite a state law that requires all property to be kept on the records. In response to a lawsuit filed by a local

⁷⁶ Based on interview with a Terrebonne Parish public official, interview by author, Houma, Louisiana, 3 August 2004.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

resident in the early 1990s and a subsequent investigation by the Louisiana Tax Commission, former Terrebonne Assessor George Hebert, who is now deceased, added about fifty fishing camps to the parish tax rolls in 1994, for the first time in Terrebonne history. The fifty camps were in two new coastal developments: Coco Village in Cocodrie and Four Point Estates in Dulac. A year later, according to the lawsuit, another 1,700 camps were added to the rolls based on maps and information received from Louisiana Land & Exploration Co., Fina-Laterre, Continental Land, building records, and parish utility records.⁷⁸ At the end of 2005, about 2,500 fishing camps were included on Terrebonne's tax rolls.⁷⁹

Assessing camps at lower rates than primary homes forces local public agencies to lose thousands of dollars in uncollected taxes each year, money that could be spent to improve roads and levees, build better bridges and hire more police. But the practice also exacerbates tension between bayou residents whose property taxes are assessed at market rates and camp owners who pay low property taxes for their vacation homes - some less than \$100 per year, online tax records show. The low assessments also ignore the history of fishing camps, which started as mom-and-pop shacks on the sea but are now high-quality, permanent vacation retreats.

Amid this new construction sits the Barataria-Terrebonne estuary, a rich ecosystem that also has the greatest erosion rate, highest rate of land loss and most critical need for coastal protection in the state. If the Louisiana coastal wetlands, an area larger than Connecticut, continue to disappear at current rates, the consequences are dire. Not only will people and their culture and lifestyles have to relocate, but "the entire country would experience a threat to a significant portion of its resource base (petroleum and fisheries especially), which would have

⁷⁸ See *Matherne v. Terrebonne Tax Assessor, et al*, United States District Court, Eastern District Court of New Orleans, Louisiana, 2000.

⁷⁹ Based on interview with Terrebonne Parish public official, interview by author, August 8, November 3 and December 7, 2005.

permanent ripple effects throughout the United States.”⁸⁰

What are the consequences of these myriad coastal threats? As residents of low-lying coastal Louisianans know too well, all coastal communities within fifty miles inland are threatened by even the mildest coastal storms. Other ramifications include squeezing out the fisheries, boarded-up processing plants and the further deterioration of storm buffers as cypress forests die from the intrusion of the Gulf of Mexico’s salty water.⁸¹ The dislocating forces of coastal development also have deep social ramifications in the form of coastal gentrification - wealthy white out-of-towners consume land and property once inhabited by locals or valued as open space - and “economic apartheid.”⁸²

By economic apartheid, anthropologist Griffith (2000) means the geographic segregation of rich and poor folk.⁸³ Such segregation is happening along the coasts of the world and in the Americas because powerful political and economic forces are “straitjacketing” individuals to specific roles in order to keep them away from private areas when they are not working. This is done through physical barriers - gated communities - as well as social norms. In this way, commercial fishers are kept isolated from their recreationist neighbors. They occupy the same space but under varying rules of discipline and order.⁸⁴ Economic apartheid in the case of coastal Louisiana, then, pertains to access, as sections of the landscape are segregated into areas for the rich and areas for the poor. While the rich have access to the entire bayou, the poor are kept out of wealthy neighborhoods by real barriers, such as gates and fences, and perceived barriers, such as economic and social isolation.

⁸⁰ Laska, 92.

⁸¹ Houck, 42.

⁸² David Griffith. “Social Capital and Economic Apartheid Along the Coasts of the Americas,” *Urban Anthropology* Fall 2000 29 (3): 255–84.

⁸³ Ibid., 261.

⁸⁴ Griffith, 278.

Chapter 5: Findings

Introduction

The four geographical focus areas in this thesis traditionally have been what Kariel and Kariel term “reservoirs of outmigration,”⁸⁵ characterized by an aging population and the loss of young people because of a lack of economic opportunity due to the decline of the fishing industry and ecosystem challenges such as coastal land loss. Each of the four communities included in this study share other spatial and cultural commonalities linked to the bayous on which they reside and depend. The communities are inseparable from their surroundings, linked to one another by a series of bridges and two-lane roads that run up and down the slivers of land masses in southern Terrebonne. In many cases, the property on which coastal residents reside has been in their families for generations; the land is a highly valued asset, connected to the past and keeping people rooted to their ancestors.

This chapter will discuss the characteristics and unique histories that define the four marsh communities in this study. While other villages in the region also share similar traits and development trends, such as Grand Isle in Jefferson Parish and Fourchon Beach in southern Lafourche, the communities selected for this study correlate with what the new Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act defines as a fishing community: “A community which is substantially dependent on or substantially engaged in the harvesting or processing of fishery resources to meet social and economic needs.”⁸⁶ Despite the rapid and transforming changes these marsh communities are undergoing, at the front line of coastal threats

⁸⁵ H.G. Kariel, “Sociocultural impacts of tourism in the Austrian Alps,” *Mountain Research and Development*, 1989 9 (1): 60.

⁸⁶ The definition can be found in Sec. 102 (16).

and increasingly impacted by a new tourism economy, each still meets this definition of a “fishing community” in every sense of the phrase.

In considering the social and demographic trends each of the four coastal communities in this study has experienced since the late 1970s, this chapter will utilize parish planning estimates as well as census data before considering what forecasters believe is the fate of these low-lying, culturally rich settlements. Unfortunately, the picture is not pretty. But it is the reality for coastal people, the American Indians and Cajuns who settled on the rich banks of bayous Dularge, Grand Caillou, Little Caillou, Terrebonne and Pointe au Chien more than a century ago, before the oil and gas industry struck gold on the state’s shoreline, and way before recreational fishers discovered the water teeming with seafood and fish. Back then, living “down the bayou” was a struggle but it made sense to families because making a real living was, indeed, possible. Little of that cultural legacy remains, as a half-million coastal residents are forced to pay the consequences each year of an overdeveloped shoreline, and a government that started caring too late.⁸⁷

Selection of Study Areas

The four communities selected for this study include, from east to west, (1) Montegut, Pointe-aux-Chenes and Isle de Jean Charles on bayous Terrebonne and Pointe au Chien; (2) Chauvin and Cocodrie on Bayou Little Caillou; (3) Dulac on Bayou Grand Caillou; and (4) Dularge and Theriot on Bayou Dularge. Each of these communities has been especially impacted by recreational development since the late 1970s, but the selection of these villages also was based on available census data and background information, accessibility for interviewing and

⁸⁷ Houck estimates that the safety of about a half-million coastal people who live in the most vulnerable parts of the Atchafalaya floodway system just west of New Orleans is at stake in terms of land loss and poor to nonexistent levee protection. See Houck, 64.

the author's personal knowledge of the history of the land and its people, and how both have changed over time.

Interestingly, all four communities studied also share the same style of recreation and tourism development, with some land speculators repeating building and subdivision-on-stilts design patterns across myriad bayou villages, no matter the differences in the layout of the land and the value locals have placed on certain open spaces. In these communities, most tourism operations are small and independently run, be they bed and breakfasts, restaurants, marinas, bait shops, hotels, or charter fishing businesses. Each community also has a large and stable residential population with a unique cultural background and certain distinctive traits.

It is useful to briefly contrast the four marsh communities in this study with neighboring Grand Isle, a seven-mile-long sliver of barrier island beach located about forty-five miles southwest of New Orleans and about an hour's drive from the southern Terrebonne bayous. Grand Isle is the only Louisiana barrier island reachable by road, and the growth of its tourism economy has made the island a prime destination for saltwater recreational fishing and sunbathing. Though Grand Isle has been continuously inhabited since the mid-eighteenth century, and commercial fishing still is part of the economy with a couple major seafood buyers on the island before the fall 2005 hurricanes, its economy and culture have significantly changed since the building of a road and bridge to the mainland in the early 1930s and the subsequent development of the oil field a decade later.⁸⁸

These changes helped Anglicize the French-Cajun-Indian culture and modernize the economy. But in Grand Isle's case, modernization has come to mean a "purposeful and gradual

⁸⁸ David Burley and Pam Jenkins, et al, "Loss, Attachment, and Place: A Case Study of Grand Isle, Louisiana," *Reconstruction* 5.3 (Summer 2005).

forgetting of its racially mixed heritage.”⁸⁹ Today, Grand Isle has about 1,500 residents, 96 percent of whom are white.⁹⁰ About 80 percent of the homes and recreational fishing camps on the island were washed away during hurricanes Katrina and Rita (see *Illustration 4*).⁹¹ Before the storm, about 62 percent of the island’s total housing units, or 1,160 of 1,875 structures, were for seasonal or recreational use.⁹²



Illustration 4: Help. This view of Grand Isle was captured Aug. 31, 2005, two days after Hurricane Katrina. Note the word “HELP!” spelled alongside the long white building. (Photo courtesy of NOAA Public Relations, www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2005/s2500.html)

⁸⁹ Keith M. Yanner and Steven Y. Ybarrola, “He Didn’t Have No Cross: Tombs and Graves as Racial Boundary Tactics on a Louisiana Barrier Island,” *The Oral History Review* (30).

⁹⁰ U.S. Census 2000.

⁹¹ The extent of Grand Isle’s damage has been well reported by the local and national media. See Mayor David Camballe’s comments in David McElmore, “Island community all but vanishes in hurricane’s wake,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 31 August 2005.

⁹² U.S. Census 2000.

Whether Grand Isle's fate is the future of Terrebonne's bayou settlements remains to be seen. However, the rapid pace of urbanization along once strictly rural coastal communities, and the loss of the younger generation to non-fishing industries as well as to surrounding areas and outside states, indicate that each of the marsh communities in this study are in danger of following in Grand Isle's footsteps. Tourism has contributed to the displacement of a sizable portion of Grand Isle's native population since the 1930s. Paved roads to the lower Terrebonne bayou communities were not built until the 1940s and 1950s; up until that time, local children went to school in pirogues or school boats, which picked up youngsters at various spots along the bayous where they lived.⁹³ The growth of the oil industry, however, has resulted in the industrialization of the wetlands as neighborhoods have been carved into the once impossibly unbuildable swamp and recreational tourism has become more accessible to outsiders.

In 1979, there were 244 housing units in Terrebonne Parish that were classified as "for vacant seasonal and migratory use," according to the 1980 census. In 2005, there were 2,500 fishing camps on the tax rolls, consuming about 328 acres of parish land. That represents a 924 percent increase in twenty-six years.

All around, the numbers are dismal. In a study conducted in the late 1990s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers found that, based on eighty-two flooding events over a 108-year period of record, the probability of a hurricane affecting the Louisiana coast in any given year is 75.9 percent. At the time, Terrebonne had experienced at least three major flood events in the past fifteen years. A half-decade later, the rate has climbed to seven flood events in about twenty years. *Table 5* shows the breakdown of seasonal storm patterns within the timeframe examined by the corps.

⁹³ The Terrebonne Parish Main Library has a collection of photographs of these school boats on display in the main lobby, next to pictures of library boats that delivered borrowed material to bayou residents through the 1950s.

Table 5: History of Hurricanes. This table lists the number of hurricanes affecting the Louisiana coast, 1885-1992.
(Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)

Month	Number of Occurrences	Percentage (%)
June	7	8.5
July	6	7.3
August	17	20.7
September	40	48.8
October	11	13.4
November	1	1.2

Drafted in 2003, Terrebonne’s Comprehensive Master Plan describes the phenomenal growth of second-home fishing camps from 1990 to 2000 as a “significant increase” while, during this same timeframe, coastal communities “have seen an outmigration of population, with little to no increases in conventional single-family residential usage.” *Table 6* on the next page shows the projected population losses in Terrebonne’s low-lying bayou communities (in red) versus the population gains expected in areas with higher flood elevations (in blue.) Note that Grand Caillou is expecting population gains, but not because of development in Dulac. The area in northern Grand Caillou, including the Ashland North and South subdivisions, is expecting considerable growth because of the number of Dulac residents moving farther up the bayou to escape flooding. Interestingly, two of the land-use goals set forth in the parish master plan are to “preserve and enhance the rural areas of the parish” and to “protect existing wetlands while providing controlled growth in specified areas.”⁹⁴

However, the authors of the parish master plan contradict themselves several pages later under the subheading “Hurricane Threats,” which accompanies a conflicting strategy:

⁹⁴ T. Baker Smith & Son, “Terrebonne Comprehensive Master Plan,” February 6, 2003: 3-18.

“[Government] should develop a plan for the long term or relocation of people displaced by hurricanes or tropical storms, particularly those below or at the poverty level, to the northern areas of the parish.” Such is the political and economic climate in which coastal residents find themselves. Unable to fight the coastal land loss battle on their own, none can take solace in the fact that their government is committed to helping them.

Area	1990	2000	Diff	% Change 1990 - 2000	2005	2010	% Change 2000 - 2020	2020
1 Montegut	3814	3643	-171	-4.48%	3558	3472	-9.4%	3301
2 Bourg	3620	4171	551	15.22%	4447	4722	26.4%	5273
3 Chauvin	8057	7750	-307	-3.81%	7597	7443	-7.9%	7136
4 Grand Caillou	4876	5738	862	17.68%	6169	6600	30.0%	7462
5 Dularge	4014	3858	-156	-3.89%	3780	3702	-8.1%	3546
6 East Houma	14763	14810	47	0.32%	14834	14857	0.6%	14904
7 South Industrial	210	202	-8	-3.81%	198	194	-7.9%	186
8 North Industrial	5293	5667	374	7.07%	5854	6041	13.2%	6415
9 Schriever	13041	15060	2019	15.5%	16070	17079	26.8%	19098
10 Upper Bayou Blue	2573	3135	562	21.8%	3416	3697	35.9%	4259
11 Bayou Cane	13096	14064	968	7.4%	14548	15032	13.8%	16000
12 Hwy 311	1608	2662	1054	65.5%	3189	3716	79.2%	4770
13 Chacahoula	512	446	-66	-12.9%	413	380	-29.6%	314
14 Gibson	2343	1632	-711	-30.3%	1277	921	-87.1%	210
15 Bayou Black	2672	2964	292	10.9%	3110	3256	19.7%	3548
16 Lower Bayou Blue	1061	1425	364	34.3%	1607	1789	51.1%	2153
17 West Houma	15429	17276	1847	12.0%	18200	19123	21.4%	20970
18 West Marsh	0	0	0			0		0
Totals	96982	104503	7521	7.76%	108264	112024		119545

Table 6: Population Change. This chart shows the population gains and losses Terrebonne's eighteen communities have seen since 1990. Note that the bayou communities in this report, all in red, are expected to lose an additional 8 to 9 percent of their populations by 2020, with the exceptions of Grand Caillou, which does not distinguish itself from the rapid population losses experienced in neighboring Dulac; and Bourg, which sits on high ground just south of Houma and is viewed as an attractive place for Chauvin and Montegut residents to relocate. (Source: Terrebonne Comprehensive Master Plan, 2-7)

Montegut, Pointe-aux-Chenes and Isle de Jean Charles

From the sky, the villages of Montegut, Pointe-aux-Chenes and Isle de Jean Charles are lost amid the endless water and marsh around them. They appear as isolated pockets of far-flung civilization, stuck in the middle of the sea as if tossed there in a cyclone of disarray. From the ground, however, the villages make more sense. Montegut and Pointe-aux-Chenes are situated on the banks of two once-crucial bayous, and, like early New Orleans, most settlements were built on the highest ground for miles, laid out in a logical, linear pattern that follows the natural curve of the waterway. Isle de Jean Charles, meanwhile, was not always an island. The historical American Indian settlement that has been inhabited by indigenous people since the 1700s was surrounded by lush cypress forests and fertile hunting ground as late as the 1960s, before saltwater from the Gulf began leaking into the freshwater marsh and killing the organisms and habitat that depended on it.⁹⁵

The 2000 census counted 4,600 people in the Montegut area and 1,803 within the unincorporated town limits, a 5 percent drop from 1990 and an 8 percent drop from 1980. While the racial composition of the community has remained relatively constant over the past thirty years - with about 75 percent white, 18 percent American Indian and 1 percent black - the area's housing stock has not. In 2000, 207 of the Montegut area's 1,791 housing units were for "seasonal or recreational use," the classification used for recreation fishing camps. The bulk of the vacation units were in Pointe-aux-Chenes and Isle de Jean Charles, according to census block group data. That is more than triple the number of housing units for seasonal use counted in the 1980 census.

⁹⁵ A Houma Indian elder who grew up on Isle de Jean Charles but now lives in the New Orleans metro area remembers his father hunting in the cypress forests around his home. Today the forests are open lakes that stretch toward the Gulf. Based on interview by author, electronic correspondence, April 20, 2005.

While the number of fishing camps for the affluent has tripled over the past thirty years, Montegut's poverty level has remained among the highest in the state. In 2000, about 18 percent of families lived below the federal poverty level, double the national average. The per capita income for the area was \$11,576. These numbers are reflected in the makeup of Montegut and Pointe-aux-Chene's public schools, all of which are federally funded with Title 1 money because their poverty levels exceed 50 percent.

Most homes in the Montegut study area are elevated one to three feet off the ground, although an estimated two dozen were raised about eight feet with federal assistance after Hurricane Lili, the last major storm to flood the area before Hurricane Rita struck in September 2005.⁹⁶ The area's recent assortment of recreational fishing camps, however, were all built in accordance with new flood elevation requirements that dictate structures must be located on twelve-foot pillars, at a minimum, in the vulnerable coastal zone. The contrast between local low-lying homes and sky-high recreation fishing camps could not be more dramatic, and the disparity between the two was most striking after Hurricane Rita. The Category 3 storm made landfall about 150 miles west of Terrebonne Parish, yet the storm's surge swamped nearly every home and business in Montegut, Pointe-aux-Chenes and Isle de Jean Charles in at least one foot of floodwater. The only structures that escaped unscathed were those elevated to the new federal flood requirements (see *Illustration 5*). That is, with the exception of approximately fifty properly elevated primary homes, the majority of the structures in this region that did not flood during Rita were recreational fishing camps.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Information provided by a Terrebonne Parish public official, interview by author, Houma, Louisiana, November 2005.

⁹⁷ Ibid.



Illustration 5: High and Low. *Pointe-aux-Chenes homes that were not elevated at least 8 feet suffered considerable damage from Hurricane Rita. Here, the difference is shown between the damage a low-lying home sustained in the rural bayou community and the damage an elevated trailer endured.*
(Author's photograph)

While a Terrebonne Parish public official said in an interview that this fact should convince reluctant homeowners to raise their properties a minimum twelve feet, the divide between wealthy camp owners and local homeowners of modest means runs deeper than mere height requirements. A lifelong Isle de Jean Charles resident said the recreational fishers that fill the tiny island community on the weekends can disrupt the tribe's peaceful way of life.⁹⁸ The island is linked to the mainland via Island Road, a two-lane, dead-end street that forms a cul-de-sac at the foot of Isle de Jean Charles. Fishing camps - an estimated thirty structures on an island that currently houses only thirty native families - proliferate toward the dead end, meaning recreational anglers must pass through the native community to reach their retreats.

In years past, it was customary for visitors to the island to stop at the chief's home, introduce themselves and get the tribal leader's permission to enter the island community.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Isle de Jean Charles resident, interview by author, Isle de Jean Charles, Louisiana, September 28, 2005.

⁹⁹ Dulac resident, interview by author, Dulac, Louisiana, September 3, 10, 28, and October 4, 2005.

Nowadays, almost nobody does this. While few residents interviewed on the island would call the recreational camp owners “disrespectful,” some said it was “upsetting” to families whose homes were severely flooded during the storm to watch the weekend anglers flock to the island soon after Hurricane Rita to resume their lifestyles. While native homeowners were still mopping up mud and relying on indigenous relief agencies for basic supplies and services (the American Red Cross never made an appearance on Isle de Jean Charles after Rita, several residents said), recreational fishers were unaffected by the flooding and its aftermath. Tellingly, one of the first businesses to open up in the region after the storm was the Isle de Jean Charles marina, whose customers are predominantly out-of-towners.

There is no school on the island. Students travel by school bus to Pointe-aux-Chenes Elementary or Montegut Middle School. Those who go on to high school must make the daily forty- to sixty-minute trip to South Terrebonne High School in Bourg. The other public school that serves the region is Montegut Elementary, a historic school that recently celebrated its ninetieth birthday. During Hurricane Rita, Montegut Elementary and Middle schools suffered extensive roof damage but no flooding due to their location on elevated ground. However, Pointe-aux-Chenes Elementary took on three to five feet of water and was one of the last schools in the parish to reopen after the storm.

Residents of Pointe-aux-Chenes and Montegut admit there is tension between themselves and the recreation fishers. Many Pointe-aux-Chenes and Montegut homeowners grew up on Isle de Jean Charles, moving away to presumably higher ground in their 20s and 30s to start a family. A Pointe-aux-Chenes mother said in an interview that her home, which sits about three feet off the ground, took on three feet of water during Hurricane Rita, and she said every single family member lost everything to the storm. The young mother grew up on Isle de Jean Charles; her

mother was a Houma medicine woman. She moved to Pointe-aux-Chenes with her husband to find safer shelter for their daughter. Instead of finding dry ground, however, the family's home has flooded numerous times since they moved in, but they are quick to point out that the neighbors across the street, who own more recently built slab-on-grade homes, have fared even worse.

Despite the widespread destruction, and the inaccessibility to the area days after Rita struck, several Pointe-aux-Chenes residents who never evacuated said the recreational camp owners somehow obtained permission from police roadblocks to ride their pickup trucks through the foot of mud and sludge along Pointe-aux-Chenes Road to reach their properties at the end, near Pointe-aux-Chenes marina. Residents said in separate interviews that they and their friends were "angry" that none of the recreational fishers stopped to talk to them or help them clean up or even say "Hello." "They just rode right on through, like we didn't even exist. We were invisible to them."¹⁰⁰

Back in the 1940s and 1950s, Montegut was a mecca for bayou residents, who could work in the town's sugar-cane refinery or on a shrimp boat, go to the movies at the downtown strip, eat ice cream and shop at a clothing store, all without ever getting in a car and driving to the nearest city, Houma. Fast forward a half-century and the intrepid visitor would be hard-pressed to find any remnants of the town's lively past, save for the boarded-up and flooded-out businesses that line Montegut's once bustling downtown corridor, and the occasional faded-out sign telling what was. Once the sugar-cane refinery closed, and roads were paved, oil and gas tycoons began moving into the marsh and the locals began moving out. Montegut and its sister villages, Pointe-aux-Chenes and Isle de Jean Charles, have been rapidly losing population since Hurricane Betsy struck in 1965. With each storm that comes, more people leave. Those that stay

¹⁰⁰ Pointe-aux-Chenes mother, interview by author, Pointe-aux-Chenes, Louisiana, September 25, 2005.

use two hands to count the big ones off on their fingers: Camille, Juan, Georges, Andrew, Isidore, Lili, Katrina and Rita.

All over the community abandoned homes rot, homes that were never gutted from two storms ago, and now they sit, attracting rats and roaches and waiting for the next hurricane to blow them away. Montegut, Pointe-aux-Chenes and Isle de Jean Charles are beautiful to the people who live there, for they are the ones who know it for what it was. In moments of sadness, however, residents will admit their treasured community depresses them at times, with all the blight and deterioration and predictions of more devastation to come. They are living what the numbers show.

In fifteen years, the population of Montegut, Pointe-aux-Chenes and Isle de Jean Charles is expected to drop by 9 percent, continuing a decades-old trend of the younger generation of coastal families moving up and out. By 2020, the overwhelming bulk of land use in the area is expected to be influenced by the increase in recreation camps, particularly in the lower reaches of bayous Terrebonne and Pointe au Chien. Terrebonne's master plan notes that this trend has been occurring on all five of the parish's bayous for some time, and they show no signs of stopping. While more "traditional development" will likely be deterred in the Montegut community because of the potential for flooding, parish planners do not expect that threat to deter the onslaught of fishing camp development. "The social and economic problems associated with flooding will dampen development, and federal, state, and local building requirements (related to flooding) will also drive the cost of new construction up."¹⁰¹

Perhaps the Montegut community that will suffer the most from the ongoing development of the coast is Isle de Jean Charles, which will not be included in the Morganza levee project. In its cost-benefit analysis of Morganza, the corps wrote that the island contains about 100

¹⁰¹ Terrebonne Comprehensive Master Plan, 4-2.

residential structures and, in studying the tiny community, two options faced federal engineers. The first was to provide 100-year flood protection for the coastal village. The second was to relocate all residents in accordance with the federal government's Uniform Relocation Act. The corps estimated that the average annual benefits associated with flood protection for the island would be \$900,000, justifying a flood-protection project that would cost a maximum \$13 million.

However, due to the island's remote location, the actual cost of 100-year flood protection is \$190 million. "Therefore, it is not economically justified," the corps wrote. Meanwhile, relocating residents would cost about \$8 million, which in the corps' opinion was an economically justifiable but unacceptable solution. The report cites a December 3, 1999 letter from island tribal Chief Albert Naquin in which the well-respected elder voices his displeasure with the corps excluding the island from levee protection. The corps' response was to construct an earthen levee about 7 feet high around the island's perimeter, "and this area was removed from further consideration."¹⁰² In early 2006, ground was broken on the first phase of the Pointe-aux-Chenes levee, and the ongoing construction work is a clear reminder to island residents that they are excluded from its protection (see *Illustration 6* on the next page).

¹⁰² U.S. Army Corps of Engineers report, "Isle de Jean Charles realignment."



Illustration 6: Wall of Protection. *The first phase of the Pointe-aux-Chenes levee project, which will exclude neighboring Isle de Jean Charles from flood protection, is under construction by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers contractors. (Author's photograph)*

Chauvin and Cocodrie

A short-sleeved T-shirt on display at the tourist restaurant Sportsman's Paradise on Hwy. 56 in Chauvin aptly describes the high value visitors place on this fishing mecca of southeast Louisiana: "Paris. Milan. Cocodrie," the shirt states. While the commercial fishing lifestyle still dominates the unincorporated town of Chauvin, the landscape is one hundred percent different a few miles south of the town center's Piggly Wiggly supermarket. The separation of Chauvin and Cocodrie along Bayou Little Caillou, Terrebonne's most developed bayou, is marked by a bridge. On one side of the bridge sit shrimp boats and modest homes of low elevation, a few token strip malls and roadside eateries that offer sno-balls in the summer. On the other side, the

tourism economy dominates, with some of the most decadent recreation fishing camps in the state snaking alongside the bayou from the Gulf of Mexico like lines in the sand.

The contrast between the lifestyles local fishers enjoy and those of the camp owners is marked by this bridge. While locals live, eat and breathe the bayou, with their front yards facing Bayou Little Caillou and the men, women and children spending most of their time on their boats, alternately catching fish and making repairs, the out-of-town recreationists visit the area only during the warm spring and summer months. Locals own steel-hulled or wood-framed trawl boats with functional bunkbed-style sleeping cabins, freezers and miles of netting. The recreationists own luxury yachts, cruisers and fiberglass boats made exclusively for sport fishing. Most of the time, the commercial fishers and recreation anglers do not even share the same fuel stops, with the commercial fishers filling up at processing plants and the recreationists tanking up at marina delis that cater exclusively to them.

But perhaps the most telling contrast between local commercial fishers and weekend anglers is their social camaraderie. The wife of a Chauvin shrimper said in an interview that the commercial fishers are like family, and they constantly communicate, trade information and support each other on the water. The recreationists, on the other hand, are not included in this loop, nor do they want to be. Though the female shrimper said she tries to be friendly with the recreational fishers, offering tips about where the best catch of the day might be, she said she and the other commercial fishers have nothing in common with recreationists, other than a love for fishing. “They keep to themselves for the most part and so do we,” she said. “They don’t really bother us except for all the traffic - and when they try to limit what we do so they can catch more fish.”¹⁰³

Elevations along Bayou Little Caillou, a thirty-mile long waterway, range from 8 feet in

¹⁰³ Female fisher, interview by author, Chauvin, Louisiana, July 15, 2005.

parts of Chauvin to under 2 feet in southern Cocodrie. Though the bayou is the most populous of Terrebonne's five, it has not been immune to the population losses other marsh communities have experienced. Parish planners expect the population of Chauvin, where 95 percent of Bayou Little Caillou residents reside, to decline by about 8 percent by 2020. The parish's master plan predicts the same land use changes that Montegut is likely to experience during this timeframe. "Below Boudreaux Canal, there are very limited amounts of land available for development in the traditional sense," the master plan states. "Development trends in this development zone involve conversion of existing land uses to recreational camp sites, particularly in the lower areas. ... Based on the above, the predicted land use for the area is as follows. Below Boudreaux Canal, any land use change is expected to be conversion from the existing land use to camp sites. Bayou Little Caillou has been the focal point of this trend in the Parish for the last 10 years."¹⁰⁴

The unincorporated community of Chauvin has seen its population drop from nearly 3,600 in 1980 to 3,375 in 1990 and 3,229 in 2000. The demographics of Bayou Little Caillou remain the same - about 90 percent of residents are white, 7 percent are black and 2 percent are American Indian. The community also has the lowest poverty levels and highest per capita income of Terrebonne's five bayous. In 2000, nearly 14 percent of families lived below the federal poverty level while the per capita income in 1999 was \$14,436. In contrast with the Montegut community, not all of Chauvin's public schools are high poverty. One of the area's elementary schools, Upper Little Caillou, has even boasted some of the highest standardized test scores in the parish over the past four years.

As Chauvin's residential population has declined, however, the fishing camp population has grown astronomically. In 1980, about one hundred fishing camps existed in mostly the lower portions of the bayou, in and around Cocodrie. In 1990, the census counted 299 camps, 46

¹⁰⁴ Terrebonne Master Plan Master Plan, 4-3, 4-4.

percent of which had a sewerage discharge violation.¹⁰⁵ In 2000, 557 of the bayou's 3,066 housing units were for seasonal or recreational use, about 18 percent. A further breakdown of the census numbers shows that all but a handful of these properties are in Cocodrie.

An extensive study of Bayou Little Caillou's sewage and drainage problems was commissioned in 1992 by the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program. The study found that the ten and a half mile stretch of land that extends south of Chauvin into Cocodrie included an impressive inventory of development. A list compiled by the study's authors counted seven hundred homes and camps in Cocodrie, four hundred of which had no approved sewage disposal system; two boat repair facilities; a dozen seafood docks; eight oilfield docks; one fire station; three restaurants; three lodging places; two grocery stores; two stores; six boat launches; ten house boats; and one marina with twenty slips.¹⁰⁶

Besides complications and environmental problems associated with discharging of sewerage from the plethora of recreational boats,¹⁰⁷ traffic snarls are undoubtedly the most obvious infrastructure ramification of the built-up fishing industry in Cocodrie. To get to the isolated hub of tourism in the middle of the southern Terrebonne marsh, visitors cut a shortcut through the eastern half of the parish and make their way down the winding, two-lane state highway that dead-ends at Coco Marina. In the winter, the drive takes about an hour from the U.S. 90 exit. When the fish start biting again in the spring, it is not unusual to spend two hours or more in slow-moving traffic through the bayous and bridges that bisect lower Terrebonne.

¹⁰⁵ NOAA's Sea Division, Shellfish Challenge Initiative, "Priority Oyster Restoration Project Characterization Report, BT-38: Connect Poorly Operating Individual Wastewater Treatment Systems Along Bayou Petit Caillou to a Community-Level Treatment System, August 28, 1997: 12-13.

¹⁰⁶ NOAA, 13.

¹⁰⁷ The state's Shellfish Challenge Initiative aims to remedy the illegal discharge of sewerage from recreationists by installing new and improved pump stations in heavily used fishing areas such as Cocodrie and Dularge in Terrebonne Parish. See "Watershed Implementation Assessment in Barataria and Terrebonne Estuaries: Shellfish Challenge Initiative," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration SEA Division, Gulf of Mexico program, Aug. 28, 1997: 1-24. The thesis is available online at http://shellfish.btnep.org/client_files/editor_files/Install%20and%20improve%20use%20of%20Pumpouts.pdf.

Ironically, the people who spend their weekends and summers along the coast hoping for more greenery and less congestion end up reproducing some of the urban ills they presumably tried to flee. As one planning director noted when commenting on a similar phenomenon in suburban Chicago, “The more people that come in looking for the rural atmosphere, the less rural atmosphere there is.”¹⁰⁸ Though locals have become accustomed to the long lines, tourist-centered businesses and influx of visitors to their once rural communities, it was not always this way.

Chauvin, a predominantly white community of about 3,300 people, has historically been an insular village full of ritual and rooted in the Catholic faith. Most people in the area identify with the Cajun culture and very few with the dominant tribe of the region: the Houma Indians. In fact, before Terrebonne public schools were forced to integrate white students with blacks and Indians in the mid- to late-1960s, Bayou Little Caillou was the only community in the parish that did not offer a school for Indians. Historically, the area has been dominated by Cajun fishers, wealthy plantation owners and descendants of slaves, including black sharecroppers through the mid-20th century who continue to live in an African-American enclave in Chauvin called Smithridge. Chauvin has four public schools: Lacache Middle, Boudreaux Canal, Little Caillou and Upper Little Caillou elementary schools. Shrimping is still the dominant industry in the community, as evident in the annual Blessing of the Fleet festival, a communal, intimate gathering which emerged in the 1920s or 1930s to usher in the new shrimp season.¹⁰⁹

Hurricane Rita flooded an estimated 70 percent to 80 percent of Chauvin’s 1,000 households, including homes in subdivisions a few miles south of Houma that had never before

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Becky Beaupre, “Suburbs Spread Further; More Residents Migrating to Kendall, Will Counties,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 1, 1999.

¹⁰⁹ Barbara Elizabeth Gordon, “The Rhetoric of Community Ritual : The Blessing of the Shrimp Fleet at Chauvin, Louisiana,” Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1991.

experienced flooding. Locals blame it on a lack of levee protection and the disappearance of coastal wetlands. Few see the connection between the abundance of recreation fishing camps and tourism development and the mud they had to mop from their bedrooms. But the connection is clear, writes Houck, and it will be as long as the focus is not on flood control but “on making money first for people with boats and then for as many people as possible, even when that has meant increasing hurricane risks and putting other people right into harm’s way.”¹¹⁰ *Illustration 7* shows an aerial view of Cocodrie fishing camps the day Hurricane Rita made landfall. Most camps sustained little to no damage because of their elevations.

Illustration 7: Above the Water. Cocodrie camps soar above floodwaters from Hurricane Rita Sept. 24, 2005. Coastal areas are increasingly susceptible to flooding from even the mildest storms because of coastal land loss and coastal erosion, yet fishing camps are allowed to proliferate. (Photo by Sandy Huffaker, used with permission from *The Courier of Houma, La.*)



¹¹⁰ Houck, 17.

Dulac

In contrast with the demographics of Chauvin, about 40 percent of Dulac's 2,500 residents are American Indians and most trace their ancestry to the historic Houma tribe.¹¹¹ Located about twenty miles south of the City of Houma, the community borders the Gulf of Mexico and consists of twenty-six square miles, about 20 percent of which is water. The citizens closely identify with their surroundings, especially the water, as the dominant industry continues to be fishing - shrimp, crab, and oysters. As home to one of the biggest shrimp ports in the Gulf, Dulac plays host to an array of prominent processing plants. These facilities reopened quickly after Hurricane Katrina, but less than a month later Rita shuttered their doors for weeks.



Illustration 8: Run Aground. A shrimp boat was washed onto a mud-slick roadway in Dulac a few days after Hurricane Rita. (Photo by Brenda Dardar Robichaux, used with permission from the United Houma Nation)

¹¹¹ A Dulac resident and minister puts the figure at 51 percent. He said many Dulac residents were missed by the census because of their seasonal occupations and lack of a consistent address. While most residents in Dulac still identify with the Houma, a small percentage belong to the Grand Caillou Dulac band of the Biloxi-Chitimacha, a splinter tribe that formed in the early 1990s with the hope of having an easier time gaining federal acknowledgement. The United Houma Nation applied for federal recognition in the mid-1980s and is still awaiting a response.

Nearly every structure in Dulac suffered extensive damage from Hurricane Rita (see *Illustration 8*), even homes elevated eight feet off the ground. As a result, residents are looking to elevate their homes even higher, to a minimum ten feet, and they are hoping to obtain help from federal authorities to do so. In contrast with the flooding experienced by locals, the owners of luxury fishing camps in Southern Comfort, a recently developed gated subdivision, suffered no flood or wind damage from the storm due to a minimum elevation of twelve feet. “Catch a little heaven” reads the wooden sign that marks the entrance to the subdivision of luxury homes on thick wooden pilings, which front the Houma Navigation Canal and sell for \$330,000 a piece.¹¹² At least one out-of-town reporter covering the aftermath of Hurricane Rita in September 2005 noted the contrast between the flooded homes of locals and the unscathed fishing camps. “What people want now in this recovery, more than anything else, is a safe and secure place to call home — their own ‘Little Heaven.’ But half a year after Katrina hit, an estimated 750,000 households remain displaced.”¹¹³

Dulac is not difficult to access. Located at the end of a dead-end highway that runs through Houma, the community is small, pastoral, and rooted in family. It is a place where neighbors are not strangers, and when tragedy strikes, as it often does in this village that sits so close to the volatile Gulf of Mexico, they band together and help each other. Still, Hurricane Rita cut through the heart of Dulac, devastating hundreds of homes to such a degree that residents could not help but ask for a hand. This is the double-edged sword of coastal development, for while recreational fishing has put the small-town community on the angler’s map, its people are still too poor, too neglected, and too off-the-radar to attract the kind of attention that brings relief after a disaster. The lack of aid became so dire weeks after Rita struck that Marlene Foret,

¹¹² From LaRussa Real Estate of Houma’s March 2006 listings.

¹¹³ Coco McCabe, “Katrina’s Gulf,” Internet article on TomPaine.com, March 9, 2006, URL http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2006/03/09/katrinass_gulf.php

chairwoman of the Grand Caillou Dulac band of the Biloxi-Chitimacha, and other tribal leaders issued a national appeal for storm relief assistance.¹¹⁴ Weeks later, Brenda Dardar Robichaux, principal chief of the United Houma Nation, took her frustrations and concerns to the next level when she spoke out at an American Red Cross national meeting in Washington, D.C., about the lack of attention paid to south Louisiana's battered tribal communities. Robichaux estimates that nearly half of her tribe's 15,000 members lost their homes to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Still, even as storm surges pummel low-lying Dulac, plunging homes into a sea of salty, muddy water and ruining a lifetime of memories, residents continue to insist there is no place else they want to be. A Dulac shrimper interviewed after Hurricane Rita said he does not have enough fingers to count how many times he has had to clean up from a storm since childhood. It never gets easy. People never get used to it. The tears do not dry up. Yet the commercial fisher does not count his sorrows. Instead, he talks, spinning stories about the bayou with an imaginative flair that comes from decades of adventures on the sea.

The fisher cannot read or write but he knows what matters, and to him it is staying in Dulac. "Nobody understands it but nobody has to but me," said the man outside his flooded home in October 2005. "I grew up here, raised my children here, spent my whole life here. I can't leave, don't want to leave. This is where my blood runs."¹¹⁵ The executive director of the Terrebonne Readiness and Assistance Coalition, or TRAC, a disaster preparedness and recovery organization that emerged in response to Hurricane Andrew in 1992, said this is a common sentiment expressed among many lower bayou residents who feel an inner connection to the land. And though it may be hard for outsiders to comprehend, this deep-rooted attachment is

¹¹⁴ The other tribes that issued the appeal are the United Houma Nation, Bayou Lafourche, Grand Caillou/ Dulac and Isle de Jean Charles Bands of the Biloxi-Chitimacha as well as the Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe in Lafourche Parish.

¹¹⁵ Dulac shrimper, interview by author, Dulac, Louisiana, September 27, 2005.

what makes discussions of locals abandoning the marsh so emotionally wrought. “The people are the land.”¹¹⁶

After Hurricane Juan swamped Dulac in 1985, fed-up residents decided they were not going to be pushed out of a community they loved; neither would they endure the heartache of another hurricane. So hundreds of Dulac residents packed up and moved up - to Grand Caillou and, specifically, the Ashland North and South subdivisions, which were created just for them in an industrialized section of west Houma in the mid to late 1980s and quickly nicknamed “Little Dulac.” Twenty years later, when Hurricane Rita devastated nearly every structure in Dulac, overtopping levees and pushing floodwater thirty miles up the bayou to Ashland North and South, the subdivisions experienced record flooding. Still, residents interviewed by the local newspaper shortly after the storm expressed relief that the water was not as damaging as it would have been had they still been living in Dulac.

“I was tired of buying new furniture and buying new floors and cleaning and evacuating,” an Ashland resident told The Houma Courier newspaper a few days after Hurricane Rita. The woman’s former home in Dulac flooded four times before she decided to try anew in Ashland. She moved after Hurricane Juan, which swamped lower Terrebonne in October 1985 and forced her to lift her home 3 feet. Hurricane Andrew left four to six inches of sludge on her floors, persuading her to move from the area where she had lived since birth. So the woman and her family hauled their mobile home to Ashland South to get away from the never-ending floods. Her neighbor, a man in his mid-50s, was not far behind. He moved to Ashland South after Andrew flooded his trailer. It was a move he never expected to make and did not wish to make, but he considered it necessary to his survival. “Andrew made us move,” he told the local

¹¹⁶ “As Coast Erodes, Dulac Looks for Ways to Protect Land and Homes,” no author provided, Oxfam America, Internet article, October 28, 2005, http://www.oxfamamerica.org/whatwedo/emergencies/hurricane_katrina/news_publications/feature_story.2005-10-28.8067692797

newspaper.¹¹⁷

The migration of Dulac residents to upper Grand Caillou Bayou is expected to increase the population of Ashland and surrounding communities by 30 percent in the next fifteen years as low-lying residents join their old neighbors up the bayou. The trend is on the upswing. From 1990 to 2000, the population of Grand Caillou swelled from 4,876 to 5,738, an increase of more than 17 percent. The land and homes residents leave behind, meanwhile, is rapidly being converted into open space, if the property was demolished by parish government with flood insurance money, or purchased for future fishing camps.

It is in this way that Dulac is slowly transforming from a hub of Terrebonne's American Indian community into a fishing hotspot for the out-of-town crowd. The gated Southern Comfort subdivision is the most graphic example of the phenomenon. The enclave had only a half-dozen camps in 2002. By spring 2006, more than thirty had been finished and lots were still being sold at a minimum cost of \$60,000 (see *Illustrations 9 and 10* on the next page). The parish master plan predicts Dulac's proximity to the Gulf of Mexico and access to outdoor sports such as hunting and fishing "will drive continued expansion of recreational campsites." The projected land use pattern for Dulac calls for "an increase in the number of campsites in the lower reaches."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Laura McKnight, "I never thought this land would flood," *The Houma Courier* 28 September 2005: A1.

¹¹⁸ Terrebonne Master Plan, 4-4.



Illustration 9: A Fisherman's Dream. A new camp goes up in the Southern Comfort subdivision in Dulac in June 2002. (Photo by Ellis Lucia, used with permission from the Times Picayune)



Illustration 10: Luxury Living. A view of the same fishing camp community four years later. (Author's photograph)

In 1980, Dulac was home to only a half-dozen such fishing camps and residents recall that back then, the vacation homes were modest structures, physically indistinguishable from the homes where full-time residents lived. The growth of recreational fishing expanded Dulac's second-home stock throughout the 1980s, however. The 1990 census lists 166 of Dulac's 1,182 housing units as for seasonal or recreational use. In 2000, the ratio climbed to 218 of the community's 1,015 housing units, or nearly 22 percent. As Dulac's residential housing stock fell by more than one-hundred fifty homes, the only new construction taking place in the bayou community was for recreational use.

The increase in fishing camps - not just in the Southern Comfort subdivision but throughout southern Dulac including the fishing community of Shrimpers Row - is particularly striking when looking at the social demographics of the bayou village, whose population fell from 3,273 in 1990 to 2,458 in 2000. The predominantly American Indian community is the poorest and most neglected of Terrebonne's bayous, residents interviewed said. About 28 percent of families live below the poverty level; triple the national average of 9.2 percent. The per capita income in 1999 was a mere \$8,849, likely due to the fact that the predominant industry is still commercial fishing. In contrast with Chauvin, but in similar scale to Montegut, Dulac's public schools are all high-poverty Title 1. The high school Dulac students attend, Ellender Memorial High in east Houma, is the only high school in the parish that receives federal money because of its high proportion of poor students.

During Hurricane Rita, elementary-school youngsters in Dulac were out of school for weeks because their low-lying Grand Caillou Elementary took on several feet of water. The school was closed for nearly two months and had its grand reopening right before Thanksgiving. During much of those two months, Dulac children were bussed to Grand Caillou Middle School

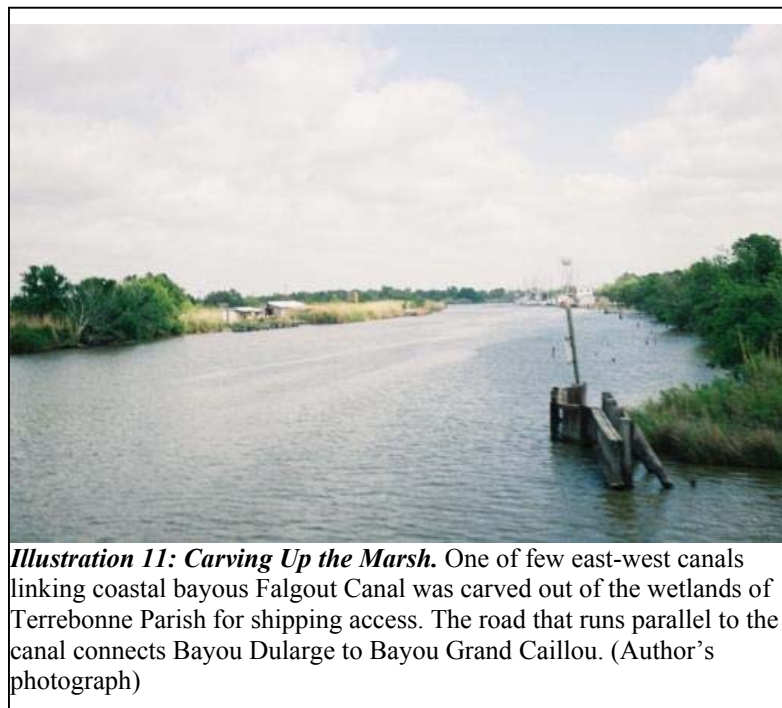
about fifteen miles north of the elementary school. There they shared classroom space with middle-schoolers twice their size. The long drive might be something Dulac parents will have to get used to. The Terrebonne Parish School Board is considering a plan that would close Grand Caillou Elementary, a century-old school that floods with nearly every storm, and relocating students to the middle school. Meanwhile, middle schoolers would attend a newly built school in Ashland.

Dularge and Theriot

Although it once was the most undeveloped bayou community in southern Terrebonne, Bayou Dularge has experienced some of the most rapid coastal urbanization over the past thirty years with the expansion of Falgout Canal, an increase in oil extraction and the explosion of fishing camps. Although these recreation retreats are located throughout Bayou Dularge, the largest development by far is Fisherman's Retreat, a gated enclave of elevated camps that are situated in manmade lagoons across from the Falgout Canal boat launch, snack shop and marina. The subdivision is just off Brady Road, a dead-end street that fronts Bayou Dularge and was first paved in the 1960s, giving local Houma Indian families driving access to the rest of the bayou. Locals remember that before Brady Road was paved, they would travel up and down the bayou in pirogues to their neighbor's home, school and grocery store. The paving of the road increased access to the remote bayou, and the carving of the east-west Falgout Canal for shipping access to the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway brought outsiders into the once exclusively local fishing village (see *Illustration 11*).

Although Dularge and Theriot share the same ZIP code and high school, they are different in ways similar to the division between Chauvin and Cocodrie. Dularge is an unincorporated town on the northern end of the bayou closer to Houma and it consists of mostly local families who own their homes. Most of the housing stock is slab-on-grade. In contrast, Theriot at the lower end of Bayou Dularge is home to a handful of fishers- mostly oyster fishers and crabbers - as well as a large proportion of out-of-towners who use their properties for part-time recreational fishing.

Bayou Dularge is home to several oyster processing plants and charter fishers who cater to the anglers. The community also contains two public schools, Dularge Elementary and Middle, and plays host to a smaller, more Catholic-oriented version of Chauvin's annual boat



blessing. While local residents tend to keep to themselves, the same cannot be said of the recreational fishing community, which in recent years has established a Web site exclusively for Dularge anglers. The site provides updated information on the best fishing spots as well as

“community” events that are specifically geared toward weekend fishers and their families.¹¹⁹

Dularge residents lack a community Web page for themselves, yet the organized fishing community has developed a fairly sophisticated way of communicating with each other. The site has more than five hundred registered users and includes a link to “fishing etiquette.” The last item on the etiquette list is “respect the professionals.” Writes Ike Ryan, “Our state has a long history of commercial fishing, and while the outdoors is a playground for the recreational anglers, it is the livelihood of the waterman. Give working shrimpers and oystermen a wide berth.”

By now, the pattern is familiar. Dularge and Theriot on Bayou Dularge are expected to lose 8 percent of their population by 2020. Terrebonne’s bluntly worded master plan adds this about the community’s fate: “The population consists primarily of commercial fishers and other moderate income levels. This area has historically been negatively impacted by flooding events. The lower area has seen continued expansion of the recreational campsites.” Again, the only land-use change the plan recommends is “the continued development of campsites in and around the Falgout Canal Area and at the lower end outside of the forced drainage area.”¹²⁰

While most of Terrebonne’s other bayou communities are expected to be included in the Morganza levee system, the so-called “forced drainage area” referenced in the parish master plan, Dularge is not. As it did with Isle de Jean Charles, the Army Corps of Engineers conducted a feasibility study to determine whether lower Bayou Dularge is “worth” saving. The corps’ report found that about 250 structures exist south of the Falgout Canal floodgates, in the community of Theriot, the area most vulnerable to storms. To protect the rural area from hurricanes would take thirteen miles of earthen levees and a fifty-six-foot wide floodgate at the

¹¹⁹ The site, www.dularge.com, includes a fishing forum, maps and aerial photographs, weather and tide updates, and a “Friends of Dularge” link that brings visitors to the Louisiana CCA.

¹²⁰ Terrebonne Master Plan, 4-5

southern end of the bayou, at an estimated cost of \$60 million. As with the low-lying island community to its east, Theriot's cost-benefit ratio was not "justified" and the corps decided to exclude the coastal from the Morganza hurricane levee project.

Parish planners predict this will have a devastating impact on the commercial fishing hub as low-lying residents leave their traditional settlements and flock to higher ground. Even without the corps' decision, this exodus from the lower reaches of Bayou Dularge has begun. The bayou's population shrunk to 1,674 in 2000, less than half of what it was twenty and thirty years ago. The bayou community is about 77 percent white, 18 percent American Indian and 1 percent black. In 2000, 27 percent of Dularge residents lived below the federal poverty level.

Of the village's 750 housing units, 188 were for recreational or seasonal use according to 2000 census data. That means fishing camps at the end of the 1990s already comprised 25 percent of Dularge's housing stock. The proliferation of fishing camps since then, and the destruction of full-time residential homes by several major hurricanes over the past few years, has likely increased that ratio significantly. Over the next few decades, as commercial fishing continues to be an extraordinarily difficult way for a family to make a living, parish planners expect Dularge to become a mostly recreational fishing hub. Sleek fiberglass luxury boats will replace shrimp boats and high-rise camps with elevators and driveways roomy enough for three cars will ultimately phase out the traditional cypress huts built when the forests around Bayou Dularge were lush and teeming with wildlife.

Community Voices

Of the forty-seven coastal inhabitants interviewed for this study, several themes emerged, and the response consistency was striking across the communities studied. For one, residents

were not inclined to say they disliked recreational fishers and other coastal tourists, even though the camps and businesses they own are intentionally isolated socially and spatially from the locals. Another important theme is that each of the residents interviewed expressed a strong connection to their cultural heritage, as well as the land and water that surrounds them. All interviewed said this attachment is what makes them want to protect their vulnerable bayou communities from further deterioration. While not outright speaking against recreational fishers, those interviewed also said they wished to see growth controlled so the character of their communities is preserved and maintained.

A commercial shrimper from Montegut captured the sentiments of many of his bayou neighbors when he described the spatial situation of coastal natives and recreational fishers. “The fishermen and all of us around here, we stick together. We don’t mess around with nobody else. If someone asks me directions or needs help on the water or something, sure I’ll help them. I’ll help anyone. But this is our bayou, you hear what I’m saying? This is our land and we stick together because this is where we grew up. We don’t want it to go away. We want it to be here forever, or at least for a long, long time.”¹²¹

The fisher, who estimated he made about \$20,000 catching shrimp last year for his family of five, is an example of how, even though they share the same appreciation of the land and the water, the poor and the owners of coastal fishing camps are separated from each other. This Montegut man, for example, did not even know that the number of fishing camps in his hometown has nearly tripled since 1980, when he was just a teenager learning how to run a trawl boat with his father.

Yet when asked whether attempts should be made to regulate the location, style and amount of coastal development or to control the structures and their overall appearance, only

¹²¹ Montegut fisher, interview by author, Montegut, Louisiana, October 18, 2005.

three people interviewed said “Yes.” The majority said they do not mind the fishing camps as long as - and this was frequently noted - they do not come any closer to their homes and they do not increase substantially in size and quantity. “As far as I’m concerned,” said a Chauvin fisher who works seasonally on an offshore oil rig, “those people can do whatever they want with their money, as long as they don’t bother me.”

How residents feel regarding the changes they see in the natural and cultural landscape is easier to detect in terms of ecosystem. While locals are not as quick to link coastal deterioration with the carving up of the marsh into coastal fishing camps, they are overwhelmingly of the belief that the loss of land is directly related to oil and gas exploration. Further, they quickly link the loss of locally unique bayou features to the oil and gas industry, saying some parts of their bayou communities “no longer feel like home” because the oil and gas businesses have pushed out local entrepreneurs or dramatically altered the landscape. For example, Boudreaux’s Supermarket in Dulac shut its doors permanently after Hurricane Rita because the three Boudreaux brothers who once ran it had neither the energy nor the stamina to clean up and renovate their flooded family business. When locals were asked about the changes they have seen in their communities over the past thirty years, five Dulac residents mentioned the loss of Boudreaux’s Supermarket, and four of the five associated the store’s closure with the intrusion of the oil and gas industry.

“Nobody can survive around here as long as we have them cutting up the marsh and drilling like they do,” said one lifelong Dulac resident. “This place looks nothing like it did when I was growing up. When I was growing up, Dulac wasn’t even Dulac. It was way further down the bayou, and now it’s all water, so they moved Dulac up. But the Dulac I know is still under the water.”

Among those interviewed there was an overwhelming expression of nostalgia and desire to revive past traditions. For example, the Dulac Mardi Gras parade was shut down about five years ago because of a lack of participation. The same fate threatens Montegut's two Mardi Gras parades, as the community remains the only bayou village to retain the Carnival tradition. While nobody interviewed said outright that they wanted to live again in the days before local schools were desegregated, and Carnival traditions flourished, several did express a love for the social camaraderie that came with "sticking to one's own." A Houma Indian woman who grew up in Pointe Barre, a tiny American Indian enclave south of present-day Montegut, an area now in the middle of a freshwater lake, said not everything was good about the old days, but the social cohesion of the community back then was irreplaceable. "We all knew each other and took care of one another, you know. Nobody was left by themselves. We didn't know what it meant to be by ourselves."

A Dularge woman who lives right down the street from the Fisherman's Retreat subdivision said that while many of her bayou neighbors insist the "oversized" enclave of affluent second homes does not bother them, she begs to differ. The woman called the fishing camps a "depressing sign" of the future. If left unchecked, she said she fears the camps and their owners will "take over" the bayou, buying up the poor people's land and turning her beloved village into a tourist trap, "a mini Grand Isle" in her own words. Among the neighbors she talks to, the woman said there is a desire to limit the growth of coastal developments, especially in the wake of the fall 2005 hurricanes. Personally, however, the woman admitted that an overall action plan should be drawn before the proliferation of fishing camps gets "out of control." Since many camp owners are the movers and shakers in Houma and Baton Rouge, it is up to the locals to rally together to craft such a plan, she said.

“If we don’t do it no one else will, because it’s really getting out of control and nobody seems to be talking about it,” the woman said. “They all want us to raise our homes like the [recreation] camp owners do, but part of the reason we flood like we do is because of them. For every building that goes up, that’s another piece of storm protection that we don’t have. I don’t know how to get people to see that. They drive by the camps every day but nobody seems to be thinking about it. I think we as a people just kind of tend to take things as they are. But that’s really not going to work any more. We need to speak up, to get together and speak up. It’s just hard, you know, because all of the meetings are in Houma and a lot of people around here just don’t have transportation. So it’s hard to fight like that, but it’s the only thing that will work.”

Most residents interviewed responded affirmatively when asked whether they believe tourism has increased in bayou communities. However, when asked whether they have personally benefited from the marketing of the rural bayou culture, nobody said “Yes.” When pressed on this matter, most residents interviewed said they believed the benefits of coastal tourism would be greater for them if they had more control over its development. For example, a young man from Pointe-aux-Chenes said he would be interested in establishing a connection with tourism officials in Houma who field requests from visitors looking to experience a “real” Cajun landscape, and not just on a swamp boat. The 21-year-old said he would make a good tour guide because he grew up in the area and has an interest in teaching people about it.

A Houma Indian basket weaver who has lived “down the bayou” her entire life said she finds it frustrating that she must go all the way to Houma, New Orleans and Baton Rouge to sell her baskets. The only other retail opportunity for local craftspeople is the twice-a-year powwows that are held at the Grand Bois campground in Bourg, about a thirty to forty-five minute drive from most lower bayou homes. The Houma Indian craftswoman said there should be a store

down the bayou to sell such locally crafted goods, but none exists. “The only way some of us can sell anything is by going to places like Jazz Fest where our crafts are more appreciated.”

The literature review of rural gentrification and rural tourism in Chapter 2 clearly falls short in terms of making sense of what is happening along Terrebonne’s bayous. For while each coastal community in this study has experienced an increase in tourism, none has enjoyed the reciprocal benefits that have been reaped by locals in other coastal areas around the world. Louisiana’s bayous, then, are less remote and more urbanized than ever before in their histories, yet they are still rural enough to experience none of the benefits, and suffer from all of the consequences, that such urbanization brings.

The feeling among residents that their bayou communities have changed dramatically during their lifetimes is supported by census data that shows each coastal village in Terrebonne lost hundreds of people from 1980. The outmigration continues as storms pummel the area, making it nearly impossible for even the most dedicated fisher to stick around. In fact, local planners estimate each coastal community in the parish will lose an additional 10 percent of its population over the next fifteen years, the estimated timeframe for the proposed Morganza-to-the-Gulf levee system to be completed. The numbers are grim and shocking, and they along with the sentiments of coastal residents tell the story of the state’s tragic coastal plight better than perhaps any other common denominator.

Discussion

Development of these four coastal communities over the past thirty years has meant sacrificing lush wetlands for subdivisions that hover up to twenty-five feet over the sea and dominate the coastal skyline. The past fifteen years in particular have seen a dramatic spike in

these vacation developments, including the rise of exclusive gated communities with half-million-dollar fishing camps, even as the traditional native population continues to rely on the same natural resources as it did in centuries past. For decades, coastal communities in Terrebonne Parish have been on the front line of natural and manmade disasters, from cyclones and floods to subsidence, coastal erosion and global climate change. The development of the same wetlands on which these communities depend for storm protection has made them more vulnerable to even the mildest coastal storm.

In the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, reports have shown that most primary homes in southeast Louisiana's coastal communities have been obliterated. Census data and information provided by parishes show the majority of these low-lying settlements were not insured, making it highly unlikely native coastal inhabitants will have the financial means, support structure or government encouragement to rebuild. Undoubtedly, the state's lush shoreline will be resettled again in a world where people are increasingly clustered near coasts, but for reasons that, importantly, have nothing to do with how the land has traditionally been used. The Disneyfication of the coast is not new when compared to similar changes in coastal land use experienced in southern Mississippi, Florida and South Carolina fishing communities decades ago. But the recent hurricanes in Louisiana may make the process easier with such a huge scattering of the population, and with more knowledge about the real demographic consequences of natural disasters post-Hurricane Andrew in 1992.¹²²

It is also important to note that the threat of recent hurricanes speeding up control of the coast by recreational fishers is not a farfetched concept but in line with a common argument that says whatever development trends were occurring prior to a disaster will accelerate once it passes.

¹²² Stanley K. Smith and Christopher McCarty, "Demographic Effects of Natural Disasters: A Case Study of Hurricane Andrew," *Demography* May 1996 33(2): 265.

Several studies have concluded that natural disasters have no significant long-term impacts on local population growth¹²³ Alternately, Yezer and Rubin suggested in 1987 that the effects of natural disasters depend on previous development patterns and prior expectations regarding disaster rates. Their theory on the effects of disasters is that if disasters occur as anticipated, the allocation of resources is not affected. But if disasters are unexpected, dramatically transforming the social and demographic landscape of a region, then the out-migration of labor and capital is accelerated.¹²⁴

Although hurricanes are an everyday reality in Louisiana, the intensity and ramifications of two major, back-to-back storms, including multiple levee breaches, evacuation struggles, weeks away from home and fights with insurance companies, were neither anticipated nor prepared for, making it plausible that the hurricane will have a significant, lasting impact on local populations in the impacted region. One solution to the problems facing coastal communities comes with a \$740 million price tag. The project is known as the Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane Protection Project, and it includes a 72-mile earthen levee that would provide protection against tidal and storm surges from hurricanes as strong as Category 3. Importantly, however, not every coastal community would be protected. The proposed levee system would exclude Isle de Jean Charles and Dularge.¹²⁵ A more recent suggestion has been to scrap protection for coastal communities in favor of a levee that would run along the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, excluding all of the marsh villages included in this report. More than two hundred residents showed up at a recent public meeting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to protest

¹²³ Smith, 273.

¹²⁴ A.M.J and C.B. Rubin, "The Local Economic Effects of Natural Disasters," thesis #61, 1987, University of Colorado, Institute of Behavioral Sciences: 4-26. Available online at www.colorado.edu/hazards/wp/wp61.pdf.

¹²⁵ Local officials have said they cannot justify the cost of protecting the island, which contains about 30 American Indian families, and rural Bayou Dularge to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. See Elizabeth Stuart, "Residents united against levee opposition," *The Houma Courier* 18 December 2001: A1.

the move, prompting the local newspaper to state in an editorial, “The 2005 hurricane season and its twin Category 5 storms showed the world how vulnerable we are. They changed life forever for tens of thousands of former residents of Orleans, Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes. Without a hurricane-protection system, eventually that will happen here, too.”¹²⁶

Another alternative has been suggested in the form of elevation. Raising homes onto stilts in a similar fashion as fishing camps would prevent flood damage, but costs begin at around \$25,000 per home. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, up to eighty percent of the American Indians who make their home in coastal Terrebonne live below the poverty line. Few move on to college, even as income supported by traditional fishing suffers from a flood of cheap imported seafood and rising fuel costs. Most coastal people lack insurance. Almost nobody has the money to raise their home. The situation is so critical that the principal chief of the United Houma Nation and the Tribal Council are considering retreat. They are looking to purchase a large tract of open land on high ground between Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes and construct housing for tribal elders who do not have the money or stamina to start over again the next time a hurricane strikes.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ “Lower Terrebonne needs inclusion,” editorial, *The Houma Courier* 16 March 2006: A8.

¹²⁷ Houma Indian official, interview by author, Raceland, Louisiana, November and December, 2005.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Areas for Future Research

Thousands of coastal residents are unable to return to an estimated 205,000 ruined, uninhabitable properties in south Louisiana because of the devastating impacts of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, including thousands of structures in Terrebonne Parish that were ruined by the storms. The pair of Gulf hurricanes promises to dramatically alter the traditionally rural landscape of coastal Louisiana in important ways discussed in the above argument. Rural gentrification, tourism and second-home development are real concerns grounded in theoretical frameworks. Understanding these concepts is crucial to understanding how the fragile coastal ecosystem may or may not be rebuilt, and what the future could have in store for a vulnerable and internationally valuable landscape.

Traditionally, Louisiana's coastal periphery has been a large underclass of poor people living on the fringe of capitalism, with telltale characteristics that include low income, high unemployment, outmigration, a declining and aging population, lack of employment opportunities and inadequate infrastructure. Combined, these factors set in motion a process of underdevelopment that is difficult to reverse. However, with the recent influx of second homeowners and recreational fishing camp developments - and their corresponding organizational and political clout - the coast's adjunct economy may be a thing of the past. Phillips (2004) found that disasters in the agricultural and fishing economies can spur rural gentrification because of their socioeconomic impacts on traditional lifestyles. This is a critical issue facing Louisiana in the aftermath of both storms.

The development of exclusive communities for wealthy fishers has resulted in rich enclaves in which the people invested in these gated luxury subdivisions own everything, down

to the streets and sewers and landscaping services.¹²⁸ Yet, while coastal tourism development in other areas of the country and world has brought a certain amount of benefits to locals, most bayou residents have not been able to participate in the new tourism economy that has literally set up shop in their back yards. The fishing camp phenomenon has occurred in such a way that locals are excluded unless they invest in businesses that cater exclusively to the affluent recreational, out-of-town fisher, which explains the rise in charter boat operations. However, local artisans and entrepreneurs have been overwhelmingly disconnected from the local tourism economy. The literature on rural gentrification and coastal tourism does not address this problem. As a case study, the situation in coastal Terrebonne Parish would serve as a meaningful contribution to the urbanization of previously undeveloped coastal landscapes.

Considering the tourism trend in coastal Terrebonne, the area's increasing vulnerability to storms, and the dire predictions of parish master planners, the traditionally rural landscape of this section of coastal Louisiana is undergoing fundamental changes and disruptions. The devastating effects of the August and September 2005 hurricanes have further encouraged the massive resettlement of rural coastal settlements as native inhabitants abandon their traditional land, new residents continue the decades-old process of transforming oceanfront property into vacation, second-home, and retirement communities, and governments aggressively market a new tourism economy. In coastal Louisiana, locals have responded to changes in their bayou communities by either ignoring it or trying to work alongside it. No resident in Terrebonne Parish in recent years - not at parish council or planning commission meetings - has spoken out against a fishing camp

¹²⁸ Those who own property in gated fishing communities pay annual dues for these services.

development because it threatens to alter the bayou landscape.¹²⁹ It is unlikely that residents who are still struggling to rebuild their flood-ravaged homes in time for the next hurricane season will find the cohesion and fortitude to band together against a change that many interviewed for this research do not believe can or will ever be reversed.

The desire to build along the southern Louisiana shoreline presses on. Before Hurricane Katrina tore roofs off a stretch of fishing camps on Grand Isle and Hurricane Rita flooded Louisiana's only inhabited barrier island, developers placed an ad in a local newspaper advertising 157 "exclusive waterfront sites" for sale at "Amaris Isle," the island's first gated vacation subdivision. The \$4 million waterfront development broke ground in June and a giant mound of sand intended to serve as infill for the project was washed into the sea during recent storms. Nonetheless, developers have vowed to continue, saying Grand Isle's tourism economy will rebuild. What has not been stated is who will be the losers if the island's tourism development is allowed to continue as aggressively as it has in the past, and whether the development of second homes risks endangering native commercial fishers already living on the island's periphery.

Such questions and tensions are happening all along the southeastern coast, including coastal Terrebonne. If the parish's coastline is doomed to become more of a pleasure and less of a working periphery, however, then more research is needed to bridge a gap in the literature between rural gentrification and coastal tourism. A number of researchers have determined that

¹²⁹ It should be noted that there was some neighborhood uprising in 2003 when developer Robert Neal threatened to transform hunting ground on Pointe-aux-Chenes Road in Montegut into a recreation fishing retreat, but the neighbors' disagreements had more to do with perceived drainage threats than the sudden presence of outsiders in their community. Since Neal vowed to turn his land into a fishing and hunting enclave called Hardscrabble Plantation, only three camps have been built to date.

tourism is especially vulnerable to disasters¹³⁰ because of its “predilection for locating in scenically spectacular, relatively high-risk zones.”¹³¹ For the most part, though, the affluent families who own Terrebonne’s 2,500 fishing camps do not have to tackle such questions because their elevated vacation homes are spared from serious flooding. They can continue to isolate themselves in exclusive enclaves, physically embodying a divided society in which the haves and the have-nots live in increasingly separate worlds.

¹³⁰ Peter E. Murphy and Robin Bayley, “Tourism and Disaster Planning,” *Geographical Review* 79(1) January 1989: 36.

¹³¹ Murphy, 38.

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Vita

Kimberly Krupa Solet was born in Point Pleasant, New Jersey and grew up along the Jersey Shore. She received her B.A. in journalism from The College of New Jersey in 2001 and relocated to south Louisiana in January 2002. She lived in Terrebonne Parish four years and now resides in New Orleans with her husband.