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Streets of Justice? Civil Rights Commemorative Boulevards and the Struggle for Revitalization in African American Communities: A Case Study of Central City, New Orleans

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Streets of Justice?

Civil Rights Commemorative Boulevards and the Struggle for
Revitalization in African American Communities—A Case Study
of Central City, New Orleans

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 Urban and Regional Planning

by

Joel A. Devalcourt

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Abstract

Civil rights commemorative boulevards are an increasingly important method of framing African American community revitalization and persistent historical inequities. Often underlying planning efforts to revitalize segregated African American neighborhoods, these boulevards are one important change mechanism for realizing equitable development and challenging structural racism. This thesis demonstrates the central importance of these commemorative boulevards in framing redevelopment and maintaining community resolve during the long struggle for revitalization.

New Orleans Civil Rights Movement; civil rights commemoration; revitalization; urban planning; structural racism; urban history; Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevards; community-based planning; redlining; racial zoning; public housing; African American commercial districts.

If we really are about the business that [Dr. King] was about and have the agenda that he had, then we would do things to improve the life of the people who he was concerned with. And that's what I'd like to see happen on these streets named in his honor. They should be change mechanisms¹

1

Introduction

The story of revitalization in Central City, New Orleans began over 40 years ago with civil rights commemorative boulevards as a central strategy to overcome a history of racial segregation and economic discrimination. In order to understand the commemorated boulevards of today we must carefully analyze the “creation” of Central City—one of New Orleans’ hypersegregated African American communities²—within an historical perspective. Continued planning efforts in Central City, and the urban planning discipline, will benefit from a broader analysis on how structural racism impacts the revitalization of the community.

Structural racism—whereby the interactions between institutions over time create durable inequalities³—inhibits the individual and community aspirations of minorities. African American communities, in particular, are linked by a shared history of slavery, unrelenting racism and perpetual struggles for equality. For generations, African Americans engaged in campaigns to ensure civil and human rights, enduring immense adversity in efforts to undo segregation. Even with triumphant legal and legislative victories, the Civil Rights Movement failed to dismantle the insidious structural forces preventing the full integration of African Americans into American society. These structures were embedded in tools for urban development since the turn of the 20th century.

White segregationists combined housing, commercial, and job market discrimination in a potent racist cocktail to keep African Americans in “poverty or deliberately impoverished” after the fall of slavery.⁴ Beginning in the early 20th century, land use, zoning, lending, and real estate practices embedded racist valuations into neighborhood development and formed enduring patterns for segregating residential and commercial economies.⁵ Under Jim Crow conditions, African American

¹ African American Resident of Miami, FL, as quoted in the film, *MLK Boulevard: The Concrete Dream*, Two-Tone Productions, Directed by Marco Williams, 2003.

² Denton, 2006

³ Grant-Thomas and Powell, 2006; Grant-Thomas and Powell, 2008

⁴ Fredrickson, 2002, p. 101

⁵ Freund, 2007; Massey and Denton, 1993; Immergluck, 2004

entrepreneurs struggled to finance businesses and create viable commercial corridors. In housing markets, the combined effects of redlining, zoning, and land use planning prevented African Americans from entering one of the largest economies and strongest means to develop household wealth.⁶ And when looking for employment opportunities in a rapidly expanding industrial economy, African Americans were systematically denied higher paying private sector jobs. The interactions between these institutional practices created African American communities that are not “treated as part of regional economies and, instead, are treated as separate, independent economies—that is, ghettoized—[which] can largely be attributed to racism.”⁷ The cumulative effects of excluding African Americans in the broader housing and job markets play a significant role in persistent poverty by concentrating jobless and unskilled people who are hemmed in by strict color lines. The result of these structures at the neighborhood level can diminish the ability of African American communities to stabilize and revitalize long after legalized segregation. After the fall of Jim Crow, African American leaders searched tirelessly for ways to overcome persistent economic inequality, leading to shared experiences and some common strategies to challenge the structural impediments in American society.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.⁸ galvanized the Civil Rights Movement and became the symbol of the struggle for civil and human rights for millions of African Americans. After Dr. King’s tragic assassination in 1968, and in recognition of national and local struggles for justice, communities across the country renamed streets to commemorate his legacy. Over time, this was accompanied by the commemoration of other national and local leaders of the Civil Rights Movement.⁹ There are now approximately 900 streets (from now on referred to as MLKs) named after Dr. King, the majority of which are located in the South.¹⁰ Regardless of whether MLKs are prominent boulevards, commercial corridors, or country roads, they are often referred to as the “Black Main Street,” connoting a shared history and experience in American society.¹¹

Although the renaming of streets is of increasing importance to African Americans publicly honoring their history and struggles during the Civil Rights Movement, commemorations are marked by decades of racial and political tensions that limit where and how the past is memorialized. Civil rights commemorative boulevards are often restricted to segregated African American

⁶ Freund, 2007; Oliver and Shapiro, 2006

⁷ Ross and Leigh, 2000, 371

⁸ When referring to Martin Luther King, Jr., himself, this study will use Dr. King.

⁹ Dwyer, 2000; Dwyer and Alderman, 2008a

¹⁰ Alderman, 2011; Michelson et al., 2007

¹¹ Tilove, 2003; In Central City, the term “African American Street” is also used.

communities, acquiring stigmas that affect investment decisions in the neighborhood. In many cases, the fight to rename streets further divides an already racially segregated community.¹²

Despite the limitations placed on MLKs, community leaders around the country are actively looking at ways to revitalize commemorative boulevards. By renaming streets, African American leaders challenge political, residential, and economic structures as a means to claim public space for their own history and redevelopment. Directly linking the commemoration of civil rights struggles with battles against inequities in jobs, housing, and business development for African Americans, many neighborhoods are looking to revitalize “African American Streets” and incorporate them into the larger economy.¹³ If navigated strategically, commemorative boulevards can be a powerful and positive tool that can attract investment and planning attention for the neighborhood.

There is a distinctive rise in the commemoration of civil rights leaders as a tool for economic development and heritage tourism. As a new “growth industry,” heritage tourism offers a potential avenue for local economic development and a means to share the community’s historical culture.¹⁴ As a means of developing the heritage “infrastructure,” commemorative boulevards have the potential to invite reinvestment. Using tools like anchor institutions, mixed-income housing redevelopment, and culture-based art and performance centers, community leaders continue to plan for Central City’s “turning point” towards revitalization. Nonetheless, these initiatives suffer from persistent structural racism, fragmented planning efforts, and potentially inequitable distribution of benefits to the community. By placing Central City’s plans for revitalization within a historical context of structural racism, this study analyzes civil rights commemoration as a vehicle for dismantling segregation in an African American community.

It is the intention of some African American leaders to rename streets in honor of the Civil Rights Movement to keep the conversation about justice alive.¹⁵ At times, this commemoration can seem to work against the neighborhood as it evokes the vitriol of some white communities, which can reinforce the structural barriers in private lending institutions. Moreover, commemorative boulevards also draw out open conflicts over memory and history within the local African American leadership and raise questions about what is most important for the community. The true challenge

¹² Mitchelson et al., 2007; Dwyer and Alderman, 2008a

¹³ Schleifstein, Mark, “Many hope the first financial institution in a generation to set up shop on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard is a sign of the area’s rebirth,” *The Times-Picayune*, December 11, 2004; Ross and Leigh, 2000

¹⁴ Inwood, 2010; Dwyer and Alderman, 2008a

¹⁵ Dwyer and Alderman, 2008a

of these commemorative campaigns for revitalization is whether they can deliver on the long list of generational demands for justice.

Commemoration may also raise more questions than it answers. Should the streets look a certain way, be in a particular place, and transcend race and class divisions? What does revitalization really mean when used in conjunction with civil rights commemoration? Does commemoration of African American history encourage reinvestment or further racism and segregation of residential and commercial economies? Street renaming after civil rights leaders provides a high-mark for community organizations to live up to, bringing enduring optimism and also persistent frustration with planning for revitalization. It is with a clear understanding of the structures inhibiting revitalization that commemorative campaigns can achieve even greater impacts. This thesis offers a compelling reason to include a historical analysis of structural racism in relation to commemoration and how to move revitalization and planning efforts towards greater equity for African American inner city communities.

Civil rights street commemoration is one of many vital ingredients in the concerted effort to revitalize Central City. Alone, commemoration adds to the rich tapestry of memory written in our urban landscape, but it does little to overcome residential segregation or the structures of the economy. However, when commemoration is used in conjunction with revitalization, it can serve as a “change mechanism” to integrate history and living culture with strategies for reinvestment and equitable development. Honoring the civil rights leaders that fought against segregation and structural racism is a valuable asset in the revitalization of a community, one that provides a versatile foundation for framing redevelopment decisions during the ongoing struggle for justice in African American communities.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis orients the history of Central City around the major historical and federal policy trends that affected the development and perpetuation of structural racism. The second chapter begins with a brief history of Central City, New Orleans and the limitations on African American enterprise under Jim Crow. It analyzes the development of tools for segregation—primarily racial zoning ordinances, racially restrictive covenants, redlining, and public housing—that developed long-term structures in housing finance, economic development, public policy, and land use planning.

The third chapter focuses on Central City during the Civil Rights Movement and the federal programs that developed as a response to the national urban crisis of the 1960s. Central City civil rights leaders challenged the structures of segregation, while at the same time using the War on Poverty and Model Cities programs to begin organizing for a revitalized neighborhood. Out of the turbulent time period, Central City developed African American political and community leaders who led the struggle to commemorate streets in honor of civil rights leaders during the 1970s-80s.

The fourth chapter focuses on the evolving strategies to revitalize Central City. Arising from the long-term efforts of organizations located in the neighborhood, campaigns for revitalization are directly influenced by Central City's civil rights history and the relevance of living culture. By placing the decades of revitalization strategies in Central City within the context of structural racism, this chapter investigates how revitalization efforts struggle to overcome historical inequities and integrate African American communities into the larger economy. Additionally, this chapter and the conclusion (chapter 5) offer insights on how Central City and the planning discipline could benefit by using a broad historical analysis of civil rights commemoration, structural racism, and revitalization in segregated communities.

Although this study paints a broad perspective on the links between civil rights commemoration, revitalization, and structural racism in Central City, there are limitations of the analysis. The perspectives of the people that live and work in Central City, especially the residents themselves, could not be fully represented in this thesis. It is the hope of the author that future research will try to expand the scope of this work to understand the relationship between resident and community-based organizational perspectives on civil rights commemoration in Central City. Although this study uses considerable archival research materials, secondary literature was invaluable to assist with the research for this thesis. By tying together archival research, secondary literature, and interviews with Central City leaders, this study adds to the literature on urban planning, MLK Streets, structural racism, and civil rights history of Central City, New Orleans.

2

Laying the Structural Foundation for Central City

New Orleans' history as an integrated city changed profoundly over the course of the 20th century. Between 1900 and 1940, a profusion of new concepts and tools in land use planning, zoning, and the real estate profession affected neighborhood development and racial segregation in cities throughout the United States. These early mechanisms for segregating neighborhoods undergirded housing finance, federal policy, and public perceptions by the 1930s. Central City, New Orleans experienced all of the national trends for segregating African Americans during this formative period of metropolitan development.

Persistent racial disparities arose from these institutionalized structures in real estate, housing policy, and land use planning. By using a structural racism perspective, this chapter “emphasizes the powerful impact of inter-institutional dynamics, institutional resource inequities, and historical legacies on racial inequalities today.”¹⁶ The cumulative effects of excluding African Americans from housing and job markets played a significant role in concentrating jobless and unskilled people in segregated communities hemmed in by strict color lines. By intent, segregation limited “the access that [African Americans] have to resources and economic opportunities...[so] that most of those in the stigmatized category are either kept in poverty or deliberately impoverished.”¹⁷ It is precisely because of the powerful structural interactions between housing and job discrimination that segregation and poverty are maintained over generations. The effects of these structures in Central City diminished the ability for African Americans to stabilize and revitalize their community long after *de jure* segregation.

This chapter begins with a brief history of the neighborhood that became known as Central City. It positions Central City directly within the national structures that solidified residential and economic segregation. These areas will be developed separately, but throughout this thesis I will show how housing and economic discrimination work in structural unison—aided by individual and institutional acts of discrimination—to restrict African Americans' access to political power, job opportunities, and capital.¹⁸

¹⁶ Grant-Thomas and Powell, 2008, p. 119

¹⁷ Fredrickson, 2002, p. 101

¹⁸ Grant-Thomas and Powell, 2008

Uptown, the Backswamps, and the Tragic Irony of the Integrated Dryades Street Neighborhood

Long before Central City was known as such, the area upriver from the French Quarter and the Central Business District was part of the growing Uptown. The Mississippi River to the south and dense cypress swamps to the north confined the Uptown neighborhoods to a sliver of high ground. The French engineer and architect Barthelemy Lafon commissioned the original plan for this neighborhood in 1806, incorporating grand boulevards, residential squares, markets, and even drainage canals.¹⁹ Lafon named the streets parallel to the boulevards after the nine Greek Muses, including Melpomene—the muse of singing and tragedy (a portion of which later became Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard). Lafon also named one street Dryades, referring to tree nymphs in a whimsical reminder of the bordering cypress swamp (a portion of which later became Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard).²⁰

Racial disparities in housing began with the earliest designs for the neighborhood. Wealthy whites owned elegant properties along the regal boulevards. African Americans—most of whom were slaves at the time—were relegated towards the least desirable land bordering the swamps.²¹ This area was known as the “backswamps” and condemned its inhabitants to the cheapest housing options available. By design, “blacks were pushed into the demi-land on the inland margin of the natural levee, where drainage was bad, foundation material precarious, streets atrociously unmaintained, mosquitoes endemic, and flooding a recurrent hazard.”²² Without a boulevard on the back end, the swamps hemmed in Central City and prevented development until mechanized pumping started in the early 20th century.

The development of canals and the concomitant immigrant influx from the 1830s onward dramatically changed the nature of Uptown New Orleans. Waves of immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and other European countries flooded into the area, with the final major influx of Eastern European Jews, who made up a significant portion of the population well into the 20th century. The synchronous introduction of immigrant labor with the construction of the Melpomene and New Basin Canals in the 1830s brought new tenement structures built by speculators in rapid succession

¹⁹ Hastings, 2004

²⁰ For more information on the naming history see Hastings (2004) and Chase (2001)

²¹ Lewis, 2003; Spain, 1979; See Campanella (2006) for maps on the distribution of free people of color and slaves in New Orleans. Higher concentrations of slaves were present in the Uptown area, as opposed to the three -tiered racial castes of the Downtown neighborhoods, characterized by a racial hierarchy of Whites, Creole free people of color, and slaves (Hirsch, 1992).

²² Lewis, 2003, p. 52

to house the growing working class, both African American and white. Likewise, after the Civil War, an influx of rural African Americans freed from the bonds of slavery migrated into the neighborhood and it became known as an area for Protestant, rather than Catholic, African Americans.²³ During this time, the area around Dryades Street became more integrated, less wealthy and more of a reflection of the city's ethnic and racial diversity. Even with the constant influx of immigrants, the neighborhood remained relatively stable, although the majority of the property owners in the area were either wealthy Americans or ethnic whites.²⁴

Although racial tensions flared at times, there is evidence to show that the integrated neighborhoods around Dryades Street were fairly stable until the end of the 19th century. A riot in 1900 in the neighborhood sparked white mob violence against African Americans in the area, but apparently did not lead to more rioting or any short-term effects on residential segregation.²⁵ Despite the relative calm of racial tensions, African Americans—now freed from slavery—continued to suffer from the effects of living in the backswamps, consistent housing shortages, constraints on jobs, and limited access to homeownership as compared to the ethnic whites. As a result, the Dryades Street neighborhood began to concentrate more unskilled workers and the housing density dramatically increased. By one account, the housing density in the Dryades Street Neighborhood nearly doubled between 1900-1920.²⁶

In addition to relatively stable residential neighborhoods, Central City also contained one of the most successful commercial corridors in the city—Dryades Street. Bartholemy Lafon's plan for the Dryades area planted the seed for this corridor's early success. Lafon designed the Dryades Street Market at the corner of Dryades and Melpomene, which after opening in 1849 offered fresh produce and meats well into the twentieth century.²⁷ The Dryades Street commercial district surrounded the market, offering a thriving hub of commerce for the integrated neighborhood that it served. Dryades Street offered opportunities for immigrants to build wealth and establish a niche in the larger New Orleans culinary and retail economy.²⁸ At the turn of the twentieth century, Dryades Street also hosted some successful African American businesses, including three insurance firms and

²³ Rogers, 1993

²⁴ Hastings, 2004

²⁵ Ibid; The riot is known as the Robert Charles Riot of 1900, and it involved a shoot out between an African American man, Robert Charles, and police officers. In retaliation, white mobs attacked African American residents in Central City.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 63

²⁷ Medley, 2001

²⁸ Hastings, 2004

a newspaper, along with a stretch of service industries.²⁹ Due to the segregated shopping along Canal Street, the city's main commercial corridor, Dryades Street businesses greatly benefited from serving the African American clientele with limited options for retail and personal services.³⁰

Although Dryades supported an integrated shopping district, the survival of African American businesses depended on access to capital, which was significantly limited under Jim Crow.³¹ Although there were several African American-owned businesses along Dryades, the majority of businesses were owned by ethnic whites, primarily Jews. Central City's integrated commercial and residential patterns resulted in a less dense African American commercial district than in other southern cities at the time, which diffused economic power and prevented wealth accumulation within the African American business community. In addition, there is no evidence of African American banks along Dryades or anywhere else in New Orleans area at the time.³² Thus, Central City did *not* enjoy "employment and circulated capital in the black community, thereby creating economic growth" as in other southern cities like Atlanta, Richmond, and Memphis.³³

Within a few decades after the turn of the 20th century, most of the thriving African American businesses apparently disappeared. One Jewish merchant who was on Dryades since the 1940s recalled that he "didn't know of any black shopkeepers."³⁴ This situation is not unique to Central City because "the history of black business development in the United States is inextricably linked to the history of social and economic development of blacks more generally in this country. Occupational, legal, and de facto segregation as well as slavery severely limited income and wealth generation for blacks."³⁵ Therefore, for generations, the structures of business development limited the development of African American commercial activity and caused many to shutter, as they struggled in an environment of constant discrimination.³⁶

As African American businesses closed along Dryades, the opportunities for decent jobs diminished. Dryades Street supported a vibrant integrated mix of businesses owned by whites that catered to the African American population, but did not hire them above menial jobs. The

²⁹ Ingham, 2003; Medley, 2001

³⁰ Medley, 2001

³¹ Immergluck, 2004

³² LaViolette, 1960.

³³ Ingham, 2003, p. 664

³⁴ Hannusch, Jeff, "Dryades Street Merchant," Times Picayune Dixie, December 13, 1981.

³⁵ Immergluck, 2004, p. 53

³⁶ See Immergluck (2004) for a thorough analysis of the history of banking, lending, and African American business in America. Also see Butler (2005) and Oliver and Shapiro (2006) for a history of African American entrepreneurship and the limits on African American wealth accumulation under Slavery, Jim Crow, and persistent racial inequalities in business.

combined effect of job discrimination and limited capital for African American businesses had dramatic affects on Central City as Dryades Street and the surrounding neighborhood became more segregated. The widespread job discrimination aided in the development of New Orleans' ghetto, especially with increased unemployment for African Americans in the 1950s. However, it was this job discrimination, as I will show in the next chapter, that also led to some of the most ambitious and successful protests and boycotts in New Orleans during the Civil Rights Movement.

The Long-Term Structural Effects of a Thwarted Racial Zoning Ordinance

Zoning arose at the turn of the 20th century as a way to protect and enhance property values by literally segregating incompatible land uses, thereby keeping unsafe or unpopular uses away from residences or commercial properties. The early progressive values of the planning tool changed when zoning advocates, realtors, and suburban developers shared the belief that the presence of African Americans—rich or poor—could affect property values. In 1910, Baltimore passed the nation's first racial zoning ordinance, which attempted to segregate whites and blacks just as it would keep rental housing and single-family homes separate.³⁷ The practice quickly spread through American cities—even in the North and West—but much of the zeal for racial zoning took place in the South, where “early zoning advocates believed in racial hierarchy, openly embraced racial exclusion, and saw zoning as a way to achieve it.”³⁸ In a rapidly expanding New Orleans during the 1920s, segregationists identified racial zoning as another Jim Crow strategy for the subjugation of African Americans.³⁹

Racial attitudes towards residential segregation changed rapidly in the 1920s.⁴⁰ At a time when new mechanical pumps allowed for the draining of swamps to build middle-class neighborhoods, whites exerted more racial intolerance over the potential for integration in newly developing areas of the city.⁴¹ An ally of the realtors and developers that espoused newly forming racial housing economics, the white supremacist media in New Orleans fueled racial tensions by reporting on the “invasions” of African Americans into white neighborhoods in northern cities like Chicago, which reportedly led to violence and lowered property values.⁴² Much of this rhetoric developed in the 1910s-1920s, as zoning advocates and the real estate profession created the market

³⁷ Silver, 1996

³⁸ Freund, 2007, p. 46

³⁹ Silver, 1996, p. 32

⁴⁰ Hastings, 2004; Thomas and Ritzdorf, 1996

⁴¹ Hastings, 2004

⁴² Times Picayune, “Race Segregation Ruling”, March 15, 1927, page 10.

conditions and the rationale for segregating neighborhoods.⁴³ In New Orleans, this pressure did not single-handedly segregate the historically integrated neighborhoods, but it laid the structural foundation for *de facto* segregation that impacted New Orleans long after *de jure* segregation was defeated.

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision to ban racial zoning did not stop New Orleans' officials and residents from enacting an ordinance of their own. In 1917, the Supreme Court prohibited racial zoning ordinances in *Buchanan v. Warley*, finding that these types of ordinances denied the "full use of property" merely from a "feeling of race hostility."⁴⁴ Unsurprisingly, segregationists in the South ignored the ruling and continued to press for racial zoning ordinances, reasoning that it was within the purview of Jim Crow to segregate neighborhoods just like public accommodations.⁴⁵ The New Orleans City Planning Commission, first in the South, was created in 1923 in part to pass a racial zoning ordinance and "evade the ruling of the Supreme Court."⁴⁶ The Louisiana Legislature, aware of the power of zoning to segregate races and armed with strong segregationists from northern rural parishes, passed a law in 1924 that mandated all cities over 25,000 people to segregate neighborhoods by race.⁴⁷ New Orleans complied in "exactly one week" by passing a racial zoning ordinance and recruiting a well-known urban planner by the name of Harland Bartholomew.⁴⁸

The effects of the racial zoning ordinance would have had sweeping effects on the integrated neighborhoods in New Orleans. Landlords would not be able to rent to people of another color unless residents of the neighborhood signed petitions in support of it—an unlikely feat in light of growing racial animosity. Homeowners would not be able to renovate or make additions to their property if they were out of compliance with the zoning code. As seen in Birmingham, which was the only city with a racial zoning law on the books until 1951, the zoning ordinance could have a "significant impact" on segregating neighborhoods.⁴⁹

⁴³ Freund, 2007

⁴⁴ As quoted in Silver, 1996, p. 31

⁴⁵ Silver, 1996; Connerly, 2005

⁴⁶ Silver, 1996, p. 34

⁴⁷ Act 118, Senate Bill No. 119, introduced by Mr. McConnell, Papers of the NAACP (microfilm collection), Part 5: The Campaign against Residential Segregation 1914-1955, Reel 2, Frame 625; Hirsch, 1992

⁴⁸ Hirsch, 1992, p. 268; Also see Connerly (2005) and Silver (1996). The advocates for the New Orleans Planning Commission were by no means unanimous in their decision to pursue a racial zoning ordinance. According to Hastings (2004), immediate dissent from the NAACP and African American leaders was also joined by some white progressives, such as Charles Favrot, an outspoken defender of comprehensive zoning and planning and part of a Chamber of Commerce interracial relations committee.

⁴⁹ Connerly, 2005, p. 49

Reactions from the African American community swiftly brought the racial zoning ordinance to court. Although the Downtown Creoles and Uptown Protestants rarely worked together on previous civil rights campaigns, the racial zoning sparked a newly shared sense of racial solidarity. The NAACP raised several thousand dollars to wage the legal battle that ultimately resulted in the successful overturning of the racial zoning ordinance.⁵⁰ The defendant in the case was Benjamin Harmon, an African American man who was trying to convert his single cottage to a double⁵¹—a common building type in New Orleans that, if curtailed, could have limited the ability for African Americans to expand upon their properties and create an additional income source.

The City of New Orleans defended its case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. As in other Southern cities, New Orleans' white elite advocated zoning and comprehensive planning as another "Jim Crow strateg[y]...to transform the racially integrated Southern city into [a] bifurcated racial world."⁵² The Times-Picayune argued along with the city in support of the ordinance, claiming that race "invasions have wrought disaster to property values, while aggravating racial bitterness and provoking violent breaches of the public peace" and that the recently upheld *Euclid v. Ambler* decision legitimized zoning for segregating races.⁵³ New Orleans lawyers also argued that the ordinance was legal under the separate but equal logic of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, as the ordinance's design prevented integration in both African American and white neighborhoods. On March 14, 1927, the Supreme Court struck down the ordinance without any consideration of *Plessy* in their opinion. The Court's opinion merely stated: "Reversed on the authority of *Buchanan v. Warley*."⁵⁴ Thus ended the legal use of racial zoning in New Orleans.

Although the racial zoning ordinance lasted only a few years on the books, produced no maps, and brought few people to court, it had a significant impact on race relations in New Orleans and the Central City neighborhood. Until the passage of the zoning ordinance in 1924, no notable instances of racial violence had occurred in Central City since the Robert Charles riots of 1900. Shortly thereafter, several bombings targeted African American businesses and residences on the fringes of Central City, bordering white neighborhoods.⁵⁵ Apparently there were no subsequent bombings, but the message was clearly sent to the African American community, as in other cities,

⁵⁰ Hastings, 2004; Hirsch, 1992

⁵¹ "Supreme Court Lifts Negro Ban", The World, New York City, March 15, 1927, Papers of the NAACP (microfilm collection), Part 5: The Campaign against Residential Segregation 1914-1955, Reel 2, Frame 777.

⁵² Silver, 1996, p. 35

⁵³ The Times-Picayune, "Race Segregation Ruling," March 15, 1927, page 10.

⁵⁴ BENJAMIN HARMON v. JOSEPH W. TYLER, Supreme Court of the United States, 273 U.S. 668, March 14, 1927.

⁵⁵ "Lay Bombings to Residence Segregation," The Pittsburgh Courier, December 11, 1926, Papers of the NAACP (microfilm collection), Part 5: The Campaign against Residential Segregation 1914-1955, Reel 2, Frame 762.

that individual acts of violence could be used when institutional tools for segregation were not legal.⁵⁶

Real estate professionals in New Orleans pursued alternative mechanisms for controlling the minority “invasion” even before the ordinance was struck down. After the ordinance suffered its first defeat by Judge Cage in New Orleans, the Moran brothers—“real estate agents of considerable experience”⁵⁷—outlined a plan to segregate neighborhoods without legislation. Termed the “Moran recommendation” by *The Times-Picayune*, it advocated for a committee composed of the Real Estate Agents Association, the Insurance Exchange, the City Homestead League, the General Contractors Association, the Contractors and Dealers Exchange, and the Louisiana Bar Association to:

Specifically denote residential areas for whites and colored. Such ones established, the next step will be for individuals and associations who perform any of the functions incidental to ownership to subscribe to pledge not to participate in any transaction in which either white or colored would attempt to obtain residence in any section reserved for the opposite race. The real estate man would decline to sell or lease, the lawyer to examine title, the notary to pass the act, the insurance man to protect, the architect to design or remodel, and the homesteads to grant loans, where any such invasion would be intended. Cooperation along these lines would be more effective than formal law, and public opinion would enforce the decisions....The outcome would guarantee that both races in New Orleans would continue to reside here in peace and tranquility⁵⁸

Even with the defeat of the racial zoning ordinance, realtors knew that public and private cooperation was “more effective than formal law.” The Moran recommendation was an act of real estate collusion against the entry of African Americans into the housing market, which significantly impacted the ability of Central City residents to secure a mortgage, as shown in the subsequent section.

Although the racial zoning ordinance did not succeed in New Orleans, the effects of zoning and land use planning achieved some of the segregationist’s vision of hemming in African American neighborhoods. Hastings (2004) analyzed maps over several decades following the passage of the city’s first zoning ordinance in 1929. Commercial and residential developers in the Central City area successfully negotiated commercial buffer zones that had the intended effect of concentrating the African American community within well-defined areas. In addition, Central City was one of the

⁵⁶ Massey and Denton, 1993; Wiese, 2004

⁵⁷ *Times Picayune*, “Segregation by Co-operation of Civic Bodies,” November 23, 1924.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

many African American neighborhoods in New Orleans to suffer the consequences of interstate highway development, which razed communities and contained the segregated residential communities both physically and psychologically.⁵⁹ And so, even without a racial zoning ordinance, affluent whites structured the zoning code and the “planning process in the service of apartheid.”⁶⁰

The types of actions seen in New Orleans during the 1920s played out across the nation as the Supreme Court struck down racial zoning in one Southern city after the next. “The movement toward legally sanctioned housing segregation ended, and thereafter racial segregation in southern cities was accomplished by the same means as in the north: through violence, collective anti-black action, racially restrictive covenants, and discriminatory real estate practices.”⁶¹ Whites in New Orleans were far more successful segregating neighborhoods using these other racist methodologies.

Racially Restrictive Covenants & Redlining

The language and logic of zoning inspired powerful real estate professionals and lenders to develop methods for segregating New Orleans’ neighborhoods. Influenced in part by racist zoning advocates and economists who believed in the “market imperative” of housing segregation, realtors incorporated racist methods into their appraisal of housing markets. These theories postulated that the presence or “invasion” of minorities, primarily African Americans, irreversibly led to neighborhood decline and property value losses. By 1924, the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) codified their racial bias of neighborhood decline in their code of ethics, “prohibiting realtors from moving African Americans into white neighborhoods.”⁶² By the 1930s, the segregationist theories of NAREB and real estate economists became a primary tool in federal housing policy during the largest expansion of homeownership in the history of the nation.⁶³ The first tool for racial segregation used by real estate professionals, however, was the racially restrictive covenant, a document that forbade owners of property indefinitely from selling the property to people of color.

In 1909, the Gentilly Terrace Company developed the first racially restricted development in New Orleans in the newly drained swamps towards Lake Pontchartrain. The advent of the mechanical pump and the growing popularity of restrictive covenants coalesced into a radical new

⁵⁹ Hastings, 2004; Unified New Orleans Plan, District 2, Introduction, p. 17.

⁶⁰ Silver, 1996, p. 32

⁶¹ Massey and Denton, 1993, p. 42

⁶² Metzger, 2000, p. 11

⁶³ Freund, 2007

tool for confining African Americans to existing neighborhoods, and allowing for whites to move freely to the suburbs.⁶⁴ In Central City, African Americans were constrained by restrictive covenants on the northern portion of the neighborhood, as evidenced in zoning documents from the 1920s. The Louisiana Realty Company declared to the zoning commission that it “imposed its own regulations in the form of racially restrictive deeds on its tract along Louisiana Parkway north of Claiborne Avenue.”⁶⁵ These early restrictive covenants in New Orleans dramatically shaped the racial demographics of New Orleans’ expanding neighborhoods, but their effects paled in comparison to the structural restrictions placed on African American homeownership by mortgage lenders and the federal government.

During the Great Depression, new methods for expanding homeownership and controlling foreclosures arose concomitantly with new forms of discrimination in the housing market. In 1933, the federal government created the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) with a single task in mind—to purchase bad mortgage loans and refinance them as long-term, low-interest rate, fully amortized loans.⁶⁶ Tragically, the HOLC also developed the racist language, biases and economics of the real estate profession into federal policy.⁶⁷ The HOLC’s simple equation for homeownership came with the “argument, first codified by economists and realtors, that racial discrimination was not a matter of ideology or personal preference but of economics.”⁶⁸ In coordination with the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, the HOLC developed the first federal appraisal system for lending to homeowners based on perceived lending risk. With the creation of four color-coded categories to designate neighborhoods by risk, the national system of redlining became federal policy. Category D, which was coded in red and termed “hazardous,” was attached to “virtually every majority-black or racially mixed neighborhood” and systematically denied federally insured mortgages.⁶⁹ The HOLC created the first “Residential Security Maps” redlining neighborhoods in New Orleans, which were “widely circulated throughout the lending industry.”⁷⁰ As shown in Figure 2a, Central

⁶⁴ Lewis, 2003, p. 67

⁶⁵ Hastings, 2004, p. 284-286

⁶⁶ Although some work in real estate financing and banking had been done to expand affordable homeownership prior to the Depression, the average mortgage was far out of reach for most Americans. This quickly changed as the federal government entered into the market to halt foreclosures and encourage homeownership during the Depression as a way to pursue the American dream—increasing one’s household wealth and social status along the way; See Vale (2007) and Freund (2007) for detailed information on the rise of homeownership in the 1930s.

⁶⁷ See Metzger (2000), Freund (2007), and Taylor Jr. and Cole (2001) for more information on the original racial economic influences on the HOLC, including the work of Frederick Babcock who wrote *The Valuation of Real Estate* in 1932.

⁶⁸ Freund, 2007, p. 115

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 114

⁷⁰ Massey and Denton, 1993, p. 52

City—with the exception of a small area of wealthy homes along Baronne and Carondelet Streets—is contained entirely within a redlined area. Thus, the HOLC's system for preventing investment in African American communities directly impacted Central City beginning in the 1930s. Much as the Moran recommendation envisioned in the 1920s, government officials, banks, realtors, and developers denied housing to African Americans based on race.



Figure 2a. HOLC Residential Security Map of New Orleans (detail), Circa 1930s. Central City is marked in red by the location D-2 to the left of center. Central City's triangular boundaries are Louisiana Avenue to the West, Earhart to the East, and St. Charles to the South. Full New Orleans map shown in **Appendix A**. Map located in the cartographic and architectural holdings at the National Archives in College Park, MD.

As the HOLC's stop-gap solution proved that refinancing loans could stabilize some of the housing market, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) took the reins and vastly changed the urban form in America, and the racial landscape with it.⁷¹ The FHA perfected the language of racial exclusion in its *Underwriting Manual* and expanded its use to all facets of the private mortgage lending

⁷¹ Freund, 2007; Immergluck, 2004; Massey and Denton, 1993

markets. “Because of this interdependence, the lenders of noninsured mortgages adopted the same racial proscriptions that guided FHA appraisal and lending activity,” which essentially normalized and codified redlining in housing markets across the country.⁷² The FHA map in Appendix B, when compared to the HOLC redlining map, clearly shows that redlining affected the major suburban building activities in New Orleans. All private suburban housing developments, bolstered by FHA-insured mortgages, avoided redlined neighborhoods in the city.

As the federal government continued to influence suburban housing markets in the 1940s and 1950s, the effects of redlining spread through all of New Orleans. In the Post-World War II environment, redlining magnified the process of segregating neighborhoods, increased racial turnover, and also exacerbated poverty in Central City:

The racially discriminatory underpinnings of the federal credit policies had the same results in New Orleans as in the rest of the country. Years later, a municipal assessor recalled that ‘10,000 GI’s returned to New Orleans ready to settle down. And they could not get a mortgage in central city, the Irish Channel, the Lower Garden District [the older sections of the city with historically racially mixed population patterns]. Many of these men went to the new subdivisions in Gentilly or Jefferson Parish’....Moderate-income white families found apartments in attractive new developments, often built with federal mortgages. No such options existed for blacks.⁷³

Whereas the ethnic whites in the Dryades Street neighborhood were able to move to the suburbs, African Americans in Central City could not become homeowners, whether they left or stayed. “The white market is preferred by builders because of its stronger and more varied housing demand, fewer difficulties of selling and financing, and greater abundance of good building sites.”⁷⁴ One of the only opportunities for African American residents to obtain a mortgage was with African American lending institutions—primarily insurance companies—but their capital reserves were far less and there was reportedly little enthusiasm from residents to invest in the institutions.⁷⁵

Working in conjunction with redlining, racially restrictive covenants further hindered mobility for African Americans. This practice continued into the 1950s in New Orleans, as covenants openly denied private market housing to middle-class African Americans who wanted to live in the city’s expanding suburban communities.⁷⁶ After considerable controversy and political maneuvering, one African American suburban development was built, called Pontchartrain Park, which was for the African American elite in New Orleans. It was off limits for a vast majority of the

⁷² Freund, 2007, p. 135

⁷³ Mahoney, 1990, p. 1275

⁷⁴ LaViolette, 1960, p. 121

⁷⁵ LaViolette, 1960; Black Dollars in N.O.: Where are they going? Part II, The PLAIN TRUTH, September 20, 1969

⁷⁶ Hirsch, 2000; Freund, 2007; Mahoney, 1985

African American population in the city, especially the underemployed or working class of Central City.⁷⁷ Even though the U.S. Supreme Court prohibited racially restrictive covenants in 1948, the FHA and suburban developers continued to use them until realtors found other tactics for racial exclusion.⁷⁸ As a result, only the most affluent African Americans in New Orleans could enjoy the suburban lifestyle spreading throughout the metropolitan region.

Housing discrimination—especially as a result of FHA redlining—drained Central City of stability and wealth. As late as the 1970s, many in Central City “found it impossible to obtain a loan from a bank or homestead.”⁷⁹ Central City’s few homeowners consequently could not obtain loans to keep their homes up to code. Renters, on the other hand, suffered from the presence of slumlords that contributed to blight and neighborhood decline, and sent clear signals to lending institutions to further redline and disinvest in the neighborhood.⁸⁰ As a result, “the fact that federally subsidized ‘private’ housing was closed to blacks was one of the factors increasing black ghettoization during this period.”⁸¹ Overcrowding, wealth-building constraints, unemployment, and deepening poverty all factored into the growth of residential ghettos developing across the United States as suburban developments were off-limits to African Americans and inner city neighborhoods were redlined by mortgage lenders and the government.⁸² As a result, many neighborhoods were stripped of stability and much of their middle-class constituency, while also limiting the gains in equity for African Americans homeowners. These generational problems resulted largely from public and private housing market discrimination.⁸³

In response to widespread complaints of housing discrimination, several studies were conducted in New Orleans on redlining. The Urban League found widespread discrimination and logged grievances against the FHA, VA, and real estate agents.⁸⁴ Another study found “covert racial discrimination among realtors and lending agencies.”⁸⁵ As late as 1978, New Orleans Mayor Ernest Morial called “redlining a ‘considerable problem’ in New Orleans.”⁸⁶ These studies, however, did

⁷⁷ Hirsch, 2000; Mahoney, 1990

⁷⁸ Freund, 2007; Massey and Denton, 1993; Racially restrictive covenants and other tactics were used in Gentilly well after 1948, as evidenced by an interviewee who’s family lived in Gentilly prior to and after the 1948 *Shelley v. Kramer* decision.

⁷⁹ Letter from A.L. Davis to King S. Wells, Executive Director of the New Orleans Community Improvement Agency; located in New Orleans Public Library City Archives, A.L. Davis personal records box 2, Central City folder.

⁸⁰ Immergluck, 2004

⁸¹ Mahoney, 1990, p. 1276. Also see Oliver and Shapiro, 2006

⁸² Immergluck, 2004; Massey and Denton, 1993

⁸³ Freund, 2007; Immergluck, 2004; Massey and Denton, 1993; Oliver and Shapiro, 2006, Jackson, 1985

⁸⁴ Spain, 1979

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 93

⁸⁶ Hager, George, “Inner City Target of New Loan Fund,” *The Times-Picayune*, June 9, 1978.

not stop the practice of covert discrimination, nor did they spur reinvestment in Central City. By the time that the FHA increased their lending to African American communities and the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 required banks to lend to disinvested communities, Central City's population was deeply poor and could not obtain traditional mortgage products.

The most insidious reason for the continued presence of redlining and housing discrimination is that mortgage markets veil racial inequities in economic terms. "FHA operations began to racialize whites' vision of housing economics during the 1930s, as the agency's story about race, property, and housing was rapidly inscribed in a very powerful state apparatus, whose representatives insisted that it was economics and the market, not individuals and their prejudices, that were setting the rules."⁸⁷ This national economic context is relevant to New Orleans, as the "Negro cannot expect much from the building industry on economic grounds alone."⁸⁸ This structural logic of racialized economics continues to underpin the mortgage finance system even today.

Public Housing and Central City's Official Segregation

New Orleans' public housing was segregated from its inception and stayed so throughout its entire history. Nearly defining residential segregation, public housing was one of the most powerful forces eroding the traditionally integrated neighborhoods in the city and played a significant role in the structural constraints that prohibited African Americans from building wealth and rising out of poverty.⁸⁹

Central City hosted some of the first public housing developments in the United States. In 1937, Congress passed the Wagner Act, providing the first stable funding source for public housing and criteria for site selection, slum clearance, and tenant eligibility. Remarkably, the Wagner Act provided for a non-discriminatory hiring policy for the construction of public housing, a fact that was uncommon in the New Deal job programs.⁹⁰ Federal officials, however, allowed local housing authorities to segregate the housing units themselves. New Orleans was the first city to receive funds for public housing, and began the process of site selection and slum clearance with exceptional speed after receiving funds in 1938. The first two projects identified and built were the St. Thomas development in the Irish Channel for whites and the Magnolia development in Central

⁸⁷ Freund, 2007, p. 132

⁸⁸ LaViolette, 1960, p. 122

⁸⁹ Mahoney, 1985; Mahoney, 1990, Hirsch, 2000

⁹⁰ Mahoney, 1985; Brown, 1999

City for African Americans. The neighborhood selected for the Magnolia development housed a diverse array of African American communities, ranging in quality from tenement slums to the middle-class homes of African American doctors and professionals. Within 36 days, the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) evicted all of the 862 households in the footprint of Magnolia. These evictions began the mass exodus of the African American middle-class from Central City.⁹¹

Following the opening of Magnolia, African American leaders pushed the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) to create public housing management jobs for African Americans. After initial negotiations for management positions, the HANO “board rapidly proved unable to live with this arrangement....After some debate, they passed a new resolution specifying that blacks would be employed in management at Magnolia...but that both projects would now be grouped ‘under the supervision of a Management Supervisor...of the white race.’”⁹² White supremacist pressures continued in HANO, leading to the same policies of job discrimination for supervisors, interviewers, and field workers in connection with tenant selection. Thus, not only were the projects’ residents segregated by race, only whites staffed higher management positions for decades.⁹³

Despite the segregation of public housing and job discrimination, public housing seemed to be highly regarded by the residents. Many of the African American residents in public housing even exceeded the income quota built into the 1937 Wagner Act’s regulations and there seemed to be a higher level of payment stability in African American public housing than in white developments.⁹⁴ Many residents held stable jobs as unionized longshoremen, which had some of the highest wages that working-class African Americans could earn at the time.⁹⁵ In addition, progressives in New Orleans ensured that the public housing was aesthetically pleasing, a rarity under the Wagner Act’s austere funding guidelines.⁹⁶ Even the growing unease among African American leaders about the future of residential segregation did not dispel the general sense that “the segregated housing projects of New Orleans came closer to true equality than most public institutions ruled by the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine.”⁹⁷

⁹¹ Mahoney, 1985, pp. 25-33

⁹² Mahoney, 1985, 29-30

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Mahoney, 1985, p. 45; Mahoney, 1990

⁹⁵ Mahoney, 1990

⁹⁶ Radford, 2000

⁹⁷ Mahoney, 1985, p. 35

After World War II, public housing in New Orleans changed rapidly with the enforcement of income quotas at a time of growing housing shortages. HANO evicted stable tenants with jobs to make way for a long list of eligible tenants, many of whom were poor, jobless, and unskilled migrants from rural parishes. As described in the previous section, widespread housing discrimination in the private rental or homeownership market prevented the evicted African Americans from obtaining housing. White tenants, on the other hand, could obtain mortgages or move freely in rental markets. Thus constrained, many ventured to available units in downtown neighborhoods that were experiencing rapid racial transition. Those left in Central City with eligible incomes could also now live in two more public housing developments built between the 1940s-1960s—Calliope (or B.W. Cooper) and the Guste (“High Rise” and “Low Rise”), both of which bordered Melpomene (later MLK). Thus the combined effects of income quotas and private housing market discrimination played a large part in Central City’s shift from a relatively stable working class community into a racially segregated and chronically underemployed ghetto.⁹⁸

In 1965 New Orleans’ public housing was legally *desegregated*, but it was entirely *segregated* in reality. Nearly all residents across the city in public housing were African American. “Whites simply did not need public housing as much as blacks did. By 1969, in the New Orleans metropolitan area, only 8 percent of whites lived below the poverty line, and most of these were outside the city limits. In contrast, almost 40 percent of blacks lived below the poverty level, and most of them were in Orleans parish.”⁹⁹ A large contributing factor besides the housing discrimination in the rapidly expanding suburbs of the 1960s was that “Blacks remained excluded from participation in the economy.”¹⁰⁰ The inter-institutional structures of the housing and job markets in New Orleans were firmly in place:

Through war and recovery, new wards and recessions, through social transformation, through civic modernization, the whites found the projects to be a path upward and, in general, the blacks did not. There was a wall surrounding those housing projects. It was not of the Housing Authority’s making. If it was invisible, it has proved tremendously hard to penetrate nonetheless.¹⁰¹

This so-called invisible wall is the structural constraints of the discriminatory housing market, the white suburban color line, job discrimination, and other ways of constraining African American mobility in the inner city.

⁹⁸ Germany, 2007; Hirsch, 2000; Mahoney, 1990

⁹⁹ Mahoney, 1985, p. 75

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 75

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 6

By the 1960s, Central City reflected the “ghetto” conditions of African American communities throughout the country, characterized by “large, impoverished, spatially constrained, and racially segregated residential communities.”¹⁰² The deleterious effects of ghetto and underclass life are well documented,¹⁰³ but it is important to note “Racial segregation—and its characteristic institutional form, the black ghetto—are the key structural factors responsible for the perpetuation of black poverty in the United States.”¹⁰⁴ The segregation of African Americans in Central City—particularly through the concentration of underemployed people in public housing—formed one of the most enduring structural ghettos in New Orleans (Racial concentrations in Central City shown in Figure 2b).

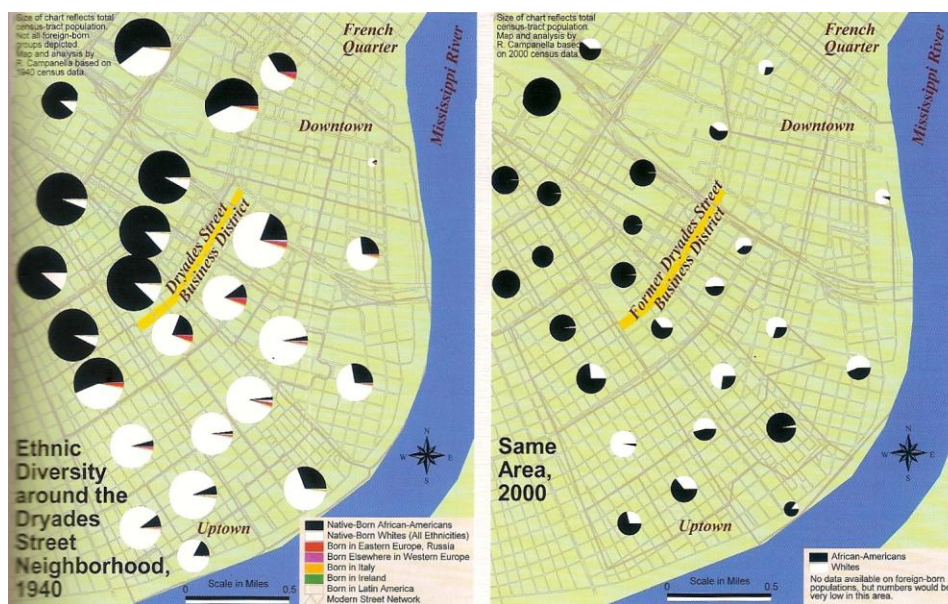


Figure 2b. Racial change in the Central City area of New Orleans from 1940-2000. Size of circles connotes density of people in census blocks. As this figure shows, Central City’s population shrunk dramatically between 1940-2000. Reproduced with permission by Campanella (2006, p. 275)

After decades of wrangling with HANO over hiring African Americans for management, both Magnolia and Calliope were handed over to resident management organizations in the 1970s, “which held substantial promise of improving organization and internal community atmosphere.”¹⁰⁵ However, with Central City already in a cyclone of decline, the changes followed the adage ‘too little, too late.’ Even with “changing political power structures...the structural forces which had turned

¹⁰² Mahoney, 1990, p. 1266

¹⁰³ Massey and Denton, 1993; Denton, 2006

¹⁰⁴ Massey and Denton, 1993, p. 9

¹⁰⁵ Mahoney, 1985, p. 92

public housing in this direction ran deep in every American city.”¹⁰⁶ These structural forces aligned economic discrimination and private housing discrimination into a powerful force that kept Central City in a state of deepening poverty, which would not relent for decades.

Conclusion

Discrimination in public and private institutions caused decline in African American business, zoning inequities, redlining, and public housing concentration in Central City. These institutional interactions affected housing investment decisions, economic development, and the mobility of African Americans in a rapidly segregating city. Although early civil rights attorneys and leaders successfully overturned many of the zoning ordinances, the structures for private and public housing discrimination were well established and continue to the present day. All of these factors played a role in the developing African American response to segregation during the Civil Rights Movement, but they also limited the gains made by African Americans as they broke the bonds of Jim Crow.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 93

The ghetto and barrio have replaced Jim Crow as the symbols of racism, and the struggle to radically reconstruct the inner city built environment has become the postmodern equivalent of the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁰⁷

3

Reclaiming the Streets: The Civil Rights Movement in Central City

The Civil Rights Movement challenged and overcame institutionalized Jim Crow laws that prevented African Americans from expressing the fullness of their political rights. However, the movement struggled to overcome the fundamental structures in housing, jobs, politics, education, and economic development. Central City hosted many of the civil rights activities in New Orleans during the 1950s and 60s, but it also suffered from some of the most extreme effects of segregation and persistent structural racism. Since the turbulent 1960s, African American leaders in Central City searched tirelessly for ways to overcome structural restraints, one of which tied civil rights commemoration to the revitalization of the neighborhood.

After Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, African American leaders commemorated the civil rights struggle by naming streets in his honor, followed by the commemoration of local civil rights leaders. Although the renaming of streets is of increasing importance to African Americans publicly honoring their history and struggles during the Civil Rights Movement, commemorations are marked by decades of racial and political tensions that limit the location and scale of the street renaming. In Central City, as in cities around the country, political battles restrict commemoration to less prominent boulevards or streets that remain within segregated African American neighborhoods. The result is that the boulevards are often stigmatized, or “branded,” with attributes of an African American ghetto that affect the neighborhood’s redevelopment potential.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the commemoration of civil rights leaders brought out struggles between powerfully connected historic preservationists—who held deep beliefs in maintaining their version of New Orleans history—and civil rights leaders who envisioned a new landscape and political order for the community and the city. The political structures in New Orleans ensured that commemorative streets would not cross into the affluent white parts of the city, affecting both the location and scale

¹⁰⁷ Taylor Jr. and Cole, 2001, p. 3, footnote 7

¹⁰⁸ Mitchelson et al., 2007

of the civil rights commemoration and further demarcating the economic and racial segregation of Central City.¹⁰⁹

This chapter begins with an account of the civil rights activities in Central City that challenged Jim Crow and the structures that prevented African Americans from full participation in our democracy and economy. The chapter transitions into the politics of commemorating the Civil Rights Movement in Central City and how leaders tied newfound political power to neighborhood revitalization efforts. In so doing, Central City leaders battled against the political and structural limitations of commemorating the Civil Rights Movement after the fall of Jim Crow.

The Civil Rights Movement in Central City, New Orleans

The Civil Rights Movement is often equated with the legislative successes of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. There is often less recognition of the struggles for jobs, housing, and equitable economic development that accompanied these monumental changes to American domestic policy. For several decades, African American civil rights and union leaders gauged their full integration into American society by the ability to secure jobs, adequate housing, and an equitable share of federal resources. Martin Luther King, Jr., himself, learned early in his career the importance of jobs and housing, and later came to ardently support a platform of “full employment” and “open housing” for all citizens.¹¹⁰ Despite the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, the realization of full employment and open housing was truly a dream. In reality, low-income African Americans found little consolation in the federal jobs programs during the 1960s and housing policy since 1968.¹¹¹ Time and again, civil rights leaders organized protests and boycotts in support of fair employment, jobs, and decent housing for African Americans, but each time the structures of the discriminatory job and housing markets obstructed them. In Central City, decades of struggle for jobs and housing produced few well-paying jobs and scant decent housing. Nonetheless, the neighborhood’s activism also produced some of the first demonstrations in New Orleans that were critical for the desegregation of public accommodations and pressured city officials to address some of the job and housing concerns over the decades to come.

¹⁰⁹ Mitchelson et al, 2007; Dwyer and Alderman, 2008a

¹¹⁰ Jackson, 2007

¹¹¹ Massey and Denton, 1993

Most of New Orleans' prominent civil rights leaders of the first half of the 20th century were Creole elites from the Downtown neighborhoods. Many Creole leaders practiced law for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and fought against Jim Crow laws, such as the racial zoning ordinance described in Chapter 2. The Civil Rights Movement in New Orleans took a distinct turn in the 1950s, however, in the Uptown neighborhood of Central City with the rise of forceful Protestant ministers and a budding militant student population.¹¹²

One of the most prominent civil rights leaders in New Orleans was a Protestant minister in Central City by the name of Reverend Abraham Lincoln Davis. Rev. A.L. Davis (Davis), as he was known, was beyond simple categorization. Born in rural Louisiana, Davis became one of the most prominent Uptown Protestant ministers in the city. Moving to New Orleans in 1936 at the age of twenty, Davis showed himself to be a forceful voice for civil rights. Davis was an activist minister at a time when activism was not popular in the church. In addition to his vocal criticism and public protesting during the Civil Rights Movement, Davis showed considerable skill as a racial negotiator—a fact that often got him criticism because of his shaky alliances with white racial moderates. Davis was also very politically active, which helped him win influence, but eventually caught him in struggles with African American opponents increasingly frustrated with the pace of change in Central City.¹¹³

In 1955, the Montgomery bus boycott pressured that city's segregation policies and led to one of the most successful economic boycotts and one of the most high-profile court cases of the Civil Rights Movement. This massive local demonstration of unity catalyzed other boycotts around the country, inspired innumerable African Americans to stand up to the oppressive conditions of Jim Crow, and launched the career of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The actions in Montgomery greatly inspired A.L. Davis, so much so that he hosted Dr. King and 100 other Southern civil rights leaders on February 14, 1957 at his New Zion Baptist Church in Central City. At this meeting, the attendees voted to create the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which would become one of the most powerful and effective civil rights organizations in the decade to come. "Initially conceived as a means of capitalizing on the success of the Montgomery bus boycott...SCLC's founding gave a stimulus to protests against bus segregation in Louisiana."¹¹⁴ Just a little over a year after SCLC's founding, Davis and other leaders successfully and peacefully

¹¹² Hirsch, 1992; Rogers, 1993; Germany, 2007

¹¹³ Hirsch, 1992; Rogers, 1993; Anderson, Ed, "5 Candidates Seeking District 'B' Council Seat, The Times-Picayune, September 20, 1977.

¹¹⁴ Fairclough, 2008, p. 281.

integrated the New Orleans bus system on May 30, 1958 through a “friendly lawsuit”—a surprising victory that did not require major mobilization and was a mild antecedent to the virulent reactions of whites to integrating schools and public accommodations during the 1960s.¹¹⁵

When court-ordered school desegregation began in 1960, whites reacted violently in New Orleans. Mothers of white children threatened and attacked four African American girls who were the first children to enter an all-white school in the Lower 9th ward, which at the time was a working class white section of town. This incident received national attention and quickly changed the perception of New Orleans as being a racially moderate city. The process of school desegregation in New Orleans also followed similar patterns seen around the country, where whites fled public schools and African Americans were left with an inferior education system and decrepit schools—directly impacting generations of African Americans in finding employment and other opportunities that white counterparts enjoyed.¹¹⁶

In these increasingly tense times of race relations and desegregation, civil rights leaders in Central City organized the first major boycott in New Orleans (Figure 3a).¹¹⁷ Although Dryades Street was the primary African American shopping district, the white businesses notoriously did not hire African Americans to work jobs above the menial level. In response to widespread discriminatory hiring practices along Dryades Street, several activist Protestant ministers and lawyers from the surrounding neighborhood—including the Reverend A.L. Davis—organized into a group called the Consumer’s League. As one of the original organizers of the boycott recalled:

After fruitless negotiations with the Dryades Street merchants, the group threatened to demonstrate. The merchants’ answer, Mitchell recalled, was, ‘Go on ahead. Demonstrate, and march all you please. You’re not gonna keep the black folks off Dryades Street.’ The Consumers’ League challenged the merchants, and ‘we organized the first march that I can remember in the city of New Orleans for civil rights.’¹¹⁸

On the other side of the counter, the predominantly Jewish merchants recalled the situation somewhat differently. Dryades Street merchant Lestor Gerson “[Shook] his head in recalling the

¹¹⁵ Rogers, 1993

¹¹⁶ Rogers, 1993; Smith, 2007; The education system in New Orleans was one of the worst in the country and could be the subject of an entire study on the effects of structural racism on education. For the purposes of this study, it is worth noting as a broad influence on persistent poverty. For a thorough analysis on the structural racism in America’s education system, see Kozol, 1992

¹¹⁷ Rogers, 1993.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 68

incident. ‘We had a bad situation that existed between the merchants and the NAACP, because they wanted an immediate change from stores with all white employees, to black and white.’”¹¹⁹

The Consumers League galvanized the historically divided African American community by organizing Protestant ministers, residents, congregation constituents, Creole lawyers, and students from all over the city to boycott the white business owners. The boycott started at the beginning of April of 1960. Within days, many of the businesses saw profits drop as much as \$3,000.¹²⁰ By May of 1960, boycott leaders counted as many as 30 newly-hired African Americans on Dryades Street.¹²¹



Figure 3a. Dryades St. Boycott, 1960. New Orleans Public Library City Archives

Several young students were deeply influenced by their experience in the boycott on Dryades and the increasingly radical actions of students across the country. Several students in particular—Oretha Castle, Rudy Lombard, and Jerome Smith among them—formed a local chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1960. CORE organized a racially diverse group of students to perform sit-ins and demonstrations on Canal Street to challenge segregation at the heart of the white power structure. Rather than being “centered in the black community, led by ministers and doctors...[t]he sit-ins downtown were different. ‘To talk about hiring some black clerks in stores in a black neighborhood was one thing, but to start talking about social change, social life, going to the same restaurants, was considered to be really radical,’” one civil rights leader recalled.¹²² Despite physical intimidation and numerous arrests, students repeatedly pressed the white political and

¹¹⁹ Hannusch, Jeff, “Dryades Street Merchant,” *Times Picayune Dixie*, December 13, 1981.

¹²⁰ Fairclough, 2008. Using an inflation calculator, this would be worth \$21,490.37 in 2009 USD.

¹²¹ Rogers, 1993

¹²² *Ibid*, p. 69

business leaders to integrate all public accommodations.¹²³ Integration of public accommodations was guaranteed with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but white businesses still persisted in their segregation of certain private facilities. Not until 1969, when the New Orleans City Council passed a strict local Public Accommodation Ordinance expanding the 1964 Civil Rights Act's scope, did public accommodation segregation officially end.¹²⁴

Even with integrated public accommodations, the hiring of African American employees in white businesses did not continue as smoothly outside of the Dryades Street area. As noted in the previous chapter, higher-level management jobs were strictly segregated by race in New Orleans. This job segregation also applied to the city's civil service employees and most private employment. These conditions significantly affected the ability of African Americans to build wealth and climb out of poverty like their lower-class white counterparts. "Segregation and social exclusivity deeply affected economic options. With a few exceptions for professionals and small business owners, black residents usually represented a low-cost labor force that served others, rarely with access to the real sources of economic, and therefore political, power."¹²⁵ These acts of discrimination in the job market amounted to willful economic racism and systematic exclusion, keeping African Americans unemployed or in low-wage jobs and thus in a perpetual state of poverty.

The deepening condition of poverty in African American communities was well known to leaders in New Orleans, but they were also on the agenda of national leaders, including Dr. King. King knew that "low southern wages were 'not an accident of geography'....Historically confined to unskilled jobs, black workers were vulnerable to structural unemployment....This was not simply a paradox of poverty amid plenty. American abundance *structured* black poverty."¹²⁶ Sharing this view, Oretha Castle argued, "this country is a deeply racist country. In some ways, I think that is the root...the economic system, and, in some ways, the political system builds on and translates that. The root problem of this country is that it's racist to the core. Every day this country is becoming more and more regressive, with the economic system becoming more and more oppressive."¹²⁷ Civil rights leaders, by tying together a trenchant analysis of segregation and economic deprivation, forcefully expressed the structural relationship preventing African Americans from truly gaining freedom from racism and poverty.

¹²³ Rogers, 1993; Germany, 2007

¹²⁴ Clement, 1970

¹²⁵ Germany, 2007, p. 25.

¹²⁶ Jackson, 2007, p. 200, emphasis in original

¹²⁷ Rogers, 1993, p. 177

In New Orleans, civil rights leaders maintained pressure on political elites to ensure jobs for African Americans. In August of 1963, after years of working tirelessly to get the city of New Orleans to hire African Americans, A.L. Davis and other leaders announced that they reached a deal with the city that would remove racially discriminatory signs on city property, ‘refrain from appealing’ court orders that desegregated local institutions, hire applicants to the civil service on the basis of ‘qualifications’, hire black firemen and sanitation workers, and the city would ‘refrain from harassing businessmen who desire to desegregate hotels, motels, restaurants, and other facilities.’¹²⁸ By September, civil rights leaders realized that the demands would not be met on their terms. Six civil rights groups organized the “Freedom March” from Shakespeare Park in Central City to City Hall on September 30, 1963—a little more than a month after the March on Washington—that drew between 10,000 and 15,000 people and was considered the largest demonstration of its kind in New Orleans’ history.¹²⁹ Among others, the Reverend A.L. Davis and Oretha Castle led the march. At City Hall, the outspoken Oretha Castle declared that: “as long as we are held in economic and political slavery, they [the whites] aren’t free either.’ She ominously predicted that there would be no peace ‘as long as Negroes are forced to live as we are now.’”¹³⁰ Even though a few of the demands were met, the hiring of African Americans by City Hall would not take place in any great numbers until the racial liberal mayor Maurice “Moon” Landrieu came into power on the wave of African American votes in 1969.¹³¹

Despite the limited successes of the Dryades Boycott and Freedom March, jobs were exceedingly hard to come by for low-income African Americans, even in a time of expanding federal intervention in urban communities. In 1964, approximately three-quarters of all African American families earned at or below poverty level wages, and almost half were actually below the poverty line.¹³² In response to deepening poverty and urban uprising, President Lyndon Johnson’s

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 91

¹²⁹ “10,000 in ‘Freedom March’ on City Hall,” *Louisiana Weekly*, October 5, 1963.

¹³⁰ Rogers, 1993, p. 92

¹³¹ The week after the Freedom March, Davis delivered a petition to Mayor Schiro written by one of the many organizations he participated in called the Citizens’ Committee. Civil rights leaders demanded the repealing of all segregation ordinances, and the breaking of the color line in trade and professional associations, and the elimination of segregated unions in the city, among other items. The response from Mayor Schiro was to split the list into pieces and divvy them up to their respective agencies, denying authority to intervene in city council and the school board (Rogers, 1993, p. 93). Rather than the wholesale use of police force as in Birmingham to quell dissent, “New Orleans’ political leadership resorted to an almost passive resistance to black demands, a resistance characterized by foot-dragging recalcitrance rather than violence” (Rogers, 1993, p. 105). Even so, the *Louisiana Weekly* declared a few years after the Freedom March that several of the demands had been met, with the notable exception of appointments of African Americans to civil service, public boards and commissions (Rogers, 1993); Also see Germany (2007)

¹³² Germany, 2007, p. 3

administration—after considerable pressure from civil rights leaders and racial liberals—embarked on the War on Poverty (WOP). Though civil rights leaders, including King, consistently pushed job guarantees, the WOP offered meager funds for job training and economic opportunity.¹³³ One of the main job programs was the Concentrated Employment Program (CEP), which in theory would train low-skill workers and then place them in the private sector for on-the-job training.¹³⁴ In practice, the program did not live up to expectations. Within the first year, Central City officials predicted 250 job placements. When only 44 jobs materialized in the first six months, Central City residents became enraged and a vast majority dropped out of the program. Federal and local officials neglected to realize that “the vast majority of local CEP enrollees were African American, yet most jobs in New Orleans beyond low-skill, labor-intensive positions were closed to African Americans.”¹³⁵ Therefore the jobs available to African Americans in New Orleans continued to be the ones that they were already able to get. By creating untenable programs with no enforcement, the WOP “kept the welfare state fragmented and decentralized.”¹³⁶ With a fragmented federal response to deeply engrained structural employment barriers, the white business elite in New Orleans maintained the color line in business with little challenge from the government.

Concentrated African American unemployment during the 1950s—coinciding with port containerization and economic restructuring—deeply affected household wealth in Central City.¹³⁷ Likewise, the movement of the remaining middle-class African American families out of the neighborhood drained both stable families and leadership. By the 1970s, in the words of Clarence Barney, the executive director of the Urban League of Greater New Orleans, “Central City [was] the largest blighted area in New Orleans” and Dryades was “one of the most terrible areas.”¹³⁸ Central City was becoming characterized by the following report by the Times Picayune entitled “The Central City Dilemma:”

Just as the rubble has increased so have your chances of becoming a murder statistic. There is really no certainty that upon turning down the next side street

¹³³ Jackson, 2007.

¹³⁴ One of the first Congressional acts out of the War on Poverty was the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964, which created the Office of Economic Opportunity and funded job training programs for the predominantly poor and African American urban populations. For detailed information on WOP programs in New Orleans and in Central City, see Germany (2007).

¹³⁵ Germany, 2007, p. 160

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 15

¹³⁷ Mahoney, 1990

¹³⁸ Ott, Dwight, “The Central City Dilemma: Dryades Area Once Leading Locale,” Times Picayune, March 9, 1975, first of a series.

you will not be mugged or shot by someone disgusted about a rat-infested house, the loss of a job, the lack of money or just strung out on drugs.¹³⁹

With more than a decade of War on Poverty relief programs, Central City was still in a state of decline that seemed insuperable. Clarence Barney concluded that “all the anti-poverty programs did was provide money but left no economic institutions controlled by the people which could become self-supporting once the money was turned off.”¹⁴⁰ This kept the residents in a state of poverty, but with additional dependencies on federal funds that would soon dwindle.

Even though the Dryades Boycott secured a few sales clerk jobs and perhaps a few lower level management positions, Dryades Street fell along with the neighborhood as a whole. As shown in Figure 3b, the business activity on Dryades peaked in 1952-1953, but sank by 1958, and then dwindled over the several decades until the final plummet in the 1990s. According to Campanella (2006), the Dryades Boycott signaled to Jewish business owners that times were changing. They subsequently moved to other Uptown and suburban neighborhoods. Jewish merchant Lestor Gerson remarked that “People didn’t want to come [to Dryades] because they didn’t want to shop here under that tension. They’d ring up and ask if it were safe to shop. After awhile they went to shopping centers in other parts of the city.”¹⁴¹ Canal Street’s integration and increased options for suburban shopping in the late 1960s facilitated the abandonment of Dryades, which “led to the virtual extinction of black business districts” in the city.¹⁴²

Although promises of private sector job creation washed away, the WOP achieved some of its goals in New Orleans. The program created some of the longest surviving service delivery systems for low-income African Americans and also became one of the main vehicles for enhancing the political power and civic participation of the African American community during the late 1960s. In particular, the Central City Economic Opportunity Corporation (CCEOC) acted as a hub for “self-help” activities and the funneling of federal funds to local political organizations under the Community Action Program, which ultimately produced “several prominent black politicians”¹⁴³ and also led the fight for the commemoration of civil rights leaders and revitalization activities in Central City.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ott, Dwight, “The Central City Dilemma: Strong Black Institutions Goal of Heritage Square,” *Times Picayune*, March 9, 1975, third of a series. Also see Massey and Denton, 1993, for a comprehensive look at the effects of federal funding on local poverty concentration.

¹⁴¹ Hannusch, Jeff, “Dryades Street Merchant,” *Times Picayune Dixie*, December 13, 1981.

¹⁴² Fairclough, 2008, p. 469

¹⁴³ Germany, 2007, p. 68

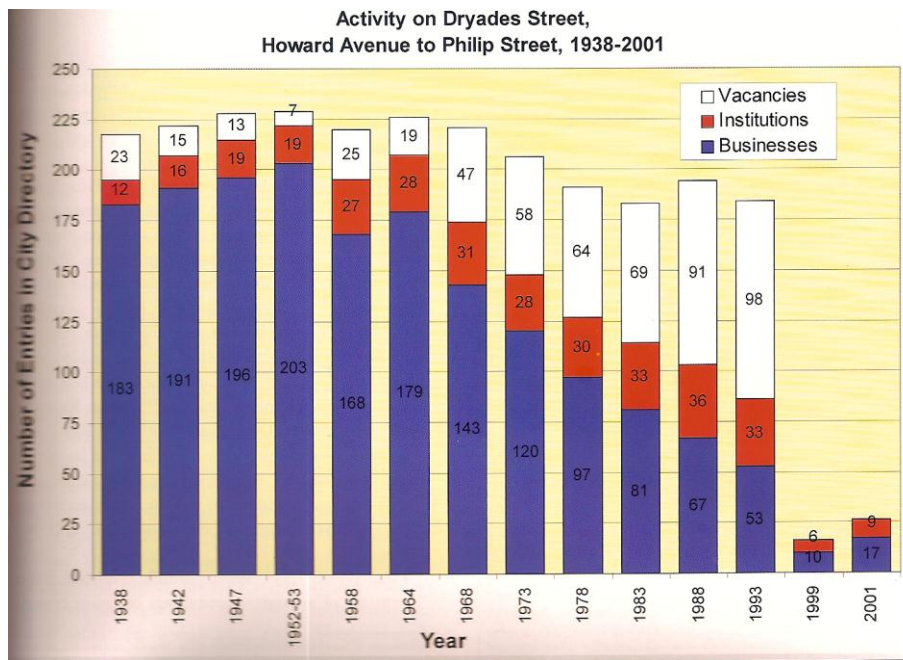


Figure 3b. Business Activity on Dryades Street, reproduced with permission from Campanella (2006, p. 275)

Reclaiming the Streets in the 1970s-80s

Though Central City was in a state of steady decline, there were committed activists still pursuing ways to find a way to raise the neighborhood from the depths of poverty, unemployment, and disinvestment. War on Poverty funds quickly dwindled in the 1970s under the Nixon Administration, but some of the organizations still survived in Central City. The CCEOC was one in particular that continued working in Central City pursuing street improvements and other ways of keeping the neighborhood afloat. The CCEOC—organized around elected block leaders representing all of Central City residents—developed African American leaders that later became legislators and city council members. Along with the political redistricting in the late 1970s that allowed for the first African American to sit on the New Orleans City Council since Reconstruction, political leaders in Central City commemorated their civil rights history in a neighborhood that had a long history of struggle against segregation. By seizing political control through the War on Poverty programs and voting drives, the African American community overcame steep opposition to commemorating the past.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Germany, 2007; Hirsch, 1992; Rogers, 1993

In the early 1970s, the CCEOC and residents pushed the City of New Orleans to invest in Central City's streets. One such street to be highlighted was the prominent residential street of Melpomene that ran through the entire Central City neighborhood, tied together two public housing developments, and crossed the historic Dryades Street. On February 5, 1973, a Melpomene Avenue Improvement (MIA) Meeting between the CCEOC and several city staffers finalized a commitment from the New Orleans Department of Streets for \$150,000 in street repairs. These city funds would be matched with \$300,000 in federal funds to perform street repairs from Dryades to S. Claiborne Ave. In addition, the federal funds could be used for a memorial "in the form of a statue or bust" that would be placed on a two-block area along Melpomene's median filled with flowers, benches, trees and shrubs. At this same meeting, "it was suggested that Melpomene Ave. be renamed in memorial of some black leader, someone national or local."¹⁴⁵ Those present suggested either Martin Luther King or Mahalia Jackson, a famous gospel singer and civil rights leader from New Orleans. The CCEOC members at the MIA presented this to the full CCEOC board on April 13, 1973. The board passed a resolution to rename Melpomene as Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and to designate the neutral ground¹⁴⁶ from Dryades to Simon Bolivar as "Freedom Walk."¹⁴⁷ Although the CCEOC sent the resolution to city hall, it did not succeed in changing the name of the street under an all-white city council.¹⁴⁸ According to the Times-Picayune in 1975, the effort was in the hands of CCEOC leader and future councilmember James Singleton, who, as director of the Central City Neighborhood Council, pushed the renaming of Melpomene Ave to Martin Luther King Drive along with the placement of a bronze statue at the end of it. According to Singleton, it was part of a larger planning proposal to revitalize Central City.¹⁴⁹

Although African American leaders gained greater access to politics in New Orleans during the administration of Moon Landrieu in the early 1970s, the New Orleans City Council remained all-white until 1975. After a highly controversial redistricting plan intended to drain political power away from majority African American neighborhoods, a vacant seat in the city council was filled by A. L. Davis at the discretion of 6 white council members—a token to the African American

¹⁴⁵ Minutes from the Melpomene Avenue Improvement Meeting from April 13, 1973, New Orleans Public Library City Archives, A.L. Davis personal records box 5 in Martin Luther King, Jr. folder.

¹⁴⁶ In New Orleans, medians are commonly referred to as "neutral grounds"

¹⁴⁷ Minutes from the Melpomene Avenue Improvement Meeting from April 13, 1973, New Orleans Public Library City Archives, A.L. Davis personal records box 5 in Martin Luther King, Jr. folder.

¹⁴⁸ City of New Orleans Inter-Office Memorandum on January 27, 1976 between Jon Eckert and Joyce Davis, New Orleans Public Library City Archives, A.L. Davis personal records box 5 in Martin Luther King, Jr. folder.

¹⁴⁹ Ott, Dwight, "The Central City Dilemma: Changing Melpomene to King Drive is Proposed," Times Picayune, March 12, 1975, Last of a Series.

community.¹⁵⁰ Even so, interest group struggles maintained inequalities for African Americans in the fragmented post-Jim Crow pluralist political process.¹⁵¹

Early in his tenure, Davis proposed a citywide holiday honoring Dr. King. In the resolution, Davis wrote that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "enormous influence was always directed toward the social betterment of minorities and the poor, toward breaking down the artificial barriers that separate the races, and toward gaining universal recognition and acceptance of the dignity of all men and women, regardless of race, color, creed, class or economic status."¹⁵² The resolution fell flat when Davis and other advocates suggested replacing All Saints Day—a difficult proposition in a Catholic city—as a holiday for King.

Davis, undeterred, then took up the initiative to change Melpomene Ave to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard.¹⁵³ At the urging of the City Council Research Staff (CRS), the CRS performed a survey of businesses and residents along Melpomene and government officials prior to the renaming. Foreshadowing the business concern surveys in subsequent battles over MLKs across the country, the CRS collected information from the Streets Department, the Post Office, business owners, the Planning Commission, and neighborhood residents.¹⁵⁴ On February 5, 1976, the CRS sent an Inter-Office Memorandum directly to Councilman A.L. Davis to inform him that the street renaming would not be too costly or create problems for the Post Office, that only one business out of a random sample of 8 would be financially burdened by the name change, and that numerous residents called in support of the renaming. The memorandum also directly confronts a growing preservationist opposition by noting other street name changes in New Orleans.¹⁵⁵ After the CRS analyzed the effects, the City Planning Commission studied the proposal, finding that 900 addresses (both commercial and residential) would be affected. Perhaps avoiding controversy, "The City Planning Commission passed on the staff's informational report to the council without a recommendation as to whether the name should be changed."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁰ Hirsch, 1992

¹⁵¹ Judge, 1998

¹⁵² Documents in New Orleans Public Library City Archives, A.L. Davis personal records box 5, Martin Luther King, Jr. folder.

¹⁵³ "King Blvd. Effects Analyzed," The Times-Picayune, September 2, 1976.

¹⁵⁴ Documents in New Orleans Public Library City Archives, A.L. Davis personal records box 5, Martin Luther King, Jr. folder; See Mitchelson et al., 2007 for national context.

¹⁵⁵ City of New Orleans Inter-Office Memorandum on February 5, 1976 between Jeffery Chow and Councilman A.L. Davis, CRS 76-124, Documents in New Orleans Public Library City Archives, A.L. Davis personal records box 5, Martin Luther King, Jr. folder.

¹⁵⁶ "King Blvd. Effects Analyzed," The Times-Picayune, September 2, 1976.

By the end of 1976, Davis successfully shepherded the renaming of Melpomene (between Earhart and Baronne) through the city council. On November 8, 1976 the city council voted in favor of the renaming by a 5-1 margin over the lone opposition of an openly racist Joseph DiRosa.¹⁵⁷ A dryly written and short front-page article in *The Times-Picayune* noted that the street “traverses a heavily black Central City neighborhood.”¹⁵⁸ The African American newspaper, *The Louisiana Weekly*, also noted that the street is in a “predominantly black section of town”, but remarked that “The street will keep its present name from Carondelet to the River, a more heavily white-populated area.”¹⁵⁹ Accommodating historic preservationists, Davis negotiated with them and Lower Garden District residents to stop MLK before it crossed St. Charles.¹⁶⁰ It is most likely that Davis and other street renaming advocates thought it would be virtually impossible at the time to build political support for a boulevard named after Dr. King that would stretch into a predominantly white neighborhood. This was confirmed in interviews with a long-time Central City leader who felt that white opposition would have been too intense for the ordinance to pass a nearly all-white council. These political structures limited the commemoration of Dr. King to the segregated neighborhood of Central City.¹⁶¹

The reactions to the name change from several white community members ranged from anti-communistic to hostile preservationist to paternalistic—all imbued with racism typical of the time. The League For Less Government Inc. complained of Martin Luther King’s ties to communism and warned: “If we call ourselves Christians and patriotic Americans, we have little choice but to oppose our City Council on this action.”¹⁶² In a letter addressed to the “Members of the City Council (Except Joe DiRosa),” a Miss Blackmore wrote:

I am a 25 year old woman, a registered voter and my degree is in HISTORY. I can’t believe you voted to change Melpomene to Martin Luther King Street. I don’t care what the name was, it was just STUPID to mess up the street names of the Muses. It is interesting that the Muse Melpomene stands for TRAGEDY because it was tragic what happened!!!!!!!!!!!!¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ The Times-Picayune, “Street Names Honors King”, The Times-Picayune, Tuesday, November 9, 1976; Hirsch, 1992

¹⁵⁸ The Times-Picayune, “Street Names Honors King”, The Times-Picayune, Tuesday, November 9, 1976

¹⁵⁹ “Street Is Named For Dr. King,” *The Louisiana Weekly*, Saturday, November 20, 1976.

¹⁶⁰ Lynda Moreau, Letter to James Singleton, Councilman-District B, April 19, 1989, Amistad Research Center, Files of James Singleton, Box 25, MLK Name Change folder.

¹⁶¹ Mitchelson et al., 2007; Dwyer and Alderman, 2008a

¹⁶² Documents in New Orleans Public Library City Archives, A.L. Davis personal records box 5, Martin Luther King, Jr. folder.

¹⁶³ Ibid

Typical of a paternalistic valuation of African American culture, a local attorney remarked, “don’t you think that the Blacks in this city would gain a lot of *credit* if they made a determined effort to see that Martin Luther King Avenue becomes one of the best-kept streets in the City of New Orleans.”¹⁶⁴ A “Concerned Orleanian” wrote that Davis’ “real concern and objective should be directed against the so called ‘black youths’ who continually roam the streets...in order to prey, maim, and steal.... [Davis’] real civic duty is to point out to *your race* the true respect for discipline, law and order, rather than lending a hand to destroy the culture that Orleanians inherited from a past generation.”¹⁶⁵ Rather than recognizing the commemorative street as an opportunity to inspire African Americans and energize efforts to revitalize the neighborhood, white opponents negatively branded Dr. King and the boulevard. This “branding” of MLKs tends to “associate a particular, racially coded imagery characterized by economic disadvantage and urban decay” with the commemorative streets.¹⁶⁶ In the case of Central City, white opponents attempted to devalue and derail the commemoration of Dr. King and civil rights struggles. They failed in that effort, but they successfully segregated the commemoration to Central City.

Electoral politics in Central City became increasingly contentious after Davis broke the City Council’s color line. In the campaign for the Council seat in 1977, Davis fended off several challengers who claimed that his health was failing, that he was unavailable to the public, and that he “is not aggressive in trying to deal with problems of the district.”¹⁶⁷ One of the challengers, James Singleton, focused his campaign on housing rehabilitation and “job standards of the service industry so those workers can be paid better salaries.”¹⁶⁸ In response, Davis said one of his “chief accomplishments was getting a section of Melpomene Street renamed Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard” and that “he has seen to it that ‘some of the streets of the district’ have been upgraded. He said he has also worked to bring conventions to the city to stimulate the economy.”¹⁶⁹ Davis won the reelection, but his health dwindled and he passed away in 1978. Davis’ legacy was cut short and “When he died, a lot of things that he had planned just died with him,” including the effort to fully develop the “Freedom Walk” along MLK, according to a long-time Central City leader.

The political dimensions of commemoration also erupted at that time. Community leaders, city officials, and the CCEOC conducted meetings in the early 1970s to fund a sculpture to be

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. (emphasis added)

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. (emphasis added)

¹⁶⁶ Mitchelson et al., 2007: p. 123

¹⁶⁷ Anderson, Ed, “5 Candidates Seeking District ‘B’ Council Seat, The Times-Picayune, September 20, 1977.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

placed at the intersection of Melpomene and Dryades, which was funded by an Economic Development Authority grant.¹⁷⁰ An African American professor and artist named Frank Hayden designed an abstract sculpture of hands intermingling in a display of racial harmony. The city unveiled the sculpture and the “Martin Luther King Walkway” along Melpomene Avenue a few months before the city council passed the name change. When it was unveiled in August of 1976, the sculpture immediately became the subject of much heated conversation about the proper way to commemorate Dr. King. At a ceremony with speeches from A.L. Davis, James Singleton, and Mayor Moon Landrieu, among others, the responses to the sculpture stole the show. One “vocal” resident felt that “we as a people have been abstracted all our lives, it’s time for us to be reflected realistically. It looks like a Martian who invaded the ghetto.”¹⁷¹ By December of 1976, the CCEOC already appointed a task force to “discuss the current dissatisfaction shared generally by the community over what the monument represents.”¹⁷² As seen throughout the country, commemorating historical figures is a highly political act and is “limited by competition and conflict among parties of social actors wishing to narrate the past differently.”¹⁷³

The derision of the abstract sculpture continued for years, until a bust of Dr. King was erected at S. Claiborne and MLK in 1981.¹⁷⁴ The debate over the sculpture demonstrated that the early commemorative initiatives did not effectively organize at the grassroots level with residents, often relying on the political muster of ministers and politicians.¹⁷⁵ Political leaders, like A.L. Davis, moved the efforts along, in conjunction with organizations like the CCEOC, and came into direct confrontation with residents who wanted another kind of recognition for Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁷⁶

The bust of King catalyzed more widespread acceptance of civil rights commemoration and conversation about the connection between commemoration and revitalization (both sculptures are shown in Appendix C). In a showing of enthusiasm for the bust, Central City residents contributed the \$29,000 to pay for it. Thousands of people attended the unveiling on Dr. King’s birthday, which

¹⁷⁰ Letter to A.L. Davis from Robert Tucker, Executive Assistant to Mayor, December 15, 1976; A.L. Davis personal records box 2, Central City folder.

¹⁷¹ CCEOC, *Profile: The People’s Newspaper*, November, 1976, p. 2; A.L. Davis personal records box 2, Central City folder.

¹⁷² Letter to A.L. Davis from CCEOC, December 10, 1976; A.L. Davis personal records box 2, Central City folder.

¹⁷³ Dwyer and Alderman, 2008b, p. 171

¹⁷⁴ Documents in New Orleans Public Library City Archives, A.L. Davis personal records box 5, Martin Luther King, Jr. folder. A legion of high school students from McDonough-35 derided the abstract sculpture as not signifying their vision of the civil rights struggle. Most of the students mentioned that they wanted a realistic bust of Martin Luther King, Jr. A small minority of students recognized the merit of an abstract sculpture.

¹⁷⁵ Dwyer and Alderman, 2008a

¹⁷⁶ Davidson, N.R., “Unveiling of Dr. King Statue Set For Jan. 15,” *The Louisiana Weekly*, January 10, 1981

was considered to be the largest MLK Day event in New Orleans at that time. At the ceremony, Mayor Dutch Morial urged the crowd to “establish a new agenda for the decade of the 80s. Let us talk about the issues of improved housing, better education, and sincere peace and harmony for all of us that are this nation. Let us take care of our children and address the elements of racism and divisiveness.”¹⁷⁷

Central City’s troubles deepened in the 1980s when the economy tanked and drugs and violence rampantly swept through the neighborhood, further alienating the community from resources and investment.¹⁷⁸ This was also a time when Central City purged residents, losing a significant share of its population.¹⁷⁹ As in African American communities throughout the nation, “Segregation concentrated the deprivation created during the 1970s and 1980s to yield intense levels of social and economic isolation.”¹⁸⁰ Moreover, between 1980 and 2000, New Orleans changed from merely a segregated city to being considered hypersegregated, with African American populations more concentrated, clustered, and isolated than ever before.¹⁸¹ In this context, Central City leaders mounted another civil rights commemorative campaign to reenergize the revitalization of Dryades Street, MLK Boulevard, and Central City as a whole.

In 1989, James Singleton, who was then the councilman from District B in Central City, co-sponsored two street name changes. Singleton “became interested in applying King’s name to the remaining portion of Melpomene because of complaints that Martin Luther King Boulevard ends at a white neighborhood.”¹⁸² Originally the ordinance proposed extending MLK all the way to the Mississippi River through a predominantly affluent white community in Coliseum Square. This proposal again drew fierce resistance from white residents, the Coliseum Square Association, and historic preservationists. According to the president of the Coliseum Square Association, “We have no problems with Dr. King...it’s just that he wasn’t a Greek Muse.”¹⁸³ One woman wrote that: “A compromise was reached in 1977 that would rename only that portion of Melpomene above Baronne Street. For certain members of the City Council to come back twelve years later and try to renege on this arrangement seems to me to be grossly unfair to the property owners and residents

¹⁷⁷ Fealing, Ken, “Thousands At King Statue Unveiling,” *The Louisiana Weekly*, January 24, 1981

¹⁷⁸ Lauria et al., 1995; Smith, 2007; Ross and Leigh, 2000. For more information on the perception of crime as a structural deterrent to investment, see Ross and Leigh (2000).

¹⁷⁹ Interview with community leader

¹⁸⁰ Massey and Denton, 1993, p. 220

¹⁸¹ The differences between 1980 and 2000 census data analysis are shown in Massey and Denton (1993) and Denton (2006)

¹⁸² Egger, Bruce and Coleman Warner, “Melpomene, Dryades may get new names,” *The Times-Picayune*, April 19, 1989.

¹⁸³ Egger, Bruce, “Street renaming cut short,” *The Times-Picayune*, April 21, 1989.

who live in the Coliseum Square area.”¹⁸⁴ After petitions, letters, and significant public pressure, Singleton acquiesced and amended the ordinance to rename MLK between Baronne and St. Charles—a mere two blocks.¹⁸⁵ According to Singleton, “‘The Muses mean very little to me personally, but I can see it makes a lot of sense to keep the name, the way the streets were done’, with all nine together.” The city council voted 6-0 in favor of extending MLK to St. Charles on April 20, 1989.¹⁸⁶ The promotion of King’s legacy as one that attempts to bridge the segregated residential divide was not enough to overcome staunch white cultural resistance—even that which was allegedly race neutral.

Nationally, it is common for African American leaders to attempt to bridge distinct racial communities, and equally likely that white opposition “scales” the extent of commemoration to segregated communities.¹⁸⁷ “When commemorating King, African Americans are often concerned about the location of the named street in relation to the white community and the extent to which the street serves as a geographic bridge between races. Accompanying the importance of naming a long and prominent thoroughfare is the equally important desire to name a street that reaches beyond the confines of the black community.”¹⁸⁸ As in the case of the MLK in Central City, commemorative streets often fail to transcend these racial boundaries. One community leader felt that white opposition was because of Dr. King “being who he was and they just did not want that because he was a Black man and they wanted Melpomene to stay there because that depicted white. So they said this is alright, this is all black so you can leave it there.” Though many MLKs connect different racially defined communities, they more often than not stop at the literal or figurative tracks, such as the MLK in New Orleans, which abruptly stops at the Uptown St. Charles street car line (Figure 3c). The abrupt end to MLK and the “suffering associated with King Boulevard in New Orleans prompts us to consider how the Civil Rights Movement, both in terms of how it changed society and how it is remembered, is a project that is far from being complete.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Lynda Moreau, Letter to James Singleton, Councilman-District B, April 19, 1989, Amistad Research Center, Files of James Singleton, Box 25, MLK Name Change folder.

¹⁸⁵ Numerous letters and a petition against the extension are available at the Amistad Research Center, Files of James Singleton, Box 25, MLK Name Change folder.

¹⁸⁶ Egger, Bruce, “Street renaming cut short,” *The Times-Picayune*, April 21, 1989.

¹⁸⁷ Alderman, 2000b; Mitchelson et al., 2007

¹⁸⁸ Alderman, 2003, p. 166

¹⁸⁹ Dwyer and Alderman, 2008a, figure 21



Figure 3c. Martin Luther King Jr. and Melpomene join at St. Charles streetcar line (Author's photo)

Although less vehement than the open white racism in 1976, the proposed extension of MLK brought vocal opposition from the white business community affected by the proposed name change. The president of Mardi Gras Masquerade, Inc. (MGM)—a costume rental company located on Melpomene—wrote in opposition to the name change, claiming, “I hope you realize the hardships that a street change would place on MGM Costume rentals....If we lose these years of establishment and identification with a New Orleans Art neighborhood...I must seriously consider a move out of New Orleans.”¹⁹⁰ In addition, several business owners, including MGM, claimed that the business expense of changing stationery would force the closure of the business.¹⁹¹ Although no national survey has been done to show the impact of address changes, anecdotal evidence found it to be negligible.¹⁹² As seen in renaming debates around the country, “commercial interests are consistently the most vocal opponents to having their address change, citing not only the cost and inconvenience but also the potential stigma of having their street identified with King and, as they

¹⁹⁰ Bob Cahlman, President of Mardi Gras Masquerade, Inc., Letter to James Singleton, Councilman-District B, April 19, 1989, Amistad Research Center, Files of James Singleton, Box 25, MLK Name Change folder.

¹⁹¹ Notes to James Singleton, Amistad Research Center, Files of James Singleton, Box 25, MLK Name Change folder.

¹⁹² Alderman et al., 2008

perceive it, the African American community.”¹⁹³ As in this case, the outspoken business opposition to MLK renaming can sometimes have “material effects”, which “influence[s] consumer behavior, investment decisions.”¹⁹⁴ In New Orleans, as in other cities, the branding of civil rights commemorative boulevards resembles redlining—directly influencing investment decisions—and also the threat of blockbusting, where white business owners flee in the face of a name change, leaving vacant buildings in their wake.¹⁹⁵

On the same day in April of 1989, 11 blocks of Dryades—encompassing the historic commercial corridor—became Oretha Castle Haley¹⁹⁶ Boulevard. Similar to the desire in the African American community to extend MLK, some leaders wished the renaming of Dryades to extend further “all the way to Louisiana Avenue...because it’s still a black area.” Council member Dorothy Mae Taylor introduced the ordinance to honor Haley—one of her long-time friends who passed away in 1987. Taylor was quoted as saying that Haley, “brought hope to a dying city, brought hope to people who felt they were nobodies.”¹⁹⁷ The only opponent on the city council was Peggy Wilson who criticized the way the name change was introduced and that she had deep memories of shopping on Dryades in her childhood. One leader in Central City later exclaimed that O.C. Haley was an “African American Street,”¹⁹⁸ proclaiming that the street ultimately was now in the hands of the African American community. Although these competing memories affected the renaming debate, they did not seem to influence the momentum towards revitalizing the area. Both the “proponents and opponents agreed that to make the new name meaningful, the city will have to seek ways to upgrade the new Haley Boulevard, a long-time shopping district that has become badly deteriorated.”¹⁹⁹ There are, however, continuing tensions between the historic preservationists and Central City African Americans over how to redevelop properties in the neighborhood, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

One of the common political outcomes arising from controversial street renaming debates is the use of a street renaming ordinance, which determines a precise methodology for renaming a street. During the debate over renaming O.C. Haley, Councilmember Wilson was quoted as saying

¹⁹³ Mitchelson et al., 2007, p. 123

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 142

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Oretha Castle married Richard Haley and so she took the full name of Oretha Castle Haley (Rogers, 1993).

¹⁹⁷ Egger, Bruce, “Street renaming cut short,” *The Times-Picayune*, April 21, 1989. For more information on Oretha Castle Haley’s life and work in New Orleans, see Rogers (1993).

¹⁹⁸ Schleifstein, Mark, “Many hope the first financial institution in a generation to set up shop on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard is a sign of the area’s rebirth,” *The Times-Picayune*, December 11, 2004.

¹⁹⁹ Egger, Bruce, “Street renaming cut short,” *The Times-Picayune*, April 21, 1989.

that “such changes should be made only ‘according to established procedures.’”²⁰⁰ In New Orleans, there was clearly enough controversy over the renaming of streets, schools, and parks in the 1980s-90s to create a street renaming ordinance in November of 1994.²⁰¹ The history of New Orleans, even street names, is a highly contentious and influential part of city’s “romance, tradition and mystique,” which is why preservationists formed a unified front against the name change.²⁰² In many ways, the heated debate over commemorating public space is a necessary element of democratic participation and that:

To some extent at least, community opposition toward any naming gesture ought to be taken into account. Imposing a name on a particular geographic community forces people to honor and remember an individual that a majority of the affected political subdivision may not view favorably. One might counter, however, that this is exactly the segment of the public that could significantly benefit from exposure to certain kinds of values and diversity through the selective naming of mainstream public facilities. Naming gestures could have a normalizing effect on names that were previously controversial or polarizing, paving the way for enhanced consideration, if not acceptance, of the views or values that these names represent, after opposition subsided.²⁰³

It is unclear, however, that street renaming ordinances solve the problem of how to develop equitable political decision-making processes for historically marginalized people. Ordinances often require signatures or petitions from residents and so “at the heart of the ordinance issue is the question of boundaries and who has a stake in the decision-making politics of street renaming.”²⁰⁴

Conclusion

The Civil Rights Movement in New Orleans began in the Central City neighborhood, as well as the commemoration of these struggles in the form of street renaming and public art. The movement to rename streets after Dr. King and Oretha Castle Haley arose from African American political power struggles and organizing that came out of the War on Poverty programs of the 1960s. This newfound power allowed for the negotiation of civil rights commemoration in highly contested arenas to literally change the physical and historical power that whites had over the landscape.²⁰⁵ It did not, however, overcome the white political structures that affected the location

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ New Orleans City Planning Commission, Administrative Rules, Policies, and Procedures, March 25, 2008: http://www.cityofno.com/Portals/Portal52/Resources/2008_RulesPolicies%20Procedures-Final.pdf. For more discussion on the background and effects of street renaming ordinances, see Alderman et al. (2008)

²⁰² Lind, Angus, “Renaming streets can be a real dead end,” The Times-Picayune, April 28, 1989. Interestingly, there is no mention in any of the news articles or letters to council members that St. Charles was originally named Nayades.

²⁰³ Bartow, 2007, p. 951

²⁰⁴ Alderman et al, 2008

²⁰⁵ Alderman et al., 2008; Dwyer, 2000; Dwyer and Alderman, 2008a; Mitchelson et al., 2007

and scale of the street renaming. The persistent stigmatization of Martin Luther King Jr. himself and the African American community in general, as well as conflicts over preserving the “history” of New Orleans, perpetuated the segregation of African American heritage to Central City.

Unfortunately, the effects of dividing the street and political landscape had consequences that renaming could not overcome, with large macro social forces such as structural racism, segregation, and disinvestment affecting Central City from the outside as well as within.

Commemoration and politics are intimately intertwined. Central City leaders used civil rights commemoration as a way to challenge white controlled institutions and representation of history.²⁰⁶ Additionally, community leaders and residents debated the meaning and usefulness of commemoration within the confines of segregation. Despite its limitations, civil rights commemoration can be instrumental in challenging segregation, structural racism, and the denial of resources to African American communities. As such, the selection and repetitive use of appropriate civil rights narratives are important for framing the political struggles for equality. It is most advantageous to use commemoration at politically strategic times to affect change for segregated African American communities.

²⁰⁶ Dwyer and Alderman, 2008a

Although much has been made of the failure of a half-century's efforts to revitalize the inner city, very little has been made of the failure to acknowledge how continued racism has defeated these revitalization efforts.²⁰⁷

4

The Long Struggle for a Revitalized Central City

Revitalization efforts in Central City started more than forty years ago and persist through each turbulent decade. Through the years, “Central City has been a target area for every style of planning that has happened.”²⁰⁸ An immense amount of planning, funding, and community energy went into the few successful and many unsuccessful anchor developments in the neighborhood. Community-based organizations and dedicated individuals sustained the revitalization efforts with their unceasing and evolving vision of a Central City renaissance, tying the civil rights history and vibrant culture of the neighborhood to a growing awareness for culture-based heritage tourism.²⁰⁹ As a new growth industry, heritage tourism offers a potential avenue for economic development and investment in Central City, especially in a city with a strong tourism economy. However, as this tool for economic development spreads around the country, specifically within African American communities in the South, competition among neighborhoods and between cities limit the tool's impacts for Central City.²¹⁰ Moreover, the question remains whether an African American tourism economy can integrate fully with the larger economy and bring an end to structural racism.

The glacial pace of revitalization often provokes criticism of neighborhood reinvestment initiatives. These criticisms, however, often ignore the structural impediments to revitalizing a blighted and disinvested African American community.²¹¹ As shown in the previous chapters, structural racism created segregated neighborhoods and economies and exaggerated resource and power inequities. In the context of Central City's revitalization, fragmented public policy and planning, budget cuts, and continued economic segregation maintain historical inequities and

²⁰⁷ Ross and Leigh, 2000, p. 377

²⁰⁸ Interview with community leader

²⁰⁹ Heritage tourism and culture-based heritage tourism will be used interchangeably, but the emphasis on “culture-based” is to show the living culture and history, rather than static recordings of the past as in some heritage tourism projects. For more discussion on heritage tourism, see Dwyer and Alderman (2008a) and Inwood (2010).

²¹⁰ Inwood, 2010

²¹¹ Ross and Leigh, 2000; Taylor Jr. and Cole, 2001

structures for African Americans.²¹² This fragmentation created funding discrepancies and investment constraints, impeding the ability for Central City to develop the massive resources necessary to reach a “turning point” towards reinvestment and economic integration.²¹³ Moreover, mainstream neighborhood revitalization strategies do not sufficiently address the long struggle in African American communities to overcome structural racism.²¹⁴ A new revitalization and planning movement—one cognizant of structural impediments to redevelopment, imbued with living history, and armed with a strategy and vision for realizing a turning point—offers the potential to be a “change strategy” in overcoming historical inequities.²¹⁵ It is precisely at the intersection of history, culture, structural racism, and planning for revitalization that we find civil rights commemorative streets poised for such an analysis.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of some early revitalization efforts that laid the foundation for more recent developments in Central City. Then, I review several of the most important plans for Central City produced over the last two decades, showing the consistency of language for revitalization around heritage tourism and the limitations of the planning process. Finally, I review several anchor projects along Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard and MLK and the structural impediments preventing the full articulation of Central City’s “turning point.”

Early Revitalization Efforts

The Model Cities and Urban Renewal programs—both authorized in Louisiana in 1968—offered a renewed direction towards housing, infrastructure, and economic development in Central City. Numerous studies, plans, and promises were made in the early 1970s as the City of New Orleans geared up for investing federal funds in distressed neighborhoods throughout the city. Though some of the funds went to the housing and infrastructure improvements, the vast majority

²¹² Grant-Thomas and Powell, 2008; Smith, 2007; Taylor and Cole, 2001

²¹³ Taylor and Cole, 2001; Ross and Leigh, 2000. Ross and Leigh (2000) identify economic integration as one of the most important determinants of whether revitalization strategies have been successful.

²¹⁴ For more discussion on mainstream revitalization and its limitations, see Taylor Jr. and Cole (2001). In particular, mainstream revitalization, as a means to bring about “fundamental transformation of poor neighborhoods,” “fragmented into a series of uncoordinated, disjointed activities in which the sum is much less than the individual parts” (Taylor Jr. and Cole, 2001, pp. 3-4). Examples of these fragmented pieces are: enterprise zones, tax districts, community development corporations, and other community development and economic development initiatives. These initiatives—which are still vital components in redevelopment—separated race and class issues from economic development, housing, and other community issues, and ultimately downplayed the impacts of larger structural forces impacting inner city neighborhoods (Taylor Jr. and Cole, 2001, p. 7).

²¹⁵ Taylor Jr. and Cole, 2001; Ross and Leigh, 2000; Thomas and Ritzdorf, 1996. See Ross and Leigh (2000, p. 369) for more discussion on the interplay between “change vehicles” and “change strategies.” Change vehicles are most commonly the community or government, and strategies are grouped by “economic or social focus.”

of federal funds went to downtown and riverfront development. Ultimately, the city's investment of federal funds in major economic development and tourism—such as the Superdome and the 1984 World's Fair—bypassed an opportunity to address structural change for target neighborhoods. Furthermore, rather than provide a singular vision for the redevelopment of New Orleans' blighted neighborhoods, the city's fragmented approach to economic development and metropolitan governance stalled early revitalization efforts.²¹⁶

The most telling evidence of the City of New Orleans' housing priorities under the Model Cities Program is shown in letters between Central City housing developers and Mayor Moon Landrieu's office in the early 1970s. The Central City Housing Development Corporation (CCHDC) showed frustration with the pace of housing investment and the lack of focus on lower-income housing solutions. In the CCHDC's perspective, "It appears that the [housing] policy is to assist 'Private Industry' rather than 'private owner occupants and individuals.'"²¹⁷ In another letter, the CCHDC claimed "it was geared up to build houses with a ready market of approved buyers when a moratorium was placed on subsidized housing in January 1973. Prior to that it was put in a holding position by Model Cities and told to do nothing but exist."²¹⁸ The Nixon administration's moratorium on federally subsidized housing in 1973 began the process of federal retrenchment in housing policy and directly impacted federally dependent and limited capacity organizations like the CCHDC. In an "era of fiscal austerity and declining urban resources...the political isolation of blacks makes them extremely vulnerable to cutbacks in governmental services and public investments."²¹⁹

Only one major housing development—Satchmo Plaza, which took 7 years to develop 34 units²²⁰—opened between the 1960s and the late 1990s in Central City.²²¹ As shown as early as the 1950s, "despite increasing Negro political power, income and rising standards of expectation affecting housing, the market forces at work in New Orleans still seem to be incapable of supplying

²¹⁶ Lauria et al., 1995

²¹⁷ Letter from John B. Armant, President of Central City Housing Development Corporation to the City of New Orleans CAO, Terrence Duvernay, February 25, 1977; A.L. Davis personal records box 2, Central City folder, New Orleans Public Library City Archives.

²¹⁸ The Model Neighborhood Housing Development Corporation, "A Viewpoint That's Often Overlooked," by Mrs. Lois Martin, Executive Director of CCHCD, February 26, 1975; Jim Singleton Files, Box 37, Dryades Street Improvement file, Amistad Research Center.

²¹⁹ Massey and Denton, 1993, p. 158

²²⁰ Mitchell, Therese, "Praised CCHCD Director Now Told She's Not Needed," The Times-Picayune, April 30, 1980; Interviews with CCEOC

²²¹ Lauria et al., 1995. Interviews also confirmed that housing development was negligible during these decades.

sufficient good housing to this part of the community.”²²² The private and public housing development constraints persisted for decades as the neighborhood continued to lose its population and the aging neighborhood became increasingly blighted. The combination of Central City’s isolation from private investment, fragmented public policy and planning, and dwindling public funding sources created a toxic environment for housing development.

Some improvements along Dryades Street materialized in the 1970s. In an effort to keep business attractive along Dryades, which already significantly declined, a partnership between the City of New Orleans, CCEOC, Community Improvement Agency, and the Dryades Street Businessman’s Association invested funds in streetscaping in 1975-1976 (Figure 4a). Even with partnerships between public and private organizations, there was apparently not enough funds allocated for maintenance, and within a few years the plants were dying and newly installed benches were “becoming unusable.”²²³ One long-time businessman along Dryades lamented the state of the street and warned that only certain private investment strategies would renew what he called “Little Canal.” Asked whether there was a chance for Dryades to be revitalized, he said, “Yes, the potential is still here. But we have to get some of the national chain stores to locate here. Like Shoe Town, Sears, or K-Mart. They would have the prestige to bring people back to Dryades. A large store would have the impact on customers. It’s the only salvation. The small merchant will never improve Dryades Street again.”²²⁴ This haunting perspective forewarns of the powerful structural impediments inhibiting African American small business revitalization along O.C. Haley.



Figure 4a. Dryades Street Improvement Project, 1975-1976. A.L Davis is 2nd from right and James Singleton is 5th from right. New Orleans Public Library City Archives

²²² LaViolette, 1960, p. 134

²²³ Hannusch, Jeff, “Dryades Street Merchant: The Owner of the Vogue talk about his 48 years on ‘Little Canal,’” *Dixie, Times-Picayune* Sunday Edition, December 13, 1981.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

One plan in the mid-1970s called the Heritage Square Planning Project (HSPP) attempted to create cultural, commercial, and housing opportunities for Central City. Sponsored by the Urban League of New Orleans, CCEOC, and city and federal officials, the HSPP targeted a large Central City parcel on Dryades Street for heritage tourism and mixed-use development. “The major objective of the project is to develop a process for revitalizing the Central City Community....It could provide a focus, a rallying point for a new sense of awareness and pride in the moment of the black experience in our nation’s development.”²²⁵ Even though citizen participation in the project identified a widespread desire for “broad-based community ownership of the ventures that are developed,”²²⁶ the heritage aspect of the plan focused on developing a “mall or strip incorporating commercial and entertainment facilities which are oriented toward the history and culture of Black Americans.”²²⁷ The plan does not make it clear how history or culture would influence development in a commercial mall or strip; rather, the plan seemed to commodify the African American experience just like in many other heritage tourism developments.²²⁸ Despite publicly funded plans and market analyses—Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) funded the project as late as 1980²²⁹—the project required considerable private sector investment. Although it is unclear the exact reasons for HSPP’s failure, it is likely that private lending institutions failed to invest in the African American businesses along a significantly disinvested corridor.²³⁰ This project would have been the first heritage tourism anchor on the historic Dryades Street, and it offers historical context to future plans for a cultural arts corridor.

Even though public funding for economic development in 1970s-80s prioritized massive downtown projects, Central City successfully built some heritage tourism infrastructure (as shown in Chapter 3). Within the context of a growing effort to revitalize O.C. Haley and MLK in the 80s and 90s, a fledgling African American heritage tourism business ventured into Central City. Called “Roots of New Orleans,” a daily tour started in 1993 that took tourists around the city to show “how African Americans have worked and played and contributed in New Orleans since the time of slavery.” One part of the tour led visitors “through the heart of black New Orleans”—down Claiborne, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard—and mentioned the

²²⁵ Heritage Square Planning Project, Commercial Development Analysis, M.R. Garcia and Company, Inc., June 18, 1976, pp.4-5; Jim Singleton Files, Box 37, Heritage Square Planning Project, Amistad Research Center.

²²⁶ Ibid, p. 7.

²²⁷ The Heritage Square Development Corporation, Application for Housing and Community Development Funding, 1976, p. 3; Jim Singleton Files, Box 37, Heritage Square Planning Project, Amistad Research Center.

²²⁸ Inwood, 2010

²²⁹ The Times Picayune, May 23, 1980, Sect. 1, p. 22

²³⁰ Immergluck, 2004, p. 64

importance of civil rights activities and landmarks in the city, such as the Dryades YMCA and the formation of the SCLC in Central City. The tour essentially charted the existing heritage infrastructure of the “Freedom Walk” designed along MLK and arriving at historic O.C. Haley. According to one participant on the tour:

“There are parts of the city that people really don’t get to see. This is like the real life New Orleans....Most (white) people know that they (black people) were slaves and in cotton fields. That’s all of what most people know.”²³¹

Despite the creation of this particular tour in the early 1990s, the general New Orleans tourism business, with few exceptions, rarely acknowledged important landmarks of the African American experience. The reasons most cited for this were personal safety and the fact that “black heritage sites have either been destroyed, neglected, or undeveloped by the city.”²³² Even though Central City played a pivotal role in the local and national campaign for civil rights, the derelict buildings, reported high crime rates, and poverty affected its potential as a business corridor and heritage tourism site. To reverse this trend, community organizations and political leaders envisioned a Black Cultural Tourism District along O.C. Haley. This vision continues to unfold with each successive plan for O.C. Haley and Central City.

The Plan Goes On...

Civil rights commemoration directly influenced planning efforts in Central City as far back as the 1970s, but the pace quickened during the 1990s following the renaming of Dryades to O.C. Haley Boulevard. Community organizations fused commemoration with a dynamic cultural renaissance of O.C. Haley and Central City, changing the focus of commemoration from a static recording of past events to a celebration of the intertwining of living culture, commerce, and history. These organizations, and many leaders and residents in the community, participated in plan after plan for the neighborhood and the O.C. Haley and MLK corridors. Throughout, plans for the boulevard developed a consistent language and vision for the revitalization, which kept the momentum for reinvestment alive, but also raises questions about who is carrying the torch of revitalization—residents or community-based organizations—and whom will redevelopment benefit in Central City. Moreover, the fragmented planning process in New Orleans over the last few

²³¹ Warner, Coleman, “Coming Together Tour Highlights City’s Hidden History: Some ways people in the area are working to improve race relations,” *The Times-Picayune*, June 17, 1993.

²³² Thomas, 2005, p. 6

decades demonstrates that traditional planning models are likely inappropriate to deal with structural racism, segregation, and historical inequalities for African American inner city communities.²³³

O.C. Haley Black Cultural Tourism District ('95) and Redevelopment: An Opportunity for Renewal ('97)

Leaders in Central City created the first culture-based redevelopment plan for O.C. Haley in 1995. Motivated “out of concern for the economic survival of the Black race” and worried that only 2% of New Orleans’ businesses were owned by African Americans, the CCEOC led the effort to create the O.C. Haley Black Cultural Tourism District (the District).²³⁴ The District—a collaborative effort between the CCEOC, city officials, business organizations, and African American-owned banks—envisioned the boulevard’s revitalization as a series of African American owned and operated anchor projects with a “cultural-based theme” that would spark further redevelopment.²³⁵ “The District will highlight and profile Black culture by providing ‘Living History’ to locals and visitors alike who enjoy music, food, and theatrical performances.” The purpose of this model would be to create a “vertically-integrated tourism district” that would be a model for “Black youth” on how African Americans can own, operate, and celebrate their own enterprising culture. A major anchor of the boulevard would be the Black Cultural and Educational Center to “revitalize and highlight the traditional history of jazz, and other Black culture in the District.”²³⁶

Over the course of a few years, the District plan turned into more concrete proposals in the *O.C. Haley Boulevard Redevelopment: An Opportunity for Renewal* study (Redevelopment Study). The Redevelopment Study gave further clarity to the anchor projects (but made no mention of the Black Cultural and Educational Center) and gave details on the financing and expected leasing for the developments.²³⁷ The Central City Councilmember at the time, Oliver Thomas, “expresse[d] the

²³³ Thomas and Ritzdorf, 1996; Ross and Leigh, 1999; Taylor Jr. and Cole, 2001; Grant-Thomas and Powell, 2008

²³⁴ Central City Economic Opportunity Corporation, O.C. Haley Black Cultural Tourism District, Memorandum to Members of the Planning and Development Team, April 2, 1997, New Orleans Public Library City Archives, Mayor Marc Morial, Economic Development and Policy Planning Division, Records of the Office of Tourism, Arts and Entertainment, Tourism Files, Box 8, O.C. Haley Redevelopment Project folder.

²³⁵ *O.C. Haley Black Cultural Tourism District*, O.C. Haley Investment Corporation’s Plan for Economic Development, Hewitt-Washington & Associates, 1995, New Orleans Public Library City Archives, Mayor Marc Morial, Economic Development and Policy Planning Division, Records of the Office of Tourism, Arts and Entertainment, Tourism Files, Box 8, O.C. Haley Redevelopment Project folder, p. 17.

²³⁶ Ibid, p. 3

²³⁷ Central City Renaissance Alliance, Working Towards Solutions, A Community Plan, Prepared by Concordia LLC, October 20, 2004; O.C. Haley Boulevard Redevelopment: An Opportunity for Renewal, The Handelman Building Project and The Venus Gardens Project, October 15, 1997, New Orleans Public Library City Archives, Mayor Marc Morial, Economic Development and Policy Planning Division, Records of the Office of Tourism, Arts and Entertainment, Tourism Files, Box 8, O.C. Haley Redevelopment Project folder.

hope for more private investors and more government seed money” as a result of the study.²³⁸ Even so, the Redevelopment Study identified several weaknesses with the projects, namely that the area is “declining” with poor housing stock, that collateral is “weak,” and that there are “risks associated with start up businesses.”²³⁹

The Redevelopment Study identified two main projects to anchor the cultural aspect of the plan and spark reinvestment. One anchor would be a renovated historic Handelman Building, containing a street-level restaurant and hotel suites above. According to the project’s sponsor, CCEOC, the development took more than 10 years to complete—with numerous financial challenges along the way because of organizational capacity and lack of tax credit expertise—but it now houses several mission-driven non-profits and low- to moderate-income housing units. A companion anchor, called the Venus Gardens, was intended to be a renovated historic building filled with commercial space and market-rate loft apartments.²⁴⁰ Moved along by the financial support of a bank, the project got off the ground quickly. The developers convinced the non-profit, Efforts of Grace, to open Ashé Cultural Arts Center, which now owns the apartments above and rents them as affordable units to artists. Both anchor projects from the Redevelopment Study are currently occupied, but the plans did not trigger massive reinvestment in restaurant, music, and art venues²⁴¹—even with the financial backing of a bank. Nor did the developments bring middle-class residents that could fill market-rate apartments. These developments did, however, trigger further planning for the boulevard and created the first working document for a cultural arts district.

1999 Land Use Plan

The City of New Orleans’ 1999 Land Use Plan (the 1999 Plan) for District Two includes plans for competing neighborhoods that are often at odds over the redevelopment of O.C. Haley and Central City in general. Tellingly, the 1999 Plan lacks any reference to the previous Black Cultural Tourism District plans for O.C. Haley. Overall, the focus of the 1999 Plan is on public housing redevelopment (along MLK in particular), mixed-use revitalization of blighted residential and commercial buildings, and a particularly strong focus on historic preservation. This is not

²³⁸ “Bring Back Haley Boulevard,” The Times-Picayune, date unknown, located at New Orleans Public Library City Archives, Files of Mayor Marc Morial, Office of Administration, Subject files 1994-2002, Box 4, “O.C. Haley Tourism District” folder.

²³⁹ O.C. Haley Boulevard Redevelopment: An Opportunity for Renewal, The Handelman Building Project and The Venus Gardens Project, October 15, 1997. See footnote 235 for document location.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ The Zeitgeist Theater moved to O.C. Haley, but interviews showed that Zeitgeist is considered an asset to the boulevard, but not a fundamental partner in the revitalization efforts along O.C. Haley.

surprising considering the rich architectural history of the district. Preservation, however, has been a very troublesome conversation in Central City, as the goals of white preservationists from more affluent parts of the district often take precedence over the needs of the Central City community.

The 1999 Plan targeted O.C. Haley Boulevard for mixed-use reinvestment. There is no comprehensive strategy or vision to achieve a fully revitalized boulevard. Blanket recommendations for preservation of existing buildings and mixed-use development give little context or planning goals for a neighborhood significantly affected by disinvestment and blight.²⁴² The 1999 Plan recognizes some inherent tensions between historic preservation and revitalization, but it does not offer recommendations on how to reconcile the significant differences:

The main issue confronting District Two is one of balancing a dire need for redevelopment and revitalization of the distressed neighborhoods while, at the same time, protecting and preserving their historic character and architecture. Many local, as well as national examples show that goals of economic development and historic preservations could, or should be one and the same. However, the success of this “dual” approach relies on the determination of all segments of the community to work together and articulate strategies for a successful revitalization of the area.²⁴³

More than a decade after the 1999 Plan, with revitalization continuing to move slowly, the recommended dual approach did not prove successful. Boasting of the power of historical preservation as a tool for revitalization, the New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission claimed, “Landmark protection over the past decade has prevented this area from becoming completely devastated.”²⁴⁴ Although community leaders in Central City strive to protect historic buildings, the single biggest impediment to revitalization along O.C. Haley, according to one Central City leader, is the dominance of historic preservationists in redevelopment decisions—just as in commemoration decisions.²⁴⁵ Another leader emphasized that Central City plans prioritized people over real estate, unlike historic preservationists.²⁴⁶ These debates, left open-ended in the 1999 Plan, emphasize that traditional land use planning is unfit for “increasing justice and cooperation between urban planners and the African American urban community” as well as reconciling differences between politically inequitable interest groups.²⁴⁷ Without recognizing the inequities and history of

²⁴² The 1999 Plan does not reference the dynamics or demographics of citizen participation in the planning process so it is likely that Central City residents were under-represented.

²⁴³ New Orleans Land Use Plan: April 1999, Planning District Two: Central City/Garden District, p. 75.

²⁴⁴ New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission, *Central City Landmarks Designation Report*, 2010, p. 6.

²⁴⁵ The same community leader noted that Garden District historic preservationists continue to plan for parts of Central City without the full participation of neighborhood residents or leaders.

²⁴⁶ For an analysis of the economic development potential and the displacement impacts of historic preservation see Listokin et al. (1998).

²⁴⁷ Thomas and Ritzdorf, 1996, p. 17.

racism between segregated communities, the planning process is unlikely to properly address structural racism in the African American inner city.²⁴⁸

Central City Renaissance Alliance Plan

Unsurprisingly, the 1999 Plan did not satisfy residents and community-based organizations in Central City. In collaboration with the department of planning and resource development in the New Orleans' office of community development, community organizations in Central City obtained CDBG and foundation grants for a new planning process that would build capacity for neighborhood organizations and create a vision for the entire community. This process culminated in 2004 with the creation of the Central City Renaissance Alliance's Community Plan (CCRA Plan) conducted by Concordia LLC. The CCRA Plan focused on ways that "all Central City residents can benefit from programs that promote community connectivity, address social issues, celebrate the neighborhood's culture and heritage, and prioritize the maintenance, development and use of the community's physical resources."²⁴⁹ As a whole, the CCRA plan created a dynamic expression of history, visions of revitalization, and strategies to overcome impediments to equitable development.

The CCRA Plan identifies O.C. Haley as the "community's main boulevard" and made clear its importance as a cultural heritage district. Noting the contributions and importance of Mardi Gras Indians, jazz and blues musicians, and visual and performance artists, the plan calls for this "critical mass of cultural activities" to "provide the basis for attracting cultural tourism," which should be "marketed locally, nationally, and internationally."²⁵⁰ The vision for O.C. Haley also includes mention of a Louisiana State Civil Rights Museum as an anchor project and the proposed Louisiana "heritage trail."²⁵¹ Interestingly, the CCRA plan uses the U-Street district in Washington D.C. as a model for a heritage tourism site, but does not mention how that example ultimately led to gentrification in the neighborhood²⁵²—something that the CCRA plan attempted to mitigate by "managing gentrification."

²⁴⁸ Taylor Jr. and Cole, 2001; Ross and Leigh, 2000; Thomas and Ritzdorf, 1996

²⁴⁹ Central City Renaissance Alliance, Working Towards Solutions, A Community Plan, Prepared by Concordia LLC, October 20, 2004, p. 5.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 21

²⁵¹ The actual route of the heritage trail does not include any mention of Central City and its importance for the Civil Rights Movement in Louisiana. Sites listed for New Orleans are: New Orleans African American Museum, St. Augustine Church, St. Louis Cemeteries, The French Market, Congo Square/Armstrong Park, and the Amistad Research Center; <http://www.astorylikenoother.com/explore/>. New Orleans is also featured in a national civil rights tour, which is shown in Appendix E.

²⁵² Stabley, Matthew, "U Street Residents Not Enjoying Gentrification They Helped Create," NBC News Washington, Jul 25, 2009

The CCRA's implementation structure, though relying heavily on community-based organizations, focused on action committees that could keep both the momentum and resident empowerment alive. As part of the CCRA planning process, an Action Team worked to train resident leaders to assist with the implementation. However, in the appendix of the CCRA plan there are numerous complaints—generated from the feedback surveys of the planning process—of lack of authentic Central City resident participation. The CCRA plan was, in many ways, a convening of leaders and community organizations. One community leader felt disheartened about the CCRA's recent citizen engagement and was dismayed that the CCRA “really lost their way as far as I'm concerned. They're not even bringing in people in their community, much less across St. Charles Avenue.”

The CCRA plan did, however, exemplify the growing use of community-based planning, which grew out of the failure of traditional planning models to address the concerns in African American communities.²⁵³ These initiatives derive “insights from the struggles of African Americans: the battle against Jim Crow, traditions of leadership and organization, residential segregation, and dilapidated housing. Blacks have always linked together the struggle against poverty, racial segregation, bad housing, residential segregation, and employment discrimination and made them part of the broader fight for freedom, democratic rights, equity, and socioeconomic justice.”²⁵⁴ The CCRA plan had flaws, but it did provide a framework for a new way of addressing structural issues and a vision for the neighborhood that did not compromise Central City leadership values for other surrounding communities. Even though the CCRA plan laid the foundation for a comprehensive Central City renaissance, the plan quickly fragmented in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, which disrupted the plan before it could become formalized.

Unified New Orleans Plan

Hurricane Katrina brought both devastating floods and a renewed focus and profusion of resources for the revitalization of New Orleans' distressed neighborhoods. Central City received considerable redevelopment attention, especially with concerted efforts by foundations and community-based organizations.²⁵⁵ Central City seemed poised to take advantage of the post-Katrina infusion of funds for redevelopment. According to one leader in the community, “We took

²⁵³ Thomas and Ritzdorf, 1996

²⁵⁴ Taylor Jr. and Cole, 2001, p. 6

²⁵⁵ Greater New Orleans Foundation, “Collaborative Investing in Central City,” December 13, 2010, <http://www.gnof.org/home/collaborative-investing-in-central-city/>

advantage of the storm, but we were already moving; we were already organized.” The most significant neighborhood-based planning initiative after Katrina, the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP), delved deeply into a potential future for Central City and promised resources to realize it.²⁵⁶

Unlike the 1999 Plan, the UNOP makes quite clear the importance and relevance of O.C. Haley in the revitalization of Central City. Trumpeting the redevelopment potential of O.C. Haley, the plan calls it “one of the most historically, culturally and artistically significant boulevards in New Orleans.”²⁵⁷ The UNOP also positions it in the history of revitalization attempts and how it could relate to larger trends for redevelopment in Central City as a whole:

Having fallen into a cycle of systemic disinvestment far prior to Katrina, the street was receiving moderate investment Pre-Katrina. Post-Katrina, a revitalized O.C. Haley Blvd. can be the neighborhood-level catalyst for economic development and revival for the Central City neighborhood.²⁵⁸

By recognizing the boulevard’s historic context in terms of culture as well as redevelopment impediments and investment needs, this plan offered new direction to Central City’s recovery and revitalization after Katrina.

The UNOP targeted the well-known Civil Rights Museum proposal as a major driver for economic development on O.C. Haley. Recognizing that there was “widespread support” for its location on the boulevard, the UNOP identifies the tourist destination as another “spearhead...for revitalization of O.C. Haley Blvd., Central City and the District.”²⁵⁹ Clearly doing their research, the UNOP expands on the potential for the museum as part of the Central City’s civil rights history, living history and culture. As such, the museum would “celebrate New Orleans’ role in the Civil Rights Movement, local activists such as Oretha Castle Haley and A.L. Davis and the historic role of O.C. Haley Blvd. in the African American Community,” as well as Mardi Gras Indians, musicians, and multicultural connections between African Americans and the Jewish community.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Although numerous plans exist in the post-Katrina planning context, this section will focus on the recommendations in the UNOP plan, as it is the most comprehensive exploration of the revitalization efforts and projects in Central City.

²⁵⁷ Unified New Orleans Plan, District 2, Chapter 5, Recovery Scenario, p. 12.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 12

²⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 12

²⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 12.

Unfortunately, the UNOP fragmented into a “wish list” of planning initiatives and its relatively ineffective implementation posed significant hurdles for concerted redevelopment.²⁶¹ Even with the detailed history and vision for the revitalization of O.C. Haley and Central City, the UNOP calls for additional planning of “comprehensive market feasibility” and a “comprehensive landscape and streetscape plan.” There is no recognition for the responsible party to develop these plans and how they would relate to the recommendations by UNOP. Despite the overwhelming detail of the UNOP neighborhood studies, the overall “failure of local officials to designate a single accountable agency to oversee recovery planning hindered the development of a clear, citywide rebuilding strategy” and also negatively affected the implementation of plans at the neighborhood scale.²⁶² Further issues around UNOP’s implementation arose when the City of New Orleans embarked on yet another planning process to create an official Master Plan. With fewer neighborhood details but more direct impact on plan implementation, the CCRA made a special meeting with the master plan team, Goody Clancy, to ensure that their planning efforts would be included.²⁶³ However, it is not clear from the Master plan documents where the plan fits in or how it is made legal under a master plan with the force of law.

Although not directly tied to any planning effort, Central City finally achieved its status as a cultural arts corridor in 2008, among many others throughout the state. Mitch Landrieu, who was Louisiana Lieutenant Governor at the time, created the Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard Cultural Arts Corridor.²⁶⁴ Rather than require businesses to have a culture-based theme, as the original purpose intended, the cultural arts corridor would offer tax benefits just like other overlay districts already on O.C. Haley.²⁶⁵ As such, it is unclear how the cultural arts corridor status will affect the ongoing revitalization of the boulevard and the search for anchor institutions.

²⁶¹ Bureau of Governmental Research, “Not Ready for Prime Time: An Analysis of the UNOP Citywide Plan,” March, 2007.

²⁶² Nelson, Ehrenfeucht, and Laska, 2007, p. 25; also see Bureau of Governmental Research, “Not Ready For Prime Time: An Analysis of the UNOP Citywide Plan,” March, 2007.

²⁶³ Interview with community leader

²⁶⁴ Moran, Kate, “Landrieu unveils cultural districts in New Orleans, Tammany,” The Times Picayune, December 04, 2008.

²⁶⁵ *O.C. Haley Black Cultural Tourism District*, O.C. Haley Investment Corporation’s Plan for Economic Development, Hewitt-Washington & Associates, 1995, New Orleans Public Library City Archives, Mayor Marc Morial, Economic Development and Policy Planning Division, Records of the Office of Tourism, Arts and Entertainment, Tourism Files, Box 8, O.C. Haley Redevelopment Project folder

The Central City Turning Point?: Searching for Anchor Institutions

For more than a decade, Central City organizations, residents, and local leaders have searched for anchor institutions to hold the renaissance of O.C. Haley and Central City together and provide focus on overcoming historic inequities for Central City residents. Anchors are a common place-based strategy used frequently as a tool for stabilizing and revitalizing neighborhoods by encouraging development and investment. Increasingly, anchors are used by community organizations to “build communities that are healthy places to live and work.”²⁶⁶ In Central City, the celebration of local civil rights history and Central City culture fueled the early search for appropriate anchors, as leaders sought institutions that developed place- and people-based solutions. The following discussion of anchors shows both the dynamic and widespread usage of the concept of anchors, as well as the structural limitations on each type of anchor that leaders sought to locate along O.C. Haley and in Central City, especially those with a people-based mission. Even armed with the dynamic cultural vision for an “African American Street,” Central City still struggles to integrate its economy with the larger metropolitan or regional economy, a key factor in ensuring the success of the boulevard and the neighborhood.²⁶⁷

Community-based organizations as the early anchors

Unlike the vision for O.C. Haley as a cultural arts tourism district, many of the past and present anchor project tenants along the boulevard are community-based organizations with people-based missions. The most significant early anchor along O.C. Haley is the Dryades YMCA, first built in 1905, which is the longest-running community facility in Central City and a significant anchor for the neighborhood. It served as the hub for many civil rights activities in Central City, and was a frequent meeting spot for A.L. Davis and other leaders in the community during the 1950s-60s. According to one community leader, the YMCA anchored the end of O.C. Haley at Philip Street, while the Louisiana Civil Rights Museum was to anchor the other end near Earhart. In 2000, the YMCA tragically burned down and became another focal point for reinvestment along O.C. Haley.²⁶⁸ As opposed to so many other obstructed redevelopment projects along the

²⁶⁶ Anchor Institutions Toolkit: A guide for neighborhood revitalization, The Netter Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania, March, 2008.

²⁶⁷ Ross and Leigh, 2000

²⁶⁸ Medley, Keith Weldon, “Dryades Street, Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard: Remembrance and Reclamation,” New Orleans Tribune, April 2001.

boulevard, the YMCA returned within a few years and continues to anchor one end of O.C. Haley, while the other end languishes.

In the late 1990s, several organizations opened on O.C. Haley and played a major role in the renewed attention to the boulevard's potential. One of them, the Ashé Cultural Arts Center (Ashé), opened in 1998 in the Venus Gardens development on O.C. Haley, acting as a community center, arts and performance space, and active space for bringing the history and culture of Central City to efforts to revitalize the neighborhood. The director of Ashé, Carol Bebelle, was an early proponent of cultural tourism and hoped "Ashé and its neighbors will help jumpstart a movement to turn Oretha Castle Haley into a cultural tourism corridor fueling economic development in Central City."²⁶⁹ Operating under the banner of "everything goes better with culture," Ashé promotes and hosts various cultural events along "the Boulevard," which act as "gatherings" to bring people together to dance, sing, and eat while building community (flier examples shown in Appendix D). Ashé also collaborated with artists in the neighborhood to bring murals to MLK and O.C. Haley, which depict the civil rights struggle and the vitality of Central City (Appendix E). Slowly, these early anchors, and several others, helped attract more investment along O.C. Haley and provided a framework for redeveloping the boulevard around principles of culture and the African American experience.

Heritage tourism and the Louisiana State Civil Rights Museum

The longest-lasting, open-ended search for an anchor institution in Central City is the proposed Louisiana State Civil Rights Museum (the Museum). The process began in 1999 when the Louisiana Legislature passed a bill—with one lone dissenting vote—that "established" the museum but did not create a board, specify a location or provide funds for the development of the site. Sen. Diana Bajoie sponsored the bill and conjectured that the "most likely site appears to be someplace on or near Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard, which is in Bajoie's Central City District." According to Bajoie, "the [Civil Rights] Movement started there."²⁷⁰ From the perspective of leaders and foundations, the museum "offers tremendous redevelopment potential and is critical to the revitalization of the boulevard and the neighborhood."²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ Pandolfi, Keith, "Oretha Castle-Haley Boulevard in Central City being restored," *New Orleans City Business*, June 23, 2003.

²⁷⁰ Egger, Bruce, "Civil rights museum is revived by senator: Law would restart long-dormant project," *The Times-Picayune*, May 31, 2004.

²⁷¹ Defend New Orleans Blog, "Rotting New Orleans school building may be reborn as civil rights museum", March

Despite the longevity of the campaign for the museum, there are significant factors locally and nationally that affect the viability of a heritage tourism anchor. Even though the Louisiana Legislature created a museum board in 2004 with members from Central City organizations, the New Orleans School Board approved plans for redeveloping it at the abandoned Myrtle Banks School on O.C. Haley, and numerous plans and studies agreed on the placement, the location and realization of the Museum is still completely unresolved.²⁷² As late as 2010—11 years after it was originally established—the decision to locate the museum in the Myrtle Banks school was threatened by the New Orleans School District’s decision to demolish the building, based on the building’s structural integrity and overwhelming cost of renovation. Moreover, several neighborhoods now vie for the opportunity to claim the museum for their own. According to Carol Bebel:

“There is an energy moving behind the museum now, and so other places in the city now want to be considered....If there’s anything that could really stain a building with injustice would be for this opportunity to happen and for it to be brought to another community.”

In response to the pressure from other neighborhoods, organizations like Ashé are petitioning to keep the location in Central City because it is the “perfect location for this institution dedicated to the advocacy for civil rights and social justice, past, present and future.”²⁷³ Nonetheless, planning for this project is in perpetual purgatory. Even with recommendations from citywide plans such as the UNOP, the future of the Museum’s location is uncertain. According to one community leader, “Some plans die, some don’t; you see how long it’s taking to do the civil rights museum. This stuff does not come easily.”

At the national level, African American heritage tourism, in just a little more than a decade, spread across the South and is now considered a “growth industry.”²⁷⁴ Just as neighborhoods in New Orleans vie for the Museum, so too are cities and communities vying for economic development tied to civil rights commemoration.²⁷⁵ The risk in Central City is not only that the

23rd, 2010: <http://defendneworleans.tumblr.com/post/467472053/rotting-new-orleans-school-building-may-be-reborn-as>

²⁷² Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, Annual Report 2004, p. 31: http://www.legis.state.la.us/boards/board_members.asp?board=870

²⁷³ Petition to locate the Louisiana State Civil Rights Museum in Central City at Myrtle Banks School Campus on Historic Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard, shown in Appendix G.

²⁷⁴ Inwood, 2010

²⁷⁵ Inwood, 2010; Dwyer and Alderman, 2008a. New Orleans is featured as part of a southern tour of the Civil Rights Movement, but there is no mention of Central City specifically. Flier shown in Appendix F.

Museum will move elsewhere, but also that as a tool for growth the benefits may bypass the already disadvantaged as in other growth-oriented development.²⁷⁶

Lending institutions and the Hope Community Credit Union

In 1978, soon after Congress passed the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 (CRA), New Orleans Mayor Ernest Morial called “redlining a ‘considerable problem’ in New Orleans,” but he “expressed cautious optimism” that loan programs tied to the CRA would alleviate it.²⁷⁷ By requiring savings and loans, or deposit-based banks, to invest in the community where deposits are made, the CRA would presumably overcome historic inequities in private lending. Unfortunately, the CRA offered few incentives for banks to locate branches in communities without a financial institution.²⁷⁸ Central City lacked a community or private lending institution for several decades and this significantly affected residents’ ability to secure private loans and stabilize the community.²⁷⁹ Most residents in Central City “found it impossible to obtain a loan from a bank or homestead.”²⁸⁰ These credit problems were massive in scope and affected African American neighborhoods across the nation:

The availability of jobs and the values of homes depend on the availability of fairly priced credit and capital. If credit becomes unavailable, then this damages the collateral and creditworthiness of the neighborhood, potentially leading to a vicious circle in which any lender interested in venturing into such an area is forced to assume significantly higher risks. The abandonment of areas by conventional financial institutions then leads to social problems that choke off more investment and lending²⁸¹

As in the case of Central City, with no neighborhood-specific institution to perform lending in Central City, both residents and businesses were left with few options to invest in their neighborhood. This often led to payday loans and other predatory lending schemes that further reaped benefits from low-income neighborhoods.²⁸²

²⁷⁶ Logan and Molotch, 2002

²⁷⁷ Hager, George, “Inner City Target of New Loan Fund,” *The Times-Picayune*, June 9, 1978.

²⁷⁸ Immergluck, 2004

²⁷⁹ Schleifstein, Mark, “Many hope the first financial institution in a generation to set up shop on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard is a sign of the area’s rebirth,” *The Times-Picayune*, December 11, 2004; Although there is no clear date on when banks left the neighborhood, the last mention I could find was about the Central City Federal Credit Union in 1976, advertising “personal loans” up to \$750. Information found in the CCEOC, *Profile: The People’s Newspaper*, November, 1976, p. 2; A.L. Davis personal records box 2, Central City folder.

²⁸⁰ Letter from A.L. Davis to King S. Wells, Executive Director of the New Orleans Community Improvement Agency; located in New Orleans Public Library City Archives, A.L. Davis personal records box 2, Central City folder.

²⁸¹ Immergluck, 2004, p. 50

²⁸² Schleifstein, Mark, “Many hope the first financial institution in a generation to set up shop on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard is a sign of the area’s rebirth,” *The Times-Picayune*, December 11, 2004.

In the late 1990s, the Trinity Episcopal Church and community-based organizations on O.C. Haley led the initiative to attract a community development credit union (CDCU). Hope Community Credit Union opened in 2004 to cheers and high hopes, as The Times-Picayune front page's title trumpeted: "Many hope the first financial institution in a generation to set up shop on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard is a sign of the area's rebirth."²⁸³ Capitalized with deposits from local and regional banks, the credit union's mission focused on inexpensive personal loans and mortgages for Central City residents. Several years later, reality tempered the high hopes for the CDCU. One community leader remarked that people expected a lot more from the credit union. With limited funds to invest in neighborhoods, CDCUs rely on outside private capital sources, or small member deposits, for loans to low-income individuals and neighborhoods.²⁸⁴ Tellingly, the CCRA Plan from 2004 recommended that more private lending institutions must supplement the work of Hope Community Credit Union and provide equal access to services and assistance with financial literacy.²⁸⁵ Although it is unclear when another financial institution will locate in the neighborhood, Central City could realize CRA benefits if Congress passes long-overdue CRA reform. Advocates for reform argue that the CRA could fix the problem of place-based banks so that neighborhoods can get investments from banks all over the country.²⁸⁶

Workforce development, retail, and the business incubator

Central City's unemployment rate steadily rose after WWII and continued to remain high for decades. New Orleans' tourism economy contained most of the employed in low-wage jobs in the city and a large majority of Central City residents worked in these positions.²⁸⁷ Efforts to confront this generational problem started in the 1960s, but suffered from fragmented and shortsighted federal jobs programs that could not break the employment color line.²⁸⁸ Even in the 60s, Central City residents and leaders strived to create opportunities to build small businesses. In 1969, Central City residents protested a white-owned grocery store called Opportunity Food Stores that charged notoriously high prices. "Organizers of the boycott want nothing less than ownership of the store by

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Seidman, 2004

²⁸⁵ Central City Renaissance Alliance, Working Towards Solutions, A Community Plan, Prepared by Concordia LLC, October 20, 2004, p. 36

²⁸⁶ McCarron, John, "After 33 years, wheels turn on CRA Version 2.0," Institute for Comprehensive Community Development, September 15, 2010

²⁸⁷ The Heritage Square Development Corporation, Application for Housing and Community Development Funding, 1976, p. 3; Jim Singleton Files, Box 37, Heritage Square Planning Project, Amistad Research Center.

²⁸⁸ Germany, 2007

the community,” however, “Black businessmen are vigorously attempting to buy their own businesses, but they simply lack the capital.”²⁸⁹ The national context continued to be bleak for African American businessmen, as they “face a wide variety of barriers and disadvantages in attempting to establish and grow businesses, especially when compared to whites....It was precisely because blacks had suffered from discrimination in credit, housing, employment, and other markets that they had accumulated less capital, less education, and less business experience, on average, than whites.”²⁹⁰

Planning efforts dating back to the Heritage Square Planning Project targeted retail as an opportunity for job growth, but persistent economic barriers prevented the full realization of African American business potential in the neighborhood. The 1999 Plan noted the neighborhood inequity in private resources sparked by public investment: “while some neighborhoods such as Coliseum Square and Magazine Street are experiencing a renaissance of commerce and an increase in residential development, other areas of the District are plagued by vacancies, disinvestment and overall decay (Oretha Castle Haley).”²⁹¹ These inequities come from the structural factors impeding revitalization and small business development in African American communities.

Central City leaders pushed ahead and continued efforts to spark retail and small business investment along O.C. Haley. In 2003, Carol Bebel from Ashé anticipated “black-owned businesses [to] start opening along” O.C. Haley and that “black tourists will seek them out when they visit the city.”²⁹² The former executive director of the Oretha Castle Haley Merchants and Business Association’s claimed that “the Central City community is clamoring for retail” like restaurants, boutiques, clothing stores, shoe stores, coffee shops, flower shops, and a bookstore.²⁹³ These types of shops could lead to increases in property value and gentrification, so the Merchants and Business Association developed a plan for the nation’s first community land trust for commercial real estate to appropriately deal with affordability problems and to curtail potential gentrification. There is cause for concern from the academic literature that gentrification could lead to neighborhood fragmentation, displacement, and class antagonisms.²⁹⁴ Furthermore, segregation—as seen in Central City for generations—“plays a key role in depriving poor black

²⁸⁹ “Opportunity...Hell,” *The PLAIN TRUTH*, October 21, 1969; University of New Orleans, Louisiana Special Collections.

²⁹⁰ Immergluck, 2004, p. 62

²⁹¹ New Orleans Land Use Plan: April 1999, Planning District Two: Central City/Garden District, p. 77.

²⁹² Pandolfi, Keith, “Oretha Castle-Haley Boulevard in Central City being restored,” *New Orleans City Business*, June 23, 2003.

²⁹³ Quillen, Kim, “Business comeback is on track for Oretha Castle Haley,” *The Times-Picayune*, July 6, 2008.

²⁹⁴ Freeman, 2006

families of access to goods and services because it interacts with poverty to create neighborhood conditions that make it nearly impossible to sustain a viable retail sector.”²⁹⁵ This structural forewarning, especially in light of previous failures to develop an African American retail corridor, should be taken into consideration for how to overcome economic segregation and mitigate class antagonisms in Central City.

With the restaurant destination and workforce development anchor Café Reconcile as an example,²⁹⁶ Central City leaders planned for a business incubator before, during and after the CCRA Plan and have continued to advocate for minority small businesses venues. Currently, the Good Work Network—located on O.C. Haley—offers business training and accounting help for small businesses. Most recently, the New Orleans non-profit Idea Village initiated an ambitious business plan for a business incubator and building trades center on O.C. Haley and linked the plan to the UNOP plans recommendation for more incubators in the city. The plan acknowledges the challenge “facing redevelopment in the City is to avoid patterns that concentrate poverty, perpetuate racial disparities, and obstruct access to employment opportunity.”²⁹⁷ The plan envisions a “catalyst for reinvestment” sparked “by nurturing new business creation, building human capital and promoting the physical rebuilding of O.C. Haley Boulevard.”²⁹⁸ This focus on human resource development is “the foundation that must ultimately support American cities and their economies.”²⁹⁹ Without it, place-based strategies will likely outweigh concurrent efforts at developing people-based economies. Unfortunately, as with so many other ambitious plans for Central City, this anchor has yet to be realized.

Mixed-income housing development and the Muses

Housing rehabilitation and development is critical to bring people back to Central City and to ensure the success of commercial corridors like O.C. Haley. The most significant housing investment in the immediate O.C. Haley vicinity is the Muses, which recently opened more than 200 mixed-income units. On a parcel of land originally purposed for an Albertson’s grocery store in the late 90s—which fell apart when Walmart located in the Garden District—the Gulf Coast Housing Partnership spearheaded the development and overcame significant opposition from nearby

²⁹⁵ Massey and Denton, 1993, p. 135

²⁹⁶ Café Reconcile is a restaurant and culinary training institute for youth on O.C. Haley. For more information, visit: <http://reconcileneworleans.org/>

²⁹⁷ Sutton, Stacey, *Neighborhood Revitalization: Crafting a Catalyst for Change*, Columbia University, 2007, p. 3.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 56

²⁹⁹ Ross and Leigh, 2000, p. 378

neighborhoods. A neighborhood leader remarked, “now that the Muses project is built and people are moving in there...I don’t see how it can’t [be a catalyst].” However, it is unclear how the Muses and other developments fit into the cultural arts district plan for the area. As another community leader noted, the housing developers in the neighborhood focus primarily on location attributes of Central City for investment potential and not the cultural aspects of revitalization. Although this could jeopardize some culture-based efforts along O.C. Haley, developers acknowledge the larger market forces affecting investment in a community and can help to navigate difficult investment decisions to keep the revitalization afloat. Even with some disagreement between community leaders and developers, there seems to be a consensus about finding the spark to reach Central City’s turning point.

Although much of the revitalization efforts in Central City focus on O.C. Haley, the residential redevelopment along MLK is vitally important for the neighborhood’s renaissance. Just as community leaders identified Melpomene as a significant corridor in the 1970s because of the public housing, so too has MLK been at the center of mixed-income public housing redevelopment plans since the 1990s. The 1999 plan identified public housing on MLK for redevelopment, with no mention of the citywide controversy around these redevelopments.³⁰⁰ The UNOP Plan, however, identified resident worries about loss of affordability in the neighborhood, and also provided vision on how to tie the MLK redevelopments to larger transportation routes and services that would integrate the MLK neighborhood with the city.³⁰¹ Many community leaders also openly support mixed-income redevelopment, one of which proclaimed that:

“We don’t want an all Black community; we want a diverse community. We want people to see their capacity to grow. So if it works out that we have poor people, we want poor people to be living next to and around people who are working class and middle class, and even upper economic class.”

Nearby, the mixed-income Harmony Oaks community (formerly C.J. Peete or Magnolia) will likely serve as a focal point for further analysis of mixed-income redevelopment in Central City.

Although revitalized public housing promises new opportunities for residents and investment, there are significant limitations on the financing of mixed-income housing developments. The market for Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) is slow right now and federal deadlines for the expenditure of the tax credits approach within the year, threatening the

³⁰⁰ New Orleans Land Use Plan: April 1999, Planning District Two: Central City/Garden District, p. 69.; Lauria et al., 1995 covers some of the controversy during the 1990s on public housing redevelopment.

³⁰¹ Unified New Orleans Plan, District 2, Introduction, p. 17; UNOP, District 2, Chapter 4, vision goals and principles, p. 22.

major public housing redevelopment along MLK.³⁰² Although tax credits provide the vast majority of affordable units nationally, the complexity of the tool and its dependence on larger economic factors could affect further redevelopment.³⁰³ Moreover, LIHTC success tends to rely on larger housing developments, limiting its use for further housing revitalization throughout the blighted neighborhoods of Central City. Thus, it is unclear the direction or timeline of housing rehabilitation along the streets between major public housing redevelopments. Much of the infill housing redevelopment remains in the hands of city officials, creative mission-driven nonprofits, and “new” methods for blight remediation.³⁰⁴

Public/private partnerships and the NORA headquarters

When the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority (NORA) decided to move their offices to O.C. Haley and invest millions of dollars in the boulevard for commercial and retail development, many thought it was finally time for the boulevard’s renaissance. Working in collaboration with several organizations in Central City, including the O.C. Haley Merchants and Business Association—a long-time advocate for a business and cultural district—NORA committed to relocating their main office on the boulevard as an anchor commercial building. NORA committed several million dollars of public grants and loans matched by private investment to nine property developments along the corridor, including restaurants, office and retail space, and a live music venue.³⁰⁵ In what seems to be a dedication to the original intent of small African American business development along O.C. Haley, NORA expects to help fund cultural ventures that community-based organizations support. It is expected that these “initial investments are designed to have a snowball effect along O.C. Haley.”³⁰⁶ Despite these intentions, “The public sector developer has to mediate between public and private interests in order to find solutions that meet both an economic and a political bottom line.”³⁰⁷ This could, as before, threaten the viability of a boulevard featuring African American businesses dedicated to culture and the arts.

³⁰² Reckdahl, Katy, “HANO commits to hiring locally for public housing construction,” *The Times-Picayune*, February 24, 2011.

³⁰³ Schwartz, 2006

³⁰⁴ Cohen, Ariella, “Rosy view of blight meets Central City’s bleak reality,” *The Lens*, May 12, 2010. Several housing organizations—such as Jericho Road Episcopal Housing Initiative and the New Orleans Neighborhood Development Collaborative—work in Central City to provide affordable rental and homeownership opportunities, as well as organize around resident issues in the community.

³⁰⁵ Elie, Lolis E., “Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard gets help from city as it tries to turn the corner,” *The Times-Picayune*, August 2, 2009.

³⁰⁶ Maloney, Stephen, “Investors see opportunity along Central City corridor,” *New Orleans City Business*, July 27, 2009.

³⁰⁷ Frieden, 1990

This news was received with near unanimous cheer, with the exception of a slightly cynical Dryades YMCA executive director, who remarked that after 39 years, “I’ve witnessed any number of attempts at revitalization, all of which for the most part have failed....Hopefully we can get it done this time.”³⁰⁸ Despite this, most leaders along O.C. Haley expected NORA’s decision to be the final turnaround for the boulevard, which could then spark further investment along other corridors in Central City. Now, nearly two years after the news broke about NORA’s plans, it is a time of anticipation as organizations wait for the time when the revitalization reaches the turning point. Unfortunately, in a market downturn like the one right now, public and private sector investment in New Orleans and in cities around the country are highly dependent on federal resources. Fickle policy and funding environments make these anchors unstable developments to rely on, especially in fiscally austere budget times like the present. As one leader remarked, NORA is “slow coming” because “it’s hard at City Hall” under the current budget cuts. Once again, exogenous structural forces in the market, as well as fragmented policy and funding, constrain what could be the final turning point for O.C. Haley and Central City as a whole.

Conclusion

Central City’s turning point is still not fully realized, but there is fitful momentum in that direction. In successive waves, O.C. Haley, and to a lesser degree MLK, have been poised to finally achieve a turning point for the neighborhood and residents. Even with the languishing plans for singular and large-scale heritage anchor projects since the 1970s, Central City leaders turned to a legion of smaller-scale anchor projects that held together the vision of an African American cultural corridor. Plans for the neighborhood grew over several decades and continued to evolve with changing funding environments and challenges that affect all structurally limited African American neighborhoods across the country. This period of evolution allowed community-based organizations to create equitable plans for residents and minority businesses, as well as develop coalitions supportive of the revitalization in Central City. One community leader grasped the longevity of the campaign for revitalization: “This is work that is done incrementally and half of it is learning what not to do.”

As an incremental process, planning for revitalization of an “African American Street” and a “Black Cultural Tourism District” continues to combat the structures that segregated Central City’s

³⁰⁸ Maloney, Stephen, “Investors see opportunity along Central City corridor,” New Orleans City Business, July 27, 2009.

housing and commercial economies in the first place. Even now, Central City still suffers from economic and residential segregation, a fact that can “largely be attributed to racism.”³⁰⁹ Full economic, political, and cultural “integration can be accomplished only through a comprehensive approach that diffuses progress throughout the entire community rather than concentrating it among a privileged few.”³¹⁰ Continued commemorative and culture-based planning efforts in Central City will benefit from a broader perspective on how structural racism impacts community revitalization, anchor institutions, and the housing and commercial economies of their neighborhood.

³⁰⁹ Ross and Leigh, 2000, p. 371

³¹⁰ Ibid, p. 379

5

Conclusion

Considering the historical legacy of impediments to revitalization, “streets of justice” cannot yet accurately describe the commemorative boulevards of O.C. Haley and MLK. However, even when faced with plan and policy fragmentation, commemoration inspires resolve—even in the face of great hardship—and frames redevelopment decisions that prove valuable in planning for revitalization. Central City’s role in the national Civil Rights Movement is vital to the neighborhood’s identity and supports the living history and culture of the community through ongoing battles for equality. This case study of Central City makes evident that achieving justice in segregated African American communities benefits from planning strategies that integrate an analysis of historical, structural racism and the deeply embedded use of civil rights commemoration.

Land use tools developed in the early 20th century effectively prevented African American communities like Central City from fully integrating into the larger economy. Racialized zoning and real estate economics created a durable template for segregation that prevented housing investment in Central City for generations. In its ultimate expression, the redlining of the neighborhood from the 1930s onward—proved by HOLC maps that deemed investment “hazardous”—removed conventional lending markets for both housing and business development. This toxic structural blend of public and private discrimination deepened segregation and poverty in Central City. The tragic ironies of the Dryades Street commercial district serve as an example of the volatile interplay of economic structures. Even as the Dryades Street Boycott momentarily bridged the bifurcated commercial economy in New Orleans’ second largest business district, it likely hastened the decline of the street and, to some degree, the surrounding neighborhood.

Who defines history and for whom the history is relevant are contentious questions ongoing in Central City and communities throughout the United States.³¹¹ Inequitable political interest groups vie for control over the representation of history. As shown throughout the country, those who are historically marginalized will often suffer continued inequality.³¹² In Central City, political and land use decisions, imbued with overt or covert racism, segregated the commemoration of the Civil Rights Movement, just as they influenced the segregation of housing and commercial

³¹¹ Dwyer, 2000; Dwyer and Alderman, 2008a

³¹² Dwyer and Alderman, 2008a; Mitchelson et al., 2007; Judge, 1998

economies. Even the hard-won African American political power during the 1960s-70s was insufficient to overcome the powerful structures affecting the neighborhood.

Even with these seemingly insurmountable obstacles, community-based organizations, Central City leaders, residents, and foundation partners persisted with revitalization and planning efforts for more than 40 years. Through plan after plan, creative methods evolved to finance anchor projects and take advantage of opportunities for investment. Central City framed revitalization, heritage tourism, and social justice work around the living culture of the neighborhood, rather than containing commemoration within the past. After observing the failure of many public sector planning initiatives, Central City embarked on its own neighborhood-based planning initiative, following the trends of African American communities around the country that were equally fed up with the inequities of traditional planning methods.³¹³ Although fragmented across numerous plans, Central City's vision for revitalization guides strategies with a strong sense of heritage and culture as assets. Continued neighborhood planning will benefit from formalized resident engagement in plan implementation, as laid out by the original CCRA plan, to empower residents in the transformation of their neighborhood. This could ensure greater equity in future revitalization projects, mitigation of class tensions, and the distribution of redevelopment benefits to residents.

Commemorative boulevards in New Orleans had a clear impact on the revitalization efforts in Central City. As such, they can be considered “change mechanisms” in efforts to overcome historic inequities, even when the boulevards remain within segregated neighborhoods. Although negative brands of MLK, O.C. Haley, and Central City affected redevelopment decisions, the consistent and ubiquitous use of civil rights commemoration and representations of culture and living history brought significant investment potential and some important anchor projects. As one of the first layers in planning for the revitalization of the neighborhood, civil rights commemoration demonstrated incredible versatility and sustainability in the face of political adversity and redevelopment challenges. Community-based organizations, residents, planners, and leaders should continue to be inspired by and driven to use commemorative boulevards to their fullest potential.

While communities use commemoration as a means to revitalize and challenge the embedded structural inequities in American society, a continually evolving planning discipline wrestles with how to undo its negative impacts on African American communities. Even with visionary ideas and designs, the fragmentation and inequities built into planning and public policy deeply diminish revitalization efforts in segregated communities. As research shows, a turning point

³¹³ Thomas and Ritzdorf, 1996

for revitalization requires massive and concerted investment to overcome historic racism and disinvestment.³¹⁴ The fragmented implementation of singular plans slows the pace of investment, and can derail productive changes to the local economy. It is clear that neighborhoods like Central City will not change with one revolutionary plan. Therefore, planners must integrate neighborhood-based plans that highlight structural factors and important historical narratives (such as commemoration) into larger comprehensive plans to prevent fragmentation and disoriented resource distribution to marginalized communities. Like the Civil Rights Movement itself, planning for the full integration of African American communities into the larger economy is a continually evolving process.

The commemoration of African American culture and struggles for civil rights is a powerful tool in revitalization and pushes the urban planning discipline to fundamentally challenge sources of inequity. Commemorative boulevards profoundly shape plans for revitalization, as well as offer an important frame for how to make equitable decisions in redevelopment. The planning discipline should not let this go unnoticed.

Many difficult questions remain unanswered in the revitalization of Central City. How to reach the “turning point,” who benefits from that redevelopment, and how to integrate Central City into the larger economy and provide sustainable jobs and housing for residents are still open-ended. To reverse the intentional structural racism of the past will likely take many more decades, but the ongoing commemorative experiment in Central City shows promise to realize the “just” street and the “just” community.

³¹⁴ Taylor Jr. and Cole, 2001

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Appendix A

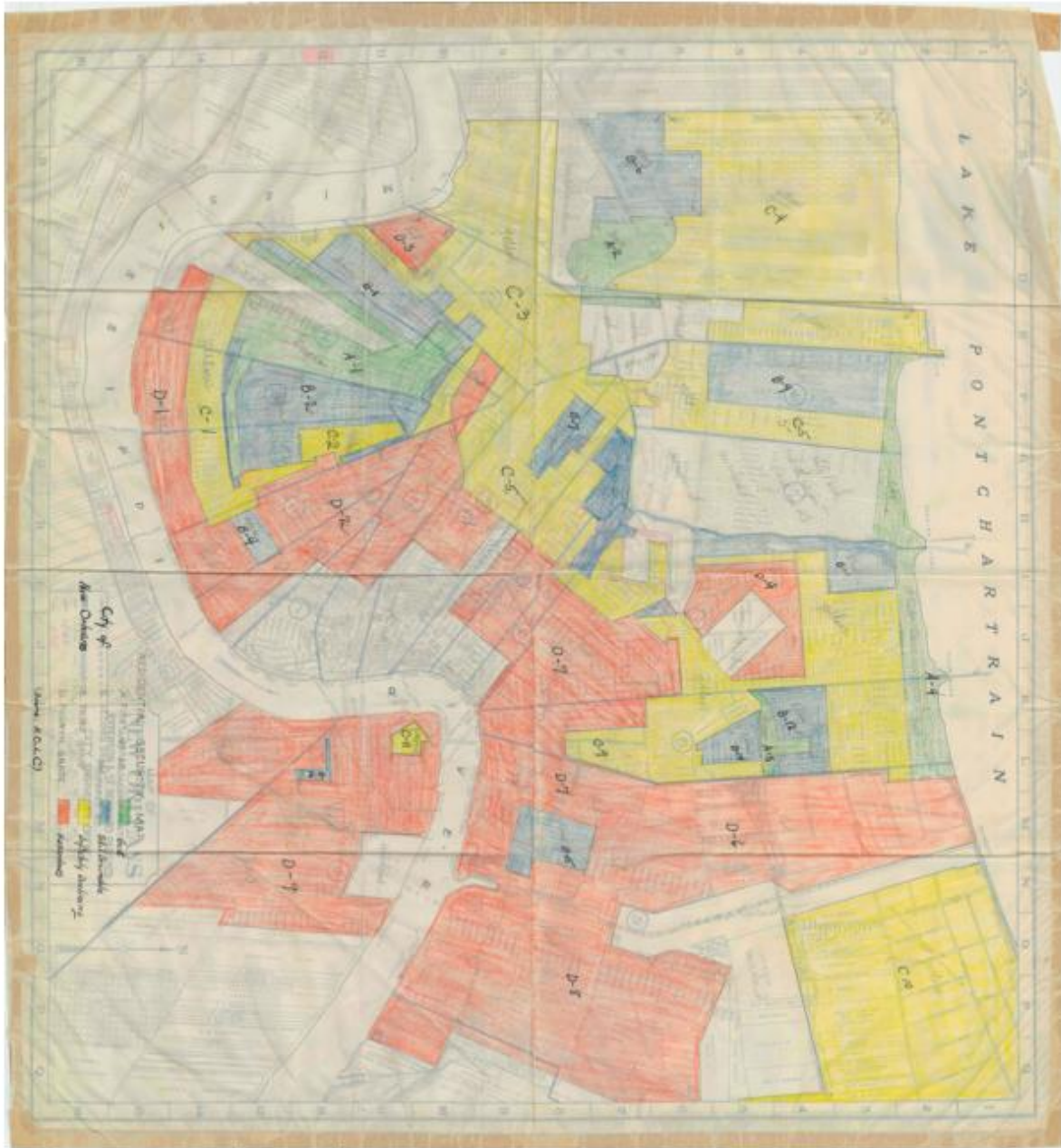


Figure A1. Home Owners Loan Corporation "Residential Security Map," redlining the neighborhoods of New Orleans, circa 1930s. Located in the cartographic and architectural holdings at the National Archives in College Park, MD

Appendix B

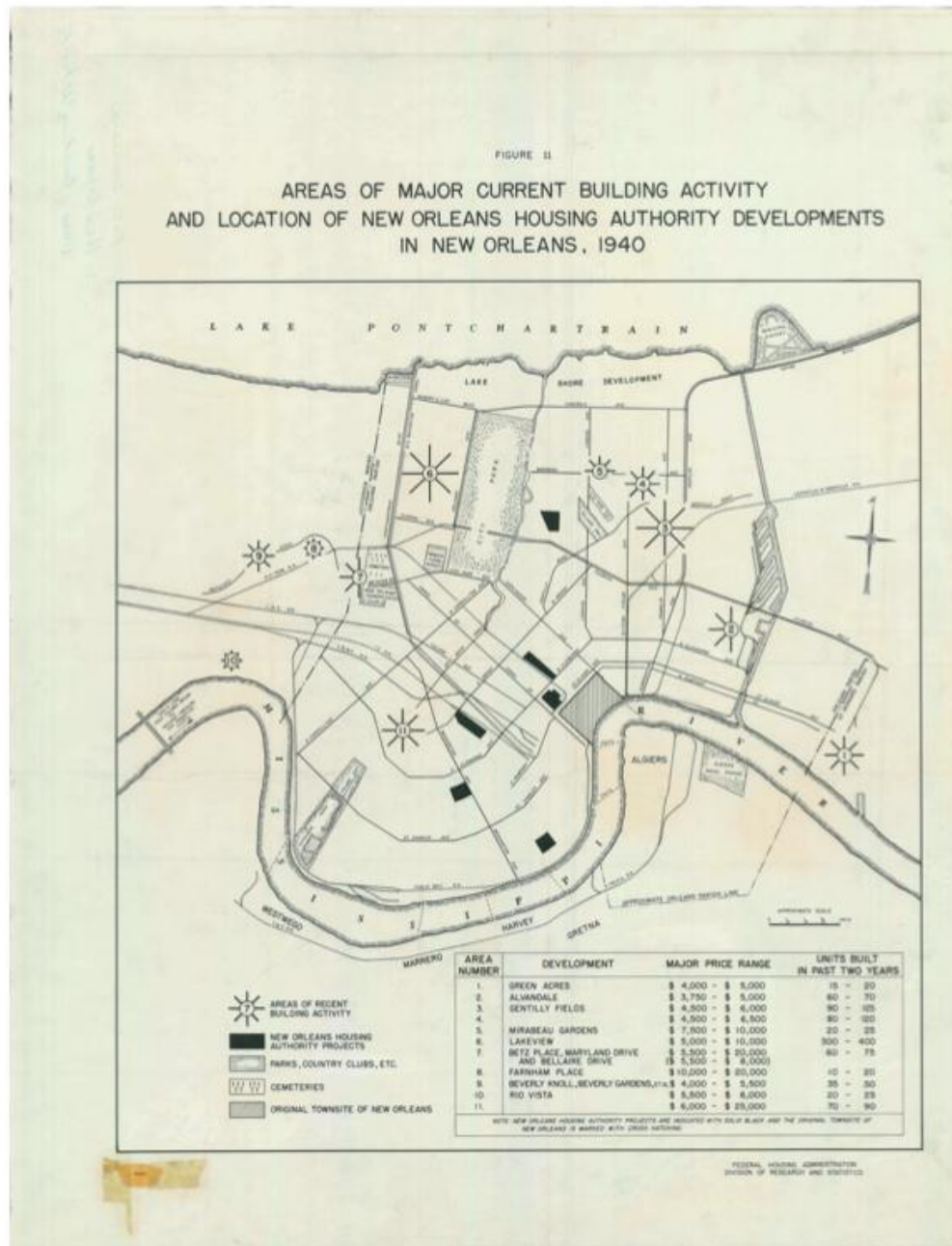


Figure B1. Federal Housing Administration “Areas of Major Current Building Activity...in 1940” are the areas in New Orleans with a small or large star. When compared to the redlining map in Appendix A, each of the areas of major building activity are located outside of redlined or “hazardous” areas of the city. Central City is clearly avoided for major investment, as are other African-American and integrated neighborhoods. Located in the cartographic and architectural holdings at the National Archives in College Park, MD.

Appendix C



Figure C1. Commemorative sculptures placed on MLK. The above sculpture is placed at MLK and O.C. Haley and prompted considerable debate and derision. The below bust of Dr. King was erected in 1981 and was financed entirely with community donations.

Appendix D

THE 13 LESSONS

The 13 Lessons is a story theater work presented in episodes which are taken from oral histories and first person testimonies of those caught in the circumstance of illiteracy, those committed to working to help them obtain improved literacy skills, champions and advocates for literacy in our community, as well as policy makers and business community representatives.

This performance work offers an empowering view of people caught in the circumstance of not knowing how to read. The 13 Lessons introduces and explores for the audience the issues, tensions and the ironies of people who are part of the adult literacy drama in our communities. The work uses a blend of original music and popular classics, combined with a script that shows dramatically, and at times humorously, the challenges and barriers that so effectively trap 40% of our adult population. It actively calls audiences to accept the mantra that "something must be done."

STORY CIRCLE

WITH TRUTH BE TOLD

TRUTH BE TOLD: RACE AND RACISM IN NEW ORLEANS

Using theater, storytelling and improvisation, the Truth Be Told project aims to open conversations in our communities around race and racism. The project is a multi-year collaborative effort by the Ashé Cultural Arts Center and the Contemporary Arts Center, along with many community-based organizations. "Story Circle" describes the emotions and experiences that have emerged from numerous Truth Be Told Story Circles and meetings held over the past years. Part touching, part tumultuous, "Story Circle" skillfully documents these attempts to expose, discuss and heal the New Orleans racial divide. Written by John Grimsley and directed by John O'Neal.

Ashé Cultural Arts Center presents

THE ORIGIN OF LIFE ON EARTH

AN AFRICAN CREATION MYTH

A DANCE/THEATER ADAPTATION OF THE BOOK OF THE SAME TITLE
WRITTEN BY DAVID ANDERSON

The Origin of Life on Earth: An African Creation Myth is based on the story of how Earth and the first people were created, according to Yoruba Culture of West Africa. The stories were handed down to Anderson as they were retold by his ancestors. This creation story connects to the African Diaspora and the arrival of West Africans to New Orleans and their legacy in New Orleans culture and tradition. The production uses the concept of storytelling that combines the spoken word with images presented from dance and film with music provided by musicians and vocalists. The remount combines the elements of the griot (storyteller) with a Vorchestra, film and dancers, showing a connection not only to New Orleans, but to its music and dance.

For booking information, contact Dollie Rivas at (504) 239-0126.
Carol Babelle, Co-founder & Executive Director
ASHÉ CULTURAL ARTS CENTER | 1712 ORETHA CASTLE HALEY BLVD., NEW ORLEANS, LA 70113
(504) 569-9070 | (504) 525-1605 FAX | ashcac@gmail.com | www.ashcac.org

LIFT EVERY VOICE & SING CONCERT

Join us as we lift our voices in liberation songs led by some of the best vocal talent in New Orleans and celebrate Civil Rights Heroes of the Sixties:

Skip Alexander, Raphael Cassimere Jr., Lolis Elie Sr., Donald Hubbard, New Zion Baptist Church, John O'Neal, Tessie Prevost-Williams, Claude Reese, Dottie Simmons, Jerome Smith, Llewellyn Soniat, Matthew "Flukie" Suarez, and Leona Tate

WHAT: Lift Every Voice and Sing Concert celebrating African-American liberation music, featuring freedom songs from the Civil Rights Movement in honor of the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. Artists include TOPSY CHAPMAN & SOLID HARMONY, DAVELL CRAWFORD, MICHAELA HARRISON, CLARK KNIGHTEN, SHARON MARTIN, DEACON JOHN MOORE, DONALD RAMSEY, KERMIT RUFFINS, BILL SUMMERS, and more. Bring the children and elders and come prepared to sing along.

WHEN: Sunday, Jan. 16, 2011 | 4 - 7 p.m.

WHERE: Ashé Cultural Arts Center
1712 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd. | NOLA

FREE ADMISSION
Refreshments will be served.

INFO: Call (504) 569-9070.
ashcac@gmail.com

EFFORTS OF GRACE, INC.
ASHÉ CULTURAL ARTS CENTER

Figure D1. Ashé Cultural Arts Center fliers for various events.



Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard MAIN STREET
In Partnership with Ashe' Cultural Arts Center & Cafe' Reconcile
4th Annual Gospel & Arts Festival & Main Street Marketplace

FREE ADMISSION!
make a joyful noise
DOOR PRIZES EVERY HOUR!
Ashé Cultural Arts Center
1712 O.C. Haley Blvd.

SATURDAY NOV. 6TH 2010 9AM-6PM

For information on vending or performance opportunities contact
Glenda Mitchell (504) 528-1807
Judy Wallace (504) 299-3910
Luther Gray (504) 495-0468
oochaleymainstreet@gmail.com

SPONSORS: O.C. HALEY Blvd Main Street, Ashe' Cultural Arts Center, Cafe Reconcile, New Orleans Musician Clinic, Ochsner Health Systems, LA Dept of Culture Recreation & Tourism, Ford Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, NOPD & Justice Foundation

LIVE Gospel Music
Jo "Cool" Davis
Rev. Lois Dejean
Glenn David Andrews
The Jones Sisters
Heavenly Melodies
Chuck Brown and Yielded Vessels
Silhouette Dance Ensemble
O.P. Walker High School Gospel Choir
McDonogh #35 Gospel Choir
Israelite Baptist Choir
New Hope Baptist Youth Choir
First Emanuel Baptist Choir
Donnie Bolden, Jr..... and many more

"Building On 10" Block Party
Live Cooking Demonstrations
"New Orleans Finest Restaurants"
Cafe Reconcile "Battle of the Chefs" Cooking Competition
Sponsored by: Cafe' Reconcile

2-K March - Recognition of "National Adoption Day" Department of Children & Family Services
Middle School "Battle of the Bands" Competition
Original Art, fashion, jewelry, home decor and more for sale by local vendors
Activities for children, face painting, human maze and much more

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Festival Sponsors: Ashé Cultural Arts Center, GoodWork Network, New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation, New Orleans Musicians Assistance Foundation, Oretha Castle Haley Merchants and Business Association, Hope Community Credit Union, Central City Renaissance Alliance, Brown's Dairy, Arts Council of New Orleans, City of New Orleans, The Office of the Lt. Governor of Louisiana, Ford Foundation

Figure D2. Festivals and cultural “gatherings” in Central City

Appendix E



Figure E1. Murals along MLK on the Brown's Dairy property (Author's photo)



Figure E2. Mural by Shakor at MLK and O.C. Haley Boulevards, providing context for the significance of the abstract sculpture across the street and showing that the artist (Frank Hayden) was African American (Author's photo)



Figure E3. Mural by Shakor at MLK and O.C. Haley Boulevards (Author's photo)

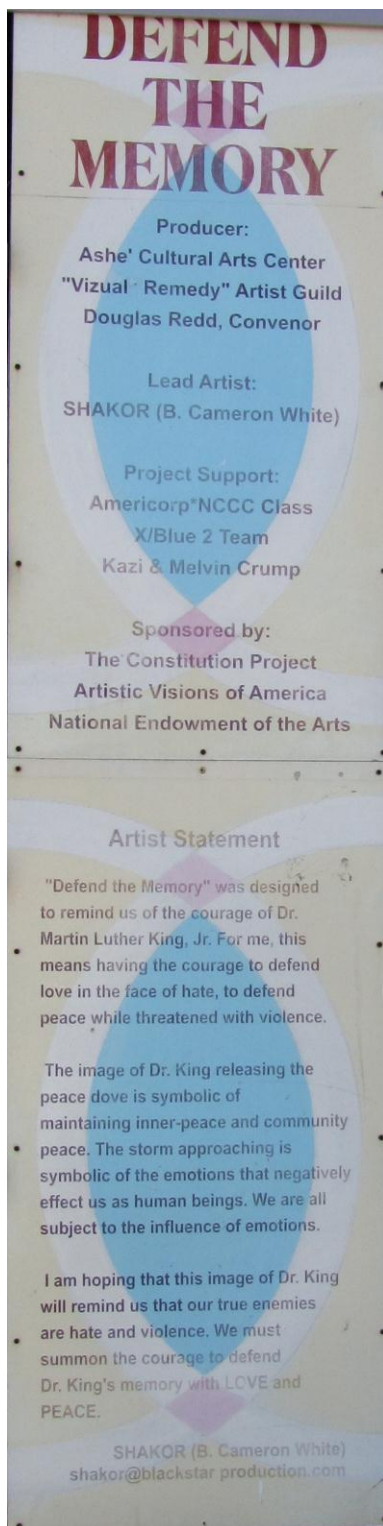


Figure E4. Detail of “Defend the Memory” MLK mural by Shakor, urging nonviolence and peace, in partnership with Ashe Cultural Arts Center (Author’s photo)

Appendix F



Figure F1. National civil rights heritage tour that includes New Orleans

Appendix G

A full block of inner-city real estate, the location of the
MYRTLE BANKS SCHOOL CAMPUS
on **HISTORIC ORETHA CASTLE HALEY BOULEVARD**
is one of the sites under **very favorable consideration** to be the location of the

LOUISIANA STATE
CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM

Central City is the perfect location for this institution dedicated to the
advocacy for civil rights and social justice, past, present and future

What makes our neighborhood the **PERFECT LOCATION?**

CENTRAL CITY IS:

- Birthplace of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference
- Home to Civil Rights Pioneers: REV AVERY ALEXANDER, REV. A. L. DAVIS & ORETHA CASTLE HALEY
- Site of the 1st Public Library to serve African Americans in New Orleans
- Home of Senator Diana Bauto, Originator of the concept for A Civil Rights Museum in Central City along with other Central City organizations, CCRA, CCP, OC Haley MBA
- One of the first African American led YMCA's
- Next to the Down Town Development District, Less than a mile from the D Day and Ogden Museums, the Contemporary Arts and Ashé Cultural Arts Centers
- Home of the Juvenile Justice Project
- Leading its inner-city renaissance under the banner of Culture, Commerce and Community and teaching the nation how to manifest a future that serves the people of this inner-city community well

**SUPPORT THE MOVEMENT FOR A CENTRAL CITY CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM
BY ADDING YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW**

Urge the Orleans Parish School Board to delay plans to auction the Myrtle Banks School property for 90 days to allow the community time to secure the potential for Central City to continue to compete for the site of the planned Louisiana Civil Rights Museum.

Name: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____ City/Zipcode: _____

Signature: _____

Figure G1. Petition to locate the Louisiana State Civil Rights Museum on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard.

VITA

Joel Devalcourt was born in Santa Cruz, California. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree from Hampshire College in film and environmental studies in 2003. He moved to New Orleans in 2008 to volunteer in hurricane recovery efforts in the city and along the Gulf Coast. He joined the Planning and Urban Studies Department at the University of New Orleans in 2008. His concentration in the program was community and economic development, with a sub-concentration in environmental planning. In 2011, he was honored with the Planning and Urban Studies Department's Outstanding Graduate Student Award.