CONTESTING CULTURAL EXPLANATIONS OF POVERTY: MIGRATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NEW ORLEANS, 1965-1980

By

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Acronyms:

CAP	Community Action Program
CEP	Concentrated Employment Program
CIA	Community Improvement Agency
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
HANO	Housing Authority of New Orleans
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
MAC	Metropolitan Area Committee
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NOCEOP	New Orleans Committee for the Economic Opportunity Program
OEO	Office of Economic Opportunity
TCA	Total Community Action, Inc.

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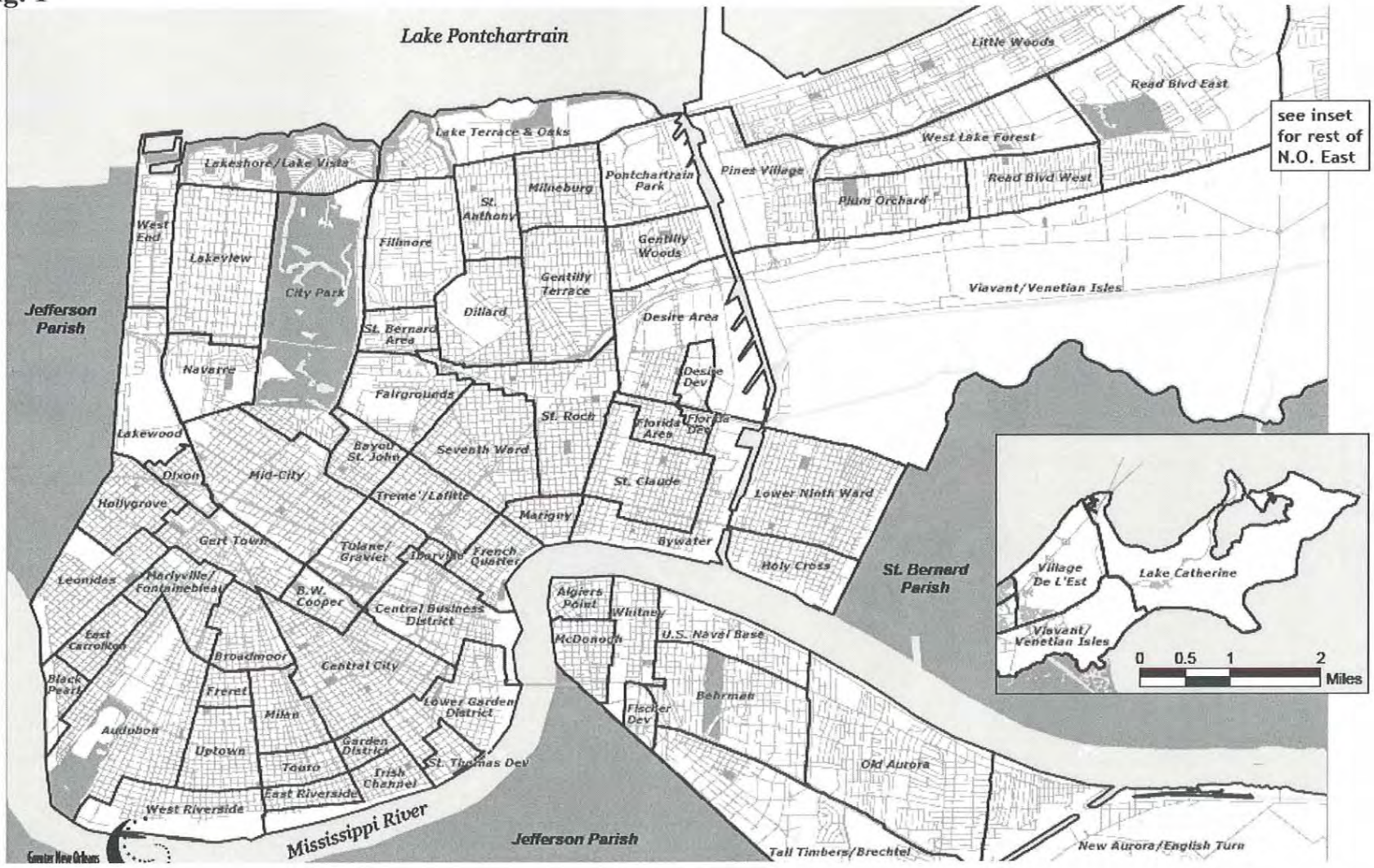
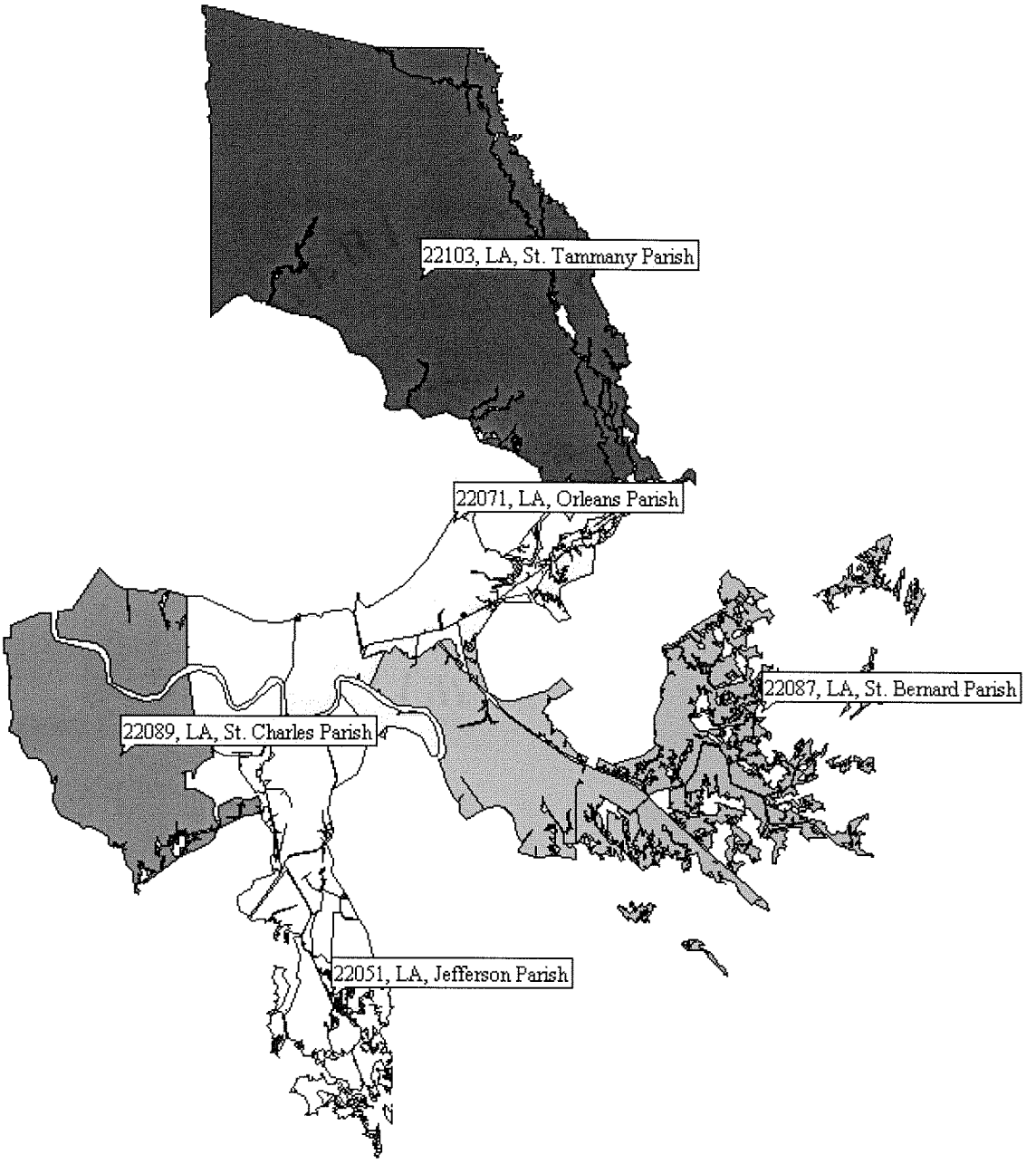
This thesis is dedicated to Mom and Dad.

Fig. 1



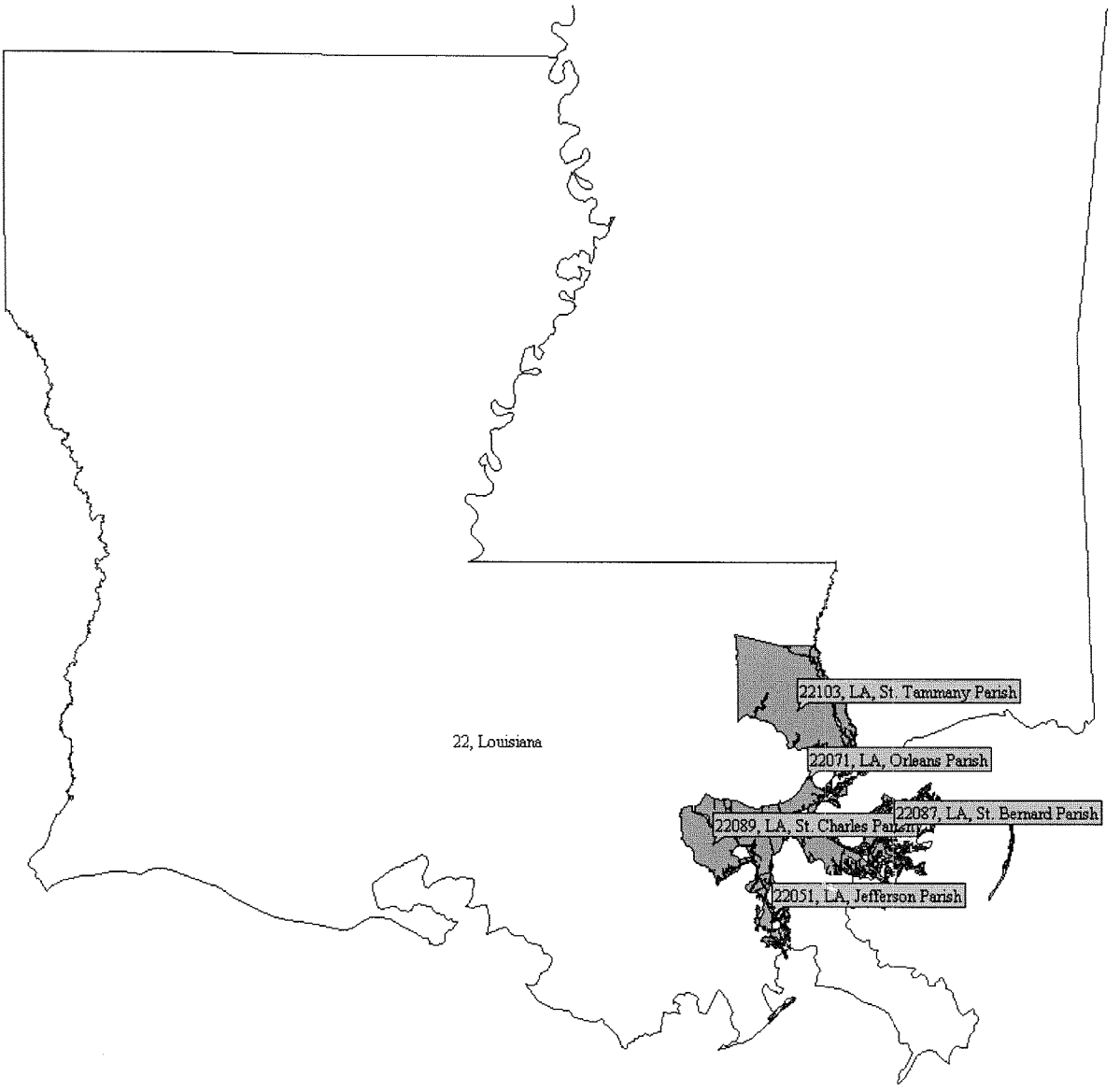
New Orleans Neighborhoods [Source: Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, www.gnocdc.org, created by Joy Bonoguro.]

Fig. 2



New Orleans and Neighboring Parishes
[Source: Geolytics CensusCD 1980.]

Fig. 3



Louisiana and New Orleans Metropolitan Area
[Source: Geolytics Census CD 1980.]

Introduction

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina riveted our nation's attention on New Orleans, Louisiana. Television news brought images of Superdome and Convention Center survivors into living rooms across the country. The hurricane focused renewed interest on urban neighborhoods which had been mired in crushing poverty for decades. Observing storm damage, CNN's Wolf Blitzer made a rare unpolished comment on the air: "You simply get chills every time you see these poor individuals. . .So many of these people, almost all of them that we see, are so poor, and they are so black".[1] For Blitzer and millions of American viewers, images of the storm's survivors depicted not only the terrible toll of the storm but also the tragedy of poverty and racial segregation in New Orleans.

New Orleans was a deeply strained city before the flood. When Katrina struck, more than 25% of city residents lived below the federal poverty line, and as many as 20% of workers were unemployed or not seeking jobs.[2] The police department, public schools, and public housing were all notoriously troubled. Widespread despair had contributed to proliferation of street violence and drugs; for more than ten years, New Orleans had vied for the title of murder capitol of the United States. The summer before Katrina had been particularly bloody – when the storm struck, the city had a homicide rate ten times worse than the national average.[3] Two days before Katrina's landfall, a front page story in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* reported that Mayor Ray Nagin, exasperated by persistent crime, was mulling a controversial public safety tax to

[1] Nicole Gelinas, "Who's Killing New Orleans?," *City Journal* (Autumn 2005).
[2] Adam Nossiter, "New Orleans of Future May Stay Half Its Old Size," *The New York Times*, Jan. 21, 2007.
[3] Amanda Ripley, "The Gangs of New Orleans," *Time*, May 14, 2006.

specifically address the homicide rate.[4] In a live radio interview, Mayor Nagin admitted that "drugs flowed in and out of New Orleans and the surrounding metropolitan area so freely it was scary to me."[5]

Hurricane Katrina focused renewed attention on questions that had existed long before the storm. Why had the Crescent City, once the wealthiest city in America, sunk to among the poorest? As debate rages over how to rebuild New Orleans, every effort must be made to create a new city that can guarantee essential freedoms of its citizens: freedom from street violence, freedom from substandard public schools, freedom to work for a living. To fulfill these goals, we must arrive at an understanding of the social, political, and economic forces that molded New Orleans into a city that failed to protect these freedoms. We must ask: Why had New Orleans fallen?

The era of city history between 1965 and 1980 marked a dramatic period of transition for New Orleans. In September 1965, Hurricane Betsy flooded a large swath of Orleans Parish neighborhoods.[6] In the following years, New Orleans experienced two major campaigns to spur the city's economic development. In the late 1960s, New Orleans community, business, and municipal leaders engaged in a federally-sponsored War on Poverty which directed unprecedented funding and political capital to improving standards of living in the city's poor neighborhoods. In the 1970s, Mayor Maurice Edwin "Moon" Landrieu led a loosely-affiliated team of developers in an aggressive campaign to lure business to New Orleans. During the same era, New Orleans underwent a tectonic shift of racial and economic demographics as white middle-class residents fled city neighborhoods for nearby suburban parishes. By 1980, many urban problems had

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[4] Gordon Russell, "A Fed-up Nagin Toying with Idea of New Tax," *Times-Picayune*, Aug. 27, 2005, 1.
[5] Ray Nagin, *Transcript of Radio Interview with New Orleans' Nagin* (CNN, Sept. 2, 2005).
[6] Orleans Parish is coterminous with the city of New Orleans.

become entrenched in New Orleans; the public school system had grown so disgracefully distressed that it repelled businesses from locating near the city, while violence and drug abuse blighted New Orleans.[7]

Identifying social, economic, and cultural forces at work during the seminal 1965-1980 period in New Orleans history is crucial to understanding the city's struggle against poverty. Of course, New Orleans' problems with economic and racial injustice were rooted in slavery and the persistent oppression which followed Emancipation. Yet the period between 1965 and 1980 represented an elastic historical era when city leaders mounted two major campaigns for economic development while demographic shift altered the city's socio-economic profile profoundly.

Hurricane Katrina raised important questions about the history of poverty in New Orleans, and how we frame the questions will determine the efficacy of our answers. After Katrina, many observers asked: "Why is New Orleans so much poorer than other American cities?" These observers emphasized the city's particular suffering, noting, for example, that the poverty rate in New Orleans was twice the national average. Urban ills afflicted New Orleans more than other cities; in 2003, the Crescent City's murder rate was three times greater than the rate in Chicago, and eight times greater than in New York City.[8] Observers who asked why New Orleans seemed to be exceptionally troubled tended to focus particularly on the city's distinctive culture. In studying the "Big Easy," cultural explanations for local troubles were legion – New Orleans had long been associated with an inimitable culture which traded long-term planning for imprudent revelry. Even worse, Louisiana's political institutions were notorious for corruption.

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[7] "A Sunbelt City Plays Catch-Up," *Business Week*, March 6, 1978.
[8] Steve Ritea and Tara Young, "Cycle of Death: Violence Thrives on Lack of Jobs, Wealth of Drugs," *Times-Picayune*, Feb. 8, 2004.

Before and after Hurricane Katrina, observers of New Orleans conjured this reputation for excessive celebration and corruption by referring to another nickname for the Big Easy: "The City That Care Forgot."[9]

Paying heed to local culture is crucial to any investigation of urban history, and New Orleans' distinct culture played an important role in allowing poverty and violence to become endemic in the city. Yet asking "Why is New Orleans poorer than other cities?" inhibits our insight into the causes of the city's poverty. This question limits our investigation to historical forces particular to New Orleans, and precludes understanding of how common American problems devastated the Crescent City. If we cast our net too narrowly, we will arrive at explanations which emphasize New Orleans' cultural uniqueness. While culture is vital to understanding a city, it can also distract from universal forces that play powerful roles in shaping local history. We will achieve a more reliable understanding of the city's poverty if we ask: "What forces contributed to urban impoverishment in New Orleans?"

White flight, an archetypal problem in urban America, contributed heavily to New Orleans' impoverishment between 1965 and 1980. During this era, local culture combined with national historical forces to defeat remarkable campaigns to stimulate economic development in the city. This thesis will be expounded in four chapters. Chapter One, entitled "A City in Flux," describes destruction caused by Hurricane Betsy, the desegregation of the city's public schools, and the decline of New Orleans' port. Each of these events of the early 1960s would have profound effects on economic development in New Orleans during subsequent years and decades. Chapter Two,

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[9] Beverly Hendrix Wright, "New Orleans: A City That Care Forgot," in *In Search of the New South: The Black Urban Experience in the 1970s and 1980s*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press), 45.; William Porter, "Resurrecting a City's Spirit," *The Denver Post*, Sept. 23, 2005.

entitled "The War on Poverty in New Orleans," explains the local and federal drive to provide relief and economic development to the city's poorest neighborhoods. Chapter Three, entitled "The Power Brokers," focuses on the team of developers who worked with Mayor Moon Landrieu to craft "antipoverty" measures which relied on public and private investment in behemoth projects to spur economic development. Chapter Four, entitled "Abandonment," delineates the dramatic white flight which afflicted New Orleans between 1960 and 1980 and describes its role in contributing to increased poverty in the city.

For primary documentation, this thesis relies heavily on the *Times-Picayune* and the *States-Item*, which were New Orleans' most prominent daily newspapers of the era. Since many black residents of New Orleans criticized the *Times-Picayune* vehemently for unfair coverage of issues of race and poverty during the 1960s, every effort has been taken to filter important events from prejudiced reporting.[10] When this thesis refers to editorializing in local newspapers, it will be to illustrate the newspapers' role as actors in the city's politics. Both newspapers, and particularly the *Times-Picayune*, wielded significant sway during this era, and their articles on subjects from racial violence to Superdome construction contributed to crafting public opinion. Despite alleged bias, the newspapers took on their own importance; as one New Orleans politician said, "If it didn't appear in the *Times-Picayune* the next day, it hadn't happened."[11]

As journalists, economists, and historians attempt to explain poverty in New Orleans, we are tempted to treat the City That Care Forgot as a cultural idiosyncrasy – a city where corruption and jovial indifference prevented economic development. These

[10] "New Orleans Daily Paper Gets Race Bias Complaints," *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 21, 1967, 5.
[11] Ben C. Toledano, interview by author, Pass Christian, MS, May 27, 2006.

explanations allow outsiders to hold New Orleans residents responsible for their own plight. Although culture contributed to New Orleans' poverty, the city also suffered from problems which afflict urban America in general. Similar images of poor, black evacuees would have been broadcast on CNN if Hurricane Katrina had struck almost any major American city, from Atlanta to Boston. Viewed in the context of urban American history, the narrative of New Orleans is at once strikingly distinct and remarkably familiar. Although the city is often seen as a cultural outlier, the history of New Orleans fits squarely within the story of urban America.

Chapter One

A City in Flux

Examining New Orleans history in the fifteen years after Hurricane Betsy requires an understanding of the powerful social, political, and economic currents swirling in the city before the floods. In 1960, a drawn-out dispute over public school desegregation revealed boiling racial tensions in the city and raised the ominous specter of white flight. By the early 1960s, New Orleans' port infrastructure stood in a state of disrepair, while trade competition from other American cities stiffened quickly. Declining port competitiveness raised concerns among city leaders and businessmen that would eventually fuel the city's second major campaign for economic development. In September 1965, Hurricane Betsy struck a massive blow to several New Orleans neighborhoods, flooding miles of city blocks and destroying thousands of homes. By the time the federal government's War on Poverty arrived in Louisiana, New Orleans was a city in flux.

The struggle to admit black students to all-white public schools altered the social, economic, and political landscape of New Orleans. The push for integration demonstrated a new level of solidarity in the black community and helped spark a sustained effort by organizers which would mold the city's black community into a potent force in municipal politics. The desegregation crisis also exposed deep rifts in the city's white community as white New Orleanians clashed over integration. Finally, public school desegregation raised serious concerns that white families would flee city

schools and neighborhoods. In 1965, New Orleans stood on the threshold of massive white flight.

The campaign for integrated public schools grew from a well-established local history of agitation for civil rights. In the spring of 1940, more than 2,500 black New Orleanians had taken to the street to protest discriminatory hiring practices at the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO).[1] Led by attorney Alexander Pierre Tureaud, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) advocated the overthrow of Jim Crow through litigation. In 1952, lawyers for the NAACP filed a school desegregation suit against Orleans Parish.[2] Two years later, black parent-teacher associations organized the boycott of an annual ceremony in which the mayor's office bused schoolchildren to Lafayette Square to lay wreaths at the statue of an antebellum New Orleans philanthropist. Traditionally, white students presented their bouquets first, while black children were forced to wait under a blazing May sun.[3] The ritual concluded with the mayor giving keys to the city to student representatives from each school. The 1954 boycott demonstrated remarkable solidarity; only a handful black children showed up, leaving Mayor DeLesseps "Chep" Morrison to hold 32 unclaimed keys.[4]

After the U.S. Supreme Court disavowed school segregation in the landmark 1954 ruling *Brown v. Board of Education,* Louisiana lawmakers put up stiff resistance to

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[1] Alan Maclachlan, "Up from Paternalism: The New Deal and Race Relations in New Orleans" (University of New Orleans, 1998), 153.

[2] Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press), xii. In this citation, Fairclough notes that the struggle for civil rights in New Orleans was "multifaceted, broadly based, and militant" between the late 1930s and 1954, and in this sense "bore little resemblance to the Montgomery-to-Selma" narrative of the civil rights movement. See this source for a detailed and comprehensive account of the Louisiana civil rights campaign; Fairclough aims to place the "classical period" of the civil rights movement in "the context of a struggle that stretched over three full decades."

[3] Liva Baker, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: The Hundred-Year Struggle to Integrate the Schools* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 212.

[4] Kim Lacy Rogers, *Righteous Lives: Narratives of the New Orleans Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 40.

integration. Just three days after the Supreme Court's landmark ruling, the Louisiana legislature had approved a resolution condemning the Court's decision as "unwarranted and unprecedented abuse of power."[5] The resolution passed by an overwhelming margin; only one state senator and three House representatives dissented.

After years of legal pressure applied by the NAACP, Judge J. Skelly Wright ordered the Orleans Parish school board to admit several black students to first grade classrooms by November 14, 1960. During the weeks preceding this date, a maelstrom of controversy swirled in Louisiana. In Baton Rouge, state legislators called a special session to consider options for rebuffing the black students. Segregationist representatives hoped to dodge the judge's demand by using a strategy they called "interposition." Under this strategy, segregationists argued that when federal courts ordered local school boards to integrate, the state Legislature could "interpose" between the court and the board. Under the tenth amendment, they argued, state legislators would be immune to federal court injunction.[6]

As a legal strategy, interposition drew sharp criticism immediately. One Louisiana State University law professor declared that interposition did not alter "one iota the choice the state has to make – get out of the public school business altogether or operate the schools on the basis of integration."[7] Yet segregationists declared that interposition would affirm "state sovereignty" in the face of federal court injunctions which they called "unlawful encroachments."[8] In a state where mistrust of federal power was ingrained, the image of local legislators standing up to federal tyranny resonated with

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[5] Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizen's Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 59.
[6] "Solons Gather in Baton Rouge for Special Session Opening," *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 4, 1960, 8.
[7] "Professor Says Federals to Win," *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 3, 1960, 24.
[8] James H. Gillis, "La. House Gets Bills to Resist School Mixing," *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 5, 1960, 1.

many white voters. Segregationists evoked the popular memory of resistance to Radical Reconstruction; one group lauded "state officials and organizations in this critical fight for liberty, the likes of which have not been encountered since our forefathers, perhaps against even greater odds, successfully repulsed federal aggression following the war for Southern independence."[9] On November 5th, representatives introduced a bill which would establish state control of the Orleans Parish school board. Newspapers predicted that state officials would close New Orleans schools rather than integrate.[10]

Despite the grandstanding of legislators in Baton Rouge, many white New Orleans leaders opposed any plan to close the city's public schools. On November 3, 1960, the New Orleans City Council had passed a resolution asking the state legislature to take no action towards closing schools.[11] Most members of the all-white Orleans Parish School Board resented the take-over threat.[12] A city councilman complained that only "one member of the school board of New Orleans wants to close the schools and he seems to have the ear of the government."[13] White New Orleanian leaders who acquiesced to court-ordered desegregation enjoyed significant backing in the city; just a few weeks before the November 14th deadline, voters re-elected school board member Matthew Sutherland over ardent segregationists.[14] Determined to keep schools open, some white New Orleanians supported compliance with the federal order to integrate.

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[9] "Citizens Group Backing Davis," *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 12, 1960, 7.
[10] Gillis, "La. House Gets Bills to Resist School Mixing," 1.
[11] "Council Urges No School Halt," *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 4, 1960, 20.
[12] The Orleans Parish School Board governed the city's public school system as an elected entity completely separate from the Mayor's Office. In the desegregation crisis, the School Board represented the epicenter of attention because the Board had been the target of federal injunction.
[13] "Council Urges No School Halt," 20.
[14] "Citizens Group Backing Davis," 7.

Many of these whites joined the organization Save Our Schools (SOS), which advocated desegregation and drew between 800 and 1,500 members by 1961.[15]

Despite the support of a considerable population of white moderates, white New Orleans leaders who opposed interposition found themselves battered by public criticism, particularly from a strong local Citizen's Council. After *Brown* v. *Board*, these organizations had spread from Sunflower County, Mississippi across the South, devoted in large part to countering the "illegal, immoral, and sinful doctrine" of school desegregation.[16] The leadership of the Greater New Orleans Citizens' Council (GNOCC) included prominent New Orleanians such as Dr. Emmett Lee Irwin, past president of the Louisiana Medical Association, and Louis Porterie, son of the former state attorney general and federal judge.[17] As the deadline for desegregation loomed, leaders of the Citizen's Council lashed out in public statements, reminding city councilmen of the "tragedy facing the community and state if public schools are integrated."[18]

During the weekend before the deadline, debate over desegregation in New Orleans reached an unprecedented level of hostility. On Saturday, the editors of the *Times-Picayune* weighed in against the segregationists, publishing an editorial which quoted a Louisiana legislator who had challenged the plan to close schools: "What are we trying to achieve – a generation of idiots?"[19] Still, the editors issued a less than resounding endorsement of integration, arguing that "damage to be done to the school system through forced integration will not be as great as total destruction of the system

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[15] Rogers, *Righteous Lives: Narratives of the New Orleans Civil Rights Movement*, 50.
[16] McMillen, *The Citizen's Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64*, 117.
[17] Ibid., 67.
[18] "City Council's Stand Scored," *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 6, 1960, 27.
[19] "Another Crisis," *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 12, 1960, 8.

through closing of the schools."[20] In the end, the *Times-Picayune* editors asserted, "Closing of the schools wouldn't mean secession from the Union – but secession from civilization."[21] At 9:45 pm on Sunday night, after a day of frantic legal jockeying, Judge Wright issued an atypical restraining order against the state legislature, obstructing them from taking any action to prevent the school integration scheduled for twelve hours later.[22]

The next morning, when four black schoolgirls arrived at two local elementary schools, they confronted a frightfully intimidating scene. Large crowds milled angrily around each school. Ruby Bridges was the lone black student seeking to attend William Frantz Elementary school, and as she approached the building she heard jeers such as "You want to be white? We'll make you white! We're gonna throw acid on your face!"[23] Bridges spent most of the day barricaded in the principal's office with a squad of deputy U.S. Marshals.[24]

Both of the newly-integrated schools were located in the Ninth Ward, home to several large housing projects and some of the city's poorest whites and blacks.[25] Mired in the same poverty as their black neighbors, destitute whites tended to draw consolation from inflated racial pride. The saying "At least I'm not a nigger" was well-known in the

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Bill Billiter, "U.S. Judge Enjoins Legislature," *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 14, 1960, 1.
[23] Baker, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: The Hundred-Year Struggle to Integrate the Schools*. Page 411.
[24] "No Instruction for Negro Girl," *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 15, 1960, 1. Norman Rockwell's famous painting "The Problem We All Live With" depicts Ruby Bridges escorted by U.S. Marshals into William Frantz Elementary School.
[25] The Orleans Parish School Board had selected the Ninth Ward as the initial site for integration in a secret conference months earlier. Board members would later claim that the neighborhood's schools had been chosen because they offered black students the best chance for academic success; all of the black schoolgirls ranked above the average achievement of white students at the schools. Picking the Ninth Ward also helped the School Board retain unreserved support from organizations like SOS, which was centered in wealthier Uptown neighborhoods. Please see Baker, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: The Hundred-Year Struggle to Integrate the Schools*, 378.

neighborhood.[26] When desegregation came to the elementary schools, many white parents were in the jeering crowds, and moderate white parents faced extreme social pressure to join the street struggle against integration. Almost all white parents kept their children home during the first days of desegregation; the *Times-Picayune* reported that only 40 of 467 white pupils remained at William Frantz throughout Monday. In the afternoon, hostile crowds harassed white families who continued to send their children to integrated schools, sometimes following the elementary school students home to berate their parents.[27]

Street violence escalated throughout the week. On Wednesday, November 16, more than 2,000 white protesters took to the streets against integration in a demonstration marked by "sporadic rioting, assaults and vandalism."[28] In the French Quarter, white teenagers hurled epithets and glass bottles at black passers-by. In a reversal of the conventional civil rights-era image, newspapers ran large photos of firemen turning their hoses on segregationist protesters.[29] Although the city's appetite for street mayhem waned after the first week of integration, resistance remained staunch. On November 28, white parents held a formal boycott of the two integrated public schools, leaving black students and a few administrators alone in the classrooms.[30] Yet federal judges continued to press the school board to enforce desegregation. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, these judges would impose a gradual but strict schedule for integration of the city's remaining schools.

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[26] Ibid., 379.
[27] *The Children Were Watching,* videocassette, directed by Richard Leacock, (Drew and Associates, 1960).
[28] Claude Sitton, "2,000 Youths Riot in New Orleans," *The New York Times*, Nov. 17, 1960, A1.
[29] Ibid., A30.
[30] "White Parents Boycott Desegregated Schools," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 29, 1960, A2.

White flight from integrated public schools was not a certainty in New Orleans. During Reconstruction, New Orleans had been the lone city in the South to experiment with school desegregation, and the results had appeared promising.[31] Racial politics in New Orleans had always differed from other American cities. Before the Civil War, New Orleans had the Deep South's largest population of free blacks, and a strong class of wealthy blacks had retained extraordinary power.[32] Many were light-skinned descendants of French colonists, and some of these free Creoles had achieved remarkable financial success as businessmen or skilled craftsmen in antebellum New Orleans.[33] During this era, Creole children often received outstanding educations at private schools for free blacks in New Orleans, or traveled to study in the North or Europe.[34]

In the years following the Emancipation Proclamation, blacks in New Orleans pressed hard for school integration. In 1867, the New Orleans *Tribune*, the city's premier black-owned newspaper, proclaimed public school desegregation to be one of the principal goals of blacks.[35] Throughout the late 1860s, the *Tribune* argued vociferously for integration and against the creation of a separate black public school system. After Radical Republicans captured control of Louisiana's governorship and legislature, proponents of desegregation found a sympathetic audience with state school superintendent Thomas W. Conway. Despite constant threats of street violence and white flight, amplified by many local newspapers, Conway remained determined to carry out

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[31] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 367.
[32] Ibid., 47.
[33] Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 158.
[34] David Connell Rankin, "The Forgotten People: Free People of Color in New Orleans, 1850-1870" (Johns Hopkins University, 1976), 208.
[35] Roger Fischer, *The Segregation Struggle in Louisiana, 1862-1877* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 39.

the Republican campaign promise of public school integration. New Orleans public schools began admitting black students in January 1871.

New Orleans' experiment with school integration during Reconstruction was brief but remarkable. Initial white reaction was strongly negative; in the first year, enrollment in public schools fell by more than 20% as hundreds of white families sought private segregated schools for their children.[36] Newspapers reported numerous incidents of racially-motivated violence in integrated schools. Yet public schools offered students an education of respectable quality free of charge, and soon many whites who had fled returned. In 1873, the New Orleans *Republican* reported that "there are fifteen or twenty colored schools, thirty-five or forty white schools, and about fifteen mixed schools. Of these the mixed schools are the best in the city."[37] The high quality of integrated schools lured white students back from expensive private and parochial programs, and, after the first year of integration, public school enrollment increased steadily until 1875.[38] Although many New Orleans whites had proved willing to send their children to desegregated public schools, sustained integration depended ultimately on Radical Republican control of state government. As Reconstruction collapsed, New Orleans' first experiment with school integration died quickly, replaced by Jim Crow segregation.

In 1960, public school desegregation raised the disquieting prospect of white flight, but major demographic shift was not a foregone conclusion. Unique in its racial politics, New Orleans was the single city in the South where local history suggested that school integration might be met with white acceptance. When New Orleans had first

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[36] William Preston Vaughn, *Schools for All: The Blacks and Public Education in the South, 1865-1877* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 88-9.
[37] "Untitled," *Republican*, July 18, 1873, 2.
[38] Vaughn, *Schools for All: The Blacks and Public Education in the South, 1865-1877*, 88.

experimented with desegregation during Reconstruction, whites had fled public schools in droves, only to return within two years. Almost ninety years later, several key developments converged to encourage white flight. A robust private school system had grown within Orleans Parish.[39] Technological advances had transformed the New Orleans metropolitan area to facilitate white flight. The construction of major highways in the region, the post-World War Two affordability of home building, and draining of nearby swampland permitted suburbanization. Before desegregation, middle-class families had begun filtering from New Orleans to nearby suburban parishes. During the 1950s, a substantial number of white residents had moved to recently-developed neighborhoods in Jefferson Parish.[40]

Even five years after desegregation, however, white flight from New Orleans represented a trend, not an exodus. The departure of white families was so gradual that even in the mid-1970s a *Times-Picayune* editorial would assert that New Orleans had not suffered white abandonment to the same extent as northern cities like Newark, New Jersey or Washington, D.C.[41] Still, the threat of white flight cast a menacing shadow in the wake of desegregation. A handful of black children had been admitted to schools in 1960, but by 1965, the school system had only been integrated up to the fifth grade.[42] During Reconstruction, the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* had warned that "only the lowest and most depraved of the whites will send their children to [desegregated

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[39] Carl Bankston and Stephen J. Caldas, *A Troubled Dream: The Promise and Failure of School Desegregation in Louisiana* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), 82.
[40] Anthony Margavio, "Population Change in New Orleans from 1940-1960," *Louisiana Studies* Winter 1970: 234.
[41] Bankston and Caldas, *A Troubled Dream: The Promise and Failure of School Desegregation in Louisiana*, 61.
[42] Ibid., 59.

schools]."[43] In 1965, as the parish started to enroll sizeable populations of black students, observers wondered if the *Daily Picayune*'s predictions would hold true ninety years later. The city hovered on the brink of overwhelming white flight.

In the early 1960s, white migration to suburban parishes represented only one of several major concerns in New Orleans. During this era, the Port of New Orleans seemed to be withering under stifling competition from newer, technologically-advanced port cities. In New Orleans, the port represented a prime provider of jobs and capital flow, and foreign trade had always contributed more to the Crescent City's economy than it had to other major U.S. cities.[44] Although many leaders expressed optimism that New Orleans could triumph over increased competition and deteriorating facilities, apprehension over the port's weakened position in the American economy would eventually contribute to a major campaign for economic development in the subsequent decade.

The early 1960s were a harrowing time for the Port of New Orleans. The St. Lawrence Seaway had opened in 1959, threatening New Orleans' dominance of shipping of Midwestern bulk goods.[45] On the Gulf of Mexico, ports in Mississippi and Texas competed fiercely for trade with Latin America. As shipping companies began to rely on container ships, ports needed to establish efficient loading and unloading procedures to remain competitive.[46] Additionally, increased mechanization of port facilities reduced

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[43] "Very Highly Colored," *Daily Picayune*, Oct. 22, 1867, 4.
[44] Peirce F. Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 71.
[45] James Kenyon, "Elements in Inter-Port Competition in the United States," *Economic Geography* 46, no. 1 (1970): 2.
[46] James Selna, "Containerization and Intermodal Service in Ocean Shipping," *Stanford Law Review* 21, no. 5 (1969): 1077.

demand for human labor on the docks.[47] To provide the same number of jobs as before, the port would need to expand its facilities considerably.

As competition stiffened, New Orleans leaders found the facilities of the city's port woefully out-of-date. In the early 1960s, the Dock Board labored to complete a major overhaul of the port infrastructure, spending more than $128 million on expansion and construction.[48] To entice trade, the city, state, and federal governments had agreed to dig the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet (MR-GO, or Mister Go). This massive canal, designed to cost another $120 million to build, would create a direct route from the Gulf of Mexico to New Orleans.[49] The MR-GO had been heralded as an economic boon. During his 1964 re-election campaign, U.S. Congressman Hale Boggs (D-LA) had trumpeted the MR-GO's anticipated economic impact, calling it "a 100-year dream come true."[50] Congressman Boggs argued that the MR-GO would make "possible the continued expansion of New Orleans' great port – the largest single source of employment and wealth in the Greater New Orleans area."[51]

The opening of the MR-GO in 1963 contributed to a euphoric outlook on New Orleans development in the mid-1960s. In 1963, the Port of New Orleans narrowly missed an all-time record for value of foreign trade.[52] Rapid expansion of the petrochemical industry brought a flood of capital into the city. Developers touted plans for a "model city" in New Orleans East, a 32,000 acre tract of low-lying land earmarked for suburbanization. Despite heady success, however, many New Orleans leaders

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[47] Ibid.
[48] "City's Growth Potential Held Scarcely Scratched," *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 11, 1960, 4.
[49] George Horne, "New Orleans Speeds Excavation of 70-Mile Short Cut to the Gulf," *The New York Times*, May 22, 1960, 88.
[50] "What Has Hale Boggs Done for Louisiana?," *Times-Picayune*, Oct. 12, 1964, 8.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Vince Randazzo, "New Orleans Tops Variety of Records; Aims Higher for '64," *The New York Times*, Jan. 6, 1964, 128.

recognized the exigency of continued port modernization. In a city which had relied on commerce since its inception, failure to maintain competitiveness in shipping would devastate the local job market. In the next decade, concerns over the port's future would help drive an important attempt to spur economic development in New Orleans.

Hurricane Betsy struck in September 1965, delivering a storm surge which flooded large areas of New Orleans neighborhoods on both sides of the Industrial Canal. Although flooding was not as extensive as the cataclysmic inundation which followed Hurricane Katrina, the historical significance of Hurricane Betsy should not be underestimated. After murky waters forced thousands of residents onto their roofs, rebuilding from Betsy would merge with the federal government's War on Poverty to fuel a local drive to renew several of New Orleans' most neglected neighborhoods.[53]

The days following Hurricane Betsy brought significant disruption to New Orleans which, in retrospect, bears eerie resemblance to Katrina's aftermath. The similarities between residents' experiences during Betsy and Katrina illustrate Betsy's profound impact on New Orleans' neighborhoods and on the city's social, political, and economic conditions. On the night of September 9, 1965, many New Orleanians had gone to bed relieved to have weathered the worst of Hurricane Betsy. Hours later, residents of the Lower Ninth Ward awakened to find muddy water advancing into their

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[53] Hurricane Betsy also delivered an ominous warning in the face of optimism over the city's economic prospects. Flood waters raced over parts of New Orleans East, where developers would soon begin building homes to house 250,000 people. The storm inflicted more than $1 billion in damage on shipping interests in the New Orleans area. The president of the Orleans Levee Board explained that Betsy had shattered defenses by pushing a wall of water into the Industrial Canal, leaving residents to speculate whether much of this water might have roared up the recently-finished MR-GO. Please see: "The 'New' New Orleans -- Comeback of a Southern City," *U.S. News and World Report*, July 25, 1966, 80.; "New Orleans Hunts Snakes, Alligators," *The Washington Post*, Sept. 17, 1965, C8.; "Flood Waters Slowly Recede," *Times-Picayune*, Sept. 11, 1965, 1. After Hurricane Katrina, the *Times-Picayune* would cite several hurricane experts in blaming the MR-GO for aggravating the city's flooding. Please see: Matthew Brown, "Mr-Go Goes from Hero to Villain," *Times-Picayune*, Jan. 8, 2006, 1.

homes. "It was a peculiar sight," one resident told the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, "I looked out the front window and the grass was grey."[54] As the flood rose quickly, families rushed to pile valued possessions out of reach of the deluge. After several hours, residents found refuge on their roofs or in impromptu evacuation centers which often held hundreds of people and dozens of dogs.[55] In the days following Hurricane Betsy, "speedboats skimmed across the water and churned up waves" on major avenues in the Lower Ninth Ward. Coast Guardsmen piloted rescue boats "past tree tops and rooftops ... The water was lapping against bricks above [doors of homes]."[56] The Lower Ninth Ward had been nearly completely submerged in up to twelve feet of water.[57] Across the Industrial Canal, the New Orleans neighborhood of Gentilly had also suffered severe flooding.

Even as residents hunted for dry land, local, state, and national leaders mobilized relief for flood victims and pledged to rebuild damaged New Orleans neighborhoods. Mayor Victor H. Schiro called for citizens to "remain calm and to cooperate with of all the people working to help restore your city to normal."[58] At the Mayor's request, Governor John J. McKeithen dispatched the Louisiana National Guard to distribute military rations among storm victims and to patrol against looters.[59] Less than twenty-four hours after Betsy struck, President Lyndon B. Johnson flew to Louisiana with leaders from the American Red Cross and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.[60] President

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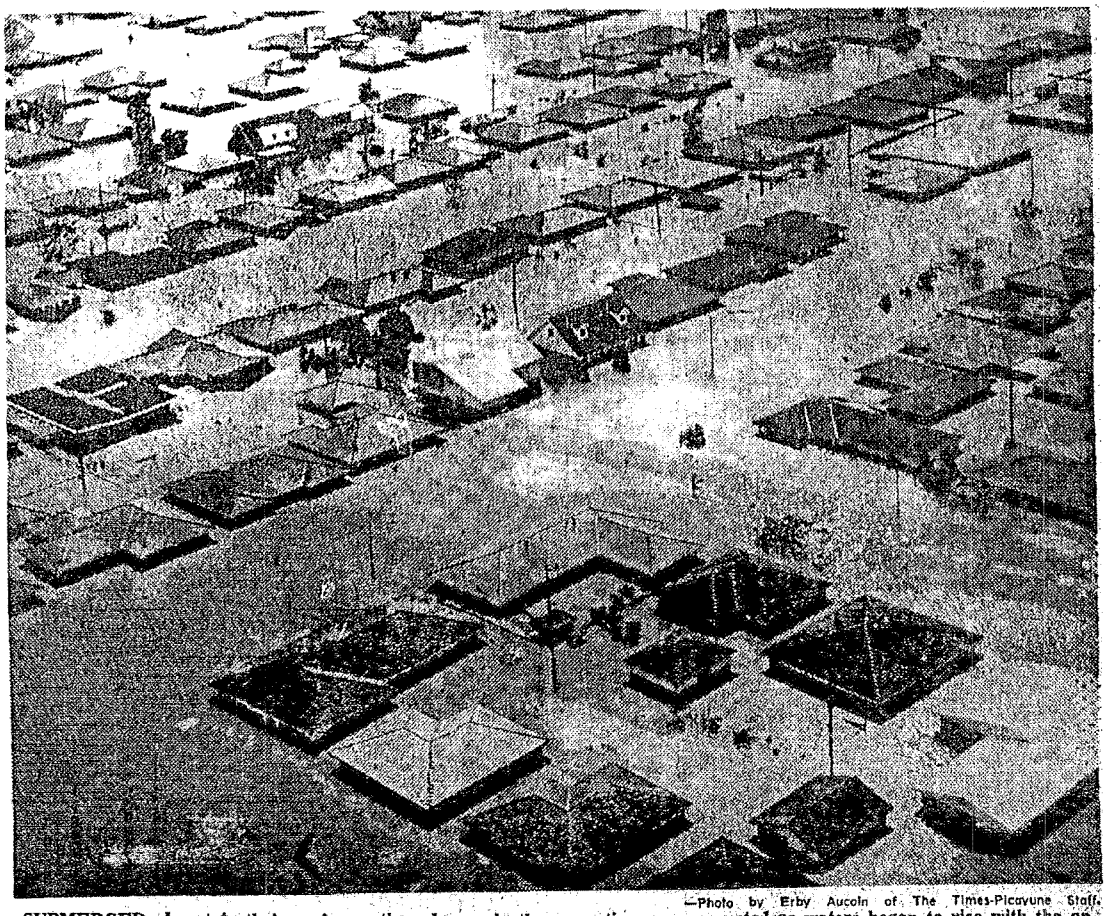
[54] Frank Schneider, "Flood Brings Family Terror," *Times-Picayune*, Sept. 14, 1965, 15.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Don Lee Keith, "Cuts to Speed Relief, Flood Waters Drop," *Times-Picayune*, Sept. 14, 1965, 1.
[58] "Relief Assured, Mayor Reports," *Times-Picayune*, Sept. 11, 1965, 2.
[59] James H. Gillis, "Resources of State Offered N.O., Other Betsy-Hit Areas," *Times-Picayune*, Sept. 12, 1965, 1.
[60] David Remnick, "High Water: How Presidents and Citizens React to Disaster
" *The New Yorker* (2005): 48.

Johnson ordered units from the Fourth Army to set up shelters and field kitchens inside the city.[61]

Fig. 4

Water Laps at Roofs of Some Homes in St. Bernard



SUBMERGED almost to their roofs are these homes in the Carolyn Park Subdivision of St. Bernard Parish. The entire section was evacuated as waters began to rise with the approach of Hurricane Betsy.

—Photo by Erby Aucoin of The Times-Picayune Staff.

Water rises to the eaves of roofs after Hurricane Betsy. This picture was taken in St. Bernard Parish, where flooding was less severe than in the Lower Ninth Ward. [Source: New Orleans *Times-Picayune,* Sept. 13, 1965, 1.]

In the days following the storm, rescue efforts continued at a desperate pace. The magnitude of the humanitarian crisis overwhelmed available resources; even several days

[61] "Johnson Calls, Renews Aid Vow," *Times-Picayune*, Sept. 12, 1965, 2.

after the flood, some Lower Ninth Ward residents remained trapped on the roofs of their homes.[62] The Coast Guard brought 10 helicopters and 30 boats to the city for rescue operations.[63] The helicopters alone ferried more than 1,000 storm victims to safety.[64] An estimated 96,000 New Orleanians sought refuge in temporary shelters after the storm until Algiers Naval Station was opened as a haven for thousands who had lost their homes.[65] The American Red Cross took up a national collection for hurricane relief, asking citizens across the country to help fund 272 shelters the Red Cross had established in Betsy's aftermath.[66]

As relief workers continued to arrive in the city, local officials hurried to begin the arduous process of draining the floodwaters. During the storm, three key pumping stations on the east side of the Industrial Canal had failed; in the days following the storm, crews labored to return these stations to working order.[67] When the Orleans Levee Board discovered that water levels in the Lower Ninth Ward were higher than in the Industrial Canal, the Board ordered crane operators to dig a massive new breach in the canal's eastern levee, hoping to speed the flood's flow back towards the Gulf of Mexico.[68] 48 hours later, when neighborhood homes remained soaked in five feet of tepid seawater, the Levee Board authorized two more man-made breaches in the levee.[69]

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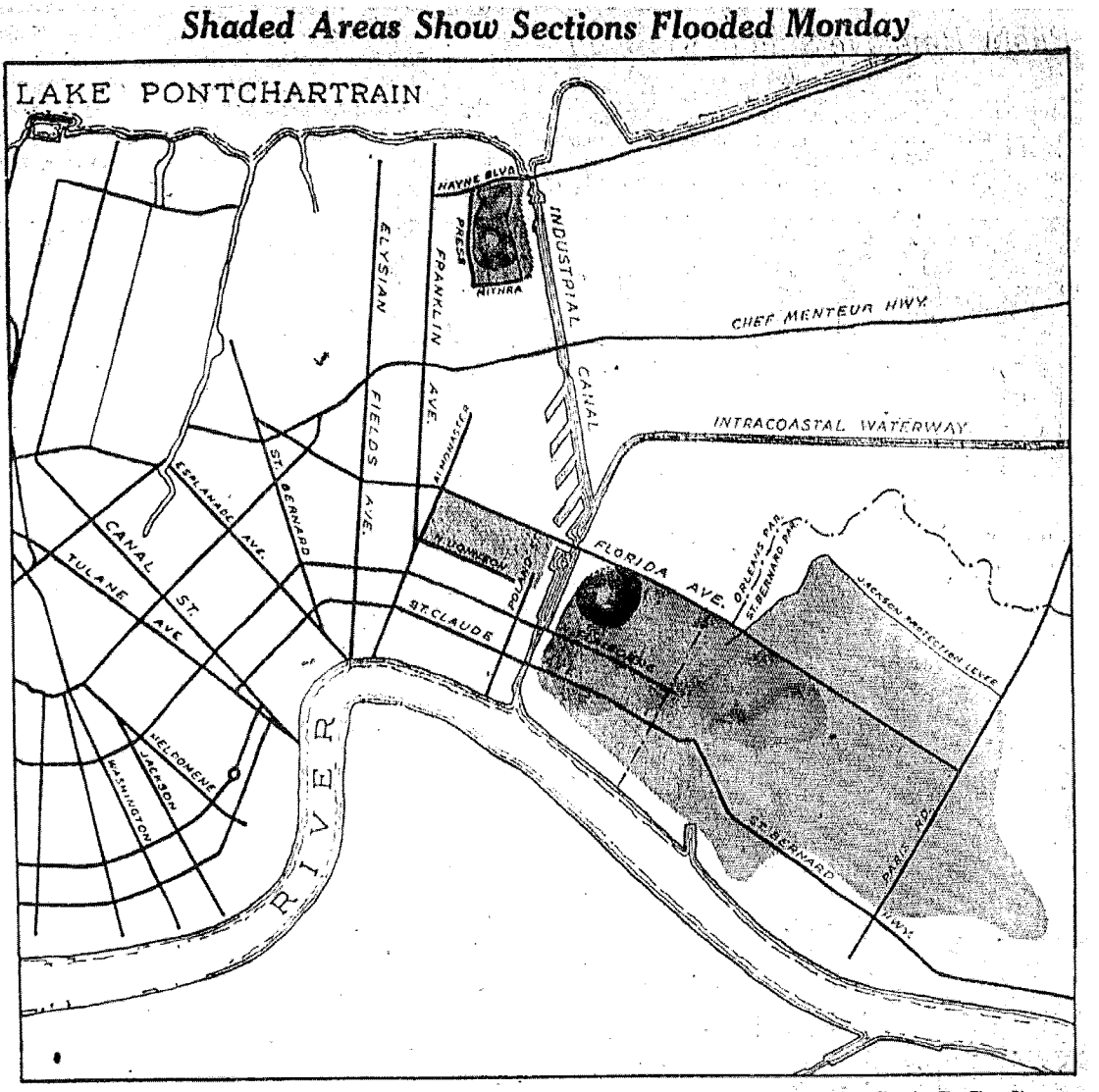
[62] Keith, "Cuts to Speed Relief, Flood Waters Drop."
[63] Thomas Forrest, "Hurricane Betsy, 1965: A Selective Analysis of Organizational Response in the New Orleans Area," in *DRC Working Papers #27* (Disaster Research Center, Ohio State University, 1970), 11.
[64] "Coast Guard Rescued 15,000 from Peril Area in 1965," *The Hartford Courant*, Jan. 2, 1966, 30A.
[65] Forrest, "Hurricane Betsy, 1965: A Selective Analysis of Organizational Response in the New Orleans Area," 10.
[66] "Red Cross Unit Begins Drive for Hurricane Funds," *The Hartford Courant*, Sept. 23, 1965, 45B.
[67] Forrest, "Hurricane Betsy, 1965: A Selective Analysis of Organizational Response in the New Orleans Area," 10.
[68] "Crane Scoops Levee Breach," *Times-Picayune*, Sept. 12, 1965, 1.
[69] Keith, "Cuts to Speed Relief, Flood Waters Drop."

Fig. 5



AREAS REMAINING FLOODED Monday in Orleans and St. Bernard Parishes are shown in this map, with the degree of shading indicating the water's depth. Darkest areas have the deepest wataer. However, Pontchartrain Park (near top of map) and Chalmette in St. Bernard were reported gradually drying up. The biggest flooded area extends from the Industrial Canal along Florida ave. and the Jackson Protection Levee on one side, the Mississippi River and St. Bernard hwy. on the other side, to a distance below Paris rd. The section with deepest water is just east of the Industrial Canal and south of Florida ave.

Map of Orleans Parish neighborhoods which remained flooded several days after Hurricane Betsy.

[Source: New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, Sept. 14, 1965, 4.]

At the time, Hurricane Betsy was the most destructive storm ever to strike Louisiana.[70] A storm surge of sixteen feet had flooded nearly 4,800 square miles of the state. More than 80 Louisianans died in the storm, including at least 29 from Orleans Parish.[71] In financial terms, state officials estimated more than $2.4 billion in storm damage.[72] Insurance companies would later pay out more than $715 million to owners of property damaged by the hurricane, making Betsy the costliest insurance catastrophe in the nation's history.[73]

As the flood receded, New Orleans braced for what Mayor Schiro called "the greatest cleanup in the city's history."[74] Mud plastered flooded portions of the city, and hundreds of animal carcasses littered the area. Recovery teams found human bodies inside homes in the Lower Ninth Ward.[75] Public health authorities administered typhoid, tetanus, and diphtheria shots to more than 50,000 storm victims.[76] Crews worked to clear over 12,000 miles of city streets.[77] The Small Business Administration (SBA) set up eight offices in refugee centers, and President Johnson promised to "allocate the funds necessary to rebuild streets, highways, and bridges. . .[and] repair essential facilities as public buildings, docks, hospitals, and schools."[78] The *Times-Picayune* published instructions on using baking soda and activated charcoal to salvage soaked refrigerators.[79]

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[70] Forrest, "Hurricane Betsy, 1965: A Selective Analysis of Organizational Response in the New Orleans Area," 8.
[71] Don Lee Keith, "Deaths Continue Rising in New Orleans, State," *Times-Picayune*, Sept. 12, 1965, 1.
[72] Todd Shallat, "In the Wake of Hurricane Betsy," in *Transforming New Orleans and Its Environs*, ed. Craig Colten (Pittsburg, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 126.
[73] "Worst Catastrophe," *The Hartford Courant*, Nov. 27, 1966, 7B.
[74] "National Guard Aid Asked to Protect from Looters," *Times-Picayune*, Sept. 11, 1965, 11.
[75] "Giant Pumps Battle Flood in Louisiana," *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 16, 1965, 21.
[76] "7,000 Betsy Refugees Still Waiting to Go Home," *The Hartford Courant*, Sept. 20, 1965, 12A.
[77] Forrest, "Hurricane Betsy, 1965: A Selective Analysis of Organizational Response in the New Orleans Area," 10.
[78] "Johnson Visits City, Promises Swift Help," *Times-Picayune*, Sept. 11, 1965, 1.
[79] "Articles, Some Food Can Be Salvaged," *Times-Picayune*, Sept. 14, 1965, 4.

In following years, rebuilding would replace relief efforts in devastated New Orleans neighborhoods. Since Hurricane Betsy had ravaged some of the city's poorest areas, the federal government's War on Poverty would soon target storm-damaged neighborhoods for improved housing, public services, and economic development. As black-led organizations advocated for neighborhood residents, rebuilding efforts would merge with federal programs designed to tackle poverty.

The early 1960s had been a time of turmoil in New Orleans. Public school desegregation had exposed raw racial relations in a city which prided itself on its bonhomie. Concerns over local economic development had escalated as New Orleanians watched port facilities lose their competitive edge. In 1965, Hurricane Betsy had capped a series of milestone events which stirred social, political, and economic currents in New Orleans. Each of these events had enduring effects on the city's economic development. Advocates for survivors of Hurricane Betsy turned to the federal government's War on Poverty for relief and economic development. The War on Poverty, addressed in Chapter Two, marked an unprecedented devotion of resources and attention to New Orleans' poorest neighborhoods. The decline of the city's port helped spur a remarkable second campaign for economic development in the 1970s. This campaign, described in Chapter Three, relied on public and private investment in large, highly-publicized projects. Finally, public school integration contributed heavily to migration of white middle-class families from Orleans Parish. This demographic shift, illustrated in Chapter Four, had tremendous consequences on New Orleans' development.

Chapter Two

The War on Poverty in New Orleans

In September 1965, Hurricane Betsy flooded much of the city's Upper and Lower Ninth Ward. These neighborhoods, located on opposite banks of the Industrial Canal, were home to some of the city's poorest white and black residents. In Betsy's aftermath, the laborious process of rebuilding from storm damage merged with local and national movements designed to tackle racial injustice and poverty. After struggles for desegregation of public schools and increased voter registration, local black groups were well-organized, and these organizations advocated vigorously for flood victims. A year and a half before Hurricane Betsy, President Lyndon B. Johnson had declared an "unconditional war on poverty," and as this federal campaign arrived in the Crescent City, antipoverty programs interlaced with storm relief in New Orleans' poor and storm-battered neighborhoods.[1] For several years, federal antipoverty officials had spoken of "rebuilding" the nation's blighted cities. After Betsy ravaged some of New Orleans' most impoverished neighborhoods, the process of rebuilding poor urban areas in the Crescent City took on a literal meaning.

Aid to New Orleans' neighborhoods fell into three broad categories: housing and infrastructure improvement, economic development, and immediate measures designed to pacify racial tensions. Federally-funded urban renewal and Model Cities programs dominated housing and infrastructure projects; in the late 1960s and early 1970s these

[1] Throughout this thesis, "War on Poverty" will be used to refer not only to federal antipoverty programs, but also to local measures that organizers labeled part of the national campaign against urban impoverishment.

programs pumped tens of millions of dollars into target neighborhoods including the Lower Ninth Ward and Desire-Florida. Job training programs used considerable federal backing to promote economic development in poor New Orleans neighborhoods. Economic development is progress towards efficient use of resources, and job training programs aimed to empower members of the poor, largely black labor pool to achieve financial stability. Finally, public and private contributions supported a number of measures intended to provide immediate improvement of quality of life for poor city residents. These initiatives included building recreation centers and temporary swimming pools in urban neighborhoods during the long summers of the late 1960s, when race-based rioting loomed. Proponents of each of these programs advertised their "antipoverty" aim, and each program received unprecedented financial support from private donors and all levels of government. Despite this support, antipoverty programs encountered crippling obstacles in their attempts to improve standards of living for residents of New Orleans' poor neighborhoods.

In the years following the storm, black neighborhood groups pressured local, state, and federal officials to apply antipoverty funds to hurricane-damaged communities. Neighborhood leaders complained that the Ninth Ward had suffered from inadequate trash collection, street maintenance, sewer drainage, and water supply before Betsy, and that these problems had been exacerbated by the storm. In an effort to capitalize on white fears, neighborhood activists threatened to "have all of the middle-class Negro homeowners move [from the Ninth Ward] and seek homes in presently all-white neighborhoods" if storm relief was not forthcoming.[2] Leaders hoped that a looming

[2] "Hurricane Victims Vow to Integrate Housing," *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 28, 1967, 30.

influx of black residents to predominantly white areas would spur action to rebuild the Ninth Ward's storm damage and urban decay.

Black leaders from storm-damaged districts focused particularly on winning federal funds for rebuilding neighborhoods. Ninth Ward leaders filed a petition for urban renewal funds from the federal government, and then traveled to Washington D.C. to corral support.[3] The proposal gained backing from white municipal leaders eager to win federal grants, and Mayor Victor Schiro soon brought a squad of city councilmen to the nation's capitol to lobby for urban renewal assistance.[4] The pleas of black community leaders and white municipal officials met sympathetic ears in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), but federal administrators balked at providing urban renewal grants for New Orleans because of significant legal hurdles erected by the Louisiana Legislature.[5]

By the mid-1960s, the Louisiana Legislature had obstructed federal urban renewal projects from taking root in the state for more than a decade. Urban renewal predated the War on Poverty by many years; by 1966, more than $5 billion in federal funds had been distributed for renewal of American cities.[6] In Louisiana, a 1954 state law had prevented urban renewal from taking hold in New Orleans. The law had been designed to protect property rights of residents of areas slated for redevelopment -- in many circles in Louisiana and across America, urban renewal represented the trampling of individual rights for federally-mandated demolition. In New Orleans, critics of urban renewal

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[3] O.C. Taylor, "La. Hurricane Victims Seek Urban Renewal Aid from U.S.," *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 14, 1967, 34.
[4] "Mixed Group from La. Goes to D.C. For Housing Aid," *Chicago Defender*, Feb. 11, 1967, 3.
[5] Taylor, "La. Hurricane Victims Seek Urban Renewal Aid from U.S.," 34.
[6] Kent B. Germany, *New Orleans after the Promises: Poverty, Citizenship, and the Search for the Great Society* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2007), 184.

referred to the program as a "communist slum clearance act" and fought furiously to insulate the city's neighborhoods from federal intervention.[7] These critics found allies among rural representatives, many of whom considered property rights to be sacred and objected to federal tax money being lavished on urban centers. As a result, Louisiana restricted federal renewal aid more stringently than any other state.[8] Throughout the 1960s, Louisiana law limited HUD to funding comprehensive local studies which identified areas of urban blight and issued recommendations for redevelopment.[9]

Frustrated by state-imposed limits on federal aid to New Orleans, the biracial coalition of municipal, business, and community leaders turned its lobbying efforts from Washington D.C. to Baton Rouge. Black leaders submitted a petition to state officials which detailed the federal funds available to New Orleans pending the repeal of state law.[10] Several years after Hurricane Betsy, the coalition advocating urban renewal in New Orleans had swollen to include the city's Urban League and Human Relations Committee, the Council for a Better Louisiana, the metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, and a host of neighborhood organizations.[11] New Orleans newspapers also joined the campaign to bring urban renewal to the city; the *Times-Picayune* ran a rare front-page editorial declaring that state legislators "who oppose urban renewal oppose progress."[12] Finally, in 1968, the state legislature took action to permit federal urban renewal programs in Louisiana cities.

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[7] Ibid., 185.
[8] "Renewal Gets Tiny Nod in La.," *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 14, 1967, 7.
[9] "Community Renewal Program: New Orleans, Louisiana," (New Orleans City Planning Commission, 1970).
[10] Taylor, "La. Hurricane Victims Seek Urban Renewal Aid from U.S.," 34.
[11] Germany, *New Orleans after the Promises*, 185.
[12] "Urban Renewal: An Editorial," *Times-Picayune*, May 14, 1967, 1.

After state legislation lifted the prohibition on urban renewal projects, HUD approved funding to implement several of the local development plans it had commissioned during the 1960s. The Community Improvement Agency (CIA) administered urban renewal in New Orleans, but city voters approved the first major CIA project by referendum.[13] In 1969, the CIA recommended plans for a five-year, $23 million redevelopment of the Lower Ninth Ward, funded largely by federal contributions.[14] In November, voters in Orleans Parish endorsed the plan by a margin of nearly three to one.[15] More than four years after Hurricane Betsy, federal urban renewal funds would begin arriving in the storm-damaged and impoverished neighborhoods of New Orleans.

Between 1969 and 1974, the CIA orchestrated redevelopment projects in several poor neighborhoods of New Orleans, including the Lower Ninth Ward, Central City, and the Desire-Florida area. During this time, the CIA made substantial improvements to neighborhood infrastructure. In 1972, a $3.1 million grant from HUD helped crews complete drainage and paving on a dozen streets in the Lower Ninth Ward.[16] In 1973, the CIA funded the clean-up of the Whitney Junkyard, which residents complained had contributed to blight in the Lower Ninth Ward for fifteen years.[17] In a sustained campaign to improve the neighborhood's image, the CIA worked to develop better

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[13] From the beginning, the CIA was closely tied to City Hall. Mayor Schiro appointed local real estate businessmen and rising black leaders to the organization's board, and the first director of the CIA had been Mayor Schiro's City Planning manager. Please see: Germany, *New Orleans after the Promises*, 188.
[14] "9th Ward Area Improvements Are Approved," *Times-Picayune*, Aug. 6, 1969.
[15] Germany, *New Orleans after the Promises*, 193.
[16] Joseph E. Peychaud, "An Overview of the Community Improvement Agency's Urban Renewal and Neighborhood Development Program, 1969-1977" (University of New Orleans, 1978), 46.
[17] Ibid., 49.

garbage collection, remove abandoned vehicles from private lots, and to fence off vacant buildings.[18]

During the same era, HUD delivered federal funds to New Orleans neighborhood improvement projects through the Model Cities program. This program, initiated by federal law in 1966, pumped out $2.3 billion to selected American cities before its demise in 1974.[19] New Orleans received a preliminary grant of $245,000 in 1969, and in subsequent years HUD distributed $9,249,000 grants annually to Model Cities projects in New Orleans.[20] These funds were directed to building community centers and health stations in the Lower Ninth Ward, Desire-Florida, and Central City neighborhoods, areas that had also received considerable federal funding through the urban renewal program.

Large federal payments to New Orleans urban renewal and Model Cities projects continued throughout the early 1970s. In 1974, Congress used the Housing and Community Development Act to adjust the route of money to urban rehabilitation projects and to effectively disband the Model Cities program. The act redirected urban renewal funds to city governments, minimizing federal administration of local renewal projects. Of nearly $15,000,000 of annual community development funds received in New Orleans, about $2.6 million were earmarked for housing rehabilitation, a marked decreased from previous HUD contributions to the neighborhood improvement projects.[21] The CIA would continue operating in New Orleans as a consulting organization for several years, but the era of cash-bathed federal renewal projects had ended.[22]

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[18] Joyce M. Davis, "Cleanup Drive Is Announced," *Times-Picayune*, Jan. 26, 1973, 7.
[19] Robert Wood, "Model Cities: What Went Wrong -- the Program or Its Critics?," in *Neighbourhood Policy and Programmes*, ed. Naomi Carmon (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 65.
[20] Edgar Poe, "G.A.O. Report Criticizes N.O. Model Cities Project," *Times-Picayune*, Jan. 26, 1973, 10.
[21] Peychaud, "An Overview of the C.I.A." 52.
[22] Ibid., 75.

While positive effects of federal funding in New Orleans could not be denied, urban renewal and Model Cities cost-effectiveness was unproven. Although the CIA and Model Cities projects made noticeable improvements to housing and public services in poor neighborhoods, large amounts of federal funds seemed to dissipate in local programs without clear results. Even while he campaigned for increased payments in 1972, Mayor Moon Landrieu seemed to pardon the questionable effect of federal contributions, telling an audience in Chicago that "[f]ederal officials expect every program to be a great success, but Model Cities money is being spent in uncharted waters."[23]

In the end, even proponents of urban renewal and Model Cities recognized that the programs' chief impact had been elevating the political status of minority activists and politicians. Many black activists had helped administer local projects. Robert Wood, an MIT political scientist who played a leading role in crafting Model Cities legislation, defended programs that provided federal funds to poor neighborhoods as "*extensions* of the *political* restructuring of the country, which was to result in African-Americans and Hispanics and successive ethnic minorities gaining formal access to important public offices – getting *elected.*"[24] In New Orleans, Wood was indeed correct that federal spending through urban renewal and Model Cities had helped rising stars in the black community gain prominence, and many of these young black leaders went on to win elected office at the local, state, and federal levels. Yet empowerment of black leaders had been a secondary goal of urban renewal and Model Cities projects; these programs had devoted significant federal funds to their fundamental objective of improving

[23] "Five Big-City Mayors Praise Model Cities," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 7, 1972, A5.
[24] Wood, "Model Cities: What Went Wrong -- the Program or Its Critics?," 70.

housing and infrastructure in poor neighborhoods. By the mid-1970s, observers were unanimous in recognizing that plentiful federal funding had failed to eliminate major inadequacies in housing, roads, and drainage in New Orleans' poor and storm-battered neighborhoods.

In the wake of Hurricane Betsy, while waiting for state legislators to open the spigots for urban renewal funds, New Orleans leaders had found other routes to bringing the War on Poverty to the Crescent City. Federal funding for antipoverty programs was plentiful, and by the time urban renewal funds began arriving in New Orleans, local groups had been receiving federal money to spend in poor communities for several years. Even six months before Hurricane Betsy, the *States-Item* had trumpeted the beginning of New Orleans' "poverty war" with an article on Total Community Action, Inc. (TCA), a local organization designated to administer antipoverty measures under the federal Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO).[25] In the following years, TCA would play a prime role in driving War on Poverty efforts in the city, and would drive the city's most ambitious attempt at promoting genuine economic development in poor communities.

Funding for TCA sprang from the federal government's attempt to use local representation to direct massive aid to poor urban neighborhoods. In 1964, Congress had passed the Economic Opportunity Act, which promised to foster Community Action Programs (CAPs) in impoverished areas across the country. Congress asked local governments to pick up 10% of CAP expenses, while the federal government would pay for the remaining 90%.[26] CAPs would be administered by local commissioners, while

[25] Allan Katz, "City Poverty War Begins," *States-Item*, April 29, 1965, 25.
[26] Leila Meier Rice, "In the Trenches of the War on Poverty: The Local Implementation of the Community Action Program, 1964-1969" (Vanderbilt University, 1997), 2.

the OEO would oversee the campaign and encourage national proliferation of programs like Head Start and Upward Bound.[27]

In New Orleans, TCA became the principal organization managing the city's War on Poverty. TCA had grown from the New Orleans Committee for the Economic Opportunity Program (NOCEOP), a body composed of prominent local progressives. The leadership board of the NOCEOP included many of the most wealthy and socially-connected members of local white society, including Darwin Fenner, one of the city's leading socialites, and Edith Stern, an heir to Sears, Roebuck, & Company.[28] After the NOCEOP changed its name to TCA in 1964, the organization recruited rising leaders from black communities, including Ernest "Dutch" Morial, who would eventually become the city's first black mayor, and Sidney Barthelemy, who would succeed Morial in City Hall.[29]

In New Orleans, TCA oversaw a myriad of local initiatives designed to relieve urban poverty and empower poor city residents. In target neighborhoods like the Lower Ninth Ward and Central City, TCA backed such diverse endeavors as day-care centers for the children of poor mothers, clearing of drainage ditches, and legal counseling.[30] TCA also engaged heavily in organizing poor black neighborhoods for political participation; in three years, TCA facilitated the growth of some eighty neighborhood councils and committees whose collective membership was 97% black and 51% female.[31] Yet TCA's

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Germany, *New Orleans after the Promises*, 315-7. In New Orleans, a robust elite social scene caused political and financial clout to interlace with social status. The political and economic ramifications of this social structure will be addressed more fully in Chapter Three.
[29] Ibid., 331-2.
[30] Katz, "City Poverty War Begins," 25.
[31] Germany, *New Orleans after the Promises*, 62.

primary initiative designed to spur economic development in poor neighborhoods was job training.

TCA devoted much of its funding and political capital to training poor African-Americans for employment. TCA supporters reasoned that weak education in poor communities prevented economic development, and that improved job training might empower workers to break out of poverty. One front page article commented that "the biggest single reason many job doors are still closed to Negroes is the lack of adequate education or skills," and that "this lack of essential training, in turn, is the result of generations and generations of poverty breeding more poverty."[32] With the stated intentions of interrupting cycles of poverty in poor black neighborhoods of New Orleans, TCA led a coalition of several local groups in launching expansive job training programs in the late 1960s.

The programs promised rewards for black community leaders and white business leaders alike. For local black leaders, job training programs represented an opportunity to deliver federal funds to the black community while providing training which might allow black workers to earn better wages. In the white-dominated local business community, leaders had long complained that a large pool of unskilled labor prevented manufacturing and industrial firms from locating in the Crescent City. These business interests lined up to support federally-funded programs that might produce a more competent labor force. For white and black leaders eager for positive publicity, vocal support of heavily-subsidized job training programs represented a cost-effective way to broadcast involvement in the campaign against poverty. For all these reasons, TCA administered job training programs with noisy support from the black-controlled Urban

[32] Rosemary James, "Lack of Education Remains Main Negro Job Barrier," *States-Item*, June 8, 1968, 1.

League and white-controlled government and business entities like the Metropolitan Area Committee (MAC), the Louisiana Division of Employment Security, and Tulane University.[33] The president of MAC emphasized the shared interests of business and community leaders, telling the *States-Item*: "Industry needs people, and [New Orleans] people need jobs. We are going all out to put them together."[34]

In New Orleans, newspapers considered job training programs the most promising of Great Society schemes. A three-part series on the programs struck an uncommonly optimistic tone, concluding with an article entitled "In-Depth Training May End Plight of Area Jobless."[35] TCA efforts in training culminated in the Concentrated Employment Program (CEP). Financed initially by a $4.6 million federal grant, the CEP targeted four poor neighborhoods of New Orleans for intensive recruitment to job training courses. Although organizers invited poor residents throughout the city to enroll in the program, the federal grant mandated that recruiters seek trainees in the Lower Ninth Ward, Irish Channel, Central City, and Desire neighborhoods.[36] In the summer of 1967, TCA set the ambitious goal of training 5,000 poor New Orleanians in the CEP's first year.[37]

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[33] Rosemary James, "Job Aid Offered on Many Levels," *States-Item*, Aug. 4, 1967, 1.
[34] "Mac Launches Program to Train Unemployable," *States-Item*, July 28, 1967, 19.
[35] Rosemary James, "In-Depth Training May End Plight of Area Jobless," *States-Item*, Aug. 5, 1967, 12.
[36] James, "Job Aid Offered on Many Levels."
[37] Rosemary James, "N.O. Takes Part in Job Project," *States-Item*, Aug. 3, 1967, 1.

Fig. 6

Front-page *States-Item* graphic during the War on Poverty
[Source: New Orleans *States-Item.* June 3, 1968, 1.]

From the outset, delays beset the CEP in New Orleans. An early campaign to sign up local companies as employers found tepid support among business executives who were hesitant to commit to hiring trainees. A frustrated CEP official complained that the operation had moved "too slowly," and that "the business community must add

its weight to the drive."[38] During the CEP's third month, a public meeting erupted into chaos when neighborhood activists accused CEP administrators of peddling empty promises of employment to poor residents.[39] Less than six months after the program's initiation, the *Times-Picayune* described declining interest in job training among poor workers. CEP director Clarence Jupiter, a black TCA executive who had formerly served as a local hospital official, bemoaned the constant need for "readjusted attitudes" among poor trainees.[40] In six months, only 316 workers had been "meaningfully placed" in training programs. The newspaper noted that the CEP's one-year goal of 5,000 trainees would take 15 years to accomplish unless enrollment rates increased, and that enrollment had declined significantly in recent months.[41] Almost before the vaunted program had been rolled out, the CEP seemed to be unraveling.

Throughout the late 1960s, the CEP found no relief from negative publicity. In the summer of 1968, the *States-Item* labeled the CEP an "admitted flop" and quoted a TCA worker who called the program "a joke."[42] The next summer, two years after the program's inception, the *Times-Picayune* ran a blistering front-page special on job training in New Orleans which questioned whether "the government is justified in spending $5,000 to make a man employable as a clerk or as a service station attendant."[43] By all accounts, the CEP had fallen far short of its initial goals; in the first year and a half of job training, the program had graduated only 2,149 workers.[44]

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[38] "Job Placement Letters Mailed," *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 30, 1967, 18.
[39] John Cotter, "Concentrated Employment Meet Not So Concentrated," *Times-Picayune*, Oct. 20, 1967, 25.
[40] Bill Voelker, "Possible Causes Cited for Slow Start of C.E.P.," *Times-Picayune*, Jan. 6, 1968, 6.
[41] Ibid.
[42] David Snyder, "Desire-Florida 'Target' Is Key to City Planning," *States-Item*, June 3, 1968, 1.
[43] Robert I. Pack, "Record of Job Training Unit Seems to Justify Criticism," *Times-Picayune*, Aug. 7, 1969, 1.
[44] Ibid.

Despite blustery rhetoric which surrounded its founding, the CEP lost momentum quickly. Harsh media criticism contributed to the program's rapid demise, but the CEP also suffered from inflated initial expectations. One official admitted that job training had been "set up with considerable publicity before industry cooperation was assured."[45] Another administrator confessed that CEP leaders had underestimated the difficulty of training the unemployed, noting that most workers in target neighborhoods were "Negro, poverty-stricken, school dropouts, reading on a fifth grade level, doing math on a fourth grade level, usually have a police record, and often have a history of drug abuse."[46] Many local leaders, white and black, complained that job prospects for CEP graduates were limited by racism; since most trainees were black, they could only access traditional "Negro" jobs in a city still sharply divided by color.[47] Local companies proved impatient with many CEP graduates, and the *Times-Picayune* sympathized with "employers. . .who cannot be blamed for their reluctance" to hire "people with bad records."[48] By 1969, the New Orleans NAACP demanded the firing of CEP's director for "lack of insight and feeling in the community."[49] Although federal funding for CEP would continue through the 1970s, the program would never again regain its prominence as a machine for economic development in poor neighborhoods.

As the CEP foundered in the late 1960s, concerns over black violence in urban neighborhoods gripped New Orleans. Heavily-reported rioting in other American cities raised fears of bloodshed in the Crescent City, and periodic outbreaks in New Orleans

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[45] Cotter, "Concentrated Employment Meet Not So Concentrated," 25.
[46] Robert I. Pack, "Low Level of Heavy Industry at Root of Employment Jam," *Times-Picayune*, Aug. 8, 1969, 1.
[47] Germany, *New Orleans after the Promises*, 160.
[48] Pack, "Low Level of Heavy Industry at Root of Employment Jam," 1.
[49] As quoted in: Germany, *New Orleans after the Promises*, 162.

neighborhoods augmented these fears. Among white politicians and business leaders, dread of impending violence became a motivation for sustained funding for urban antipoverty programs, but initiatives that originated to prevent racial violence tended to emphasize immediate, superficial relief of conditions in poor communities. As the city's War on Poverty shifted to stress rapid relief, public support for economic development projects eroded.

Mounting frustration over unrelenting racial and economic inequality justified some fears of race-based violence in New Orleans, and heavy media coverage of local and national violence contributed to an increasingly anxious atmosphere. After the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968, a few New Orleans housing projects erupted in violence. Although Dr. King's killing had been memorialized in New Orleans by a peaceful march of black demonstrators to City Hall, the nights following the murder saw more than twenty firebombings in Orleans Parish.[50] In the St. Bernard public housing development, police squared off with large crowds after teenagers showered a fire engine with bricks.[51] Meanwhile, local newspapers ran vivid accounts of chaotic rioting in other American cities. Although New Orleans dodged full-fledged riots, the local and national outcry after Dr. King's assassination raised concerns that the Crescent City might succumb to racial bloodshed.

During the summer following the murder of Dr. King, local reporting of conditions in poor neighborhoods struck an ominous tone. An article on New Orleans' troubled Central City neighborhood closed by quoting a resident who described frustration and suspense: "The people have been promised things for too long and they've

[50] "Negroes Lower U.S. Flag after March on City Hall," *Times-Picayune*, April 6, 1968, 5.; "22 Fire Bomb Incidents Told," *Times-Picayune*, April 7, 1968, 13.
[51] "Police Clear Housing Area," *Times-Picayune*, April 8, 1968, 3.

never got nothing. . .Nobody's talking about burning down any buildings. But that's not saying it won't happen."[52] The *States-Item* expressed hope that New Orleans would escape violence, but acknowledged that black "militants" were gaining sway in impoverished communities. One leader of a black group described Vietnam veterans as a driving force of black militancy: "I see a group of people disgusted with life slowly becoming violent. . .There are young Negro veterans fresh from Vietnam who for various reasons can't find a job because of color. The attitude of these people is 'if I went to die in Vietnam, I'd just as soon die on the streets of New Orleans.'"[53]

At times, civil rights and antipoverty leaders fanned fears of racial uprising in attempts to win support for urban programs. Even before Dr. King's assassination, the presidents of MAC, TCA, and the Urban League participated in a public discussion panel entitled "Unemployment – Invitation to Urban Chaos – What are Our Chances in New Orleans?"[54] In this forum, an Urban League official emphasized the danger of pent-up frustration in the city's poor, black neighborhoods, noting that "people don't riot because of suffering or hardship but because of absence of hope – there is a feeling of hopelessness here in New Orleans and rightfully so." Another leader believed that recent riots in other American cities had instructed New Orleans blacks in violent tactics: "From riots in other cities, the Negro has learned that burning down his own area does not help and this time they'll be burning someone else's property."[55] At the discussion, panelists advocated TCA programs in target neighborhoods as a remedy to looming urban violence.

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[52] Charles Ferguson, "N.O.'S Central City: Life in World Apart," *States-Item*, June 5, 1968, 23.
[53] David Snyder, "Militants Willing to Talk -- Good Sign for Summer," *States-Item*, June 14, 1968, 1.
[54] "Unemployment Is Discussed," *Times-Picayune*, Feb. 21, 1968, 9.
[55] Ibid.

Despite the best intentions of these leaders, rhetoric that emphasized the violent potential of poor neighborhoods augmented an already-growing trend towards programs designed to quell urban passions rather than cure urban ills. In the late 1960s, as fears of racial violence in New Orleans increased, local government and civic leaders turned to recreation programs designed to placate residents living in poverty. Job training programs like the CEP had been designed to foster economic development of poor neighborhoods, but job training outfits were slow in organizing and even slower in producing results. The menace of racial violence contributed to an atmosphere of urgency among local leaders and encouraged reliance on programs that promised rapid improvements. As economic development programs like the CEP struggled to meet exaggerated goals, the main thrust of the city's War on Poverty shifted to immediate, superficial relief for poor, black residents.

During the late 1960s, local groups rushed to soothe urban anger by providing highly-publicized recreation opportunities for young blacks. Benjamin C. Toledano, the Republican candidate for New Orleans mayor in 1970, recalls being summoned to an emergency meeting of prominent civic leaders which promised to address the city's poverty. When the black tie event unfolded, however, Toledano discovered that the dinner had been organized to raise funds to place temporary swimming pools in poor neighborhoods during the summer.[56] In the summer of 1967, the New Orleans Police Department helped place portable pools in black neighborhoods as a tactic to ease tensions.[57] TCA and MAC, two organizations that had collaborated in administering and promoting the CEP, launched an expansive summer recreation program in 1968. Private

[56] Ben C. Toledano, interview by author, Pass Christian, MS, May 27, 2006.
[57] Jim Manning, "3 Dry N.O. Swim Pools Symbolize Poor Planning," *States-Item*, June 13, 1968, 1.

donations from local businessmen funded much of the program; although the City Council had approved $100,000 in municipal support, MAC raised $126,000 through contributions.[58] Assisted by this fundraising, TCA established temporary recreation centers in public schools and churches in target neighborhoods throughout the city, promising to accommodate 10,000 poor children throughout the summer.[59] Local leaders and fundraisers paraded recreation drives as "antipoverty programs."

Some leaders argued that recreation programs contributed to economic development of poor neighborhoods. One MAC official, for example, related the summer programs to economic development by promising to provide young students with skills for the workplace, explaining that summer camps would "turn the fantastic energy of these children away from destructive time-killing, aimless, futureless activities into the development of skills and sports and crafts that will help them [for] the rest of their lives."[60] Although sustained recreation opportunities might have encouraged economic development by allowing young residents to learn life skills during summer months, these programs gained prominence in the late 1960s due to their pledge to immediately improve standards of living for poor children. Recreation programs affected most poor youths during the summer, when fears of riots reached their zenith. Summer programs offered limited benefits to local economic development, but they became a primary element in the city's War on Poverty because of their promise to preempt riots.

Despite well-publicized campaigns for improved recreational opportunities, access to pools and parks in poor neighborhoods remained abysmal. Even after federal legislation demanded integration of public accommodations, city officials were reluctant

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[58] "Mac, Chamber Ask Funds for Recreation Plan," *States-Item*, June 6, 1968, 25.
[59] "Antipoverty Recreation Program Is Scheduled," *States-Item*, June 10, 1968, 6.
[60] "Mac, Chamber Ask Funds for Recreation Plan," 25.

to desegregate swimming pools. Informal segregation limited black access to pools severely. In 1965, a black resident had told a reporter that "no one has been swimming in [the black] community since last year. The pools were closed after the Civil Rights Act [of 1964]. There is a pool at the Hilton Inn for their guests. But it is classed as a private club."[61] By 1968, the situation had hardly changed; black residents criticized the New Orleans Recreation Department (NORD) for practicing "de facto segregation."[62] For the summer of 1968, MAC pressured city officials to provide emergency diversions for poor children; the fire department eventually agreed to distribute fire hydrant sprinklers to "responsible persons" in poor neighborhoods.[63]

Recreation programs represented a well-intentioned response to a legitimate need stated by poor residents of New Orleans. Lack of functioning pools and community centers in black neighborhoods had a profoundly negative effect on quality of life for many residents -- one black citizen complained that recreational facilities in the Ninth Ward were "practically non-existent."[64] Yet recreation programs had been marketed as antipoverty measures, and as the War on Poverty waned, drives for recreational opportunities expended valuable political capital without improving access to jobs. By the late 1960s, the peak of the national campaign against urban poverty had come and gone in New Orleans, and the brief, fragile political consensus which allowed public and private organizations to promote economic development directly in poor communities had been squandered on an abortive job training effort and stop-gap recreation measures.

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[61] Rosemarie Brooks, "Jim Crow Flies as Ever in Storm-Hit New Orleans," *Chicago Defender*, Sept. 25, 1965, D1.
[62] Manning, "3 Dry N.O. Swim Pools Symbolize Poor Planning," 1.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

By the early 1970s, the failure of War on Poverty initiatives in New Orleans had crystallized. Federal urban renewal and Model Cities programs had achieved significant infrastructure improvements in poor neighborhoods, but these improvements paled in comparison to copious federal funds devoted to the problem. As federal patience with questionable cost-effectiveness wore thin, Congress tapered its support for urban renewal and Model Cities. Job training had attempted authentic economic development in poor neighborhoods, but sluggish progress and harsh local criticism weakened political support for these programs. Recreation drives designed to mollify anger among blacks further reduced public backing for economic development measures by offering "antipoverty" relief which provided immediate, albeit shallow, improvements.

In the decade after Hurricane Betsy, New Orleans had experienced a remarkable era of local politics when public and private leaders cooperated to address issues of poverty in city neighborhoods. Despite unprecedented financial investment, New Orleans emerged with little to show for its antipoverty effort. Economic development had failed to take seed in poor neighborhoods, and temporary improvements to local infrastructure deteriorated without being replaced. National political forces curtailed the War on Poverty in New Orleans as the federal government withdrew from ambitious antipoverty programs. Louisiana's culture of reputed permissiveness towards corruption also weakened the War on Poverty. Antipoverty drives came to be associated with corruption; although major TCA scandals would not break until the 1980s, distrustful Orleans Parish voters compared meager results to profuse investments and concluded that War on Poverty leaders had pocketed the difference.

During the 1970s, New Orleans leaders would abandon their focus on housing, job training, and recreation drives. This is not to say that local leaders had finished promoting "antipoverty" programs. In 1970, city voters elected Mayor Moon Landrieu, a white racial moderate from outside of the city's highly-structured elite social community. Landrieu had capitalized on extraordinary political organizing within the black community, and the new mayor rewarded black leaders promptly with unprecedented access to City Hall. Landrieu's mayoralty also marked a sea change in distribution of political power among white private sector leaders – rather than courting bankers and leading socialites, Landrieu relied on an ambitious corps of developers to dream up schemes to rescue New Orleans from declining fortunes. Landrieu and his businessmen linked each of these schemes to reducing poverty, and major public and private funds would be expended in the pursuit of economic development. In the 1970s, "antipoverty" programs in New Orleans would involve wharf renovation, Superdome construction, and dogged pursuit of income from tourism and petroleum.

Chapter Three

The Power Brokers

During the 1960s, elite white businessmen participated in several key War on Poverty organizations, including TCA and MAC. The political clout of these civic leaders stunned black activists; Lolis Elie, a black labor negotiator, recalled watching local businessman and socialite Darwin Fenner settle municipal issues by calling Mayor Victor Schiro and saying "Vic, this is Darwin. Come on over here. I want to see you."[1] In 1970, however, the election of Mayor Moon Landrieu marked an important shift in distribution of power among New Orleans business leaders. Mayor Landrieu depended on a new, loosely-affiliated team of developers and businessmen to carry out his campaign for economic development.

During Landrieu's two terms in City Hall, he cooperated with local businessmen by pursuing public and private investment in large projects. These projects included port renovation, construction of the Louisiana Superdome, and expansion of facilities to accommodate tourists. Landrieu and his developers promoted their schemes as "antipoverty" or "community revitalization" measures, arguing that development in such economic sectors as port commerce, sports and entertainment, and tourism would increase standards of living for all New Orleanians. As port negotiations faltered, however, New Orleans grew dependent on the tourism and petroleum industries for income. Despite moderate success in drawing capital to New Orleans, Mayor Landrieu's

[1] Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972*, 337.

drive for economic development offered scant assistance for the city's poor residents, largely because the campaign made little effort to target poor areas for development. During the same era, however, a sustained exodus of middle-class residents devastated many New Orleans neighborhoods.

Like many American cities, New Orleans featured a class of bankers, elite businessmen, and lawyers who exerted considerable power over municipal affairs. At certain times in New Orleans history, this elite class had grown to overshadow even the mayor's office; historian John Barry wrote that "perhaps more than any other city in America, New Orleans was run by a cabal of insiders."[2] In 1927, when high waters on the Mississippi River seemed to threaten the city, bankers in New Orleans had strong-armed the mayor and state officials into dynamiting levees downriver, relieving pressure on city floodwalls but inundating St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes.[3]

This caste of private-sector leaders also wielded power over an elaborate social scene. New Orleans' elite were most visible during Carnival season, when the krewes of Comus, Rex, Momus, and Proteus paraded in the street and threw extravagant invitation-only balls. These krewes drew their membership from several ultra-exclusive social clubs; the Louisiana Club, the Boston Club, and the Pickwick Club.[4] These clubs routinely hosted American presidents and prominent foreign diplomats – and they routinely excluded Jews, Italians, Hispanics, Asians, women, blacks, and newcomers to New Orleans.[5]

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[2] John Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1997), 215.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Phyllis Hutton Raabe, "Status and Its Impact: New Orleans' Carnival, the Social Upper Class and Upper-Class Power" (Pennsylvania State University, 1973), 99.
[5] Stuart O. Landry, *History of the Boston Club* (New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1938), 169.; Ben C. Toledano, "What Really Killed New Orleans," (Pass Christian, Mississippi: 2006), 4.

The exclusivity of social clubs and familiar history of behind-the-scenes manipulation combined to spawn a popular image of the city's elite as playing a shadowy but dynamic role in municipal affairs. After Hurricane Betsy, many residents of flooded areas suspected a conspiracy akin to the 1927 dynamiting of the levees.[6] In her sociological study of Mardi Gras krewes, Phyllis Hutton Raabe noted that in New Orleans "one image of upper-class control envisions men meeting in Carnival krewe meetings and deciding civic issues."[7] Raabe, and most observers, recognized this theory as simplistic, but social scientists studying New Orleans agreed that the Carnival aristocracy was real, and that it played a role in the city's power structure. When Morton Inger conducted interviews with members of elite social clubs, one admitted that "my influence is chiefly inheritance and elbow grease."[8] Another member told Inger, "I knew the elite socially and was in automatically."[9]

Judging the influence of this elite class in New Orleans proved difficult. In the 1970s, Charles Chai, a professor of political science at Tulane University, investigated the real power of elite private sector leaders in New Orleans. While conducting research for his remarkable report entitled "Who Rules New Orleans?," Chai interviewed more than eighty prominent residents of New Orleans, asking them the following questions:

> Suppose a major project were before the community – one that required decisions by a group of leaders whom nearly everyone would accept. Which people would

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[6] Shallat, "In the Wake of Hurricane Betsy," 129. Hurricane Katrina revealed the staying power of charges that Betsy flooding had been caused by intentional destruction of levees. In a song memorializing Katrina, 17th Ward native Lil Wayne rapped: "I know some folks that live by the levee that keep telling me they heard the explosives/ same thing happened back in Hurricane Betsy, 1965, I ain't too young to know this." Please see: Lil Wayne, "Georgia Bush," in *Dedication 2*, ed. DJ Drama (Atlanta, Georgia: 2006).

[7] Raabe, "Status and Its Impact: New Orleans' Carnival, the Social Upper Class and Upper-Class Power", 77.

[8] Morton Inger, *Politics and Reality in an American City: The New Orleans School Crisis of 1960* (New York: Center for Urban Education, 1969), 82.

[9] Ibid.

> you choose to make up this group – regardless of whether or not you know them personally?
>
> In most cities there are certain persons who are said to be influential behind the scene who have a lot to say about the programs that are planned, projects and issues that come up around town. What persons do you think are influential in this way?[10]

The responses Chai received underscored the power of businessmen in New Orleans. After tabulating his data, Chai came up with twenty-eight top-level New Orleans leaders who had received ten or more nominations. Eighteen of the twenty-eight were businessmen; only three were government officials.[11] Even more startlingly, the majority of respondents had failed to cite the mayor as an important community leader.[12] Chai concluded that "top ranking community leaders (dominated by business executives) in New Orleans do not feel that local political leaders are part of the top community leadership structure at all. Rather they see top leadership from their own ranks."[13] Chai's research gained wide acceptance in New Orleans; in 1978, newly-elected mayor Ernest "Dutch" Morial referred to "Who Rules New Orleans?" in his first major address from City Hall.[14]

While Chai's research confirmed the existence of a potent executive class in New Orleans, the study presented a hazy rendering of the city's power structure. During the late 1960s and 1970s, the elite class of New Orleans was in a state of tumult, as influence shifted momentously from the Carnival aristocracy to a new, looser association of

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[10] Charles Chai, "Who Rules New Orleans? A Study of Community Power Structure," *Louisiana Business Survey* 2, no. 4 (1971): 3.
[11] Ibid.: 4.
[12] James K. Glassman, "New Orleans: I Have Seen the Future, and It's Houston," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1978, 18.
[13] Chai, "Who Rules New Orleans? A Study of Community Power Structure," 4.
[14] Glassman, "New Orleans: I Have Seen the Future, and It's Houston," 18.

developer-businessmen.[15] Elite club members rested secure in their social status, and a reporter for *The New York Times* noted that they had grown "proudly aloof from serious political affairs."[16] In the 1960s, Old Guard leaders like Darwin Fenner and Richard Freeman had wielded significant sway with Mayor Victor Schiro; in the 1970s, Mayor Moon Landrieu's ear turned to a new species of power brokers like Joseph Canizaro, Lester Kabakoff, and Herman S. Kohlmeyer. Most of these developers had arrived in New Orleans relatively recently, and they expressed little interest in insular social clubs.[17] Instead, they pursued business deals with a doggedness that could seem downright uncouth to members of the city's elite social circles.[18] Chai's study made little distinction between these two groups of "businessmen", but their visions for the city diverged dramatically.

As the social elite retreated from political decision-making, Mayor Landrieu and newly-influential private businessmen pinned hopes of economic development on renovating the city's industrial and commercial infrastructure. Compared to previous mayors, Landrieu had far fewer ties to the Carnival aristocracy.[19] In office, Landrieu relied heavily on ambitious private businessmen to help him realize his plans for economic growth. This era was a time of grand projects in New Orleans, and business leaders attracted public and private investment by promising jobs and influx of capital. Landrieu and his developers often justified public expenditures on major projects by advertising their potential as "antipoverty" or "community revitalization" measures. In

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[15] J. Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 164.
[16] Roy Reed, "New Orleans May Get Liberal Mayor," *The New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1970, 13.
[17] Charlotte Hays, "Joe Canizaro and the Erector Set," *Metro New Orleans*, December 1974, 56.
[18] Ben C. Toledano, interview by author, Pass Christian, MS, March 20, 2007.
[19] Reed, "New Orleans May Get Liberal Mayor," 13.

1969, port officials released a well-publicized study calling for the construction of Centroport U.S.A., a massive facility in eastern New Orleans which would replace the crammed wharves along the Mississippi River.[20] With firm support from Mayor Landrieu, private developers also pitched the Louisiana Superdome as "a real shot in the arm for the community."[21] At the same time, Landrieu backed a business-driven revitalization of the French Quarter which helped solidify tourism as one of the city's key industries. Although Mayor Victor Schiro had cooperated with Old Guard businessmen to initiate some development measures, such as modest port renovation, New Orleans' second major campaign for economic development coalesced under Mayor Landrieu and his team of power brokers. Their colossal projects would transform the physical, social, and economic landscape of New Orleans.

In the late 1960s, facilities in the Port of New Orleans lagged behind competitors despite uneven efforts to modernize. The Port of Houston had proven a major challenger, and ports in Biloxi, Mobile, Gulfport, Pascagoula, and Tampa represented growing threats.[22] The proliferation of containers meant that ships had grown larger and larger; many vessels could not fit through the undersized Inner Harbor Lock between the Industrial Canal and Mississippi River.[23] New Orleans' port had lost much of its geographical advantage as improvements in trucking on interstate highways and container shipping opened new trade routes to American's breadbasket. Hurricane Betsy had inflicted more than $1 billion in damage on shipping interests and port facilities in

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[20] Richard Baumbach and William Borah, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carre Riverfront-Expressway Controversy* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1981), 228.
[21] Charles Burck, "It's Promoters Vs. Taxpayers in the Superstadium Game," *Fortune*, March, 1973, 182.
[22] Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, 115.
[23] Edgar Poe, "Corps Urged to Hurry up with Ship Lock," *Times-Picayune*, Feb. 3, 1978, 20.

the New Orleans area.[24] Since the port was bound by expensive private property, expansion of warehouses had proven prohibitively pricey. Surveying the cramped, outdated Port of New Orleans, many city leaders believed it was time to go back to the drawing board.

Responsibility for updating New Orleans' port fell on the Board of Commissioners for the Port of New Orleans, known throughout the city as the "Dock Board." In 1896, the Louisiana legislature had empowered the Dock Board with extraordinary authority to expropriate private property, construct facilities, and lease lots to private interests on all riverfront property in Orleans Parish.[25] Although Dock Board members often came from the elite circles of social clubs and Carnival krewes, the director and small group of staffers conducted almost all of the Board's business.[26] In the late 1960s, the Dock Board's leadership corps had a national reputation for aggressive pursuit of commercial expansion.[27] These men recognized the urgency of improving the city's port.

In May 1969, the Dock Board commissioned the Bechtel Corporation, an international engineering and construction firm, to issue recommendations for port development. Bechtel engineers presented a thirty-year plan to shift major port operations to eastern New Orleans, where tracts of undeveloped land would allow the port to expand. Centroport U.S.A. would be located nearer to the recently-completed MR-GO, allowing ships arriving from the Gulf of Mexico to avoid the Inner Harbor

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[24] "New Orleans Hunts Snakes, Alligators," C8.
[25] Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, 61.
[26] Ben C. Toledano, interview by author, Pass Christian, MS, March 20, 2007.
[27] Kenyon, "Elements in Inter-Port Competition in the United States," 24.

Lock. Many New Orleans residents expressed hope that Bechtel's plan might allow New Orleans to regain its dominance in shipping.[28]

Despite initial optimism, the Centroport U.S.A. plan languished throughout the 1970s. A high cost and protracted timetable hampered the project; Bechtel did not think the port could be completed before the Millennium.[29] In the meantime, the Dock Board and congressional representatives exhorted the Army Corps of Engineers to improve existing shipping routes to the Port of New Orleans. When the Corps developed several proposals to replace the Inner Harbor Lock, neighborhood residents and environmentalists met the Corps with determined resistance.

At first, the Corps proposed to bypass the Inner Harbor Lock by constructing a new, gigantic lock in St. Bernard Parish. This plan would have required digging a large canal through the parish to the town of Violet. Although Dock Board officials campaigned hard for the plan, residents of Violet mounted resolute resistance, arguing that St. Bernard Parish was being sacrificed for the economic well-being of New Orleans.[30] When popular opposition forced the Corps to abandon the Violet lock and canal plan in 1972, the *Times-Picayune* declared the local protest movement's success to be the year's biggest news story in St. Bernard Parish.[31]

Chastened, the Corps next moved to widen the existing Inner Harbor Lock. A determined alliance of neighborhood activists and environmentalists rose in opposition. The expansion would cut into the Lower Ninth Ward, the largely-black neighborhood which had been ravaged by Hurricane Betsy. The president of the Ninth Ward Citizens

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[28] Baumbach and Borah, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carre Riverfront-Expressway Controversy*, 230.
[29] Ibid., 229.
[30] J.E. Bourgoyne, "Channel Lock Plan Is Aired," *Times-Picayune*, Jan. 30, 1973, 8.
[31] John Mcmillan, "Opposition to Ship-Lock, Canal Biggest '72 News," *Times-Picayune*, Jan. 28, 1973, 9.

Voters' League complained that the construction would displace many elderly black residents, and noted that "little concern is given when black folk are to be disrupted."[32] Environmentalists weighed in against the lock expansion because it required considerable dredging of the Industrial Canal, which would release heavy metals and other pollutants trapped in the canal's mud.[33]

With major expansion efforts stalled by local opposition, the Dock Board tried to encourage investment in a technology which New Orleans leaders hoped would triumph over container shipping. Lighter-aboard-ship barges (LASH) carried dozens of smaller, sealed barges in gigantic holds.[34] LASH barges seemed perfectly designed for New Orleans' heavy commerce of bulk cargo from mid-western farms. While efforts to build waterways which could accommodate container ships lost momentum, the Dock Board encouraged local firms to invest in LASH barges. In 1972, a front-page story in the *Times-Picayune* trumpeted the technology.[35]

Despite a flurry of activity in the early 1970s, efforts at major port improvement soon stalled. Strong local opposition movements in St. Bernard Parish and Lower Ninth Ward slowed the project's momentum, and the plans seemed to become entangled in the snaking bureaucracy of the Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps, it should be noted, was defending its hurricane protection plan desperately throughout the decade. In 1978, Louisiana senators Bennett Johnston and Russell Long were still urging the Corps to act on the Inner Harbor Lock.[36] As time passed, the growth of international shipping vessels made the MR-GO seem more and more undersized, so the urgency of constructing a large

[32] "9th Ward Canal Work Opposed," *Times-Picayune*, Jan. 27, 1973, 11.
[33] Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, 116.
[34] Ibid., 72.
[35] "Locally-Based Firm Gets $20 Million Barge Pact," *Times-Picayune*, Oct. 29, 1972, 1.
[36] Poe, "Corps Urged to Hurry up with Ship Lock," 20.

lock to connect the port to the MR-GO diminished. In 1986, the Dock Board abandoned plans to construct major port facilities near the MR-GO, and the Inner Harbor Lock improvement plan was effectively dead.[37]

As efforts to develop the New Orleans port foundered, many city leaders looked to petroleum companies to pipe much-needed capital into the city. When a cooperative of oil conglomerates including Shell, Texaco, and Chevron pushed to construct a massive refinery center on the Gulf of Mexico, Mayor Landrieu helped woo the project from Texas to Louisiana by offering inexpensive leases of city-owned land.[38] At Poydras Street and St. Charles Avenue, Shell Oil Company erected the shimmering, 50-story office tower known as One Shell Square.[39] Already booming in Texas, oil companies had arrived in New Orleans and left an unmistakable mark on the skyline. Local leaders hoped that petroleum profits would infuse resources into the stagnant New Orleans economy.

As petroleum companies took a more prominent role in the city's economy, Louisiana politicians and businessmen hoped to emulate Texan economic expansion in New Orleans' downtown. Politicians like Governor John J. McKeithen and Mayor Landrieu invested heavily in grand projects which they hoped would bring glory to their administrations and jobs to the city. In terms of political justification, these projects paralleled War on Poverty programs; proponents argued that private ventures warranted government investment because the schemes would help employ the people of New Orleans. In design, however, these projects represented an entirely distinct approach to poverty – an approach that produced mammoth architectural feats but ambiguous rewards

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[37] Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, 117.
[38] "La. Superport Option Signed," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 24, 1972, A10.
[39] Michael Klein, "French Quarter Walk Leads into History," *The Hartford Courant*, Nov. 5, 1978, 11F.

for the city's working class. Nevertheless, it was difficult to refute politicians and developers who argued that New Orleans lacked jobs, and should invest in job creation. Armed with this mantra, New Orleans politicians and businessmen transformed the city's physical and economic landscape by using public funds to fuel corporate projects.

The most visible New Orleans project of the 1970s was the construction of the Louisiana Superdome. In 1965, private developers had approached Governor McKeithen with a proposal to build a stadium in New Orleans' Central Business District (CBD) that would dwarf Houston's vaunted Astrodome.[40] McKeithen became an immediate supporter. During the post-game jubilation after Louisiana State University's victory in the 1966 Cotton Bowl, McKeithen surprised revelers with a proclamation: "Louisiana will build the best stadium in history."[41]

Governor McKeithen, Mayor Landrieu and private developers mounted a massive campaign to convince New Orleans residents that they needed a stadium. Newspaper advertisements paid for by promoters said the Superdome would cost $35 million in public money, support itself by hosting hundreds of sporting and civic events, and help draw business to the CBD.[42] Promoters sold the stadium as a magnet for jobs and capital. The editor of a New Orleans weekly described the Superdome as an attempted anti-poverty measure, writing that "when the city felt itself forced to face the fact that so many of its people were poor, and without jobs, its solution was, of course, to erect a building – the Superdome."[43]

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[40] Glassman, "New Orleans: I Have Seen the Future, and It's Houston," 14.
[41] Burck, "It's Promoters Vs. Taxpayers in the Superstadium Game," 178.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Glassman, "New Orleans: I Have Seen the Future, and It's Houston," 14.

Almost as soon as the Louisiana legislature approved the Superdome, the project was fraught with problems. Despite assurances from promoters that "neither the state nor the city backs the construction bonds," the legislature had pledged state backing for bonds issued by an entity called the Louisiana Stadium and Exposition District (LSED).[44] The legislature had granted support based on the original blueprint for the stadium, which envisioned 55,000 seats. When LSED planners decided to increase capacity past 65,000 seats, the project's cost ballooned.[45] Expenses mounted further when builders began driving pilings for the foundation, and many of the pilings failed.[46] Soon, the *Times-Picayune* was running frequent tallies of the public expenditures poured into the Superdome. Herman S. Kohlmeyer, one of the principal developers of the project, seemed to revel in duping the state legislature. "The man who built the Taj Mahal didn't ask the permission of the people," he said. "Ditto here."[47]

The Superdome opened formally in 1975, but its net effect on the economic development of the city remained ambiguous. Proponents credited the dome with spawning a wave of flashy construction in the CBD; between 1974 and 1978, more than $1.2 billion in new building was announced or initiated in the district.[48] Much of the capital invested in Superdome construction came to be seen as political graft; a state report issued in 1975 accused the LSED of circumventing public bidding laws to reward politically-connected building firms.[49] The stadium struggled to live up to promises of self-sufficiency. In the first fiscal year of operation, the Superdome lost more than $5

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[44] Burck, "It's Promoters Vs. Taxpayers in the Superstadium Game," 178.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Paul Atkinson, "Deans Restate Stadium Stand," *Times Picayune*, Apr. 13, 1972, 1.
[47] Burck, "It's Promoters Vs. Taxpayers in the Superstadium Game," 182.
[48] "A Sunbelt City Plays Catch-Up," 70.
[49] "Superdome Study Finds Favoritism," *The New York Times*, March 28, 1975, 24.

million.[50] In 1978, the *Atlantic Monthly* reported that the facility cost $50,000 a day to keep open, and "no one today seriously thinks the Dome will ever come close to paying for itself."[51]

As the dome began hosting raucous Mardi Gras celebrations and Super Bowls, the white colossus came to be seen as a symbol of New Orleans' pursuit of Texas-style grandeur.[52] Before the stadium opened, event organizers had boasted that comedian Bob Hope would preside over the Krewe of Bacchus as it paraded through the Superdome during Carnival.[53] Local schemers hoped that Bacchus would "start a trend of Carnival krewes parading in the domed stadium."[54] Although New Orleans entrepreneurs had long sought to draw sightseers, these plans marked a new audacity in marketing Mardi Gras as a regional and national attraction. The Superdome itself could not achieve self-sufficiency, and the building came to represent a growing belief in New Orleans that the city's economy would depend on attracting tourists. For economic sustenance, New Orleans had begun to depend on the kindness of strangers.

The Superdome marked the most visible symbol of the city's push to become a national attraction, but signs of the crusade were visible throughout downtown. In the late 1960s, developers had completed construction on the Rivergate, a gigantic convention center located near the foot of Canal Street.[55] Mayor Victor Schiro proved one of the Rivergate's strongest advocates, boasting that the convention hall could hold

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[50] "1st Year for Dome: -$5 Million," *Times-Picayune*, Sept 2, 1976, 6.
[51] Glassman, "New Orleans: I Have Seen the Future, and It's Houston," 14.
[52] Calvin Trillin, "U.S. Journal: New Orleans; on the Possibility of Houstonization," *The New Yorker*, February 17, 1975, 94.
[53] Paul Atkinson, "Bacchus -- 1975 -- a Dome Sellout," *Times-Picayune*, March 3, 1973, 1.
[54] Ibid.
[55] "New South Comes to New Orleans," *Hartford Courant*, Nov. 11, 1969, 27.

nearly 18,000 people.[56] Promoters advertised the facility as "within walking distance of everything," particularly the French Quarter.[57]

The drive to attract tourists to New Orleans was also clearly visible in the French Quarter itself. Moon Landrieu had made French Quarter improvement a core campaign promise, and soon after entering office he established a police squad for the neighborhood which made 300 arrests in its first two weeks.[58] Throughout the 1960s, preservationists, tourism businessmen, and neighborhood proponents had battled against federal plans to construct a Riverfront Expressway which would have cut between Jackson Square and the Mississippi River.[59] The federal Department of Transportation killed the idea in July 1969, but neighborhood alliances remained strong.[60] Mayor Landrieu capitalized on momentum from the Expressway's defeat by sponsoring a renovation of the French Quarter's Mississippi River bank. The prime development of this renovation was the Moonwalk, a broad boardwalk opposite Jackson Square which allowed city residents and tourists alike to watch the river mosey sleepily past the city.

In developing the French Quarter for increased tourism, city officials and local businessmen tried to craft a neighborhood that could attract tourists while retaining traditional charm. Throughout the 1970s, Mayor Landrieu launched consecutive sanitation campaigns to scrub the neighborhood.[61] In an effort to maintain the neighborhood's architectural appeal, the city stipulated that all major construction be

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[56] Harry Forgeron, "A New Face for 'Old' New Orleans," *The New York Times*, Feb. 18, 1968, 1.
[57] Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, 92.
[58] Nicholas C. Chriss, "New Orleans Mayor Travels at Fast Pace," *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 1970, 19.
[59] Baumbach and Borah, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carre Riverfront-Expressway Controversy*.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Terry Kirkpatrick, "Old French Quarter Getting a New Look," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 23, 1975, 2.

approved by the Vieux Carré Commission, a preservationist organization.[62] On the outskirts of the Quarter, a string of hotels sprang up to host carousing tourists.[63] Mayor Landrieu cooperated with developer Lester Kabacoff to promote the International River Center, at the foot of Canal Street, which included a Hilton hotel, cruise terminal, and shopping plaza.[64]

Despite the remarkable expansion of tourist accommodations, local businessmen and Mayor Landrieu aspired to even greater development of the industry. In 1974, just six years after opening the Rivergate, tourism businessmen began working with Landrieu to entice the world's fair to New Orleans, hoping to leverage state money for a new convention center.[65] Although the world's fair did not come to fruition in New Orleans until 1984, local executives Floyd Lewis and Carl Bailey worked with City Hall and state officials through much of the 1970s to secure the exposition.[66] Tourism had become big business in New Orleans, and Mayor Landrieu worked unstintingly with local developers to stimulate growth of the industry.

Feverish attempts by Mayor Landrieu and private sector leaders to modernize the commercial infrastructure of the city achieved tepid results – the Superdome construction and French Quarter clean-up probably helped draw capital and jobs to the city, but efforts to develop the port misfired. Despite a vigorous campaign to develop commercial

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[62] Forgeron, "A New Face for 'Old' New Orleans," 6.
[63] Frank Schneider, "In New Orleans: Buildings Rise near Waterfront," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 1970, E1.
[64] This complex would later become known as the Hilton New Orleans Riverside. Please see: "A Sunbelt City Plays Catch-Up," 70.; Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City*, 177.
[65] Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and the Transformation of the Crescent City*, 178.
[66] Ibid. The World's Fair of 1984 was a production of the Louisiana World Exposition, Inc. (LWE), which was managed mostly by business leaders outside of the Carnival aristocracy but which included prominent aristocracy members like Darwin Fenner. The convention center built for this extravaganza would become an infamous gathering point for Katrina survivors in the days after the storm.

enterprises around the port, New Orleans had come to depend on two notoriously mercurial industries: tourism and petroleum. The city's economy had rooted itself in the whimsical desires of tourists and the fluctuating price of oil.[67] Both industries proved to be particularly bad at distributing wealth throughout the city. Although tourism provided more than 25,000 jobs in 1976, the average personal income of workers in the industry was only $5,000 per year.[68] Even worse, few oil companies operating in southern Louisiana spent their windfall profits in New Orleans – their headquarters were located in Texas.[69] During the 1970s, the only two major industries flourishing in New Orleans were the least capable of nourishing the city's residents.

During this critical era, the city's Carnival aristocracy had taken a backseat to Mayor Landrieu and a new generation of developer-businessmen, but the elite caste's culture of inactivity may have affected the city's economy substantially. In closing "Who Rules New Orleans?," Tulane's Professor Chai expressed concern that the city's strict social structure would repel corporate executives, and the capital they controlled, from the city. Chai noted that "new families coming to New Orleans, no matter how successful they are in the world of business, have very little chance of joining the more prestigious Carnival organizations."[70] Chai also quoted a newcomer who had complained that "the best way for a person to become a community leader is to arrange to have had his grandfather born here."[71]

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[67] The *Economist* would later blame New Orleans' economic woes on "an addiction to oil revenues," noting that the city lost more than $1 billion in revenues after oil prices fell in the early 1980s. Please see: "Bust in the Sun," *The Economist*, Dec. 5, 1987, 35.
[68] "A Sunbelt City Plays Catch-Up," 70.
[69] Trillin, "U.S. Journal: New Orleans; on the Possibility of Houstonization," 97.
[70] Chai, "Who Rules New Orleans? A Study of Community Power Structure," 10.
[71] Ibid.

By the late 1970s, Chai's concerns had become a widely recognized problem in New Orleans. The city's Economic Development Council cited social exclusiveness as a major deterrent to bringing new industry to the city.[72] Oil company administrators who did move to New Orleans were decidedly unwelcome at the Louisiana or Boston clubs, so they dined at the "frankly unsocial" Petroleum Club.[73] During an era when New Orleans ached for economic development, the prideful traditions of social clubs and elite Mardi Gras krewes had become an obstacle to potential investment.

Yet the energetic efforts of Mayor Landrieu and his developer allies debunk the myth that New Orleans' blasé culture had prevented politicians and business leaders from acting against anticipated economic troubles. It was true that many members of the social elite had slipped into satisfied detachment, but a new breed of serious businessmen had replaced them quickly. The new developers envisioned huge profits from their projects, but they pursued government backing by emphasizing economic benefits for all city residents. City Hall had worked with growing urgency to draw business to the city.

As mayors and businessmen pursued economic development, the city suffered a demographic shift that wreaked insurmountable damage to New Orleans' socio-economic fabric. White flight in New Orleans had seemed mild compared to other American cities -- it had begun as a trickle in the 1950s, and increased slightly after Ruby Bridges entered New Orleans public schools in 1960. Within two decades, however, the city's abandonment by the white middle class had become apparent and devastating. In this sense, the socio-economic decline of New Orleans was rooted in a problem which

[72] Glassman, "New Orleans: I Have Seen the Future, and It's Houston," 16.
[73] Ibid.

afflicted urban America in general. A quintessentially American problem, rather than the city's unique culture, would play a primary role in concentrating New Orleans' poverty.

Chapter Four

Abandonment

Between 1960 and 1980, New Orleans experienced striking migration of white residents to neighboring parishes. Two major factors contributing to white flight were the "pull" of new suburban development and the "push" of declining public schools in New Orleans.[1] The promise of idyllic suburban living drew middle class residents in droves to Jefferson, St. Bernard, St. Charles, and St. Tammany Parishes, and an array of new highways and bridges traversing the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain allowed suburban residents to commute more easily to New Orleans for work. At the beginning of the 1970s, ten years after initial desegregation of New Orleans public schools, whites began deserting the city's school system in shocking numbers. This middle class "abandonment," as it was referred to in local newspapers, sapped economic and social resources from the city and played a major role in further entrenching New Orleans in poverty.

In New Orleans, as in much of the country, a lengthy history of oppression had caused race and economic class to intertwine. Blacks were far more likely to be poor than whites: in 1970, 44% of the city's blacks lived below the poverty line, compared to 12.8% of whites.[2] Black life in New Orleans could not be equated starkly with poverty – more than half of the city's blacks were *not* legally poor, and indeed blacks had acquired newly prestigious roles in local government following the election of Mayor Moon

[1] Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, 216.
[2] "Low-Income Areas in Large Cities," in *1970 Census of Population* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census).

Landrieu in 1970. Still, New Orleans' poverty was concentrated heavily among the city's black population. As Carl Bankston and Stephen Caldas noted in their study of Louisiana school desegregation, poverty was so endemic in the black community that any large-scale attempt to desegregate schools meant a significant increase in the number of poor students.[3] White flight tended to extract middle class residents from the city, leaving a comparatively poorer population.

In the 1950s, white residents of New Orleans began to trickle across parish lines to nearby suburbs. By the end of the decade, major improvements in regional transportation would amplify white flight considerably. Beginning in the mid-1950s, the completion of two major bridges opened new suburban areas to development. In 1956, the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway allowed cars to travel from St. Tammany Parish (north of the lake) to near the border of Orleans and Jefferson Parishes.[4] Advertised as the "longest bridge in the world," the Causeway connected to Causeway Boulevard in Jefferson Parish, which soon became the suburb's main strip.[5] Two years later, automobiles began crossing the Greater New Orleans Bridge, which spanned the Mississippi River near downtown.[6] For the first time, residents of the metropolitan area's West Bank could access the heart of New Orleans directly, rather than by traveling upriver to the Huey P. Long Bridge in Jefferson Parish.

Commuting from the suburbs also became more feasible after a series of less noticeable transportation improvements. In the 1950s, Orleans Parish officials widened a

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[3]Bankston and Caldas, *A Troubled Dream: The Promise and Failure of School Desegregation in Louisiana*, 81.
[4] "Causeway History," *Greater New Orleans Expressway Commission*, www.thecauseway.com.
[5] Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, 78.
[6] "Bridges," *Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development,* http://www.dotd.state.la.us/operations/cccd/bridges.asp.

significant stretch of Claiborne Avenue by twenty-eight feet.[7] In the same era, city funds contributed to adding lanes to other key avenues and building seventeen overpasses and underpasses. A $4,500,000 overpass, built with local, state, and federal support, provided a six-lane connector between the Greater New Orleans Bridge and the Pontchartrain Expressway.[8] The construction of Veterans Memorial Highway cut an east-west swath across Jefferson Parish.[9] While these improvements did not alter the skyline of the Crescent City as bridges did, they increased the traffic capacity of the city's main boulevards, thus easing the commute from Jefferson Parish and beyond.

Rapid improvements in regional transportation made suburban life more attractive by shortening the commute to New Orleans and easing travel within the suburbs. The arrival of Interstate 10 (I-10) provided an ultra-fast link between New Orleans and neighboring parishes. One key component of I-10, the Twin Span Bridge, traversed Lake Pontchartrain between the city of Slidell and eastern New Orleans. While the bridge opened for traffic in 1963, it would be another decade before the full effect of I-10 was felt in New Orleans. In 1972, construction crews completed two major sections of Interstate 10 from Downman Road to Paris Road and from Pontchartrain Boulevard to Tulane Avenue. For the first time, drivers could travel on I-10 all the way from St. Charles Parish through New Orleans and on to Slidell.[10] In addition, 1968 saw the completion of a second span of the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway, improving the link between St. Tammany Parish and the city.[11]

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[7] Robert Meyer, "New Orleans Eases Traveler's Lot," *The New York Times*, Sept. 12, 1954, 23.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, 78.
[10] James Calhoun, ed., *Louisiana Almanac, 1973-1974* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 1973), 465.
[11] "Causeway Stretch Opened to Traffic," *States-Item*, June 4, 1968, 7.

As transportation improvements increased access to New Orleans from suburban parishes, residents left the city in throngs. Between 1960 and 1970, the total population of New Orleans fell by nearly 35,000.[12] Since birth rates in the parish outpaced death rates, the decline in total population masked far greater migration; the New Orleans City Planning Commission estimated that net out-migration had reached 96,640 during the decade.[13] Most residents who left the city were white, and in ten years the city's white population dropped by more than 60,000. During the same period, suburban growth in Jefferson, St. Bernard, St. Tammany, and St. Charles parishes was explosive: total populations in these parishes increased by between 39.3% and 64.5% (please see Fig. 7 and 8). While migration from rural Louisiana and other states contributed to the growth of suburbs in the New Orleans area, flight from Orleans Parish was an important factor in the rapid population increases seen in suburban parishes.

Families who moved to suburban developments were overwhelmingly middle class, and the out-migration of these residents depleted Orleans Parish of social and economic resources. As a magnet for middle class New Orleanians, Jefferson Parish would soon gain a reputation in some circles as "the most parasitic suburb in the United States."[14] By the end of the 1960s, white flight was a major menace in New Orleans. Fears of racial violence, addressed in Chapter Two, probably helped fuel migration in the late 1960s, as did increasing concerns over crime in the city.[15] As the long-term effects of school desegregation set in throughout the 1970s, the shift of middle class residents

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[12] "1970 Census Summary Report," (New Orleans: New Orleans City Planning Commission).
[13] Ibid.
[14] Arnold R. Hirsch, "New Orleans: Sunbelt in the Swamp," in *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth since World War Two*, ed. Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 108.
[15] "City Plans Police Patrol Increase of 48 Per Cent," *Times-Picayune*, April 29, 1965, 1.

away from the Crescent City would amplify further, leaving a heavily impoverished city center.

Fig. 7

	Total Population, 1960	*Total Population, 1970*	*Percent Change, 1960-1970*	*Total Population, 1980*	*Percent Change, 1970-1980*
Orleans Parish	627,525	593,471	-5.4	557,515	-6.1
Jefferson Parish	208,769	337,568	+61.7	454,592	+34.4
St. Bernard Parish	32,186	51,185	+59.0	64,097	+25.2
St. Tammany Parish	38,643	63,585	+64.5	110,869	+74.4
St. Charles Parish	21,219	29,550	+39.3	37,259	+26.1

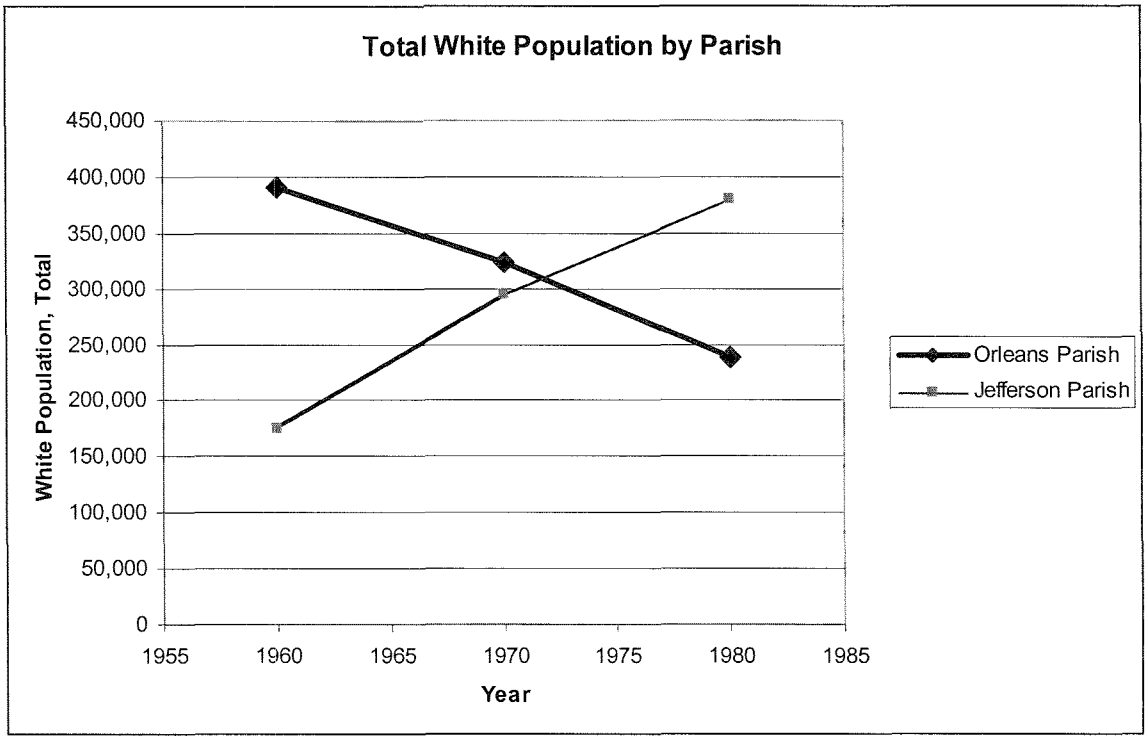
[Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, calculations by author.]

Fig. 8

	White Population, 1960	*White Population, 1970*	*Percent Change, 1960-1970*	*White Population, 1980*	*Percent Change, 1960-1970*
Orleans Parish	390,000	324,296	-16.8	238,170	-26.6
Jefferson Parish	175,000	294,637	+68.4	380,720	+29.2
St. Bernard Parish	29,000	48,353	+66.7	60,963	+26.1
St. Tammany Parish	28,016	51,643	+84.3	96,046	+86.0
St. Charles Parish	15,490	21,730	+40.3	27,508	+26.6

[Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, calculations by author.]
Note: White populations for 1960 are approximate based on Census data.

Fig. 9



[Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census]

While the allure of suburban living pulled middle class residents from Orleans Parish, desegregation of public schools, and the resulting perceived decline in academic standards, pushed white families to leave the city. In the first decade after school integration, flight from the city's school system had been markedly restrained, largely due to the slow pace of desegregation. After four black schoolchildren entered New Orleans public schools in 1960, desegregation spread slowly but inexorably through the school system. In the academic year of 1962-1963, only 107 black students attended integrated schools.[16] In 1965, Judge Frank B. Ellis ordered a grade-by-grade desegregation process that would result in integration of all public schools within five years.[17] The next year, eleven all-white junior high schools began admitting black students, and eight all-white high schools followed suit in 1967.[18] Although the school system had been officially integrated in 1960, it took nearly 10 years to bring real desegregation to most of the city's classrooms.

Although newspapers had predicted severe white flight after Ruby Bridges braved venomous crowds in 1960, the number of white students enrolled in New Orleans public schools remained stable throughout much of the decade. At the start of desegregation, just over 38,000 white students attended public school, and this number actually increased slightly by 1964. During the second half of the 1960s, white attendance dipped slowly as students trickled to private schools and neighboring parishes. In the first ten

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[16] Donald E. Devore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans, 1841-1991* (New Orleans: University of Southwestern Louisiana Press, 1991), 260.
[17] Bankston and Caldas, *A Troubled Dream: The Promise and Failure of School Desegregation in Louisiana*, 59.
[18] Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 265.

years after initial desegregation, white enrollment in New Orleans public schools decreased by little more than 2,000 students.[19]

Fig. 10
Total Enrollment in Orleans Parish Public Schools, 1960-1970

Year	*Black Students*	*White Students*
1960-61	52,581	38,112
1961-62	55,820	37,845
1962-63	59,223	38,728
1963-64	62,598	38,645
1964-65	64,893	39,314
1965-66	67,059	38,657
1966-67	70,225	37,609
1967-68	72,028	36,773
1968-69	74,435	36,411
1969-70	76,079	35,860

[Source: Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools,* 265.]

The 1970-1971 academic year marked the beginning of a decade-long freefall of white enrollment in the city's public schools. As numbers of black students increased in schools across the city, more and more white families placed their children in private schools or migrated to neighboring parishes. Racism certainly played a role in encouraging white flight, but as the effects of flight amplified, parents voiced rational concerns that quality of education in Orleans Parish public schools had fallen since desegregation. In ten years, total enrollment in the New Orleans school system had increased more than 20% (from 90,693 students to 111,939).[20] School resources were so

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

sparse that facilities crumbled from neglect; a school maintenance campaign in 1972 would spend a month repairing broken windows at the pace of 1,000 panes per week.[21]

Even more frightening to white parents was the influx of poor, black students to formerly all-white classrooms. Most of these students had been educated in the feebly-equipped classrooms of all-black Orleans Parish schools, and when desegregation arrived many were poorly prepared to achieve academically.[22] Even worse, racial tensions sometimes led to classroom violence; in 1971 and 1972, several well-publicized fights at Nicholls and Abramson Senior High Schools pitted black students against whites.[23] Desegregation placed new strain on formerly all-white schools, and prompted serious concerns over the city's ability to maintain public school standards.

Fig. 11
Total Enrollment in Orleans Parish Public Schools, 1970-1981

Year	*Black Students*	*White Students*
1970-71	76,502	33,349
1971-72	77,289	30,453
1972-73	77,660	26,379
1973-74	76,929	22,614
1974-75	75,986	19,773
1975-76	75,400	18,688
1976-77	75,431	17,933
1977-78	74,646	16,788
1978-79	73,855	15,155
1979-80	73,008	14,079
1980-81	72,367	13,293

[Source: Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools,* 265.]

[21] Emile Lafourcade, "School Board Ok's Transfer," *Times-Picayune*, Aug. 29, 1972, 2.
[22] Bankston and Caldas, *A Troubled Dream: The Promise and Failure of School Desegregation in Louisiana*, 81.
[23] Emile Lafourcade, "Racial Ills Team Approved Here," *Times-Picayune*, Jan. 25, 1972, 12.

Fig. 12

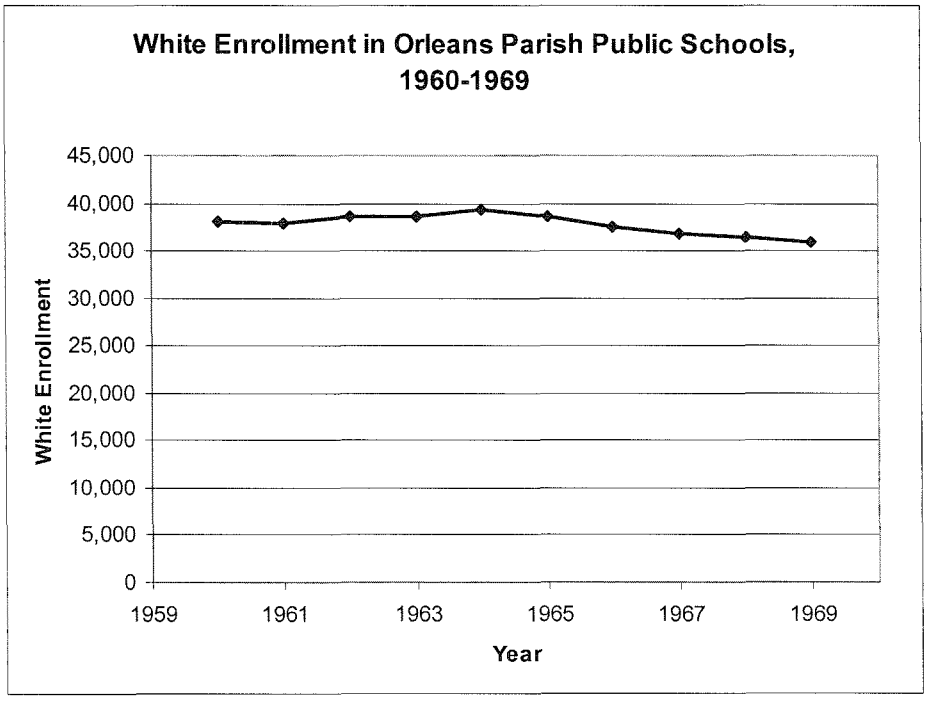
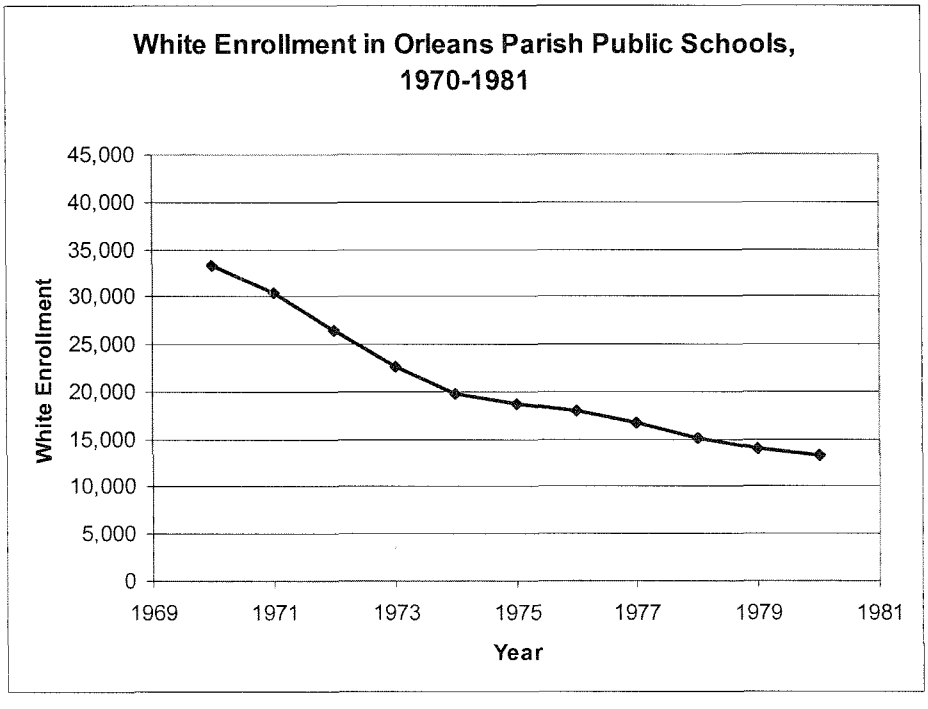


Fig. 13



[Source: Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools,* 265.]

White flight from public schools grew in a crescendo as desegregation spread to include public school teachers. In May 1972, a coalition of civil rights organizations including the NAACP released a report upbraiding the Orleans Parish school board for sluggishly pursuing increased integration of students and faculties.[24] Dr. Mack Spears, the president of the school board, had been educated in New Orleans public schools and at Harvard University. Dr. Spears fired back at the civil rights activists, claiming that desegregation was proceeding as quickly as possible, and that the school board was fighting to maintain academic standards. According to Dr. Spears, integration had caused veteran white teachers to flee the school system, and new hirings had introduced many inexperienced educators to New Orleans.[25]

Despite Dr. Spears' spirited defense of the school board, pressure to speed desegregation of the school faculties continued to mount. In the wake of the civil rights report, many observers believed that federal court action against the school board was imminent. Throughout the late 1960s, the school board had attempted to increase faculty integration by encouraging white teachers to voluntarily transfer to traditionally black schools and black teachers to transfer to predominantly white schools.[26] In the summer of 1972, the school board abandoned the policy of voluntary transfers and vowed to engineer 60% black and 40% white faculties in all elementary schools within several years.[27] The board also promised to use mandatory teacher transfers to achieve a similar racial composition in secondary schools. Dr. Spears declared that the school board had

[24] Emile Lafourcade, "Report Partly Unfair -- Spears," *Times-Picayune*, May 30, 1972, 4.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 267.
[27] Ibid., 268.

turned to mandatory transfers to preempt a federal court order.[28] In August, school authorities announced plans to transfer more than 800 teachers -- nearly one-fifth of the city's teaching staff.[29]

The plan to desegregate faculties using compulsory transfers drew an angry outcry from white teachers. Fifty teachers resigned in August.[30] Eighty teachers filed a class action suit against the Orleans Parish School Board seeking a year-long injunction against the plan.[31] In a well-publicized court battle, lawyers for the teachers argued that the transfers would cause "permanent damage to the education of the children involved."[32] The plaintiffs charged that transfers would particularly harm special education programs by forcing specialists to switch grade levels.[33] The teachers' suit came before Judge Herbert W. Christenberry, who had taken over enforcement of the desegregation order from *Bush v. Orleans Parish School Board,* the original NAACP case which had led to New Orleans school integration in 1960. In late August, Judge Christenberry dismissed the lawsuit, declaring that his court would "not look over the shoulder of the school board in its administrative problems."[34] Concerned that the plaintiffs might seek a more sympathetic arbiter in a state court, Judge Christenberry threatened to overrule any judicial decision which delayed attempts to desegregate public school faculties.[35]

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[28] Bankston and Caldas, *A Troubled Dream: The Promise and Failure of School Desegregation in Louisiana*, 60.
[29] Lafourcade, "School Board Ok's Transfer," 2.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Gordon Gsell, "Suit to Stop 50-50 Faculty Rejected," *Times-Picayune*, Aug. 29, 1972, 1.
[32] Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 269.
[33] Gsell, "Suit to Stop 50-50 Faculty Rejected," 1.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 269.

After the momentous transfer of 800 teachers at the beginning of the 1972-1973 school year, white enrollment in public schools dropped steadily. During the summer controversy, school board members and public school teachers had argued openly over the causes of declining educational standards in public schools; school board members had complained that veteran white teachers resigned in the face of integration, and teachers had protested that faculty transfers to achieve specific racial proportions disrupted their ability to instruct. With the woes of the New Orleans school system splayed across the front page of the *Times-Picayune*, families sought better educational opportunities elsewhere. Families who could afford to moved to neighboring parishes or enrolled their children in private academies.

A rapidly growing view of Orleans Parish public schools as physically dangerous to students also fueled white flight. Since angry crowds first swirled around desegregated elementary schools in 1960, integrated schools had been regarded as sites with considerable potential for violence. This pernicious perception had been confirmed during the race-based high school brawls of 1972, but reports of school violence grew increasingly more alarming throughout the decade. In early 1976, the *Times-Picayune* examined a one month period in New Orleans schools, finding police records that a student had attacked his assistant principal with a chair, a 63-year-old teacher was stabbed by three students in an administrator's office, and a 44-year-old teacher was hit by a shotgun blast while arriving for work.[36] After the firebombing of a local high school, the teacher's union lobbied hard for an increased security presence in public schools.[37] The New Orleans school system had developed an image of lawlessness, and

[36] Dwight Ott, "Violence in Schools Leaves Elders Pondering," *Times-Picayune*, Feb. 8, 1976, 12.
[37] Dwight Ott, "Lacour Asks City Aid on Security for Schools," *Times-Picayune* Feb. 7, 1976, 17.

white families who had remained for fifteen years after desegregation scrambled to move their children.

By 1978, New Orleans had acquired a widespread reputation for abysmal schools. *Business Week* identified one of the city's chief economic problems to be "a large core of low-skilled people locked into poverty by an inadequate educational system."[38] A five-day "Schools in Crisis" special report in the *Times-Picayune* began bluntly: "In the last 20 years, the New Orleans Public School System has fallen into a critical state of academic, physical and financial disrepair. It is a school system of poor children, dilapidated schoolhouses, pinched budgets and a dismal public image."[39] The *Times-Picayune* also published a letter from a local teacher, who wrote that school integration had failed when "whites packed up and left, leaving the schools just as segregated as before. And with them went our middle-class families, black and white, leaving our school system with children who are indeed 'fighting the odds' by the time they reach kindergarten."[40]

Indeed, white abandonment of the public school system had been acute. By 1978, when a federal judge declared the school district "desegregated," more than 82% of students were black.[41] White flight from the New Orleans public school system had escalated noticeably throughout the early 1970s, and during the decade white enrollment decreased by more than 60% (Please see Fig. 6 and 7). As white enrollment plummeted, the proportion of students living in poverty increased dramatically, stretching public school resources to the breaking point. Desegregation had trapped the New Orleans

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[38] "A Sunbelt City Plays Catch-Up," 71.
[39] Molly Moore, "Orleans Schools Founder in an Ocean of Despair," *Times-Picayune* April 5, 1981, 1.
[40] "Supporting Schools," *Times-Picayune*, April 15, 1981, 10.
[41] Bankston and Caldas, *A Troubled Dream: The Promise and Failure of School Desegregation in Louisiana*, 64.

school system in a cruel cycle; white abandonment contributed to a decrease in academic standards, while poor academic standards repelled middle class students from the public schools. Twenty years after initial desegregation, the Crescent City's school system stood in a state of crisis.

During the 1970s, as the school system strained to avoid disaster, new stretches of Interstate 10 and the Lake Pontchartrain Causeway opened to traffic. The failure of public schools combined with continued improvements in regional transportation to sustain white flight throughout the 1970s. By the end of the decade, middle class abandonment had taken a ruinous toll on the city. Between 1960 and 1980, the white population fell from nearly 400,000 to 240,000.[42] New Orleanians had long prided themselves on the absence of an obvious ghetto in the Crescent City; some residents had delighted in pointing out that most Northern cities had far higher rates of residential segregation.[43] As white flight left large tracts of concentrated poverty in largely black neighborhoods, the argument that New Orleans lacked ghetto neighborhoods grew more difficult to sustain.

In many neighborhoods of New Orleans, white abandonment had been nearly total. The sprawling Florida-Desire area, located across the Industrial Canal from the Lower Ninth Ward, was home to more than 20,500 people, and by 1980 nearly 97% of neighborhood residents were black.[44] Also in 1980, the Central City, Seventh Ward, and Sixth Ward/Treme/Lafitte areas of the city, which housed more than 66,000 New

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[42] "County and City Data Book, 1967," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census), "County and City Data Book, 1983," (U.S. Bureau of the Census).
[43] Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
[44] "New Orleans Neighborhood Summary, 1980," (New Orleans: Finance Department of the City of New Orleans).

Orleanians, were all composed of more than 90% black citizens. Only twenty years before, significant numbers of white residents had lived in the Sixth or Seventh Ward.[45] At the end of the 1970s, white New Orleanians maintained a few outposts of affluence in the Garden District, Lakeview, and Audubon/University neighborhoods, where the percentage of black residents ranged from 0.07% to 3.84%. As had long been the case in New Orleans, real estate values were highest in largely white neighborhoods; in 1980, median contract rents in the three white neighborhoods listed above were double the median rents in 90% black areas (Please see Fig. 8). Poverty tended to concentrate in largely black neighborhoods (Please see Fig. 9 and 10). Despite initial optimism that New Orleans would dodge devastating white flight, migration of white residents from many Orleans Parish neighborhoods had been dramatic.[46]

[45] Karl E. Taeuber and Alma F. Taeuber, *Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1965), 269.
[46] "New Orleans Neighborhood Summary, 1980."

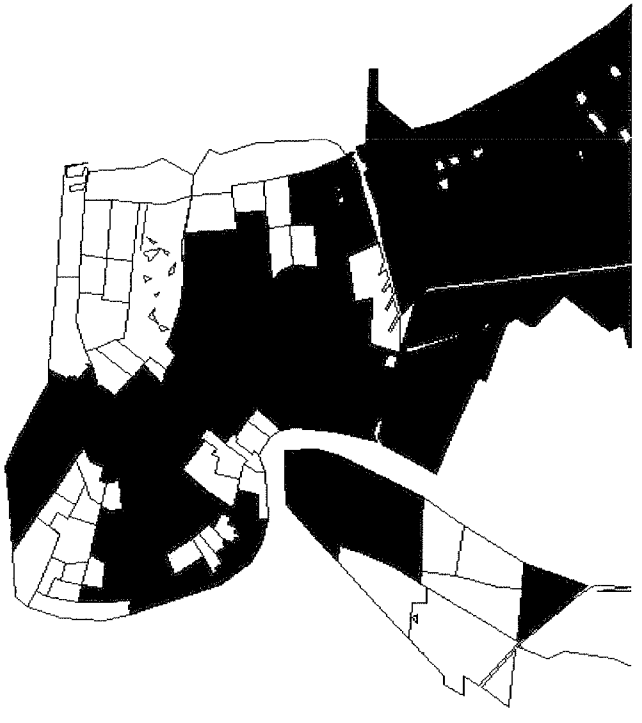
Fig. 14

Racial Demographics of New Orleans Neighborhoods, 1980

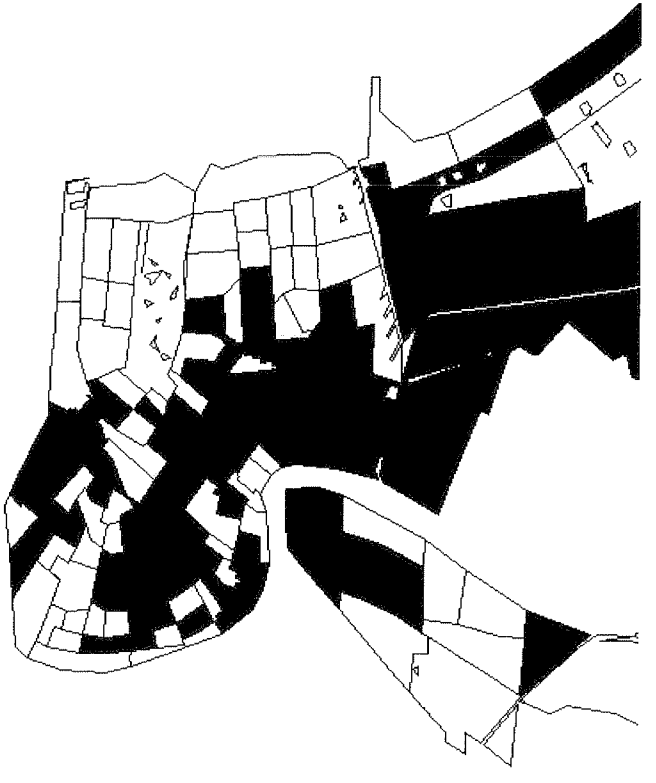
Neighborhood	*Total Population*	*Black Population*	*White Population*	*% Black*	*% White*	*Median Contract Rent*
St. Bernard Area and Project	8,822	8,607	196	97.56%	2.22%	$108
Sixth Ward/ Treme/ Lafitte	12,002	11,380	594	94.82%	4.95%	$117
Seventh Ward	22,071	20,679	1,208	93.69%	5.47%	$126
Iberville Project	2,367	2,286	77	96.58%	3.25%	$52
Desire Area	4,638	4,070	546	87.75%	11.77%	$125
Desire Project	8,575	8,564	8	99.87%	0.09%	$57
Florida Area	4,777	4,660	88	97.55%	1.84%	$116
Florida Project	2,787	2,762	11	99.10%	0.39%	$50
Central City/ Magnolia	32,770	29,970	2,635	91.46%	8.04%	$111
Garden District	2,481	60	2,396	2.42%	96.57%	$256
Audubon/ University	18,160	698	16,990	3.84%	93.56%	$225
Lakeview	10,612	7	10,535	0.07%	99.27%	$231

[Source: *New Orleans Neighborhood Summary, 1980.* Finance Department of the City of New Orleans.]

Fig. 15 and 16



New Orleans:
Census Tracts with 500+ Black Residents, 1980



New Orleans:
Census Tracts with 500+ Poor Residents, 1980

[Source: Geolytics CensusCD 1980]

As abandonment continued, many New Orleans leaders and residents recognized white flight to suburban parishes as a tremendous threat to the city. When the federal government backed a plan to construct a multi-lane bridge across the Mississippi River between Uptown New Orleans and West Bank suburbs, city residents criticized the proposed bridge as a conduit for white flight commuters. One critic told *The New York Times* that the bridge would "be the end of New Orleans as we know it."[47] Although federal officials withdrew the bridge plan, transportation improvement in other areas of the city proved more than sufficient to sustain white flight. Along with local residents, leaders in New Orleans took notice of the threat of exodus to the suburbs; as early as 1966, state senator William J. Guste warned Louisiana congressmen in a letter that "more and more people run from the ghetto, and indeed run from the city to the suburbs."[48]

Despite growing realization that white abandonment could jeopardize the way of life of city residents, the phenomenon proved extremely difficult to tackle head-on. Any governmental scheme to corral residents in the city was politically unviable; such social engineering policies were unpopular across America, anathema in Louisiana. In the absence of a realistic plan to limit white flight, New Orleans fell to the same demographic phenomenon that preyed on urban America in general. New Orleans, the most unique of American cities, had been ravaged by the most ubiquitous of American problems.

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[47] Roy Reed, "Bridge Dispute Spans History of New Orleans," *The New York Times*, May 9, 1971, 60.
[48] William A. Guste Jr. to Hébert, July 26, 1966. Edward Hébert Collection, Tulane University Libraries. As quoted in Kent B. Germany, *New Orleans after the Promises: Poverty, Citizenship, and the Search for the Great Society* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2007), 198.

Conclusion

Cultural explanations for economic ills are part of New Orleans' fabric. For centuries, New Orleanians have referred to a distinctive local culture in "The City That Care Forgot" that celebrates reckless revelry over prudent planning. Many New Orleans residents have long believed that this culture is detrimental to the city's economic development; a business management study commissioned in 1969 found that 80 percent of local business leaders expressed "a belief that people in the New Orleans area are generally apathetic and resistant to change."[1] Business managers in New Orleans diagnosed economic malaise as the result of four factors: the "sluggish attitude and lifestyle stemming from the French-Spanish Catholic culture, unique to Southern Louisiana and the New Orleans area," the city's reliance on the Mississippi River, the city's location in the American South, and "a preoccupation with social and good-time activities, e.g. Mardi Gras."[2]

Certainly, local culture represented an obstacle to economic development campaigns in New Orleans. Charges of corruption tainted antipoverty programs and Superdome construction. Among well-bred elites, an attitude of insulated apathy encouraged intensive planning of secrecy-shrouded Carnival balls rather than economic development projects. Social exclusivity repelled corporate executives from locating their businesses in New Orleans. All of these culture-based explanations are important to

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[1] "Community Leaders Attitude Survey: A Summary," (New Orleans: Regional Planning Commission for Jefferson, Orleans, and St. Bernard Parishes, 1969), 41-2. as quoted in: Daniel S. Juhn, "Mcgregor's Theory X-Y and Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory: An Empirical Study of Managerial Thinking in the New Orleans Area," (New Orleans: College of Business Administration, Louisiana State University in New Orleans, 1972), 2.

[2] Ibid.

understanding New Orleans' distinctive brand of poverty. Yet recognizing local cultural pathologies must not distract us from powerful forces at work in New Orleans and urban America in general. New Orleans is unique among American cities in its history and culture, but it suffered greatly from white flight that also plagued Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and countless other cities.

White abandonment devastated New Orleans neighborhoods between 1960 and 1980, but the failure of two economic development campaigns also contributed to urban poverty. Quantifying the damage done by white flight and unsuccessful economic schemes would be impossibly complex, but we can gain insight on which historical forces were most destructive by comparing New Orleans to other American cities. A glance at the urban histories of Atlanta, Georgia and Houston, Texas suggests that white flight, rather than failed economic development, had a singularly devastating effect on New Orleans. Although the failure of economic development plans during the 1960s and 1970s contributed to New Orleans' troubles, the most significant cause of entrenched poverty in New Orleans was massive flight of the white middle class.

During the 1970s, economists and journalists hailed Atlanta and Houston as paragons of economic expansion. In an era when many American cities struggled, Atlanta and Houston represented successful "New South" or "Sunbelt" economies which relied on investment in technology, transportation, and, in Houston, petroleum. New Orleans, by comparison, was labeled a "Sunbelt laggard."[3] During this era, however, the shifting socio-economic profiles of Atlanta and Houston revealed the frailty of Sunbelt development and the destructive power of middle-class migration. Despite its expanding

[3] Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice, *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth since World War Two* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 108.

economy, Atlanta suffered tremendously from white flight and endured poverty rates comparable to New Orleans' statistics. In contrast, Houston avoided significant white flight and retained far lower rates of urban poverty. These examples instruct us that significant white flight could be a potent impoverishing force even in the face of trumpeted economic expansion. Since white flight predicted urban poverty rates better than economic expansion in Atlanta and Houston, these examples suggest that New Orleans suffered most from white abandonment, rather than failed economic development.

As early as 1959, journalists hailed Atlanta as "the nerve center of the New South."[4] Like New Orleans, Atlanta had been built around a hub of transportation – commerce on the Mississippi River sustained early New Orleans, while Atlanta sprang from a nexus of railroad lines. By the 1960s, as deep-draft container ships and rival ports threatened to weaken New Orleans' lifeline, Atlanta invested heavily in expanding transportation markets. Just as commercial airlines became prominent, Atlanta built a state-of-the-art airport that by 1969 was the third busiest in the nation.[5] At the same time, Atlanta developed a robust interstate trucking industry. By 1980, more than seventy trucking companies had established major terminals in the city.[6] Atlanta boasted a wide array of other signs of increasing economic prosperity; the Coca-Cola Corporation poured money into Emory University, and the Major League Baseball Braves arrived to play in Atlanta's new stadium in 1966.

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[4] William A. Emerson, "Where the Paper Clips Jump... And 'M' Stands for Men, Money, Millions," *Newsweek*, October 19, 1959, 94.
[5] Bradley R. Rice, "Atlanta: If Dixie Were Atlanta," in *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth since World War Two*, ed. Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 40.
[6] Ibid.

Despite Atlanta's image as a site of giddy Sunbelt expansion, population statistics from this era paint the somber picture of a central city burdened by white flight to neighboring counties. Between 1960 and 1980, Atlanta's population fell from 487,000 to 425,000, while the percentage of black citizens increased from 38% to 66%. The population decrease was the result of a net migration of white residents; Atlanta's white population fell from nearly 300,000 to about 130,000 in twenty years, while the black population increased by almost 100,000. By 1980, Atlanta ranked alongside New Orleans in many key poverty indicators; more than 45% of Atlanta households lived on less than $10,000 a year, compared to 43% of households in New Orleans. Per capita incomes in both cities hovered between $6,463 and $6,539, and unemployment rates in each city were comparable (8.1% in Atlanta to 9.2% in New Orleans). Standard educational benchmarks in each city were also similar; in Atlanta and New Orleans, roughly 60% of citizens had completed 12 years or more of education.[7]

While many observers regarded Atlanta as a beacon of Sunbelt development, the benefits of this development failed to reach a significant proportion of city residents. Even observers who lauded the city's economic growth acknowledged the existence of slums in Atlanta; one article noted that "one-fourth of Atlanta's residents . . . live in sub-standard housing."[8] By the 1970s, middle class whites had fled to nearby suburban counties in such numbers that Atlanta legislators were pushing for rights to tax across county lines. This proposed "metropolitan tax," modeled after a similar scheme in Minneapolis-St. Paul, was criticized by a suburban official as a plan to "milk the

[7] "County and City Data Book, 1967."; "County and City Data Book, 1983." These figures are not adjusted for inflation.
[8] Emerson, "Where the Paper Clips Jump... And 'M' Stands for Men, Money, Millions," 95.

suburbs."[9] Like New Orleans, Atlanta had experienced significant white flight which contributed to urban poverty. If Atlanta was an example of Sunbelt success, then the positive effects of economic expansion could be counteracted by flight of resources from the central city.

While many observers touted Atlanta as a major regional triumph, the "buckle" of the new Sunbelt economic model was found in Houston.[10] After World War Two, a flood of capital from petroleum companies boosted Houston's economy; by the 1970s, 29 of the nation's 30 largest energy corporations were headquartered in Houston.[11] The city's skyline glimmered with office towers like the Pennzoil Building, One and Two Shell Plaza, and the Conoco Towers.[12] Enormous profits from petroleum allowed Houston businessmen to invest in other industries, and by the 1970s Houston's port ranked first in the country in foreign trade tonnage. Powered largely by demand for tools for oil production, Houston developed into one of the nation's major manufacturing centers.[13]

Although Houston faced its share of racial tensions, the Sunbelt's buckle suffered less from white flight than Atlanta or New Orleans. Between 1960 and 1980, Houston experienced explosive growth -- population increased from 940,000 to 1,600,000. Houston's population of both white and black residents increased significantly, and the percentage of black citizens increased only 4.6% (22.9% to 27.5%). Houston had far lower rates of poverty than Atlanta or New Orleans -- only 24% of Houston's families

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[9] Rice, "Atlanta: If Dixie Were Atlanta," 54.
[10] Bernard and Rice, *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth since World War Two*, 6.
[11] Barry J. Kaplan, "Houston: The Golden Buckle of the Sunbelt," in *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth since World War Two*, ed. Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 198.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 197.

lived on less than $10,000 per year, compared to 45% and 43% in the other cities. At the end of the 1970s, Houston boasted better educational statistics than Atlanta or New Orleans; nearly 70% of Houston's citizens had completed 12 years or more of school, compared to 60% in the other cities.[14] Having avoided major white flight from the city between 1960 and 1980, Houston emerged with far lower poverty rates than Atlanta or New Orleans.[15]

A brief examination of the socio-economic profiles of Atlanta and Houston lays bare the exceptionally destructive effect of white flight. Simultaneously, analyzing these Sunbelt success stories leads us away from explaining New Orleans' poverty purely in terms of failed economic development. In Atlanta, dramatic white flight trumped an expanding economy by causing significant urban impoverishment. Houston avoided overwhelming migration to suburbs and endured far lower poverty rates. As we seek to weigh the destructiveness of historical forces in New Orleans, the examples of Atlanta and Houston highlight the intuitive truth that cities fared most poorly when they suffered severe middle-class flight, even when traditional economic indicators pointed to positive expansion. These Sunbelt examples suggest that we look first to white migration, rather than failed economic development, in diagnosing New Orleans' impoverishment between 1960 and 1980.

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[14] "County and City Data Book, 1967."; "County and City Data Book, 1983."

[15] Houston's statistics concealed significant concentrations of poverty in the "energy capital of the world." Since Houston's total population in 1980 was nearly triple that of New Orleans, poverty rates based on percentages obscured a large poor population living in Houston. Although only 24% of Houston's families lived on less than $10,000 per year, this rate translated to roughly 380,000 real households in the Texas city. In comparison, 43% of New Orleans families earned less than $10,000 per year, but this represented only 240,000 real households. Thus, even a Sunbelt city with low poverty rates was home to a large population of poor citizens.

Social scientists who study impoverished neighborhoods must be wary not to describe poverty in a manner which slanders the poor.[16] Recognizing the devastating effect of white flight on New Orleans should not be mistaken for blaming black residents for the city's recent ills. Rather, this thesis notes the tremendously detrimental effect of white migration in contributing to the decline of a great American city. Improved regional transportation allowed suburban developments to lure middle-class residents from New Orleans, while racism was active in pushing white residents across parish lines as the city underwent desegregation of schools and public accommodations. In New Orleans, however, accusations of racism must be applied judiciously; many white residents who fled the city did so in pursuit of quality education and peaceful neighborhoods, rather than from stark phobia of integration. As we saw in our analysis of the public school system, white flight was a treacherous trend which tended to self-replicate – as middle-class residents relocated, their former neighborhoods suffered a decline in reputation among whites which induced more residents to move. As the cycle continued, however, racism played a less decisive role in driving white desertion of schools and neighborhoods. As Bankston and Caldas noted in their recent study of Louisiana schools, "Bigoted parents do not send their children to the majority-black schools of Orleans, and they feel comfortable with their decision. Nonbigoted parents do not send their children to the majority black schools in the district, and they feel uncomfortable."[17]

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[16] Alan Howard, "An Arsenal of Words: Social Science and Its Victims," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1978): 481.
[17] Bankston and Caldas, *A Troubled Dream: The Promise and Failure of School Desegregation in Louisiana*, 72.

More than a decade before Hurricane Katrina, longtime New Orleans resident Carol Flake tried to capture the "state of mind, the way of life" of the Crescent City in her book *New Orleans: Behind the Masks of America's Most Exotic City*. Flake wrote: "Yet for all the psychic steam that undoubtedly has been vented in revels over the years, all the demons loosed, all the bottles uncorked. . .New Orleans is still a stratified city, constrained by secrets and social codes and double lives. The most alluring and festive of cities, it is still a crushingly poor provincial outpost burdened by corruption and a petrified elite."[18] Flake, of course, is correct that New Orleans has a unique local culture of revelry, corruption, and social stratification. Yet in assessing the Crescent City's ills, we should not allow local culture to dominate our explanation of the city's poverty. Rather, we must conclude that New Orleans suffered most from hardships no city has solved completely. With informed empathy, we must resolve to rebuild what is, after all, an American city.

[18] Carol Flake, *New Orleans: Behind the Masks of America's Most Exotic City* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 7.

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