

Rebuilding others' communities: a critical analysis of race and nativism in non-profits in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina

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The devastation of Hurricane Katrina and the federal levee failures facilitated the unprecedented proliferation of non-profits in some areas of the city. While the short- and moderate-term experiences of non-profits in the aftermath of Katrina have been examined, their long-term successes and failures remain unknown. In this paper we look at how race and nativism hindered the success of non-profits in rebuilding New Orleans. We likewise seek to demonstrate how the reactions on the part of non-profits to being the racial other or that of an outsider often further impeded the effectiveness of non-profits. The three authors, using data from participant observation, interviews, and ethnography, over a four-year period, describe generalisable lessons learned from rebuilding New Orleans' communities, including the recognition of competing racial discourses in redevelopment; the valuing of local knowledge; and coming to terms with the paradoxes of the affect economy.

Keywords: disasters; non-profits; Hurricane Katrina; New Orleans; community rebuilding; affect surfeit

Introduction

In the years following the 2005 flooding of the city as a result of the federal levee failures, the pace of recovery across New Orleans has been uneven with some areas recovering faster and even experiencing some gentrification, while other areas struggle to regain population and other vital community resources such as schools and grocery stores. As has been well documented, those communities that had been the most marginalised in pre-Katrina New Orleans were the ones that faced the most severe damage during and after the disaster (e.g. Brunsma *et al.* 2007, Fussell and Elliott 2009, Fussell *et al.* 2010). These communities continue to suffer from “chronic disaster syndrome” – characterising a society where trauma is chronically perpetuated; where the city is always in a state of emergency, constantly “responding” rather than “recovering” (Adams *et al.* 2009, p. 623). Such disparity in recovery across the city may be attributable, at least in part, to political and economic arrangements that turned recovery over to corporations (Gotham and Greenberg 2014).

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In her work on the rebuilding of New Orleans, Adams (2013) describes how the uneven recovery and the influx of volunteers created an “affect economy”. Throughout New Orleans, suffering and need provided niche markets for humanitarian organisations where “affect circulates as a source of market opportunity for profit” (Adams 2013, p. 10). This economy is the result of what Somers (2008) calls “market-driven governance” and what Klein (2007) calls “disaster capitalism”. As she notes, communities that had little to offer under a for-profit recovery were forced to rely on the surplus of affect that resulted in the outpouring of aid from volunteers, civic groups, churches, and non-profits. In places like the Lower Ninth Ward, which was ground zero for devastation following Hurricane Katrina, the lack of long-term work by for-profit federal subcontractors created a need for the permanent presence of non-profits and volunteers. Our focus in this paper, rather than the neo-liberal tendencies of the affect economy, is the long-term issues for non-profits and communities working in the affect economy, and in particular in those areas with a surplus of affect.

Where non-profits, volunteers, and civic groups provided assistance in rebuilding and recovery, results have been mixed. While over two million volunteers came to help rebuild New Orleans between 2005 and 2011,¹ some were part of well-integrated organisations while others were simply thrust into non-profits with little organisational capacity to effectively use them. The influx of volunteers and the sudden appearance of non-profits promoting social justice provided a stark contrast to the pre-Katrina landscape, especially in terms of volume and missions, as well as their highly uneven distribution across the city. Over time, this has resulted not only in differential access to recovery resources, but also in contrasting and often contradictory experiences of residents with non-profits and volunteers.

As Adams (2013) notes, in some communities volunteer labour and non-profits have superseded the revitalisation and use of local labour. Many residents in New Orleans, having become exasperated at “waiting for the white man to fix things” (Hawkins and Maurer 2012, p. 1), have grown wary of the presence of non-profits.² This was additionally problematic when non-profit leadership, largely non-Hispanic white individuals, did not demographically represent the constituents that they were intending to serve, which were largely low-income, African-American communities (DeVita *et al.* 2012).

Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of New Orleans, issues of race and nativism shaped both the dialogue regarding what was to be done and who would get it done. In his work on public housing, for example, Arena (2012) notes how identity politics temporally disrupted the fight for the right to housing. Furthermore, by concentrating on the rebuilding of privately owned houses, the most disempowered and displaced residents were left out of post-Katrina conversations (Johnson 2011). Indeed, many point to the arrival of outsiders as a significant deterrent to successful black political mobilisation (Luft 2012). Luft (2008) likewise shows how early relief groups, such as Common Ground, at times struggled to simultaneously rebuild primarily black neighbourhoods while the organisation’s predominantly white volunteers perpetuated racist stereotypes.

Furthermore, funnelling of the non-profits and the volunteers into the disaster-stricken areas typically reinforced or at best coexisted with strategies for social and racial marginalisation rather than challenging pre-existing inequalities (Johnson 2011). Many non-profits based in black communities were more interested in perpetuating the goals of the white elites who comprise New Orleans’ growth machine than effectively creating social change (BondGraham 2011). In fact, as BondGraham (2011) writes, local elites have long used federal monies to quash social movement activity in the south.

The long-term aftermath of Hurricane Katrina offers an opportunity for an unparalleled examination of the role of non-profits in rebuilding communities affected by social,

economic, and/or environmental devastation (Eikenberry *et al.* 2007). In particular, we focus on the set of obstacles many non-profits have encountered in their practices, and assess how their presence in particular communities may (or may not) have contributed to the long-term rebuilding of these areas, and ultimately, to New Orleans as a whole. Rather than assess the “effectiveness” of various organisations, we aim to demonstrate the complex ways in which non-profit organisations understood and attempted to negotiate the challenges they confronted, and how their practices were perceived by the local residents. Hence, we stress that this paper is not about castigating non-profits or critiquing any particular non-profit. Moreover, while we base our analysis on our experiences with non-profits throughout the city for this paper, most of the data comes from our work in the Lower Ninth Ward, partly due to the above-mentioned concentration of non-profit rebuilding activities in the neighbourhood.³ While there was some amount of grassroots organising throughout the city, we also focus on the role of non-profits that were not “home-grown” but were started or operated by “outsiders”⁴ in their sincere desire to ignite, assist, or participate in rebuilding disaster-stricken communities. In doing so, we explore how the meanings of “social justice” or “community recovery” are articulated by the non-profit organisations, and how their praxis unintentionally resulted in undermining the agency of the disaster-stricken areas and their residents. To this effect, we propose that the uncoordinated *flooding* of these neighbourhoods by non-profit organisations’ activities caused by the surfeit of affect created a central paradox for the affect economy – namely that too much affect can stall and possibly even prevent recovery.

The paper is organised as follows. In the following section, we look at the roles of non-profits in rebuilding communities in general. After explaining our methodology and data, we turn to our experiences of working with non-profit organisations in post-Katrina New Orleans. Here we note many of the obstacles facing non-profits in trying to rebuild others’ communities. In particular, we note how racial inequality coincides with and often exacerbates other obstacles, which we define and discuss in the body of the paper, including nativity, volunteerism, the city as a site of urban experimentation, and mission creep. We end with some policy recommendations on how non-profits can mitigate mistakes when rebuilding communities in the aftermath of social disruption.

The role of non-profits in times of disaster

Due to urban renewal strategies in US cities in the second half of the twentieth century, which involved a shift of government aid from urban to suburban development, many communities in major metropolitan areas experienced a serious decline in living conditions (Massey and Denton 1994, Satter 2009). Ultimately, as poverty became concentrated, many communities fell into severe disrepair (Wilson 1987). Fraser and Kick (2005) note that attempts to rebuild communities during this time fell along three different political strategies,⁵ but that today, because of the neo-liberal response to urban conditions, the work of rebuilding communities has fallen to broad-based coalitions involving non-profits. Simultaneously, the responsibility to help so-called others is increasingly being scaled to the level of the local (Fraser *et al.* 2003).⁶

Many scholars have castigated non-profits for their lack of accountability to local communities (Eisenberg 1997), and for contributing to a decline in civic responsibility (Putnam 2000) and a decline in social movement activity (Arena 2012). Recent disasters such as Hurricane Katrina have shown that both national and local governments have employed neo-liberal policies in disaster relief that rely on a free-market approach (BondGraham 2011, Gotham and Greenberg 2014). Such policies will fuel market-driven redevelopment

while further exacerbating the evermore diminishing public safety net, creating a need for non-profits to assist in the rebuilding of communities that are most vulnerable. Several authors who have focused on non-profits in the aftermath of disasters have demonstrated the volatile and sometimes even contentious relationships between the two.

While administrative failure, the increase in neo-liberal regimes and increased dependence upon private resources, and the magnitude of the disaster all account for increased demand for non-profit work, an often overlooked fact is that many local non-profits were severely hampered in their capacity to serve in the immediate aftermath of Katrina. In a survey four months after Katrina of over 700 metro-area non-profits, 95% of the respondents noted that they were affected by the disaster and close to half were non-operational (Auer and Lampkin 2006). The same report finds that of the 177 non-profits surveyed in Orleans Parish, only 19 were fully operational. Nonetheless (and despite a drastic reduction in the overall population of the city), the number of non-profits and public charities in Orleans Parish increased from 2000 to 2010, from 2426 to 2521 and from 1448 to 1838, respectively (Auer and Lampkin 2006). At the same time, there were more than one dozen International Non-governmental Organisations that provided humanitarian assistance during and immediately after Hurricane Katrina, an unprecedented level of disaster relief in the USA (Eikenberry *et al.* 2007).⁷

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, many non-profits were started by New Orleanians. Organisations such as the People's Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF) were organised by residents who had previous ties in social movement organisations (Flaherty 2010). The PHRF was highly successful in reaching out to other activist organisations and shaped conversations about the right of return from the very beginning. Notably, PHRF positioned itself to reject foundation funding and called white activists to account for larger issues related to white supremacy (Flaherty 2010). Common Ground Relief Collective (later known as Common Ground) likewise sought to make system-wide changes. It, however, comprised mainly non-nativist activists. From both organisations a number of other non-profits were created, some activist oriented and others more narrowly focused on rebuilding neighbourhoods. Likewise, many neighbourhoods had Neighbourhood Associations dating back decades (Wooten 2012). There were also groups such as ACORN and INCITE! that had long histories in the city. Organisations that came after PHRF and Common Ground, as discussed in the findings section of the paper, avoided modelling themselves, to much detriment, after the PHRF – in part because many of these organisations frequently grew out of the PHRF and Common Ground. These newer organisations, many of which relied on the same structures that doomed the PHRF and created numerous problems for Common Ground, namely using short-term volunteers for labour, are among the many we worked with and use for the basis of this paper.

Bryson *et al.* (2006) point out that networks and organisations must be socially embedded pre-disaster and that embeddedness must be based on trustworthiness and legitimacy. According to Burns and Thomas (2006), New Orleans has long been governed on issue-based coalitions rather than the establishment of more permanent political arrangements. This was often the result of the use of identity politics by real estate developers and national non-profit organisations that used the black elite political regime to counter demands by black residents (Arena 2012). The outcome in the most marginalised neighbourhoods was a lack of development and interest in community affairs on the part of the city and a strain on local capacities for redevelopment (Germany 2007, Simo and Bies 2007). The result was that there were virtually no coalitions in place to help victims during and immediately after Katrina. This legacy of a lack of embeddedness and trust created a situation where residents were suspicious of outsiders, typically of a different

race, who suddenly appeared in their neighbourhoods. It did not help that many post-Katrina non-profits tended to focus on specific clients (in terms of race, class, or geography) rather than on common solutions. They typically operated in a non-democratic manner or at least eschewed local decision-makers and thus alienated community stakeholders, while they also lacked legal authority to address the original social problems that caused the disaster in the first place (Eikenberry *et al.* 2007, p. 166).

Post-Katrina conditions often required many non-profits and INGOS (e.g. Oxfam, and Mennonite Disaster Services) to change their organisational structure (Phillips 2014). This meant that many organisations were doing disaster service for the first time or operating in a drastically new context. Many non-profits, especially those that were not locally established, did not know how to negotiate the byzantine bureaucratic structure of New Orleans or the arcane rules for rebuilding historical properties. Additionally, many of these non-profits brought volunteers from outside of the city who were unfamiliar with the culture and historical issues that facilitated deep divisions between various groups (Fussell 2007). While the number and commitment of many volunteers were beneficial for some aspects of the rebuilding efforts, the logistics of managing mostly unskilled, outsider volunteers were often challenging for the non-profits on the ground (Green *et al.* 2007).

Many of the discussions we have outlined do not fully explore the changes over time in the problems that non-profits faced in New Orleans in the years following Hurricane Katrina. The challenges non-profits faced at any given time reflected changes in the interests and priorities in recovery as months and then years passed, and the organisations' own transformation over time. Furthermore, an analysis or survey of the long-term issues has not been forthcoming, but could be helpful for non-profits and communities negotiating past the immediate aftermath of future disasters. In our analysis, we focus on several different issues and dilemmas both facing and created by non-profits. In particular, we note not only the relationship that race and nativity – that is, whether or not someone is from New Orleans – have manifested as obstacles in their own right, but also how they compounded other issues for non-profits in their efforts to rebuild post-disaster communities.

Methods

The three authors have each had different relationships with non-profit work in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. In total we worked with approximately 20 non-profit organisations and interviewed 33 representatives from these organisations.

The first author worked with a consortium of non-profits, local government officials, neighbourhood groups, and academics in the Lower Ninth Ward for a period of 14 months during 2010 and 2011. While the author's organisational home was a rebuild organisation located in Holy Cross, he spent much of his tenure with the organisation working on large projects with other non-profits and neighbourhood stakeholders.

The second author worked with two organisations, an urban farm and educational programme and one limited liability company (LLC) market that operates under a non-profit community development corporation, during 2009–2012. Both organisations were established since 2008, and focus on urban agriculture and food justice as a focal point of community redevelopment.

The third author researched post-Katrina food justice activism and organising in the city of New Orleans during an 18-month ethnographic research tenure between 2011 and 2012. She interviewed representatives of more than two dozen organisations throughout the city, but concentrated on projects in the Mid-City and Lower Ninth Ward neighbourhoods.

While doing research in disaster areas can be fraught with particular problems (Phillips 1997, Haney and Elliott 2013, Richardson *et al.* 2013), since our research took place in the long-term aftermath of Katrina, we have managed to avoid many of the problems commonly associated with disaster research. Most importantly, none of us experienced significant problems with access to communities or individuals (Stalings 2006), possibly due to the embedded and sustained nature of our research methods using ethnographic observations. Furthermore, since our work collectively comprises a semi-longitudinal study, there were no timing issues that restrict our analysis to too short a time frame to fully capture the development of non-profit operations overtime (Stalings 2006). Likewise, while many disaster studies suffer from a lack of triangulation (Phillips 1997), our separate research projects involved surveys, interviews, and participant observation.

Nonetheless, we did encounter some challenges in our study of non-profits. First and foremost, as our combined research tenure and foci span over four years, four neighbourhoods, and nearly 20 organisations, many of the non-profits experienced personnel change during this time. Thus, our snapshots of various non-profits and their work were not always identical. Coupled with personnel changes, many of the non-profits that we worked with were understaffed and constantly in the process of reprogramming, which made it difficult to have a definitive idea about which of the programmes were currently being planned, in progress, or had been discontinued.⁸ Finally, in examining issues of nativity (i.e. the relative importance of being “from” New Orleans) and belonging, we endeavoured to remain cognisant and critical of our own positionalities as outsiders within that space. These challenges in the field reflect the complexities of the post-disaster recovery processes, and our awareness of these shifting environments in which the non-profit organisations were operating allowed us to engage in a critical analysis of our combined data. Furthermore, the challenges we experienced led us to being more observant of how both race and nativity created problems for non-profits operating in a post-Katrina environment.

Findings: constraints on rebuilding others’ communities

Because of the disproportionate media attention on the Lower Ninth Ward⁹ during Katrina and in the immediate aftermath, many non-profits and volunteers were drawn to that particular neighbourhood.¹⁰ This created a surfeit of affect with the vast majority of resources being poured into just one neighbourhood, overwhelming the area with the presence of “outsiders” and “new” ideas. While other neighbourhoods did have native non-profits emerge to work on recovery, many of the non-profits in the Lower Ninth Ward were set up by non-natives who were often white and middle class (DeVita *et al.* 2012). While others have focused on the ambivalence that young professionals in the city felt about their role as change agents in the city (Ehrenfeucht and Nelson 2013) or how residents viewed race as a structural barrier to receiving aid in the aftermath of Katrina (Hawkins and Maurer 2012), the role of race and racial inequality in causing other problems for non-profits has not been addressed. Here we note that racial inequality was the most immediate challenge for non-profits – even in the long term, and that it not only supersedes but also exacerbates other issues for non-profits.

Race and racial inequality

While race was often masked by an outsider/native dichotomy, as we discuss it more extensively later, it became a prominent and divisive issue when volunteers were improperly socialised into neighbourhoods or when residents who did not usually participate in the

volunteer-led recovery suddenly encountered large groups of volunteers. For example, at a potluck dinner to celebrate Night Out Against Crime in 2010 in the Lower Ninth Ward, the host's brother was surprised at the number of young, white volunteers sitting around eating. While Mayor Landrieu mingled with residents, a surprised resident asked volunteers where they were from. After one volunteer replied Oregon and another New York, the resident began laughing and noted that there had not been that many whites in the neighbourhood since the 1970s. The question of "where did all you 'white' people come from" was often overheard at crawfish boils and other similar events to orient large groups of volunteers to particular neighbourhoods.

The new and prominent presence of white people also served to remind residents, particularly in neighbourhoods like the Lower Ninth, that young people – both black and white – from other neighbourhoods in New Orleans were *not* helping rebuild. On one occasion as one of the authors sat outside (a community centre) in the Lower Ninth Ward, a resident remarked upon seeing a bus full of students from the University of Ohio:

[t]hat's a shame that we got kids, white kids from California or wherever they from, here helping us rebuild our neighborhoods, but kids uptown at Tulane or even SUNO¹¹ ain't here to help. I mean that tells you something about this place. It tells you something about the future too. It don't look good for us.¹² (Danny, black male, 50s)

Danny, as others, felt that while the racial inequality exposed by Katrina led many to New Orleans to help rebuild, such migration and the changes it wrought simply were not sustainable. Likewise, Kendra, a community organiser born and working in the Lower Ninth Ward, also commented that many non-profits run the risk of doing more harm than good in the communities in which they work. She said,

It really sickens me that organizations . . . generally use demographic information, they generally paint a story of why they're needed . . . So I'm just tired of these organizations writing grants to help poor black people and black people are not leading them . . . , black people are not . . . the ones at the forefront of these.

Non-profits were often faced with the additional task of soliciting community buy-in for their projects. This task often revolved around having support from notable or highly visible stakeholders in the black community. These symbolic attempts to include the black community often backfired as residents felt left out of core organisational decisions and ultimately rejected their tokenism. Al, who was asked to be a director of a non-profit whose previous director and entire board and staff were white, confided in the first author that he knew he was only being asked to serve in that capacity to make the non-profit's actions more palatable to the community and that he would never actually be listened to by the board. He ultimately decided against working with the non-profit. Another long-term volunteer with another non-profit, the only black volunteer during most of the first author's work with the non-profit, stormed out of several meetings. When asked during a formal interview why meetings were occasionally stressful, he replied: "no one else here listens to you when you're the only black guy in the room. You would think they would, since maybe you represent the community, but I'm always the odd guy out".

It should be noted that these racial tensions were exceedingly apparent to most of the white volunteers and non-profit organisers we met in New Orleans. In fact, a multiracial coalition came together to organise an anti-racism training facilitated by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. This particular workshop in the summer of 2012, attended by the third author, brought together organisers within the food justice community to discuss issues

of race and power as they related to both landscapes of food (in)access and also non-profit work throughout the city. In an interview with the third author following the workshop, Kendra, who helped organise the workshop, said she was grateful to get the conversation started, but felt that it did not go far enough towards advancing real organisational change:

I had hoped that it [the workshop] would be the start of us really looking at racism as a key factor in why conditions are the way they are . . . I don't know. I think it was a good start. I think I probably had too many expectations for the workshop, like it was going to change everybody's lives. But the workshop was really meant to be an introductory conversation.

Kendra went on to explain that the greatest benefit from the anti-racism workshop was creating a space for African-American organisers within her group to speak openly about race and racial oppression:

The one thing I think was really important and powerful that it did do was that it allowed our core group to talk about race . . . in a way that I don't think we would have [because] there's one white woman who was in the core group, and what I find is that black people, especially old black people, really pussyfoot around white people and not talk about racism or their own anger . . . they don't want to make anybody feel uncomfortable.

Thus, simply providing a forum for broaching these issues was an important step in the right direction.

More common, however, were strategising sessions and organisational meetings *about* rather than *with* “communities of need”, reflecting the outsider status of the leadership at many of these non-profit organisations. In the sections that follow, we elaborate on some common themes that characterise many of the exogenously led non-profits we observed.

Discounting of local knowledge

In the aftermath of Katrina, many different types of volunteers travelled to New Orleans to help in the recovery (Barsky *et al.* 2007). While many of these volunteers came with good intentions, many also came with preconceived notions of how New Orleans should be rebuilt. There was additionally a bias towards expert, as opposed to folk or local, knowledge (Allen 2007, Frickel 2008). Part of the reason for this was no doubt the way in which residents of New Orleans were depicted as “waiting” for rescue, assistance, aid, etc. The image of the passive body was prevalent in the national media and in public discourse. As Hawkins and Maurer's (2012) interview with one resident revealed, there was this idea that people were simply “waiting for the white man to fix things”. The result was that there was a discounting of local knowledge.

While the relationships between project leaders and community members was more nuanced, these biases and preconceptions were particularly prevalent among short-term volunteers. A resident of the Lower Ninth Ward noted that he was frustrated with volunteers, whom he referred to as “pilgrims”, coming to the neighbourhood and assuming that residents could not take care of themselves. “They act like we didn't build this neighborhood, rebuild it after Betsy, like we ain't been living here for fifty years” (Lee, black male, 50s). Another resident of the Bywater neighbourhood told one of the authors that he moved from the Lower Ninth to avoid the volunteers and non-profits.

I can go weeks here without having someone tell me what's wrong with my city, months really. I know what's wrong with New Orleans. I lived here my whole life. Just because you – not

you, you know, but other volunteers – because you read a book or you came to the [French] Quarter ten years ago for Mardi Gras – that doesn't mean you know anything about what's happened here. I loved the Lower Ninth, but every day I was there someone wanted to tell me how to pour concrete, fix my roof. I couldn't walk without someone popping up telling me I was doing it wrong. Upper Ninth is just as much home as the Lower Ninth. (Paul, black male, 50s)

Many local organisers noted that there was a narrative of “educating” residents. A community organiser in the Lower Ninth Ward, for example, expressed frustration with many non-profits (specifically those related to urban agriculture) that set up shop in her neighbourhood and in similarly disinvested communities:

I take issue with a lot of the urban ag[riculture] organizations who are in similar communities who may have a history of growing. They come in . . . like, ‘I'm coming to educate you, poor black people, so you can be healthy and strong! I'm empowering you!’ Meanwhile, they may have been doing it [gardening] for generations and generations.

Likewise, Evelia, the director of a Latino social services organisation in New Orleans, critiqued the failed efforts of a Mid-City organisation to promote healthy food access in low-income neighbourhood. “Look at [that organization]”, she says, “that fancy building, and that beautiful little farm. People in the neighborhood know that wasn't meant for them. You can't just go to people later on and say, ‘Oh, you are welcome to come here too!’”

On more than one occasion directors of various non-profits noted that they appreciated not being told how to do things. Mack “Ward” McClendon, the executive director of the Village,¹³ explained to the first author after a tiring day of dealing with short-term volunteers from The University of Ohio,

You respect knowledge from the 9th, and that's important because most people come here and try to do their thing when we already have a way of doing things. That shows folks real quick that you ain't one of them.

Post-Katrina non-profits often did not know the non-profit landscape in New Orleans prior to 2005 and hence many residents questioned their motives and credentials (Simo and Bies 2007). Non-profits run by “the locals” (typically understood as pre-Katrina residents) seemed to be embraced, while those run by newcomers that lacked ties were seen as “self-appointed” (Simo and Bies 2007) and ignorant of local customs and ways of doing things. Even when volunteers tried to do the right things (Ehrenfeucht and Nelson 2013), their mere presence caused residents to question the ongoing need for non-profits. One resident of the Lower Ninth Ward noted that they were back in their house and in school in less than a year after Hurricane Betsy in 1965 (where the neighbourhood experienced a similar level of flooding), but now “we talking years, plural, like maybe 5 more, so like 10 years and the only thing different is that this time we've had to rely on others to help”. Another resident of the Lower Ninth Ward explained her opposition to the non-profits succinctly, “if you been here six years and ain't fixed the problem, maybe you ain't doing things right”.

Volunteerism

A particular problem in the aftermath of Katrina was that volunteers were often used in place of local labour, creating an antagonistic relationship between volunteers (and non-

profits with whom they worked) and the local population. While there were local volunteers, many from other areas of the city, often through educational institutions such as Tulane University or University of New Orleans, non-profits increasingly relied on out-of-town volunteers. While residents were often pleasant to volunteers as individuals, non-profits were seen as encroaching on the economic and political autonomy of the neighbourhood. John, the director of a non-profit in the Lower Ninth Ward, noted the negative impacts on volunteers on the local labour market. A number of non-profits, like Brad Pitt's homebuilding non-profit, The Make It Right Foundation (MIR), promised residents that at least 60% of all workers would be hired locally.¹⁴ This has not been the case; the actual percentage of neighbourhood residents who work on the MIR houses varies, but it has been closer to 20%.¹⁵ Other non-profits have likewise been slow to hire locals as directors or to use electricians, plumbers, or other craftspeople from the more marginalised neighbourhoods.

The availability and efficacy of the volunteer workforce posed many problems. Most volunteers were unskilled and were only available for a short period of time, some as briefly as a few hours. In many non-profits accommodating and making the most out of these volunteers' willingness to help became a task of its own, which sometimes superseded their primary mission of community recovery. For example, the following excerpt from a field note taken at Our School at Blair Grocery (OSBG), an alternative school that uses urban farming as its core curriculum, illustrates the typical sentiments among those who were put in charge of handling the volunteers:

To pretty much everyone's relief, today was a very slow day at the farm. One group is in Tangapahoa and other is in Houma. This gave the more permanent interns at OSBG an opportunity for some normality and relaxation. The volunteers are obviously wearing on the staffs' nerves. [A female staff member] explained it to [a white male staff member] as "methodical babysitting". (Field note, 16 June 2010)

Similarly, the Latino Farmers' Cooperative had a service learning partnership with Tulane University, meaning students came on a weekly basis to volunteer at the cooperative. At the time, the third author was working as unpaid staff in the cooperative's office, and recalls feeling frustrated on days the students were due to work in the office, because managing the student volunteers took time away from work she would have otherwise spent processing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program applications (her primary responsibility). In that case, it was clear that the students were benefitting more from the volunteer experience (both in the form of school credit and a sense of contributing to the community) than the cooperative was benefitting from their donated time. Neither the students nor the cooperative leadership could be blamed for this inefficiency, but it was a legitimate (and common) example of the unintended consequences of unpredictable and inconsistent volunteer labour on which the non-profits undeniably relied to some degree.

Evolving nature of non-profits – "mission creep"

As Dijkzeul and Wakenge (2010) argue, professionalism often matters more for building trust than do the humanitarian principles of the non-profits. As non-profits evolved over time, newer members took over key leadership positions. These new members were not always cognisant of informal arrangements with community members. In one instance, a resident who was accustomed to borrowing tools from a non-profit's shed was arrested for burglary when the person overseeing the tool shed was replaced with a new volunteer.

Most of the new, post-Katrina non-profits in New Orleans were originally organised around a specific issue. As funding became more difficult to secure, many non-profits began to turn to other ventures to secure funds. This diversification concerned residents who were accustomed to a non-profit operating in a particular sphere of activity and now saw the non-profit as trying to become a permanent fixture of the neighbourhood. It likewise often led to claims of infringement by other non-profits in the community that were working locally in a similar capacity. When a rebuild non-profit in the Lower Ninth Ward neighbourhood began urban gardening to raise money by selling produce at a local farmer's market, two other non-profits already engaged in urban gardening ceased communication with them for months. Another non-profit found itself on the margins of the non-profit community when they partnered with an international tour company to provide "local" tours of the Lower Ninth Ward.

Some organisations found themselves engaged in work that fell outside of their original mission when their original mission proved too difficult, broad, or unsupported. We refer to this phenomenon as *mission creep*. Hollygrove Market and Farm (HMF), an LLC, for example, was established by a local non-profit organisation, originally to increase access to fresh food within the Hollygrove neighbourhood. After several years of little neighbourhood interest or engagement, the LLC contemplated shifting its mission to meet its current programming, which primarily consisted of buying produce and other food products from area farmers and selling them in the market space. In an interview with an intern working at HMF at the time, the intern expressed frustration with the mismatch between the mission and programming:

It [the mission] can't be about helping people by allowing them to shop in our market. People get that. They don't see that as a community mission; they see it as advertising. If our goal is to support local farmers, that's great. But it's different to talk about helping the neighborhood.

In agreement, another intern present added, "Did anyone ask them if this is what they want?"

The diversification or branching out by non-profits often caused internal problems as well. One of the most visible manifestations of such internal conflict occurred at OSBG, where the staff and the volunteers were under increasing pressure to keep up with the number of concurring projects, with the two leaders travelling constantly to promote the programme and seek additional funding. The following field note by the second author's research team provides a glimpse of the confusion on site.

I'm having a very hard time keeping track of everything going on at the farm, especially when I'm only there 2 or 3 days a week. However, when I brought this up with [a white male staff member], he said that even though he worked 16 hour days 7 days a week he felt the same way. There's a lot going on and organization is posing somewhat of a problem—people seem to be on very different pages. (Field note, 13 June 2010)

Many unpaid staff and volunteers felt that the organisational practices were centred on growing and selling sprouts to local restaurants for profit, rather than providing alternative educational environment for the youth, which was at the core of the organisation's original mission. The tension continued to mount and in March 2011, the entire staff, except for the two founding leaders, walked off after a brief strike that did not result in compromise or open conversation over transparency and directing the organisational focus back on education rather than farming. Some of the former staff members are still operating in New Orleans on various urban agriculture or education-related projects, while others'

whereabouts are not known to the researcher as of 2014. OSBG has since restructured itself and continues to operate from the same location, which has since expanded through purchasing and leasing of additional growing spaces nearby as well as in remote sites outside of Orleans Parish. While this was one of the most drastic and visible examples of conflict and transformation, similar internal struggles over mission praxis disconnects or leadership hindered many non-profits from operating effectively.

While many non-profits continued to try to survive in a financially competitive environment, where many donors were no longer concerned with New Orleans or had experienced “Katrina Fatigue”,¹⁶ residents interpreted these attempts as a critical departure from their original intentions. Many residents painted the non-profits with broad brush strokes. The misdeeds of one non-profit typically blemished the entire non-profit industry. When lower-nine.org began to expand their urban farm and sell produce at the local farmers market, a number of residents complained to the first author that the market should only be for residents and that they [the non-profit] should not be growing food. Later, upon the discovery that several other non-profits had small gardens, residents expressed alarm that these non-profits would also start selling at the local farmers market. Expressing their frustration to the first author by telling him that “you guys started this”, they were surprised to learn that the community spaces in question belonged to non-profits that allowed residents to grow small plots of vegetables.

Discussion: suggestions for non-profits operating in unsettling times

In our combined field work, we were able to witness both successful and unsuccessful attempts by non-profits to help residents. While we have pointed out a number of missteps, many non-profits in fact did serve residents quite well in the long-term aftermath. In order to aid in future disasters, it is critical, however, to address those failures in recovery. Also, while our experiences are limited to the recovery of New Orleans, and primarily the Lower Ninth Ward, after Hurricane Katrina, we believe many of these observations are generalisable to other disasters and other communities. Here we develop some suggestions for non-profits to more effectively work during unsettling times.

First and foremost, many problems experienced by non-profits in the long-term aftermath of Hurricane Katrina could have been mitigated, if not entirely avoided, by paying closer attention to the racial dimensions of the disaster, the pre-disaster context, and the aftermath. While Katrina initially instigated a national conversation on race, that conversation was both short lived and had a minimal impact on race relations in the country.

As Omi and Winant (1994, p. vii) argue, “race continues to shape both identities and institutions in significant ways. Until we understand the concept of race, it is impossible effectively to analyze the familiar issues which involve race”. We agree with this assessment of the importance of race, and argue that explicit analyses of how race and racism operate within particular communities – but also throughout society – are crucial components of effective non-profit work, especially when they regard unfamiliar issues or are in unfamiliar contexts. At the very least, non-profits operating in unsettling times need to address the larger social structures that perpetuate social inequalities if they are to make long-term differences or, at the very least, avoid doing harm.

In places such as New Orleans, which have very distinct histories of race relations, the acknowledgement of racial differences is even more important. As Tattenahm (in Alkon and Agyeman 2006) notes, the idea that black people would do farm work for white people for free was a major lapse in understanding the nuances of the racial history of New Orleans. Likewise, the fact that black people had fought to integrate institutions in neighbourhoods

like the Lower Ninth Ward, only to be subsequently met with white flight, was lost on many of the founders of non-profits, who were often white newcomers to the city. The disconnect was exacerbated by the failure to consult residents about their operations or intent before beginning work in the neighbourhood. Similar mistakes were made by volunteers who wanted to know why homeowners whose houses they were helping to rebuild were not there to assist them (not realising the homeowner was either at work or still displaced) or why some homeowners used rebuilding grants to buy large vehicles (so more members of their families could evacuate).¹⁷ We would urge that whenever volunteers travel into historically marginalised spaces, some form of critical race education occurs, potentially facilitated by the non-profit organisations or other local institutions such as universities or bureau of tourism.¹⁸

Second, our observations indicate that the most enduring projects relied on a coalition led by local residents and supported by post-Katrina newcomers who have themselves remained in the city. Even projects led by non-native residents of New Orleans, such as the Grow Dat Youth Farm, have earned credibility and respect by valuing local knowledge and incorporating local human capital into their planning and programming. Projects that attempt to “cut-and-paste” mission statements and programming from other contexts fare less well, as they tend to focus more on abstract ideas than locally specific needs and desires, unless they attempt to modify their mission and praxis over time accordingly.

A prominent example of valuing local knowledge came through the process of creating a “food action plan” for the Lower Ninth Ward neighbourhood. This community-led initiative had a mission, spelled out in the 2012 Food Action Plan document, to “invest in the health of our community by supporting the development of sustainable food systems in the Lower Ninth Ward directed by and for its residents”. Simply creating a plan for laying out next steps “for what we want for food access in our neighborhood” took several months of meeting and discussing community members’ needs and desires. Since many community members had grown up in the neighbourhood (and, in many cases, had parents and grandparents who had also grown up there), they felt they were best suited to determine what a “food plan” for the neighbourhood would look like. These steps take time and long-term visions, as well as persistence and consistencies on the part of the non-profits to follow through. Based on our observations, the benefits of these efforts sometimes may not materialise immediately in tangible form, but they provide opportunities for building necessary coalitions and trust. That said, we acknowledge that in the immediate aftermath of a disaster the short-term recovery efforts take precedence. What our data seem to indicate, however, is that consulting and involving the local residents on long-term visions seem to be crucial for the longevity of non-profits and the perceptions of their success in the community.

As such, those non-profits who included residents on their boards or staff typically fared better than those who did not. To use a counterexample, OSBG, which met with both financial and organisational success, never sought out community support for their urban farm or educational programmes. Two years after starting the non-profit, the executive director sent some volunteers to a community meeting to apologise and they were met with animosity from neighbourhood stakeholders who resented not being included in the non-profit’s activities at the outset.

The first author was frequently asked by the non-profit he worked with to brief residents at community meetings if no one else from the non-profit was able to make it to the biweekly meetings. When asked why, he was told by the executive director that “the community needs to know what we are doing”. Many non-profits learned this quickly. Charrattes became quite common in the long-term recovery. Non-profits learned to invite

neighbourhood residents to meetings where they could look over designs for buildings or parks and have a say (or at least feel that they did) in how things were (re)built. The question and answer session, mentioned earlier in the paper, in November 2010, was also a learned response to keeping the community up to date on the plans of the non-profits. But as our data show, it is important that the involvement of the local residents does not become token or symbolic, which could result in more resentment and cynicism.

In addition to keeping the community informed of plans and progress and giving them a role in decision-making activities, adopting the cultural practices and traditions of clients, hiring locals, and using stakeholders to facilitate access to individuals who might be reluctant to or not know how to seek aid are all ways to value local knowledge. Again, our longitudinal data point out that there are opportunities for non-profits to employ these tactics over time, as the post-disaster efforts shift focus from immediate recovery to sustained redevelopment.

Finally, our findings regarding the proliferation of non-profit organisations in post-Katrina New Orleans indicate the need for a more nuanced understanding of how neo-liberalism manifests in practice, at least as the concept relates to the dynamics of post-disaster recovery process. Our study shows that in addition to the macro-level divestment and resource redistribution that hand recovery over to the private enterprise, including both for- and non-profit organisations that rise to the occasion to fill the void created by the public sector, micro-level activism's efforts to engage with the community recovery could contribute to the construction of these communities as "in need of help", therefore undermining the area residents' sense of self-efficacy and optimism. At worst they replicated the tendency of larger foundations and non-profits to impede grassroots change (BondGraham 2011, Arena 2012). By overwhelming few selective areas that were considered most in need, such as the Lower Ninth Ward, non-profit organisations' well-intended recovery efforts in these areas had unintended adverse effects as a result in some cases.

In New Orleans, the paradox was that while community stakeholders in other neighbourhoods often resented the Lower Ninth Ward because of all the attention it received, it nonetheless experienced one of the slowest rates of recovery in the city. On the other hand, residents of the Lower Ninth resented being what they referred to as the "poster children" for Hurricane Katrina, and for being exposed to the unprecedented concentration of non-profits and newcomers, especially due to the very slow pace of recovery despite all the promises being made by the non-profits. Residents of the Lower Ninth Ward thus felt left out of the decision-making, felt invaded by outsiders, and felt lied to as their recovery lagged behind the rest of the city. In the long term, the surfeit of affect created a situation whereby communities experienced very different levels of recovery.

In short, the surfeit of affect that the affect economy relies on created an untenable situation whereby neighbourhoods and non-profits competed for attention and funding. This resulted in the reification of racial and class differences between neighbourhoods that existed post-Katrina and facilitated non-profits changing their day-to-day activities to become competitive for new sources of funding, which in itself had negative repercussions for community and non-profit relations.

If the affect economy (Adams 2013) is here to stay, it needs to be better regulated. To reduce affect surfeit, there needs to be a coordinating centre or agency that monitors non-profits and limits their activities to their mission or at least prevents non-profits from service overlap. As Bryson *et al.* (2006) note, most structural social problems will not be solved by individual non-profits; rather, cross-sector collaboration is necessary. Not only was there little collaboration between non-profits in the long-term aftermath, but also there was virtually no cooperation between non-profits and local government. As such, many non-

profits experienced what Chandra and Acosta (2009) call “response fatigue” – whereby organisations lose effectiveness in the long term as they simply “give out” from lack of support. Likewise, as we previously noted, the mere presence of non-profits so many years after the disaster further exasperated and fatigued residents.

To be sure, there are unique challenges in organising and sustaining non-profits in post-disaster contexts. Again, the authors would be remiss if we did not point out that many non-profits we worked with and personnel we interviewed were doing remarkably well in serving their respective communities. Yet for many non-profits operating in the long term, in an environment where needs shifted along a continuum from immediate aid to challenging long-standing social inequalities, their relationship with their host communities proved to be challenging.

As neo-liberal responses to social disruption become more normative (Gotham and Greenberg 2014), the likelihood that communities will be forced to rely on non-profits and volunteers to rebuild after instances of social disruption becomes more apparent. Increasingly, as BondGraham (2011) and others (Arena 2012) have pointed out, non-profits themselves are quickly becoming neo-liberal tools to reproduce status inequalities. Thus, it is crucial that the non-profits that enter post-disaster regions in hopes of assisting with the recovery are better prepared to face the types of challenges we outline in this paper, in order to maximise the resources and intentions of activists and workers – but most importantly to ensure socially just post-disaster recovery that effectively reflects the needs and the sentiments of those who are going through materialistic and psychological trauma.

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Notes

1. The first author’s personal communication with Mayor Mitch Landrieu, 11 December 2010.
2. Residents of the Lower Ninth Ward were especially weary of non-profits after the discovery that the co-founder of one of the more successful non-profits in the neighbourhood, Common Ground, had been an FBI informant at the 2008 Republican National Convention which resulted in the arrest of two other activists. Similarly, the closing of ACORN – which had been based in

New Orleans and was very active in the neighbourhood – and subsequent raids by state investigators on offices in the city affected local sentiment towards non-profits.

3. At one point in 2011, the first author estimated that there were over 30 non-profits working for about 4000 residents in the Lower Ninth Ward.
4. The importance of outsider status is discussed in a subsequent section.
5. These strategies are summarised as follows: the social work approach which focused on neighbourhood-based organisations but often with aid through government programmes or policies; the neighbourhood maintenance approach which focused on protection from unwanted land uses or other “change triggers” that might further destabilise the community (Schwirian and Mesh 1993); and the political activist approach which focused on structural causes of community disorganisation.
6. It is important to note that many of the non-profits in New Orleans were led by residents of the communities in which the non-profits were based. In the Lower Ninth Ward, where most of our observations come from, however, because of the lack of non-profits before Katrina and because of the amount of damage and dramatic loss in population, many non-profits were led by and/or comprised either newcomers to the city or residents of New Orleans who lived outside of the community.
7. As Pipa (2006) notes, however, the total number of non-profits, charities, and non-governmental organisations involved in aiding victims in the immediate aftermath was probably much higher.
8. This also provided us with insight into one of the main issues non-profits themselves faced.
9. The Lower Ninth Ward consists of two neighbourhoods, Holy Cross and the Lower Ninth. It went from about 20,000 residents in 2000 to a little over 5600 in 2010. Pre-Katrina, it had one of the highest homeowner rates (64%) for a majority black neighbourhood (96%) (The Data Center 2015).
10. The Lower Ninth Ward had the largest number of deaths, the highest mortality rate, and some of the worst flooding in the city (Jonkman *et al.* 2009). Additionally, the Environmental Protection Agency declared 100% of the homes in the neighbourhood uninhabitable.
11. Southern University of New Orleans at New Orleans is a historically African-American University.
12. It should be noted that the authors did frequently come across volunteers who attended local colleges and universities.
13. The Village is a non-profit that is active in many different community aspects: job training, computer centre, recreation centre, and piano shop – to name just a few. It has served as a community hub since 2007.
14. From a question and answer session with 21 non-profits in the Lower Ninth Ward organised by David Eber and the Lower 9th Ward’s Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development and by John C. Williams Architects on 13 November 2010.
15. From the same meeting on 13 November 2010.
16. Lori Peek (2012) discusses Katrina Fatigue in the context of Denver, where the media, employers, and residents simply lost interest in helping victims of Katrina. We extend it further to note that many donors and volunteers also experienced this Fatigue as did residents – who simply grew tired of talking about Katrina.
17. The first author frequently gave tours to new volunteers or to groups who volunteered with the non-profit he was primarily associated with.
18. We met many educators and leaders at non-profits who did educate students and/or volunteers (see Perry and Lovell forthcoming), but there were many others who did not.

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