

**BEYOND THE RANDOM BRUSHINGS OF BIRDS: BLACK WOMEN ON THE
MEANING OF THE SAINTS TO POST-KATRINA RECOVERY OF HOME**

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Kinesiology – Doctor of Philosophy

2017

ABSTRACT

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The New Orleans Saints transformed themselves from worst to first in the National Football League (NFL), winning their first Super Bowl in franchise history five years after Hurricane Katrina. Observing New Orleans' unique celebratory culture, the media debated the team's success as symbolic of the recovery of the City. New Orleanians would disagree that this event, momentous as it was, connotes the work of recovering home is done. Instead, the Saints embodied a hopeful resilience. The team functioned as a conduit to the practice of celebratory memorial, for which New Orleans is known—mourning sorrow through festive celebration. Celebrating the Saints (and their Super Bowl Championship season) exemplified the second line tradition—the cultural performance of home as a shared, embodied knowledge of transcendence blending a visual, emotional, and kinetic experience of narrative, rhythm, food, community, and resistance. Thus, the meaning of the Saints' success exceeded football—it provided a vehicle for *New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home*.

Still, there exists a dissonance between legitimated narratives and narratives constructed from lived experience—specifically those of black women, erased not only from the center of the “Saints as recovery” narratives but from disaster recovery narratives in their entirety. Black women's accounts were ignored, despite expressed intergenerational bonds with the team as fans and consumers, their experiences rendered undetectable. Indeed, the Saints are an important thread in the fabric of the post-Katrina recovery story. However, understanding the Saints as *the*

story is a problematic act of epistemic silencing enacted against black women recovering home in real-time, possessing relevant narrative and theoretical contributions.

This dissertation is a theoretical exercise, blending visual study and a black feminist epistemological framework to interrogate the narratives of black women on-the-ground to understand the meaning of the New Orleans Saints 2010 Super Bowl victory to the post-Katrina recovery of home. The project was designed as an 18-month ethnographic study, combining archival research, participant observation, and photo elicitation interviews with 7 black women (ages 23-81). Five images that depicted the Saints phenomenon as well as themes from extant literature accompanied a semi-structured interview schedule to empower participants as experts and encourage self-authored narratives describing the meaning of the Saints to the post-Katrina recovery of home. Findings suggest that the Saints' success is integral in the recovery of home—as the embodiment of New Orleans unique culture of celebratory memorial as step toward healing.

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For my parents, Paul and Linetta Gilbert, who have loved much, sacrificed much, provided much, taught much, counselled much, prayed **MUCH**...Thank you for giving me the gift of life and a home in New Orleans.

In memory of my grandmothers, now ancestors—Aline Caldwell, Betty Cory, and Lee Esther Edwards. May my life be the embodiment of your unspoken prayers and bring to life your dreams deferred.

For my Aunt Colitta, who cared for me as her own and my Aunt Yvonne, whose love throughout my life cannot be quantified. Our shared moments help me make it through.

And for Patricia Ward and LaVerne Kappel, my junior high school teachers, who SAW ME, encouraged me, and created opportunities and the space for a black girl to manifest her dreams.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“[W]herever there has been a struggle, black women have been identified with that struggle.”

– Ella Baker, “The Black Woman in the Civil Rights Struggle”

This project was conceived (unknowingly) on August 29, 2005—simultaneously the day Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans and the first day of my doctoral program at Michigan State University. As I took classes, studied, and taught, this project was a life source symbiotically developing and growing within me. Yet, I would eventually discover that birthing is a process. I began laboring without the benefit of preparation or understanding of what was to come. I was entrusted with some of the most painful moments and experiences of peoples’ lives and the responsibility to do right by them was not lost on me. Thus, contractions were steady and the labor has been difficult—both physically and emotionally taxing at every stage. However, I suppose bringing something meaningful into existence should not be easy. I am grateful to the midwives—Drs. Kristie Dotson, Martha Ewing, Deb Feltz, and Steve Gold for their patience and guidance through this process. I especially thank Kristie for wiping the tears from eyes and the sweat from my brow, for holding my hand, and for helping me to *PUSH*. And, I am thankful for my village for their love, support, and prayers throughout...

Thank you Daddy, for *everything*! You are the great love of my life—my confidant, my cheerleader, my counselor, my backbone, my wish granter and magic maker, my calm, my very best friend. You made me the priority of your life and because you did I believed I was important, I deserved to take up space—that my desires, my needs, my ideas are important. You

have never limited the possibilities for my life. Thank you for building a home for us in New Orleans. That decision formed the foundation for who I *be* and made every word on every page of this project possible.

To the woman who birthed me, you taught me to appreciate the uniqueness and beauty of my home. Nobody loves a second line more than you, Mama! I will be forever grateful that on a cold Tuesday afternoon—my very first Mardi Gras day—you bundled me up and took me to see Big Chief Bodalis. From that moment, the backdrop of my world was painted with canvases colored by tambourines, culture, feathers, history, beads, rhythm, community, dance, the beauty of my people, chanting, and resistance. You planted a seed that took root deep in my spirit, though I would not realize or understand it until much later. I remember a moment in my own recovery when my soul was submerged in the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina. I began playing a cd with a compilation of “sounds from New Orleans” as I prepared to teach a unit about the cultural rituals. The instant I heard Big Chief Bodalis and the Wild Magnolias start singing I could feel myself floating to the surface—and the elements of this project began to make sense and come together. Your spirit has been the reminder that regardless of your pain, when you hear the second line, you gotta *ROLL!*

I am surrounded by a community of women who continue to nurture me into my own black womanhood. My heartfelt gratitude is immeasurable for all my mamas—who have paved the way and poured into me, for their sacrifice, for their sheer black woman determination that willed my success and the completion of this project into being—even those whose names I may not recall or will never know. I have been sustained by the guidance of my Teedie, Audrey Jackson Johnson, my othermother, Lora Carmicle, and my godsister, Asali DeVan Ecclesiastes

who embodied black feminisms before the first release of those words from my lips. Thank you to Gramma Lee Esther, Ms. Gloria, and of course, Lil' Mama for the kind of grandmother love that is always what I need. I thank my nannies—T'Vicky (Victoria Dorsey) and T'Lisa (Green-Derry) for being the aunties (pronounced in New Orleans ANT-teez) that are always exactly what I need, just when I need it. In the tradition of black feminisms, I have been blessed with a host of othermothers. Thank you Aunt Jessie, Mama Jamilah, Mama Saundra (Reed), Mama Carol (Belle), Mama Trudell (Webster), Cynthia Ross, T'Di (Diane Boisseau), Ms. Eve (Francois), and Ms. Vicky (Charles). Ashleigh, you fight for New Orleans with your whole being. What an inspiration you are! I am forever grateful to all of the grandmothers, Teedies, aunties, nannies, godmothers, and sister-friends for standing in the gap. A special expression of gratitude to Ms. Freddi Evans for a lifetime of support and for writing the text that would frame a lens through which I could conceptualize this work.

I am indebted to Alex, Briceshanay, Mama Carol, Aunt Jessie, Jocquelyn, Laurena, Mama Saundra, Ms. Whilda, and Timolynn for your powerful insights that guided and informed this work. Your courage, your trust, and faith in me are gifts I can never repay. Thank you Mama Cherice and Brian (Harrison Nelson) for inviting me in and for sharing the culture. Big Queen Reesie you are “pretty, pretty” inside and out. There are not sufficient words to thank Christian Unity Baptist Church and the Ashe' Cultural Arts Center. You have been there through it all. You hold me up when I do not possess the strength to stand. In the most difficult moments, the Sisters of the Academy (SOTA) encouraged me to labor on. I am grateful for your sisterhood, your sister-scholar energy and wisdom, and the space to transition from one stage to another.

This process of birthing has taken me far from home. I am thankful that I did not labor

alone. My life is richer for having known Bridgette Laskey, Olive Ikeh, and Marini Lee and I am humbled to call you sister-friends. Thank you for being a hand to hold and a shoulder to cry on—for holding me close, for praying, for breathing for me when I could not do it for myself. My cup runneth over! My appreciation for the Kappa Upsilon Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated and the 8 Divas of Distinction knows no bounds. You inspire me to be to reach ever higher.

Birthing is now completed and I am charged with tremendous responsibility of developing and caring for this work. Exhausted and elated, I am renewed by the knowledge that in my most difficult moments I can draw the strength of my village and my ancestors who surround me. I proceed in the affirmation that I am, we are, home is RESILIENT. The raging storm and a devastating flood that began this process is but *shallow water*...

Call: *Shallow water, shallow water...*

Response: Shallow water, oh Mama!

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Above all else, our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's but because our need as human persons for autonomy. This may seem so obvious as to sound simplistic, but it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression a priority or worked seriously for the ending of that oppression.

– Combahee River Collective

CHAPTER 1 – INTERSTICES: BLACK WOMEN AND THE INVISIBLE DRAMA OF HOME

Home is, for some, “a place where no one is prey.¹” For some, it is site of resistance²; the spatiality of families and social relationship at a given moment³; a place to be known and to know others⁴. Black women have long been theorizing about home. Yet for a number of people, Hurricane Katrina disrupted all that was known about this conceptualized space. Academic and popular culture literature alike became consumed with the question of home? What is it? Where is it? What is the meaning of home? In New Orleans, the post-Katrina disaster recovery process has been fraught with outsider misrecognition of all that home is and represents, the result of a pernicious inability to understand the meaning of home and its place in the recovery to New Orleans.

Hurricane Katrina was a poignant moment in the lives of New Orleanians.⁵ It was a catastrophe of unimaginable proportions—leaving New Orleanians to question: what will become of home? Katrina was more than simply a powerful storm. It was a defining marker of history—those experiences that occurred before Katrina and those after the storm forever changed home in New Orleans. This project proceeds as an exploration of Hurricane Katrina as a contextual thread connecting three seemingly unrelated themes: New Orleans’ distinct culture, the meaning of the New Orleans Saints’ 2010 Super Bowl victory to the post-Katrina recovery,

¹ Toni Morrison, “Home” In *The House the Race Built*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Random House, 1998).

² bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990).

³ Gayle Tate, “A Long Ways Home: The Context for Oppression and Resistance” In *Unknown Tongues: Black Women's Political Activism in the Antebellum Era, 1830-1860*, (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2003).

⁴ Barbara Smith, “Home” In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* ed. Barbara Smith (Latham, NY, 1983).

⁵ While I acknowledge that Hurricane Katrina devastated the entire Gulf Coast region including Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, the focus of this project is New Orleans. Thus, New Orleans will be discussed exclusively throughout this text.

and black women's interstitial politics within both. The concept of home lies at the heart of all three. In the days after the storm, it would be impossible to recover the physical homes of New Orleans without recovering the spirit of home in New Orleans. Sport, of all things, provided the opportunity to enact shared cultural memory, perform the culture of home, and revive the battered spirit of New Orleanians. The New Orleans Saints' return to the city and post-Katrina efforts of recovery and resilience paralleled those of New Orleanians who returned in the initial days after the storm—displacement, uncertainty, renovation, and the sense of fractured community. While media narratives rightly capture the jubilation of the Saints' Super Bowl Season, absent are testimonies and experiences of black women—as if this phenomenon had simply passed them by. Thus, this inquiry centers black women's narratives as point of departure for understanding the meaning of the Saints' against-all-odds journey to a Super Bowl Championship.

Hurricane Katrina shattered the familiarity of home, ushering in the first moments (in generations, for some) of separation, of forced displacement from the life's breath of their being. The storm brought the first Mondays without the aroma of red beans and rice and streets that had never seen anything as magnificent as the Big Chief on Mardi Gras or St. Joseph's Day, and certainly nothing so *pretty*⁶—feathers radiating, dancing to the sound of his chants. Katrina silenced tambourines and trumpets. Home once beloved was no more—submerged in a disaster of human propulsion and unspeakable proportion. Its vibrant pulse now weakened—but faintly, defiantly still detectable. The days after Katrina were a fight just to “be.” Yet, that was the first step of recovering home—to be, in spite of all that weighed in the balance. Slowly, the news

⁶ To describe a masking Indian as “pretty” is to offer a compliment; to compliment an Indian as *the prettiest*, is to bestow the highest honor.

cameras began to leave. The world stopped paying attention. Recovering home became a simple choice: be or die.

As the people of New Orleans were grappling with the realities of displacement and recovery, the Saints were facing similar challenges of home-lessness. Hurricane Katrina rendered the Superdome, the Saints' home field, uninhabitable. The necessary renovations were substantial—home games were out of the question for at least a year. Some players returned to New Orleans without their families. Despite all that remained unsettled—insurance claims, the education system, contractors—the Saints had returned to work. “Home games” were played in Texas, at Louisiana State University, even in a high school stadium. The circumstances undermined the remnant of the team's salvageable dignity. These were the Saints—and dignity was, after all, relative. This was a team that had been the NFL's loveable losers for so long, expectations were nonexistent. Still, the Saints kept playing. New Orleanians who had returned recognized in the Saints an experience that was relatable. Coming back to New Orleans to recover home required an unspeakable fortitude. Survival amidst every forecast to the contrary was audacious. Given the choice to be or die, the Saints chose to be, some would argue inspired by, and in honor of, the people of New Orleans. That was their gift to the City—to offer a momentary reprieve from the work that was recovery. As the team continued to win, the media in every format was abuzz with “narratives of home,” which evolved from a physical shelter to one's identity as a New Orleanian. Both were located in the symbolism of the Superdome (which came to represent the suffering of the City)—and by extension the Saints.

The 2009-10 season enshrined Sunday as a respite from thinking about, from talking about all that had been lost. The same Saints who had given a perennial losing presence in the league *started to win*. Three wins became six, and then seven, then eight. The sports world

began talking about the possibility of an undefeated season and the gaze of the world returned to New Orleans. In their unlikely Super Bowl chase, the Saints would face two of the NFL's most prolific scorers in Brett Favre and (New Orleans native) Peyton Manning during the playoffs—and win. On February 7, 2010 the New Orleans Saints did the unthinkable, they claimed the Lombardi Trophy. They had traded their status as worst for first as the world watched with bated breath. The media saw in New Orleans an invigorated pulse. The pallor was beginning to fade. The celebratory spirit of New Orleans was again larger than life.

Speculation about the meaning of the Saints to the recovery of New Orleans was renewed. Academic discourse examined two roles for local sport during moments of disaster recovery: economic re-development⁷ and galvanizing a collective community conscience.⁸ The media posit that the Saints' success symbolizes the post-Katrina recovery of New Orleans. Media narratives, more easily accessible to the public than their academic counterparts, are perhaps most problematic because while media narratives capture the devastation of the disaster and jubilation of recovery, I argue the location of New Orleans' recovery of "home" in the success of the Saints, grossly neglects the testimony of those most qualified to offer it. To be sure, there *is* a role for sport in the recovery of home. However, these narratives as they are constructed, present glaring knowledge gaps. The New Orleans Saints exist as an integral element of home for black women. This has been the case since the establishment of the franchise. During the post-Katrina recovery, black women were avid consumers and integrated weekly games into family gatherings and celebrations of community. Yet, nowhere within academic or media narratives

⁷ Robert A Baade and Victor A Matheson, "Professional Sports, Hurricane Katrina, and the Economic Redevelopment of New Orleans," *Contemporary Economic Development* 25, no. 4 (2007): 591-603.

⁸ Rick Ecksein and Kevin Delaney, "New Sports Stadiums, Community Self Esteem, and Community Collective conscience. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 26, no. 3 (2006): 235-247.

can black women's politics of home be captured. Black women are disregarded as competent testifiers with contributory experiences relevant to the production of knowledge.

Project Description

The purpose of this study is to understand the meaning(s) of the New Orleans Saints' Super Bowl winning season to the recovery of "home" in the Central City community through critical, visual analysis. This exploration is guided by the following research question: What is the meaning of the Saints' success to black women's post-Katrina recovery of home? While much has been written about New Orleans and the city's post-Katrina challenges, little has been grounded in the experiences of black women from New Orleans, told in their own voices, and researched by black women who call New Orleans home. This study addresses these gaps—thus making original contributions to extant literature. In its very design, this project seeks to shift the conceptualization of scholarship from a dominant framework of statistical significance to one that consults and values participant meanings and understandings of the phenomenon of interest. This study challenges traditional ideologies of knowledge, and specifically, who can be regarded as a "knower." First, the research question seeks out the significant meaning(s) of the Saints to a community actively involved in the recovery process rather than only consulting academics about the *impact* of sport on the post-Katrina landscape. Second, through a Black feminist lens, this project incorporates marginalized perspectives into the extant academic discourse, given that African Americans and women (two characteristics of the researcher) epitomize the margins in sport and academe. Naples avers "(i)t makes a difference to the results of research whose questions get to count as ones worth pursuing and how these questions are to be conceptualized

and the research designed to answer them.”⁹ This approach simultaneously gives authority to those with lived experience and (re)introduces their voices into the scholarship. Calling attention to the routine nature of structural suppression of experience helps to “achieve a better grasp of what is required in practice to operate in a way to work against it.”¹⁰ This inquiry acknowledges the presence and contributions of black women’s experience and its relevance in investigation of the intersection of the Saints and the post-Katrina recovery of home.

AN INVISIBLE DRAMA OF HOME

Hortense Spillers characterizes interstices as “a small drama of words.”¹¹ Black women’s politics of home illustrate a small drama of words, indeed in that the words that reflect their experiences are so few—despite their breadth and depth. Spillers characterizes *what* the interstices represent. However, the interstices also speak to a *where*—a location with the terrain of validated narrative discourse. The interstices represent the taken-for-granted *space between spaces* to which black women’s experience is relegated and consequently rendered invisible simply because there yet remains inadequate language in the dominant framework through which these experiences can be understood. It is not that black women’s experiences cannot be understood—they simply are not understood because black women (and their experiences) exist in a space between the discursive spaces where black=black men and women=white women. I contend that black women’s post-Katrina recovery of home is situated in the interstices as a drama of words unacknowledged and refused utterance.

⁹ Nancy Naples, *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, an Activist Research*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003) 49.

¹⁰ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 7.

¹¹ Hortense Spillers, “Interstices: A Small Drama of Words,” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 73-100.

Framed by Spillers, the post-Katrina disaster recovery literature understands black women experience in the interstices as more localized problem—an *invisible drama of home*. The media correctly understands the images of scores of people trapped in their homes throughout New Orleans, at the Super Dome, and at the Convention Center to be in conversation with images of the elation found on the streets of New Orleans during the Saints Super Bowl celebrations. Yet, the experiences of black women on-the-ground, recovering home in post-Katrina New Orleans is lost in translation. Black women's epistemic contributions to the recovery and sport's role in it have been consigned to the margins, rendered willfully undetectable. They are missing from visual, oral, and textual narratives. Black women exist in the space between race, gender, class, sport¹², and home. The breadth and depth of black women's experiences are routinely overlooked due to their location in narrative crevices.

What contribution could black women make to the understanding the meaning of the Saints? This very question concretizes the interstitial nature of black women's knowledge of sport and physical activity. Black women have a unique knowledge of the physical—as forced laborers, as those (mis)labeled physically deviant and anatomically grotesque (from Saartjie Baartman also called “Hottentot Venus” to Serena Williams), as having a legacy of athletic, even Olympic excellence (once given the opportunity to participate equally), and even as consumers of sport and physical activity. Yet, this disregard for black women's contributions is not new. Audre Lorde writes,

¹²¹² While it is acknowledged that sport, play, and recreation are different concepts in the field of kinesiology, in New Orleans, the professional sport of football creates opportunities for communal recreation and fans can be observed indulging in the spirit of play the city is known for. Thus, the words may be used interchangeably throughout the document.

It's not that we [black women] haven't always been here, since there was a here. It is that the letters of our names have been scrambled when they were not totally erased, and our fingerprints upon the handles of history have been called the random brushings of birds.¹³

Resulting from hegemonic constructions of race and gender, black women, positioned at the margins, embody the interstices of “home”—an invisible drama to recover the spirit of home through the performance of a distinct cultural memory, detectable yet perniciously disregarded. Theirs is the space on the periphery, the taken for granted area between the boundaries of race, gender, and home in the *new* New Orleans. Black women's epistemic contributions have been taken for granted as academic and media narratives interrogated New Orleans' culture of home. Furthermore, black women's physical engagement with the local cultures of sport and physical activity was summarily dismissed in the construction of external narratives about the role of sport in disaster recovery and more specifically, the meaning of the Saints' success to the recovery of New Orleans. The Saints *are* important to black women in New Orleans working to recover home. Yet, this cultural context remains willfully unperceivable.

Despite their glaring presence, black women's experience and epistemic contributions exist undetected by dominant narratives. As Anna Julia Cooper posited so long ago, black women are consistently overlooked as testifiers.¹⁴ This circumstance remains in post-Katrina New Orleans. However, to be a testifier, it is essential that one be acknowledged as a credible witness. This includes being credited with the possession of relevant knowledge—a position that

¹³ Audre Lorde, “Foreword,” in *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance*, eds. Joanne M. Braxton and Andree Nicola McLaughlin (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998), xi.

¹⁴ Anna Julia Cooper “Our Raison d'Etre,” In *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including A Voice from the South and Other Important Essays, Papers, and Letters*, ed. C. Lemert and E. Bhan. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1892) 51.

many black women are denied in public narratives.¹⁵ Searching for black women's voices among the accepted disaster recovery and even sport-as-recovery narratives yields precious little. Yet, these voices are, indeed, present and discernible should one only look. This is the impetus of this project.

With respect to home (and many other topics besides), black women are well suited to offer significant contributions. However, it seems when sport intersects with issues of home, as it did in the Saint's Super Bowl Victory, black women are not consulted. The media has presented its case clearly—the success of the Saints was to be seen as a symbol of the recovery of the city of New Orleans. Yet, that case has been made with no word from the black women who call New Orleans home. The team's success will undoubtedly be told as part of the “how we got over Katrina” recovery story. However, the assumption that the Saints are *the* story—the totality of recovering home—for black women in particular and New Orleanians in general, is problematic and narratively unjust.¹⁶ Absent from the dominant discourse, the sporting context further forces black women to the epistemic periphery of the recovery narrative landscape. I argue that this sporting context encapsulates the hegemonic practice of constructing and (re)producing narratives that disregard the testimonies and experiences of those with the least epistemic standing and yet the most relevant testimony.

While much was written, broadcasted, and researched about New Orleans in the days that followed Hurricane Katrina, few of these texts considered the perspectives of black New Orleans. In their text, *Overcoming Katrina: African American Voices from the Crescent City and*

¹⁵ Ibid, Contemporary black feminist scholarship includes Ann DuCille, “Phallus(ies) of Interpretation: Toward Engendering the Black Critical ‘I’,” in *Still Brave*, eds. Frances Smith Foster, Stanlie James, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York, NY: Feminist Press, 1993); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Second ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000); Rebecca Wanzo, *The Suffering Will Not Be Televised: African American Women and Sentimental Political Storytelling* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Miranda Fricker *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, London: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Beyond, D'Ann Penner and Kenneth Ferdinand assert "[v]ery little literature exists about what New Orleans means to blacks, especially to those who live outside of the tourists' arc of awareness."¹⁷ Still, there remains a need for analyses of what New Orleans means to black *women*. Even Penner and Ferdinand's acknowledgment obscures the under detection of black women, their understandings of home, and their contributions to its recovery in these dominant narratives—with an interstitial experience and politics of home, yet important to the recovery and renewal of home in the new New Orleans. Black women have long been theorizing about the meaning and significance of home. Their intellectual contributions have often been under detected, thus relegated to the interstices—the crevices or spaces between definable boundaries.

Black women's presence in the interstices of home refers to the conditions that enable their invisibility in socio-political contexts. Interstices speak to experiences that are distinctly definable yet willfully undefined, on the taken-for-granted boundaries of discernible social existence. In 1905, Fannie Barrier Williams shed light on black women's interstitial experience. She wrote,

“(t)hat the term the ‘colored girl’ is almost a term of reproach in the social life of America is all too true; she is not known and hence not believed in; she belongs to a race that is best designated by the term problem, and she lives beneath the shadow of that problem which envelops and obscures her.”¹⁸

Barrier Williams describes black women in the interstices—undetectable, unknown—existing *beneath the shadow* of the very social and structural impediments that impact our experience. Over 100 years ago, Barrier Williams penned these words, documenting the *invisibility* of black

¹⁷ Penner and Ferdinand, *Overcoming Katrina*, xxi.

¹⁸ Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Colored Girl" in *The New Woman of Color: The Collected Writings of Fannie Barrier Williams, 1893-1918*, ed. Mary Jo Deegan (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1905) 63.

women in the American social landscape that resonates in black women's post-Katrina recovery of home. Springer contemporizes the interstices, providing an important conceptual lens for understanding black women's post-Katrina recovery of home—a practice of dismissing their relevant knowledge and experiences of New Orleans culture of home and sport as a vital aspect therein—creating a unique and complex epistemology existing “in the cracks,”¹⁹ yet relegated to the discursive crevices invisible in the larger landscape. For black women in New Orleans, the loss of home includes a loss of *narrative dignity*, an epistemic right to respect and credibility in the creation and articulation of recovery narratives. Research on Hurricane Katrina reporting speaks to the loss of dignity caused to black Americans due to the media's disaster coverage.²⁰ Katrina coverage offered implied and often overt visual, oral, and textual narratives that so otherized black Hurricane Katrina survivors—as deviants, criminals, and those outside the parameters of citizenship—to frame them as blameworthy in their plight. Black women, in particular, were gratuitously oversampled in images that depicted the suffering caused by the storm—creating a stark contrast in the hyper-visibility of black women in Hurricane Katrina coverage²¹ and relative invisibility in narratives about the post-Katrina recovery of home.

Black women have long had distinct ways of discussing home. Black feminist tropes of home often disquiet idyllic depictions found in other literature. Home is recognized as an often contested site. bell hooks describes the tenuous nature of home for black Americans during

¹⁹ Kimberly Springer, “The Interstitial Politics of Black Feminist Organizations,” *Meridians* 1, no. 2 (2001).

²⁰ Justin Davis and Nathaniel French, “Blaming Victims and Survivors: An Analysis of Post-Katrina Print News Coverage,” *Southern Communication Journal* 73, no. 3 (2008): 243-257; Louisa Edgerly, “Difference and Political Legitimacy: Speakers' Construction of 'Citizen' and 'Refugee' Personae in Talk about Hurricane Katrina,” *Western Journal of Communication* 75, no. 3(2011): 304-322. Adeline Masquelier, “Why Katrina's Victims Aren't Refugees: Musings on a Dirty Word,” *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 4(2008): 735-743; Pamela Reed, “From the Freedman's Bureau to FEMA: A Post-Katrina Historical, Journalistic, and Literary Analysis,” *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 4 (2007): 555-567; Jason Rivera & DeMond Miller, “Continually Neglected: Situating Natural Disasters in the African American Experience,” *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 4 (2007): 502-522.

²¹ Melissa Harris-Perry *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011) and Wanzo, *The Suffering Will Not Be Televised*, 15-38.

slavery.²² Home presented the possibility for one's terror and dehumanization, and was rife with the ultimate threat of forced displacement. Nevertheless, home was a sacred space. Often it was the only space of familiarity—that held knowledge of customs, responsibilities, and even those held dear. Harriet Tubman encountered this complexity of home as a hurdle to her efforts on the Underground Railroad, making her notorious firearm a necessity in her accoutrements for those who considered leaving her travel party. The apprehension Tubman encountered from those who did not join her likely stemmed from the fear of leaving the only place identifiable as “home.” Theirs was not a rejection of liberation, but of the uncertainty of the unknown and an inability to conceive of a home not even imagined. Carla Peterson discussed the meaning of home to 19th century black women.²³ Peterson chronicled the efforts of black women during the Reconstruction era to experience the rights of America as home. The experiences of black women in America were fraught and yet America was still a home they hoped to know. For black women, home was sacred in spite of the pain that transpired—loss of dignity, material possessions, even loved ones. Home was and is more than a structure. It embodies the essence of how we “be.”

Such is the case in post-Katrina New Orleans, where home exceeds dwelling place as something to be performed. Be-ing at “home” evokes food, family, music, memory, dance, resistance, rhythm, and celebration. These interwoven elements construct the *New Orleans aesthetic of home*. These textural elements are influenced by the comingling of Native American, African, African American, Caribbean and European cultures developed during the evolution of New Orleans. The New Orleans aesthetic is a tacit culture of celebratory memorial embedded in

²² hooks, *Yearning*, 148.

²³ Carla Peterson, *Doers of the Word: African American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

very essence of what it means to call New Orleans home. It is a call to “rejoice when you die;”²⁴ to dance through the tragedies of life; to celebrate the sorrows overcome. I define this concept of home as an aesthetic because knowing and living home in this way integrates stylistic and principled ways of being that performs cultural memory through the transformation of tragedy into creative expression and release. The New Orleans aesthetic of home memorializes a shared cultural and social history through an interdependent fusion of performed culinary, musical, rhythmic, and political rites. While home in most other venues more readily calls to mind a dwelling place, in New Orleans home is a kinetic, social, culinary, and spiritual way of being that embodies a long-established collective memory. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, it is this concept of home that is at stake in disaster recovery. It would make no difference to simply replace infrastructure without the renewal of this spirit. New Orleans would be just another ordinary city in the American south. Home is something more. “The spirit of culture, song, dance, story, and image, creates a spiritual force that energizes and motivates us to endure, move forward, and make it through to the other side.”²⁵ This is New Orleans’ cultural aesthetic of home—this is what allows for the recovery of the spirit of home ravaged by the storm.

TRACING THE ROOTS OF NEW ORLEANS’ CULTURAL AESTHETIC OF HOME

Laissez les bon temps rouler, “let the good times roll” is an expression often used to characterize the culture of New Orleans. New Orleans indeed embraces, even embodies a spirit of celebration. It is useful to consider the contributory social and political context. New Orleans’

²⁴ *Rejoice When You Die* is the title of Leo Touchet’s 1998 book describing in images and text the richly unique culture of New Orleans. However, this euphemism captures the the spirit force at the heart of home in New Orleans.

²⁵ Carol Bebel, “The Vision Has Its Time: Culture and Civic Engagement in Postdisaster New Orleans,” Koritz and Sanchez, *Civic Engagement in the Wake of Katrina*, 93.

hospitality extends to its establishment as a formal port city. Despite being an important site for trade and commerce, New Orleans developed an identity quite different from other colonized North American settlements. The southeastern region of the Louisiana Territory was generally left to its own social devices.²⁶ The swampy, balmy climate of southeast Louisiana required a particular fortitude of adaptability—to an unyielding tropical climate as well as the comingling and coexistence of different heritages which blended to produce a unique new homeland.

From its inception it remained a remote backwater, far from the administrative reach and vested interests of central powers. In this situation of benign neglect and reduced hegemony the Native American, European and African cultures and peoples meshed, clashed, and developed at their own speed and discretion. The coincidence of pluralist cultural inputs, relative neglect and active conduits by river and sea has led to a welter of quasi-autonomous cultural settings which are exceptional.²⁷

As a result, New Orleans' racial and social politics took on a different "face" than in other settlements on the continent. Of the diverse ethnic backgrounds, the prominence of African heritage in New Orleans' enduring cultural traditions is significant. New Orleans is often characterized as the most African city in America.²⁸ The prevalence of sustained African influences in New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home results from the geographic and social disregard for this region. Consequently, New Orleans engenders one of the oldest, richest established cultural traditions in North America.

²⁶ Charles Rowell and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, "Gwendolyn Midlo Hall with Charles Henry Rowell," *Callaloo* 29, no. 4 (1992) 1049-1051.

²⁷ Berndt Ostendorf and Michael Smith, "Jazz Funerals and the Second Line: African American Celebration and Public Space in New Orleans" in *Ceremonies and Spectacle: Performing American Culture*, eds. by T. Alves, T. Cid and H. Ickstadt, (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2000), 238.

²⁸ Carol Bebel, "The Vision Has Its Time," 95. For more see Jason Berry, "African Cultural Memory in New Orleans Music," *Black Music Research Journal* 8, no. 1 (1988) 3-12. Freddi Williams Evans, *Congo Square: African Roots in New Orleans* (Lafayette, LA: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press) 2011. George Lipsitz "New Orleans in the World and the World in New Orleans," *Black Music Research Journal* 31, no. 2 (2011): 261-290, Rowell and Midlo Hall, "Gwendolyn Midlo Hall with Charles Henry Rowell," 1049; Kalamu ya Salaam, *He's the Prettiest: A Tribute to Big Chief Tootie Montana's 50 Years of Mardi Gras Indian Suiting*, 1997, New Orleans Museum of Art.

The historic and cultural epicenter of New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home can be located at Congo Square, known by many names, including Place Congo, Place d'Armes and Place des Negres.²⁹ I argue this is an important geographical and cultural site as the locus for understanding the aesthetic of home in New Orleans, personified by two important traditions: 1) celebratory memorial and 2) call and response. These two elements of home build upon each other while simultaneously exemplifying what it means not only to know home, but to recover home in New Orleans. The tangible and intangible foundation of celebratory memorial and response—through artistic, community expressions of rhythm, dance, spirituality, and resilience are rooted in the Congo Square gatherings.

Located on the Gulf of Mexico, New Orleans was an important port city for trade between the Louisiana Territory, the Caribbean, Native American and American settlements. Congo Square served as an imminent trading post and marketplace for local and international trade and is thus, integral to understanding “home” in New Orleans because it was a central meeting place, trading center, spiritual site, and cultural exchange. While under French rule, the *Code Noir* of 1724 established a legislated autonomy for enslaved blacks. Slaves were often permitted on Saturdays to engage in activities from which they could generate their own sources of income such as hunting, fishing, and crafts like sewing, and baking which were sold on Sundays at Congo Square gatherings. This income could even be used to purchase one's freedom.³⁰ Sunday was a day of rest, free of labor for all—even slaves—and endured as a cultural norm under Spanish and later, American statehood.³¹

²⁹ In her well researched historical reflection on the significance of Congo Square on the social, cultural, and political history of New Orleans and its influence on the American fabric, Freddi Evans notes Congo Square's many names and characterizations including informal references to this locale as, among others, “Negro Square,” “the commons,” and the parade ground” p. 20.

³⁰ Freddi Evans notes the importance of Congo Square as a space where blacks could not only sell their wares, it was a convening of merchants from whom they could purchase goods as well. This “backatown” Sunday market economy was integral to the early success of New Orleans. For more on the Code Noir, see also Berry, “African

Because the plantation system did not become profitable until much later, an owner would gladly dismiss slaves to their own care on weekends. Hence, slaves usually spent Saturdays hunting and gathering and Sundays in the city at the central marketplace selling their produce and participating in social and cultural renewal.³²

From 1763-1803,³³ Sundays became a day for slaves and free people of color to gather en masse to worship, dance, perform burial rites, and sell their wares—with the restriction in 1817 that these meetings were confined to a specific locale.³⁴ Blacks (slave and free) in New Orleans were permitted to congregate on Sundays in the “back of town” at Congo Square.

Congo Square was a particularly famous (or infamous, depending one’s perspective) site for the traditional African inspired music and dance performed during Sunday gatherings. A frequent feature during the collective traditional singing, drumming, and dancing was the ring shout.³⁵ This dance—in which musicians, dancers, and singers form a circle and individuals spontaneously take turns improvising steps—is noted as one of the elements of African culture incorporated in the New World. An important site in the international trade of slaves, sugar, cotton, and spices, New Orleans’ social and commercial relationships with the African continent and trading posts in Cuba and Haiti created moments of fellowship for slaves and free people of color with others who originated from the same African regions and tribes. These moments were culminated by the Sunday gatherings at Congo Square. During these gatherings, the cultural memory of home past was called forth as blacks in New Orleans forged a new “home” and if

Cultural Memory in New Orleans Music,” 3-12; Ostendorf & Smith, “Jazz Funerals and the Second Line”; Joseph Roach, “Echoes in the Bone,” in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), 33-71; Michael Smith, “Behind the Lines: The Mardi Gras Indians and the New Orleans Second Line,” *Black Music Research Journal* 14, no. 1 (1994): 46.

³¹ Evans, *Congo Square*, 20 and Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 57.

³² Michael Smith, “Mardi Gras Indians and the New Orleans Second Line,” 46.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Evans, *Congo Square*, 1, 24, 26.

³⁵ For an extensive account see “The Dances,” Ibid. See also Matt Sakakeeny, “New Orleans Music As a Circulatory System,” *Black Music Research Journal* 31, no. 2 (2011): 291-325.

only temporarily, danced a negotiated survival within it. The ring shout and other traditional dances—the Congo (Chica), Calinda, Bamboula, Chacta, Coujaille, Juba, and the Carabine³⁶—were performed as spectators watched, participated and even reinterpreted the rhythms and movement through improvisation.

The cultural practice of gatherers encircling the dancers and musicians existed in many parts of West and Central Africa during sacred as well as social occasions. Those gatherers, however, did not constitute an audience of detached observers; for they joined performers by clapping their hands, stomping their feet, patting their bodies, answering the calls of the chanters, adding improvised intonations and ululations (shrills in sometimes piercing pitches), singing songs that accompanied the dances, shaking gourd rattles, and replacing the dancers who became fatigued. Also true to African cultural practice was the integration of dance, song, and drum/musical instruments.³⁷

New Orleans was not the singular site of Sunday gatherings in which blacks gathered to worship collectively. However, the meetings were distinctive in the centrality of the drum as the spirit voice at Congo Square, replicating “the form if not the actual vocabulary of religious ceremony in Africa. By keeping these traditions alive, slaves gave light to their past, illuminating the city with a distinct self-image.”³⁸ It is significant that African elements of culture in New Orleans continued to thrive despite growing discomfort with the economic and social liberties afforded to blacks in New Orleans due to Louisiana’s immersion as an American state.³⁹ Thus, the Congo Square experience is a springboard for the unique performance of home that is New Orleans.

THE SECOND LINE TRADITION

³⁶ Again, see “The Dances” in Evans’ *Congo Square*.

³⁷ Evans, *Congo Square*, 89.

³⁸ Berry, “African American Cultural Memory,” 6.

³⁹ Evans’ *Congo Square* offers a comprehensive history of Congo Square and its influences, as well as its influence on New Orleans, the Americas, and the world. Smith’s *Mardi Gras Indians* includes specific attention to Congo Square’s role on international music traditions.

Second lines are unique to New Orleans and are a defining aspect of its culture. The second line is a parade that memorializes a significant event—whether joyous or sorrowful—moving through the streets, blending performance and participation. The term, *second line* is all at once 1) a sometimes scheduled yet dynamic parade, typically 3-5 miles through the black neighborhoods of New Orleans to memorialize a given event or experience accompanied by a brass band, often with a little known route; 2) the gathering crowd that follows the band, forming the parade and 3) the distinct style of dancing performed during these parades. The band constitutes the first line—although this is not a term used in common vernacular. A brass band leads a group of revelers along a route of sites significant to the particular group of organizers (which may or may not be finalized or shared with the crowd of gatherers).⁴⁰

Despite the spiritual element of second line parades, gatherings in the black, working class neighborhoods of New Orleans have historically met with suspicion and surveillance. Therefore, second line parades typically occupy the backstreets of New Orleans to avoid harassment and brutality of the police. Kim Marie Vaz writes,

The second line and its music are sometimes interpreted as an expression of resistance to oppression when poor people take over public streets in processions. The second line is also valued for the spiritual communion it engenders among family and friends.⁴¹

The spaces germane to the everyday lives and “ramblings” of the organizations’ members are honored as sacred spaces and paid tribute during scheduled stops. The second line may be a reflection on overcoming a tumultuous experience or on a life that touched many, but always it is

⁴⁰ Joel Dinerstein “Second Lining Post-Katrina: Learning Community From the Prince of Wales Social Aid and Pleasure Club,” *American Quarterly* 61 no. 3 (2009): 615-637; Brenda Osbey, “One More Last Chance: Ritual and the Jazz Funeral,” In *Louisiana Culture from the Colonial Era to Katrina*, ed. by John Lowe (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), Helen Regis “Blackness and the Poetics of Memory in the New Orleans Second Line,” *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 4 (2001): 752-777. Kim Marie Vaz, *The “Baby Dolls:” Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013.

⁴¹ Vaz, *The Baby Dolls*, 38.

a celebration that memorializes—that remembers the struggles that have led to this moment. If the second line is an anniversary of a Social Aid and Pleasure club (similar to mutual aid and benevolent societies), stops might include the homes of club members, a neighborhood park, a sponsoring bar or restaurant, and the home(s) of deceased members. If the second line commemorates the death of a loved one, the route may include stops at the place of death, the home of the deceased’s family, particularly the mother and/or the favorite “watering hole” of the deceased. Always the extended musical tributes that constitute pauses during the second line are intended to give respect to those who have supported the organization.⁴²

The rhythm, the music, the dance, and songs are expressions of one’s journey through life. Yet, it is more than signification; it is the physical move of the spirit, an act of releasing the sorrows of life. The essence of New Orleans’ cultural aesthetic of home is that New Orleanians use the resources at their disposal to create something beautiful. This aspect of celebratory memorial, in particular, is illustrated by the second line’s use of the city’s existing physical infrastructure to heighten and extend the intensity of the moment. “Bands nearly always stop under the highway overpass of I-10 to send out loud, cascading riffs, using the concrete overpass as an amplifier and resonator.”⁴³ It is this spirit of ingenuity and its lasting legacy in the heart of New Orleanians that serves as a cornerstone of this unique understanding of home. This is more than a cliché. The second line culture epitomizes celebratory memorial even amidst the most dehumanizing experiences. Quite literally, the second line reimagines and reconstructs segregated spaces of New Orleans to turn segregation into congregation.⁴⁴

⁴² See Smith, *The Mardi Gras Indians* and Osbey, “One More Last Chance”

⁴³ Dinerstein, “Second Lining Post-Katrina,” 619. See also Matt Sakakeeny, “‘Under the Bridge:’ An Orientation to Soundscapes in New Orleans,” *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 1 (2010): 1-27.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

A native New Orleanian describes her reaction (very typical of most who live New Orleans as home) to a second line passing her home on a seemingly ordinary day.

I was out in the courtyard turning soil about the roots of the rosebushes, when I heard the unmistakable booty-bounce of Funkadelic blaring through the streets of the neighborhood. I went out front, tracking leaves and soil back to front through my own clean house, to check out the source. To my surprise it was a jazz funeral—or rather, a Second-line accompanying a funeral from the church less than a block away. Of course it was a funeral because in New Orleans, and especially in Treme, what else would it be? And to my surprise it was a funeral because never before had I heard so unsuitable a musical number for the accompaniment to the cemetery. Without meaning to, I overheard that the deceased, a man of twenty-five or so years, had been something of a womanizer in his young life. His "boys" were sending him off in the style to which he had clearly been accustomed.

The crowd talked to one another, calling out over banners and funeral parlor fans bearing the image of the deceased and held aloft by the Secondliners as they danced and followed in his wake. Young men in cutoff trousers waved the image of a dark-skinned fellow boasting a snap-brim hat and a bold, natural smile. Without loosening their grip or lowering their trophies, they danced and twirled and shook their behinds in the air with perfect grace. So great was the crowd that it was all but impossible for me to move out onto my own front steps. Those who wanted only to observe had been pressed back four and five deep onto the sidewalks—all the way from the church—and up onto the small steps of all the neighboring creole cottages. Thus it was, squeezed onto my own top step, that I had managed to pick up some few murmurs about the deceased. There were any number and variety of bands. Boys and girls in high school uniforms with tall hats and gold and green tassels, young men in ill-fitting jeans and khakis, every manner of T-shirt and guayabera. All kinds of hats and caps and head-rags topped off the persons of the musicians. And the whole loosely knit consortium had come to a temporary holdup at the corner of St. Claude and Esplanade. But the bumptious number that had brought me through the house and onto the front step was apparently the signature of the featured brass band, stalled right there at my door and blowing away for all they were worth.⁴⁵

To know New Orleans as home is to memorialize the imperfect nature of life, recognizing even moments of complexity as dear nonetheless. Osbey's reflection represents the second line's call to turn mourning into dancing. Her account also illustrates the changing nature of the second line. Less and less are second lines held to commemorate the passing of New Orleans' seasoned icons after leaving their mark. Jazz funeral second lines are more often remembering lives taken too soon—before reaching their full potential. The second line tradition, as illustrated above,

⁴⁵ Ibid, 288.

drives two very important cultural practices in New Orleans: the jazz funeral and Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs.

Jazz Funerals

“Of the things that matter to me, one that comes to mind whenever I travel is the importance of dying and being laid by in New Orleans...I want to die in New Orleans”

-B. M. Osbey “I Want to Die in New Orleans”

The centrality of the jazz funeral in New Orleans’ culture underscores the reverence for death as a part of the life journey. There is, to be sure, a different relationship with death in New Orleans. Death is the release of a loved one into the spirit world—a natural transition celebrated as a homegoing by one’s community. Burial traditions which might be taboo in other settings are quite common at home in New Orleans. For instance, New Orleanians do not

...believe, as some do, in keeping children from funeral and burial services. On the contrary, our children go up to kiss their deceased elders, greeting them in death with the same reverence and affection with which they greeted and bade them goodbye in life.⁴⁶

Death’s goodbye is one of celebration. The second line tradition as demonstrated by the jazz funeral is an exemplary element of home for those who know New Orleans as theirs.

Second lines known accompanying jazz funerals are a kinetic, spiritual commemoration of the life and death of one beloved to a specific community in New Orleans. The jazz funeral is a complex system of balanced tradition and spontaneity. Typically, a traditional Western funeral

⁴⁶ Osbey, “I Want To Die In New Orleans,” 246.

ceremony is performed in the church.⁴⁷ At the conclusion of the service, the brass band meets the body and mourners on the street in front of the funeral site. The band begins with slow, solemn dirges and leads a somber procession of family and friends (customarily) to the gravesite, where the body is “cut loose” (lain to rest). At this point, there is a noted shift—from Western to African inspired—in music and atmosphere from mourning to celebration. Here begins the musical and spiritual improvisation. Musicians re-interpret jazz funeral musical standards as parade followers improvise their movements, making the second line their own. This, by all accounts, is a practical explanation of the second line tradition brought to life through the ritual of a jazz funeral. Brenda Osbey masterfully describes this event in detail.

Traditionally, the street crowd waits outside until the body emerges from the church. At this point, and until the procession reaches the cemetery, the band, indeed, the entire procession, is under the direction of the grand marshal, who leads not with baton or even with hands but with his feet-his walk, his stance, the various postures he throws his body into as he commands the attention and respect of all who look on. Exiting from the church under the masterful and signifying direction of the marshal, the band plays the dirge and a variety of sacred music.

It is only after completing the grave-site ritual, and upon exiting the cemetery grounds, that a single loud blast signals the beginning of the big send-off. The street crowd, which has been following along on foot and growing in size and number, joins in here and helps to dance the soul on home. The formal procession, comprised of the deceased and the mourners, the musicians and the clergy, makes up the first or official line; the street revelers comprise the famous Second-line. Such numbers as “Oh! When the Saints (Go Marching In)!” and “Didn’t He Ramble” and other more contemporary songs are then played for the duration. The entire celebration is usually followed by a repast hosted by the family or one or more of the lodges, social aid and pleasure dubs, or other societies to which the deceased belonged. This, in New Orleans, is what is meant by “doing it up *right*.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Smith notes the distinction of the two cultural stages within the homegoing celebration. I echo this point of distinction to include that these influences intertwine to form the unique funeral tradition in New Orleans.

⁴⁸ Osbey, “One More Last Chance,” 284.

While jazz funerals are a time to reflect upon the good deeds of the deceased, they are also notably moments to reflect on the badman or badwoman character as well⁴⁹. This too, originates in African tradition. West African burial memorials “honored the dead for the existential presence, and they were not above comedic commentary on the deeds and misdeeds of kith and kin.”⁵⁰ The musical shift from somber dirge to uptempo folly embodies collective cultural memory of Louisiana’s African past manifest in popular jazz funeral selections like “Didn’t He Ramble” and “I’ll be Glad When You’re Dead (You Rascal, You).” The jazz funeral is a burial rite once specifically reserved for New Orleans’ musicians, members of SA&PC and dignitaries is not a universal burial experience. However, the second line culture is adapting and second lines to memorialize the life of someone beloved to a particular community, a member of the Mardi Gras Indians or Social Aid and Pleasure club, or even a victim of senseless murder (rather than only popular musician or official) are increasing. More recently, jazz funerals have been conducted symbolically and/or for a fee (as was the case in Spike Lee’s documentary about Hurricane Katrina).⁵¹

Drawing from the African roots that undergird the spirit of New Orleans, this mourning ritual celebrates death as but another stage in one’s spiritual journey.⁵² It is not the end, merely a spirit’s transition from one world to the next. While there is a sadness that accompanies the loss of a loved one, in New Orleans this calls for a spiritual transition of both the living and the dead. The spirit of the living must also transition through grief to the release their beloved. That is not to say that this is a simple task—it is part of the home learned through generations.

⁴⁹ Smith, “Behind the Lines,” 49; Smith, *The Mardi Gras Indians*, 29.

⁵⁰ Berry, “African Cultural Memory in New Orleans’ Music,” 4.

⁵¹ For more see Dinerstein “Second Lining Post-Katrina,” 625.

⁵² Ibid, see also Berry, “African Cultural Memory in New Orleans Music,” 4.

Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs

Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs (SA&PC) began as community institutions to ensure the wellbeing of their members. Established and operational as early as the 1780's,⁵³ SA&PC were (and remain) important institutions within New Orleans' African American community. Member dues often cover burial costs, health care, even provide contingency money when members lack funds to cover living expenses.⁵⁴ These organizations are also important representations of New Orleans' comingled cultural heritage. Historically, SA&PC combined the community empowerment ethic of the city's ethnic immigrant groups (Germans, Italians, Irish, Polish),⁵⁵ and African American civic, religious, and social organizations.⁵⁶ Often called second line clubs,⁵⁷ these organizations demonstrate the spirit of community that exists in New Orleans. Typically during the months of August to April, Sunday afternoons in New Orleans are filled with second line parades hosted by SA&PC representing different neighborhoods across the city—most often in Tremé' and Central City.⁵⁸

I return to black women in the interstices as an invisible drama of home. Black women are at the helm of creating and sustaining home yet even within these cultural institutions, they occupy the space between spaces. Gender roles within SA&PC are rife with contradiction. While the strength and continuity of the cultural traditions are dependent upon the black women who raise their children to respect and value this heritage, roles and even participation in SA&PC are often gender specific or segregated. Still, black women serve as some of New Orleans' foremost cultural ambassadors. Women's SA&PC illustrate this point, none perhaps better than Central

⁵³ Smith, *The Mardi Gras Indians*, 25.

⁵⁴ Dinerstein, "Second Lining Post-Katrina," ; Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid, also Regis "Blackness and the Politics of Memory," 755.

⁵⁷ Smith, *Mardi Gras Indians*, 27.

⁵⁸ Osbey, "One More Last Chance," 285; See also Dinerstein, "Second Lining Post Katrina," 619, 624; Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory," 756.

City's revered *Original New Orleans Lady Buck Jumpers*, organized in 1984 is known for their fierce second line abilities, flamboyant costuming, and widely attended annual parades. The Lady Buck Jumpers' official route second line route (like many others) is published in the Sunday paper and takes over uptown New Orleans. Members also sponsor several charitable events throughout the year to support families in the Central city community. Astutely understanding their interstitial politics, black women use their cultural platform to address the greater concerns of their community. However, contemporary women's SA&PC like the Lady Buckjumpers inherit a legacy of from black women who forged New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home from the very interstices intended to marginalize them.

"I want to be somebody's baby doll so I can get my loving all the time."

– Bessie Smith

The Baby Dolls. The Baby Dolls' contributions are often underappreciated in their significance to celebratory memorial at the foundation of New Orleans. The "Baby Doll practice"⁵⁹ has been traced to black "sporting" women employed in New Orleans' pleasure district of Black Storyville. However, to flatten their identity to simply that of prostitutes fails to honor not only their humanity but the subversive nature of their creative expression. "The Black women who lived or worked in the district and its surrounding areas were engaged in a variety of occupations, the majority perhaps as sex workers, but also as servants, cooks, seamstresses, and

⁵⁹ Vaz, *The Baby Dolls*, 8.

accomplished musicians.”⁶⁰ In her well researched and insightful text, *The “Baby Dolls”*: *Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition*, Kim Marie Vaz reframes the Baby Dolls as women who crafted an enduring subculture by astutely manipulating the socioeconomic obstacles and life chances available to them (race, gender, opportunities for education, Jim Crow, etc.) and thereby “appropriated Mardi Gras for their own purposes.”⁶¹

Mardi Gras in New Orleans celebrates the release of life’s stress and inhibitions. Revelers are encouraged to lose themselves in a spirit of merriment and indulgence—eat, drink, dance, laugh as part of a public (or as some believe, community) spectacle. Leave the cares of the world behind, if but for one day. Mardi Gras could be understood as a manifestation of Joseph Lee’s playground movement, which argued that play was essential for the revitalization of spirit—for children *and adults*. “Play, to the grown person, is rebirth, renewed connection with the sources of his strength. Under the conditions of our industrial civilization, which has wandered so far from nature’s path, it is a necessity of life.”⁶² The Baby Dolls embraced this sentiment as they innovatively reframed Mardi Gras as a tradition of play, leaving an indelible imprint on the masking culture.

The Baby Doll tradition is thought to have begun in 1912 as a SA&PC for black women who experienced various forms of marginalization, yet residence uptown—further from the prime downtown area of the pseudo-sanctioned black vice district—added geographic limitations within their profession.⁶³ Vaz notes that Beatrice Hill and Leola Tate originally organized a

⁶⁰ Ibid, 16. Also Sherrie Tucker, “A Feminist Perspective on New Orleans Jazz Women.” Research report. New Orleans Jazz and National Historical Park, 2004.

⁶¹ Vaz, *The Baby Dolls*, 21.

⁶² Joseph Lee, “Play for Young and Old,” *The North American Review* 226, no. 1 (1928): 92.

⁶³ Storyville has been noted as New Orleans’ infamous red-light district populated by brothels and dance halls. Often romanticized, life in Storyville was far from luxurious. Although enforcement of laws against sex work was less stringent, women were still arrested and charged for crimes like theft. Furthermore, Storyville was not immune to

group of their peers to establish “an association for Mardi Gras to outdo all [Black women] maskers.”⁶⁴ They did not want to merely be seen—they were demanding recognition of their humanity and their audience was strategically chosen.

The original intent of the Baby Dolls was solely about female spectatorship. Men were not the object of their gaze. Rather, their aim, clearly and colorfully stated, was to undo and impress another group of Black women who they defined as competitors, a group that in their estimation had unearned privilege due to their ability to work “downtown.”⁶⁵

Black women in similar circumstances could understand their struggle to carve out their own existence with dignity. Mardi Gras fashioned a platform for the simultaneous performativity of their self-worth and the resistance of their structural marginalization.

Hill and Tate organized a group of women that became known as the *Million Dollar Baby Dolls*, as a statement that their audacious creativity and tenacity demanded respect. They were “tough,” resilient, and fiercely independent women who chose the name Baby Dolls defiantly, reclaiming an exploitative identity and moving from object to subject.⁶⁶ “Let’s be ourselves, let’s be Baby Dolls, that’s what the pimps call us.”⁶⁷ Contemporary masking continues themes established early on—dresses fashioned from fabrics that vary from satins, velvets, even gingham patterns with short skirts and bloomers (to show off their legs), and large bonnets resting atop (sometimes blond) wigs with spiral curls. Additional accoutrements include oversized pacifiers dangling from the neck, toy dolls with matching garments carried in arms and

segregation, which divided the district into 2 areas—Storyville and Black Storyville. That is not to say that there was not an economy that supported sex across the color line. As one might expect, there were disparate rates and conditions for women based on color (and even skin tone among black women) making black women’s lives especially vulnerable. For more see Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004; Craig L. Foster, “Tarnished Angels: Prostitution in Storyville, New Orleans, 1900-1910,” *Louisiana History* 31 (1990):395; Vaz, *The Baby Dolls*.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 22.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 65.

⁶⁶ “Baby Doll” was a vernacular term for prostitutes.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 22.

perhaps the accessory most significant to the Baby Dolls' origins, a garter with money in it—suggesting Baby Dolls are women capable of supporting themselves. The Million Dollar Baby Dolls were even rumored to have a million dollars on their person to be thrown in the merriment and frivolity of their masking traditions.

Similar to previously mentioned elements of New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home and the second-line culture that forms the basis of SA&PC, in particular, the Baby Dolls embody black women in the interstices of home. They crafted a cultural presence through their indefatigable resilience—leaving a legacy that has yet to be adequately appreciated. A black feminist analysis understands the Baby Dolls as an exemplar of resistance. Masking is a performed critique of female domesticity. “When they masked, the Million Dollar Baby Dolls disrupted the gender script of female submissiveness, dependence, and chastity.”⁶⁸ While gender norms of the day created an expectation that women would marry for security, the Baby Dolls were determined to be independent—financially from individual men and socially, refusing to join male SA&PC. They defiantly mock established gender ideology, exercising and supporting a reversal of gender roles. So revered are they that men have historically participated in the Baby Doll practice, challenging heteronormative gender expectations. Still, the resistance of gender norms exceeds cross dressing. In her narrative, a former Baby Doll recalls the fluidity of performed gender. “[T]he flagrant display of flashing and tossing money away made a scene. “When we started pitching dollars around we had sportin’ [Black men] falling on their faces trying to get that money.”⁶⁹ Not only were Baby Dolls financially secure, during this spectacle, the toughest men—the hustlers—dropped to the ground to collect money thrown frivolously at them.

⁶⁸ Here, “sporting” men and women were those who comprised the underworld. Ibid, 68.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 26.

FIGURE 1 – Traditional Baby Doll Costumes



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⁷⁰ This image of the Gold Digger Baby Dolls circa 1942 is exhibited at the Louisiana State Museum depicts traditional costuming. <http://www.npr.org/2013/02/16/172165237/the-baby-dolls-of-mardi-gras-a-fun-tradition-with-a-serious-side>

FIGURE 2 - Contemporary Baby Dolls



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The Baby Dolls rejection of gendered expectations and disregard for respectability shifted “a woman’s place” from the private spaces of the home to the public domain of the streets. Baby Dolls were women outside of the conventions of respectability and they embraced the creative freedom that emerged from this taken for granted existence.

There are several themes of the Baby Doll phenomenon. The first is the relationship between the women’s dances and the music of the times. The second is the women’s

⁷¹ Social media sites help to increase awareness of the Baby Doll tradition. The House of Dance and Feathers shared this image of contemporary Baby Dolls dancing through the streets of New Orleans on their Pinterest site <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/56/14/b1/5614b19e6b08dae89ec604a5e29b0333.jpg> .

appropriation of feminine symbols to critique and satirize the limitations of their sex, imposed by patriarchal legal and social norms. Third is the women's own view of themselves as "tough," resilient trendsetters and unconventional community leaders. Finally, as "women dancing the jazz" (from jass/jazz, to swing, to bebop, to rhythm and blues, to hip hop and bounce) they carry a message of hope and resilience to a community that has always relied on its culture to make it through life.⁷²

Baby Dolls danced, drank, spoke their minds—they were independent. They were women who embraced the street culture of New Orleans at a time when women were expected to be in the home. "They created an art form by drawing on the tools of their culture, united in entrepreneurial sisterhood, and turned the street into their platform."⁷³ They were women free from the constriction of respectability politics and resourceful enough to engage the music of the dance halls and a willingness to embrace the risk and latitude of the streets to transform the pain of their lives into beauty. In so doing, the Baby Dolls established a culture that dictated recognition of- and influence on the greater cultural landscape. Their lives and labors were perceived as menial by some. Yet, the Baby Dolls' resistance of social morays was instrumental in creating a tradition that moved them from margin to center. Respectable society (however reluctantly) embraced the music, dancing, fashion, and inhibition of Black Storyville—enabling the Baby Dolls' to influence the celebratory memorial that marks New Orleans' cultural aesthetic

Mardi Gras Indians. The Mardi Gras Indians are a subset of SA&PC with distinct contributions to New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home. Mardi Gras Indian "gangs" across New Orleans represent specific neighborhoods or communities, with membership that often includes multiple family members, spanning generations. The origins of the Mardi Gras Indians (or simply, Indians) are imprecise, at best representing a genealogical history that is complex and

⁷² Ibid, 101.

⁷³ Ibid, 35.

contested. This is, perhaps, attributable to African descended peoples' oral versus written tradition. One albeit outsider history suggests contemporary Indian culture began as an imitation of the Plains Indians observed in the Buffalo Bill tour of 1884. However, alternative histories document Indian masking as early as 1746.⁷⁴ The allegiances between blacks and Native Americans in New Orleans, however, are not in dispute. Some contemporary Indians claim they mask in homage to the Native Americans who aided the escape of slaves who fled plantations to Louisiana's cyprieres (cypress swamps) and wooded marshes.⁷⁵ Others mask to honor the Native Americans that "did not allow themselves to be enslaved by white men."⁷⁶ Some Indians acknowledge Native American bloodlines, as direct descendants of unions between blacks and Native Americans in established maroon communities.⁷⁷ Alliances between Africans and Native-Americans were, indeed recorded. Slaves and the Natchez Indians united in 1729 in the Natchez Revolt against the French.⁷⁸ Regardless of the origin, the principles of liberation and honor are at the heart of the Indian tradition.

The Mardi Gras Indians are important to New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home because they embody a counter narrative within the New Orleans and American experience. The Indians' tradition of *masking*, parading through the streets of New Orleans in hand stitched suits, is a performance of ritual, narrative and memory. Indian suits are themselves a narrative—often through actual images, color selection, or the design or pattern of the beading incorporated.

⁷⁴ For an elaborate history of the Mardi Gras Indians see Daryl Lee Harris, "New Orleans Mardi Gras Indian Chiefs and Their Costumes: Trans-Cultural Communal Icons" (PhD dissertation, University of Alabama, 2006), 4.

⁷⁵ Rowell and Hall, "Gwendolyn Midlo Hall with Charles Henry Rowell," 1051; Smith, *Mardi Gras Indians*, 24.

⁷⁶ With gratitude for many conversations with Big Chief Brian Harrison Nelson of the Guardians of the Flame Maroon Society.

⁷⁷ Smith, *Mardi Gras Indians*, 24.

⁷⁸ Rowell and Hall, "Gwendolyn Midlo Hall with Charles Henry Rowell," 1049; Smith, *Mardi Gras Indians*, 23. This allied force was eventually defeated by the French forces reinforced by the Natchez enemies, the Choctaw Indians. However, contrary to other accounts that simply imagine the Indians as mimicry or New Orleanians playing dress up, Smith contextualizes this aspect of home.

Indian suits are best understood as counter-narratives⁷⁹—stories as much about the Native- and African American past and present as they are a vision for a life hoped for.

Masking Indian is a way of life culminated twice a year. Indians generally only mask on two days—Mardi Gras day and St. Joseph’s night. The suits donned by Indians are not to be confused with costumes often worn to various other celebrations in New Orleans. The making of Indian suits is creatively and physically exhausting. “In the year of exhaustive labor that it takes to make them, their designers ‘sweat blood.’”⁸⁰ Indian suits take an entire year to make—sewn and beaded by hand (the use of sewing machines is strictly prohibited) to depict specific narratives symbolically significant to the Indian’s life, worn for that specific day, then dismantled and next year’s suit begun. Indian suits symbolize individual as well as collective identity. However, Indian suits and the culture they represent are often misunderstood or mischaracterized, even by academics who research them with the best intentions. One such representation accurately understands the Mardi Gras Indian tradition as counter-narrative but fails to credit these individuals as competent testifiers about their experiences.

The working class blacks who create the Mardi Gras Indian tribes collectively author an important narrative about their own past, present, and future. Drawing upon the tools available to them—music, costumes, speech, and dance—they fashion a fictive identity that gives voice to their deepest values and beliefs.⁸¹

I would take issue with the depiction of Indian identities or the narratives depicted by Indians suits as fictive. The beaded narratives are far from fiction to the Indians from whom they emerge. These are often narratives about liberation—of their ancestors, or for themselves in the afterlife. Furthermore, I would argue these are only fictive identities if they fail to be accepted by the

⁷⁹ George Lipsitz, “Mardi Gras Indians: Carnival and Counter-Narrative in Black New Orleans,” *Cultural Critique* 10 (1998): 99-121.

⁸⁰ Joseph Roach, “Mardi Gras Indians and Others: Genealogies of American Performance,” *Theatre Journal* 44, no. 4 (1992): 477.

⁸¹ Ibid.

community. The Mardi Gras Indians are accepted as part of the culture of New Orleans. The Big Chief is respected in his community as a social leader, anchor, and icon—despite “day jobs” often in areas of more menial labor. The memorial for Percy Lewis, more commonly known as “Big Chief Pete,” Big Chief of the Black Eagles, offers a poignant example.

[H]e had worked for the previous twenty years in the custodial department at Tulane University, holding down several other jobs to support his large family. About a thousand people gathered in the street in front of the Central City funeral home that day. Photographers hovered around a wooden hearse at the side door of the mortuary. A horse, stoic as the cross atop the long wagon with open side panels, waited in place.⁸²

His identity as a community leader was not a fiction. The Big Chief’s passing demanded the community’s recognition. That so many paused to celebrate his homegoing denotes the fingerprint left by his life on his community.

You cannot simply dress up Indian—it is not something you can decide to be on a whim. It demands commitment to lifestyle and acceptance of a legacy. Indian practice is typically held weekly to teach, learn, and practice secret signals, songs, dances, chants and even to sew collectively—passing on elements of this unique heritage. The Indians’ role in New Orleans’ aesthetic of home is clear. “They practice all year in neighborhood bars, and they draw a group of neighborhood residents into the streets behind them as a ‘second line’ of supportive singers and dancers.”⁸³ Unlike other parading societies, masking (the Mardi Gras Indian parading tradition) is a sacred rite of the black, working-class.⁸⁴ Indians are, in fact, distinctive for their

⁸² Berry “African Cultural Memory in New Orleans Music,” 10. See also Jason Berry, “Good Bye Chief Pete,” *Gambit*, May 7, 1983.

⁸³ Lipsitz, “Carnival and Counter-Narrative,” 102. See also David Elliott Draper, “The Mardi Gras Indians: The Ethnomusicology of Black Associations in New Orleans” (dissertation thesis, Tulane University, 1973) 54.

⁸⁴ Osbey’s “I Want To Die In New Orleans” and “One More Last Chance” offer the most poignant and beautifully written accounts of this. She is also given preference of authority because she is black woman raised in New Orleans. Other scholarship supporting scholarship include Berry, “African Cultural Memory,” 8, Dinerman “Second Lining Post-Katrina,” 624, Ronald W. Lewis, Rachel Breunlin, and Helen Regis, *The House of Dance and Feathers: A Museum by Ronald W. Lewis* (New Orleans, LA: University of New Orleans Press/ New Orleans Story Project, 2009) 66; Lipsitz “Carnival and Counter-Narrative;” Smith “Behind the Lines,” 57.

purposeful and defiant choice to parade through the backstreets of black neighborhoods⁸⁵—simultaneously cultivating the rich and precious culture while rendering these rituals more exclusively sacred. While connections to Native American heritage are visually drawn, the Mardi Gras Indians enact a shared, cultural memory of African values as well. “In New Orleans, as in Africa, this translation of criticism to action takes place through a fusion of music, dance, speech, and dance.”⁸⁶ The Mardi Gras Indian tribes exist in direct opposition to dominant Mardi Gras krewes. Traditional (white) Mardi Gras royalty represent New Orleans’ white collar elite masquerading as a monarchy. Brian Harrison Nelson, Big Chief of the Guardians of the Flame Maroon Society states that for Indians, Mardi Gras is about “an *unmasking* tradition...becoming ourselves. The beading. The dance. The call and response. It’s African. If we could have come out as African we would have but we would have gone to jail, if not been killed.”⁸⁷ Mardi Gras Indians are often from working-class neighborhoods—and yet are revered by in their own communities as cultural icons. The Big Chief acts as a standard bearer and is often called to act as a peace maker—“like a mediator.”⁸⁸ Big Chief Allison “Tootie” Montana, is remembered in his Seventh Ward neighborhood not only as a community dignitary for ending the violent confrontations between Indian tribes but as a well-respected tradesman.⁸⁹ The Indian tradition demonstrates the cultural aesthetic of home as ritualized performance of community, resistance, narrative and rhythm drawing from cultural memory.

⁸⁵ Lipsitz, “Carnival and Counter-Narrative;” Smith “Behind the Lines,”.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 106.

⁸⁷ Excerpt taken from conversation with Big Chief Brian Harrison Nelson

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

FIGURE 3 – Example of Beaded Narratives in Mardi Gras Indian Suits



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⁹⁰ This is an example of the pictorial beadwork narrative display represented in Indian suiting. Pictured here are Big Queen Rita (in the foreground) and Big Chief Bo (in the background) of the Creole Wild West Tribe. "From the Streets of New Orleans ~ Mardi Gras Indian Super Sunday" Now Public, Accessed September 28, 2012, <http://www.nowpublic.com/culture/streets-new-orleans-mardi-gras-indian-super-sunday-0>

FIGURE 4 – Example of 3-Dimensional Beading in Mardi Gras Indian Suits



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⁹¹ This second image represents the three dimensional beading narrative suiting. Pictured are Big Queen Aussetua and Big Chief David Montana of the Wichita Hunters Tribe. News One. “Mardi Gras’s Fat Tuesday: Music, Beads, And Good Food.” Accessed September 28, 2012, <http://newsone.com/1076895/mardi-grass-fat-tuesday-food-music/> The site itself leaves much to desired in its coverage of news and culture. However, the representation of this aspect of culture is worthy of inclusion.

FIGURE 5 – Full Image of 3 Dimensional Beaded Mardi Gras Indian Suit



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⁹² This image captures a full view of three dimensional beaded narrative Indian Suiting. This particular suit weighed 150 pounds. Featured in this image is Second Chief Corey Rayford, of the 7th Ward's Black Feather tribe. Rayford credits the support, skill, and community sewing of his family in the beauty of his suit. Nola.com. "Mardi Gras Indian's Fabulous New Suit Combines the Efforts of Family Members and Friends." Accessed September 28, 2012. http://www.nola.com/mardigras/index.ssf/2011/03/mardi_gras_indians_fabulous_ne.html

Indians incorporate the second line tradition as an aspect of their parading ritual. Yet, Indian music marks an interesting instrumental departure—incorporating the tambourine in its song and dance, as well as the tapping of sticks and bottles by participants in the following crowd.⁹³ From a practical standpoint, this is because revelers may not have been anticipating a second line to pass by. These musical instruments were readily available (especially as the procession pauses for refreshment) and render amplified musical tones.

Finally, second line tradition makes distinct contributions to New Orleans music. The rhythms that emerge *behind* the drumming of the band, the beats of the clapping hands, tapping bottles, the pounding feet create the backbeat also called the second line beat. “Behind the drums of the brass bands in the second-line parades and behind the bass drum and smaller drums in the marches of the Indians, these percussionists provide the “New Orleans backbeat”⁹⁴ (sometimes called the “second-line beat”) that is legendary among musicians.”⁹⁵ The second line beat is an evolution of what is referred to as Congo Square’s Bamboula beat⁹⁶ and serves as the rhythm of the second line. It is “a foundational drum pattern for all New Orleans musicians and every local drummer makes it his or her own.”⁹⁷ The improvisational nature of the backbeat is the tie that binds together the aforementioned aspects of the second line tradition—the jazz funeral and SA&PC like the Mardi Gras Indians—in their enactment of celebratory memorial.

⁹³ Berry, “African Cultural Memory,” 8.

⁹⁴ Evans provides a contextual history of the backbeat from whence the second line beat comes in *Congo Square*. For more see Dinerstein “Second Lining Post-Katrina,” 619.

⁹⁵ Smith, “Behind the Lines,” 60.

⁹⁶ Evans, *Congo Square*, 107.

⁹⁷ Dinerstein, “Second Lining Post-Katrina,” 619.

CALL AND RESPONSE

Credited as the “birthplace of jazz,” New Orleans’ second line parades are often credited for the inspiration and evolution of the jazz genre.⁹⁸ Noted for its improvisational form and the salience of call and response, jazz harnessed the energy and spirit of this street culture, translating them to transform the musical conventions of the day. “Improvisation and call and response became key elements of early jazz, creating space for individual and, in a broader sense, group expression.”⁹⁹ Call and response is a form of rhythmic, tonal, and as I will argue, behavioral action and *reaction* in which one actor calls out and another responds—sometimes in repetition, and at other times as an adaptation or reinterpretation. This musical and cultural practice has direct linkage to the Congo Square experience—of song, dance, and rhythms—and is taken up by the second line tradition of celebratory memorial which exemplifies the cultural aesthetic of home in New Orleans. There are songs that are expected at every second line: Rebirth Brass Band’s “Do Whatcha Wanna,” calling for second liners to release any inhibitions and stress and more recently the Lil’ Rascals’ “Roll With Me, Knock With Me” imploring “wipe your weary eyes, Mama don’t you cry,” found on many second line playlists because they resonate with second line values of dancing through life’s storms. Similarly, there are songs *every* Indian tribe sings—“Handa Wanda,” “T’ouwais bas Q’ouwais” (Hey Pocky Way, if you will), “Fire Water,” and most importantly, “Indian Red” are established standards because they are directives to the second line crowd—“we’re not looking for no trouble,” “if you aren’t joining the second line, to get out of the way” or the most sacred of lyrics, the Indians’ refusal to

⁹⁸ For an extensive analysis see Frederick Ramsey and Charles Smith, *Jazzmen: The Story of Hot Jazz Told in the Lives of the Men Who Created It* (New York, NY: Limelight Editions, 1985).

⁹⁹ Richard Mizelle, “Second Lining the Jazz City: Jazz Funerals, Katrina, and the Re-Emergence of New Orleans” in *Katrina’s Imprint: Race and Vulnerability in America*, eds. Keith Wailoo, Karen O’Neill, Jeffrey Dowd, Roland Anglin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 69. For more extensive analysis, see Lewis Erenberg, *Swinging the dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 3-35.

bow. These songs become unique to a specific tribe or even a specific performance in their interpretation. Each tribe changes the tempo or words to “insert the distinctive histories and features of their own group.”¹⁰⁰ The Big Chief may change the lyrics to reflect an experience important to the community—the return of the SA&PC to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, the death of a club member, and even the against-all-odds Super Bowl victory of one of the NFL’s historically worst franchises.

The Saints’ Success as a Representation of New Orleans’ Cultural Aesthetic of Home

During the post-Katrina recovery of home, the second line remains an institution in New Orleans. To be fair, elements of second line culture have been briefly included in the media coverage the Saints’ celebration. However, the media’s attention has been out of focus, demonstrating its lack of cultural and spiritual literacy with regard to sport’s meaning to the recovery of home. Further, it is because media narratives fail to effectively detect black women as cultural contributors or the implicit historical context they offer as relevant to the fabric of home, accepted disaster recovery narratives remain incomplete expressions that inaccurately construct post-Katrina, post-victory New Orleans as recovered. However, that day of completed recovery has yet to dawn. This is the gross misreading of the second line culture.

The New Orleans cultural aesthetic understands its African, Caribbean, European, and Native American influences not as discrete but as inexplicably and indeterminably bound to create a “home” little understood outside of its geographical and cultural boundaries. Traceable to Congo Square, the celebratory memorial practice (exemplified by second line tradition generally, to include the Mardi Gras Indians, SA&PC, and the Baby Dolls specifically) as well as

¹⁰⁰ Lipsitz “Carnival and Counter-narrative,” 106, Add others from New Orleans

call and response are tangible manifestations of home inscribed within those who know New Orleans as such. However, the “black expressive culture of New Orleans remains overexposed and under-analyzed.”¹⁰¹ New Orleans has long been supported by the tourism industry as an economic engine—largely fueled by and dependent on black heritage and culture—notably, the culture of New Orleans’ working class communities.¹⁰² The media inadvertently extends this practice in their assumption that celebratory memorial implied a return the New Orleans of old. What was missed was that the *people* needed to rekindle the essence of who we are as New Orleanians and recover the spirit of home. In short, the Saints and their triumph (despite their unlikely and extraordinary nature) should not have been the focus of the media’s recovery narratives. Instead, the Saints provide a lens for understanding the work of recovering the cultural aesthetic of home.

The prevalence of African cultural memory in New Orleans music is an important thread of analysis of the Saints as a vehicle for the New Orleans aesthetic of home. The Saints rightly understood that theirs was an important role in the recovery of home. Despite its turbulent history, the Saints have been a vibrant, marker of New Orleans as home. During the periods of the team’s worst performance, fans continued to watch the Saints—at home and in the Super Dome (albeit with paper bags covering their faces at times). They were the city’s loveable losers and symbolized a “get back up to fight” mentality embraced by the New Orleans ethic.

Post-Katrina, the Saints play began to take on the spirit of the second line culture that is the lifeblood of home in New Orleans. The team began to mirror second lines as

an ongoing cultural plebiscite of the vernacular dancing will at moments of community transition. They not only chart the passage of individuals from life to death, but also signify the transition of the community from ‘social death’ to cultural affirmation. The

¹⁰¹ Dinerstein, “Second Lining Post Katrina,” 615.

¹⁰² Osbey “One More Last Chance,” 284-293. Others include Regis, “Blackness and the Politics of Memory, Roach 1992.

ideas central to Jazz, particularly the notion of freedom and polyphony, of spontaneity and collective, energetic bodily improvisation, which mark second line dancing, are appropriate for the celebration of life and of death, but particularly for the articulation of community consensus in times of crisis and of rupture.¹⁰³

The Super Bowl winning season was a collection of many efforts, many rhythms of recovery—sometimes steady, sometimes staccato—memorializing New Orleans’ survival of a deadly storm and celebrating the community of New Orleans. “Second-line parades serve to cleanse and renew the spirit.”¹⁰⁴ The Saints served the same purpose. If only for three hours every Sunday, cheering on the Saints offered a respite from the loss of home and the challenges of recovery. Watching the Saints win—even the distinction of being undefeated—spoke to the weary spirit of New Orleanians. To be certain, these moments could not negate the realities of recovery, but they did rekindle a collective memory of “home”—an ever resilient spirit that memorializes tragedy through celebration.

The cultural aesthetic of home in New Orleans embodies a spirit that turns mourning into dancing. Still, this not an easy premise to grasp for some. The second line tradition of the jazz funeral offers a parallel to the responsibility to renew the spirit of New Orleans. The following example is an account of a father’s second line as his last gift to his son—to send him into the next stage of his life journey in celebration. As a member of the Mardi Gras Indian culture, this father uncharacteristically transformed his son’s homegoing into a moment to honor their sacred cultural memory. Osbey recounts a story told to her by her mother of a jazz funeral that broke tradition with an improvisation of the jazz funeral ritual.

There came a point in the Mass when the priest was literally *sat down* by the father of the deceased, a member of the Mardi Gras Indian Council and a well-known community

¹⁰³ Ostendorf & Smith, “Jazz Funerals and the Second Line,” 263.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, “Behind the Lines,” 49.

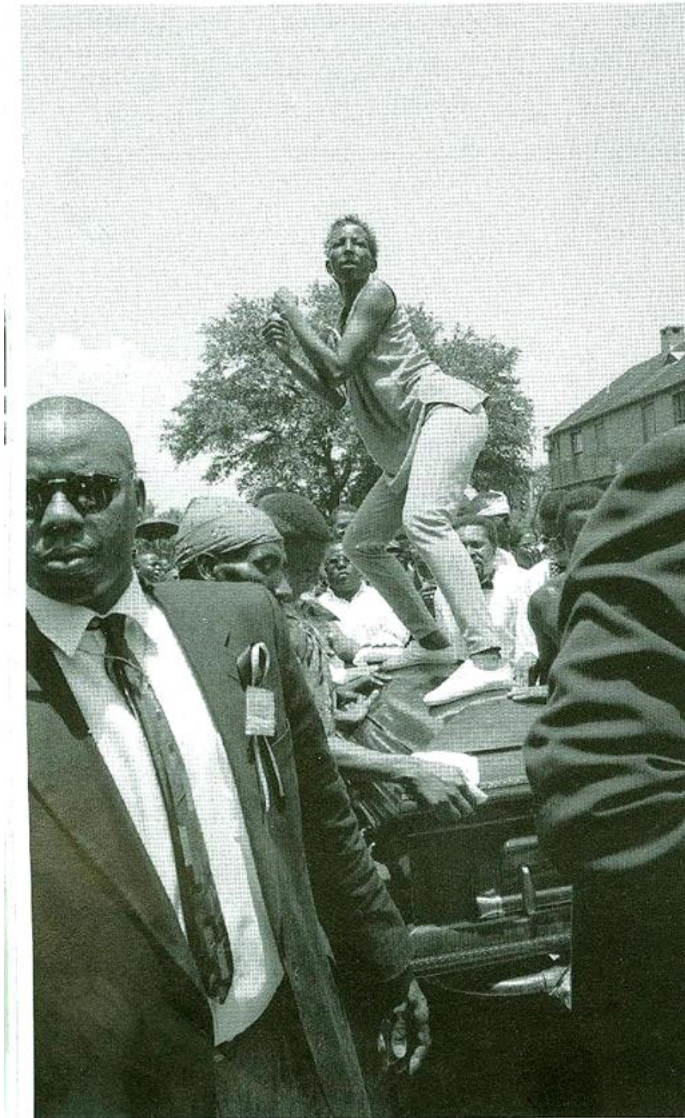
activist. He apologized briefly for taking over the ceremony. He pulled himself up to his full and impressive height. He did not speak long.

Mostly she remembered his closing words. He asked simply that the mourners excuse him long enough to change his shoes; he had to put on his dancing shoes, he said, so that he could dance his son on home. Right there in the church he dressed his feet and began to dance. And as he danced he began to sing. And the songs he sang were the songs we all grew up singing every Carnival Day and then again on St. Joseph's Day, the only day of the year that the Indians don again their feathers and their crowns, their satins and bejeweled garb. As the mourning father made his way about the interior of the church, his tribe and his son's joined in with him. In one voice they sang and they chanted. Over and again they danced the circumference of the church. And when they were pleased with the spirit they had called down in that holy place, they carried their celebration out into St. Claude Street. They re-formed their circle just outside the church doors. There they sang and danced and chanted some more. And the crowd took up the song and carried them along on their way to the cemetery. There was no grand marshal and no playing of the dirge. The hearse went along slowly, however, much burdened by the crowd.¹⁰⁵

Celebratory memorial is, at times, painful. This is not a cultural directive to delegitimize life's sorrows. However, it is an enactment of the freedom of the spirit—to free oneself from the agonies of life. The most poignant image that captures this spirit was captured at a jazz funeral as a mother danced on the casket of her murdered son.

¹⁰⁵ Osbey, "One More Last Chance," 289-290.

FIGURE 6 – The Second Line as an Element of New Orleans’ Cultural Aesthetic of Home



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The scene can only be described as a most tragically beautiful moment. Ms. Andrews, (pictured above) says goodbye to her son, dancing through her grief as her son rests beneath her. This is her last chance to honor the spirit of her son, to lovingly and painfully release his spirit and that of her own grief.

¹⁰⁶ Lewis, Breunlin, and Regis, *House of Dance and Feathers*, 40.

The Saints provided moments of tragic beauty as well. As the Saints took to the field for the first time in 2006, resounding cheers filled the space of unthinkable suffering—only a year after thousands who could not evacuate prior to warnings about the catastrophic nature of Hurricane Katrina flocked to the Super Dome for shelter. In 2010, the Saints’ success was a means to dance atop the figurative casket of Katrina, to memorialize everything she took, and look hopefully to the future. As fans held signs that read, “I Believe” they danced their faith that the dark moments of their past could bring a brighter day. If the Saints could do the impossible, so too could they. Every Sunday of the football season, the people of New Orleans danced and cried and believed with a renewed spirit.

The Saints’ celebrations did not simply replace established New Orleans traditions demonstrative of the cultural aesthetic of home. Much to the contrary, these celebrations *affirmed* rather than replaced New Orleans’ strong faith tradition. Evans notes attendance at Congo Square was not a choice to forgo the meetings of the church body. “New Orleanians did not neglect Holy Mass in the mornings, but the afternoons of the holy day were devoted to ‘amusements, fun, and frolic of every description—always with an eye to much sport for a little expense.’¹⁰⁷ Locals typically attended a cockfight, ballgame, the circus, or a similar event in the afternoon...”¹⁰⁸ Sunday fan consumption of the Saints followed this established custom. Fans visited their houses of worship on Sunday mornings and cheered the Saints in the afternoons.¹⁰⁹ The Saints represented one aspect of the Sunday culture of home in New Orleans. Still, the Saints represent more than repetitive behavior merely for repetition sake. The Saints took on a

¹⁰⁷ Creecy p. 20 in Evans, *Congo Square*,

¹⁰⁸ Evans, *Congo Square*, 37.

¹⁰⁹ This is supported by interview transcripts of study participants as well as one of the dissertation images selected for this project.

quality of improvisation as well. Osbey articulates the complexity of simultaneously customary and improvised practice.

There is also, of course, the conundrum of custom in New Orleans. The ability not merely to adapt but to improvise is itself inherent in all our notions of tradition. Here, improvisation is the tradition. And we have all of us always known as much.¹¹⁰

Perhaps, the Saints knew this as well. Even the institution of sport required improvisation in the days that followed Hurricane Katrina. Sunday afternoons took on greater significance as anticipated moments of catharsis and faith. Each week, the team's improvisational of performance of home renewed the spirits of New Orleanians improvising a recovery of home post-Katrina.

The Mardi Gras Indian culture informs the understanding of the Saints as a vehicle for New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home as well. As members of the New Orleans community, the Saints had a responsibility in the recovery effort. The team could not physically replace the houses, material goods, or even the New Orleans of old destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. What they could do was play for the fans—dedicate every practice, every down, every second on the game clock to the people of New Orleans. The African tradition demonstrated in various forms of New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home but specific to the Indian practice of call and response offers an analytical framework through which the Saints share a role of the in the post-Katrina recovery of home.

[T]he "call and response" between the leader and the gang...represents the symbiotic relationship between the individual and the group. The chiefs have certain concrete responsibilities-in life and in songs-and when appropriate they take the lead both musically and socially. But each individual plays an important role in the tribe, replete with occasions to show off individual skills and attributes for the benefit of the entire group.

¹¹⁰ Osbey, "One More Last Chance," 286.

Using a musical framework, call and response is described as having,

primordial human instruments—the sound of the feet hitting the earth or the floor, the hands clapping, the body movements responding to the dominant rhythm uttered tonally on the drums. In New Orleans the purest beauty of this tradition is found in the second line parades surrounding brass bands, especially at jazz funerals.¹¹¹

The Saints harness the essence of call and response lending their own human instruments to the chorus of recovery. At times, their “voice” is the distinguishable, others it simply blends in. The people of New Orleans lead the call through their steadfast will and determined resilience.

Always the Saints’ endeavors of that season were the response. Each Sunday, each play, each down was an improvised, danced faith that recovery was possible and within reach, even if New Orleans had to stretch to take hold of it. This is the spirit of home in New Orleans.

The Saints are not akin to the role of the Chief, as the media might imply. The people of New Orleans mirror the Chief—the Saints occupy a collective, yet still important role as a member of the chorus. The Saints “danced” through each completion with a faith that they could transcend their past, exceed their circumstance and represent the spirit of their city. “Only the chief can sing lead in this song, but his responsibility is to call forth the other members of the tribe by naming their roles-spy boy, flag boy, trail chief, etc.”¹¹² The people called forth the team, individually and as a collective. The Saints responded, using their own unique instruments, their play and their position in a national forum, to respond to the emotional needs of those working to recover home. Though they may have never intended to, the Saints reflected the Indian’s musical practice of call and response.

¹¹¹ Berry, “African Cultural Memory,” 6.

¹¹² Lipsitz, “Carnival and Counter-Narrative,” 108

Yet, pushing past metaphor, the Saints themselves and the larger Who ‘Dat nation¹¹³ began to *exhibit* New Orleans’ cultural aesthetic of home throughout the season. I offer two brief examples below. The first is illustrated through the salience of music in the Saints’ performance of home. For years, brass bands would circulate around the Super Dome playing traditional brass band second line music during intervals of the competitions. This was not a new edition for the 2009-10 season. However, as the Saints remained undefeated for much of the regular season, a new anthem, *Who Dat!?!/Black and Gold to the Super Bowl* signaled a determination for the team and the city. The song begins with the ominous sound of New Orleans signature brass followed by a slower rendition of the backbeat. Most striking is this musical fusion of the second line and local sporting culture. The lyrics even weave the two into a narrative declaration of faith that they (the team and the city) will be victorious. The first verse opens,

*We’re going to Miami
Already tamed the wildcat
Second lining to the Super Bowl and bring the crown back
Brown bag days, over
Take ‘dat to the bank*

*Old Archie Manning tell them,
“This ain’t your daddy’s Saints”*

The lyrics continue by naming key players and their particular strengths as well as teams—once intimidating—that will succumb to defeat. The chorus is the famed battle cry performed as call and response.

*Call: We’re yelling, “Who ‘Dat?!”
Response: Who ‘Dat?!
Call: Who ‘Dat?!
Response: Who ‘Dat?!
All: Who “Dat say they gonna beat them Saints?!”*

¹¹³ This is the formal designation of fans and followers of the New Orleans adopted by the team and the New Orleans community.

Similar to the sound of an approaching second line, whenever this song is heard, New Orleanians run to the source and dance their own steps of celebration.

The second example came from the Saints' 2009-10 pre-game huddle. In practical terms, this was a simple call and response exercise to focus the team. However, after one of the major networks filmed this during a national broadcast, it was used to open one of ESPN's prime time shows and became a sensation. It became a signature moment of Saints' games—so much so that networks broadcasting Saints games interrupted pre-game analysis to include this brief glimpse of what it meant to call New Orleans home. Quarterback Drew Brees always led the call. However at home games, by the end of the chant the entire Super Dome joined the chorus.

<i>Call:</i>	<i>One</i>	<i>Call:</i>	<i>Win</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>Two</i>	<i>Response:</i>	<i>It's great</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Win</i>	<i>Call:</i>	<i>Nine</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>For you</i>	<i>Response:</i>	<i>Ten</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Three</i>	<i>Call:</i>	<i>Win</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>Four</i>	<i>Response:</i>	<i>Again!</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Win</i>	<i>Call:</i>	<i>Win</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>Some More</i>	<i>Response:</i>	<i>Again!</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Five</i>	<i>All:</i>	<i>Again!</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>Six</i>		
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Win</i>	<i>All:</i>	<i>Again!</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>For kicks</i>	<i>All:</i>	<i>Again!</i>
<i>Call:</i>	<i>Seven</i>	<i>All:</i>	<i>Again!</i>
<i>Response:</i>	<i>Eight</i>		

During the season, Drew Brees was often asked to divulge the words of the chant and he refused, stating it bonded the team in their common effort—a Super Bowl victory.¹¹⁴ I also note the

¹¹⁴ Brees only shared the lyrics after the Saints returned to New Orleans with the Lombardi Trophy. He explained the lyrics at a press conference in New Orleans. For the extended explanation see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qShsVCi1DE&feature=related> This chant appears to be retired. The Saints have used different chants in the subsequent seasons.

incorporation of improvisation. The chant as Saints fans know it is an improvisation of one recited by the Marine Corps¹¹⁵ altered to fit the needs and circumstances of the Who ‘Dat nation.

Both of the examples presented above (the Who ‘Dat anthem and the Saints pre-game chant) represent more than just expressions of solidarity. Their presence alters the space they enter. Evoking New Orleans cultural aesthetic of home, they shift the spirit into one of celebratory memorial. They are not meant to erase the challenges endured—they are a call to celebrate those moments as challenges overcome. They are a reflection on the fact that *we made it!* It may not have come without scars but we made it. To understand that is to understand a home that is *naturally N’awlins*.

Hurricane Katrina left in her wake difficult moments of recovery. Yet, closer analysis reframes the storm as a connecting thread, weaving together three rhythms of home, incongruous on the surface: New Orleans cultural aesthetic of home, the Saints’ rise to the 2010 Super Bowl Championship, and black women’s interstitial politics of home and its recovery. This project examines the polyrhythmic harmony of recovering home that results. **This chapter** introduces the problem of the Saints as the symbol of the post-Katrina recovery of home in New Orleans. While the local franchise’s ascension to Super Bowl Champions has been integral to revitalizing New Orleanians’ spirit of home, it cannot *replace* home—making the Saints an inappropriate symbol as presented in media and academic narratives. Home in New Orleans is re-conceptualized as the celebrated interplay of adaptation and memory. This chapter outlines New Orleans’ cultural aesthetic of home, practices of celebratory memorial and call and response enacted during the establishment of the city itself, carried forth by the long established SA&PC second line tradition. Using black feminist epistemology, visual studies, and sport sociology I argue the Saints phenomenon demonstrate black women in the interstices of home. The Saints’

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

success sparked traditional and informal celebrations throughout the city during their Super Bowl winning season. However, media and academic narratives about these celebrations, representing the Saints as symbolic of New Orleans' recovery failed to understand their cultural context and significance. Furthermore, black women were rarely, if ever, consulted, included, nor, documented as participants in these events. Still, this example is a microcosm of a larger social terrain. Black women contributions remain an invisible drama of home—under-detected and underappreciated even by academics and social and cultural commentators drawn to the richness of New Orleans.

Chapter Two offers a theoretical framework for understanding theories of home in two stages. The first section reviews literature germane to how one knows home to answer the question can the Saints stand in for home lost? Focus is given to the concept of home as experience. Drawing from classic black feminist tropes, this section proceeds on the premise that not only is homeplace in post-Katrina New Orleans tenuous, the testimony of the experience of home has been readily dismissed, resulting in narrative indignity. A theoretical framework is constructed by reviewing literature that conceives of home as experience of citizenship, resistance, and, hope.

The second section reviews a methodological lens for this project's focus on home. It provides a rationale for visual sociology as a means of 1) defining home and 2) understanding what it means to recover home in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. I argue that black women's experience of interstitial politics of home has yielded dramatic spaces of cultural engagement and reproduction largely dismissed in American institutions. This disregard limits black women's access and contributions.

Chapter Three describes the research methods involved in the process of collecting data to explore the meaning of the Saints' Super Bowl success to black women's post-Katrina recovery of home. This is not merely a procedural recounting—this chapter offers insight into the intellectual history upon which the methodological framework is drawn. Zora Neale Hurston's anthropological classic, *Mules and Men*¹¹⁶ and other more contemporary black feminist scholars¹¹⁷ serve as guideposts for a black woman researcher researching home. This is a pivotal moment for New Orleans and the scholarship driven by its rebuilding process. Hurricane Katrina effectively illustrated the danger of ignoring marginalized voices. This project offers a corrective step in its consideration of the research question from the interstices rather than from the dominant perspective. This study diverges from the previous strategy of measuring the significance of local sport to the community merely in terms of revenue generation. Instead, the post-Katrina Saints phenomenon is examined through visual and narrative analysis of those actually living it.

Also significant is the project's Black feminist epistemology; which speaks not only of the experiences of black women but underscores the importance of the contributions of Black women to scholarship. This lens places particular emphasis on the researcher "keeping herself present" as well as on recognizing and incorporating lived experience in scientific inquiry. From

¹¹⁶ Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Harper & Row).

¹¹⁷ The most useful resources for developing my own research tools were Irma McLaurin, "Introduction: Forging a Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics of Black Feminist Anthropology," in *Black Feminist Anthropology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 1-23; and Cheryl Rodriguez, "A Homegirl Goes Home: Black Feminism and the Lure of Native Anthropology," in *Black Feminist Anthropology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 233-258.

this epistemological stance, theory must make room for experiential knowledge; even my own as a native of New Orleans, black woman, and researcher.¹¹⁸

Media discourse expresses the return of the Saints to the Superdome, and ultimately their success as Super Bowl champions, as metaphoric of the restoration of New Orleans. Yet, few studies utilize a multilayered approach to dialogically *and* visually interrogate this assumption. The purpose of this study is to understand the meaning(s) of the New Orleans Saints to the recovery of “home” in the Central City community through critical, visual analysis. Throughout this text, the Saints will be generally conceptualized to include the professional football team, its representative logo, the team’s post-Katrina successes, and its home field—the Superdome.

Engaging visual study to investigate the role of sport in the recovery of New Orleans as a methodological approach is a unique and underutilized strategy within the field of Kinesiology. Photo elicitation interviews educated participant narratives that conceptualize the meaning of the Saints’ success in rebuilding their “home.” The presented images provided an additional dimensional layer to the standard interview by evoking richly specific emotions and experiences that connect the participants to the subject of interest. These imagery-driven narratives offer a critical evaluation of the current media discourse and its relevance to lived experience. This project has transformative potential in that it seeks to confer authority of experience to the people of New Orleans to be invited guests in the narrative rather than subjects of it. This self-authorship grants them the political power to bring about positive social change.

Chapter Four is a reflection on the ways in which the Saints are (and are not) meaningful to black women’s recovery of home in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The data reveals that the Saints are important to the cultural aesthetic of home in New Orleans, even prior

¹¹⁸ In 1892, Anna Julia Cooper captures the absence of black women’s narratives in “Our Raison d’Etre.” More than a century later, ours remains an interstitial politics of home. In *Black Feminist Anthropology*, 51, McClaurin revisits this classic black feminist trope. Other scholarship includes 1998, Mohanty, 1991; Stone-Mediatore, 1991.

to the storm. The team's success has also been significant catalyst in renewing the spirit of home during the work of recovery. This is true for black women recovering home in New Orleans, yet their testimony to that effect is overlooked and taken for granted in dominant disaster recovery narratives. More specifically, this chapter fleshes out findings on three levels. First, an analysis is presented of the participant responses related to New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home. Second, I advance an analysis of home at the complicated intersection of sport in New Orleans and the legacy of slavery. Third, I develop some unexpected gems in the data—how the term “refugee” that informed the experience of home and black women's unique knowledge of the sporting culture within this context. The chapter concludes with participant reflection on what the Saints' success does *not* mean to the post-Katrina recovery of New Orleans.

Finally, **Chapter Five** concludes by discussing the findings of the study. This project reveals convergence at the site of professional sport and cultural rites of leisure and play in its exploration of the role of sport in post-Katrina disaster recovery. This study makes a significant contribution to the field of kinesiology, to be sure. Still, I argue for more interdisciplinary explorations that locate black women in the process of meaning making. Centering black women brings our knowledge and experiences of the physical, often existing in the take-for-granted landscape of the interstices, into focus. Considering the significance of black women's theory to knowledge production and the pervasive dismissal of black women's epistemic contribution, I argue for increased studies of black women's narratives about the role of sport in disaster recovery.

There is no political movement to give power to support those who want to examine Black women's experience through studying our history, literature, and culture. There is no political presence that demands a minimal level of consciousness and respect from those who write or talk about our lives. Finally, there is not a developed body of Black feminist political theory whose assumptions could be used in the study of black women's art.

– Barbara Smith

CHAPTER 2

UNPACKING A HOME OF TEXT AND IMAGE: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“As they say, home is where the heart is. So, I guess my heart is 20,000 leagues under the sea. That would be a good explanation for the emptiness that comes through my chest and expands to my body and words. It’s hard to keep going and pushing when you don’t even know if what you’re looking for is still there.”¹¹⁹

– Maria Hernandez, “Worse Than Those Six Days,”

The task of defining home is challenging. Its definition is both imprecise and perfectly knowable. The immediate moments after Hurricane Katrina made landfall brought about a most certain uncertainty about home once loved—it no longer remained as once known. Hernandez aptly phrases the initial sentiment of most New Orleanians—we were not even sure if what we were searching for was still there. Hernandez’ words spoke to the experiences of more people, perhaps than she even imagined, as she penned them. I remember coming home for a long weekend from college. It was not the first time I had done so. This time, I was home with some friends. The first signal that I was finally “home” was the wafting aroma of brewing coffee that floated in the air just as the car reached the top of the Interstate 10 high rise. On que, the skyline of the city sparkled and I could hear my friends in the background, excited that an authentic Rebirth Brass Band song was playing—welcoming them to the City. Similarly, if I close my eyes I can see every inch in every room of my adopted grandmother’s house. I know my place at her

¹¹⁹ It was a difficult decision—a labor—to open this chapter with these words, mostly because it was, and is, every time I read them so difficult to move on after reading them. For everyone who lived through the six days to which Hernandez refers, their mere mention is a horror. Hernandez talks about the swift transition from her excitement as a high school senior to the uncertainty of the whereabouts even survival of her father. Excitement about my own new beginnings in a doctoral program dwindled as I watched helplessly as my home and my people were trapped 20,000 leagues under the sea. In the moments when I allow my mind to wander onto a mental checklist I doubt that I have known anything worse than those six days. Nevertheless, this is a perfect beginning because it captures the dis-spirited nature that recovery would have to embrace because move we must and we did—even if it was simply the move of breath into and out again of the lungs, or a tear down a cheek, or a prayer from the lips.

table—where she fed me literally and spiritually, the soothing crease of her palm against my cheek to quiet fevers and tears, and the loving calm of her voice as home, sacred and irreplaceable. In the days that followed Hurricane Katrina, both notions of home were uncertain, Like Hernandez, I had only a heart filled with doubt and emptiness. I could only cling to the television for information—any information about what was happening in and to my home. The television offered little hope—images of the Twin Span (a portion of Interstate 10 that leads to New Orleans from the east) where I was once greeted by the welcome of brewing chicory, revealed portions of the highway that had been totally removed. Would I ever know that home on the high rise again? The city was underwater. Members of my family were unaccounted for. My grandmother was missing. My home was 20,000 leagues under the sea.

The media presents the Saints' Super Bowl success in 2010 as symbolic of the post-Katrina recovery of New Orleans. This presupposition is a gross misinterpretation of New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home—a culture that memorializes tragedy through celebration. Pivoting from the last chapter's demonstrations of the Saints' as a marker of New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home, this chapter further develops a conceptual framework for understanding the Saints as an element of home. Literature germane to understanding the meaning of the Saints is reviewed thematically, revealing an element missing from the discussion of home thus far—the power to define home for oneself. This chapter proceeds in two stages: the first section unpacks theories of home—a classic black feminist trope. As such, the application of a black feminist lens is insightful in discussing home—particularly when the challenges to establishing homeplace are innumerable. Thus, Black feminist expressions of home pull together threads of homeplace that speak to the recovery of home in New Orleans.

Black feminist epistemology is further significant to the development of a conceptual framework in its call for self-definition of social reality. Only those living the recovery experience can determine the meaning of the Saints' success to that process. The media alone should not be given the power to script the narrative. Black feminist epistemology necessitates the recognition of those with lived experience as knowers with the authority to speak for themselves. This project provides the space and authority for black women to narrate the intersection of the Saints' success with their experience of home. The first section of this chapter unpacks the ways in which black feminist epistemology makes room for a conceptualization of home in which the Saints find meaning post-Katrina.

The second section reviews the methodological approach to framing a visual understanding of home in post-Katrina New Orleans. Visual sociological methods are selected because they generate a rich narrative through the evocation of experience.¹²⁰ Visual methods create a space for participants to recollect and retell their experience in ways of their choosing and capacity. Because this is the articulated purpose of this project, visual methods are integral to the conceptual understanding of the research question. Taken together these two disciplinary foci create a distinct framework that not only locates the Saints in the conceptual understanding of home, it suggests that had the people of New Orleans been given the credibility to craft their own narratives of home, we might better understand the Saints as a socially, culturally, and politically relevant thread during its recovery.

At the foundation of this project is Audre Lorde's assertion that black women have "been here since there was a here."¹²¹ The black feminist framework of this project furnishes a lens through which the literature that informs this work locates and centers black women's

¹²⁰ Colleen Keller, Julie Fleury, Adriana Perez, Barbara Ainsworth, and Linda Vaughan, "Using Visual Methods to Uncover Context" *Qualitative Health Research* 18, no. 3 (2008): 428-436.

¹²¹ Lorde, "Wild Women in the Whirlwind," xi.

knowledge, experience, and contributions “here”—useful in exploring the meaning of home as well as establishing a methodology for such an inquiry. Revisiting Lorde’s analysis, black women experience systematic acts of dismissal and erasure which serve to obscure their presence. “[O]ur fingerprints on the handles of history have been called the random brushings of birds.”¹²² This chapter proceeds, uncovering not only our existence in these theoretical spaces but countering the perceived randomness of our efforts, capturing our understanding of the meaning of home as deliberate acts of survival.

THEORIES OF HOME

Home as Experience

Black feminist discourse has long been concerned with expressions of home and its meanings. The next section applies a black feminist analysis to this project’s central question: Are the Saints a metaphor for the recovery of home? This is a unique approach and as such, there is no extant conceptual framework. However, the development of such a framework hinges upon an understanding of experience. The concept of experience has been the site of contentious debate. Mulinari and Sandell flesh out what is meant by experience, regarded as a foundational tenet of feminist theory, as it operates in practice¹²³. Experience refers to a specific knowledge about individuals’ own lives, their social world, and their agency within it. While not universal, the imbricated experience of the subaltern is valid as an area of study and as an ideological critique because it creates a space for self-authored exploration of the social world as lived.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Diana Mulinari and Kerstin Sandell “Exploring the Notion of Experience in Feminist Thought,” *Acta Sociologica* 42, no. 4 (1999): 287-297.

Feminist researchers would argue that women's experiences were not untheorized before or uninterpreted but, "silenced, misrepresented, and misinterpreted."¹²⁴ However, as early feminist scholars worked to remove the invisibility of women in society and the academy, work to address the taken-for-granted life experience of other important groups relegated to the margins remained undone. While gender is certainly an important element of experience, it is not the *only* salient problematic within traditional empirical discourse. Specifically, Mulinari and Sandell highlight three criticisms of traditional feminist understanding of experience. First, (white) feminist work "does not specify *which* women have been silenced."¹²⁵ The intersection of race, class, and sexuality are indispensable in the comprehension of women's experience and yet, is often missing from early feminist work. Second, traditional feminist analysis obfuscates power dynamics among women. The concept of shared knowledge takes for granted that the researcher and the researched do not share equal power. Finally, experience as alluded to in feminist theory references the experience of white, middle-class, heterosexual (also able bodied, cis-gendered) women. While espousing the value of gendered experience, feminist work similarly ignored specific women's simultaneous experience of race, class, and sexuality *as well as* gender.

Joan Scott further problematizes experience through a historical analysis, particularly questioning the appropriateness of experience delineative of evidence. For Scott, experience as "the other" or on the margins complicates traditional readings. Rereading *The Motion of Light and Water*, Scott declares Samuel Delaney's recollection of his experiences (as a self-professed gay, black, science fiction writer) as "the substitution of one interpretation for another."¹²⁶ Scott advocates instead that experience is understood as discursive phenomena.

¹²⁴ Ibid., #.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience, *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1999): 794.

Subjects are constituted discursively and experience is a linguistic event (it doesn't happen outside established meanings), but neither is it confined to a fixed order of meaning. Since discourse is by definition shared, experience is collective as well as individual. Experience can both confirm what is already known (we see what we have learned to see) and upset what has been taken for granted (when different meanings are in conflict we readjust our vision to take account of the conflict or to resolve it—that is what is meant by "learning from experience," though not everyone learns the same lesson or learns it at the same time or in the same way). Experience is a subject's history. Language is the site of history's enactment.¹²⁷

Yet, this too, fails to adequately frame experience as conceptualized in this project. Scott successfully moves toward a more critical analysis within experiential texts. This approach shifts analysis from one of social reality to one of language itself. However, in so doing, Scott strengthens feminist and black feminist critiques of lenses of experience insufficient to engage marginalized narratives.

Countering Scott's discursive framework, Sharon Stone-Mediatore draws instead from Chandra Mohanty's analysis of Third World feminisms as a means of viewing experience (specifically, marginalized experience) as vital to critical feminist praxis without its equation as positivist evidence. Mohanty's analysis moves beyond Scott's in two significant ways: first, in its agential consideration of subjects as speakers and producers of knowledge and second, in its global contextual framing of local discourse. According to Stone-Mediatore, this makes explicit the necessity of self-defining the social reality of marginalized experience—not to simply create an addition to the existing exclusionary narrative, but to reframe it. "Efforts to remember and to re-narrate everyday experiences of domination and resistance, and to situate these experiences in relation to broader historical phenomena, can contribute to an oppositional consciousness that is more than a mere counterstance."¹²⁸ Yet, critical consciousness does not inherently accompany

¹²⁷ Ibid., 793.

¹²⁸ Sharon Stone-Mediatore, "Chandra Mohanty and the Revaluing of Experience," *Hypatia* 13, no. 2 (1998):123.

marginalized experience. Instead, collective reconstruction of lived experience transforms oppositional struggle to a concept of experience that tracks marginalized perspectives in a way that validates rather than objectifies.

Home as experienced naming, claiming, resisting. Mulinari and Sandell draw from Patricia Hill Collins (black feminist thought) and Dorothy Smith (feminist tradition) to reframe experience as “a sociological feminist imagination that conceptualizes experience not as granted, nor presupposed, but as real historical products and social practices, always in process and always contested”¹²⁹ as researchers formulate and pose contemporary questions for scientific inquiry. This occurs as reflexivity is implemented as a tool in feminist projects for the researcher to continually negotiate *her own* experience as contextually relevant and informative in contemplation of the subject in question.

This chapter offers a conceptual framework for understanding home, its fragility in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and the meaning of the New Orleans Saints in its post-Katrina to black women. Yet, we are not a monolith. Black women became a focal point during Hurricane Katrina, present at every level—some in the undoing, some in the recovery of home. This section opens by providing a frame of context—dichotomous, yet parallel images of black women during critical moments of the storm. The next voices presented will be the narratives of two very important women to Katrina’s legacy on home. They are both exceptional women—both accomplished, both talented, raised in the American South. They could not be more different. They present two very different images of August 25, 2005—the day Hurricane Katrina made landfall. Their narratives are offered in conversant with each other, framing home as experience.

¹²⁹ Mulinari and Sandell, “Exploring the Notion of Experience,” 42.

Home as named: The “refugee” experience.

“I must admit there were many times I wish I were dead. Those people I saw dead in front of me, those people I was feeling sorry for because no one helped them to live—I think it turned out they were the lucky ones. They didn’t have to be dealing with all this. No FEMA. No people looking at you in scorn and disgust because you are poor.”

– Anonymous, Stories of Survival (and Beyond): Collective Healing After Hurricane Katrina

The narrative indignity endured by black women in New Orleans post-Katrina was manifest in many ways—they were castigated as less than deserving of citizenship rights, they were separated from their loved ones with no means of communication or return, they lacked the power to effectively communicate with and mobilize the government on the behalf of their immediate survival. The second chapter outlines the the dubious nature and history of home for African Americans—this is only exacerbated in post-Katrina New Orleans. More than simply quantifying it as hard to define, I present home as a contested site for black women. Yes, it is something cherished and sacred but consider this: what happens when the thing you cherish most (even your own image) brings you pain?¹³⁰ New Orleanians have been misrepresented and mischaracterized even before Hurricane Katrina began formulating in the Caribbean. How then, does one maintain a sense of stability?

The crooked room¹³¹ is analogous to the narrative struggles black women faced in the post-Katrina recovery of home. The crooked room is an exercise in which participants are tilted to varying degrees and then asked to straighten themselves as perfectly as perceived possible. In theory, one uses their surroundings to perceive balance. Katrina’s Crooked Room is a

¹³⁰ I am a black feminist scholar and in that spirit I must be self-reflexive in my praxis, even despite the fact my own angst in doing so. It took me 10 days to write this section because it is a truth I did not want to confront about myself but if I am honest, I know all too well. Sometimes the image of me is so distorted I do not even recognize it as myself.

¹³¹ Harris-Perry offers an insightful and extensive analysis of black women and the crooked room in *Sister-Citizen*, 29. The crooked room in this text is a touchstone for the distorted narratives (re)presented in the disaster and recovery coverage.

particularly jarring case because the distortions come from within and from without. Until this point, black women's narrative distorters have often looked markedly different from themselves. However, Condoleezza Rice, the first black woman to hold the office of Secretary of State is a primary figure in the Katrina crooked room. It was unprecedented that a black woman would be at the helm of the Bush administration as decisions were made about a developing catastrophe in one of the country's most culturally and economically important cities.¹³² Rice had the power and authority to advocate in a way other black women could not for those who remained in harm's way by staying in the city but had no way to flee from the storm. Rice could order mass transport, facilitate medical supplies, organize shelter—but instead she traveled to New York for a much needed vacation. In her memoir she writes,

I didn't think much about the dire warnings of an approaching hurricane called Katrina. My under secretary for management, Henrietta Fore, was on top of the State Department issues. The State Department had a passport office in New Orleans, and we had backup arrangements for our people in Houston. I attended a Homeland Security principals meeting on Thursday, August 30, and returned to the State Department to check once more on plans for securing our offices in the Gulf of Mexico. Then I flew to New York.

That evening, upon arriving at the Palace Hotel, I flipped on the television. Indeed, the hurricane had hit New Orleans. I called Henrietta, who said our people were safe...I called Secretary of Homeland Security Mike Chertoff, inquiring if there was anything I could do. "It's pretty bad," he said..." Mike was clearly in a hurry. He said he'd call if he needed me. I hung up, got dressed, and went to see *Spamalot*.¹³³

It is curious that the State Department took the threat of Hurricane Katrina seriously enough to make provision for *their people*, but not the people of New Orleans. As the conditions in New Orleans deteriorated, Rice's vacation in New York continued. The imminent threat to the

¹³² It would seem the economic importance was only realized as oil production in the country was slowed due to Katrina's devastation to the Gulf Coast.

¹³³ Condoleezza Rice, "Katrina," in *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York, NY: Crown, 2011), 395-396.

survival of the ordinary people of New Orleans did not yet warrant the termination of Rice's Manhattan holiday. She continues,

The next morning, I went shopping at Ferragamo shoe store down the block from my hotel, returned to the Palace to await Randy and Mariann's arrival, and again turned on the television. The airwaves were filled with devastating pictures from New Orleans. And the faces of most of the people in distress were black. I knew right away that I should have never left Washington. I called my chief of staff, Brian Gunderson. "I'm coming home," I said.

"Yeah. You'd better do that," he answered.

Then I called the President. "Mr. President, I'm coming back. I don't know how much I can do, but clearly we have a race problem," I said.

"Yeah, why don't you come on back?" he answered.¹³⁴

From this account one would hardly believe that thousands sought shelter at New Orleans Super Dome and Convention Center. Nowhere in this narrative of upscale hotels, Broadway shows, and boutique shopping is there any mention of families walking and/or swimming for miles to the nearest source of safety, mothers unable to feed their children, elderly without medical care. These are two very different images—black women "refugee'd" in the Delta while the most powerful black woman in the country luxuriates in the land of plenty. Without the benefit of historical insight, one might be led to believe that these could have been separate occasions.

In Rice's defense, she acknowledges she had been "tone-deaf."¹³⁵ However, her *mea culpa* falls flat in her failure to understand and accept racial tensions in negotiating the handling of Hurricane Katrina. In her very brief chapter about Hurricane Katrina, Rice concludes that racially charged assessments and critiques levied against the President, personally; and his staff administratively were unreasonable. Furthermore, the Secretary's description of these critiques

¹³⁴ Ibid., 396.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

as using the “race card”¹³⁶ displays a continued failure to grasp the gravity of not only perception but actual loss for those who experienced the catastrophe of Katrina. New Orleanians had witnessed the swift response to natural disasters in neighboring states, like Florida who had endured a major hurricane in the not-to-distant past—as had all Americans. The response was organized and immediate. Carol Bebelles takes Rice to task for dismissing criticism, especially by those living recovery, as a simply playing the race card. Quite to the contrary, Bebelles dissects the anatomy of structural racism—fail safes that simply never triggered and collective head scratching rather than a scramble to save the lives of Americans in distress.

The reality of a week going by before the most powerful country on the face of the earth could manage to organize the rescue of and to provide food and water for its drowning citizens in New Orleans is absolutely incredulous. There are people who say, “I don’t believe that George Bush sat down and said: ‘Ah, those black folks over there . . . I’m not going to attend to them.’” What I think happened, however, is this: Because it was black folks, the federal government did not accept the responsibility for the disaster itself or the charge for the rescue and relief. And so there was no moral or other authority moving with all deliberate speed—by any means necessary—to take care of the business of saving people’s lives and people’s human dignity. Bureaucrats took valuable time to make choices, to make decisions, to contact a person, to be certain that a connection was made, to be certain that the paperwork was passed on to the next point of authority. There wasn’t the sense of desperation present that moves people to bend or ignore rules to accomplish their mission. That’s where the racism played out. It played out in the maintaining of protocol and the abandoning of American citizens. While our Secretary of State played tennis and shopped for shoes—inside and in-between the seconds and minutes of this real life drama—racism was given permission to play out in individuals, in systems, and, eventually, in the whole network of government bureaucracy. The stingy and reluctant attitude of providing money for people in the disaster was fueled by less than honorable and ethical feelings. These were then nurtured by the tiny minute to minute decisions, such as choosing to go to or leave work or to stay late. No doubt there were managers who decided not to authorize, or insist, employees stay and work overtime to be sure that matters were taken care of expeditiously. It makes you wonder what would have been the response if these people in distress had been in Texas or Florida and had been of a different color and a different socio-economic class than those Hurricane Katrina victims trapped in New Orleans.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 399

¹³⁷ Charles Rowell and Carol Bebelles, Carol Bebelles and Charles Henry Rowell, *Callaloo* 29, no. 4, (2006)1210.

It is in these “tiny minute to minute decisions,” the choice to go home rather than stay late that Katrina’s crooked room was constructed. The floor is tilted as each tiny decision is made—not to authorize protocol, to go or remain on vacation, not to authorize federal funds for wetlands protection—sometimes so slightly that it is barely detectable.

Katrina’s crooked room is disorienting because everything about the surroundings of home are askew. The very markers it would seem should be counted on to regain one’s bearings are improperly balanced. Hurricane Katrina left lasting imagery—most notably, a city under water, crowds of mostly poor, black Americans stranded for days in a major urban center and branded criminals, dependents, vagrants, and victims. Dr. Condoleezza Rice’s unfortunate role in Katrina’s crooked room is included as an important reflection on home as experience. In that moment, Rice might have offered instructions of compassion—calling for these racialized narratives to end. Similarly, Rice’s actions might have been different if she could but consider the effect of her (in)action on the home of others. Instead, the person with the most authority aided in keeping the entire room tilted. When one is confronted with the reality that her life has less value than a Broadway show or a pair of shoes, the ability to stand upright is impaired. Thus, women like the one whose words opened this chapter found themselves in despair, unable to effectively calculate the value of their lives. Katrina’s crooked room begs the question, can survivors ever feel at home in a place where they had been dispossessed? Can they ever stand upright?

Are the Saints “home”? To answer this question one must understand how the Saints relate to home as experience or social reality. Consulting the literature, the Saints emerge as relevant to the post-Katrina experience in three important ways. First, the team acts as a site for the penultimate performance of citizenship, albeit a *new* citizenship. New Orleanians’ experience

of citizenship was fluid, at best, after Hurricane Katrina. Yet, the Saints carve out a meaning for “home” as a viable venue through which to perform *New Orleans* (not US) citizenship—even despite difficulty in defining its borders. Second, the team’s success provides a visual site of resistance—to resist victimhood and pre-scripted narratives—for embodied resilience. Finally, the Saints exemplify an experience of hope. The team’s success presents an opportunity to look beyond the immediate realities of recovery to hopeful anticipation of something better.

Home as reclaimed: The experience of performed citizenship.

“It was like our citizenship went down the stream right along with our houses, all forgotten by our government.”

– Deborah Carey, “Forgotten By Our Government”

“Citizenship is mobilized by performance, but it is also hard and meaningful work.”

– Ross Louis, “Reclaiming a Citizenship Site: Performing New Orleans in the Superdome”

Carla Peterson (1995) traces the expression of home as the experience of citizenship in the writings and speeches of African-American women during Reconstruction. Former slaves, despite being born on US soil, believed newly conveyed citizenship would at last avail them the experience of America as home. By performing espoused American ideals—establishing and maintaining a homeplace, civic engagement, economic sufficiency—“the nation itself might become home.”¹³⁸ Hard, but meaningful work for recognition as belonging to something and somewhere already so much a part of their lived experience. In 2005, New Orleanians forged an interesting relationship with performed citizenship as well. New Orleans had always been home—and as a part of the US, it was expected that in times of crisis, the government would

¹³⁸ Carla Peterson “Home/Nation/Institutions: African-American women and the work of Reconstruction,” in *Doers of the Word: African American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*, ed, Carla Peterson (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 197.

assume responsibility for its citizens. Hurricane Katrina revisited these black feminist yearnings and the conflicted nature of home uncovered in Peterson's text.

The storm gathered strength in the Gulf and a warning was issued. Those who could—those with (ample) resources, enough medicine or medical transport, a place to go and means to get there—those who were not too young or old or worn out or sick or deserted left, leaving behind the city's most vulnerable to bear the Katrina's wrath. The levees breached and the city filled with water like a tub drawn for a bath after a long day. The most devastating loss to New Orleanians was the loss of home—the “places where all that truly mattered in life took place—the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls.”¹³⁹ The social reality of home had been forever changed in a manner of hours. Louis (2009) contends that Hurricane Katrina challenged the social reality of home because it created a crisis of citizenship for New Orleanians.¹⁴⁰ Citizenship lay beneath the floodwaters with the rest of the memories of New Orleans of old. Without food or water, electricity, or dwelling place, the label “refugee” emerged to describe those left behind. Had they not only moments before the storm been Americans—citizens of this nation? Just moments before, having been born in the United States—having resided within its borders, many as homeowners—afforded citizenship rights. However, birth and lifelong residence on American soil no longer constituted recognition or protection of citizenship. Hurricane Katrina had obliterated both the physical structures and belonging of home, (mis)labeling once citizens as refugees.

Katrina was a masterful magician. With a mere sleight of hand, the pride of citizenship engendered by a crisis of national security earlier in the decade was transformed from a statement to a question. President Jimmy Carter frames New Orleanians' critiques as a

¹³⁹ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End, 1990), 41.

¹⁴⁰ Ross Louis “Reclaiming a Citizenship Site: Performing New Orleans in the Superdome,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (2009): 279-295.

retrospective lesson in accountability to the very least of these. In his Foreword to *Overcoming Katrina: African American Voices from the Crescent City and Beyond*, he describes three things about African Americans recovering from Hurricane Katrina that are both exemplary and underreported: their work ethic, faith, and patriotism.¹⁴¹ President Carter notes that New Orleanians' loss of citizenship post-Katrina is problematic precisely because of its abundant existence pre-Katrina.

...I was struck by the intensity of pre-Katrina patriotism even in narratives equally suffused with an awareness of race-based discrimination. A striking number of these storytellers and their relatives risked death while serving our country. Even the younger generations showed pride in American displays of military prowess, were impressed by the speed and precision of American humanitarian aid after the 2004 tsunami, and wept with the survivors of 9/11. As a reader, you may be startled by the venom behind the assertions of betrayal as American citizens in the aftermath of Katrina. I interpret it as inversely proportional to the strength of their loyalty to the United States and identification as American citizens before the storm”¹⁴²

If there was any doubt, Hurricane Katrina reminded us of the power of words—and that of images to reinforce them. “Refugee” rang across the airwaves, nightmarish printed accounts, even new media posts to describe survivors of this truly devastating storm. New Orleanians never imagined after losing everything—some literally losing home from their very clutches—that their dignity and citizenship were assailable in the process. It mattered little that people being described had been born in the US, had paid taxes, many owned homes—the blanket term, “refugee” was offered in description of survivors. It was a simple matter of scripting—of crafting a narrative.

It appeared they were losing more than their homes; now they were being stripped of their very political and social identities. Perhaps it was the wind and the water that

¹⁴¹ Former US President Jimmy Carter, foreword to *Overcoming Katrina* eds. D’Ann Penner and Keith Ferdinand (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), ix.

¹⁴² Carter, *Overcoming Katrina*, ix.

physically had displaced them. But how could it have been so easy to displace them socially and culturally from their rightful identities as citizens?¹⁴³

The citizen stakes out a claim of belonging, whereas the refugee has no home—is a foreign outsider, othered by a state of flux. What is certain is that New Orleanians, particularly African Americans, suffered a discernible loss of dignity. Yet, if you look closely there were specific types of images presented and repeated in disaster coverage. Melissa Harris-Perry argues that the visual narratives portraying the victimhood of black women during disaster broadcasts were so pronounced so as to inscribe a level of shame and blame for the circumstances in which they found themselves post-Katrina.¹⁴⁴ The media was inundated with images of what appeared to be mostly poor black women—young women clutching children or disheveled elderly women—stranded, hot, and dehydrating before our eyes always asking, pleading for help. America watched for days as no help came.

The city of New Orleans presented innumerable images of its sudden deaths in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, but none more memorable than the sight of a blackened swath of flooded street and, off to the right, a sliver of dry highway overpass. Surrounded by ringlets of raindrops, the bloated body of a black woman shrouded in white lies face down adrift in the water. The humiliation of her death is added to only slightly by an embarrassing stain on her anus. Several feet to the right of the corpse is a full black plastic garbage bag. To the right of that, life continues again in the form of a large black woman, bending to pour water for a despondent-looking pit bull, both safe on the overpass.

Death was sudden for the corpse in the street. She may have fought off a fast filling living room and struggled a long while before giving out. She may have floated down familiar blocks or merely dropped in her tracks short of some goal. Her death seems to reflect the special vulnerability of black women faced against the rising waters; slow rescues; the total disappearance of privacy, sustenance, and protection; many with children beside them, many elderly. She is a warning to the woman with the dog. All we know for sure is

¹⁴³ Margaret Somers “Genealogies of Katrina: The Unnatural Disasters of Market Fundamentalism, Racial Exclusion, and Statelessness,” in *Genealogies of Citizenship: Markets, Statelessness, and the Right to Have Rights* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 65.

¹⁴⁴ Melissa Harris-Perry *Sister-Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 152.

she was a human being, almost certainly poor, desperate, and dishonorably known at her nightmarish end—except by those who loved her.¹⁴⁵

The scene depicted in the previous excerpt denotes basic humanity, to be certain. However, the investigations into the administrative failures and Katrina survivor testimony revealed New Orleanians were deprived a basic right to *narrative dignity*, the credibility and knowledge to articulate one's experience and make meaning of it for oneself.¹⁴⁶ Narrative indignity is the inability—especially on the occasions when most qualified to offer relevant, competent testimony—as a result of another's disrespect, disregard, or dismissal as a knower. In the example of Hurricane Katrina, (black) survivors are called refugees—implying nomadic state dependents from a war-torn state, despite evidence; even offered testimony to the contrary.

The story of Denise Rubion-Johnson is one of paradox and one that should truly unnerve America.¹⁴⁷ Rubion-Johnson, a black woman and nurse, remained in New Orleans with her family because her husband (who had survived a stroke) was not strong enough to evacuate. In exchange for in-kind nursing services, she was allowed to stay at University Hospital with her husband and son until the storm had passed over the city. However, Nurse Rubion-Johnson and her family are trapped for five days with no power or running water. When the “rescue” arrives, Nurse Rubion-Johnson—who had been caring for ailing patients as her own loved one required care (not an uncommon act among New Orleanians during this crisis)—is assumed to be just another “refugee” to be controlled, patrolled, and surveilled.¹⁴⁸ An attendee at the Mayor Nagin's

¹⁴⁵ David Troutt, “Many Thousands Gone, Again,” in *After the Storm: Black Intellectuals Explore the Meaning Of Hurricane Katrina* ed. David Dante Troutt (New York, NY: New Press, 2006), 4.

¹⁴⁶ Marita Gilbert “The Next Storm System: The Right to Dignity in Recovering Home in Post-Katrina New Orleans,” in *Human Rights in Times of Transition* eds. Bogumil Terminski and Jennifer Briggs (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, Forthcoming), 5.

¹⁴⁷ Harris-Perry, *Sister-Citizen*, 143.

¹⁴⁸ Rubion-Johnson describes the storm as the “great equalizer”—prior to the storm, she drove a Lexus the National Guard made no distinction in the treatment she received and that of the woman standing next to her who lived in the housing project.

Bring Back New Orleans Commission Meeting on November 14, 2005 speaks to the post-Katrina experience, “I am a homeowner who is homeless. I am a taxpayer and a voter... We are not refugees, we are Americans.”¹⁴⁹ Yet, post-Katrina, depictions of New Orleanians made them feel like anything but American.

The media’s Katrina narratives are important texts about narrative dignity. The media’s self-professed intention was a tone neutral label to describe Katrina survivors. Settling on the term, “refugees” resulted in discursive over-completeness,¹⁵⁰ linking disparate issues—in this case “other” and criminal—framing storm survivors as a threat to be contained (however unintentional) and circulating that narrative throughout the airwaves. I argue this departs from the foreign other “refugee”¹⁵¹ most often evokes, and instead called to mind a dark, insider danger from within established parameters of citizenship—which only served to heighten the turmoil fueled by misinformation and caricature. More immediately, Hurricane Katrina’s rising waters and winds made death a very real possibility—especially without access to food, water, electricity, or in some cases, suitable shelter—engaging the human instincts for survival. Yet, it appeared that in these moments that so clearly teetered on the brink of life and death for some, media narratives appealed to the worst in the American psyche. Psychologist Denese Shervington writes,

The media, rather than portraying African Americans as traumatized disaster victims who were in states of shock, desperately trying to find food, clothing, and shelter, chose instead to portray them as looters and criminals. This is in stark contrast to whites who

¹⁴⁹ Harris-Perry, *Sister-Citizen*, 149

¹⁵⁰ Justin Davis and Nathaniel French “Blaming the Victims and Survivors: An Analysis of Post-Katrina Print News Coverage,” *Southern Communication Journal* 73, no. 3 (2008), 249.

¹⁵¹ Gilbert, Human Rights, Forthcoming; For more see Louisa Edgerly, “Difference and Political Legitimacy: Speakers’ Construction of ‘Citizen’ and ‘Refugee’ Personae in Talk about Hurricane Katrina” *Western Journal of Communication* 75, no. 3 (2011), 304-22.; Adeline Masquelier “Why Katrina’s Victims Aren’t Refugees: Musings on a Dirty Word,” *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 4 (2008): 735-43.; Pamela Reed “From the Freedman’s Bureau to FEMA: A Post Katrina Historical, Journalistic, and Literary Analysis,” *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 4 (2007), 555-67.; Jason Rivera and DeMond Miller. “Continually Neglected: Situating Natural Disasters in the African American Experience.” *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 4 (2007), 502-22.

engaged in similar behaviors, but instead were portrayed as heroes taking care of their families' needs.¹⁵²

An example from Yahoo news compares storm survivors—one black male, one white couple—the caption describing the young man read, “A young man walks through chest deep water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans.” The caption that accompanies the image of the couple reads, “Two residents wade through chest-deep waters after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina came through the area.”¹⁵³ The problem of over-completeness is that “refugee” conflated blackness with poverty *and*, as the media coverage continued, criminality. The racialization of survival behavior exemplifies a narrative indignity that is unconscionable.

The Saints as a site of citizenship/The Saints as a thread of Home. Louis tracks the New Orleans Superdome (home to the Saints) as a defiant performance of a newly carved out citizenship as residents grappled with tragedy, loss, and recovery.¹⁵⁴ The Superdome as a site for citizenship performance is complicated by its designation as a “refuge of last resort” for those unable to evacuate New Orleans prior to the hurricane making landfall. In the days that followed the storm, a barrage of continual, sensationalist media coverage and speculation replaced government intervention, slow at best, in its arrival. Those who had remained—the poor, the infirmed, and the aged—were forced into a new performance of citizenship (or as I contend, home). The first act of performing home in post-Katrina New Orleans was resistance of the “refugee” label. This performance was not to be lost throughout the recovery.

¹⁵² Denese Shervington and Lisa Richardson, *State of Black New Orleans*, 2007.

¹⁵³ Cheryl Harris and Devon Carbado “Loot or Find: Fact or Frame,” in *After the Storm: Black Intellectuals Explore the Meaning of Hurricane Katrina* ed. David Dante Troutt (New York, NY: New Press, 2006), 88. For more see sources in note #23.

¹⁵⁴ Louis, “Citizenship Site,” #.

Still vivid were the memories of the days without food or water, then-President George W. Bush's flyover the City, and the mismanagement of FEMA. Believed forgotten and abandoned by the government, the people of New Orleans view the Saints as an embodied "sinn fein" approach to the reconstruction of home.¹⁵⁵ The phrase is translated "we ourselves" but carries the charged connotation of "ourselves alone," adopted by a political wing of the IRA. Louis describes this new citizenship as a reclamation of home.

To attach your identity to this post-Katrina place, to claim New Orleans citizenship, requires the sobering realization that the statement, "I am a New Orleanian," is not universally interchangeable with "I am an American." While the nation received a "lesson in political obligation" during the storm, New Orleanians received a lesson in the fragility of citizenship.¹⁵⁶

Far from Ireland, the politically charged nature of post-Katrina recovery was tangible. Ironically sport, often considered a social equalizer epitomized this sentiment. The NFL scrambled to source venues for Saints' "home" games, forcing them to play in Baton Rouge, in Texas, and in New Jersey during the season the Superdome was being renovated—and occasionally in high school facilities—with only *we ourselves* on whom to rely and in whom to believe.

Also central to the perception of the Saints as home is the relationship between the team and the City after the storm. New Orleans contradicts a typical relationship between a sports community and its professional team. The city is not embodied by the team; making them different than Green Bay and the Packers or Dallas and the Cowboys. Much to the contrary,

[t]he Saints draw their identity from the city itself, its fans, and their performances...The team's logo, a black and gold *fleur de lis*, derives from the city's ubiquitous French icon. Perhaps for NFL fans, the New Orleans Saints act as a collective, seasonal representation of the city but a more nuanced observation is that the team and its domed stadium provide a single snapshot of performing New Orleans citizenship and, thus, lessons about the 'real and imaginary identity of the city' itself.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., #.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 286.

The Saints, then, become the embodied locality of New Orleans. The team's narrative of homelessness, loss, and resilience on the NFL stage was intimated to epitomize that of New Orleans in the media.

Home as resistance: "Refugee" is not my name

"I've always believed that images were powerful enough to shape the consciousness of whole societies. The community did not have the power to tell its own stories. The government and the media broadcast images did not reflect who we really are."
– Ashley Jones, "Rain"

The Saints function in another important Black feminist conceptualization of home—home as a site of resistance.¹⁵⁷ Homeplace in post-Katrina New Orleans was indeed tenuous. Yet, the very nature of home provided the penultimate opportunity for resistance. Black and gold flags bearing a fleur de lis (the team insignia) and the words "I Believe" that hung brazen and defiantly from structures in various states of (dis)repair, flew in direct contradiction to the "refugee" label once given.

Historically, African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical dimension...one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist.¹⁵⁸

The ascendance from the "Aints" to Superbowl champions opposed the perceived insurmountable odds for recovery. The Saints shifted the embodiment of home from victim to victor. The people of New Orleans found themselves in a moment of confronting the hard but meaningful work of performing citizenship captured by Black feminist tropes of home as

¹⁵⁷ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990) Toni Morrison, "Home" In *The House the Race Built*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Random House, 1998).; Gayle Tate, "A long ways home: the context for oppression and resistance" In *Unknown tongues: Black women's political activism in the antebellum era, 1830-1860*, (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2003).; Margaret Washington, "The Negro Home," in *The Interracial Conference*, (Memphis, TN, 1920).

¹⁵⁸ hooks, *Yearning*, 42.

experience. The social reality of recovering home forged a new experience of citizenship and resistance. However, the experience of home as resistance was especially important in the analysis and reclamation of the post-Katrina media narrative of recovery as well.

Reararticulating a black feminist conceptualization of home as resistance to testimonial oppression resonates with contemporary scholarship as well. Black feminists have long been concerned with the idea of black women being able to name for themselves their own unique knowledge. Kristie Dotson takes up this classic Black feminist theme as she argues for the dismantling of contributory injustice. In “On 200 Years of Bad Luck,” Dotson asserts that contributory injustice results from a thick ignorance, “not merely an additive ignorance but an ignorance that is well insulated against counter-evidence or re-education”¹⁵⁹ that prevents an uptake of testimony derived from unique experiential knowledge. It is this form of injustice that has encapsulated the experience of black women and yet remains unnoticed in philosophical and theoretical texts—even those espousing to correct for credibility deficits suffered by marginalized peoples. Dotson refers to Miranda Fricker’s (2007) *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* as exemplary of just such a text.

Fricker eloquently outlines the harm of hermeneutical injustice as the structural deprivation of sufficient hermeneutical capital to have one’s testimony accepted as constructive to the social world. The author describes hermeneutical injustice (a form of epistemic injustice) as the inability to define one’s own social reality. When a group’s access to and/or inclusion in social processes is limited, they experience hermeneutical marginalization. The hermeneutically marginalized “participate unequally in the practices through which social meanings are

¹⁵⁹ Kristie Dotson, “On 150 Years of Bad Luck” “A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression,” *Frontiers* 33, no.4 (2012): 4.

generated.”¹⁶⁰ Therefore, their voices are often neglected or silenced so as to prevent self-interpretation of their experiences. In short, the stifled group is disregarded as knowers because their lived experience is overlooked or discounted.

The effect of hermeneutical injustice is that it creates and sustains structural inequity. Once discounted as knower, a group is assumed to lack the authority to understand their own experiences and consequently, even to be included in meaningful dialog *about* themselves. The primary wrong of hermeneutical injustice is that the speaker is “rendered unable to make communicatively intelligible something which is in his or her best interests to be able to render intelligible.”¹⁶¹ The secondary problem emerges as a result of the first—groups systematically and structurally ignored garner less *hermeneutical capital*. Limited access to, participation in, and control of the process of meaning creation (in this case, media narratives) reduces the validity of disadvantaged groups’ own accounts. However for Fricker, hermeneutical deficits brought about by presumed socially undesirable behavior such as “a medical behavior affecting (one’s) social behavior at a historical moment at which that condition is misunderstood and largely undiagnosed” is not unjust, simply “circumstantial epistemic bad luck.”¹⁶²

Using Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*, Dotson offers the following example to describe the shortcomings of Fricker’s analysis. Extending the allegory, Dotson asks readers to envision a line of cave-dwelling prisoners extending from left to right. This line represents a continuum of privilege the closer to the right of the line a prisoner finds herself, making those on the farthest right, most hermeneutically privileged while those farthest left receive less hermeneutical

¹⁶⁰ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 152.

credibility. Though relegated to a dimly lit “cave existence,” someone whom they never see (except in shadows) visits the prisoners to deliver necessary food and water.

Not being able to turn from right to left, they have experienced them as shadows or simply as voices they sometimes hear when eating. Let us also suppose that the same person always feeds them from left to right. Now, as a result of being fed on the right, the person on the farthest left would have a unique experience. She would be the only one who has never had a voice sound on her immediate left. She therefore has the ability to detect something about the larger social world none of the other members can detect in the same way. Let us say that given the way the range of experiences have been articulated in the Shadowland, she knows that her experience is unique. However, due to thick ignorance that results in and from Shadowland worldviews, her unique experience and its possible resulting revelations are deemed *irrelevant*. Her testimony of the experience is not rejected per se. It is not laughed at as preposterous, especially by those prisoners who also share her station on the far left (as they too are aware that all is not precisely as it seems). Rather, her observations are *simply ignored or treated with indifference*.¹⁶³

The indifference and irrelevance with which this prisoner’s testimony is met thwarts her contributions to hermeneutical knowledge construction of the social world. This is the essence of contributory injustice. Dotson further argues that Fricker’s exemption of a hearer’s “honest mistake,” attributable to accepted socio-cultural and political ideology from demarcation as injustice is a fundamental shortfall of her analysis.

Furthermore, Fricker moves her concept of circumstantial bad luck from theoretical to practical in her treatment of black women activists and scholars who speak on the very issue of testimonial credibility raised in her texts.¹⁶⁴ None of these women (mentioned by name or

¹⁶³ Dotson, “Bad Luck,” 9.

¹⁶⁴ Sue Campbell, “Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression,” *Hypatia* 9, no.3 (1986): 46-65; Shirley Chisholm, “Race and Anti-Feminism,” *Black Scholar* 1(1971): 40-45; Anna Julia Cooper, “Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and progress of a Race,” in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including A Voice from the South and Other Important Essays, Papers, and Letters*, ed. C. Lemert and E. Bhan. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield 1892); Kristie Dotson, “Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression,” *Social Epistemology*; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Second ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* 17, no.2 (1992): 251-274; Ula Taylor, “The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis,” *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (1998): 234-253; Mary Church Terrell, “Lynching From a Negro’s Point of View,” *The North American Journal* 178, no. 571(1904) 853-868; Sojourner Truth, “Aint’ I a Woman?” in *The Voice of Black America; Major Speeches by Negroes in the United States, 1797-1971* ed. Phillip Sheldon Foner

contribution) can be found in the pages of Fricker's book—though their work to end testimonial oppression is indisputable. As such, Fricker's text renders the perspectives of women of color and black women, in particular, irrelevant. Nevertheless, testimonial oppression is a central theme of black feminist epistemology poignant to this project. One form of this oppression, testimonial quieting, offers a rereading of hermeneutical injustice situated within marginalized perspectives significant to the meaning of the Saints to post-Katrina New Orleanians.

Testimonial quieting is an audience's failure to recognize a speaker's validity as a knower.

Dotson argues that testimonial quieting serves as a practice of silencing because "(a) speaker needs an audience to identify, or at least recognize, her as a knower in order to offer testimony."¹⁶⁵ The people doing the work of rebuilding New Orleans are quieted from the dominant media narrative in much the same way as black women are quieted from dominant theoretical works.

I contend that eradicating testimonial oppression—contributory injustice and testimonial quieting is a goal of black feminist epistemology. Furthermore, correcting for this oppression has been at the root of black feminist epistemology given that both are, at their core, exercises in power. These concepts emerge from the socially situated exercise of power and authority: whose knowledge is accepted as credible and what makes one's experiences valid? Drawing from feminist standpoint, Dotson suggests that those with material and/or hermeneutical resources and power grant individuals the ability to shape the process of meaning creation. More specifically, in situations of unequal power, the understandings of the powerless are skewed or even obscured

(New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1851); Ida Wells-Barnett, "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases," in *The Selected Works of Ida B. Wells-Barnett* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1892); Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Colored Girl" originally published____ also published in *The New Woman of Color: The Collected Writings of Fannie Barrier Williams, 1893-1918*, ed. Mary Jo Deegan (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1905) .

¹⁶⁵ Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Epistemic Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia* 26, no.2 (2011): 5.

by those of the powerful. Extending black feminist epistemology, Dotson contends one's lived reality grants the authority of experience to name and evaluate the social world.

However, standpoint ideology—traceable to the earliest black feminist thought and texts—makes an important contribution as well. Anna Julia Cooper's *Our Reason d'Etre* offers the first Black feminist (or any feminist) analysis of the contextual pertinence of social location in recognizing and validating voice.¹⁶⁶ Evoking a litigious framework, Cooper presents her case for the Black woman as simultaneously raced, gendered, classed, and thus, othered—voiceless, and invisible in the American South.

It is because I believe the American people to be conscientiously committed to a fair trial and ungarbled evidence, and because I feel it essential to a perfect understanding and an equitable verdict that the truth from *each* standpoint be presented at the bar,—that this little Voice has been added to the already full chorus. The “other side” has not been represented by one who “lives there.” And not many more can sensibly realize and more accurately tell the weight and fret of the “long dull pain” than the open-eyed but hitherto voiceless Black Woman of America.¹⁶⁷

Cooper proclaims that her testimony is distinct and relevant to the case of African Americans' treatment in the South and demands that it be added to the record. She insists that only she can rightly interpret and make known her experience. Vivian May adds,

Sarcastically, Cooper begs our pardon, but assumes we will acknowledge her right to speak about the issues at hand: “the doctors while discussing their scientifically conclusive diagnosis of the disease, will perhaps not think it presumptuous in the patient if he dares to suggest where at least the pain is.”¹⁶⁸

Black women have cleared their throats, offered bold, passionate, even intimate testimony.

However, this testimony has been dismissed and instead substituted for the judgment of media.

¹⁶⁶ Anna Julia Cooper “Our Reason d'Etre,” in *The voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including A Voice from the South and other important essays, papers, and letters*, ed. C. Lemert and E. Bhan. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield 1892) 51.

¹⁶⁷ Cooper, *Our Reason D'Etre*, 52.

¹⁶⁸ Vivian May, “Thinking from the Margins, Acting at the Intersections: Anna Julia Cooper's A Voice From the South,” *Hypatia* 19, no.2 (2004): 78.

“As Katrina’s aftermath unfolded before a watching world, black survivors were called, among other things, ‘scumbags,’ ‘looters,’ ‘thugs,’ ‘hoodlums,’ and ‘refugees.’”¹⁶⁹ Black women pled for help as the rumors of widespread lawlessness throughout the city spread unchecked, unsubstantiated, and deemed more credible than the eyewitness accounts of black women left in need.

In this way, the politics of the cultural aesthetic of home come in to play. New Orleans *is* its culture and vice versa. They are inextricably linked. To the extent they were crafted and mythologized as distinctly exotic, it became easier to frame even New Orleans’ disaster narratives as othered. If in this moment of crisis, New Orleanians drew on the element of call and response—so culturally, socially, and politically familiar—they called, but received a much unexpected response. From an ethnomusicology perspective, music’s circulation (its transmission to different venues) visually, emotionally, discursively links the practices to the physical (and I would suggest, cultural) spaces of New Orleans and the people who call this town home. “People, places, and music are entangled with their representations in the media in discourse and together they constitute a circulatory system.”¹⁷⁰ However, cultural transmission is as much a function of the transmitter as the transmission. If the transmitter is disregarded as insignificant, stripped of narrative dignity, the transmission is more easily dismissed. During post-Katrina disaster coverage, some testimony was blatantly disregarded in favor of others. Stories of criminal outbreaks abounded (without proof) while stories like Deborah Carey’s were too readily dismissed.

¹⁶⁹ D’Ann Penner and Keith Ferdinand, *Overcoming Katrina* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), xxi. The authors make special note that the term “scumbags” was deployed by Chris Beck, quoted in *CNN Reports*, 29.

¹⁷⁰ Matt Sakakeeny, “New Orleans music as a circulatory system,” *Black Music Research Journal* 31, no. 2 (2011): 293.

All you could hear was people screaming for help. National Guards my ass. They didn't even save us. The so-called criminals of New Orleans saved us, stealing boats, trucks, 18 wheelers, and buses. Society calls these people animals, saying, 'They don't deserve to be citizens.' You ask me, we should be afraid of what they call National Guards, certified to BYHO ("Blow Yo' Head Off!"). If you ask me, the people known as criminals should have been the city leaders.¹⁷¹

With scarce material resources, even less information, and a developing crisis, a most dysfunctional circulatory system was rapidly formulating. Governor Kathleen Blanco issued a statement requesting assistance with post-Katrina's "urban warfare," which precipitated the events of September 2, 2005—when "a thousand soldiers and police in full battle gear stormed the convention center."¹⁷² Perceptions and tensions only began to shift when New Orleans native, Gen. Russell Honore assumed command of the Joint Task Force, commanding servicemen to lower their weapons, "These are Americans. This is not Iraq."¹⁷³ However, the consequence of the dysfunctional circulation of the post-Katrina condition so otherized survivors as to strip them of their citizenship and criminalize survival behavior that would be normal in any other circumstance and for anyone else facing the same scenario.

Testimony that there was no food or water was rebuffed—help was on the way. Only help did not come for days. When it did, it came in the form of a loaded machine gun, aimed and ready. "Imagine being rescued and having a fellow American point a gun at you"¹⁷⁴ It is actually a scene quite unimaginable. Your long awaited rescue has finally arrived—only it appears more like that of a combat rather than rescue mission. The rumored acts of violence that fueled the characterizations of survivors as miscreants and criminals were later discredited. "Approximately three weeks after the last New Orleanians had evacuated, the members of the news media

¹⁷¹ Deborah Carey, "Forgotten By Our Government," in *Pedagogy, Policy, and the Privatized City* eds. Kristen Buras, Jim Randels, Kalamu ya Salaam, and Students at the Center (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2010), 83.

¹⁷² Penner and Ferdinand, *Overcoming Katrina*, xix.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

admitted that these reports of rampant crime and violence were either taken out of context or grossly exaggerated. They drew their conclusions on the basis of military and police witnesses, who were in New Orleans after Katrina's landfall, not the testimonies of displaced black New Orleanians"¹⁷⁵ The cultural and demographic "blackness" of New Orleans provoked a circulated a otherizing of suffering, excusing inaction, and narrative indignity in recovering home.

Testimonial oppression—as exemplified by contributory injustice and testimonial quieting—are particularly relevant in the case of post-Katrina narratives, where initially the media craft social meanings of the phenomenon. The Saints' Super Bowl pursuit and victory make narrative room for New Orleanians, their experiences and understanding, as their truly unique celebratory spirit became impossible for the media to ignore. As the eyes of the sporting world turned to New Orleans, her people were included in the dialog rather than merely being its subject. Toni Morrison speaks eloquently to the significance of "the last word."¹⁷⁶ She recalls her editor's suggestion that she revise the last printed word of her book, *Beloved*. She discusses the artful perfection of the word of her choosing—that it appropriately captured the themes and struggles of the text. She describes her fruitless search for another word that would capture the same meaning—remarking the editor could not have possibly understood how personally relevant and significant this one word, the last word, was in conveying the message of the text in its totality. The people of New Orleans' experience is akin to Morrison's. How hard it must have been to endure their journey, carve out a path to resilience and then find just the precise words to measure and retell their truth only to have it "edited" or simply ignored by the media. Morrison is correct. There is power in having the last word. Possessing the authority to control the last

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., See also Davis and French, "Victims and Survivors," 243-257; Kathryn Russell-Brown "While Visions of Deviance Dance in Their Heads," in *After the Storm: Black Intellectuals Explore the Meaning Of Hurricane Katrina* ed. David Dante Troutt (New York, NY: New Press, 2006), 111-123.

¹⁷⁶ Morrison, *Home*, #.

word—victor rather victim, resilient rather than refugee—is to challenge testimonial oppression. Defining for themselves the meaning of the Saints as one of many representations of home or to specify why the Saints evoke homeplace is to resist the media’s pre-scripted narratives.

Hopeful resistance or, Home under (re)construction.

“My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them.”
— bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2003, p. xiv)

Peterson’s analysis of black women’s writings in the nineteenth century is an important reflection on the trope of home as hope. She writes, “[f]or African Americans, emancipation meant the opportunity to create a local place that might truly become home.”¹⁷⁷ The hope for homeplace in the land in which they had been born (for many), been forced into labor, and struggled to carve out their own humanity was accompanied by black women’s acknowledgement of that home as a politically, physically and emotionally contentious landscape. Yet, this hope endures in anticipation that America might live up to the principles upon which it was founded. It is a choice to see past unspeakable, generational oppression to the possibility of what could be. It is a hope that despite what had been, America could truly become home.

Is there a place for sport in mending the physical and emotional sites of home? The visual reconstruction of the professional sports facilities, according to the media, represents the reconstruction of identity—of the home lost. In the absence of a domicile, is a renovated Superdome the next best thing? Cheering the Saints’ success has been a temporary salve that began the healing of hope—the first step in the reconciliation of the Katrina-triggered identity

¹⁷⁷ Peterson, *Doers of the Word*, 197.

crisis.¹⁷⁸ The New Orleans Saints have been critical in the recovery of the City because their physical presence and athletic performance offered hope in a most disheartening situation. It is this hope that presents a therapeutic outlet as the work of recovery transpires.¹⁷⁹ While the re-opening of the Superdome was important visible marker as an initial locus of hope, the Saints' return to the Superdome was as polemical as it was celebrated. Critics speculated whether the funds used to refurbish the Superdome might have been better spent on housing for those now displaced.

With garbage still clogging the streets and people still homeless, what could that money have done to correct those conditions? This appears to be just another example of badly placed priorities by Americans. We should all be ashamed to put a football game ahead of human suffering.¹⁸⁰

It is significant that these dialogical perspectives, particularly as offered in the aforementioned sentiment, emerge from individuals who never called New Orleans home. That is not to say that those affected by the storm may not have shared this sentiment. However, noting the context of the presented statement is insightful. This is particularly telling when weighed against commentary included from New Orleans resident and Saints fan, Gail Landry—actually in attendance for the Saints' return to the Superdome.

It was an electrifying, near spiritual experience. I was overcome with the electricity, the passion, the determination of the team and the fans. Any anxieties and doubts I harbored about returning to the Dome melted in the sea of black and gold. *And now I get it.*¹⁸¹

Both testimonial oppression and Morrison's (1998) last word emerge as salient here. *USA Today* privileges the perspective of Jack Wood of Fort Wayne, Indiana. However, the words of Gail

¹⁷⁸ Michelle Janning, "Public spectacles of Private Spheres: An Introduction to the Special Issue," *Journal of Family Issues* 29, no. 4 (2008): 427-436.

¹⁷⁹ Christopher Lawrence, "Perspectives on the New Orleans Saints as a Vehicle for the Installation of Hope, Post-Katrina," *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 2, no. 3 (2008): 89-99.

¹⁸⁰ Lawrence, "Installation of Hope," # quoting Wood.

¹⁸¹ Lawrence, "Installation of Hope," 6. Emphasis added.

Landry, negotiating the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina are found not among a national forum but instead in the *Times-Picayune* (the local newspaper in New Orleans). The larger national narrative overlooks Ms. Landry's (or any New Orleanian's) capacity as a knower—the dialogical meaning is created about her, without her. This exemplifies but a microcosm of the media narrative surrounding the return and subsequent success of the Saints. How very different the national discourse might be if the people of New Orleans, not Fort Wayne, were given the last word?

Hope is the “it” Gail Landry *got*. This hope is described by Mary Grey as “*outrageous* hope, hope beyond all reason, beyond emotion, and even beyond all anger at injustice...”¹⁸² The first year after Katrina was a heavy lift. Coupled with the reconstruction of homes, streets and highways had to be resurfaced or in some cases replaced, power grids had to be repaired, schools had to be restructured. “Experiencing hope in this context is necessary because reminders of the tragedy (were) everywhere.”¹⁸³ Still, this outrageous hope makes room for resistance of narrative indignity of testimonial oppression and the mischaracterizations of New Orleanians in the recovery of a home under construction. Surrounded by reminders of tragedy, outrageous hope grants the authority of the last word on the possibility of home to Katrina survivors.

The Saints catalyze the expression of home as hope in the *new* New Orleans. bell hooks writes that it is in these moments that hope is most greatly needed. Quoting Mary Grey, she reminds readers:

Hope stretches the limits of what is possible. It is linked to basic trust in life without which we could not get from one day to the next...To live by hope is to believe that it is worth taking the next step: that our actions, our families, and cultures and society have

¹⁸² Mary Grey, *The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2001), 2 emphasis added.

¹⁸³ Lawrence, “Installation of Hope,” 91.

meaning, are worth living and dying for. Living in hope says to us, ‘There is a way out,’ even from the most dangerous and desperate situations...”¹⁸⁴

Throughout the week, the team engaged in humanitarian efforts and on Sundays rallied the hearts of New Orleanians—returned and displaced for catharsis—to exchange pain for exuberance. The Saints were, for four quarters, a hopeful diversion from the reality of recovery.

The post-Katrina return and success of the Saints was a therapeutic igniting of hope.¹⁸⁵ I argue that this is powerful not just because individuals believed in the capacity for their own resilience—the loss of home was not confined to an individual experience—but for the renewal of home as community. The devastation of Hurricane Katrina exists as a destruction of the entire city and life as it was formerly known within. New Orleanians lost the physical structure of home, the locality of their hometown, and in being displaced to other parts of the country, the cultural essence of homeplace. The Saints *are* an element of home in that they embody the pain, the challenges, the determination for transcendence. The Saints call to the spirit of New Orleanians—to look beyond the disarray of Katrina, to resist and push past the darkness of yesterday, to believe in a home hoped for.

Between the bricks and mortar: Home built of possibility.

“And here let me say parenthetically that our satisfaction in American institutions rests not on the fruition we now enjoy, but springs rather from the possibilities and promise that are inherent in the system, though as yet, perhaps, far in the future.”

– Anna Julia Cooper, *Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race*

¹⁸⁴ Mary Grey, quoted in bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of hope* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), xiv.

¹⁸⁵ Lawrence, “Installation of Hope,” 89-99.

It is this hope that makes the Saints (a professional football team within the American institution of sport) compelling in their achievement and meaning to the City. The Saints provide not only hope but ignite a spark of possibility for recovery. In writing about community, Peter Block suggests that transformation occurs only after a reorientation to see a community's possibility rather than its challenges.¹⁸⁶ The media's role in what I will describe as *the language of hope* is principally constructive.

The media's power is the power to name the public debate. Or, in other words, the power to name 'reality.' This is true for the mainstream as well as online media. The point is this: Citizens have the capacity to change the community story, to reclaim the power to name what is worth talking about, to bring a new context into being.¹⁸⁷

I would argue this understanding of language aptly connects the previous threads of home. The Saints inspire a language of hope spoken by New Orleanians recovering home, in their own words, tone, and accent that tells a story of struggle and resilience, painful memories and hopeful possibility. The Saints' success shifts the media gaze toward New Orleans allowing for the newly (re)defined citizenry to name, reclaim, and resist the accepted narrative in a while simultaneously envisioning the possibility of home, reconstructed.

Building on Block's work, I contend the Saints are a catalyst for home as possibility. "[P]ossibility is not a prediction, or a goal; it is a choice to bring a certain quality into our lives."¹⁸⁸ In New Orleans, the choices are many—acquiescence or resistance; loss as devastation or as the challenge to begin anew; victim or victor; to remain stuck without a homeplace to call one's own or to re-imagine the possibility of home. The Saints, perhaps, present Grey's (2001) against all odds hope as not only outrageous, but tangible. Thus, the fleur de lis is indispensable

¹⁸⁶ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2008).

¹⁸⁷ Block, *Community*, 46.

¹⁸⁸ Block, *Community*, 42.

to New Orleanians, that is—to citizenship, to hope, to resistance. It sparks an unspoken conversation that conveys the will to envision possibility.

...[T]he alternative future we speak of takes form when we realize that the only powerful place from which to take our identity may be the conversation that *we are*. We begin the process of restoration when we understand that our well-being is defined simply by the nature and structure and power of our conversation (emphasis added Block, 2008, p. 53).

The Saints insignia turned visual mantra is an affirmation that because *we are*, “I Believe.” Once associated with an outrageous hope that the team would succeed, it has come to evoke the possibility of home renewed. This section opened in reflection on home as experience of the real-time, real-life consequences of Katrina’s handling, creating a crooked room of sorts stripping the narrative dignity of survivors. The Saints’ success *could not* undo the narrative damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. However, the sporting context was powerful enough to create space where it had not been present. Hurricane Katrina revealed an experience of citizenship in crisis—the Saints made room for a new citizenship, the Who ‘Dat nation. The Saints’ success presented an opportunity for resistance—to talk back to the narratives that mischaracterized and misrepresented New Orleanians. The Saints signaled to the people of New Orleans that we were “Katrina kids” no more. We could move beyond the shadow of our past toward the possibility of hope—and we had the spirit to do so within us as a part of our knowledge of New Orleans as home. Celebrating the Saints was an important part of recovering home because New Orleans needed the hopeful possibility of home recovered.

METHODOLOGY

Given the complexities of home as articulated in the literature, studying what the Saints mean to home calls for an exploration of experience. Therefore, visual methods are integral to

the methodology of this project. Visual study is conceptually useful in this empirical contemplation of the question of home specifically due to its evocation and engagement of experience—assisting both the research participant and researcher to better evaluate experiential knowledge.¹⁸⁹ The use of visual studies helped to make the often abstract concept of experience concrete in that images presented resonated with the participant or served as a point from which their narratives diverged.

Visual Studies: Defining experience visually

Visual sociology merges photographic analysis and interviewing to contextualize the social world.¹⁹⁰ This methodology evokes participants' lived experience to better understand cultural practices or occurrences. Visual methods also “speak to the truth” by encouraging reflexivity on the part of the researcher and participant.¹⁹¹ “Such multilayered methods utilize photography, writing, and narrative about the images produced to understand an essential question, and might present the fullest picture of a cultural phenomenon, in the words and from the perspective of participants.”¹⁹²

John Collier is credited with the first mention of visual sociology although it evolved as an offshoot of documentary photography and its predecessor, portraiture. Particularly significant to the American sociological tradition, visual sociology has been useful in capturing and

¹⁸⁹ John Collier, “Photography in Anthropology: A report on two experiments,” *American Anthropologist* 59 (1957): 843-859; Steven Gold, “Using Photography in Studies of Immigrant Communities,” in *Visual Research Methods*, ed. G. Stanczak (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007); Douglas Harper, “Visual Sociology: Expanding Sociological Vision,” *American Sociologist* 19, no. 1(1988): 54-70; Keller, Fleury, Ainsworth, & Vaughan, “Visual Methods to Uncover Text,”; Sharan Merriam, *Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009); Sarah Pink, “Interdisciplinary Agendas in Visual Research: Re-situating Visual Anthropology,” *Visual Studies* 18, no. 2 (2003): 179-192; Gregory Stanczak, *Visual Research Methods: Images, Society, and Representations* (Thousand Oaks, CA, 2007).

¹⁹⁰ Harper, “Expanding Sociological Vision,” 54-70.

¹⁹¹ Collier, “Photography in Anthropology,” 843-859; Keller, Fleury, Perez, Ainsworth, and Vaughan, “Uncover Context,” 428-436; Pink, “Interdisciplinary agendas,” 179-192.

¹⁹² Keller, Fleury, Perez, Ainsworth, and Vaughan, “Uncover Context,” 429.

analyzing social problems in a way that allows participants to engage not only concepts but their visual representations and to provide self authored responses and reactions. “[I]n studies of social or environmental ecology and social interaction, the camera can gather information that cannot be gathered with the eye or other recording devices.”¹⁹³ About the implications for the inclusion of images in the process of sociological study, Steven Gold writes,

[P]hotos are treated not solely as sources of data, but also as tools that facilitate the process of research more generally. They help to establish rapport with the respondents, contextualize and lend specificity to the subject matter in question, and humanize the portrayal of respondents.¹⁹⁴

Hoping to understand interactions among ethnically diverse groups in urban factories and communities, researchers later developed a technique called photo elicitation to identify themes previously difficult to codify through surveys and interviews.¹⁹⁵

Photo Elicitation.

“Photographs can be read to understand nuances of interactions, presentations of self, and relations among people to their material environments”.
– Douglas Harper, *Visual sociology: Expanding sociological vision*

Photo elicitation is an interview process that presents participants with a photograph and derives meaning from participant reactions and discussion.¹⁹⁶ Images taken by the researcher, those already existing in public archives or from personal records can accompany and/or

¹⁹³ Harper, “Expanding Sociological Vision,” 62.

¹⁹⁴ Gold, “Photography in Studies of Immigrant Communities,” 143.

¹⁹⁵ Collier, “Photography in Anthropology,” 843-859; Gold, “Photography in Studies of Immigrant Communities,” 144-166; Douglas Harper, *Changing Works: Visions of a Lost Agriculture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

¹⁹⁶ Timothy Curry, “A Visual Method of Studying Sports: The Photo Elicitation Interview,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 3(1986): 204-216; John Oliffe and Joan Bottorff, “Further Than the Eye Can See? Photo Elicitation with Men,” *Qualitative Health Research* 17, no.6 (2007); Charles Suchar, “Grounding Visual Sociology Research in Shooting Scripts,” *Qualitative Sociology* 20, no. 1 (1997): 33-55. See also John Collier, “Photography in Anthropology,”; Harper, “Expanding Sociological Vision,” 54-70; Harper, *Changing Works*,; Keller, Fleury, Perez, Ainsworth, and Vaughan, “Uncover Context,” 428-436; Pink, “Interdisciplinary agendas,” 179-192.

completely replace a typical interview schedule. These images are used as prompts to understand participant constructed meaning. “Prompting a participant with ‘tell me about this photograph,’ for example, shifts the locus of meaning away from empirically objective representations of objects or interactions. Instead, images gain significance through the way that participants engage and interpret them.”¹⁹⁷

Photo elicitation is generally used to study four aspects of sociology: social class/social organization/family, community and historical ethnography, identity, and culture. The simple concept of inserting a photograph into an interview yields richer data than a traditional interview because the engagement of imagery allows the participant to process the subject differently than through the use of dialog alone.¹⁹⁸ “Elicitation interviews connect the ‘core definitions of the self’ to society, culture, and history.”¹⁹⁹ The imagery facilitates participants’ emotional connection and reaction. Oliffe and Bottorff list three ways photo elicitation serve as a conduit in the interview process.²⁰⁰ First, the photographs are objects to which the participants have both a physical connection (picking them up, arranging them, handing them back to the interviewer) and an emotional connection (through the authority of their lived experience with the images pictured). Second, the images serve as a retreat when the participants become uneasy with any aspect of the dialog. Finally, the photographs empower the participants as experts—making

¹⁹⁷ Marisol Clark-Ibanez, “Inner City Children in Sharper Focus: Sociology of Childhood and Photo Elicitation,” in *Visual Research Methods*, ed. G. Stanczak (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 12.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.; Douglas Harper, “What’s new visually?” in the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA, 2005); Collier, “Photography in Anthropology,” 843-859; Gold, “Photography in Studies of Immigrant Communities,” 144-166.

¹⁹⁹ Harper, *Changing Works*, 13.

²⁰⁰ John Oliffe and Joan Bottorff, “Further Than the Eye Can See? Photo Elicitation with Men,” *Qualitative Health Research* 17, no.6 (2007): 852-853.

participants more invested in providing extensive detail and elaborative explanation enmeshed with contextual clues about their social location.²⁰¹

Photovoice and photo elicitation methods accompany individual, semi-structured, narrative interviews in Oliffe and Bottorff 's study to describe men as cancer survivors. The authors find that visual methods are particularly useful in facilitating dialog about an otherwise difficult subject—the effect of prostate cancer on sexuality and intimate relationships. The authors conclude that photo elicitation is particularly well suited to raise awareness about marginalized subgroups. Clark-Ibanez concurs noting the advantages of photo elicitation in her research with inner-city children.

Photography stimulates [respondents'] interview memories in ways that are different from verbal-based interviews—ways that are potentially unknown to the research. Using photos can improve the interview experience with [respondents] by providing them with a clear, intangible, yet nonlinguistic prompt.²⁰²

The lack of a formal interview schedule allows the images and the respondents to set the tone for the interview and creates a space for participants to construct meaning of their experience—which might prove otherwise difficult.

Visual Sociology as a black feminist approach. Photo elicitation interviews “help answer questions suggested by the literature and previous fieldwork.”²⁰³ Conceptually, black feminist epistemology and visual sociology are central in framing of the research question. Together these two elements contextualize the meaning of the Saints to the recovery of New Orleans. Visual methods are strategically useful in tracking experience and specifically, its meaning as authored by New Orleanians. Visual studies answer the black feminist call for reflexivity through

²⁰¹ Harper, *Changing Works*; Oliffe and Bottorff, “Photo Elicitation with Men,”; Pink, “Interdisciplinary Agendas,” 179-192.

²⁰² Clark-Ibanez, “Childhood and Photo Elicitation,” 173.

²⁰³ Gold, “Photography in Studies of Immigrant Communities,” #.

recalling, reframing, and retelling one's own experience and thus, provides a vehicle for resisting epistemic injustice as it relates to the post-Katrina narrative.

More specifically, combining these two themes can be characterized as a culturally sensitive research approach—a method that “can use the cultural standpoints of both the researcher and the researched as a framework for research design, data collection, and data interpretation.”²⁰⁴ Culturally sensitive research approaches allow for the possibility of multiple realities rather than a universal truth. By valuing participant co-constructed meaning, these approaches incorporate taken for granted voices and experiences within the academic discourse. A culturally sensitive perspective prioritizes the shared knowledge of those that have experienced a particular phenomenon—shifting shared understanding from the margins to the center of research. Tillman argues for culturally sensitive research approaches that engage the perspectives specifically of African Americans at every level of the process of inquiry—advocating for strategies “that include the connectedness of the researcher to the research community, uncovering and discovering the multiple realities and experiences of African Americans, collaborative interpretation (co-creation) of the data to produce emancipatory knowledge, and the generation of African-American theory.”²⁰⁵

I contend that this concept can and should be extrapolated for this project. In the days that have followed Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans has become a hotbed of empirical study. Yet, few researchers grasp the contextual significance of the city's culture to their work. Tillman defines culture as “a group's individual & collective ways of thinking, believing, and knowing which includes their shared experiences, consciousness, skills, values, forms of expression, social

²⁰⁴ Linda Tillman, “Culturally Sensitive Research Approaches: An African American Perspective,” *Educational Researcher* 31, no. 9 (2002): 3.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

institutions and behaviors.”²⁰⁶ An approach sensitive to uncovering culturally nuanced understanding is a particularly important contribution to current scholarship. This review of literature reveals a continued necessity for culturally sensitive approaches to research. The first chapter described *New Orleans’ cultural aesthetic of home* as a unique understanding of home through a legacy of celebratory memorial incorporating music, memory, dance, resistance, rhythm, and community. For New Orleanians, this is the essence of what it means to know New Orleans as home. However, literature about recovering home (admittedly externally generated) only tangentially makes reference to this fundamental understanding of the meaning of home. Thus, a culturally sensitive approach to the conduct of research is imperative.

The next chapter documents the research methodology guiding this project. First, the research setting is introduced and a rationale for its selection is provided. Next, the steps in the research process are described from data collection, reflection, analysis, and reporting. Then, a reflection on researching home is discussed to outline the challenges and contributions of the researching from the perspective of researcher and researched. Finally, the chapter concludes with a reflection on black feminist praxis in the conduct of this research project—how it informed the methods, analysis, and very approach to the study. The next chapter uncovers nuanced relationship between black women and sport/physical activity to reveal the Saints as an important aspect of recovering home post-Katrina.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 4.

“Let’s face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. ‘Peaches’ and ‘Brown Sugar,’ ‘Sapphire’ and ‘Earth Mother,’ ‘Aunty,’ ‘Granny,’ God’s ‘Holy Fool,’ a ‘Miss Ebony First,’ or ‘Black Woman at the Podium’: I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented.”

– Hortense Spillers, *Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book*

CHAPTER 3 - BRICK BY BRICK: BUILDING A RESEARCH METHOD FOR EXPLORING THE MEANING OF THE SAINTS' SUCCESS TO BLACK WOMEN'S RECOVERY OF HOME IN POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

Lorde speaks to the systematic erasure of black women from the public imagination, in her comparison of black women's lives, experiences, and contributions to "the random brushings of birds,"²⁰⁷ This chapter documents the procedures undertaken to explore black women's narratives to understand the meaning of the Saints to the post-Katrina recovery of home are anything and the insightful knowledge that results are *anything but* random—but instead, purposeful, systematic, ethically approached, and rich in cultural nuance. Reflection on the process of this study reveals black women as both present and instrumental in the production of knowledge about the role of sport in the culture of New Orleans—finding, as Lorde suggests, that black women have "always been here, since there was a here."²⁰⁸ Spillers proceeds to expound on this analysis, identifying the hermeneutical lacuna by which black women become invisible. Black women exist in the interstices, spaces between space where language fails—both (black women and the interstices they occupy) unidentified and unappreciated by dominant knowledge. We do not merit interpretation. Thus, we do not warrant taking up space marked by the words that note our presence, strengthening fictive kinship bonds to black women's intellectual history and practical contributions. Still, there remains a dearth of even black women conducting scholastic inquiry about black women. This study moves toward countering that paucity.

The previous chapter outlined *what* is being studied—a black feminist epistemology of home through visual methods. The literature reviewed conceptualized and developed a black feminist methodology useful in tracking the way(s) the Saints fit into black women's narratives

²⁰⁷ Lorde, *Wild Women in the Whirlwind*, xi.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

of recovering home. This chapter delineates *the process* of investigation—it paints a clearer picture of the research process by detailing the methods used to understand what the Saints’ success means to black women’s recovery of home in post-Katrina New Orleans. I proceed in four parts. First, I begin by framing the research approach used to guide this project. Second, I offer a description of the research site and sample population—rationale for selection and inclusion in this study as well as sketches that introduce this New Orleans neighborhood and the black women who call it home. The third section chronicles data collection and analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with insights gleaned from a black feminist approach, design, and praxis. There were no extant research methods for approaching this study. Therefore, deliberate attention is given to the process of this exploration. This study, like many black feminist projects prior and many to come, was constructed brick by brick. Each brick laid in support of the next to provide a foundation of appropriate form and function. Noting the analysis of Lorde and Spillers’, the bricks of this study are assembled in an effort to erect a viable structure from which black women’s post-Katrina narratives of home can be studied in the future.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Overall Approach and Rationale

Situated within the social constructivist paradigm, this exploration of recovering home seeks to understand the social meaning(s) created and negotiated by the participant and researcher. The project is designed as a qualitative study, characterized by John Creswell in the following way.

Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action.²⁰⁹

Qualitative research is guided by *the process* of study—commonly identifiable by emergent, adaptable, yet purposeful and rigorous design that seeks to understand meaning through rich description.²¹⁰ Constructivist researchers situate their own epistemological and experiential contexts to make sense of the sociocultural, historical, and political understandings that emerge—often called interpretivism²¹¹—because of the inductive process of interpreting meaning. This paradigmatic stance references black feminist discourse centered on experience as core to understanding social reality.

This project seeks to honor participants by authentically capturing the meaning of the post-Katrina Saints phenomenon in recovering home. Therefore, quantitative analysis would be inappropriate for this study. There has been an onslaught of numbers associated with this tragedy—classification as a Category 5 hurricane, \$75 billion in damages, 80% of the city

²⁰⁹ John W. Creswell, *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2002) 37.

²¹⁰ John Creswell, William E. Hanson, Vicki L. Clark Plano and Alejandro Morales, “Qualitative Research Designs: Selection and Implementation,” *The Counseling Psychologist* 35, no. 2 (2007): 236-264; Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln, *Fourth Generation Evaluation* (Newbury Park, Sage, 1989); Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research* 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999); Sharan Merriam, *Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998); Janet Ward Schofield, “Increasing the Generalizability of Qualitative Research,” in *The Qualitative Researcher’s Companion*, ed. Matthew Miles and Micheal Huberman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002).

²¹¹ John Creswell, *Educational Research*; Mertens, Donna, *Research Methods in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity With Quantitative & Qualitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998).

flooded, and 20 feet of water.²¹² Yet, offering further statistics fails to regard the significance of lived experience.

Data-gathering Methods and Analysis

Archival research and in-depth participant observation provided contextual data. During archival research trips, I travelled to Central City, met with residents and stakeholders, and collected source documents from newspapers, organizations, and events in and about the research site and/or its intersection with sport during the post-Katrina recovery. During the 18-month period of ethnography, I attended and participated (in varying degrees) in events significant to Central City to see and understand the recovery process on the ground. Photo elicitation interviews, however, were the primary method of data collection—conducted to better understand the meaning of the Saints’ success to the recovery of home in post-Katrina New Orleans as articulated by those with lived experience. Images that represented themes from post-Katrina recovery literature were presented to explore the relationship between the Saints and expressions of home. The images were chosen because they reflected themes that emerged from the literature and/or during pilot study. Interviews questioned the team’s success as symbolic of recovery. Is the Saints’ success meaningful to New Orleanians working to reconstruct home?

Semi-structured, face-to-face photo elicitation interviews were conducted over an estimated period of three months to investigate the relationship of sport to the recovery of New Orleans. This particular photo elicitation utilized what Bogden and Biklen characterize as “found photos”²¹³—4 previously published in the local newspaper’s coverage of the Saints’ Super Bowl

²¹² Ismail White, Tasha S Philpot, Kristin Wylie, and Ernest McGowen, “Feeling the Pain of My People: Hurricane Katrina, Racial Inequality, and the Psyche of Black America,” *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 4 (2007): 523-538.

²¹³ In Sharan Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

season and 1 from a public access digital archive of recovery narratives. These images are included below.

FIGURE 7 – Photo Elicitation Image #1



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²¹⁴ John Doherty, "Untitled," *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank* <http://www.hurricanearchive.org/object/42022> (accessed February 26, 2011).

FIGURE 8 – Photo Elicitation Image #2



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²¹⁵ Rosalie O'Connor, "04.05 N.O.091.JPG," *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank*, <http://www.hurricanearchive.org/items/show/25646> (accessed February 26, 2011).

FIGURE 9 – Photo Elicitation Image #3



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²¹⁶ Matthew Hinton, "Who Dat? Second Line for the Black and Gold," *The Times-Picayune* NOLA.com, January 24, 2010 http://photos.nola.com/tpphotos/2010/01/who_dat_second_line_for_the_black_and_gold.html (accessed February 26 2011).

FIGURE 10 – Photo Elicitation Image #4



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²¹⁷ Ibid.

FIGURE 11 – Photo Elicitation Image #5



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Open-ended questions encouraged study participants to explore and express their perspectives of experiences, events, or topics. Questions and images in the semi-structured interview schedule

²¹⁸ This image was posted to the nola.com site by a subscriber and shared in the Sports section during the Super Bowl chase. The image title refers to the three ingredients viewed as the heart of New Orleans cuisine, implying quarterbacks Bobby Hebert and Drew Brees are the heart of the New Orleans Saints. Kinga33, "Like Bell Pepper, Onion and Celery," *The Times-Picayune* NOLA.com, http://photos.nola.com/photogallery/2010/09/like_bell_pepper_onion_and_cel.html (accessed February 26, 2011)

explored themes from the literature presented previously. Each interview was audio recorded and field notes were taken for later review and analysis.

The photo elicitation interview was highly effective in addressing the knowledge gaps presented in the first chapter. Its deployment as a research method created an instant rapport between the participants and the research topic, producing an atmosphere of comfort in which they could share their experiences. The images established the participants as experts—allowing participants to easily identify and articulate their own narratives based on their connections to the images. Finally, photo elicitation yielded rich data from emotional connections and responses to the experience(s) evoked by the images. Participants offered extended narratives and required fewer prompts or clarifying statements.

The inclusion of photo elicitation as a visual methodology was intended to help participants identify and convey her lived experience of the research topic. Participants' narratives made connections between their own experiences with the Saints throughout their lives as well as during the post-Katrina recovery process. However, it is important to note that flexibility of the emergent research design allowed for the inclusion of themes not addressed in the initial review of literature that were introduced in the dialog. For example, open ended questions like “If you could describe what the Saints’ success means to New Orleans (especially after Hurricane Katrina), what words come to mind?” created space for the participants to construct narratives that reframe the Saints as not a symbol of recovery, per se, but as an opportunity to engage in the unique cultural aspects that make New Orleans home. The photo elicitation interview established a seamless cultural rapport with participants and the research topic. Whether participant narrated experiences coincided or diverged from those pictured, instant connections were established.

Member checks were conducted by two independent transcribers in addition to the researcher for added research confidence. Interview transcripts were analyzed for commonalities and patterns, triangulating participant responses and themes from the extant literature. Data analysis included intensive reflection upon (a) the data collected, (b) of the research process, (c) interactions between the researcher and participants, (d) emerging challenges and (e) insights in keeping with the black feminist tradition of reflexive inquiry. Following Maxwell's directives for assessing and evaluating qualitative data, analysis occurred at three levels.²¹⁹ First, reflective memos were kept to document and facilitate analytic reflection. Second, codes were drawn from the thematic referents discussed within the literature. Other codes were developed from frequencies that emerged from the data "developed in interaction with, and (are) tailored to the understanding of a particular idea being analyzed."²²⁰ Finally, a contextual analysis of the selected images, transcripts, and field notes "connect statements and events within a context into a coherent whole."²²¹

Procedures. Recruited participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1) identification as a black woman, 2) residence in the Central City neighborhood since 2003 and 3) return to Central City after Hurricane Katrina to ensure understanding of the Saints phenomenon as well as the unique culture of the City and this neighborhood in particular, both prior to and proceeding Hurricane Katrina. During recruitment, participants were asked to determine a space in which they felt comfortable discussing what recovering home meant to her. Thus, the interview venues varied. In every case, the researcher and participant were seated at either a large table or desk—useful for the initial placement of the accompanying images. Each

²¹⁹ Joseph Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996).

²²⁰ Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design*, 79.

²²¹ Ibid.

interview began with a brief description of the research topic and a review of the consent process. Once participants consented to participate in the study, participants were invited to examine and review the five selected images, which were placed on the flat surface at which we were seated. Several moments were allotted for participants to “take in” the images before beginning questions. Participants were directed to engage the images in whatever manner that they chose—these interactions varied greatly. Most sat in silence. Many picked up a single image at a time, reviewed it, and returned it to the surface. One sat back and analyzed the photos individually and then as a collection. One of the women looked at each photo, returned to Image #1, picked it up and said to me, “I like this! Why did you choose this one?”

FIGURE 12 – Robust Participant Narratives Generated Through Photo Elicitation



FIGURE 13 – Participant Engagement with Photos During Interview



Participants also differed in the manner in which they referenced the images. One participant touched a specific image prior to answering a question, one participant picked up an image and then began an extended narrative about the importance of faith in recovering home. Another paused before speaking, gazed at the image and then began her response—eyes fixed on the image. Her response was not directly about what was pictured but what the image represented *for her*. While the procedures had the element of routine for the researcher, the process of constructing narratives varied among the interlocutors. Therefore, each participant had a unique interaction with the images that informed their narratives and our exchanges —as our

conversation began and throughout the interview process. Black women's "fingerprints on the handles of the history" and culture of New Orleans has always been here,²²² from the culture of New Orleans as home to celebrating the Saints as an integral part of recovering home lost in the floodwaters of Katrina. Even when largely absent from the legitimated images and narratives, the participant narratives suggest that black women indeed contribute to knowledge production about the Saints, the culture of Saints' fandom and the local football franchise consumption. Black women's knowledge, experience, and contributions are more than the random brushings of birds.

Site Selection and Population.

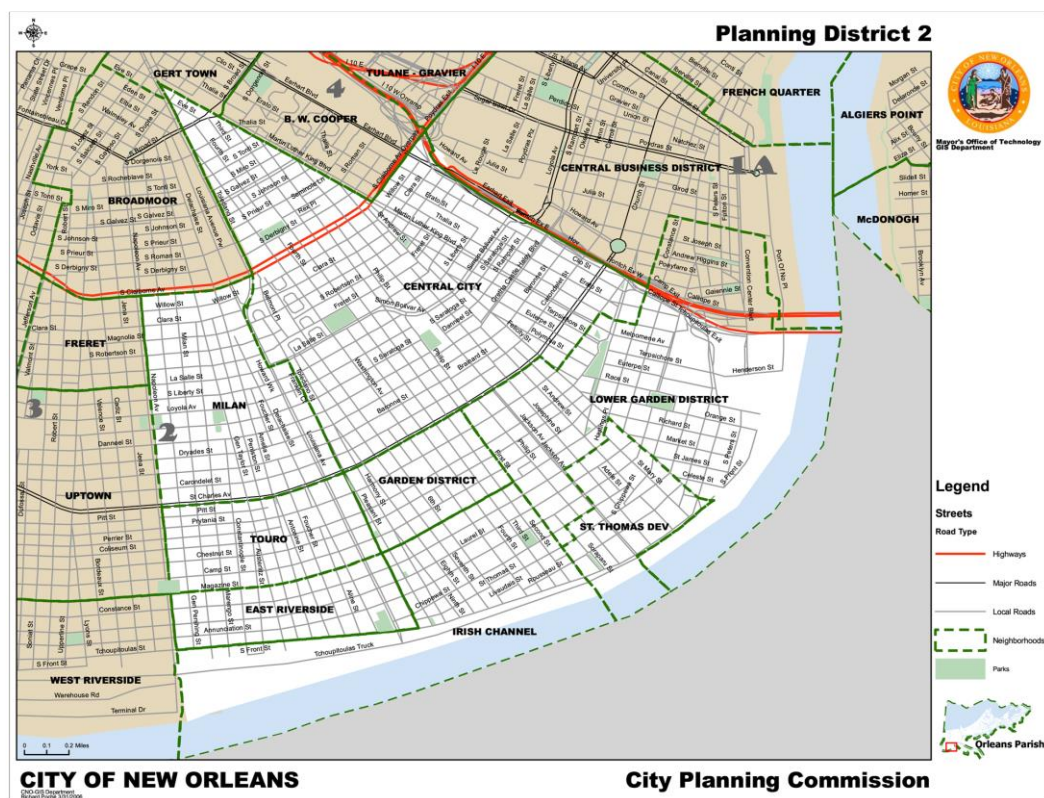
Culture and quality of life are central features to healthy communities. The connections of human life to history, folkways and rituals help a community to develop a sense of roots, safety and belonging. Central City is a unique creative community possessing a vibrant culture that has provided generations of New Orleanians with unique cultural and human experiences that have helped to make New Orleans the city that it is today.

– Central City Manifesto, 2004

In exploring the meaning of home, Central City seemed a perfect fit. Central City began grappling with questions of home and its unique significance in New Orleans even before Hurricane Katrina. Its residents started to enact the cultural aesthetic of home—to transition from lamenting issues of disinvestment and crime to celebrating the new opportunities they would themselves create. The Central City neighborhood of New Orleans, Louisiana spans from Toledano Street/Louisiana Avenue to the Pontchartrain Expressway, and North Broad Street to Saint Charles Avenue.

²²² Lorde, *Wild Women in the Whirlwind*, xi.

FIGURE 14 – Neighborhood Map of Planning District 2



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Established in the 1830's as a working-class neighborhood, Central City housed domestic workers employed in the nearby, affluent American Sector neighborhood of New Orleans. This community later merged into the City of New Orleans in 1852. European immigrants and African Americans were drawn to this area for two reasons: 1) the American Sector was the

²²³ Hastings, Dorian. July 2009. Central City Data Report. New Orleans, LA: Central City Renaissance Alliance, 4. This map was provided by Kysha Brown Robinson, Executive Director of CCRA during an archival research trip.

established commercial corridor of the City and 2) this neighborhood was but a short distance from the Garden District homes in which Central City residents were employed.²²⁴

Central City has been a working-class neighborhood since the construction of the New Basin Canal, and continuing into the 19th and 20th centuries with gasworks, sawmills and ironworks within its borders. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Dryades Street (now Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard) more resembled the Lower East Side than a typical Southern city. Immigrants from every corner of the world flocked to New Orleans and quickly took advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities their new homeland offered. From door-to-door sales, whether food or furniture, peddlers acquired a cart, then a stall in the Dryades Street public market, then built a store or restaurant. Jewish merchants got their foothold in this way, establishing furniture and clothing shops along Dryades. A German baker, Leidenheimer, established a business still operating in Central City. And Italian food vendors also got their start here; the Rouses and Christianas lived along Dryades in the early 1900s.²²⁵

Central City was home to an important commercial thoroughfare—vendors that would allow black patrons to shop without harassment and often try on garments. However, desegregation instigated devastating white flight and urban disinvestment which financially crippled this community.

In 1998, the Ashe' Cultural Arts Center acquired the Venus Gardens Department Store Building,²²⁶ beginning a slow but steady Central City renaissance. The Ashe' Center is an established, cultural institution with the expressed intention to artistically reclaim community where once abandoned.

Ashe' Cultural Arts Center is an effort to combine the intentions of neighborhood and economic development with the awesome creative forces of community, culture and art to revive and reclaim a historically significant corridor in Central City New Orleans: Oretha Castle-Haley Boulevard, formerly known as Dryades Street... We work to involve the entire community, from children to elders, in our planning and creative efforts. We celebrate the life and cultural traditions of the community, and then we immortalize them in our art. Storytelling, poetry, music, dance, photography, and visual art all are a part of the work we do to revive the possibility and vision of a true "Renaissance on the Boulevard." Our name ASHé - a Yoruban word that translates closely to AMEN - So let

²²⁴ "Working Toward Solutions": A Community Plan. October 2004. New Orleans, LA: Central City Renaissance Alliance, 6.

²²⁵ Hastings, *Central City Data Report*, 6.

²²⁶ <http://www.ashecac.org/main/index.php/about-us/history> Accessed November 25, 2012.

it be done - The ability to make things happen, bears testimony to our commitment and intention to accomplish our goals.”

Ashe’ is a gathering place. Ashe’ is a neighborhood information hub. Ashe’ is home to artistic, cultural, activist expression. There is always something going on at Ashe’—always something to be learned, always something to enrich the soul. It is literally in the center of New Orleans and each day personifies the spirit of the City.²²⁷

Ashe’ (as it is affectionately called) is described as an “18,200-square-foot, multi-use facility located on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard in the heart of the historic Central City section of New Orleans. The building houses two halls and twenty-nine apartments.”²²⁸ Elements of recovery are all around Ashe’.

Every visit to Ashe’ is a sensory experience. Geographically, it is flanked by a mixed landscape of businesses—the Good Work Network, a small business incubator; Café Reconcile, a neighborhood culinary institution, as well as vacant buildings including one Central City is in active negotiations to purchase as home the Civil Rights Museum. The simultaneous signs of former disinvestment and current revitalization are more than evident. The landscape tells yet a different story of recovery.²²⁹

The Central City community and its Ashe’ Center personifies the challenges and potential posed during this post-Katrina recovery. “Home” is informed by a rich history and culture which is inscribed in all who know Central City in this way. That does not lessen the challenges of recovery. Still, residents forge ahead, carrying with them New Orleans’ cultural aesthetic of home to assist them in their recovery. They don suits and feathers, tap tambourines, run to catch the sound of the passing brass band, and second line through sorrow to the other side.

Central City personifies the spirit of celebratory memorial. It has seen tragedy and chooses to celebrate life. Often overlooked in favor of other New Orleans neighborhoods (e.g. the Lower 9th Ward and Tremé), Central City is paramount to this project’s analysis of the

²²⁷ Originally in my field notes accessed from <http://www.ashecac.org/> on June 29, 2011. Punctuation original.

²²⁸ <http://www.ashecac.org/main/index.php/about-us/history>

²²⁹ Excerpt from Field Notes

recovery of New Orleans. Resident inspired, directed, and answerable initiatives to facilitate the reinvestment of social and financial capital were established even prior to Hurricane Katrina. This organized civic and non-profit infrastructure was created during an 18-month planning process from 2003-2004 when,

...more than 200 Central City residents and stakeholders participated in a...comprehensive planning process for the revitalization of Central City. The process was guided by Concordia LLC and funded by the Ford Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, other local foundations, and the City of New Orleans. Residents created the Central City Community Plan and Vision and the Central City Renaissance Alliance (CCRA). During the rigorous planning process, residents established committees based on community themes: Strengthening Community Connections, Neighborhood Beautification, Telling the Community Story, Ensure Quality Housing, Lifelong Learning, Neighborhood Safety, and Employing the Community & Community Wealth Building...and then came Katrina.²³⁰

Although other neighborhood associations have emerged with similar objectives since the storm, they lack the well-established, galvanized support similar to the public and private partnerships that existed in Central City prior to the storm and continue during the recovery.

Central City was worthy of study for several reasons. First, the geographic centrality of this neighborhood is reflected in its very name. Central City's adjacency to the Superdome allowed residents unique physical proximity to both the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina and the triumph of the return of football to the City. The perspectives of Central City residents contributed significant narratives about both the recovery of the City as well as local football's role in it. Second, Central City presented a unique opportunity to explore the perspectives of individuals who are simultaneously homogenous and diverse. The neighborhood is geographically linked to the Superdome. However, this section of the city includes the Central Business District, the Garden District (the city's wealthiest, historic district) and mixed income

²³⁰ Central City Web Prospectus, June 2009. New Orleans, LA: Central City Renaissance Alliance.

housing. Therefore, study participants provided critical insights from varied ethnic, socioeconomic, historic and gendered experiences of New Orleans' recovery process and local sports' implications on it.

Furthermore, conducting the study in New Orleans increased the opportunities for researcher access to residents and stakeholders. This in situ data collection removed physical and academic distance between the researcher and respondents—which Gold explains is an important advancement in sociological study.²³¹ He writes, “[t]he most prestigious forms of social research are based on methods like library research, surveys, and analysis of official statistics, which keep investigators distant from people, processes, and settings they claim to study.”²³² The unique social climate of New Orleans that values presence—solving problems over a meal or sharing news on the porch—will allow a sense of familiarity between the participants and the researcher. Similarly, the sights, scents, and sounds of the recovery that can only be understood through presence in New Orleans allowed the participants to convey their experience in a way that could not be captured through distanced interviews alone.

Finally, Central City is renowned for its rich tradition of celebratory memorialization. The Greater New Orleans Community Data Center (GNOCDC) highlights the prevalence of social aide clubs as well as Mardi Gras Indian tribes that find a home in this community—both host weekly second line parades through the streets of Central City²³³ The meaning of home has a tangible presence, regularly performed in Central City and reflected in the community's public

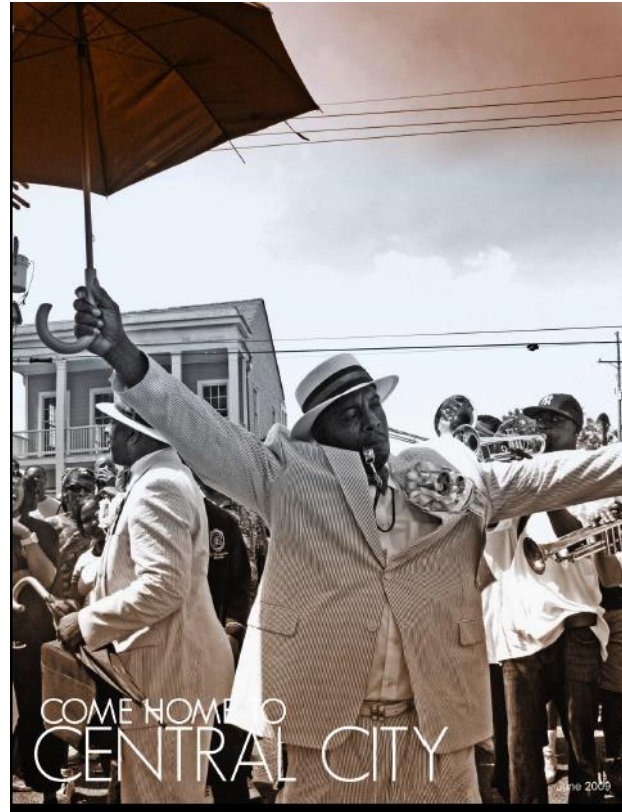
²³¹ Steven Gold, “Using Photography in Studies of Immigrant Communities,” In *Visual Research Methods*, ed. Gregory Stanczak. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007).

²³² Gold, *Immigrant Communities*, 144.

²³³ For more see “Working Toward Solutions”: A Community Plan. October 2004. New Orleans, LA: Central City Renaissance Alliance; as well as Central City Web Prospectus, June 2009. New Orleans, LA: Central City Renaissance Alliance, and Dinerstein’s “*Second Lining Post-Katrina*.”

biography. This neighborhood lends itself to the ethnographic study of recovering home proposed by this project as evident by the cover of this document is pictured below.

FIGURE 15 – Celebratory Memorial as a Performance of Home in Central City



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Sample. The sample can best be typified as a purposeful sample.²³⁵ Recruitment occurred at three levels. First, The Ashe’ Cultural Center, a community anchor, graciously allowed me to recruit participants during scheduled events. I was introduced at community meetings and during informal gatherings to individuals who might be interested in participation. Second, I attended the 5th Annual Central City Convening, entitled “People, Place, and Purpose” on June 21-22, 2011—an annual event celebrating and evaluating the partnership between the Central City neighborhood and philanthropic institutions to ensure community development and reinvestment

²³⁴ Central City Web Prospectus. June 2009. New Orleans, LA: Central City Renaissance Alliance.

²³⁵ Kathleen Collins, Anthony Onwuegbuzie, and Qun Jiao, “Prevalence of Mixed-Methods Sampling Designs in Social Science Research,” *Evaluation and Research in Education* 19, no. 2 (2006): 83-101; Marshall & Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research* 4th ed; Merriam, *Qualitative Research*.

inspired by resident-articulated and driven efforts. Event planners introduced my project (formally during closed meetings and informally at the larger community events) to attendees including residents, community activists, and funders. I was given the opportunity to describe the purpose of my study and recruit potential participants over the course of the two-day event. Finally, I made use of network sampling,²³⁶ strategically identifying and interviewing primary participants who referred others who might offer insightful information about the research topic. Although there was an initial recruitment of study participants, it is acknowledged that informant referrals increased the depth of perspectives presented.

This case study included a sample size of 10 participants²³⁷ interviewed because of their knowledge and experience during the post- Katrina recovery period as well as their involvement in the Central City community. However, data analysis was conducted on a subset of 7 participants—black women from 23-81 years of age, living in Central City. Data collected from the remaining 3 interlocutors was used for contextual reference. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the participant privacy.

²³⁶ Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research* 4th ed; Merriam, *Qualitative Research*.

²³⁷ See by Collins, Onwuegbuzie, and Jiao, "Prevalence of Mixed-Methods Sampling Designs in Social Science Research," Creswell, *Educational Research*, " ; and Creswell, *Educational Research*,

TABLE 1 – Participant Descriptions

<i>NAME</i>	<i>AGE</i>	<i>OCCUPATION</i>
<i>Blake</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>Dancer and Creative Artist</i>
<i>Ebony</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>Childcare Worker, Community Advocate</i>
<i>Raven</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>Operations Manager of the Neighborhood Community Center, Resident Council President, Small Business Owner</i>
<i>Amber</i>	<i>50's</i>	<i>Community-Based Arts Administrator, Artist, Advocate</i>
<i>Sable</i>	<i>"A very young 60"</i>	<i>Retired Civil Servant, Community Advocate/Neighborhood Activist</i>
<i>Saffronia</i>	<i>77</i>	<i>Entrepreneur, Former Government Executive (in various capacities)</i>
<i>Golda</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>Retired Licensed Practical Nurse/ Part-Time Receptionist</i>

A sample, including participants ranging from early adulthood to an octogenarian, with displacement to cities as close as Baton Rouge and as far as Washington State was unplanned. Still, its diversity provided a range of perspective that yielded insightful and varied narratives that frame a conceptualized meaning of home post-Katrina and the place of the Saints' success within in it.

“WITHOUT HURT, HARM, OR DANGER:” LOCATING THE NARRATIVE LANDSCAPE OF HOME

And now, I'm going to tell you why I decided to go to my native village first. I didn't go back there so that the home folks could make admiration over me because I had been up North to college and come back with a diploma and a Chevrolet. I knew they were not going to pay either of these items too much mind. I was just Lucy Hurston's daughter...I'd still be just Zora to the neighbors. If I had exalted myself to impress the town, somebody would have sent me word in a match-box that I had been up North there and had rubbed the hair off of my head against some college wall, and then come back there with a lot of form and fashion and outside show to the world. But they'd stand flat-footed and tell me that they didn't have me, neither my sham-polish, to study 'bout. And that would have been that...I hurried back to Eatonville because I knew that the town was full of material and that I could get it without hurt, harm, or danger.

Zora Neale Hurston, an intellectual foremother of black feminist research and praxis, articulates her decision to conduct an anthropological study in the place she called home. A black woman negotiating her relationship to the academy, Hurston makes the case that she is uniquely qualified to bridge her academic training and her cultural competency in the study of black folklore in the American South. The prospect of native research offered a chance to escape an outsider existence and return to the familiar—to conduct research with reduced social distance as “just Zora.”²³⁸ Hurston recognized in her homeplace an untapped epistemic gem. More importantly, she reveals that she so valued her home and all who had a stake in it to approach it respectfully and ethically. Some seventy-seven years later, Hurston’s words resonate as I—a black woman negotiating my own place within the academy—contemplated a return to study my homeplace.

Hurston’s imprint of black feminist, ethnographic scholarship on studying home greatly informs the design of this project. First, Hurston offers a blueprint for native research via participant observation. Hurston’s recognition of the wealth of resources “at home” served as a launch pad for this project’s native research framework. Second, purposeful effort to shift epistemic authority from researcher to interlocutors builds on Hurston’s study of black folk traditions. Similarly, this project recognizes New Orleanians on-the-ground as sources of knowledge production versus adopting a perspective of the researcher as the sole epistemic contributor. Finally, this project draws from Hurston’s ethical intentionality in data collection. Conversations about disaster recovery are indeed difficult, particularly during the process of

²³⁸ Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Inc., 1935) 2.

recovery. However, throughout this project every effort was made to respectfully and ethically interact with research participants and the larger Central City community.

Like black women, black feminism, is not a universal construct. The intellectual genealogy of black feminism dates back to nineteenth century²³⁹ scholarship, literature, and activism of women including,

Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, Mary Shadd Cary, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells. Contemporary feminists include Barbara Christian, Frances Beale, Michelle Wallace, June Jordan, E. Frances White, Audre Lorde, Gloria (Akasha) T. Hull, Barbara Smith, Cheryl Clarke, Paula Giddings, Cathy Cohen, Pearl Cleage, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Angela Y. Davis, Deborah King, Kimberly Springer, Winifred Breines, Ula Taylor, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Joy James, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Ann DuCille, Stanlie James, Elsa Barkley Brown, Barbara Omolade, Evelyn Hammonds, Carole Boyce Davies. Responses to black feminism has fueled the development of other feminisms including Womanism (Alice Walker, Layli Phillips, Geneva Smitherman), Africana Womanism (Clenora Hudson-Weems, Delores P. Aldridge), Critical Race Feminism (Kimberle' Crenshaw, Patricia J. Williams), Hip-Hop Feminism (Joan Morgan).²⁴⁰

Speaking and recognizing the names of the women listed above, names our presence “here.”²⁴¹

Nevertheless, the listing of these names is by no means an attempt at creating a canon. Instead, it is an acknowledgement of the contributions of black women beyond the “random brushings of birds”²⁴²—as significant, noteworthy, and exemplary. Black feminisms encompass a vast expanse of practical and theoretical terrain. I point to three conceptualizations of black feminism—as articulated by the Combahee River Collective, June Jordan, and Irma McClaurin—bricks integral to this project and in addressing the concerns of black women

²³⁹ Mary Phillips outlines the evolution of black feminist intellectual contributions in her dissertation entitled, “The Personal is Political: The Feminist Leadership of Black Panther Party Members Ericka Huggins and Elaine Brown in Producing Black Panther Theory,” Dissertation, Michigan State University, 2012. For an extended historical analysis see McClaurin, “Forging a Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics,” in *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*, ed. Irma McClaurin, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 6-14.

²⁴⁰ Phillips, “Personal is Political,” 89.

²⁴¹ Lorde, *Wild Women in the Whirlwind*, xi.

²⁴² Ibid.

through scholarship and activism. The Combahee River Collective described their black feminist politics as,

actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.²⁴³

The Combahee River Collective understood black feminism as a declaration of self-valuation, necessitating a politics of activism and critique which spoke to the race, gender, class, and sexuality oppressions (among others) faced by black women and women of color. However, their aim was not to advocate for black women separate and apart from the black community. Rather, black women's concerns *should* remain central to struggles of liberation and empowerment. The Collective stated,

(a)bove all else, our politics sprang from the shared belief the Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's but because of our need as human persons for autonomy. This may seem obvious as to sound simplistic, but it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression a priority or worked seriously for the ending of that oppression... We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters, and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.²⁴⁴

Black feminisms are predicated on an understanding of the contributions unique to black women in both public and private spheres, through individual and collective acts of struggle and resistance. The Combahee River Collective moved black women from the margins of a blanket conceptualization of women, centered black women's concerns, and spoke to issues of oppression on both structural and community levels.

²⁴³ The Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," in *The Black Feminist Reader*, eds. Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) 261.

²⁴⁴ Combahee River Collective, "Black Feminist Statement," 263.

For author and poet, June Jordan, black feminism is a question of love. In *Civil Wars*, Jordan describes black feminism as a love without self-sacrifice.²⁴⁵ Black feminists are called to love what is right and what is good but not at the expense of loving what is good for themselves. Jordan writes,

My black feminism means that you cannot expect me to respect what somebody else identifies as the Good of The People, if that so-called Good (often translated into *manhood* or *family* or *nationalism*) requires the deferral or the diminution of my self-fulfillment. We *are* the people, you care to talk about. And, therefore nothing that is Good for The People is good unless it is good for me, as I determine myself.²⁴⁶

Jordan understands black feminisms as counter to systemic political, economic, creative, and sexual oppressions. Jordan's black feminist politics is a determination for black women to be self-possessed. Despite a difference in verbiage (collective versus individual), the Combahee River Collective and June Jordan's conceptualizations of black feminism echo black women's self-love through intentional resistance of oppression.

Irma McClaurin describes the black feminist project as one that is guided by previous and enduring contributions of black women to address oppressive conditions. McClaurin defines black feminism as,

an embodied, positioned, ideological, standpoint perspective that holds Black women's experiences of simultaneous and multiple oppressions as the epistemological and theoretical basis of a "pragmatic activism" directed at combating those social and personal, individual and structural, and local and global forces that pose harm to Black (in the widest geopolitical sense) women's well-being.²⁴⁷

For McClaurin, black feminism is rooted in bonded kinship. Some of the women listed previously may never have spoken the words *black feminism*, yet we claim an intellectual

²⁴⁵ June Jordan, "Where Is the Love?," in *Civil Wars* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1981) 144.

²⁴⁶ Jordan, "Where Is the Love?," 144.

²⁴⁷ Irma McClaurin, "Theorizing a Black Feminist Self In Anthropology," in *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*, ed. Irma McClaurin, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 63.

kinship because their literary, scholarly, and activist contributions crafted a kinship bond and enduring legacy of theory and praxis that advances the empowerment and advancement of the black community, specifically black women. McClaurin writes,

What we can claim is our own desire and political right to fashion (fictive) kin ties and seek ancestors from the past and present, and derive from their work a tradition composed of Black intellectual thought, feminism, and the gendered experience of African descended people. Not all of those we claim as kindred would necessarily embrace the label of feminist or Black feminist, but fictive kin are made, not born.²⁴⁸

Contemporary black feminist projects carry forth traditions newly forged to advance our community. Yet, such fictive kinship is never truly closed. For example, the list of contributors to black feminism cannot capture all the possible fictive kinship ties that can be forged, nor does it represent the full scope of those ties. While the list provided above is meant to honor the foremothers that blazed the trail for our very existence, it by no means captures black feminism in its entirety. The contributions of countless black women will remain nameless but are no less significant to black feminisms' intellectual endeavors, scholarship and advocacy.

This study explores black women's narratives to understand disaster recovery and its intersections with the success of the local football franchise in post-Katrina New Orleans. This is a critical investigation of the epistemic barriers to the social uptake of black women's narratives, particularly those at the juncture of recovering home and the Saints' unlikely Super Bowl victory in 2010. The project speaks to the practical and theoretical concerns salient to sport/physical activity studies and black feminism with respect to the concerns of black women's epistemic contributions to the community and the academy. This has been a missing link in studies in socio-cultural aspects of Kinesiology and Sociology.

In the world of sport feminism, unfortunately, there is a noticeable gap between our theory/research and our practice...There should, in my view, be more concern among

²⁴⁸ McClaurin, *Black Feminist Anthropology*, 5.

feminist sport researchers over the unification of theory and practice, the personal and the political: in sum, what I have defined here as praxis.²⁴⁹

In these words lies a challenge to make black feminist work, regardless of discipline, meaningful in our immediate intellectual environments as well as to the communities from which we identify.

However, “there is no single ‘feminist way’ to do research; in fact, there is a great deal of individual creativity and variety.”²⁵⁰ Similarly, I am not arguing for an explicitly black feminist research method. I argue instead for black feminist research praxis seeking

to alleviate conditions of oppressions through scholarship and activism rather than support them. To do so means directly confronting the way in which our identities (always informed by race, class, and gender) are implicated in the research process and in the very way in which we relate to the discipline...²⁵¹

I understand *black feminist praxis* as the responsible conduct of research aimed at bridging the gap between theory and practice, drawing on fictive kinship bonds with ever permeable relationships to assuage the myriad and interlocking raced, gendered, classed, sexuality oppressions black women encounter. I contend there are three components critical to black feminist praxis: a theoretical framework informed by the kinship bonds to black women’s intellectual and activist traditions, methods that seek to address conditions of epistemic oppression and the knowledge gaps that result, and ethics that perceive inquiry as a bridge

²⁴⁹ Hall, M. Ann, “The ‘Doing’ of Feminist Research,” in *Feminism and Sporting Bodies: Essays on Theory and Practice* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers), 78-79.

²⁵⁰ Ann Hall, “The ‘Doing’ of Feminist Research,” In *Feminism and Sporting Bodies: Essays on Theory and Practice* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1996) 74.

²⁵¹ McClaurin, *Black Feminist Anthropology*, 57.

between theory and practice. Thus, this project has integrated a research praxis derived from an “intellectual heritage of innovation and implicit critique, from the fusion of art and politics, theory and poetics, from the interplay between identity and ethnography”²⁵² to understand the social and cultural meaning of recovering home post-Katrina in New Orleans—connecting the intentionality of black feminist praxis and sport inquiry in its focus on black women’s narratives to better understand the meaning of sport to the post-Katrina recovery of home. I proceed by outlining the components of this project’s black feminist praxis. I begin by describing the bonded kinship to black women’s intellectual contributions and their significance to this project. Next, I identify the research methods deployed consistent with a black feminist framework. Finally, I conclude by discussing some ethical considerations related to a black feminist approach and native research—each of these, a brick foundational in the exploration of black women’s post-Katrina narratives of home—with all due care to study “without hurt, harm, or danger.”

Theoretical Framework

For people of color have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in the riddles and proverbs, in the play with the language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity?

– Barbara Christian (1987), *The Race For Theory*

Barbara Christian makes clear black women’s necessarily different relationship with theory.²⁵³ Theirs is a practical theory on-the-ground, their concerns far from abstract. Black

²⁵² McLaurin, *Black Feminist Anthropology*, 56.

²⁵³ Barbara Christian, “The Race for Theory,” in *The Black Feminist Reader*, eds. Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) 17.

women's presence as theorists, competent and active in the process of the knowledge production, is indeed detectable if one only looks. Black women's theory building happens in the interstices—in the taken-for-granted, peripheral spaces between spaces. Black women have a legacy of theorizing about their experiences of surviving and resisting oppressive conditions, organizing and advocating for their empowerment and well-being.

Black women's alternative theorizing is a key component of black feminist praxis—built upon fictive kinship bonds to black women's activist work, scholarship, and artistic expression. Theoretical kinship bonds to Fannie Barrier Williams, Hortense Spillers, and Zora Neale Hurston are crucial to the development of a theoretical framework informing the black feminist praxis of this project. Illustrating the theoretical kinship bonds that guide the black feminist praxis of this dissertation is more than a mere exercise: 1) it links black women's contributions to the process of knowledge production and 2) it locates this project within the intellectual genealogy of black feminist work. Therefore, I describe theoretical linkages to Barrier Williams' articulation of black women as unknowable, black women's interstitial politics as described by Spillers, and Hurston's approach to inquiry of knowledge on-the-ground as well as the significance of these ideas to knowledge production about home. The establishment of these theoretical linkages is important because although I am building a theoretical framework brick by brick²⁵⁴, I am not the first black woman to articulate the ideas. The black women who first articulated these ideas are under detected or simply omitted from the record.

Black women's exclusion as contributors in the production of knowledge is a larger question of their concerns, struggles, and experiences remaining largely unknown. Fannie Barrier Williams described black women as unknown—ever present, yet vigilantly disregarded. In

²⁵⁴ I credit Dr. Kristie Dotson, who often used this term in for the mentoring conversations to describe my theoretical approach.

response to DuBois' rhetorical question, "How does it feel to be a problem?,"²⁵⁵ invoking the race question in America, Barrier Williams responds that black women are excluded even from the possibility of a problematic existence—unknown *even in the sense of a problem*. The question of the color line oversimplifies the oppressive conditions black women encounter. Barrier Williams writes, the black woman "belongs to a race that is best designated by the term problem, and she lives beneath the shadow of that problem which envelops and obscures her."²⁵⁶ This early 20th century dialog suggests that even the most renowned (male) thinkers in the black community fail to acknowledge the presence and concerns of black women. Yet, as Barrier Williams asserts, black women's "presence is inevitable."²⁵⁷

This dissertation is an attempt to address Barrier Williams' *unknowability* of black women by exploring of black women's narratives to understand the meaning of the Saints' Super Bowl success to the post-Katrina recovery of home. The study is grounded in the experiences of black women because, despite being underrepresented in the dominant literature, they are integral in thinking, writing, and theorizing about the significance of culture and history, established community, and the effects of (even manmade and social) disaster to the meaning of home. Carla Peterson chronicles the nineteenth century intellectual history of black women who hoped that emancipation might establish America as home for once enslaved blacks. Sojourner Truth envisioned emancipation as an opportunity for home as citizenship. Frances Watkins Harper advocated for the Reconstruction establishment of a physical homeplace—land ownership as a legitimate and autonomous stake in America as home. Harriet Jacobs conceived of "homebuilding" as not only the physical acts of construction, furnishing, and domesticity but

²⁵⁵ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co, 1903) 2.

²⁵⁶ Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Colored Girl" in *The New Woman of Color: The Collected Writings of Fannie Barrier Williams, 1893-1918*, ed. Mary Jo Deegan (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1905) 63.

²⁵⁷ Barrier Williams, "The Colored Girl," 401.

as the act of creating community. Maria Stewart's writings describe home as faith. Each of these tropes salient to black women over a decade ago emerge in post-Katrina conceptualizations of home.

Narrowing the context to New Orleans, Freddi Evans discusses the importance of Congo Square in the establishment of New Orleans as a site to be called home. She chronicles the historical, social, cultural and political significance of Congo Square in the infusion, perpetuation and sustaining of African culture into this "new world." Brenda Osbey reflects on the culture of "home" and its role in the black community's strategies of resilience. Carol Bebelles reframes the mishandling of Hurricane Katrina as a manmade disaster prompted by a spiraling, bureaucratic lack of urgency to act with catastrophic impact on home in New Orleans. Denese Shervington illustrates the psychological effects of Hurricane Katrina and the government's (non)response while probing for the capacity for community resilience. Melissa Harris-Perry's analysis of the misrecognition of black women due to a history of distorted stereotypic depictions captured the structural erosion of humanity suffered by black women during Hurricane Katrina (and in the larger American culture). In 1905 as Fannie Barrier Williams lamented that black women are unknowable, she regretted that despite their vast and varied contributions, black women remain ignored in dominant frameworks. Little has changed in the 21st century.

In her characterization of black women in the interstices, Hortense Spillers contemporizes the work of Barrier Williams and in so doing, the theoretical kinship bonds that inspire this project's black feminist praxis. For Spillers, black women exist in a peripheral boundary land of space between spaces carrying neither the identity of "black" or "woman" but simultaneously "black woman." This creates conditions for disregard—as not wholly identifiable as either, given the raced grouping most often implies black men and the gendered grouping implies white

women. Thus, black women embody an interstitial politics, with experiences and concerns willfully undetected. Contemplating the life and literary contributions of Georgia Douglas Johnson, June Jordan questions the disregard for black women's extraordinary endeavors, especially in light of the labor required for even basic expressions of creativity. Jordan asks,

...Why does the work of all women die with no river carrying forward the record of such grace? How is it the case that whether we have written novels or poetry or raised our children or cleaned and cooked and washed and ironed, it is all dismissed as "women's work"; it is all, finally, despised as nothing important, and there is no trace, no echo of our days upon earth?²⁵⁸

Johnson was a remarkable woman with extraordinary talent. However, Jordan notes there is little evidence of her life's work—little to document that she ever existed. Jordan's negotiation of black women's interstitial politics harkens to Lorde's evocation of the random brushings of birds. Black women's contributions are not only dismissed from the intellectual and historical record but deemed as insignificant as the fluttering wings of a bird.

It is fitting that Zora Neale Hurston introduce this section on black feminist research praxis, not only because she embodies scholarship conducted by black women but because she demonstrates scholarship on-the-ground—centered on the lives and experiences of populations often taken for granted yet whose rich cultural traditions are invaluable to the fabric of America. Hurston's first destination for research on folklore in the American South was her hometown of Eatonville, Florida. Hurston rationalizes her decision was based on the fact that there was relevant, contributory knowledge that she could obtain ethically, representing the voice in which it was spoken.

Hurston's project in *Mules and Men* reframes the assumption that knowledge flows *from* the academy. Instead, she offered an alternative epistemology. For Hurston, shifting the focus to

²⁵⁸ Jordan, "Where Is the Love?," 144-145.

include peripheral knowledge was a no less but equally, if not more worthy site of inquiry. Her work demonstrates those on-the-ground as most knowledgeable of- and capable of speaking to their experiences. Sandra Harding defines epistemology as,

(a) theory of knowledge. It answers questions about who can be a “knower” (can women?; what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge (only tests against men’s experience and observations?); what kinds of things can be known (can “subjective truths” count as knowledge?), and so forth. Sociologists of knowledge characterize epistemologies as strategies for justifying beliefs: appeals to the authority of God, of custom and tradition, of “common sense,” of observation, of reason, and of masculine authority are examples of justificatory strategies. Feminists have argued that traditional epistemologies, whether intentionally or unintentionally, systematically exclude the possibility that women could be “knowers” or *agents of knowledge*...²⁵⁹

While Harding astutely identifies the epistemic problems for women in science, black women once again fall between the cracks—occupying an interstitial presence. Hurston’s work poses at least two answers to the epistemological question, “*who* can be a knower?” As a black woman in the academy, Hurston’s mere presence suggests that black women are competent knowledge producers. Yet, rarely in Hurston’s day or even in the contemporary moment, are black women credited as knowers or epistemic contributors. As a foundational tenet for a black feminist praxis, this study demonstrates a political commitment to center black women when considering questions like “what can be known?” Examining black women’s post-Katrina recovery narratives to understand the meaning of local sport in the recovery of home also establishes black women as knowers in this empirical endeavor.

Second, Hurston’s anthropological project deems the ordinary people in her hometown of Eatonville as knowledge contributors. Hurston understood there was a unique knowledge in the mundane folklore passed down as the culture of “home” in Eatonville that was yet to be

²⁵⁹ Sandra Harding, “Is There a Feminist Method?” introduction to *Feminism and Methodology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

appreciated by the academy. Similar to Hurston, I knew there was a deep, rich, and yet untapped knowledge awaiting me “at home” in New Orleans. My own experience as a native New Orleanian suggested that there is a unique knowledge of sport and play that intersects with culture as an aspect of recovering home. As New Orleanians, the culture of home is a part of our being. I also understood that ordinary black women are competent as epistemic contributors to knowledge production on that topic. Echoing Hurston, I went home to New Orleans “*because I knew that the town was full of material...*”²⁶⁰ to be ethically, responsibly, and respectfully gathered and analyzed.

Methods

How we study is as important as what we study—therein lies the significance of methods. By definition, “a research method is a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence.”²⁶¹ The method of inquiry is especially critical to black feminist research praxis—determining the approach to the research topic and population. The methods are the link between what was happening on the ground and the theoretical discourse. More importantly, it is through the methods that New Orleans is given a platform to speak on her own behalf. To explore the meaning of the Saints’ Super Bowl success to black women’s recovery of home post Katrina, an effective approach had to consider 1) the conceptual implications of the extant literature, 2) the discursive implications of the media narratives 3) the epistemic implications of the disregarded of New Orleanians living recovery in real time, and 4) procedures that would both accommodate the academy and make room for black women’s narratives—heretofore dismissed as irrelevant to

²⁶⁰ Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 2.

²⁶¹ Harding, *Feminism and Methodology*, 2.

the production of knowledge. The research methods in this study attempted to address these concerns.

Two black feminist tools were useful throughout this project: autoethnography and reflexivity. Autoethnography also described as “autobiographical ethnography or sociology, personal or self-narrative research and writing”²⁶² incorporates reflexive analysis into the research process and “challenges what counts as knowledge, making the case for first person knowledge and life experience as data.”²⁶³ Throughout the research study, autoethnographic practice was useful in processing the research experience—data collection and analysis, evolving critique, emergent research design, developing questions and concerns, even observations and insights as a native researcher. This research tool captured the improvisational nature of ethnographic fieldwork and the decision making process by which this type of dynamic research is guided. However, autoethnography should be more than a procedural accounting.

Autoethnographers should,

openly discuss changes in their beliefs and relationships over the course of fieldwork, thus vividly revealing themselves as people grappling with issues relevant to membership and participation in fluid rather than static social worlds.²⁶⁴

This was increasingly salient in post-Katrina New Orleans, where the environment of home was truly fluid—and undertaking research on its meaning must, by its very nature, be flexible in its design as well.

Still, the dynamic nature of this project was not entirely related to the physical research environment. In the initial stages of developing this study, I wrestled with decisions about black

²⁶² Leon Anderson, “Analytic Autoethnography,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, (2006): 373.

²⁶³ In her own autoethnography about being an overweight physical educator, Lauren Morimoto goes on to state that “an autoethnography of one fat girl offers different (and valid) knowledge and truth than that gained through a survey of 500 fat girls.” Lauren Morimoto, “Teaching as Transgression: The Autoethnography of a Fat Physical Education Instructor,” *Proteus* 25, no. 2 (2008): 31.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 384.

feminist research praxis versus traditional research design in kinesiology, where identity is often excluded from what counts as scholarship. Yet, McLaurin identifies autoethnography as a black feminist research method that “allows us an arena within which to bring together identity, scholarship, and knowledge production...”²⁶⁵ My field notes became a space to work through reflections, observations, and even challenges to the research process. Not only did I describe themes that emerged from data collection and analysis, field notes captured my own rationale for the research design. One such example is included below.

When I began thinking about my research question, I knew that black women were an integral component to my research question but were being under-consulted and even invisible in the dialogs as they were occurring....

My first set of data collections included narratives of both men and women. I think I *wanted* to do a black feminist project that wasn’t gender specific to contradict myths that black feminist work only discusses black women. A preemptive strike against “Here we go again, another black woman doing black feminist work on black women.” I *know* better than that. I do. Even academics internalize disempowering ideology we know should be ignored. However, it is powerful, especially for me as a junior scholar.

I returned to East Lansing and began listening to the recorded interviews. I listened and listened again. I didn’t transcribe a single syllable. I just listened to the narratives. All of them at first and then just the women—the depth, the texture, the wisdom of the stories. I knew the narratives of the women were strong enough to stand alone. I didn’t need to legitimize their narratives with the inclusion of anyone else. Furthermore, by shifting the focus to the narratives of black women I would be holding fast to my values as a black feminist researcher. In August, I limited my sample to “black women living in Central City.”²⁶⁶

Throughout the study, autoethnography was useful in highlighting knowledge derived not only from the data but from the conduct of research. Even the excerpt presented above illustrates

²⁶⁵ McLaurin, *Black Feminist Anthropology*, 61.

²⁶⁶ Excerpt taken from Field Notes

analysis of the dissonance between external narratives and those generated by those with lived experience—my own as a native researcher.

Reflexive practices made important contributions to the black feminist praxis of this project as well. Reflexivity sampling²⁶⁷ or documented reflective, incremental assessments of the research process (e.g. blog, vlog, memos, field notes, or diary) offered an additional vital lens of analysis. Separate from procedural notes, these reflexive “memos” often contained material that “blurred the lines” of research—but were important nonetheless. In a meeting with one of the participants, I encountered what I can only describe as “uncomfortable distance” between myself and the research participant. As often as the topic of is discussed in coursework and literature, I was still unprepared for that moment. I described the encounter in my field notes later that night.

There was a period during my interview with Sable where we reached very difficult subject matter—when she discussed her realization of the destruction to New Orleans, her home. As she talked about what she saw and what she felt, the emotions overtook her—and me. There were painful, painful moments when she re-lived the agony of losing home and tried to find words that could capture that experience. She could not. Strangest thing, in the same way, in the same moments she struggled to place her experience in words, *I* was struggling—I recalled my own moments of visual reconciliation with the horror of Hurricane Katrina. It was almost as if the waters began to rise again—like I could feel them physically rising from the pit of my stomach and engulfing everything within me. Rising. Rising. Tears filled her eyes like rivers and fell heavy with the weight of sorrows too great to name. I blinked back my own tears as I had so many times before—held them tightly as I could. *Not now, not yet.* I wanted to go sit next her, to clutch onto this woman who is like a mother to me and just cry together...but, I was unsure where the boundary fell between researcher and family. And so, we sat together in silence—just *feeling* until she regained her composure and moved gingerly into her next thoughts.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Sharlene N. Hesse-Biber and Deborah Piatelli, “Holistic Reflexivity: The Feminist Practice of Reflexivity,” In *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007) 509.

²⁶⁸ Excerpt taken from Field Notes

These are the moments and experiences that do not fit neatly into traditional, distanced research texts. Yet, they are critical in understanding the ways in which one's research topic, conceptual framework, method, and even identity are important. Reflexive practice created an analytical space to process and make connections to between several themes about distance between the researcher and the women living recovery (and seeing myself in that role) in a way that was thorny, at best, in the moment. While the issue of researcher distance was not resolved before the next interview, I was able to allow the participants and myself room for their narratives (and our difficulties in revisiting them) to breathe.

The embricated nature of the research methods—empowering participants as experts, the significance of a native researcher, a theoretical framework informed by black feminist praxis, and fictive kinship with black women's intellectual and activist history—makes room for research that honors black women as knowledge producers. Each element vital to the construction of this project. The following sections capture the labor of the brickwork. The intricate and intentional design layered multiple theoretical and practical insight to hear from black women routinely and systematically dismissed. Antithetical to “the random brushings of birds,” this judicious inquiry centers black women's knowledge, experiences, and contributions to understand the role of sport in the post-Katrina recovery of home.

Ethical Considerations

Patricia Hill Collins describes these unquantifiable experiences as a transition beyond feminist commitments not to exploit research participants²⁶⁹ to an ethic of caring and identifies

²⁶⁹ Marjorie DeVault and Glenda Gross, “Feminist Interviewing: Experience, Talk, and Knowledge,” In *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007) 187;

three components: individual expressiveness, the appropriateness of emotions, and the capacity for empathy.²⁷⁰ The previous example from my field notes demonstrates the taxing nature of black feminist praxis. In even the most delicate moments, these three components look different for different participants. Despite my grapplings over researcher-participant distance, the empathy required in that moment was silence and a space to reconcile the participant's (and my own) emotion. Having space to reflect and craft her narrative without apology was powerful and freeing—but remembrance can be painful as well. The previous example considers the implications of an ethic of caring on physical space—and its importance in connecting with participants. Yet, the ethic of caring is equally important in the elimination of narrative space as well.

Issues of power and authority are present in all research.²⁷¹ A common thread across all texts is the power differential existing between researcher and research participant. As the researcher, I took the following steps to reduce the distance between myself and those involved in the research study. First, the research design was intended to shift authority from the researcher to interview respondents by “decentering the researcher’s voice” and privileging participants’ experience from the margins to center.²⁷² “(I)nterviewing offers researchers access to people’s lives, ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the

Reinharz Shulamit, “Feminist Interview Research,” In *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992) 27; Alison Wylie, “The Feminism Question in Science: What Does It Mean To ‘Do Science As a Feminist’?,” In *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007) 570.

²⁷⁰ Patricia Hill Collins, “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought,” in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 234-236.

²⁷¹ DeVault and Gross, “Feminist Interviewing”; Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Deborah Piatelli, “From Theory to Method and Back Again: The Synergistic Praxis of Theory and Method,” In *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007) 49; Gesa Kirsch, *Ethical Dilemmas in Feminist Research: The Politics of Location, Interpretation, and Publication* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999) 31; Ann Oakley, “Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms,” In *Doing Feminist Research*, ed. Helen Roberts (New York, NY: Routledge, 1988) 37 ; Shulamit, “Feminist Interview Research,” 19.

²⁷² Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, “From Theory to Method and Back Again,” #

researcher.”²⁷³ Quite literally, my voice is least detectable in interview recordings and transcripts. After offering prompts, interlocutors were given the space to share narratives uninterrupted. Findings include direct quotations to illustrate relevant themes. I have included extended quotations where possible to illustrate black women’s epistemic contributions to the meaning of sport in New Orleans’ post-Katrina recovery of home.

Second, I hoped to evoke a conversational environment during interview sessions by encouraging narrative construction as a means of reflection on posed questions. I encouraged participants to share stories that illustrated a particular point. Hilary Graham characterizes this form of sharing stories as exemplary of a feminist research ethic.

In stories, data and interpretation are fused, the story-line providing the interpretive framework through which the data are constructed. The story, moreover, marks the boundaries of what the individual is prepared to tell...²⁷⁴

Before asking any questions, I explained that few of the interview questions are predetermined—that the participants’ stories are their own to tell. Therefore, open-ended questions were posed casually to call to mind stories that reflect self-authored experience of the research phenomenon. As expected, the resulting narratives varied in the range of intimacy and length. “People’s stories are shaped by the formats available to them and reflect the perspectives and values of their communities.”²⁷⁵ However, the ethic of caring made room for relationships between myself and the participants that allowed those nurtured the organic nature those formats as they emerged.

Blake, a dancer and creative artist had been struggling with a creative block for almost a year at the time of our first interview. As we sat in her living room, she recalled in great detail

²⁷³ Reinhartz, “Feminist Interview Research,” 18.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 30.

²⁷⁵ DeVault and Gross, “Feminist Interviewing,” 185.

her Katrina experience and recovery. While I listened for the “gaps,”²⁷⁶ it was clear that at least part of this was related to the storm. In our follow-up our conversation, Blake wanted me to know that she had not only been writing again but had performed twice in two months since our last interview. She updated me excitedly,

It was like something really was birthing out of me; this bubbling thing was coming out of me. It was amazing. People were (asking) “Why are you holding back that fire? Are crazy? What’s wrong with you? It’s just an amazing feeling to just have those connections. So, I just thought that I would share that with you.”²⁷⁷

Blake continued to share that our conversation was the first time she had been able to talk about Hurricane Katrina, the loss of her mother, and being able to watch her celebrate the Saints before her passing. While the facts of Blake’s narrative are important, the act of performance is paramount. As an artist, her ability to return to the vibrant nature of her character and the way she experienced New Orleans as home prior to the storm adds a depth and perspective to her recovery narrative that cannot be underappreciated. Discussing the Saints created a venue for Blake to express the team’s significance to her mother and the way(s) she makes connections between the team’s success and the recovery of New Orleans as home. The ethic of caring gave Blake a space for the recovery of her own creative expression.

Generalizability. Scholars of qualitative research²⁷⁸ warn that positivist criteria for evaluation are not relevant to constructivist designs. Schofield makes a distinction between the goal of generalizability in quantitative and qualitative research. Generalizability in the former assumes a replication of the study would yield similar results. The goal of the latter, however, is

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 183.

²⁷⁷ Except from Interview Transcript

²⁷⁸ Guba and Lincoln, *Fourth Generation Evaluation*; Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*; Schofield, “Increasing Generalizability,”

not to produce a standardized set of results that any other careful researcher in the same situation or studying the same issue would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that it is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation.²⁷⁹

Generalizability in qualitative work should be reconceptualized as “fitness” between one study and others interested in the same question or conclusions. However, this approach to inquiry *does* seek to address conceptual rigor. Therefore, constructivism measures quality of evaluation in the following three ways: trustworthiness, nature of hermeneutic process itself, and authenticity.

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness measures can be thought of as parallel to internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity in traditional quantitative inquiry. Credibility, most similar to internal validity, refers to the respondents’ constructed meanings or realities and the reality as presented by the researcher. Persistent observation, peer debriefing, and a review panel were deployed to increase the likelihood of credibility in this study.²⁸⁰ Systematic peer debriefings after periods of interviewing and observations were conducted frequently throughout the 18 month period of ethnography for feedback, support, and practical advice about the project from other colleagues and mentors. Interviews were transcribed by a team and then reviewed for commonalities. Codes were then compared to peer debriefing sessions as well as field notes.

Parallel to external validity, transferability, refers to the similarity of conditions in studies with the same interests. Transferability was best reached through thick description.²⁸¹

Throughout the data collection process, detailed field notes captured rich description of interview sites, participant behaviors and engagement, insights gathered from researcher-participant

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 174.

²⁸⁰ Guba and Lincoln, *Fourth Generation Evaluation*; Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*.

²⁸¹ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” In *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973); Guba and Lincoln, *Fourth Generation Evaluation*; Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*; Merriam, *Qualitative Research*; Schofield, “Increasing Generalizability”

interactions, and the social pulse of Central City and the greater New Orleans community. These field notes were consulted during data collection and evaluated during analysis to provide additional researcher reflexivity. Thick description was achieved using autoethnography and reflexivity as black feminist research praxis. Together, these two tools provided rich detail of the settings, analytical context, and biographical researcher insights to frame the study's theoretical implications.

Dependability. Dependability in qualitative research parallels quantitative reliability. Dependability, however, is less concerned with the static nature of data than in positivist approach. Dependability necessarily makes room for emergent constructions, realities, and design—with the caveat that these changes reflect development in conceptual thought and are traceable through field notes. Every decision relative to the design and execution of this study has been documented. While the paradigmatic framework of this study makes room for emergent design, rigorous field notes detail insights, challenges, and themes as they arose.

The Hermeneutical Process. Authenticity ensures that the researcher's findings can be confirmed. Quite simply, would another verify that the product(s) of your work are attributable to participant contributions, involvement, and empowerment? Again, interviews were transcribed by the researcher and two others. Interview transcriptions and recordings will be kept for five years after conclusion of data collection, leaving an audit trail by which the research can be tracked. Relevant participant quotations and interactions, as well as extended excerpts from field notes are included in the study findings. Participants were provided an opportunity to offer feedback after the initial interview in follow-up conversations. One participant, Blake, requested a follow-up conversation to add to one an additional response about the connection of faith, the Saints, and the culture of home. Blake connects the themes in this way,

It's not much but I just was thinking back on the pictures and how the people had the Saints jerseys, and they were praying. And, I was...really meditating on that image and...I was thinking prayer is really strong because even the die-hard people who really...love the Saints really had faith and they really *believed* so of course they would pray for them. And then I just thought of it as parallel to my life. How I prayed to be safe during Katrina and how I prayed to just be sane after the whole situation...So I just was thinking about the power of prayer and how sometimes we can get out of touch with that side of ourselves and we wonder, "how am I going to make it?" because that's what I kind of went through. Of course, I was this very vibrant person before the storm and after the storm and then when I had my daughter I was like, "how am I going to do this?" But then seeing that picture really just brought it to life that prayer is a powerful thing.²⁸²

Blake felt it was important to return to this point because she believed these ideas to be not only intertwined but central in the recovery efforts of New Orleans.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans is "full of material" and unlike many others with no understanding or appreciation for the sacred and troubled space of home in New Orleans I could "get it without hurt, harm, or danger." That is not to say that the methods by which this undertaking was accomplished was simple or haphazard. There was no pre-existing blueprint for an exploration of home of this nature. This evolved as an inquiry built brick by brick—each element concrete but interconnected and intentionally configured. Documenting the study's rationale, data gathering methods, site and participants is undoubtedly important to methodology. However, the black feminist framework of theory and praxis upon which every aspect is built carries the load of home for this project and helps move black women's knowledge, experiences, and contributions beyond the "random brushings of birds."

²⁸² Excerpt taken from interview transcript

The black woman artist will revere the black woman. For it is her duty to to record and capture with song, clay, strings, dance and in this case, ink, the joys and pains of black womanhood. And the person who is sane, secure and sensitive enough to revere her art is the same person who will revere her for life.

– Renita Weems

CHAPTER 4 - DISAST/HER DIALOGS: FINDING THE SAINTS IN BLACK WOMEN'S NARRATIVES OF RECOVERING HOME

I have to admit, despite the painful and public debates over the fate of public housing post-Katrina, Harmony Oaks is beautiful. How much of my life has been spent on these streets? In a second line? Or at one of the block parties hosted by many rappers from this area when I was a teenager? Or following the Indians? Many memories. If I close my eyes, they would replay like a digital video. Even now, I can feel them. It is as if the street still carries their rhythm.

I am a few minutes early so I make notes to fill the time. It has become a habit, documenting. The new structures are reminiscent of older New Orleans architecture—a blend of brick and siding. It is a bright, sunny day and people are passing on their way to conduct their daily business. Is this how an ordinary weekday felt before? I'm not sure I remember?...

The walk to Raven's office gave me an opportunity to look around the Community Center. The office spaces are beautiful and well apportioned. The staff is friendly and helpful. There is a community computer center—being utilized. I thought, "This is a major step from the demolition of the Magnolia." I had met Raven only briefly, but this interview was our first conversation. I would not say her greeting was one of a friend, but I understand. Why should she trust me? Academics have come to low-income communities, particularly those in public housing developments, with less than noble intentions and shown themselves to be less than honorable. I can say that Raven was gracious. Always gracious...

And then, everything about the rapport between us shifted. I asked, "So where did you go to school? That's such a New Orleans question, I know, where did you go to school?" First, Raven talked about her elementary school in the neighborhood and then she said, "And following, I went to the Eleanor McMain Magnet School from 7th-12th." That was where I went to high school as well.

"What year did you graduate?" I asked her.

"'87."

"Well, I graduated in '95." I told her.

*"Oh, you went **there**?" she asked, a little surprised.*

"I went from 89...? 7th-12th."

It was a moment in which there was an unspoken connection—I'm not that unlike you. We began to talk about classes, hangouts, and past times in Central City. Raven saw me not as the girl who left New Orleans for better (insert your own noun here) but the girl that walked on the same streets, knew the same music, went to the same school, had the same teachers...It also suggested the same apprehensions I had about feeling distance from Raven, she had about feeling distance from me. However, from that moment we had a conversation like old girlfriends. So much so, that when it was time for me to tour the property, her secretary jokingly interrupted on the intercom, "I'm sorry to break up your midday Happy Hour, but some of us are down here working hard. Listen, Danielle is down here to see you."

*This day with Raven has left me with some truly powerful messages about recovery. I'm still not sure what I have learned from all I have seen and heard and felt. As I think about my project, it occurs to me that Raven's narrative was very insightful as a starting point for analysis...*²⁸³

*"...a moment for me was, coming in from Houston on the bridge, and there were no signs, no street signs in different areas, and (her partner) was living in a hotel on Canal Street. Canal Street looked like a new city. I didn't know where I was. I was driving myself—"Okay, what street is **this**? What street is **this**?" That was like... Are we going to recover? I was saying, "Lord, I don't—will we **ever** be able to come back to New Orleans?"*
— Raven²⁸⁴

Raven's last words were piercing. Her experience in New Orleans as "a new city," was particularly telling. Raven had been a resident of public housing for much of her life—she had moved into the Magnolia Housing Development when "was 3 years old, making 4."²⁸⁵ At 41, she is the President of the Harmony Oaks Resident Association and a small business owner. Yet, after the storm, the city had waged what had become a long and bitter debate about which of its residents had "a right to return." The Magnolia had always been home for Raven. Central City would always be home for her.²⁸⁶ Her inability to navigate the once familiar streets made Raven question whether her return would be a physical possibility. The political will made Raven's recovery of home another question entirely.

Would survivors of Hurricane Katrina ever be able to recover home? Most survivors will respond that the greatest losses of Hurricane Katrina are the intangibles—among those is the loss of home. While home is a difficult thing to define it is easily identifiable. Home for Sable is,

Safe. Known. Comfortable. Assured. *Mine*. Home is my point of reference.....It causes my belonging. Familial. Home is like a pile of onions a mile high—just layer upon layer

²⁸³ Excerpt taken from field notes

²⁸⁴ Excerpt taken from Interview Transcript

²⁸⁵ About to turn 4. Excerpt taken from Interview Transcript

²⁸⁶ From Interview Transcript

upon layer. You can't even begin to know all of the layers. Here in New Orleans, you always knew within 2 phone calls how to get what you needed. I like to think of New Orleans as a place with zero degrees of separation. Recovering home meant I am connected to my real life. Anywhere else I'm just ordinary...in fact, I'm *invisible*. Anywhere else, I'm visiting.

Raven described home as “somewhere where you can be yourself, you. There's culture, you know, there's a meaning. And, and here in New Orleans, I can't live anywhere else...So, it's just the food, and everything. It's just being around people that you're familiar with.” Survivors confronted jarring disaster on two fronts: 1) the loss of homeplace and 2) the displacement from one's sense of the familial and familiar. Was the New Orleans Saints' 2010 Super Bowl victory meaningful to the recovery of home? The discourse was extensive—but black women were curiously absent.

My doctoral experience was divided between my studies in East Lansing and the recovery in New Orleans. I felt as if I perpetually had one foot in each setting, firmly planted in neither. During the 2009-10, the Saints went undefeated for a long stretch of the season. Punditry began about what that meant to the recovery and as I watched, I wondered why no one looked like me. Initially, I conceived of this project as a simple question: what would black women say if someone bothered to ask *them* about the meaning of Saints Super Bowl success to the post-Katrina recovery of home? Participant narratives understand the Saints as integral to the post-Katrina recovery as a vehicle for the celebratory culture of home. Cultural illiteracy causes the misrecognition of the Saints as symbolic of recovery in external narratives. Thus, my findings underscore the importance of the perspective a native researcher brings to the culture of home in New Orleans.

Study findings reveal black women as theory makers, instrumental in knowledge production about the post-Katrina Saints phenomenon. A modest review of their narratives demonstrates Barbara Christian's claim,

...I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in the riddles and proverbs, in the play with the language...²⁸⁷

Participant narratives illustrated an embodied knowledge of home and the meaning of the Saints in its understanding that comes from lived experience. Yet, black women's knowledge claims have been disregarded. Despite what Fannie Barrier Williams describes as black women's "inevitable presence," we remain "unknown."²⁸⁸ The findings represent 18 months of observation and conversation—what I came to think of as the *Disast/her Dialogs*, which center black women's accounts and experiences of Hurricane Katrina and recovery.

Abbreviated narratives open this chapter to illustrate the autoethnographic nature of this study and its significance to the work of theory making. I open with excerpts from my field notes and a quote from a participant—presented together. Two voices woven together, illustrating our cooperation and dual contribution in the theory making process. Throughout this chapter, extended quotations and contextual narratives are included to demonstrate Christian's concept of black women's theory making. Theorizing occurs in the interplay of black women's words strung into narratives (theirs and mine) that connect us and create the space for us to make sense of our experiences. Participant's experiences are informative, integral even, as embodied knowledge, critical in the process of knowledge production.

²⁸⁷ Christian, "Race For Theory," 17.

²⁸⁸ Barrier Williams, "The Colored Girl," 401.

Disast/her dialogs demonstrate Barrier Williams' concept of black women's inevitable presence in the meaning of the Saints to the post-Katrina recovery of home in New Orleans. They are an exercise in the exploration of black women's narratives that not only facilitate their recognition but grants the authority of meaning making to those with the most relevant experiences to do so. "Her" is a composite of many women—the women interviewed and many others I may never encounter. Likewise, her includes me— a native researcher and New Orleanian and a black woman reconciling the post-Katrina recovery of home in my own right. Our dialogs resonate with the scholarship of black women ("hers") that have come before. Building on Barrier Williams assertion of black women's unknowability, these dialogs concur with Lorde insisting that black women have, indeed, been involved in the construction of narrative that make meaning of the relationship between sport and home in New Orleans since either existed. The act of theorizing as portrayed by Christian is both significant and underappreciated in sport-as-recovery narratives.

I open this chapter with an excerpt from my field notes and a quote from an interlocutor to illustrate that we (researcher and participant) are equally involved in the theory making that undergirds knowledge production. Theorizing, in this case, results from the interplay of words strung into narratives that connect us and help make sense of our experiences. This chapter reviews significant contributions these disast/her dialogs make to scholarship on the role in disaster recovery. Findings embed black women as knowledge producers in the sport-as-disaster recovery narrative—revealing participant narratives conversant with extant literature. The first section is a discussion of the participants' construction of the Saints' success as a recovery of New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home. Post-Katrina, the Saints' success was significant because it provided a vehicle for re-establishing cultural traditions of celebratory memorial

intrinsic in performing home. Black feminist tropes outlined in Chapter 2 surfaced as well. The second section considers the Saints at the complicated intersection of race and sport. Extemporaneous narratives fused themes of race, sport/recreation/play, and New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home, relating the Saints to home as experience. The third section reviews narratives identifying meanings beyond the literature. Interlocutors connected the Saints to home as hope—that their future post-Katrina could be brighter than their present—and home as resistance of association with the term, “refugee.” However, their responses conveyed an embodied knowledge of these tropes that exceeded what could be captured in the extant literature. Participant narratives reflect black women in the interstices of home and sport. The final section contemplates what the Saints’ success does *not* mean to the post-Katrina recovery of home.

THE ROUX

The roux is a culinary staple of many New Orleans dishes—the “base” of most sauces, gravies, and soups. The roux holds the essence of both flavor and presentation. I use this term to describe the base tropes of home that emerged as salient to this inquiry, the New Orleans aesthetic of home. These tropes express ways of be-ing at home—performing home in New Orleans. Home is where the spirit lives. The New Orleans cultural aesthetic of home understands celebratory memorial as the opportunity for spiritual transition through life’s agony to life’s joy.

Saffronia is a petite woman in her seventies, flawless in her presentation. She speaks in perfect diction and even though we are meeting at her home, her blouse and slacks are starched to perfection. Saffronia purchased her home in 1983 (which at the time was almost in a state of

ruin), renovated it, and established it as a successful bed and breakfast. Reflecting on the meaning on home, we discussed the history, architecture, and culture of New Orleans for seemed like 15 minutes but was, in fact, *an entire day*. Saffronia captured the essence of home eloquently. When asked to describe how the culture makes New Orleans home, Saffronia responds,

I think it's in the water. It's certainly in the music... and it's certainly in the resiliency. Now, no matter what happens, that celebratory spirit permeates. And I think, I really think it's our African culture. I really do. Now I haven't been to Africa, so I don't really know, but I have been to Jamaica, and they party... okay. I've got that, taken (her daughter) to Jamaica. With the drums and the music. Now, we call it second line, they just drumming down the street dumdadumdadum, they're having a ball! And you join right in, you can't sit by. Yes, I mean, you have some ice in your rear or something if you can sit by. For me that has always been a religion for me. Like a religion. When I'm down or whatever, I put on BB (King) (snaps) and (snaps) finger pop, and dance around and what have you. First thing you know, I'm alright. I go to church and the same thing happens in the church...

Mama used to say-wait, backup let me give you a little bit of background. When we got on the St. Charles street car, there'd be a whole ten or twelve black women, some in uniforms, some not, going to work. You know, we'd get off Broadway and St. Charles going down, coming down, cause people were on either side...coming down. And...Monday morning,

“Child, did you hear Reverend Jackson! Did you go to this church?”

“No but you know, Sally did, and she said he tore it up (small laugh).”

But the essence of it was, those who had not gone to church would say, “You know, I really should have gone, I had so much on my mind...and so on and so on,” they'd go through a litany of stuff, and...when I come back from church, I'm willing to take on the world.

That was in essence-they don't say those exact words. And...I used to ask 'cause I was afraid of people when they shouted (laughs) 'cause a person would go that way, and limbs go this way, and then everybody be trying to hold them, and they're wiggling and they're down on the floor, so I'd run....

One time, I said to Mama, “Why, why are people shouting?”

She said, “They're not shouting.”

I said, “Well what are they doing? They throw away everything, wigs go one way, purses go one way, they go another way, everybody's scrambling to get 'em

up off the floor!”

She said, “Live long enough, Honey, and when you start thinking about *alllll* the stuff that you have to deal with, and that you can’t do nothing about, that these dollars won’t go all around the places they need to go, you gonna shout too.” She said, “But when you do, that phase of that week is over.”

It was a release.

And we need it. Okay? Like a good cry. We need it. You have to let it out. And, I didn’t really, really, really understand that. Well she had died, long time, and...either (Saffronia’s daughter) had just run away, or something, but in that general time, all of that was sort of, “Why? How come? When? What did I do? What did I not do? What was I supposed to do?” And on and on. And they sang (pauses)...Amazing Grace.....(tears up) and I fell apart. But when it was over, it was over...and I never understood that until then....So we, what is different about New Orleans is...we don’t know what all the people are shouting about. We don’t know what all them are getting upset about... but they get to march, they get to second line, they get to shout... in some way, we have to deal with it. And in talking with some of the guests...who come here...they go away feeling relieved. Released.

Home could not exist without the culture. Saffronia’s narrative captures the performance of celebratory memorial integral in New Orleans’ cultural aesthetic of home. Celebratory memorial is the roux—the base of knowing New Orleans as home. Only after the release could the spiritual and physical recovery begin. While other American cities participate in the faith tradition, none have an integrated cultural ritual like this one. The second line is where the spiritual and the physical meet in a moment of release. After Hurricane Katrina, the need for release was paramount.

Interlocutors vividly articulated the Saints as a means to perform the New Orleans cultural aesthetic of home. Repeatedly, celebrating the Saints was mentioned as a venue for play, recreation, catharsis, release, and the performance of the cultural rituals of home that had become all the more sacred after Hurricane Katrina. There is probably not a soul alive who knows more about play, recreation, catharsis, release or the performance of the cultural rituals of home than Sable. Sable is medium height with long salt and pepper “dreaded” locks pulled up into a

headwrap. Her skin is the color of caramel, with a smile just as sweet. Sable boasts that she has lived in Central City all of her life and is blessed to be among 5 living generations of her family. We meet in her office at the conclusion of the business day but her warmth and generosity of spirit create an intimacy that transforms the otherwise officious environment into what felt like a most sacred, safe space. Words, memories, experiences, narratives flow freely and without inhibition. In these moments, Sable links Saffronia's perspective on culture to the culture of sport.

What are those things we celebrate? Er'thing. *Every thing*. Understand where the culture comes from. And it developed in New Orleans, I think, this is just my lay expertise because New Orleans was different than any other place in the South because we had the largest conglomeration of Free Men of Color as well as slaves. So the opportunity to...be about what you felt...like doing was there for many. And then the-there was of course, the set aside like Congo Square where the dominant culture recognized "if you're going to keep them under control, you better give them a day to do what they want to do." So, I think that's all rolled up into one, was the boiler plate for celebrating everything in our own way. Because we had a day and we had a place and so we began to celebrate those things that were significant to us at that point and time and it kind of just spread out. You know to other opportunities to live that. Okay so, our...opportunities to celebrate *really* deflected the morose...oppression that we suffered on a daily basis. And, because a party is interesting to everybody, it jumped the color line, it jumped the culture line. So, "*how the heck can they be so happy? Happy, happy, happy. They was always dancing and jigging and jumping. Oh well, that's Miss Rose. Lemme go down here-*" And Miss Rose caught you up into a dance and so Miss Sally went to doing those same things. And...there was a lot to be...deflected. There was a lot of oppression that needed to be...as the Bible says, "turn your mourning into dancing." And, that's-that's what I think began to happen.

Of course, you already know the story line behind the second line. The first line was the sad going to the graveyard. (sings) Dun-nuh-nuh-nuh.

"The dirge?" (researcher asks)

The dirge. *Exactly*. And people were all sad or whatever, whatever. So, in order to encourage the family coming back from the graveyard, you was going to the Repast. You have a *different* mindset. You're going to get you a little juice, you're going to get you a little dinner. You got a little dance to do. The second line became *that*...And because our culture is really connected on all jajillion sides to food, food and music are the levelizers, equalizers to all of our cultural underpinnings.

And when a lot of people say culture, they mean how black people do it but *I'm* talking about just the culture of this part of the country...this, this city has a-so as far as culture is concerned, when *we* say culture here-if you say culture in New York, we're talking (mimicking snobby voice) "high society, with your lip stretched off to the side and talking very nasal-y and it's the museum and it's the theatre and the *op-er-a* and maybe some legitimate theater..." but that's not what we're talking about down here. We're talking about what makes us us. Now that's New York culture and I'm not putting it down but *New Orleans culture* is something different. There is that word that I love so much and that's the "familialness". Where we gather everybody around and we become one as a family and we become one in tuned with the rhythm that we've set.

That's why that silence was so deafening...there's not a time when we don't hear and feel the humming of this city. The heartbeat is ever present. Tailgating started *right here. It did!* It did. (researcher laughing) It did. It had to.

"You going up in there?"

"I'm not going up in there but I'ma party right out here like I went." (She laughs)

It is important to note that these narratives articulate the Saints as important only as a thread within New Orleans' larger cultural aesthetic of home. Both mark the importance of Sunday afternoon—either for attending church, watching the football game, or following the second line. Saffronia and Sable offer a framework for understanding the Saints as essential to the culture of celebratory memorial. Sable even concludes New Orleans' renowned cultural celebration of community in large gatherings of food, music, (often) cocktails, and festivity is the precursor to the tailgating phenomenon. The Saints success presented an opportunity post-Katrina to "turn mourning into dancing"—if but only on Sunday afternoons. The team offered moments of celebratory memorial—an opportunity to perform home even if the physical homeplace was in disrepair, which was invaluable to a city in recovery.

THE SPECTER

6:18 a.m. I parked the car and walked half a block to Congo Square. My first Maafa—remembrance of those lost in the slave trade. I spotted Golda, who has become like a

grandmother to me, sitting on a bench in the shade. Golda wore a short-sleeved white top and white capris, which combined with the morning sun, amplified the striking silver and gray of her natural hair. She smiled and patted the bench as if to say, "Come sit with me." I did and she hugged me close. "You made it," she said.

"I did."

"And, where's your mom?"

I giggled, "She slept in this morning." She laughed in response.

"Well, we'll just have to do it together."

And then we sat in silence listening to the prayers and libations. You could almost forget that Golda is over 80 years old. She's so active and vibrant. For the moment, I had. How many 80 year olds would be preparing for a 5+ mile walk on a day sure to hit 100 degrees? Here she was as yet another reminder of those who have come before me that are standing with me...

And, then there emerged a traditional song, which we all began to sing as well as the men began drumming. The sound filled the air and enveloped us like a sweet aroma. The elder women began dancing. So elegant and graceful. They began to invite others to join them until there was a circle of melodic song and dance. Just as this very square was designated as place the ancestors were free to sing, dance, celebrate years before, WE WERE FREE. How proud they must be to see that we remember the heritage they left us!

But, it was time to leave this place. A procession began to exit the edge of Congo Square, representing the Door of No Return. As we approached the exit, we were again enveloped in smoke—asking the ancestors to walk with us; to be with us on this journey, once theirs, now ours. The drumming continued as we were given salt to rub between our hands, representing the earth from whence we came and our foreheads were marked with ash, symbolizing the ashes to which the ancestors returned.

It is interesting to note the interconnectedness of culture in New Orleans. While this celebration is one of African heritage, the ashes rubbed on our foreheads evoke the Catholic tradition of rubbing ash on the foreheads of parishioners, particularly on Ash Wednesday. New Orleans is designated as the largest black Catholic city in the world. So important is the Catholic faith to New Orleans that we are divided into parishes rather than counties, Ash Wednesday (the Catholic Day of Atonement) is even a holiday in New Orleans. The presence of ashes here represents a mingling of African and Catholic traditions in New Orleans.

We began to walk, following the sound of the drum and a man dressed in traditional tribal dress. Following the (African and African American) culture of call and response, he led us in chanting to evoke the spirit of Fiyiyi (a Mardi Gras Indian Tribe inspired by the warriors of the Mandingo people). Fiyiyi is the spirit that could not be killed, that sustained our people. See http://web.mac.com/drrashon/FiYiYi/Fo_Day.html Suddenly, I noticed the presence of a police escort, implying the number of participants had grown substantially since ceremony began. More importantly, it forced bystanders to stop and take notice. They were forced to pause, acknowledge our presence and if only briefly, observe with us.

I was at the head of the procession but something inside of me directed me to turn around. The procession had at least doubled. I could see beautiful black, brown, yellow, and even white faces dressed in white filling the width of the street, poring onto the sidewalks and stretching back the length of at least one block. Singing. Dancing. Some blowing whistles. Some shaking tambourines. Others clapping their hands in time. There were elders walking next to babies, mothers walking next to daughters walking next to fathers walking next to sons.

We were walking to different landmarks significant to Africans and African Americans that have lived in, and one might argue, created New Orleans. We stopped first at the African American Museum. Located in Treme, the historic African American suburb of the original City. We then journeyed to the historic St. Augustine Church to the Tomb of the Unknown. Baba Luther Gray reminded to pray as our ancestors did to bring those things we desire to come to pass, even if we can not see or understand how it is even possible. There was a historical description of both the church and the tomb and their significance to African Americans in New Orleans, followed by silent observance, prayers in English, Yoruban, and by the Congolese tradition.

The heat was sweltering. At one point, I saw sweat drip down the length of my leg. I joined Golda in the bus for the next two stops. In a few minutes, I could hear the drum faintly but growing ever closer. Then suddenly, a beautiful procession of white began approaching. The singing swelled until music filled every crevice. Those were some of the most breathtaking moments. We were there at the base of the (Mississippi) river to greet the procession. Sort of a symbol that we had made it through the first part of the journey.

*The next stage of the journey, however, would leave an indelible impression. Boarding the ferry to cross the Mississippi River, once and still a major port for commerce, **changed my life!***

We walked up the stairs to board the ferry. There was a long, hall divided by bars to separate those exiting the ferry and those yet to board. When we reached the end of the terminal we encountered a closed gate. The heat was indescribable. The space was so tight I could smell the people standing on either side of me. I could feel the heat radiate from their bodies. Too close. No air moving. Was this what it was like in a slave holding pen, awaiting the boat to carry us from everything we had known? It was such a sad space. Even though I knew this would pass—I could go back to an air conditioned home and a family that loves me—all around me seemed to be confusion. The moments felt heavy with misery. I could hear people talking but gone was the drum and the song. There was no more laughter. Somewhere a baby was crying but I couldn't see it.

I am a claustrophobe. I was becoming frightened. I was only comforted that Mama Trudell (who is like an other mother) was next to me and I could hear her voice. She began to introduce me to the women she was speaking with but I couldn't tell you now who they were or what we talked about. Just heard their voices. Felt a bead of sweat travel from my neck, down my stomach to my leg then my ankle. My mind was consumed by 2 words: Middle Passage. We were met with stares by the people who were exiting the boat as they tried to

figure out just what we were doing. I wondered if that was what it was like for slaves to be looked over, gawked at before purchase. I was so overwhelmed I couldn't even make sense of it all.

Then the gate opened and we entered the boat. Mama Trudell and I walked downstairs to the deck where the cars were. Immediately, I ran to the shade and just took in as much fresh air as I could. For the first few minutes, I looked only at the water. I thanked God and the ancestors that someone had already endured the unthinkable so I would never have to. Amber found us as the drumming began again. On the interior of the boat there was an ad for the Saints, it was a simple black poster with large gold fleur de lis in the center. It provided information for purchasing tickets in small but bold print at the bottom center it read, "Catch the Spirit." I laughed to myself. I took Mama Trudell's hand in mine and she, Amber, and I began to dance like we had been set free.

Once on the west bank of the river, everyone exited the boat. The sun shone brightly again. As we reached the foot of the ferry station, I was greeted by the vibrant fuschia feathers of a Mardi Gras Indian fully masked (in his entire costume). There was another in peach and still another in turquoise singing, welcoming us to freedom.

We made it! And now, we were reminded that in the midst of tragedy we celebrate. We sing, we dance to commemorate where we've been—everything we've been through—that we're still here. And along the way, we are and have been the bearers of culture.

We had arrived at the Village, an open air memorial to the different cultures and venues African Americans encountered in Louisiana. The village is composed of life-sized replicas of the various shelters housing the peoples connected to African Americans in Louisiana—the Acadians (Cajuns), Africans, a trading post, etc.

After being offered oil to fragrance the body, smoke to invoke the spirit of the ancestors once again, water and watermelon to refresh the spirit, the drum called to us again. This time the Mardi Gras Indians sang with us their sacred songs. Among them, my favorite, the prayer, Indian (pronounced In-yon) Red.

Tears filled my eyes just remembering. As the words spoke to the pride of my people, I understood that recovery isn't an option for a people with a blood lineage to perseverance such as this. They had survived unspeakable inhumanity and did it with resilience. As I paused on this day to remember, everything about my project began to make sense. Truly I was hearing from the people—through interviews, through cultural ritual, through my own simultaneous performance of research praxis and cultural knowledge.

*Participants were taken back to Ashe' Cultural Arts Center for final words, lunch, and extended celebration. I left to prepare for an evening at the Superdome, home of the Saints. I had received what I needed...*²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ Taken from Field notes

I opened with this vignette from Maafa (the observance of those lost in the slave trade), because it is illustrative of the interconnectivity of race and the physical in New Orleans—whether through connection to slave labor that physically built the structures and culture of the City or the adoption of the fleur de lis as the insignia for the team’s franchise. The convergence of the race and sport/play/recreation is inescapable. The presence of race in New Orleans is that of a looming spectre—not entirely physical, but present. The legacy of slavery in New Orleans lingers unrepentant, leaving in its wake tendrils of a crazy beautiful culture of celebration and disparity that spans generations so remarkable it is internationally adored. Hurricane Katrina forced a cataclysmic confrontation with race—New Orleans limped away bloodied, maimed, and scarred. I noted the racial undercurrent during my observations. Yet during interviews, race, particularly the legacy of slavery was palpable. That is not to say, interlocutors were bitter. Quite the contrary, participants spoke with wisdom—understanding the history of race unique to New Orleans as a nuanced construct that has distinctly shaped their experiences.

Amber provides an analysis of Hurricane Katrina as a contemporary consequence of race. Amber is a Community-based Arts Administrator, Cultural Artist, and Neighborhood Activist knowledgeable about literature and world cultures—well-read and well-traveled, but you always feel as if you have been enveloped by the practical wisdom of a friend. Amber describes herself as having lived “more than five decades.” She is truly a cultural ambassador, dedicated to the appreciation and integration of art and culture into understandings of the history and cultural significance of the city. She has been a leader in the efforts to re-establish the Oretha Castle Haley corridor and to revitalize Central City. In truth, it would not be an overstatement to describe Amber as an institution. She is fiercely proud to live in New Orleans, referring to it

lovingly as, “the most African city in America.”²⁹⁰ Thus, Hurricane Katrina was a painful, contemporary reminder of New Orleans’ (and America’s) past.

I read an article from a woman, I think in Chicago, where she said, and then...and then I realized what it is that I felt and thought about it. That what this circumstance had done is it had contemptualized—it had contemporized the Middle Passage. All of the factors were there. The rising water, families being separated, mothers from children, men being separated, not being able to offer protection because they have to go somewhere different than that. You know, we (were) handled any kind of way, et cetera et cetera, that...in 2005, we no longer were talking about 400 years ago. All of a sudden it became a contemporary experience that everybody didn’t realize, but everybody felt it. They just didn’t know what they were feeling, you know. And so I said, “Woah!” I said, “This ain’t good, you know.”

For Amber, the past had been called forth and broadcast for all to experience. But, it was not the same experience for everyone watching. This is what the narratives revealed about the meaning of home—that it is an intimate and personal experience depending on your embodied knowledge of home.

Participant narratives located the Saints within the fabric of home. Yet, their narratives revealed a complicated intersection of the Saints and history of race in New Orleans. Image #1 caused just such a response for two interlocutors. During the interviews, Blake and Sable went back to the image, picked it up, took an extended pause for close examination, and then began her narrative. For both women, the fleur de lis, was in fact, a visual representation of home—but not one without contradiction. For Blake, the fleur de lis is troubled by a past of violent oppression. Blake began,

I kind of learned that-when I saw this image (picks up Image #1), I was just like, oh!... (Sits, just looking silently at the image) because I learned all about the fleur de lis, and where it comes from, and how it is like the branding of the running-of runaway slaves. And, if they did it a second time, they would kill them. And then that now, this is our-we praise this image and people get it tattooed on them and stuff like that. So, when I saw

²⁹⁰ In an Informal Conversation

that I was like, “Aww.” Something cringed inside of me from what had happened to my ancestors and now, how we praise it.....

Despite her appreciation for the possibility of home the Saints’ success has helped to rekindle post-Katrina, Blake remains uneasy with the tenuous nature of home that the fleur de lis evokes. Celebrating home in the present is colored by grieving a home past.

While Blake gestures to the history the fleur de lis visually connotes, Sable connects the Saints to Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans’ latent legacy of slavery. Sable picked up Image #1 and began,

As you know, the fleur de lis was used to brand runaways, black gold. So, to see those boys in *black and gold*, black uniforms run, run, running to the goal (line), running from every horror and atrocity, every characterization as being the lowest and lowliest, running to the trophy—the gold standard, running and could not be stopped, would not be stopped. Yeah, I get that. We were depicted as nothing, worthy of being left abandoned. *Forgotten*. But the Saints made it so you *could not* forget us. Here in New Orleans, taking something tragic and turning into a triumph is what we do. We can’t run away from our history but it can become our strength. So, even this insignia can be celebrated because we know what it’s like to use horrors as ugly as slavery or Katrina and forge a culture so rich the world must stop and take notice.

Sable’s play on black slaves as gold for white owners and black boys in black and gold uniforms running to the goal line—again, ostensibly as gold for white owners implies in the new New Orleans there remains remnants of home past. However, Sable masterfully and poetically describes the Saints’ role in reshaping one of New Orleans’ ugliest moments into one of her brightest. For Sable, this is home in New Orleans—turning tragedy into beauty and the Saints have been integral in that effort post-Katrina. Therefore, the Saints function as a thread of home for Sable because celebrating the team’s success enacts the culture of home.

LAGNIAPPE

Lagniappe is *that little something extra*—the miscellaneous surprise. In reporting the research findings, I would be remiss if I did not discuss the unexpected gems that developed during the course of the research. As a black woman and scholar in Kinesiology, I knew that black women would have much to contribute to knowledge production in this area. Still, even I was unprepared for the under detection of black women's narratives—both on the role of the physical, sport, and play within culture as well as the meaning of sport in disaster recovery. Participant narratives revealed deep and long standing bonds with the Saints as a fabric of performing home in New Orleans. Yet, black women's politics of sport and home remains an interstitial one. I characterize these findings as lagniappe, not because they are unimportant but because they are an unexpected surprise worthy of further mention.

Melissa Harris-Perry's analysis of the Crooked Room argues that media stereotypes of black women, particularly during Hurricane Katrina, misrecognized their experience or simply failed to recognize their humanity at all. However, the participant's narratives demonstrate that the post-Katrina Crooked Room was an exercise that exceeded merely asking black women to align themselves vertically despite distorted surroundings. The floor of this structure was not only tilted, the entire structure had been compromised—making the ability to detect black women's presence and challenges of recovery a critical, yet underappreciated enterprise.

Disast/her dialogs are as Barrier Williams suggests, unknowable. Amber describes it in this way,

[T]here's a way in which...the media never helped people to realize the extent to which we had been damaged. People do not have accurate understandings of that and so, therefore, they don't have accurate gauges for measuring progress.

I interviewed Amber at the Ashe' Cultural Arts Center on a summer evening in July. There is always something happening at Ashe'. On this evening, black men from the community were meeting to address violent crime. As I walked toward the office to meet Amber, two women who run the boutique explained they were working at a feverish pace to gather items for transport to the Superdome to set up a vendor's booth at the Essence Music Festival. They paused to hug me and told me Amber was waiting to speak with me. Hearing my voice, Amber met me in the hall, "You can't escape the Saints for a second, can you? Even if it's just a conversation about the *Superdome*," and gave me a warm hug. Amber is the ultimate Saints fan²⁹¹—and she understands why the City needed them and vice versa. Amber explains, "[I]f there was ever a people who needed something to lift them up, this one did. And so in a certain way, that game was not a game."²⁹² This is what has been lost in post-Katrina media. For Amber, externally generated discourse has created conditions for further misrecognition, which in turn, perpetuate the disregard of experiences on-the-ground.

Golda exemplifies the experiences alluded to by Amber. Golda is the youngest 81-year old I have ever met. She is a retired Licensed Practical Nurse, working part time as a Receptionist. She is a petite woman, with neatly cropped, natural silver and white hair that always seems to shine in the light—the perfect mixture of wisdom and love. Prior to the storm, Golda owned the Central City home she shared with her mother outright. Golda describes the moment she understood the effects of the storm on her home.

Well, I looked at tv and saw that our house was covered in water. *That* was enormous. You know, you can't really, well I couldn't really envision that being possible. I said, "No, tv got it wrong. You know, (her home on) Whitfield is something else." But, to actually...actually...realize that *every thing* you have is no more, that takes a while...to

²⁹¹ This is her own description taken from her interview transcript

²⁹² Excerpt taken from Interview Transcript

sink in. ‘Cause you always feel like I can go and get this and you know, clean it up. It was such a long thing where the water seeped in and they started talking about the other stuff that was in the water. It takes you a while to realize *that’s gone. Everything is gone.* That word, “everything,” it took on a whole new meaning. Sometimes when you say everything and you think you got something on the edges—“everything,” meant *everything*. Everything is gone. Papers, things that you took for granted that you (thought) would be kept...no more. And when I could get back here and opened, when I opened the door, the refrigerator met me at the front door. Oh! I mean the refrigerator had floated...and when we left, I had pictures from when my kids were small-I cherished the pictures ‘cause I used to keep them, ‘cause I didn’t trust the kids to keep them. And I would always put them in one of those big, plastic bags that the people collect cans (in) and put it as high as I could for all of the other hurricanes and it worked. Not this time. Not this time because we had 11 feet of water. That took care of everything in the house. It didn’t get to...the attic because I had some albums up there. So that, that-whatever was up there, it didn’t happen. But, to the top of the ceiling that you could see, it reached the top of that. Even today, like I said, I constantly think of things...that we had that we planned to cherish but it just didn’t happen.

Hurricane Katrina had taken everything. For Golda, that included the joy of independence and a life with her mother. Golda had lost her everything—her homeplace, her independence, and her mother. Golda was one of the people Amber described that “needed something to lift them up.” The Saints established that New Orleans, the town left for dead, could be a winner. Amber believed that the ability to win transformed the spirit of New Orleans when it was most in need. She characterized it in this way,

I think it was an opportunity for us to see what spirit can do. You know, I think that the Saints recently had a great team, but I think that the thing that propelled them to championship was all of the well wishing. All of the blessing and prayer. All of the, the spiritual energy. They really, in a certain way for them, New Orleans winning-winning the game was New Orleans winning. And so, it wasn’t really about winning the game, it was about New Orleans winning. And New Orleans needed to win. And in my moment, Marita, of the winning, I have got to tell you that we had a paradise here. We had a paradise where we had the beloved community operating. I mean people were relating to each other in that way. People really were stepping out of the joy of being a part of the “we” winners. It was just really powerful. I went out to the parade because I wanted to experience it. I wanted to see what it looked like. I wanted to have the stories to tell.

The media did not help people recognize the damage to Hurricane Katrina survivors. Perhaps they will never effectively capture the meaning of the 2010 Super Bowl victory. Winning, for New Orleanians, meant that the city's story could be rewritten. New Orleans was a champion. She could approach her other looming challenges like a champion rather than one who was forgotten, abandoned, and left to die. This, in part, is what the Saints meant to recovery.

Citizen of the Who'Dat! Nation

Even years later, conversations about the government's response to Hurricane Katrina was an emotionally charged experience—for the participants and the researcher. Some of the interlocutors sprang into action while others were in utter disbelief that a nation as powerful as the US was as unprepared and ineffective as became apparent. The *refugee effect* was instrumental in how participants understood home. Participants could not, by definition, be refugees, because they had a home in America—or so they thought prior to Katrina. Blake, Saffronia, and Sable were the most demonstratively vocal on this issue during our conversations. These three women represent different generations and thus, different experiences with citizenship rights. However, their responses convey similar sentiments of resistance to the foreignness and general unbelonging “refugee” elicits.

Blake is the youngest participant in the cohort at 23 years old and a single mother of a preschool aged daughter. Blake is medium height, her skin beautiful—rich and brown like the color of milk chocolate, with her hair worn in short twists. Blake was familiar with resisting ill-suited labels. During our first interview, she described how her inability to cope with her grandfather's death during her adolescence resulted in behavioral problems and placement in

Special Education. Despite her teacher's acknowledgement that she had been misdiagnosed, she had to wait a full year from the time for her annual Individual Education Plan to be re-evaluated—and there would still be significant hurdles. “Imagine an eighth grader being charged with responsibility of getting herself out of Special Ed...”²⁹³ The next year, she was successfully placed into mainstream classes, only to have to teach *herself* the material she missed while assigned to Special Education. The “Special Ed” label had followed her. Blake recalls,

It's just so crazy because there's a lot of stuff from 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th (grades) that I don't know. People are like, “How don't you know subject-verb agreement. How don't you know-?” I don't know certain chunks of stuff. Like I had to go and learn long division all the way over. And, I have to constantly do it in order to remember it because it's not something that's in my mind...

So, I went all the way to 12th grade with the fear of not graduating. I moved out of Special Ed but there's a fear of not graduating because of this 10th grade LEAP (Louisiana Educational Assessment Program), math part of the LEAP. And so, I had passed the English, passed all of the other parts of the LEAP but my 12th grade year I was just like, (makes a panic face). So, I went to LEAP remediation. I didn't go to Summer Camp, I just studied or whatever. And I was just like, “there's nothing else I can do.” I went in there, took the test, prayed, and I was just like, “Ok.”

I was walking down the hall 12th grade year and the lady who knew me from like, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th-she had the test scores. And, she *was not supposed to do this* but she looked at my test scores and was like, “*You passed! You passed!*” So, I was just over-excited. I could really experience my 12th grade year! I couldn't even think. That's why I said that experience of high school was really rare.

The term “refugee” is yet another label assigned to Blake that misrepresented who she is. It was an inappropriate descriptor that had the power to change the condition and quality of her life. Like “Special Ed,” the label “refugee” had an otherizing effect Blake was unwilling to accept. Blake explained,

Oh, I was burnt up every time they said that. Every time I heard it, (pounds the table with her palms as she speaks) I would get into a deep and blood-spitting-everything was

²⁹³ Blake, Excerpt taken from Interview Transcript

pulsating inside of me when talking about that term. I just was-and right now it has me kind of crazy but-It's because that we're a part of the United States. And, refugees are people who are taken from their country, right? And brought to another country. So, we weren't even taken out of our country. We were out of our *city*. But, it touch-it touches me deep...

For Blake, being instantaneously stripped of citizenship was more than she could bear. It was simply one loss too many. Saffronia, on the other hand, *reacted*. Armed with age, experience, and wit, she was able to turn the tables.

When we went to.....Arkansas, that's where we went, and we were staying with Linda, my friend, and then we got a house which we were staying at. We rented. And so when we would go to get food, 'cause I went wherever they, we were supposed to get stuff, *I went*. Even though we were extremely fortunate to have money, to have credit cards, and what have you. Um and then we, I remember, this incident just, they asked for people who, we didn't get food stamps, we could get food. They had these big pallets, rolling pallets, and you could get a hundred pounds of for each person in your family.

And so we went. (My friend) was with us, (my grand daughter) and me. So we'd go in and we were standing there in line and the line was going pretty good and they had taken-like a Schwegmann's²⁹⁴. And it was like a store. You could get whatever, just pick out foods, they had fresh, they had meats, they had chicken places and what have you, it brought fresh...stuff. It was unbelievable.

And all you needed was to show your driver's license and wherever you were from. So we get to the door and this woman is standing there and she says "Oh my God! The refugees are coming out of the woodwork....." I was third or fourth in line. When I got to her, I was livid! I mean, I was trembling. When I got to her, I went up to her and I said, "You know what? If I'm a refugee, then you caused it."

"—Oh no! Oh!"(the woman replied)—I said, "Don't you holler at me!" I said, "because I'm close to killing you right on the spot. I'm no more refugee than you are. I was born in *America*. Everybody with me *was born in America*." People behind me said, "And we were born in America." I will never forget that. So, finally she said, "Oh, I'm so sorry." I said, "Don't be sorry, just be smart. Keep your mouth *shut*."

²⁹⁴ A former grocery store chain in New Orleans

Blake and Saffronia offer useful perspective. However, Sable's narrative names the heart of the issue. I asked Sable what it was like to hear Hurricane Katrina survivors labeled as refugees. She answered without a beat and her reply was sobering,

The same way I feel when you call me a "*nigger!*"..... (We both sit in prolonged silence as her statement permeates the air). I don't receive it in the way that you intended it. It diminishes my importance...It diminishes my humanity.

Sable's tone was not angry but firm, measured and direct. The wound was yet fresh. Each of the women understood refugee to be a racial transcription that removed the compassion that belonging affords.

Participant narratives revealed that the Saints are important, in part, because of the perceived opportunity the team's success created for Katrina survivors to reconstruct narrative dignity. Sable, a self-described "very young sixty" and "bandwagon fan"²⁹⁵ provided a narrative that elaborated on the importance of the Saints to New Orleanians during their recovery efforts. I conducted my second interview with her on the afternoon of the Saints-Giants Monday Night Football Game. The Saints are leading the NFC South but still need a victory to solidify their position as Head of NFC South. The City is humming. Almost everyone is wearing a Saints jersey, a fleur de lis insignia, or the team colors of black and gold. We chose to meet in her office in Central City, given we both had previous appointments nearby. Almost every child leaving school dons Saints paraphernalia. Sable was dressed in a black brocade suit and a bracelet with fleur de lis symbols of varying patterns and colors. Sable describes as the Saints' success as recovery of belonging that began to heal the wounds the term "refugee" inflicted.

²⁹⁵ From Interview Transcript

There's something *really* comforting—emotionally, psychologically, culturally, socially comforting. And that's a point, that's the point of reference that the Saints had for the entire city. It went past the economics and past the sociology. It went past the distance, past the color line, and not a whole lot of things go past the color line, it went past the...th-money and the space and place. It went past all that. And you became a *Who 'Dat*.....That was big! That was big. We had lost our-we were poor little lambs who had lost our way and we didn't have to go bah, bah, bah, you know, and nobody heard us. *Who 'Dat* was heard around the-around *the world*. It was a centering cry.

Who 'Dat established a sense of belonging for New Orleanians—and more important to interlocutors—black Hurricane Katrina survivors. It created a demand for recognition. In this excerpt, Sable references the five days in which “nobody” heard New Orleanians’ desperate pleas for help. Sable’s narrative constructs the Saints’ success as a moment in which the eyes that *would not* recognize the suffering of New Orleans *could not* ignore her triumph, incremental as the process may be.

Closer analysis uncovers additional embodied knowledge about resistance. Much like the second line culture enacts ritualized performance as acts of resistance against oppression, celebrating the success of the Saint became way of resisting victimhood. Sable proclaims, *Who 'Dat* “was a centering cry”—It was a reminder that New Orleans is stronger than the words written about her or her people. In New Orleans home is a way of be-ing, a performance. The Saints provided a performance of resistance that was observed on a world stage.

How's ya' Mama 'nem?

To know New Orleans as home is a way of *be-ing* that celebrates life—all of its joys and pain. The opening chapter detailed the rich and multi-faceted social history of home in New

Orleans and yet admittedly, the complexity is not lost even on New Orleanians. In other towns one might call home, popular is the greeting, “How are you doing?”—a standard inquiry about individual wellbeing. However, *at home* in New Orleans, it is highly likely to encounter the greeting, “*How’s ya’ Mama ‘Nem?*”—a different parlance entirely. Common in creole and black vernacular, this greeting inquires about the condition of one’s community but centers on the mother (read black woman). Despite their importance in sustaining and driving New Orleans’ cultural aesthetic of home, black women’s accounts have been disregarded and dismissed from dominant narratives of recovery. Black women’s recovery remains an interstitial politics of home—a drama rendered willfully invisible.

The salience of the utterance, *How’s ya’ Mama ‘nem?* to this project is noted here. It represents what it means to know New Orleans culture as home and to be at home with its cultural idioms. More importantly, the phrase connects the interstitial (and taken-for-granted) foundation of black women within the culture of New Orleans to this project’s corrective steps to center black women’s narratives in understanding the meaning of the Saints’ Super Bowl victory to the post-Katrina recovery of home in New Orleans. The phrase refers not only to a cultural understanding of home but one in which black women are central figures. I attempt to understand the meaning of the Saints’ Super Bowl success through black women’s post-Katrina narratives of home while speaking to black women’s interstitial politics of home.

During data analysis, I conducted close readings of participant responses to flesh out points of intersection between participant conceptualizations of home and those found in the literature. Participants illustrated black women’s interstitial politics within the sports and Central City communities. This was illuminated as a pattern of narrating experiences by *evoking other black women* emerged across participant narratives, particularly those that constructed a meaning

of the Saints to the post-Katrina recovery of home. Often interlocutors evoked their mothers to describe what the Saints have meant to their recovery. Two of the women connected the success of the Saints to the loss of the mothers. For Blake, the Super Bowl victory is a marker of her mother's joyful life transition. When asked to describe the emotion of recovery after the Saints won the Super Bowl Blake responded,

That moment was all over everybody. Even *I* was overjoyed because it was something I never experienced before. I didn't go—did I go to the parade? No. I didn't go to the parade because I had the baby. But, my mom was basically on her death bed and she put her whole, big coat on and her mittens or whatever and she was out there; cheering them on, catching whatever they were throwing off the float. So, just to see her, the biggest fan of the Saints live in glory that was just wonderful for me.

Blake's mother passed shortly after the Victory Parade. As Blake discussed her own feelings about her loss, she paused and reflected on that moment as a commentary on hope. As much a self-directed inspiration—for emotional recovery from the loss of her mother as well as from the physical ravages of Hurricane Katrina, Blake referenced the Saints as a glimmer of hope for a weary city.

I think that because they won the Super Bowl, it kind of gives you hope because you struggle and you struggle and you struggle and you struggle. You never give up. And you never believe defeat. So you just keep on trying. I think it gives the City hope and I'm not like the biggest fan and I won't go out and buy a jersey—and maybe I *will* one day *just because* of what it means now.

The Saints' Super Bowl success was meaningful to black women as a remembrance of their mothers—as expressed by Blake and echoed by Amber. The Saints are important as an inter-generational bond between black women who call New Orleans home.

Like Blake, Amber evoked her mother to express the meaning of the Saints' success to the post-Katrina recovery of home in New Orleans. Amber's narrative mirrors Blake's in that she finds a parallel between the Super Bowl victory and her mother's passing. Similar to the death of Amber's mother, Hurricane Katrina was the lowest of life's low moments. It was an unspeakable pain. Both moments presented a battle of spiritual will. Amber recalls,

It was a war. They (the Saints) were really fighting for the spirit and the hope for the people in New Orleans. And I think that that's the thing that carried 'em, that's what carried 'em through, and that's what carried 'em on to victory. Because, we were hurting so badly, and the thing that this reminds me of is, it reminds me of when my mother died.

My mother had open heart surgery in Texas and they had a-there was a book called *Hearts*, and it was about the heart complex there and all. And in it, it explained that often what they would do, is when you lost a-if they were concerned for the family and they've lost a patient, what they would do is they would come out and they would tell you, "We thought it was rough but we managed to do it." And they would go back into the back and they would come back ten minutes later and they would tell you that they lost 'em. And it's really about lifting people up, because they really are afraid. I was in Texas alone.

And so when I left, I left my mother. My brothers were coming in and I left to buy her some night wear because she really was not, she didn't want to be informed about the surgery. And she didn't realize she was going to have this horrible scar, so she didn't want the boys to see that. So, she wanted something that was higher, so I went. And when I called back, I could tell that something was off, so I hurried back, and when I got back, she stroked right in front of me. And so they rushed her off to the thing. And I think I had been fine through all of it, but I lost it, you know. I didn't have anybody else, and I just simply lost it in the hospital. And so the man who was in the room next to me, his wife, when she heard the call on the...she understood what was going on and came up. So she waited with me in the waiting room. And so we're sitting there. So we're sitting in it and so I'm hysterical and she's calming me and so the doctor comes in and says, This was a close call and blah nananana, and I just do the whatchucallit and then go and in ten minutes, he comes in and says, you know, "Miss Amber, we lost her." And I think that, I thought about that with this...Because it was the same way. I think that people were so low that (The Saints) understood that they needed to lift them up, and this time there wasn't a down, they'd already done the down. This was about really, really about lifting them up. And I think that that's the motivation.

Amber understood the Saints' success as motivator to the people of the City who had been knocked down, dragged down, flooded out—to find the will to get back up when they did not even possess the desire. Amber's narrative constructed the meaning of the Saints' success in post-Katrina recovery as a powerful agitator of much needed spiritual lift.

It is also important to note that black women were central in participant fan identification. When asked, "Do you consider yourself a Saints fan?" every participant responded with a narrative evoking another black woman. Raven sat back in her chair, closed her eyes, as if picturing her mother before her and described her mother's fandom as performance, "My mother was a *great fan* of the Saints...(laughing) and she used to holler too loud! Blake characterized her fan identification as a tribute to her late mother,

Well, I love the Saints. I truly do but I'm not a sportsy sports person. But because...like a tribute to my mom I have to cheer for them. Because she was a *die-hard* fan. Like *all her life*. Even when they (were) like 0-1 and 2, she was like, "Alright, Saints!" I mean, and before she passed, she got to see-she got to go to the Saints (Superbowl Champion) parade and she got to see all that-the Super Bowl stuff and everything. So, I was just like, "Wow!" So I have to...be one (a fan) for her and I have to be one for the City because they have die-hard fans here. I don't care if they win or lose but I'd *rather* have them win. I'd rather have-I'd rather see them do good.

While most women spoke of their mothers as the impetus of their fan support, Golda spoke of her daughter. She replied, "Yes, because my oldest daughter, when the Saints were formed, my oldest daughter was the 1st black cheerleader that they had. So, she did that all through college until she got tired of doing that." My findings insist that black women have much to contribute as knowledge producers of post-Katrina narratives of the meaning of sport in disaster recovery. However, there yet remains an interstitial politics that prevents the uptake of black women's knowledge and experience.

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A SAVIOR...

...The Saints simply do not fit the bill. Heretofore, this project has been concerned with what the Saints success means to the recovery of home. However, it is equally important to understand the linkages participants *did not* make between the Saints success and the post-Katrina recovery in their narratives. It was easy to get swept up in the moments of jubilation. New Orleans needed it—and deserved it. But, after the confetti fell and was cleaned up, after the last note was played on the trumpet, after the last dance had been danced and the last gleeful tear had been shed, the recovery of home continued.

In an interview, Amber reminded me we can only accurately discuss recovery when we remember the devastation from which New Orleans began. I open with the Golda's sobering realization that her home no longer existed as she knew it.

Like most people, Katrina took everything I had. What little I had on and a few little things I had with me.....(her voice softer) My Katrina story is, it was awful watching everything I had taken from me *completely*. That was quite devastating.

The worst losses, however, were immaterial. Raven describes negotiating the loss of community in the wake of the storm. The realization that some members of her community had been trapped was heart breaking. Raven recalled,

I just started thinking about all the residents, all the people who grew up in the Magnolia (Housing Development) who basically wound up at the site, who really didn't have families, I was wondering where they were. This one resident in particular, I grew up with his family...he just kept...he was on my mind. I said, "Lord, I hope (he) is alright." And later I found out that they found his body by the Delachaise (Street) apartments by the fence.

Hurricane Katrina had dealt a crushing blow to the people of New Orleans. The Saints offered a cultural respite of performing home—even as a physical homeplace may not exist. However, the interlocutors were careful not paint the Super Bowl is a magic pill. Saffronia stated simply,

What I can say in all honesty is the Saints gave us a reprieve. Gave us a reprieve from whatever it was we were being burdened down with. Didn't get the money for the Road Home...that little piece of shit I had of a job just faded out, and et cetera. And I don't make the connection between... I don't see the connection between the Saints and recovery.

The work of recovery was long and emotionally taxing. The physical, emotional, and psychological effects of the storm may never be fully appreciated. For Saffronia, the team *itself*—the organization and even the game of football was not a significant element of recovery.

Ebony offered a similar perspective. Ebony is a 30 year-old child care worker who returned relatively soon—almost two months—after the storm made landfall. Ebony would have to return alone, leaving her children in the care of her mother. There was a demand for child care but other services were scarce. At the time of our interview, Ebony had been reunited with her partner, children, and mother. Yet, she notes the difficulty of the first days after the storm. While she credits the Saints for reinvigorating the City, she limits their success to “a win.” Ebony stated,

You know, they don't pay any of my bills. I was, I'm happy that they won and again, it was just a feeling... Well, I mean we were returning *before* the Saints won the Super Bowl. We were trying to get here, it was just how... To get here was a big thing. You know, coming back to what? I don't think it really had to do with the Saints coming back, you know. Again, it's not like they built houses that everybody could come back to and different things like that. So, it's—it's a win, (laughs) basically.

The Saints' success was meaningful to the recovery of home as an energizer of the spirit. Yet, the challenges of recovery continued after the game clock read 0:00. Ebony's own experience prevented her from being completely overtaken in the moment of Super Bowl victory.

Furthermore, her commentary speaks to the immediate concerns of black women recovering home that exceeded the capabilities of the Saints. On Monday morning, issues like housing,

security, and education were realities to be addressed. While the Saints are meaningful as a thread of the cultural performance of home, Raven refocused the attention from the Saints to the people of New Orleans. She insists, “I would say that the city as a whole shows the perseverance of the people who live here. (We) all came together.”²⁹⁶ The Disast/her Dialogs express the Saints reignited in New Orleans a much needed spirit of exuberance, “they were just another piece of the puzzle.”²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Excerpt from Interview Transcript

²⁹⁷ Raven, Excerpt from Interview Transcript.

*Some of us Did Not Die
We're Still Here
I Guess It Was Our Destiny To Live
So Let's get on with it!*

– June Jordan

CHAPTER 5 – “I GOTTA PASS (BY)...”: FINDING OUR FINGERPRINTS ON THE HANDLES OF HISTORY

Ask a New Orleanian their itinerary for the day and it could likely include, “I gotta pass by my mama ‘nem (or insert the name of the person’s home with whom they intend to visit).” To “pass by” or simply, pass is to interrupt the day with a visit with, commune or fellowship for some undetermined period of time. It implies that the person or event is important enough to warrant one’s physical presence. Hurricane Katrina required that many of those who know New Orleans as home pass by—to check on friends and loved ones, to evaluate the severity of the damage, and to negotiate the implications of the storm. There was some news that could not be conveyed with a phone call—some sorrow and eventually, resilience that had to be experienced and shared in person. In the aftermath of Katrina and the unprecedented success of the Saints, I was compelled to pass by place, the culture, and the people I knew as home. *Something* was happening. The energy was appreciable. Still, as outsider narratives described the moment, the voices of black women were undetectable.

My dissertation project was motivated by a series of observations. On September 25, 2006 the New Orleans Saints returned to their home field after a year of displacement to face their bitter rivals, the Atlanta Falcons on Monday Night Football for the National Football League’s season opener. Thirteen months earlier, Hurricane Katrina had decimated the city and the “home” New Orleanians once knew. The Super Dome had not been spared. As New Orleanians negotiated loss, displacement, and recovery so too did the Saints. It would be an important night for all who knew New Orleans as home. Hundreds of miles away at Michigan State University, I left campus immediately after teaching my classes for the day (something I never did) and following New Orleans’ Monday culinary ritual, began cooking a pot of red beans

and rice, baked chicken, and corn bread. I turned on ESPN for company and to my surprise the day's coverage had been devoted to the Saints' return to the Dome. Throughout the day and even after the subsequent Saints victory, the media described the day as "symbolic of the recovery of home for New Orleans." I was, at best, ill at ease as a New Orleans native experiencing my own recovery. Who was consulted in the formulation of this narrative?

Three years later, the Saints are a miracle in the making. The Saints remained undefeated late into the 2009-10 NFL season. As the weeks rolled on and the Saints secured their place in the playoffs and eventually the Super Bowl, the "the Saints as symbolic of recovery" rhetoric grew to a roar. The excitement was palpable—but was this unlikely success a metaphor for recovery? The initial query was born. It would be a difficult subject to broach. I decided to deploy photo elicitation during interviews to ease the interview process. The plot thickened. After searching through thousands of images to include in the interview schedule, only two capturing the Saints phenomenon contained black women. I knew black women were present because I a) had been to games myself, b) noticed other black women in attendance, and c) knew black women who identify as observed lifelong Saints fans in its truest sense—that of the fanatic d) observed black women engaging in consumption activities, such as hosting football parties and purchasing paraphernalia and e) discussed the implications of the season with other black women proud to call New Orleans home. This was an investigation I could not ignore. I often heard the words of Audre Lorde as I conducted archival research, collected and analyzed data, gave papers and presentations about my work, and finally wrote my dissertation.

It's not that we [black women] haven't always been here, since there was a here. It is that the letters of our names have been scrambled when they were not totally erased, and our

fingerprints upon the handles of history have been called the random brushings of birds.²⁹⁸

The random brushings of birds—black women’s contributions as arbitrary, capricious, and taken for granted in the sporting landscape. Our understandings and experiences had been relegated to the interstices. Still, we are, and always have been here. Beyond mere presence, our contributions are significant to the production of knowledge about the meaning of home in New Orleans and the role sport has played in it, both prior to and in the days since Hurricane Katrina made landfall. Yet, so few have bothered to “pass by” black women’s understandings and experiences of home.

The purpose of this study was to address the disregard for black women as contributors to knowledge production with respect to the role of sport in disaster recovery. Black women’s knowledge has been rendered willfully undetectable. The larger goal was to explore the narratives of black women on-the-ground to understand if sport was meaningful in the recovery of home. This project was guided by the research project: What is the meaning of the Saints’ success to black women’s post-Katrina recovery of home? There exists no extant framework through which this research phenomenon might be interrogated. Therefore, this project became an exercise in construction—I had to build every element brick by brick. An 18-month ethnographic study in the Central City neighborhood of New Orleans included development of a conceptual framework, archival research, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews. Photo-elicitation interviews with 10 participants were conducted however only 7 were analyzed—black women who have been residents of Central City at least 5 years prior to Hurricane Katrina, ages 23-81.

²⁹⁸ Lorde, “Wild Women in the Whirlwind,” xi.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

I began by framing this study as an exploration of three seemingly unrelated themes: the distinct culture of New Orleans, the meaning of the New Orleans Saints' 2010 Super Bowl victory to the post-Katrina recovery, and black women's interstitial politics within both. And yet, they are not at all distinct but rather, quite comingled. Much about New Orleans is. Therefore, I proposed ordinary black women as theorists pivotal to the production of knowledge, highlighting their experiences, and centering their accounts within the research process, rather than dismissing their knowledge entirely. As a result, this study makes significant contributions to the extant scholarship on sport and leisure studies as well as interdisciplinary literature on disaster recovery.

This project was an exercise in "passing by." The empirical and literal act of honoring black women's post-Katrina recovery narratives in New Orleans yielded findings that suggest the Saints' success is meaningful as a thread of the New Orleans cultural aesthetic of home. Celebrating the Saints provided a conduit to celebratory memorial as a means of spiritual release. Interlocutors drew parallels between Saints parties—communal gatherings of food, spirits, music, dance, and festivity—and the cultural rites of play as exercised through the second line tradition practiced by Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs like the Baby Dolls and Mardi Gras Indian Gangs. Findings insist that only by honoring and maintaining these traditions is recovering home as possibility. Even as participants discussed the success of the Saints in connection with the loss of a loved one, it is the spirit of release—the celebratory memorial that "turns mourning into dancing." This is New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home. Participants consistently intertwined narratives the cultural observances of the second line tradition as a spiritual catharsis and the success of the Saints as spiritual release for a city in crisis.

New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home understands sport and play as a way of being, integral to overcoming life's hardships. In the success of the Saints, one can observe sport as a venue for play in post-Katrina New Orleans. Yet, the importance of play is not limited to this geographic region. Within the field of kinesiology, there is a disciplinary appreciation for play. Joseph Lee, founder of the playground movement espoused a belief in the importance of play for adult revitalization.²⁹⁹ "The aim of every city is to have play and recreation established as a public function."³⁰⁰ Lee's original ideas about the role of play in the spiritual renewal of adults were in reference to men in the military. Play could be useful in the maintenance of morale in men deployed in military service.

It is perhaps, not surprising that black women's participation and very presence is ignored and that we are disqualified from contributing to the validated knowledge that comprises scholarship of sport and play. However, the opening chapter notes that African descended peoples in New Orleans (particularly women) deployed play, sport and recreation as a tool for emotional survival from their earliest moments of being "here." Ignoring that herstory, few are the images of black women celebrating the Saints and lacking is the study of black women's contributions to the celebratory memorial that harnesses the revitalizing power of play. This study passes by "the letters of our names [that] have been scrambled when they were not totally erased," that Lorde avers deny our presence, recognizing their existence and significance—an acknowledgement that we are indeed *here*. It is an act of being present in the construction of- and theorizing about Black women's narratives and experiences as a step toward unscrambling and re-inscribing those missing and misidentifying letters.

²⁹⁹ Joseph Lee, 44

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 88.

The failure to appreciate black women's role in New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home is entrenched. In her efforts to uncover our fingerprints and to reclaim the legacy of the Baby Dolls, Vaz notes that one of the primary documents used to document their herstory was published by three white men who never had direct conversation with the Million Dollar Baby Dolls but instead, relied upon and edited the notes of a black journalist (who was never credited for his work). "[M]en have written about the Baby Dolls largely from a decidedly non-feminist stance"³⁰¹—perpetuating perceptions that understand these women in light of their professions rather than their humanity or capabilities. Accounts typically craft narratives that emphasize the sexual undertones rather than the agency and innovation of Baby Dolls performance of home. Thus, there remains a paucity of literature that captures the significance of their resistance, creative expression, and cultural influence generally—more specifically, little has been written by women who understand and value the lives and experiences of the black women instrumental in crafting the celebratory memorial that makes New Orleans home. As a result, the Baby Dolls' humanity and the struggle for a hopeful performance of home in New Orleans is thrust to the margins in favor of centering the salacious nature of their work.

Similarly, outsider recovery narratives are culturally illiterate in their analysis of the role of sport as a site play as an aspect of celebratory memorial. The uniqueness of New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home demonstrated by the Baby Dolls is mirrored in the Saints' Super Bowl season. Participant narratives of the role sport in post-Katrina recovery underscore Vaz' study of the Baby Dolls in that to know New Orleans as home is to deploy elements of play to negotiate even life's worst circumstances, creating an art born of resilience. The Saints' identity was one of losers, the league's social misfits—summarily dismissed in previous relatively successful

³⁰¹ Vaz, *The Baby Dolls*, 10.

seasons. Still, the team took the field every week of each season, braving the insults and disregard of the NFL to exist on their own terms. While other cities tailgated during the 2009-2010 season, we danced through the streets singing and dancing in the second line, an art form of our own making—with a hope that exceeded sport but would inspire recovery of home that could turn tragedy into triumph.

Sport is often perceived as a great equalizer. However, participant narratives illuminate that the experience of home has been patently different for black women. Despite the myriad references to sport (and specifically the Saints) narratives about the fleur de lis demonstrated black women's embodied knowledge of sport in New Orleans were anything but equal to the dominant experience. The narratives are a reminder that behind even the moments of the greatest euphoria, the spectre of racism lingers. That a symbol—simultaneously representative of the French aristocracy and a violent marque used to identify runaway slaves—was adopted as an NFL insignia and has come to represent the recovery of New Orleans is rife with contradiction. Fuel, perhaps, for some of the loudest cheers. As Sable suggests, those cheers were inspired by the exact moment of getting to that moment—that New Orleanians cannot “run from our history but it can become our strength.”³⁰²

Experiences were no more equal outside of the context of sport. Consistently, interlocutors recalled challenges to their citizenship rites while being displaced after Hurricane Katrina. The term, “refugee” used in the media and even by government and administrative agencies caused visceral responses for participants. However, when I listened closely, the anger was an immediate response to deflect unspeakable pain—a point agonizingly illustrated by Saffronia as she described, in detail, a painful incident during her evacuation and early

³⁰² Excerpt taken from Interview Transcript

displacement in Arkansas. After her anger subsided she stated softly, “I take pride in being an American. Ugh. Whenever I heard that word, I just, it *hurt*.”³⁰³ Saffronia had been and remained an American. She had given birth to two American children. She had owned property in an American state. All of these things proved her American citizenship. However, in one instant, a storm had imprinted a “refugee” label upon her previously unquestioned identity.

As I “listened for gaps,”³⁰⁴ I began to understand that the term “refugee” as demeaning because it robbed interlocutors of their belonging. The embodied knowledge that participants carry about the spectre of race connoted refugee as a racially charged term. The Saints success however re-created a citizenship to which New Orleanians could belong. The *Who ‘Dat?! Nation* provided a community of belonging that transcended the color line and as Sable would add, “...and not a whole lot of things go past the color line.”³⁰⁵ While this may not have been an equalizing experience, it was *something* to grasp on to. How similar this seems to the narratives of the 19th century black women chronicled by Peterson—hoping for a home in America they could grasp on to.

I presented black women’s interstitial contributions as *lagniappe*—that little something extra—to describe the depth of perspective that is underappreciated, yet ultimately enhances this empirical pursuit. Black women have much to contribute to knowledge production. However, those contributions are routinely dismissed as what Lorde describes as “the random brushings of birds”³⁰⁶—inconsequential and fleeting. Participant narratives uncover black women’s intergenerational relationships with the Saints as home. Yet, their experiences remain untold,

³⁰³ Ibid

³⁰⁴ Chase, Susan E. “Taking Narrative Seriously: Consequences for Method and Theory in Interview Studies.” In *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief*, edited by Yvonna S. Lincoln and Norman K. Denzin, 273-296. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003.

³⁰⁵ Excerpt taken from Interview Transcript

³⁰⁶ Lorde, “Wild Women in the Whirlwind,” xi.

under detected, and invisible. Black women are largely absent from dominant media narratives capturing the post-Katrina Saints phenomenon. This project takes a first step by asking black women to make meaning of their experiences and presenting excerpts—sometimes uninterrupted—as examples of our capacity for theory making. Narratives locate the Saints in the cultural aesthetic of home, however, these narratives have yet to receive uptake.

Implications

What must be understood from the outset is that recovery is an ongoing process. While this was an ethnographic study—organic and dynamic in nature—things were constantly in a state of flux. Families were still reuniting. A new governor, followed by a new mayor were elected. Roads were being rebuilt and repaved. People were finally coming home. At times, it was as if you could feel the ground shifting. How then, could one study the recovery of home? Research methods for this study necessarily had to disrupt the perception that knowledge is generated from the academy and funneled to the community. Instead, methods appreciated knowledge on-the-ground, later shared with researchers—yielding richer data and mutual research relationships. Visual methods were an important first step in building rapport with participants. The images chosen reflected the researcher’s embodied knowledge of New Orleans’ cultural aesthetic of home and developed an initial level of trust. Photo elicitation also allowed participants to narrate experiences evoked by or completely contradictory to the images—making the interlocutors the experts in either case. It became increasingly clear that their theories about the meaning of sport to the disaster recovery have been grossly overlooked to this point.

The black feminist ethic of caring became increasingly important throughout this work. Participants did not wish to simply share their narratives of recovery—they wanted to share their experience, to share in their recovery of home. Participants graciously invited me to share in time with their families, participate in cultural events, attend community engagements, and observe them in professional settings—they wanted me to see, smell, taste, share in the experience of New Orleans coming back. Often these events and gatherings coincided with Saints events but it made little difference when they did not. The culture of the city is so deeply intertwined it is often difficult to disentangle its moving parts.

I mention the ever changing research climate because while many might consider it a limitation, I, instead, consider it a strength. The following examples are a testament to the black feminist research praxis of this project. My interview with Blake was just after Thanksgiving. The Saints had defeated the New York Giants the night before. The City was in a state of joy. Try as she might, Blake could not match that spirit. Still, there was something about the connection with Blake. Something in the way we laughed together. Something in the way I understood her love for writing and dancing. Something about the way she loved her daughter after the storm. I had seen this before. Katrina had changed many of us. The true Blake was buried under the weight of the storm. We continued to talk. I would listen as long as she needed. There was a moment when she must have felt safe enough to say to me finally, “I don’t know when is *my* Super Bowl going to be? I don’t know.”³⁰⁷

Two months later, Blake and I spoke again—I could feel the ground shifting under my feet. Blake’s voice was joyful as she talked about the importance of the faith New Orleanians had that the Saints would win the Super Bowl. However, before we concluded, Blake thanked

³⁰⁷ Excerpt taken from Interview Transcript

me for just listening during our previous conversation. She added, “I think the conversation that we had was needed. It needed to happen for me to really be encouraged.”³⁰⁸ Once participants believed they could trust me enough to share their experiences, they did not want to simply give me narratives to transfer to text, they tried to help make them live for me. This sharing of embodied cultural knowledge simply can not be quantified. Christian’s alternative theorizing became clear as participants narrated their conceptions of home by drawing links between the cultural traditions of New Orleans and post-Katrina celebrations of the Saints.

Recommendations for Future Research

The enormity of the 2010 Super Bowl Championship may never be appreciated outside of New Orleans. However, additional challenges have arisen since. This study might be expanded to investigate any changes in perception after events such as the Deep Horizon oil spill or the Saints’ bounty scandal in the following years. A longitudinal study could also be implemented to document the ever evolving process that is recovering home and the Saints’ role within it. Black women’s narratives should be explored to determine meaning of the Saints’ success as recovery continues. The effect of the success can be measured years later to determine if it inspired subsequent developments.

And so, I end where I began—arguing for recognition of black women’s epistemic contributions that goes beyond the random brushings of birds. Narratives that fail to account for the experiences of those about whom they are written will always be incomplete. Sport as disaster recovery narratives, particularly about the Saints phenomenon—which disregard black

³⁰⁸ Excerpt taken from Interview Transcript

women's epistemic and theoretical contributions do not effectively understand the role of sport in the recovery of home. Who conducts the research and how research is approached is equally important. Interlocutors were willing to share because they believed I could understand and would pass by, taking care not to misrepresent the complicated cultural nuance of home in New Orleans. The way in which Hurricane Katrina and its recovery is discussed, written about, studied and who has the authority to do so is equally important. There is a noticeable underappreciation of black women's theory—in the academy and on the ground. More studies are required with greater focus on the concerns and perspectives of black women recovering home in real-time. However, this project revealed that more native research is necessary to accurately and effectively depict the culture that informs home in New Orleans.

Two upcoming events provide opportunities for continued research in this vein. The Commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina (2015) and the New Orleans Tricentennial (2018) will call on the celebratory memorial at the heart of New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home. Reflection on the losses of Katrina as well as the progress and stagnancy of recovery offer moments during which the community can process, mourn, and celebrate its resilience. In celebrating the 300-year history of the City, intentional interstitial study could present forward looking strategies for grappling with the legacy of race, gender, and class in New Orleans and the convergence(s) uncovered in this study. Research should probe for developments in the recognition of black women's theoretical capacity at the intersection of sport, recovery, and home. During these moments, future studies might consider what post-Katrina recovery looks like in the *new* New Orleans—expanding the scope of disaster recovery narratives to make room for black women. Photovoice, in which participants create their own

images to narrate meaning, could serve as a culturally sensitive research method useful in generating participant articulated experiences and facilitating reflexivity.

This study illuminates the practice of overlooking Black women's significance to the production of knowledge about New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home. Returning to Lorde, it is imperative that investigations persist to uncover our "fingerprints on the handles of history."³⁰⁹ These fingerprints are distinct markers of our presence, detecting that have, indeed, "been here since there was a here."³¹⁰ The aforementioned commemorations provide an ideal opportunity for research, reflection, and analysis. However, there exists a need for not only more research, but projects that center black women in the *creation* of New Orleans' cultural aesthetic of home to include various aspects of celebratory memorial like community building, food (e.g. women chefs), music, recreation and play—moving black women's knowledge and contributions from the interstices. There has been a proliferation of interest in the second line tradition and SA&PC. However, black women have seldom been the focus—as if the culture exists absent our presence. The fact that we have been and remain "here" has been dismissed despite the very fingerprints that provide evidence. As I mentioned in the rationale for this project, the researcher matters to the research. More native, black women researchers committed to culturally sensitive and ethical research praxis are necessary are a first step.

Future research should be guided by a simple question: "what is your purpose?" Admittedly, my answer to this question changed throughout this project. Only as I moved toward completion of this project did I come to understand that I was writing, not as the random brushings of birds but to save my life. I am not the first black woman to make this claim. In "Race for Theory,"

³⁰⁹ Lorde, "Wild Women in the Whirlwind," xi.

³¹⁰ Ibid, xi.

Barbara Christian asserts that she is writing for her survival. *Mad At Miles: A Blackwoman's Guide to Truth* later echoes that sentiment as Pearl Cleage declares, “I am writing, writing, writing, for my life.”³¹¹ Admittedly, this project has helped me understand both as more than simply good prose. Speaking with, listening to, and analyzing the words and experiences of black women working to recover home illuminated that their cultural performance of home—celebrating the Saints and through other cultural rites—as acts of survival. The scholarship of black women and native researchers exceeds a simple career building exercise when we understand our research as lifelines for ourselves and the populations we study. As I continue in my own recovery, this dissertation and my future research on the culture of home are written as acts to save my life.

³¹¹ Cleage, Pearl. *Mad At Miles: A Blackwoman's Guide to Truth* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press), 5.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title: The meaning of the Saints to the recovery of post-Katrina New Orleans

**Conducted by: Marita Gilbert, Doctoral Candidate
Of Michigan State University, Department of Kinesiology**

E-mail: gilbe160@msu.edu

Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx

You are being invited to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. Please read through the information below and ask any question that comes to mind about the project before making your decision about participating.

The purpose of this study is to understand the significance of the New Orleans Saints success on the recovery of New Orleans. If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to take part in a face-to-face interview approximately 45minutes – 1 hour long. This conversation will be audio-recorded and the researcher will make some hand-written notes for later reflection.

There are no known risks associated with being in this study. Please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential to the maximum extent permitted by law. Research participants will be identified only by pseudonyms (alternate names) to shield their identities. All records will be securely stored and kept in a locked file cabinet—accessed solely by the researchers involved in this study and the Institutional Review Board. All publications resulting from the data collected will exclude any identifying information of the research participants.

You should be aware that your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting any current or future relationship with Michigan State University. You may choose not to answer any question without penalty. Your participation will not affect any benefits to which you are entitled.

Please feel free to ask any questions you may have about the study at any time. You may ask questions now or at any point during the study. I am glad to share the findings with you after the research has been completed. If you later decide to discontinue your involvement with this project, simply let the researcher know.

Your assistance in this project is deeply appreciated. Should you have any questions about this study, please contact Marita Gilbert at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or Steve Gold, Ph.D. Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Sociology at Michigan State University at (517) 353-6352 or e-mail: gold@msu.edu.

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