JOYCE MARIE JACKSON

Declaration of Taking Twice: The Fazendeville Community of the Lower Ninth Ward

ABSTRACT The Fazendeville Village was a residential community founded during the Reconstruction era in 1867 on the land where the Battle of New Orleans (1815) was fought during the War of 1812 in what is now Chalmette, LA. The entire community was displaced and their homes were razed in 1964 to provide more land for the National Historical Park to commemorate the battle. Most of the residents moved to the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans and now, 42 years later, they are displaced again and their homes (those that are still standing) will be razed because of the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the floods. Previous research has proven that vernacular networks affect the exodus, return, recovery, and rebuilding of certain communities after traumatic situations. In this study, I suggest that in the Fazendeville community during past trauma, the maintenance of cultural livelihood was caused by communality, spirituality, and traditionality. In addition, I propose that these are also the vernacular networks that are catalyst for community renewal and empowerment—after hurricanes, floods, and historic displacement by the federal government. My ultimate goal is to transform ethnographies into a praxis capable of making the community present and not marginalized or excluded from history and the strategic plan for rebuilding New Orleans. [Keywords: vernacular networks, sacred landscapes and dual meanings, struggles for representation, church as catalyst for renewal]

> It is the community that cushions pain,
> the community that provides a context for intimacy,
> the community that represents morality and serves as the repository for old cultural traditions.
>
> —Kai T. Erikson

"If the church is rebuilt, the people will come back," asserted Reverend Theodore Sanders, the eight pastor of Battle Ground Baptist Church in the Lower Ninth Ward, on January 24, 2006.[1] Drawing on the pastor's adamant assertion and three previous reconstruction projects for the church, there is a large probability that he may be right. In the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and the ensuing floods, many churches were destroyed in the Lower Ninth Ward, and Battle Ground Baptist Church was one of the oldest, having its 136th anniversary in November 2004. This church, along with its largest associated community known as Fazendeville, has been very resilient in the past, recovering from displacement by the federal government and by Hurricane Betsy. However, many of the residents that have been very optimistic in the past are not as sure as Reverend Sanders is about the recovery of the church and the community. As everyone is saying, Katrina was different.

Fazendeville was the name of a small settlement of African Americans nestled on the east side of the Mississippi River levee occupied from 1867 to 1964. It was located approximately seven miles southeast of New Orleans, Louisiana, in St. Bernard Parish in Chalmette. Many of the first residents migrated from the plantations located in the Mississippi River parishes and were similar to other early reconstruction period African American communities that were founded after the Civil War. The community was established on the natural levee of the river, a location affording the highest and driest land in a region that is close to if not below sea level in some places and subject to flooding. Formerly known as the Chalmette Plantation, it was here that Britain and the United States fought the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, the last battle of the War of 1812. The community was developed on the battlefield, on a tract that is now between Chalmette National Cemetery, established by the U.S. War Department in 1864, and the Chalmette Monument.

After the Civil War, Jean Pierre Fazende, a freedman of color and a grocer, divided the land he had inherited into parcels, which he sold to newly emancipated blacks. The property was a narrow strip of land that stretched from the Mississippi River halfway to the St. Bernard Highway. The unique community of Fazendeville, also known locally as "the Village," had been developed, nurtured, and maintained by the geographical location of the settlement, the

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social and economic independence of the residents, and their marginal contact with residents outside the area. The 45 to 50 families constituted a thriving and vibrant community. According to the residents, during its almost 100 years of existence, it had a one-room school that educated community children through the eighth grade, at least three churches, two benevolent society halls, two barrooms, and three grocery stores of different sizes.

When the Chalmette National Historical Park was established in 1939, Fazendeville remained in the midst of the preserved battlefield. "Both National Park Service officials and local preservationists spearheaded efforts for land acquisition to reconstruct the established boundaries of the battlefield. The Battle of New Orleans Sesquicentennial Celebration Commission, created in 1962 by President Kennedy, was preparing for the celebration" (Peña 2001:25). Therefore, in 1964 the National Park Service acquired the Fazendeville residential area through forced purchases and condemnation, eliminated the structures, and physically erased the historic community. Essentially, most residents then moved into the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans, which was right across the parish line, predominantly black, and affordable. Many of them have continued to live in this area for more than 40 years. Now, because of the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and consequent flooding, these same people are displaced again.

The residents' accounts are themselves uniquely valuable in enlarging our comprehension of the multifaceted human dynamics through which communities are conceived, developed, displaced, and renewed. In addition, it is also important to see how they have endured in spite of adverse circumstances, spanning both natural and man-made disasters; specifically, in the case of Fazendeville, these included ultimate physical removal by the federal government, and then again, more than 40 years later, by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the floods.

By utilizing ethnographies from before and after Katrina and Rita, I am examining the community's resilience and cultural modes of coping with historical and modern day trauma. In addition, I am interested in vernacular networks and how these affect the return, recovery, and rebuilding of certain communities. Essentially, I am suggesting that in the Fazendeville community during past trauma the maintenance of cultural livelihood was because of communality, spirituality, and traditionality. In addition, I am proposing that these are also the vernacular networks that are catalysts for community renewal—post hurricanes, floods, and historic displacement by the federal government.

Previous research on social networks and hurricanes by Jeanne Hurlbert and colleagues demonstrates that

> individuals' networks matter in both the preparation and recovery phases of the storm, over and above the personal characteristics of the victims and characteristics of the communities in which they live. They matter for the amount of informal social support individuals provide and receive, for their perceptions of the adequacy of social support, and for their physical and mental health. [2005:1]

I definitely agree with the fact that networks matter in both the preparation and recovery phases of the storm, but in the case of Fazendeville, I have to take issue with the phrase, "over and above the ... characteristics of the communities in which they live" (Hurlbert et al. 2005:1). In many other cities, this is certainly true, but in New Orleans there are many examples to the contrary. The Lower Ninth Ward, the topic for this study, is one exception; specifically, the Fazendeville community in the Lower Ninth Ward has a very strong, independent, and resilient character.

This same team of scholars' study on Hurricane Andrew illustrates that

> in the short-term recovery phase of that storm, individuals who received more social support experienced better physical health and lower levels of depression than individuals who received less support. Among those who drew that support from their social networks, stronger ties—particularly kin ties—and ties to similar others (homophilous ties) served as key informal support conduits. [Haines et al. 1992:225–256, see also 2002; Hurlbert 2005:1]

The research team continues to assert:

> Our research also showed that the structure of individuals' social networks prior to the storm affected the degree to which they activated network ties for help in the preparation and recovery phases (2002). Individuals embedded in higher-density networks with more gender diversity (i.e., a mix of men and women), and networks that contained higher proportions of men, kin, and younger individuals activated core network ties for informal support to a greater degree than individuals embedded in core networks lacking these characteristics did. [Hurlbert et al. 2005:1]

Although Katrina was different and expands and complicates the trauma over an indefinite period of time, drawing on the above previous research and the wealth of recent ethnographies from the Fazendeville community, this study will illustrate the character of one community (past and present) and show how this community has fared with historical trauma and displacement. In addition and in spite of the fact that "Katrina's victims may find the task of maintaining their network ties to be taxing, complex, and perhaps overwhelming in the face of so many other losses and disruptions" (Hurlbert et. al. 2005:2), there is evidence of hope and renewal in this community. Only time will tell how these same vernacular networks will aid in the recovery, renewal, and empowering process. At this moment, we can only tentatively predict what will happen in the future.

For the first phase of this project, I relied most heavily on oral histories and ethnographic interviews of residents, concentrating on the elders first (18 residents). For the second phase, I continued to interview elderly residents as well as those in their middle ages, basically adult children of the elders (15 residents). Other existing available data on Fazendeville was scant, and the majority of it was located in the

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Jean Lafitte National Historical Park Archives. Before the federal government razed the homes, they were mandated by official policy to document what they were destroying. Therefore, there are official correspondences with National Historical Park Service personnel, government officials, and residents and their attorneys, as well as photographs.

In the third phase of the project, the post-Katrina–Rita phase, the collection of data from residents has been more difficult, because most of them are displaced in various locales around the United States because of the devastation. Thus, all the home addresses and telephone numbers I had had for residents were now defunct. The majority of the people I interviewed for the first phase, the elderly, aged between 70 and early 90s, did not have a computer in their house unless they were living with children or some other younger relative and none had cell phones. A large number of those I interviewed in the second phase had computers and cell phones, however, the computers were all under water and the cell phones would not hold signals anymore because towers were down.

Because I was also a relief worker during this devastation, I knew that it would take a while before people could be contacted. Most were still being shuffled around from one shelter to another, struggling with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Red Cross and trying to get settled with family or friends in other locales. While working with relatives, friends and new acquaintances in our shelter, I could not help but think about the people that I had worked with through the years on so many research projects in New Orleans, but the people from the Fazendeville Village, in the Lower Ninth Ward, stood first on my screen of thoughts.

I wondered if Mrs. Elizabeth Lindsey evacuated safely. I had interviewed her on her 88th birthday; she is a descendent from one of the first Fazendeville families in the area, and she and her husband were among the last to hold out against displacement by the federal government in 1964. I also wondered if her house withstood the storm. It was the only house that was moved to the Lower Ninth Ward from the Fazendeville settlement in Chalmette. I wondered about the safety of Mrs. Doretha Thomas. She had shared many traditional healing remedies and practices that people used in the village along with her Mississippi River baptismal experience and other celebrations within Battle Ground Baptist Church. In addition, I hoped that Reverend Theodore Bush had safe passage. He had shared a wealth of stories with me from the village dealing with racial issues and had explained how hard it was to be and remain a proud black man in the early 20th century in St. Bernard Parish. Yes, I remembered many of the people, their homes, and their New Orleans hospitality. They so graciously had let me walk into their lives and bring up memories that many of them had suppressed for years. We talked about their beloved village over iced tea in the summer and hot Community Coffee in the winter. Now, I was left wondering whether they had evacuated safely? Were they all right, and what were their physical and mental conditions following Katrina, Rita, and the floods? Did they want to and were they going to have the right to return?

DECLARATION OF TAKING I

The Fazendeville Village that was built across from a pecan grove lacked any formal legal and political organization of its own; it had no established cooperative labor groupings, and it was not the center of large highly concentrated commercial activities. However, there was a secular educational institution, a few voluntary associations, and some commercial activity. The village itself was enmeshed within the larger political and societal organization of St. Bernard Parish and Chalmette, but without significant and separate representation within these groupings.

Like slave quarter societies on plantations that lined the Mississippi River, the Fazendeville Village had strong African and Caribbean components. The families and their culture constituted a mixture of African, diasporic, and European cultural elements, all of which combined to create a unique mode of life and expression. This community, complete with its own folklore and social institutions, was predominantly oral and aural in its communication. Its expressions were spoken and heard in an intensely sociable atmosphere, as the village dwellers carried on their lives in many face-to-face contacts in the past and even today, albeit in different spaces. Some voices are still heard within these pages that I write.

The common ideological identification of the people of the village; the informal network of social relations surrounding kin, marriage, and friendship; and the interlocking relationships associated with the activities of churches and the benevolent associations were all integral to the functioning of the community. The face-to-face contact of large numbers of community members at church anniversaries, revivals, baptisms, and funerals gave the Fazendeville Village its focus as a vibrant, resilient, and independent community when it existed on the battleground site between the Chalmette National Cemetery and the Chalmette Monument (see Figure 1). This existence lasted from 1867 to 1964 when the U.S. Department of the Interior decided that this sacred space was needed to expand the National Historic Park.

On February 7, 1964, Frank J. Barry, National Park Service Solicitor wrote a letter to the Honorable Attorney General of the United States. An important excerpt follows:

> For use in connection with the administration, protection, and development of the Chalmette National Historical Park pursuant to the act of October 9, 1962 (76 Stat. 755), I have determined that it is necessary, advantageous, and in the interest of the United States to acquire by condemnation a parcel of land in St. Bernard Parish, State of Louisiana, consisting of 7.02 acres, more or less, and described in the exhibits to the enclosed Declaration of Taking.
>
> This 7.02-acre parcel lies in the heart of the field over which the historic Battle of New Orleans was fought in

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FIGURE 1. Aerial view of Fazendeville. Fazendeville community is near center, Chalmette monument is bottom left, Mississippi River is bottom right, the military cemetery is top right, and St. Bernard Parish Road is top left.

> January of 1815. Its early acquisition as an entirety is necessary in order to construct a tour road, to erect markers to interpret the Battle of New Orleans, and otherwise to prepare for the forthcoming sesquicentennial celebration of the battle. [Frank J. Barry correspondence to U.S. Attorney General, February 7, 1964]

Even though the discussions and correspondence on the proposed addition to the National Park had started years before, the above excerpt from the letter was the impetus for the displacement of people and the demolition of their homes in the village. Although the federal government made official claims to the land and justified its actions as nationally significant, villagers interpreted the process differently.

BRACING AGAINST POWER

What follows are some of the residents' speculations on the real reason for condemnation procedures and how they felt about this "government situation." Mr. Morris Williams opined:

> The only thing that I can remember is Senator Hebert and Eleanor and Senator Carls and those people, they had been trying to get that land down there to make that a park. And so that was coming up. My thinking about the integration of the school and they might have had to integrate our children in the schools in the area, 'cause they were bussing them from Fazendeville down to Violet Consolidate. But, they were passing white schools to get to a black school. I think that might have had some part to get them out of there. 'Cause there was too many of them in there. [interview, April 6, 2002]

Mr. Williams continued, giving another reason:

> The people in the land, they were trying to become registered voters. You'd begin to brace against the power. They'll always try to push something down on you to break you. The people didn't break because the lawyer he came down with us . . . a black lawyer. He went down to the courthouse and he laid down the foundation to

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> become registered voters. After that, I left because that's when I became a registered voter in New Orleans. In 1963. My family was poor, but we were poor and independent and my mother's family was the same way. [interview, April 6, 2002]

Reverend Theodore Bush explained that

> Old Linch [Park Superintendent] said, a few more years, there will be no more Fazende Village, and he kept it up. . . . This woman, I don't know what her name was or where she was from but this might have been started in Washington. . . . I am trying to think of that lady's name. . . . Mrs. Brown started that in Washington about making the park . . . and then old Linch he kept it up and he said a few more years there ain't gon be no more Fazendeville and he kept it up. But they ain't made no park out of it. [interview, April 13, 2002]

Reverend Sanders had this to say, referring to the same issue, in a telephone interview:

> People from Fazendeville picketed the courthouse [in Chalmette] in 1963 and protested with signs because they could not vote. They had to recite the Preamble to the Constitution or pay poll taxes. So, they were suing the parish for their right to vote. Now Kaiser Aluminum sold the property on both sides. So, when it came to the Village, the politicians did not defend the Village and allowed the Federal Government to move us out. Frank Cager, Morris Williams, and Val Lindsey were the last ones to sell their property. . . . I moved out in 1953 and there was talk that the Village was going to be sold then. [interview, July 8, 2002]

From the Reconstruction era until the present, many African Americans have been inclined to believe that the government has been insincere in its claimed support for racial equality. During the history of Fazendeville, the community did not seem to have much support from its public officials at several crisis junctures, including gaining voting rights and desegregating the schools. Because residents were not informed in the early stages of the process of making their homes into a federal park, suspicions based on earlier betrayals led to circulation of rumors. When people do not have direct official answers from the "authorities" or the "power structure," then they began to formulate their own answers.

When I asked former residents to tell me the approximate time they became aware of the government's intentions to acquire their property by purchase or condemnation proceedings, most could not remember exactly when it was. Reverend Sanders mentioned that he left the village in 1953 and that he heard rumors during that time. However, most said that they knew about the proceedings about two years before it happened, but that even then the government still did not disclose the exact time. When I asked Mrs. Yvonne Dorsey about her earliest knowledge of the government seizing her property, she replied:

> In 1962. We had moved but we would always go back, but eventually everybody had to leave so they tore all the houses down with bulldozers. Lindsey was the last to leave. It was talked about a long time before it happened. Finally, in September 1964 everyone had to go. It was very sad. [interview, April 13, 2002]

The residents retained a lawyer in 1962 to help them acquire more information and to assist them in understanding the situation and their rights. Below is an excerpt from a letter, dated September 20, 1962, that an attorney sent to U.S. Senator Russell Long on behalf of Mr. Eugene Cager and several other property owners in Fazendeville:

> This office has been retained by Mr. Eugene Cager and several property owners of Fazend Village, Louisiana, to represent their interest relative to establishment of a new National Park in their area. These people tell me that newspaper publications indicate that Fazend Village, which is located in Chalmette between the National Monument and the National Cemetery, will be wiped out as a result of the establishment of this park.
>
> There are approximately forty families mostly negro living in this area and they are naturally anxious to know what they might expect. Since you have sponsored this bill establishing the park, would you please let me know whether the park will encompass the area of Fazend Village, and, if so, what steps are to be taken in condemning the property owned by these people. I would appreciate knowing the present stage of this bill and whether it is now in committee. Will you please send me any pertinent information pertaining to the rules and regulations by which this property will be condemned and methods of determining how much these property owners will be reimbursed. [correspondence, September 20, 1962]

A few other residents said they knew about it back in the 1950s but they did not have definite evidence, it was just hearsay. It was very difficult for the National Park Service to disclose an exact date for occupation because of the complex process of determining property titles, and sorting through legal entanglements. However, regardless of the length of time for the process, in the interest of fairness, residents should have had official disclosure as soon as deliberations began, or at least as soon as the bill was passed. The assistant director of the park sent a letter to Senator Russell Long to respond to his inquiry on the Fazendeville property on October 8, 1962. It stated, "As you know, S. J. Res. 60 has been cleared by Congress for the President's signature. The National Park Service proposes to acquire all of the holdings within the Park described in the bill, including property known as Fazendeville" (correspondence, October 8, 1962).

It could be coincidental that this series of disruptive events—the desegregation of schools, struggles to register to vote, and loss of their land to the government—happened around the same time. However, the confluence of events was close enough that it was certainly logical for villagers to see them as connected. In essence, several residents of the village believed that there was a conspiracy between the federal government (the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve), the local white politicians, and some of their powerful constituents in Louisiana and Washington, D.C., to prevent blacks in the village from gaining voting rights, going to school with their children, and maintaining their land holdings on the battlefield. In essence, powerful whites wanted poor black residents removed from their homes, homes that just happened to be

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located on the sacred battleground of the War of 1812's Battle of New Orleans.

At this point in time, many years after these events, I cannot easily substantiate any of the villagers' claims, and I am not sure if enough documentary evidence will ever surface even if they are right. However, these assertions constituted a satisfactory explanation of events for a number of former village residents. Forty years later, their rationalization for the government taking their land is more feasible and stronger than ever.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Part of the villagers' consternation arises from different definitions of what a park is. The villagers' perceptions of a park include land with trees, areas to play ball, areas to cook out, and areas for people to sit in the shade and converse. The land that was taken from them has none of these amenities; it is still a grassy field. Consequently, they feel that their allegations of more than 40 years ago have validity. Several residents strongly contend that "they ain't made no park out of it." Mrs. Yvonne Dorsey's comment illustrates the point:

> The park destroyed all the pecan trees. The pecan trees was on the front of the Village. The street was in the middle. It was a field to the right and one to your left, the same size, the length of the Village. Our houses was on the left in front of the Monument. The road was where the sewer [Sewer Treatment Plant] was. Where the church was it was all pecan trees. They cut all the pecan trees down. It is a flat field now. They took it for the park. [interview, April 13, 2002]

Mrs. Deloris Theodore Thomas stated:

> They bought everybody out and they had to go because my Mama and Daddy would still be there. And they have not done anything with it. [interview, August 12, 2002]

Mr. Morris Williams added to the discourse:

> They have not done any thing to this place since we moved out of there. The only thing that they did to this place is to cut a road from the Chalmette Monument to run you into the Chalmette Cemetery. But, any improvement or anything else is nothing ever had been done there since. [interview, April 6, 2002]

In contextualizing the above comments, we actually have two views or perspectives on what a park is supposed to be. Villagers saw the government destroying valuable resources such as the trees and their community; the National Park Service saw destroying the grove of pecan trees and the community as necessary for the recreation of the battlefield, and so they transformed the site into an empty field with no trees.

When asked what was the response to the acquisition of the property and did anyone try to fight the government, Reverend Bush replied:

> They ain't made no park, but one thing they just took our houses and we ain't got nothing for them. Now there was a few of us tried to hold out and a little fellow was in the cemetery working under Linch said: If the rest of them did like ya'll did, you would have gotten way more money for your land. But they had some . . . they get a little few nickels and they was satisfied. But we few, we tried to hold out. [interview, April 13, 2002]

Mrs. Ada Smith recalls:

> Well, I know the government told them they had to move. They did not want to move. Some of the older people had a meeting and said they was going to fight it but it did not come to that but the younger people said let it go. But, all the older ones are dead now. [interview, April 3, 2002]

Reverend Sanders, in an emotional state, put it aptly:

> Even now, I feel that pain. It was a very heartbreaking time and there was much pain and suffering [emotional]. I think some of the scars and the wounds have still not healed yet for our parents because that was their home. Now, it is almost like you don't have anything to fall back on, you don't have anywhere to go or a home to go back to. And so, it is like a part of us has been cut off and so it's a painful experience. Even now, I feel that pain.
>
> It could have been done better, but it wasn't done that way. It was done roughshod. The houses were worth around $20,000 or $30,000 and I don't think anyone got more than $7,000 for their house. So, they kind of took the property away from them. So, I used to could go down there stand at the end of the road and look down the road and now the Park Service has literally dug up the road. [interview, February 24, 2002]

THE LAST STAND

Amidst the paper trail of correspondences housed at the Jean Lafitte Unit of the National Historical Park and Preserve, I find that the process of eminent domain was not very smooth; on the one hand, there is evidence of protest by some of the residents and, on the other hand, some residents thought the government was doing them a favor.

Initially, an order of immediate possession was obtained from the court, but after some deliberation, officials decided that this was impossible. Therefore, "in this connection, no objection will be interposed to a modification of immediate possession to permit inhabitants of the parcel a period of three months to relocate and to remove their possessions" (correspondence, January 29, 1964). However, the time was extended for individual cases. Some had to have time to acquire loans to purchase other property, others had to have time for appraisals, some wanted to move their houses to other sites, and some wanted time to try and fight the government or to try and get a better price for their property.

An example of one correspondence follows in an excerpt from a letter dated September 8, 1963, and written by the Park Superintendent to the Southeast Regional Director:

> Mr. Oliver Bush had told us that he was proceeding nicely with getting this option signed and for that reason we gave him some additional time. He informed us last weekend that all signatures were on the option with the

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exception of Vivian's whom he would procure the following day. The truth of the matter was brought abruptly to our attention when we picked the "signed" option up from him at his station . . . Oliver loudly proclaimed that they had agreed not to sign and would have to have more money.

He apparently was unmoved by your paragraph regarding "preserving this historic land for future generations." It was rather a disheartening blow after our hopes had been continually heightened. It reminded us of one of the first lessons we learned (perhaps not well enough) when we began this project. That is, don't count your options until they're signed. [correspondence, September 8, 1963]

The pastor and deacons of Battle Ground Baptist Church wanted justice, so they wrote the Park Superintendent a letter and he passed the new developments on to the Regional Director. This excerpt from a letter dated June 18, 1963, describes the situation:

You will be interested to know our colored neighbors chipped in to accumulate a fund of $25.00 and had negro integrationist lawyer Touro [Tureaud] out Wednesday night of last week for a public meeting in the Benevolent Hall. James Lawrence told Lawrence Page that Touro [Tureaud] told the assembly they had better cooperate if prices were near reasonable, that it was futile to buck the Government when it was set on an improvement project.

In hiring the civil rights attorney, Alexander Pierre Tureaud, the residents were attempting to display some notion of power to voice their objections. Although their power symbol did not regain their land, they were able to hold out long enough to gain more compensation then the initial offer. The Lindsey heirs played out another more dramatic scene documented in a letter dated September 25, 1963, written by the Park Superintendent and addressed to the Southeast Regional Director:

It was a two hour session in which Val Lindsey lost his temper and stalked out and the entire confab consisted of bickering, arguing, and the heirs trying to out shout one another.

Before Val Lindsey left the gathering, he said that he would fight it in the courts, regardless of cost and time. He also said that he would rather wind up without a single penny after it was settled than to be pushed around and offered an unfair price. He said he would consider the offer on his own house and land when it came, as a separate deal entirely. However if it was anything like the other two that we were discussing, he would rather have nothing than something unfair. The gist of the entire meeting seemed to be that they would all rather have absolutely nothing and be dragged from their homes bodily, screaming, before they would settle for our offer. It was impossible to talk sense to them or to try and reason with them due to the continuous shouting and arguing among the various heirs. We feel that it would be useless at this time to try and pursue that particular option any further. [correspondence, September 25, 1963]

Mr. Val Lindsey and his family knew that the government would eventually take the land, but they were able to maintain their stand until the city evicted the last families. They moved only after they were able to obtain a just price. After Mr. Lindsey was satisfied with the compensation for his land, he said that he would be damned if he would allow the government to destroy the house. So, he had it moved to the Lower Ninth Ward on Reynes Street and this is where the family settled in a different space but in the same house. Ironically, 42 years later, Valeria Schexnayder, Mr. Lindsey's daughter, is fighting for that same family house (as well as her own) after the devastation of the hurricanes and the floods. However, there were villagers who thought that the government did the residents a favor. The following expression from Mrs. Rose Drew Cager is illustrative:

We weren't angry . . . about the government buying the Village. We weren't angry. All them little raggedy houses in the Village, people were glad to get in some decent houses. I don't know nobody that was angry. . . . It was a little land that had nothing but raggedy houses and was a beautiful place to live. [interview, June 5, 2002]

When asked what they wanted people to know and what they wanted to remember about Fazendeville, Mrs. Deloris Thomas replied:

I don't want to remember the hard work and the negative things. I do want to remember the baseball games, the baptizings, and all the festivities and good times we had. Everybody raised everybody's children. Fazendeville's children was raised like all the other children should be raised. [interview, August 12, 2002]

Mrs. Yvonne Dorsey states:

I think the Village was a blessed place because the worst thing that I saw was a fire. You never heard of so many murders like we have today. Even when there was a storm and it flooded, the water would come up to the back of the Village but would never come into the Village. I always thought that God was watching over the Village. We had problems but we also had love. [interview, April 13, 2002]

These voices from the village have some vital things to say about their sacred space, and, more specifically, they can promote further constructive engagement with concepts emanating primarily from their core of life and meaning in the village. Unfortunately, in the past the sin of omission and racism has been used to structure the official history of the United States. Racism is also a powerful tool that defines hierarchy, and it uses symbols of material culture—be it in the form of statues, monuments, museums, artifacts, buildings or landscapes—to ascribe past and present meanings (Shackel 2003:16, 18). It is important to illustrate how the Fazendeville residents served their need to have a symbolic structure to represent where they once lived and to continue their meaning for home and belonging.

BATTLE GROUND PILGRIMAGE

Because the village was razed in 1964 and the area was officially established as part of the Chalmette Unit of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, the majority of the former residents do not associate with the site except in their memories. Only periodically, a few have physically

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returned. Mrs. Rose Drew Cager and her husband Frank Cager used to take their exercise in the area by walking early in the mornings. Lloyd and Yvonne Dorsey occasionally walked in the area. A few have gone back for the annual January 8th Battleground Commemorative Celebration. Mrs. Ada Smith comments:

> Really and truly, I went for the first time in January [2002]. So, they had a fence and we did not like that. They had big times when the horses would be stepping we would go and look. We don't get together on that day [Decoration Day] anymore. A lot of things have changed. [interview, April 3, 2002]

Mrs. Deloris Theodore Thomas also went back recently and she had this to say:

> When I walked through the cemetery, everything started coming back and this was about forty years. . . . This was recently. I walked back through the cemetery. I said, oh my God! Some things I would not want to remember—hard work. Mama had nine children. [interview, August 12, 2002]

The Battle Ground Baptist Church congregation went back to their former home site for an anniversary celebration in 2000. They went to the Chalmette Monument, had a program, and returned to the church. Many walked, while others drove their vehicles. This visit to the site represented a pilgrimage to and from whence they came. David Jacobson states that "pilgrimage is the means of meeting the sacred, or seeking 'eternal moments' or monuments that transcend the present, be they national parks, museums, or memorials" (2002:161). The pilgrimage that was taken on that day by the church congregants also symbolized the village community's migration across the parish line to another home. Although Mr. Morris Williams said that the distance traveled was about 12 blocks, it was much longer symbolically. The people were in a sacred context of time and space, seeking to capture an eternal moment and thereby memorialize the village. The Chalmette Monument and the Cemetery meant something to them as reference points for placing the village in memory, because there was nothing left at the site but a grassy field. They remember seeing the Chalmette Monument every day they walked out of their homes. Now the monument is a memorial marker for the former villagers to remember where their homes were.

Even though their community developed on the 1815 Battle of New Orleans site, only two or three people ever mentioned the War of 1812 or the famous battle, which eventually caused the National Park Service to raze their homes in the Village. Therefore, villagers could not care less about the battle of 1815, but some do identify with and value the Chalmette Monument that memorializes the battle. Thus, the Fazendeville residents have transformed the monument into an icon that they can use to symbolize and depict a familiar place that they still call home. So, "places like voices, are local and multiple. For each inhabitant, a place has a unique reality, one in which meaning is shared with other people and places. The links in these chains of experienced places are forged of culture and history" (Rodman 2003:208). So, it is only fitting that the church congregants decided to make a pilgrimage back to the Chalmette Monument as opposed to the village site, which is only a grassy field, because of their "frozen identities and notions of belonging" to this place where they have shared meanings with others (Nyamnjoh 2006:13). It does not matter where they go to live, their identities as Fazendeville residents are frozen. This is certainly the case for Mrs. Evelyn Minor and Mr. Ernest Clark, who both live in California. In their interviews, they speak of the major role the Fazendeville Village has played in the foundations of their lives and their sense of belonging. Therefore, the residents have transformed the Chalmette Monument to represent and serve their own meanings and notions of belonging to this sacred place.

DECLARATION OF TAKING II

In many respects, the Fazendeville Village was still alive in the Lower Ninth Ward until August 29, 2005, when Hurricane Katrina launched a devastating and traumatic event that New Orleans residents will forever have engraved in their memories. However, before I examine the effects of Katrina, I will briefly describe the Lower Ninth Ward and the Fazendeville Village in the Lower Ninth.

A number of the residents spoke about the village comparatively in the past and the present. Whereas their lives were not exactly the same as in the village setting, they all agreed that although there were positive aspects in moving to the city, their overall quality of life was better in many respects in the village. When I asked residents if they felt like the community was still alive in the Lower Ninth Ward, although in a different space, the responses were varied. Mrs. Rose Drew Cager answered:

> I don't know because the younger ones they don't even remember it too much, you see. And the older ones so few of us are still living, you see. I talks about it, mostly to my kids, so they could know we came from Fazendeville. It was our home and a beautiful place to live. [interview, June 5, 2002]

Mr. Morris Williams remarked resolutely:

> The people out of Fazendeville are prosperous people. Because, I could tell you, right now, it's a little village. Right here in the Ninth Ward, you could call it Fazendeville. They just moved from Fazendeville . . . on this side of the street. The majority of those people, those two blocks, they all out of Fazendeville. . . . My sister-in-law just called me up, she's from Fazendeville. [interview, April 6, 2002]

Williams also points out:

> I can tell you this, you can start from in the Ninth Ward from Delery St. on back to Caffin Avenue over, you gonna find somewhere four or five people from Fazendeville are living close together, because of that home feeling. They still have it—family. [interview, April 6, 2002]

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FIGURE 2. Map showing boundaries of Lower Ninth Ward and migration of Fazendeville residents from the Chalmette site to Lower Ninth Ward. (Map by Charles Flanagan, 2006)

The ethnographies done with the residents from the village corroborate what several of the residents are asserting. With interviewing 33 residents of the village before Katrina, I found that 21 were still living in the Lower Nine (see Figure 2). Therefore, between 1964 and 2005 many residents who had moved into the Lower Nine after the federal government displacement have remained there in spite of their progress economically, educationally, and socially. The thriving and vibrant community of the Lower Nine became home for most of the Fazendeville residents for more than 40 years, then Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the subsequent floods took a devastating toll on the area. At this juncture, it is important to know about the Lower Ninth Ward community before the hurricanes.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE: COMMUNALITY

Originally a cypress swamp, the Lower Ninth Ward, referred to as "the Lower Nine" by most residents, was the lower portion of plantations that stretched from the Mississippi River to Lake Pontchartrain. Desperate for property but unable to afford housing in other areas of the city, African Americans, who were formerly enslaved Africans, risked flooding and disease to move in the area. "With greater means and power, the white population occupied the better-drained sections of the city, while blacks typically inhabited the swampy 'rear' districts" (Colten 2005:77). Finding employment in the nearby industries was another motivation for settling in this remote area. Immigrant laborers from Ireland, Italy, and Germany came here for similar reasons.

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TABLE 1. Population of African Americans in the Lower Ninth Ward, Orleans Parish, and Louisiana

Total numbers (2000)	Lower Ninth Ward	Orleans Parish	Louisiana
Population	14,008	484,674	4,468,976
Total households	4,820	188,251	1,656,053
Ethnicity			
Black	98.3%	66.6%	12.1%
White	0.5%	26.6%	62.6%

(U.S. Census Bureau: 2000a)

In 1897 a Southern railway map showed routes and connections through New Orleans. Through information gathered from the Greater New Orleans Data Center, we find that in 1899 legislation was passed for drainage and pumping systems, but it was not until between 1910 and 1920 that the city installed sufficient drainage systems. The Jourdan, Tupelo, and Florida Avenue Canals were constructed in preparation for the Industrial Canal, which was the main conduit to connect the Mississippi River to Lake Ponchartrain in 1923. Of course, this main waterway further isolated the Ninth Ward community from the city proper.

In the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Lower Nine is one of the communities that is targeted for major bulldozing because its location at the lowest part of the Mississippi River flood plain puts it inevitably in harm's way. Neighborhood leaders believe that city officials and their allies in the development community have been targeting the Lower Nine for upscale redevelopment for many years. The national press described the pre-Katrina Lower Nine as ramshackle, poor, and crime infested. This is not, however, the full story.

The Lower Nine consists of two distinct neighborhoods, Holy Cross and the Lower Ninth Ward. Holy Cross is located between the levees of the Industrial Canal and the Mississippi River and stretches as far down to the east as the St. Bernard Parish Line and as wide as St. Claude Avenue to the north. The Lower Nine is bordered by the Industrial Canal to the west, the Southern Railway Railroad and Florida Avenue Canal to the north, the St. Bernard Parish line to the east, and St. Claude Avenue to the south (see Figure 2). Table 1 shows the population in the Lower Ninth Ward in relation to Orleans Parish and Louisiana.

Before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Lower Nine was a solidly working-class neighborhood with strong family ties and a high home-ownership rate of about 60 percent. Homes are often mortgage free because they were handed down through generations. There was a mix of well-constructed shotgun cottages and bungalows, with brick homes and an occasional larger Victorian home fitted along a fine weave of interlocking streets. According to Mr. Morris Williams, many of the residents from the Fazendeville Village bought the land and built their houses with help from other neighbors, friends, and relatives, as was the case for his home. In addition, many residents bought and built additional dwellings for another relative such as a mother or an adult child, so some families owned more than one property. The Lindsey family (Val and Elizabeth) actually moved their home from the Village to the Lower Nine. Oddly enough, when I was allowed by the National Guard to view the devastated community, I found that it, the house formerly located in the village, was one of the houses still standing after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the floods had run their courses. However, their daughter's double shotgun three-bedroom wood-framed house, which had been next door, had disappeared altogether; only the concrete front steps remained.

The porches, stoops, and yards of the homes extended into the streets of the Lower Nine and people walked about, talked, and visited each other in these spaces. The neighborly community provided the pedestrian-friendly connections that minimized the need for car ownership. Mass transit was readily available and within walking distance.

BRACING AGAINST POWER AGAIN

Because of the Lower Nine's geographic isolation and working-class majority black resident population, there has been a history of neglect by city officials. Therefore, inhabitants have developed a history of activism starting with the several African American benevolent associations and mutual aid societies established to assist many of the area's newly emancipated populace during the 1870s. In the period between 1862 and 1880, there were 226 African American societies registered, listed in the Signature Books of the Freedmen's Bank, or frequently noted in the newspapers (Barlow 1989:183; Blassingame 1973:147).[2] Since that time, civic grassroots groups organized in the Lower Nine fought diligently to acquire funds and services for the community. This activism developed more with the fight for civil rights. As a result of Lower Nine resident activism and the expertise of a legal team from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the school desegregation movement marked New Orleans as the first deep-South school district to open its exclusively white doors to black children.[3] Within the last several decades other organizations formed in the Lower Nine, some exclusively by citizens, like Common Ground Collective (CGC), and others like the Lower Ninth Ward Housing Development Corporation, formed with the aid of Congress after Hurricane Betsy.[4] Other organizations with a national presence that have members in the Lower Nine also have supported local people on some other fronts. For example, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer's project to expand the canal and replace the locks with larger facilities has been a controversial issue since the 1970s. Because the Lower Nine will be the neighborhood mostly affected by the Industrial Canal Lock Project, more prominent national organizations—including the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and All Congregations Together (ACT)—filed motions to help stop the project; however, all motions were denied.

Thus, the community of the Lower Nine is not just a city territory delineated for voting divisions; it is a vibrant

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and active community with a network of relationships that reveal themselves through conscious actions. Here, the networks of people share bonds of mutual concern.

MUSIC, DANCE, AND FEATHERS: TRADITIONALITY

The Lower Nine is a community with many vibrant cultural traditions and known and unknown artists. The rock-and-roll legend Antoine "Fats" Domino Jr. continued to be a resident in the Lower Nine when he gained fame. Among his numerous awards are the Grammy's Lifetime Achievement and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Awards. The fact that he still choose to live in the Lower Nine when he could have easily moved elsewhere speaks to the sense of being rooted and belonging to a known community. Members of the Fazendeville community, while still residing in Chalmette, were some of Fats Domino's greatest admirers, as he played there on a regular basis in the early years of his career.

Other well-known musicians hailed from the Lower Nine including the Lastie family, which is one of the largest and most honored musical families in New Orleans. The family patriarch Deacon Frank Lastie played trombone and drums in Lower Nine churches. His sons Melvin, David, and Walter Lastie also became accomplished musicians. In addition, the internationally known trumpeter, vocalist, and bandleader Kermit Ruffins grew up in the Lower Nine. He cofounded Rebirth Brass Band, is the leader of the Barbeque Swingers, and occasionally performs with his Kermit Ruffins Big Band.

However, Errol Chandler, who is not as well known a musician, was first a resident of Fazendeville then moved into the Lower Nine. He made two hit records during the decade of the 1960s—"What Have I Done" and "Lonely Place." Because of his recordings, he was quite popular for a while, but his records fell off the charts and he never recorded again. However, during my interview with him on July 10, 2005, he brought out the 45 rpm recordings to show me and was very proud of his moment of fame.

There are several social aid and pleasure clubs and Mardi Gras Indian tribes in the Lower Nine, and some residents are affiliated with both traditions. The social aid and pleasure clubs parade at least one Sunday during the year to celebrate each one's founding anniversary. The members, both men and women, parade in uniform or color-coordinated outfits and regalia with a brass band and usually many second liners—supporting community members who dance along and follow the organizations as they parade through the streets. The Mardi Gras Indians also dress in colorful suits and usually come out at least three times during the year—especially on Mardi Gras Day, St. Joseph's Day, and Super Sunday. Similarly, they also have their supporting second liners. The members of these organizations are integral to the social fabric of the Lower Nine community. They do not only parade together, they work, play, socialize, and worship together. In addition, they provide vernacular networks that were most helpful as support conduits before and after the hurricanes and the floods. Again as another social scientist, observes:

> Unlike the case for voluntary migration, in forced migrations nearly everyone leaves but their strategies for leaving depend upon who they can count on for assistance—private economic resources and social networks or public institutions. Social networks not only shaped whether people evacuated before or after Hurricane Katrina struck and therefore how they evacuated, they also will continue to shape how displaced New Orleanians reconstruct their lives. [Fussell 2006:2]

It is easy, even in the devastation left by the hurricanes, to understand how the Lower Nine represents the idea of community and how vernacular networks can assist in recovery. Being involved in place-based traditions like the Black Mardi Gras Indians or second-line clubs can alienate a person in host communities during a period of sanctuary, but as soon as the networks are functioning again, people have a strong tendency to look towards home. According to the 2000 U.S. Census (2000b), 77.4 percent of New Orleans residents were born in Louisiana and have lived there for the majority of their lives. Therefore, it is understandable why tens of thousands of the 500,000 residents did not evacuate. Of course there are also the issues of not having a vehicle or funds to help with the migration process, but the other major factor is that New Orlenians are more rooted in place with a sense of belonging to family, neighborhood, and traditional associations than most U.S. citizens.

UPON THIS ROCK: SPIRITUALITY

Black migration in the United States and throughout the diaspora was rendered less onerous because of religion. Historically and traditionally, religion was an organizing principle of the life structure of the community. Black churches have been the most significant, conservative, and dominant institutional phenomenon in African American communities. As C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya assert,

> The proscriptions of 250 years of slavery, followed by another hundred years of Jim Crow segregation, permitted only the religious enterprise among black people to become a stable, cohesive, and independent social institution. As a consequence, black churches have carried burdens and performed roles and functions beyond their boundaries of spiritual nurture in politics, economics, education, music, and culture. [1999:92–93]

In the village, Battle Ground Baptist Church was a central structure as place of worship, school, forum venue, political arena, social club, dramatic theater, conservatory of music, and ritual space for other celebrations and life cycle rites, including christenings, marriages, and funerals. With these multiple levels of community involvement located within the Church, it is no wonder that this was the first institution to be owned and controlled by and for blacks in this community, and in many others. W. E. B. DuBois has

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referred to the building of black churches as the "first form of economic cooperation" among black people (1907:54). Not only did the church give birth to new institutions—including schools, banks, insurance companies, and low-income housing—it also provided an academy and an arena for political activities, and in addition nurtured young talent for musical, dramatic, and artistic development (Lincoln and Mamiya 1999:8). After all, religion is, as Emile Durkheim (1965) has made clear, a social phenomenon, a shared group experience that has shaped and influenced the cultural screens of human communication and interpretation.

The black sacred cosmos, or the religious worldview of African Americans, is related both to their African heritage and to their conversion to Christianity during slavery and its aftermath. In accord with their African heritage, religion is envisioned as a part of everyday life; therefore most activities in the community centered on the church. This was and is the case for Fazendeville.

The Fazendeville church history, collectively reconstructed by elderly members and written by Mrs. Doretha Thomas, was printed in the 1992 program book for the church's 124th year anniversary. Battle Ground Baptist Church was founded in 1868 on Godchaux Plantation in Chalmette, Louisiana. The first worship service was held in Morais Sugar Mill, and the site where the Battle of New Orleans was fought inspired the few members to give that same name to the church. Reverend John Anderson served as the first pastor from 1868 to 1872. This same year the church was moved to a settlement known as Oak Alley, which was destroyed by fire in 1892. Afterward, the church was relocated again. The location of its third home was in Fazendeville. A committee of women who referred to themselves as "The Willing Workers" raised the $400 to purchase the property, and this time, it remained in the same community for 49 years. In January 1927, the edifice was again totally destroyed by fire but was again rebuilt in 1928 (see Figure 3).

After the National Historical Park Service purchased the church property through condemnation–eminent domain, the church was relocated and rebuilt on Flood Street in the lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans in 1964. This area is only a few miles across the Orleans Parish line from Chalmette. That same year, Hurricane Betsy came through destroying the church again, this time by flooding. Once more, the church was faced with rebuilding, and a few years later, an annex was added to the original edifice (see Figure 4). In the church's 135 years of existence, eight pastors led the congregation. Reverend Sanders, who took over as pastor in 1986, presently holds the position (Thomas n.d). Battle Ground Baptist Church has certainly stood the tests of fire, the federal government, Hurricane Betsy, and flooding prior to the recent Katrina disaster in 2005, proving that it is definitely a strong anchor for the community of Fazendeville in the past and in the present.

Another indication that the church is the focal point and "rock" of the village is the proximity of the houses in relationship to the church. Although two thirds of the sample of 33 ethnographies is not an overwhelming amount when you look at the large picture of an entire community, it still has validity when we can visually see that most of the interviewed residents settled and bought land within two miles around the church (see Figure 2). In a few instances, two people (parent and child) were interviewed in the same home.

FIGURE 3. Battle Ground Baptist Church in Chalmette after the fire—rebuilt. (*Source*: NPS Archival Photo)

Now, with the current developments of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and having been twice flooded, it will be interesting to observe what happens next with the congregation and the church as focal point, because, with this disaster, the entire Lower Ninth Ward community on the lakeside of Claiborne has been displaced. When the breach occurred in the levee because of the barge, the water surge was strong and fierce, moving everything in its path. Houses, churches, and other types of buildings were moved off foundations, set across the streets, pushed down the block, and placed on top of vehicles; some were ultimately and totally destroyed. Of course, with all of this devastation, there were no public services. Therefore, the probability of residents returning within the next couple of years is slim, so this will make it more difficult for the churches to recover, whether in or out of the Lower Nine.

In sum, the black Baptist church in the village took as its mission the elevation of the religious, the moral, and

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FIGURE 4. Battle Ground Baptist Church in the Lower Ninth Ward after Hurricane Katrina and the floods. The church is a brick shell because it has been thoroughly gutted. (J. Nash Porter, 2005).

the material condition of the people it served, and for that it garnered the esteem of its general populace. It was also one of the associated vernacular networks that facilitated survival of the community. Because the village was a small settlement, comprised of approximately 45 families at any given time, the church was an important center of life. Battle Ground Baptist Church mirrors the historical processes of Fazendeville in relation not only to religion but also to culture, economics, and politics. As the cultural womb of the community, the church played a central role in the social, cultural, political, and economical significance and development of the village.

Indeed, the church did much to alleviate the burdens of Jim Crow, segregation, and economic and political oppression. The Battle Ground Baptist Church had a peculiar place of institutional primacy in the village, and it served as the custodian of the community's most basic societal and moral values. In the church, the people of Fazendeville continued their ritual practices. Revivals, baptisms, weddings, funerals, weekly Sunday services, Watch Night, Christmas and Easter services, choir rehearsals, Sunday school, Bible study, deacon and deaconess meetings, candlelight marches, and many other group interactions brought segments of the community together (Jackson 2003).[5] These same principles hold true for the Lower Nine. They do not baptize in the Mississippi River anymore and they have not had a candlelight march since the church moved from the Fazendeville site to Flood Street, but almost everything else remains the same. As Mr. Morris Williams pointed out:

> Battle Ground Baptist Church is [now] home to the people of Fazendeville, because we are people who do not have a home. Everyone, when you come to a homecoming, you can go back to where you was born or raised and the people are still living in that community. But, we don't have a community to go back to. And the only place, if you come from New York, Chicago or anywhere you want to come from, and if you want to see anybody from the Village you have to come to Battle Ground. So, therefore that's what keep the people in close unit to Battle Ground Baptist Church because that's the only place that we can call home. [interview, April 6, 2002]

When former residents come back to visit or for family reunions and homecomings, they always return to Battle Ground because it serves as the symbolic space for home. These gatherings served as a means of reaffirming the existence of the community as a shared group of people with kindred experiences.

The displaced residents also face tremendous challenges to their spiritual lives and they face additional difficulties. Much of the basic structure of meaning to their lives has been cast into doubt by their experiences during and after the 2005 disaster exodus. In the past, members consciously had to pool resources to re-create the religious institution that serve as the focus of community activities.

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Without a strong community base, the recreation of a functioning religious community is not possible. As they reconstruct their lives in another environment, some have complicated adjustments to make. Even though Reverend Sanders, pastor of Battle Ground Baptist Church, has settled into another community in Montgomery, Alabama, he is still worried about his congregation. In a telephone conversation in January 2005, he shared the following with me:

> Five of my members have died and the worst thing for me was not being able to officiate at their funerals. But many more are depressed, stressed, disoriented, etc., especially the elderly. [conversation with author, January 10, 2006]

In speaking with the son of one of the founding families, Eric Cager, on April 10, 2006, I discovered that one of the deceased elders was his mother, Mrs. Rose Drew Cager. Three months after that conversation, I was told by one of the deacons of the church that two more elders had passed away. At this juncture one year later, nine people have passed on out of the total interviewed for this project, and seven of those are post-Katrina deaths.

Of course it is not only members of congregations that are having a hard time but also the ministers. At the most recent First District Meeting of the Missionary Baptist Churches in New Orleans, 26 ministers were present. The president, Reverend Zebedee Bridges asked some to give their testimony and reminded them that "in order to have a testimony, you have to be tested" and "but without faith, it is impossible to please God" (January 24, 2006). All of them had a testimony, but only a third verbalized their testimony for all to hear. One minister declared, "In the midst of all the devastation, we still have much jubilation" (January 24, 2006). Another one asserted, "God gave me an assignment with a new pair of shoes custom-made for me to do what he wants me to do" (January 24, 2006). Along with beginning their testimonies with inspirational messages, they related dismal details of their escapes from the dark flood waters, they spoke of exodus experiences with family, friends, and total strangers, they related various places where they have lived, they spoke of good and bad experiences of being displaced and through it all, most continued to quote biblical scripture interspersed with the other details of their personal testimonies. Several admitted that Katrina really tested their faith, strength, and overall spirituality. Some were humbled and faced with being just one of the flock again instead of the shepherd. These ministers must confront the veracity of their spiritual beliefs, persistent recurring questions about the viability of their political views, and overcome a loss of occupational and church status. That loss has economic, personal, and psychological implications for the ministers as well as for the congregational members.

They must re-create their relations of kinship and community—frequently out of fragmented, ruptured pieces—and then attempt to maintain those ties. For these reasons, the posthurricane and flood experiences of the Fazendeville Lower Nine residents remain a vital issue not only in its own terms but also as a source of further insight into the dynamics of the evolution and resiliency of the community as it faces the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

LOWER NINE PILGRIMAGE

As members of the Battle Ground Baptist Church congregation collectively made pilgrimages back to the Fazendeville site on the church anniversary, residents now have been individually making pilgrimages back to the Lower Nine. They are also arranging more family reunions and opportunities to get together. Like so many residents, Mrs. Yvonne Dorsey declares:

> My house is totally destroyed, but I have been back quite a few times. I still don't know what I am going to do, because it is a lot to do, but I am coming back to the Lower Ninth Ward. [interview, April 20, 2006]

Some of the Dorseys are living in Atlanta following Katrina. Mrs. Dorsey's son, Eric Dorsey, is a young deacon in Battle Ground Baptist church. He was born in November 1965, right after Hurricane Betsy flooded the Lower Ninth Ward in September of the same year, and he is displaced in Atlanta. He explains:

> People were able to come back after Hurricane Betsy, I was told, but it is much harder to just come back after Katrina. When we first went back we shared some tears. It is nothing but the grace of God that is sustaining us. We are here in Reserve now, having a family reunion with my sister. She was blessed and able to buy a home in Reserve. Basically, we are scattered out all over, but most are trying to get closer to New Orleans. My father and I had a business, the Lloyd and Eric's Personal Touch Barber and Hair Care (established in 1985), but it is totally destroyed. But God is in the restoration building business. You know, we serve that kind of God. [conversation with author, April 20, 2006]

Most residents are coming back to view their homes, but invariably everyone also has to go to the church. Even if they have no intentions of moving back, they have to have one last look before they can come to terms with a new residence outside of the Lower Nine and New Orleans. It somehow tends to help with closure and the psychological healing process. Toward the end of our interview at the First District Missionary Baptist Church Meeting, I asked Reverend Sanders to tell me some of the ways he thought the community could be preserved, and he answered:

> A genuine effort by those who are empowered to make changes and to give relief and to provide financial where-with-all to accomplish some of these things. Many of these people don't have the where-with-all. They are elderly people, but they love this city and they want to move back. They are just looking for something to hang on to. If we can build Battle Ground back, the church, it will mean a lot. The church is scattered right now, but they love BGBC and if the church is rebuilt, the people

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will come back. If they are given an opportunity to come back and to make a viable wage. . . . But, I believe that with a genuine effort with the right people behind us, I think it [the return] can happen. [interview, January 24, 2006]

POSTSCRIPT

Almost a year after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the floods, the levees are still not fortified, but I have discovered that Mrs. Doretha Thomas is still well and among the living and Reverend Theodore Bush also had safe passage. Mrs. Elizabeth Lindsey, however, survived the storms but passed on in May 2006. It is comforting to know that before she made her transition she saw her house and was able to realize that it had miraculously weathered the storms.

At this juncture, it is difficult to predict precisely the future of the Fazendeville residents of the Lower Ninth Ward. There are many positive signs of integration and success in other cities along with the maintenance of some New Orleans's culture. However, along with those who are doing well are many who may take years to heal and restore their lives, if they are able to recover and heal at all. The lives of some residents are dismal because of post-traumatic stress disorder, isolation, loneliness, and lack of identity. Overall, the varying courses of adjustment for each family reflect the heterogeneity of people in traumatic situations. The experience of the Fazendeville Village people shows not only how certain values determine the nature of the people individually but also how these values energize the communal spirit of the people and the character of a community, and form the basis for their collective experience of village solidarity. Furthermore, the communal, spiritual, and traditional networks channel the way in which those basic communal values culminate in a distinctive principle of coherence, which forms the bedrock of the village's 137 years of existence. Now, we must view the future of this community like a quilt, evolving and taking shape from separated pieces coming from various distances and perspectives, to appreciate and understand the complexity and overall patterns that are revealing themselves through time.

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NOTES

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1. New Orleans is divided into 17 wards for the purposes of voting.

2. According to Blassingame, "Since only the most prominent and active clubs received public notice, in all probability at least a third of them never appeared in the newspaper. Included among the organizations were benevolent associations, militia companies; rowing clubs; masonic, Odd Fellow, Eastern Star, and Knights Templar lodges, religious societies, social and literary clubs; orphan-aid associations, racial improvement societies and baseball clubs" (1973:147).

3. One of the first schools was McDonough #19, now called Louis D. Armstrong Elementary, on St. Claude Avenue. This 1960 historical event spurred violent white protest and attracted media attention from around the world. After the crisis subsided, whites from the Lower Ninth Ward began a decade-long exodus eastward into St. Bernard Parish.

4. In 1966, Congress passed the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act that initiated an assistance program to rebuild facilities and services necessary to improve the general welfare of those who live in such areas. Services included educational and social services vital to health and welfare. Through the Model Cities Program, employment in the Lower Ninth Ward increased and revitalization occurred as agencies were established to assist and encourage metropolitan development.

5. A Watch Night meeting is a New Year's Eve service in the African American folk church. The reason for the significance and continuity of these services that are still celebrated today can be traced back to gatherings and meetings on December 31, 1862, also known as Freedom's Eve. On that night, Americans of African descent came together in slave quarters, praise houses, churches, barns, private homes, and other gathering places throughout the nation, anxiously awaiting news that the Emancipation Proclamation had become law. Then after the stroke of midnight on January 1, 1863, and according to President Abraham Lincoln's promise, all slaves in the Confederate States were legally free. Therefore, a Watch Night meeting is a religious thanksgiving mode of celebrating freedom. This tradition transcends denomination, socioeconomic class distinctions, religious ideology, and geographical areas (Jackson 2003:41).

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