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TREMÉ : THE CHALLENGES OF AN EQUITABLE RECOVERY IN NEW ORLEANS

ABSTRACT

The current rebuilding of New Orleans' neighborhoods and communities faces the dual dangers of environmental and social injustice amplified by the slowness of the process as well as inadequate programs for needy citizens. Devastated by the effects of the hurricane and its consequences, weakened by improper emergency management, destabilized by uncoordinated recovery strategies, the city is still, 3 years after the storm, in a difficult situation. Nevertheless, communities like Tremé demonstrate the beginnings of a successful repatriation thanks to appropriate rebuilding programs focusing on the culture and needs of the local neighborhood. By helping long term residents to return, the Qatar Tremé Renewal Project exemplifies the effort to achieve a fair and robust community rebirth. But even in this context of reconstruction, this case study exposes the tensions between sustainability, justice, and recovery. Hence, in order to plan and implement an equitable revival, the rebuilding has to be systemic and encompass the entire society, from renters to homeowners, from musicians to school teachers - a challenge yet to be fully met by the many organizations and programs at work in this fragile city.

INTRODUCTION

When Hurricane Katrina's water ooded 80 % of the city, reaching the edge of the French Quarter, New Orleans became iconic among environmental and social justice scholars and activists for its revelatory images and the immediate uncovering of racial disparities in the U.S. Nearly three years after the storm, questions regarding the social equity, justice, and sustainability of the recovery are more crucial than ever. By far the largest group impacted by these failures have been the poor and minority residents of New Orleans who were driven out of their homes in record numbers. The initial U.S. government failures of FEMA, followed by similarly poorly organized programs such as the Road Home program - designed to compensate owners and help with rebuilding - have left New Orleanians looking elsewhere for help. More than 380,000 residents, homeowners, and renters were displaced and nearly 105,000 residents[1] suffered damage to their property. The underlying questions continue to be: Who can come back? Can social justice be achieve in the recovery of this devastated environment? How can criteria of sustainability help New Orleans communities recover? One neighbourhood in New Orleans, Faubourg Tremé, exemplifies the challenges of this revival. Its former residents are struggling to return, and many families (predominantly African-Americans) are still evacuated nearly three years after the storm. One of the main issues is ensuring that opportunities are provided to minorities so that they can successfully achieve a sustainable repatriation of their neighborhood. The choices made in this historic older neighbourhood, echoing those made in other neighborhoods across the city, in uence its future and the equity of its resurgence.

Community revival and sustainability: why rebuild Tremé?

Tremé is one of the oldest African-American neighborhoods in the U.S. dating back to the late eighteenth century when free people of color and refugees from what is now Haiti and the Dominican Republic populated the area (Figure 1). Annexed by the city in 1812, it soon emerged as one of the most prosperous and politically active black communities in the U.S.

Tremé represents a treasure-trove of New Orleans' cultural heritage. It contained much of the city's skilled labor force in the 19th century, including many free people of color before the Civil War (and their descendants in later years). Tremé is also the birthplace of Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, and other jazz greats. Its heritage is also visible in its amazingly rich architecture, most of which remained intact after the hurricane, but it had suffered from long-term physical neglect which was exacerbated by the storm. Within its bounds is Congo Square, a gathering place and market where free blacks and slaves congregated in the antebellum south, and very likely the original cradle of jazz. Additionally, Tremé is known for vibrant second-line parades and jazz funeral traditions, performative events that help define New Orleans' culture as different from other southern cities (Allen, 2007). There are also a number of historically significant museums, churches, parks and other 19th century structures, marking it as both an incubator and living center of African-American culture in the city.

During the 19th century blacks, whites and mixed-race people lived side by side, creating the Creole culture that defines New Orleans exceptionality today. While Tremé's population was ethnically diverse, segregation came incrementally as a result of political choices, as well as social and economic pressures. The gradual spatial segregation of Tremé's residential areas was further reinforced and institutionalized in a local segregation case, Plessy vs. Ferguson. Homer Plessy, one of many notable Tremé residents, was the plaintiff in this landmark case. Plessy was a Creole and "octoroon" (7/8 white), and became famous when he tried to show the unfairness of the Separate Car Law and other early attempts at legally mandated segregation on public transportation. His unsuccessful challenge of

FIGURE 1. Tremé, a challenged neighborhood in New Orleans.

IMAGE 1. New Orleans African American Museum of Art in the Meilleur-Goldthwaite House, c. 1828-29.
Source: Isabelle Maret

IMAGE 2. St. Augustine's Church, one of the oldest African American Catholic churches in the U.S., built by Creoles and free people of color, c. 1841-42. *Source: Isabelle Maret*

IMAGE 3. The interior of the St. Augustine's Church. *Source: Isabelle Maret*

the Separate Car Act went to the Supreme Court where the court maintained that there was nothing unconstitutional about providing 'separate but equal' public and private facilities.

If Tremé was ethnically diverse and prosperous in the 1800's, a series of urban design and planning assaults on the community led to its decline from the 1930's to the 1970's. Even if some of these projects seemed to benefit the greater city of New Orleans (for example, the Municipal Auditorium was built over the Tremé Market, which had been the city's 4th largest market), they nevertheless destroyed the physical and social cohesion of the neighborhood. The Lafitte housing development, built in 1941, housed only African-American tenants. Across Claiborne Avenue, the Iberville development housed only Caucasian tenants. Such segregation of spaces became ubiquitous, reinforcing segregation in a neighborhood that had once been heterogeneous. Partially as a result of the public housing developments, af uent residents began to sell their homes, resulting in large houses being sub-divided into multi-family rental units, accommodating poor and working class residents.

The downward trend in property values was worsened in the 1960s by the decision to route Interstate 10 (I-10) through Tremé. The original plan, developed by the infamous Robert Moses, proposed an elevated expressway along the Mississippi river, dividing the French Quarter from the river. While the choice of location for the new elevated interstate saved the New Orleans riverfront, a victory for preservationists, it dealt a divisive blow to Tremé. The highway overpass was built above Claiborne Avenue, the "St. Charles Avenue" of Tremé—a shady tree-lined thoroughfare lined with grand houses and much of the area's business storefronts, bisecting the neighborhood and Tremé (Figure 5). In addition to effectively erasing a major business corridor, the elevated freeway challenged the many cultural practices rooted along this avenue. Mardi Gras Indians still parade under the highway, but the day-to-day socializing that took place under the shade of the neutral ground's mature live-oaks has since ceased. This neighborhood was cut in two (Figure 1), and the former heart of its socializing became a noisy, polluted, and unwelcoming corridor of asphalt.

Another unfortunate project was the building of Louis Armstrong Park which is now walled-off, open only to the desirable French Quarter side of Tremé (Image 4).   What was once a culturally diverse gathering place lost its accessibility and at the same time, its socializing and creativity incubator functions. However, while urban renewal created urban blight and economic hardship in the neighborhood, it also proved a catalyst for strengthening community groups dedicated to preserving Tremé and its traditions. The people realized that Tremé's identity depended both on its architectural history (Images 6-8) and cultural-spatial practices (Crutcher, 2001) (Images 9-10).

These unique cultural, social, and historic elements that comprise Tremé are what planners and heritage conservationists have tried to protect and rebuild after Katrina. The challenge is to redevelop a sustainable neighborhood while increasing social equity and thus also guarding the ability of former residents to live there. Planners need to focus on approaches that incorporate concepts of justice, equity, and sustainability into the rebuilding process. Some of the major challenges include developing sustainable strategies to help homeowners restore their homes and helping low-income renters return to their neighborhood. Infill rebuilding could also provide housing possibilities for residents of other communities whose houses were totally destroyed and who choose to stay in New Orleans (though relocate on higher ground), without impeding the return of former residents. The resurgence of Tremé as an attractive and diverse neighborhood depends on the ability to develop equitable and sustainable rebuilding strategies while avoiding the total destruction of the integrity of the neighborhood.

Prior to Katrina, many of the homes and buildings in Tremé were in mild to moderate disrepair,

IMAGE 4. Interstate I-10 cutting Tremé's community. *Source: Isabelle Maret*

IMAGE 5. Louis Amstrong Park, a walled enclave in the Tremé neighborhood. *Source: Isabelle Maret*

IMAGE 6. A typical 'double shotgun' house, c. 1890s. Currently being rehabilitated by the QTRP. *Source: Isabelle Maret*

IMAGE 7. A typical Creole cottage in Tremé being repaired by the QTRC in collaboration with the owner, Mr. Thomas, c. 1850s. *Source: Isabelle Maret*

IMAGE 8. A corner store and residence (with owner) being rehabilitated by the QPRP, c. 1850s. *Source: Isabelle Maret*

IMAGE 9. The Backstreet Cultural Museum has exhibits and events dedicated to preserving the performance traditions of New Orleans including the Mardi Gras Indians, Jazz funerals, and Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs. *Source: Isabelle Maret*

IMAGE 10. Example of elaborate Mardi Gras Indian costumes from the Backstreet Museum. *Source: Isabelle Maret*

due to a lack of community resources. According to Census 2000, 92.4 % of the population was African-American, with the average resident earning just $19,564 per year and 44 % earning less than $10,000. Homeownership in Tremé was relatively low with just 22% of the households owner-occupied. A closer examination of the housing stock shows that 69 % of the structures in Tremé were built before 1950[2]. More than 20% of all housing in Tremé was listed as vacant and a significant portion of these also appeared on the City of New Orleans' listing of blighted and abandoned properties (Dominick, 2007).
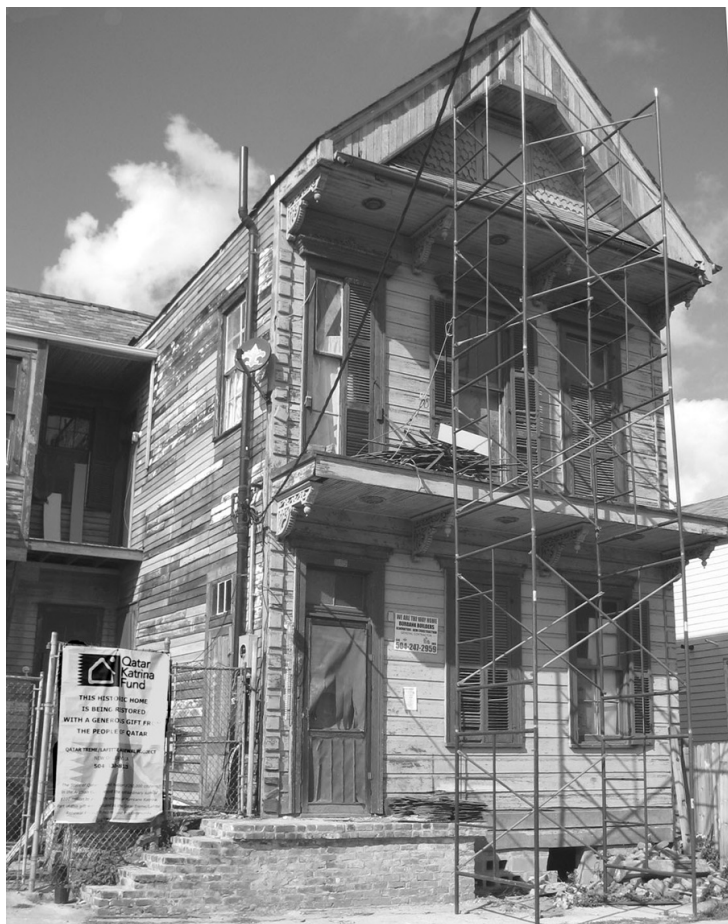
IMAGE 11. House with significant with damage being repaired by QTRP. *Source: Isabelle Maret*

IMAGE 12. New condominiums on Rampart Street which divides Tremé from the French Quarter. *Source: Isabelle Maret*

The neighborhood sustained significant damage from wind and rain (Image 11) during and after Hurricane Katrina though it received only a small amount of damage from ooding.[3] An estimated 52% of the homes received "severe damage" (over $30,000) and an additional 17% received "major damage" (between $5,200 and $30,000).[4] Placing it in further peril, Tremé is currently a prime target for both new development and gentrification because of its location on high ground and adjacency to the French Quarter (Image 12). The houses in disrepair are good deals for investors who can afford to rebuild them and sell them for high profits, thus making the neighbourhood unaffordable for many of its former residents.

Although renters represented 72% of the population in 2000, their share dropped to 44.5% by 2006[5]. Rents in New Orleans have increased dramatically since hurricane Katrina, but especially in neighborhoods like Tremé which did not dramatically ood and which enjoy proximity to the French Quarter and Central Business District. Newcomers, especially middle class whites, are increasingly settling in the city, especially in the blocks close to the French Quarter and to Esplanade Avenue. This raises critical issues of gentrification and social equity as former residents feel that they are being denied the right to return and rebuild their neighborhood's identity. Similarly, if parents can't repatriate their homes, children will also remain displaced. And as entire families are displaced, the social sustainability of the community is endangered. Jerome Smith[6] states, "Tremé will never come back if folks that use to make the culture happen are not here …. It can't come back without the children." The kids who used to play music after school in the streets are gone, and Jerome Smith mentioned there is a "heavy silence" currently present in the neighborhood. Planners need to avoid what Al Harris, another resident declares: "the rebuilding could be a physical success, but you will lose the soul of the buildings."

Justice, equity and rebuilding strategies: is the Qatar Tremé Renewal project a recipe for success?

Tremé captures what is happening throughout the city in regards to federal aid. Nearly three years after the storm, homeowners are finally receiving financial assistance from the federal/state program reimbursing them for storm related damages, the Road Home program. As of April 14, 2008, out of the 154,946 eligible homeowner's applicants, 106,174 had 'closed', with an average award disbursed of $58,664. This shows clear progress of the reimbursement process, especially between 2007 and 2008. However, even though the money is at last coming in, New Orleans and Tremé contain many houses waiting for repairs. Residents have to finalize their choices, find contractors, and dig up other financial resources, which sadly, many are not eligible for. The program rules, which were quite stringent mainly to avoid corruption and facilitate the process, did not have the expected results. Instead of enabling the rebuilding, the bureaucratic nightmare tied to the financial help mostly served to frustrate residents and slow down rebuilding progress. It is one of the main reasons for the continued state of decay of many houses in New Orleans today. Moreover, the Road Home program has different programs. The major one is geared towards helping homeowners who agree to stay in Louisiana for 3 years after they receive assistance and have the financial capacity to rebuild quickly or buy a new house, as the funds provided are usually not sufficient to rehabilitate a damaged home. In Tremé, however, many residents were renters. The failure to quickly organize a program for rental properties has potentially major consequences for the housing stock in Tremé and throughout the city. If these houses are not fixed, renters can't come back. The small rental property program "provides incentives to property owners to repair their storm damaged, small-scale rental properties, and make their units available to low- and moderate-income tenants at affordable rates[7]." The first round of closings for the rental program took place in May 2007, and only 2,693 small-scale rental properties were awarded money across the whole city. Rental property owners need more help to be able to

repair their properties. In neighborhoods like Tremé, there is a substantial fear about seeing investors come into the city, lavishly restore historic buildings, and make it quickly unaffordable for previous residents to come back. Tremé is a prime location, and investors can make good deals, buying at relatively low prices and selling them after some work. Renting or acquiring these properties will be too expensive for previous residents.   This situation is even more problematic since Mayor Ray Nagin gave the go-ahead, on March 24th 2008 to demolish the Lafitte Housing Project. This decision was criticized by many housing advocates: "we're really disappointed," said Walter Gallas, head of the New Orleans field office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. "We believe that the city, HUD and HANO are making a big mistake[8]." We can only hope that the redesigned mixed-income public housing development includes choices for former residents.

Until the Spring of 2008, the recovery process in Tremé as a whole has been slow. The Office of Recovery and Development Administration (ORDA), headed by Dr. Ed Blakely, has planned to redevelop the North Broad Street corridor (see Figure 1), which borders Tremé, but progress remains to be seen. A careful integration of these strategies and other efforts focused on these issues and coming, for instance, via international support, could help redevelop Tremé as an equitable and sustainable neighborhood. The ORDA has been willing to integrate different community rehabilitation efforts, but it does not currently have the capacity to achieve its goals. There is, at present, a lack of coordination between the different strategies and groups. This integration would be key for a sustainable and equitable redevelopment process. The international help is, in the short run, crucial to get things going as the funds can be used quickly via foundations. The federal funds, when finally granted are detrimentally slow and bureaucratic. Thus, international help is absolutely essential for rebuilding as it quickly brings local actors the ability to efficiently achieve progress.

Foreign Aid

From television images of people waving at rescue helicopters from their roofs to the trapped victims living in squalor in the New Orleans Convention Center, America's poverty and racial inequity was broadcast around the globe. Immediately after Katrina, offers of foreign aid came pouring in to Washington. Other nations came forward with offers of aid, both cash and in-kind. Of the $854 million offered by foreign governments to the U.S, however, only $40 million has been claimed and used (Solomon and Hsu, 2007). While some aid was wasted due to the inability to coordinate and get the aid to the people in a timely manner, other funds were   at-out refused. The Bush administration told other nations, in so many words: 'Thanks, but no thanks.' Whether this reaction was inspired by pride or commitment to 'personally' help the city, it obstructed the rate and timeline of the recovery. As the federal government continued to act slowly and the money was slow to arrive, the city neither had the financial capacity to rebuild efficient basic services in a timely manner nor the possibility to plan short and long term strategies. Nearly three years after the storm, New Orleanians suffer from a major barrier: investment. After four planning processes the issue is not ideas or vision; but the lack of capacity to move forward - without money and leadership, the best plans stay on the shelves. As no remediation plan was in place when the hurricane struck the city, the rebuilding process has been tedious and controversial. First, the Bring New Orleans Back Commission's plan, drafted in January 2006 without citizen participation, proposed a smaller footprint with vast parks throughout the neighborhoods, supposed to retain   ood water. It was strongly rejected by the citizens, most of whom were still evacuated. Then, the New Orleans Neighborhoods Rebuilding Plans, led by the City Council, framed neighborhood plans for the 47th of the 49th most   ooded neighborhoods, with a real effort to get residents input. As the state agency, the Louisiana Recovery Authority needed a

citywide plan to distribute federal funds, the Unified New Orleans Plan was produced. It represented a comprehensive strategy, integrating the previous planning efforts and including all the neighborhoods of the city. At last, the ORDA (former Office of Recovery Management) took these recommendations and identified 17th targeted investment zones to be used as catalyst for redevelopment. Most of these targeted zones are still, in June 2008, waiting for funding to be implemented.

These figures, however, do not tell the entire story. Some governments effectively gave their donations to outside groups, such as the Red Cross, instead. The government of Qatar made another decision: to give $100 million to help rebuild the Gulf Coast after Katrina via the establishment of the Qatar Katrina Relief Fund. The Fund provided direct cash assistance to groups and institutions to rebuild homes, to provide medical care, and to pay for student scholarships to local colleges and universities. They began disbursing the funds in May of 2006 and gave the final grants out in January 2007, $1.7 million of which went to repair two schools and five mosques serving the Muslim community in New Orleans.

Qatar's Ambassador to the U.S., Nasser Bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, led the effort to identify local organizations that could efficiently and effectively distribute the funds. He solicited advice from governors, mayors and the congressional delegations of the affected areas, as well as forming a distinguished advisory committee that included community leaders. The success of this careful selection strategy is evidenced in the success of one of its grantees: The Qatar Tremé Renewal Project.[9] The aim of this project was to help low-to-moderate income homeowners return to their houses. The project was executed by Covenant House New Orleans, taking initiative even before funds were fully available, and even though the aims of the project were only peripheral to their traditional mission.

The Qatar Tremé Renewal Project
For over 20 years, the Covenant House New Orleans (CHNO), located in Tremé, has been providing comprehensive services to homeless and at-risk youth for the Greater New Orleans area. Their secondary mission is the stability and preservation of families and they offer services to the community to foster this goal as well. CHNO was concerned that many families were not moving back, or were moving back into unsafe conditions, such as into homes with improper plumbing, leaky roofs, or even onto streets with many vacant houses. Citizens were pressured all over the city to prove the viability of their homes[10], and this was a critical issue, especially for low to moderate income homeowners who needed the resources to make the repairs or renters who were dependent on their landlords' situations. There was also a looming deadline of one year after the storm set by the City Council for owners to complete gutting and remediation lest their property be declared blighted and seized by the city and sold at auction. This was a special concern Tremé residents, given Tremé's attractive "high and dry" proximity to the French Quarter. It was perceived by the community that prospective home buyers as well as big developers were circling, looking to buy properties that were declared blighted and available for purchase.

The CHNO proposed a project to rehabilitate 100 homes of low and middle-income families in Tremé. They envisioned helping long-time residents, key community leaders, and others re-inhabit their homes, thus stabilizing the community and encouraging others to return home. Their application was accepted by the Qatar Katrina Relief Fund and they were given $2.5 million to complete the project. At that point the CHNO decided to step out of the project as home building was outside of its area

of expertise and primary mission of helping at-risk youth. In early 2007 they formed the Qatar Tremé Renewal Project (QTRP) as a separate entity to carry out the grant.

In May 2007 they hired a project director, Cathy Puett, a licensed social worker with a background in non-profit organizations (Images 13-14). While having no construction experience, Puett has the ability to build trust in the community and a practical notion of how to get things done. The QTRP developed a simple application for homeowners, primarily to determine if they: 1) had lived in the house prior to Katrina; 2) were within the project's income guidelines; and 3) were unable to re-inhabit their homes without outside funds. The projects were also approved upon the capacity of the resident to complete the other costs if needed, and to show its stability and willingness to stay in their house for three years. Applications were vetted by a selection committee which was a heterogeneous group, including a school principal, representatives of the CHNO board and other local NGOs, an attorney, an accountant, and citizens from Tremé active in neighborhood groups.

Construction began on the first homes two months later, in July 2007, lightning-speed by post-Katrina New Orleans standards.[11] The residents of Tremé welcomed Qatar's generosity and many felt that non-profit groups were actually driving the repatriation effort, especially given the poor performance of federal agencies.[12] The project averaged about $25,000 per home and the first few homes were a learning experience for Puett, allowing her to tighten the process along the way. The money spent by the QTRP is a "soft second mortgage" that is forgiven after the owner has lived in the house for 3 years.

At first it was difficult to balance all the variables of renovating storm damaged homes, particularly since other NGOs and homeowners themselves did work on the house at the same time. Since QTRP had such limited funds they chose to fund work that included basic services and stabilization, such as plumbing, electric, and house-levelling. Other granting agencies, such as the State Historic Preservation Office, focused on the specific historic elements of the house, notably those that would keep the structure contributing to the Historic District status of the neighborhood (Image 15). Other NGOs, such as Rebuilding Together, relied on large groups of volunteers from out-of-town. They typically did construction that lay people with some expert help could do: painting, ooring, some carpentry and dry walling. A combination of rebuilding funds and volunteers, along with the owners themselves, often working together, were needed to bring a home to habitable status—a challenge for any project manager.

The process from application to completion was straight-forward but offered some unexpected benefits to the homeowners and the community. The first stage of the project was geared towards key members of the neighborhoods (teachers, police, community leaders) who had returned or plan on returning and could act as a major strength and by example inspire other residents to return to their community. They exemplified the possibility of a successful homecoming while bringing stability and empowerment to the area. First, the homeowner completed a simple one-page application that was sent to the selection committee. After careful examination, a yes/no decision was made. Next, one of QTRP's two part-time construction managers wrote a scope of work document, specifying the work for bid. Puett then walked through the scope of work with the homeowner as some trade-offs and material choices may have needed to be made. The work plan was submitted by QTRP to the Historic District Landmarks Commission (HDLC) for preliminary approval, as Tremé is a National Register Historic District. A licensed, insured contractor was selected among bids by the QTRP and they were responsible for obtaining building permits and HDLC compliance documents. The contractors were paid by QTRP at the end of every month for work completed and therefore did not disappear before

IMAGE 13. Cathy Puett, Director of the QTRP, in front of one of the houses being rehabilitated. *Source: Isabelle Maret*
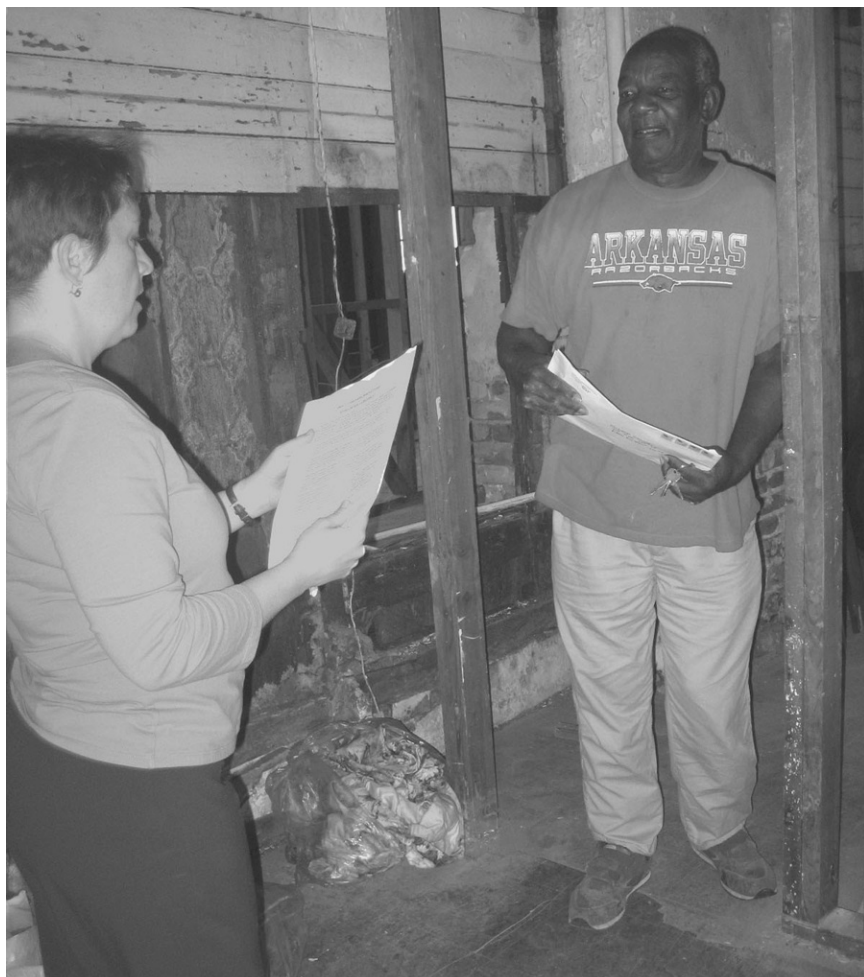
IMAGE 14. Puett at a progress meeting with a Tremé homeowner. *Source: Isabelle Maret*

work was completed, as often happened throughout the Gulf Coast. Hence, the residents were helped throughout the process, the work was completed, and it was achieved by competent workers.

The fact that the QTRP managed and paid the contractors is important. New Orleans has been fraught with contractor incompetence and fraud since Katrina and homeowners feel secure that the QTRP process has properly identified honest, qualified contractors. Many homeowners go on to negotiate for additional services with the same contractor and they help their neighbors do the same. The QTRP has now produced a simple document for local homeowners on how to locate an honest contractor, what to look for, and what to expect.

As of early December 2007, 28 homes were completed or well into the process of completion, an amazing feat by a small non-profit. As applications come in, they will select and complete the remainder of the 100 houses in the next year. As more and more houses are rebuilt, more applications

FIGURE 15. Dumee-Brasco House (c. 1845) now owned by a local schoolteacher and her family is being repaired thanks to both the QTRP and the State Historic Preservation Office. *Source: Isabelle Maret*

are coming in. The speed and energy of the QTRP, and their ability to garner community trust and support, are commendable. They are carefully choosing the houses to rebuild in the hopes that they will bring with them many former long-term residents and, in turn, that other residents will follow. As Mr. Thomas[13] stated, coming out of a house originally built by his ancestors, now in the process of renovation, "this gives us the opportunity to come back to our neighborhood." This rebuilding effort provides energy in the neighborhood as residents not only see the changes but believe in the fairness of the process. House by house, brick by brick, resident by resident, they know that patience and perseverance will prove successful in the long run. The aim is thus to help former residents to come back, and to encourage stability in the neighborhood.

CONCLUSION

To date, assessing the total population in New Orleans is a challenge. Some estimates figure that New Orleans has about 300,000 residents, 65% of its original population (Dunbar, 2007). This number probably includes some who have moved to the city for construction jobs or those who came to clean up after the storm and decided to stay. The US Census Bureau estimated that 239,124 residents had returned by July 2007, a total challenged by Orleans Parish. Nevertheless, the post-Katrina population loss, comprised so heavily of low-income African-Americans, combined with gains from other races after the storm, has left New Orleans both whiter and more Latino than before[14]. The fate of many former residents from more damaged neighborhoods than Tremé remains uncertain.

As Road Home money has started to ow and NGOs gain momentum and utilize experience and hindsight to improve rebuilding efforts, we are hopeful that more repatriation will occur. However, these programs have focused mainly on homeowners, and most of the low-income renters continue to be left behind. This issue exemplifies the challenge of equitably rebuilding, since many low income New Orleanians have not been given the opportunity to move back. As the rents and prices of non- ooded houses sky rocket, former residents are not left much alternative in term of accessibility to affordable housing, which is an explicit issue of justice, equity and sustainability. Some are returning without help, worsening the already large number of homeless people. "Recently released estimates by Unity for the Homeless show that 150 people are living in tents under the I-10 overpass, 31 % of whom are recently homeless because of the loss of federal rental assistance or their removal from temporary trailers" (Liu, Plyer, 2008). To achieve a sustainable reconstruction, the recovery has to be equitable, and embrace the whole population, from children and the elderly to energetic artists and musicians. But in the real world of New Orleans, the reality is far from equitable, and this shows the tensions between sustainability, equity, and justice. On the one hand, as numerous basic services, facilities and housing capabilities are still lacking, it might not be sustainable or equitable for many low-income citizens to repatriate the city as their quality of life could be deplorable. On the other hand, impeding residents to come back demonstrates the tensions of justice and equity in this context as the "right to return is in itself a claim of justice" (Brand, 2008, p3).

Tremé is one of the critical neighborhoods that needs to be rebuilt in an equitable and sustainable way. The vulnerability of the population before the storm makes these statements all the more meaningful, as buildings could be bought by investors, revamped and sold to new residents, thus excluding those who lived in and made this neighborhood what is was before. This neighborhood is a major facet of the heritage and identity of the city. We can rebuild the buildings, but if we don't allow former residents to come back, the soul will be lost; we will just create a Disneyland version of the city. Social and economic sustainability are two major goals of the rebuilding process. Housing is a key element to rebuilding intangible entities like 'community' and enterprises like the Qatar Tremé Community Revival Project show a just approach. Still, these efforts need to be linked to wider efforts by the city itself. Appropriate infrastructures have to come hand in hand with efforts targeted at individual homeowners and renters. Both have to be accompanied by the reopening of key community spaces. In Tremé, the reopening of St Augustine Church, or L'il Dizzy's restaurant has begun to pave the way. Obviously, many other fronts needs to be addressed, too, one being to facilitate the return of renters, providing them also with a sustainable quality of life.

Tremé still has a long way to go, but conscientious work is now being done to spark a more equitable revival of the neighborhood that includes help for long-time residents. The community needs to be empowered to lessen its vulnerability and tighten healthy social networks. Sustainability will depend on the capacity of the city to provide adequate services and the return of residents. The different strategies currently in place from the federal government, the state, the city, or international help should be integrated so as to maximize the results. A coordination of the QTRP's type of effort with the city's long term recovery plan would help re-create a sustainable community capable of retaining neighborhoods' historic characters and soul... what makes New Orleans unique and attractive.

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES

Isabelle Maret, formerly on the faculty at the University of New Orleans, is now an Associate Professor of Urban Planning at the University of Montreal. Her publications include a recent book, *Etalement urbain et friches industrielles, revers de l'idéal américain* (2004), on brownfields and urban sustainability. She is currently analyzing issues related to urban vulnerability, community resilience as well as sustainable urban planning. GIS specialist, she continues her research on post-disaster recovery in New Orleans. She lost her home due to massive ooding after Katrina.

Barbara Allen, formerly the Executive Editor of the *Journal of Architectural Education*, has written extensively on the politics of knowledge in urban environmental activism, including a book on environmental justice in Louisiana titled, *Uneasy Alchemy: Citizens and Experts in Louisiana's Chemical Corridor Disputes* (2003). She is currently an Associate Professor and Director of the Graduate program in Science and Technology Studies at Virginia Tech's Northern Virginia Campus, near Washington, D.C..

[ENDNOTES]

1. MIT Center for Real Estate.

2. From the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, http://www.gnocdc.org.

3. There is also evidence that at least one tornado touched down after the storm, wiping out entire buildings along a linear path through the community.

4. From the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, http://www.gnocdc.org.

5. Recovery Action Learning Laboratory, *Final Report on the Summer 2006 – Survey for the Department of Justice's Weed and Speed Project*, New Orleans, Nov. 2006.

6. Jerome Smith and Al Harris, residents of Tremé were interviewed by Barbara Allen and Isabelle Maret on October 18, 2007.

7. http://road2la.org/rental/default.htm.

8. Rechdahl, K., *Nagin Oks demolition of the Lafitte Housing Complex*, Times Picayune, March 25, 2008.

9. The original name of the group was The Qatar Tremé'/Lafitte Renewal Project, but the Lafitte Public Housing Project became a very contentious political issue and the group felt its work could best be accomplished by concentrating on private housing in the Tremé' neighborhood.

10. The Bring New Orleans Back Commission gave a deadline of May 20, 2006, for each neighborhood group to submit a rebuilding plan. These groups have to show who can, and/or wants to come back, and how they envision the rebuilding of their neighborhoods. The task is a major challenge as many residents had been and continue to be unable to return to their communities. (Maret, 2006, p 12.)

11. According to many citizens and NGO representatives that we interviewed, the Road Home program, funded by the federal government to rebuild Louisiana, has been a huge disappointment. It was mid-2007, almost 2 years after the storm, before some people began seeing their Road Home money. Because of this, the QTRP did not count the potential Road Home funds when assessing what resources the applicant homeowners had.

12. All government agencies are not alike. While FEMA and the Road Home program are abysmal examples of managing aid, the State Historic Preservation Office, funded by a U.S. National Park Service program, has done exemplary work, in a timely manner, in rehabilitating older homes in New Orleans.

13. Mr. Thomas, resident of Tremé was interviewed by Barbara Allen and Isabelle Maret on October 19, 2007.

14. See Katrina's index, http://www.gnodc.com.

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