

THE KATRINA MOMENT: RETHINKING DISASTER WITH BLACK GEOGRAPHIES

by

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Prelude

I spent two years working in homeless services in Los Angeles after graduating from college in 2016, matching unhoused individuals to long-term housing opportunities, supporting outreach, case conferencing, and community planning. Working in the field, I quickly became aware of the precarious nature of citizenship. For example, I learned that without proof of a state ID card or driver's license in the state of California, one is ineligible for social services and public housing opportunities. Never had I considered how critical a small piece of plastic was for one's survival or the ways it might serve as a barrier to rights and citizenship.

With this understanding, I worked to pilot a resource event to address this barrier by helping clients apply for ID cards. Through the event, I met a young woman from New Orleans, whom I will refer to as Céline. As I helped her fill out the application for a new California ID, she shared her journey and experiences of homelessness. I was surprised when I learned she had most recently relocated from Houston, Texas. Céline's story represented one of many who had experienced multiple bouts of displacement and homelessness. In her case, from New Orleans to Houston after Hurricane Katrina and then from Houston to California following Hurricane Harvey. Seemingly separate local events, Céline's experience illustrates the long-term and protracted impact of disaster and vulnerability for an individual over time and space.

Introduction

Céline's story coupled with my experiences working in homeless services pushed me to critically consider the precarious nature of citizenship and the increased vulnerability encountered by victims of disaster. These teachings put into perspective how arbitrary and simultaneously restrictive citizenship is. Navigating and learning about homelessness in Los Angeles, it was hard not to make connections between the unhoused in Los Angeles and those living in refugee encampments in Greece or Italy, for example. Layered on top of this, was my awareness around disparate racial and gendered inequities that compound one's precarity and vulnerability of citizenship. What started as my first job out of undergrad--motivated by the possibilities of making an impact and enacting change--turned into an opening and opportunity to explore the complex entanglements and processes of race, gender, the state, citizenship, displacement, disaster, and crisis.

Through the lens of Black geographies, this thesis explores the ways Black second-class citizenship informs and is informed by geographies of disaster and crisis. This thesis considers the ways Hurricane Katrina provides a unique window into the contestations of the racial state during sites of disaster and disaster relief and focuses on the ways disaster and crisis become further entangled and reproduced by the paradox of Black second-class citizenship. Taking seriously a Black geographic theory of the refugee, I also look to consider the possibilities of a disaster justice that lays bare the precarious conditions of citizenship within the United States and its perpetuation of vulnerabilities to disaster.

I situate my research in the context of literatures of Black geographies and their critical approaches to both the state and citizenship. After a review of my research methods, I then provide

background about Hurricane Katrina as an archive of struggle over the racial state - a series of processes and systems that are contested. I then turn to an in-depth engagement around the geographies of disaster, crisis, and the racial state. I focus on the ways these geographies materialize in relation to: (1) the histories of state sponsored disaster relief and FEMA as technologies of the racial state, (2) the paradox of Black second-class citizenship, and (3) Black Human rights struggles of emplacement and displacement in response to the erasure and despatialization of Black placemaking. In conclusion, I consider the political possibilities of a black geographic theory of the refugee and discuss its significance for debates around disaster and citizenship.

Literature Review

Hurricane Katrina was deemed a ‘natural disaster’, but the language that propped up this supposed naturalness only served to naturalize poor and black agony, distress, and death. Indeed, the history of the region provides a different narrative. Given the history’s firmly stitched pattern of formal and informal racial segregation, socio-economic differentiation, and long-standing environmental neglect, the human suffering caused by Katrina was hierarchically distributed: the privileged residents of New Orleans, a largely white population lived higher above sea level, on drier and less polluted lands, and were able to escape the hurricane by using readily available transportation; the economically underprivileged residents of New Orleans, largely black and living in areas with insufficient socio-economic services and low-income housing, suffered the brunt of the effects. (McKittrick and Woods 2007: 2)

Hurricane Katrina, as a moment, exposed the workings of the racial state, revealing the different ways race marks and orders the state. As McKittrick and Woods suggest, for many Black New Orleanians, this materialized as government neglect, the literal loss of life, displacement, racialized media depictions, and the militarization of their communities. The inequitable racial divisions of how the disaster was experienced, requires a critical consideration of the relationship between race and the state and the ways this relationship is codified and reproduced. Hurricane Katrina, therefore, requires that we ask, “is it possible to understand the state without race”? and

furthermore, Katrina also implores us to consider the stakes of this question during periods of disaster and crisis and how that might inform the possibilities for a disaster relief that is just and transformative.

A leading scholar of critical race theory, David Theo Goldberg argues for a conceptualization of the modern state as a racial state¹, providing the following definition:

I argue that race is integral to the emergence, development, and transformations (conceptually, philosophically, materially) of the modern nation-state. Race marks and orders the modern nation-state, and so state projects, more or less from its point of conceptual and institutional emergence. The apparatuses and technologies employed by modern states have served variously to fashion, modify, and reify the terms of racial expression, as well as racist exclusion and subjugation. (Goldberg 2002: 4).

Examining Katrina through the lens of the racial state, helps to illustrate the ways race marks and orders the state through processes and geographies that naturalize black suffering and death. Katrina revealed that apparatuses and technologies employed by the racial state predates specific moments of crisis, informing narrations and articulations of disasters and crises in themselves. In the case of Katrina, this was specifically illustrated by the ways articulations of the environment and disaster were deployed by the racial state. Providing a helpful metaphor to frame the processes by which racial categories are managed by racial state apparatuses and technologies, Ruth Wilson Gilmore suggests, “the state’s management of racial categories is analogous to the management of highways or ports or telecommunication; racist ideological and material practices are infrastructure that needs to be updated, upgraded and modernized periodically” (Gilmore and Gilmore 2008: 144). To understand the state, therefore requires that we identify the processes and

¹ “We should take care in not to reducing the racial state to THE racial state, a theoretical generality for the purposes of the analysis to empirically singular expression. Besides the convenience of the phrase, there is no unique institutional entity that goes by the title of “the racial state” It follows that one can only draw generalizations about the form of the states, of racial states, racially conceived and configured states, racism within and racist states, the specificities of which in fact require empirical elaboration” (Goldberg 2002: 34).

practices through which the relationship between race and the state are updated and upgraded. Katrina provides great insight into the temporalities over which these changes take place and the ways the racial state actively works to manipulate and dictate those processes, evidenced by the ways those most vulnerable encounter and experience disaster. Katrina, framed in this way, allows for the exploration of contested geographies of struggle as a challenge to the racial state and its fractional alliances of power blocs embedded in the historical entanglements of race, the state, disaster, crisis, displacement, and citizenship.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore further takes up the racial state, providing a definition of racism that considers the state processes that reproduce vulnerability as a tool of racialization. Defining racism as “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (Gilmore 2007: 28), Gilmore’s definition provides a nuanced articulation of race and racism that requires us to understand and center how we might identify particular systems and processes that reproduce precarity and vulnerability. This requires a recognition of historical processes of anti-black racism and recognizing the ways these processes are reproduced and codified through other racial categories. Historicizing these particular relationships between racism and the state, political theorist Cedric Robinson popularized and identified racial capitalism as a term to explain and articulate the specific ways the expansion of capitalist society has evolved historically, informed by social ideology, culture, institutions, systems, and state development.

The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force, then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism. I used the term “racial capitalism” to refer to this development and to the subsequent structure as a historical agency (Robinson 2020: 2).

As historian Robin D.G. Kelley notes, “Cedric revealed exactly how racial capitalism “creates the difference between classes” and why antiracism is fundamental to “combat the difference” (Kelley 2020: xv). Taking up, these thinkers’ engagement with race and the state is a critical component for any analysis of how we evaluate disasters and crises, because they help to illustrate the ways that our present entanglements of disasters and crises are reproduced by racial state orderings across scales. Hurricane Katrina provides just one example of the confluence of disasters and crises, exposed through a historical analysis of the racial state.

One of the most notable confluences of disaster and crises present within the context of Hurricane Katrina are the entanglements between race, the state, and the environment. As McKittrick and Woods note previously, even the framing of a hurricane as an immediate event and one that is “natural” requires further consideration. The naturalization of natural disasters is a political act with material consequences. This practice of naturalizing disasters erases the ways the structures of white supremacy and settler colonialism operate in tandem through control of the natural environment and the drive toward capitalist gain (Tuck and Yang 2012; Pulido 2016). Indigenous geographer Kyle Whyte for example, highlights how the narratives of climate crisis more broadly can work to erase Indigenous peoples’ perspectives on the connections between climate change and colonial violence (Whyte 2018). Speaking to the Arctic Indigenous experience, Candis Callison writes that we need to recognize what “‘climate change portends for those who have endured a century of immense cultural, political and environmental changes’” (2014: 42). In the name of response to disaster and crisis, poor, Black, and indigenous lives have been indelibly impacted by environmental destruction, land disposition, and forced relocation and displacement.

Within the fields of Political Ecology and Environmental Justice, some scholars have identified gaps within their fields regarding critical approaches to the relationships between the environment and the state. Referring to Political Ecology, geographer Morgan Robinson suggests,

Political ecologists have had an ambivalent relationship with the state and with what has been formalized as “state theory.” They are generally happy to research and write about state employees, state policies, state economic and development strategies, global economic entanglements, and migration between states – but have historically been reluctant to be explicit about what the state itself *is*. (Robertson, 2015, p. 457)

Robertson alludes to the necessity of a critical analysis from a political ecologist lens regarding what the state is, is not, and how it informs the field and knowledge production surrounding what is produced. Speaking to a similar gap within the field of Environmental Justice, Hilda Kurtz suggests, that environmental justice scholars have tended to overlook the significance of the state’s role in shaping understandings of race and racism (Kurtz 2009). Questioning the limited frameworks and barriers experienced by activists and researchers when working within the state, others have considered instead working in opposition to the state (Holifield 2007; Harrison 2015; Konisky 2015), identifying the state as a racial state (Omi and Winant 1994), in some capacities sanctioning racial violence. More recently however, scholars are looking to reposition environmental racism, so that it is recognized as fundamental to racial capitalism (Pulido 2016; Pulido 2017; Ranganathan 2016). These scholars have advocated that that Environmental Justice scholarship and activism focus on racial capitalism, requiring attention to the essential processes that shaped the modern world, such as colonization, primitive accumulation, slavery, and imperialism (Pulido 2017). Addressing these intersections in her article, “Flint, Environmental Racism, and Racial Capitalism”, Pulido argues, “the recent poisoning in Flint, Michigan, is a powerful example of both environmental racism and the everyday functioning of racial capitalism.”, making a broader argument for situating environmental racism within a more

intersectional conception of capitalism that is deeply racialized (Pulido 2016: 1; Ranganathan 2016). Katrina thus serves as a critical moment to examine these intersections of the environment and the state, taking seriously how their arrangements frame and structure our lived realities and environment.

Critical to conversations engaging a racial state analysis are the ways citizenship is negotiated as an apparatus of the racial state, a process that instructs the codification of racial geographies through state restrictions and controls of the citizen through economic, political, and socio-cultural means. Critically engaging with these themes, a growing number of geographers have explored the dynamic ways communities of color negotiate the racial state as a vulnerable and precarious citizenry. Some examples include Camilla Hawthorne, who explores entrepreneurship as a key terrain of struggle through which Afro-Italian women have asserted claims to Italian citizenship and belonging in the context of stagnation and refugee ‘emergency’ (Hawthorne 2019); James Holston, who describes “insurgent urban citizenship” as a mobilization of Brazilian resident claims to have right to the city and a right to have rights (Holston 2009); and Margaret M. Ramirez who centers Black and Latinx experiences of dispossession in Oakland and works to consider how residents are imaging and fighting for their city’s future (Ramirez 2019). Their engagements with race and citizenship illustrate the ways oppressive racial state apparatuses function to despatialize communities of color across geographic scales. Exposing the contradictions of racialized citizenship, these scholars highlight citizenship as a negotiated and contested space. Most importantly, a space whose future is actively being transformed and reimagined through struggle.

Beyond geography, scholars across disciplines are working to consider alternative frameworks and rearticulations of citizenship that transcend the limitations and structures of state and nation-state boundaries and restrictive citizenships. Historians concerned with the Asian diaspora in particular have considered the struggles and negotiations of citizenship through the lens of transnational histories and empire (Azuma 2005; Fujitani 2013; Man 2018). Much of their work critiques a one-sided approach to internationalism, instead challenging categories reproduced by empires and nation-states. Through an exploration of transnationalism, they also explore the historical utility that race has played in building empires, and the complex negotiations that arise when considering belonging and citizenship among those contexts. Through a different lens, scholars of the African diaspora have produced research in response to the dispersal of Africans through voluntary, forced, and induced migrations considering and questioning the limitations of certain geographies, nation-state boundaries, and the politicization of African diaspora citizenship and identity (Diouf and Dodson 2005; Edwards 2003; Hall 2005; Kelley and Lemelle 1994). Through the engagement of different diasporas, these scholarships compel a more critical examination and critique of the relationship between race and the state and the many ways citizenship, whether global or local is constantly being navigated, contested, challenged, and transformed. Providing an additional lens to engage with the politics of citizenship, the field of critical refugee studies seeks to critique the socially produced categories of citizenship, central to their critique, is an examination of the role of the nation-state by upholding systems of sovereignty, reproduces stateless and precarious citizenships (Arendt 1943; Malkki 1995). Central to this scholarship, is an attention to the geographic processes in which the nation-state limits and restricts mobility for certain categories of citizenship. For historian Peter Gatrell, “[inviting] a history of, and in, displacement” (Gatrell 2013: 2), might inform new possibilities to reimagine categories of

citizenship as well as a critical consideration of the complex movements of peoples in addition to state and legal perimeters that enforce such categories and movements. As Gatrell suggests, a global history centering refugees “shows how the practices and legacies of population displacement were not limited to one particular time or place but extended far and wide. The consequences are also better understood by stretching the canvas as wide as possible. Refugees frequently demonstrated an awareness of displacement elsewhere, and it would be strange indeed if historians overlooked these connections” (2013: 13). Building on this scholarship across disciplinary scholarship, I seek to put them in conversation with each other, considering the different geographic processes that inform both the commonalities and differences of those experiencing precarious citizenship.

Black Geographies: An Intervention

The connection between geography and blackness is crucial to identifying some of the conditions under which race/racism are necessary to the production of space (McKittrick 2006: 12).

In *Demonic Grounds*, Katherine McKittrick identifies the urgency for an engagement with the spatialities of geography and Blackness. Instrumental in founding and informing the subfield itself, McKittrick posits that Black Geographies as a field of inquiry, expands the intersections of geography and blackness through the exploration of the spatial complexities of Black life, oppression, resistance, radical imagination, racial capitalism, and black space-making. It is within this vast scholarship that I situate my research, specifically in the context of Hurricane Katrina as a crisis of the racial state.

In their pivotal collection of essays, *Black Geographies*, Clyde Woods, and Katherine McKittrick address the raced and classed geographies of Hurricane Katrina, uncovering and exposing the historical legacies that produced such an uneven crisis. This work builds and is in

conversation with other scholars of Black Geography who have produced work that illustrates the historical particularities of New Orleans as a site for a tragedy like Katrina, exposing the historical legacies of conditions that render African Americans as a threat to the body politic (Woods, 2017; Camp, 2016; Ortiz, 2008), or a process that Clyde Woods identified as processes “...that systematically reproduce mass destitution, displacement, disempowerment, racial inequality, and new disasters” (Woods 2017: 259).

For the purposes of this project, I look to expand on their work, examining citizenship and the racial state through the lens of Black geographies. Reflecting on the utility of Black Geographies, Camilla Hawthorne identifies the field’s particular engagement with questions of Blackness and how they uniquely allow for a critique of the foundational geographic categories such as capital, scale, nation, and empire (Hawthorne 2019b). She posits that “by revealing the colonial and racist assumptions that undergird so many key concepts in geographical inquiry, Black Geographies can then point the way to their eventual undoing” (Hawthorne 2019: 9)

My project draws on multi-disciplinary bodies of scholarship: Black geographies, political ecology and environmental justice, and critical refugee studies. First, I bring black geographies in conversation with political ecology and environmental justice. I found that Black geographies offers useful frameworks for pushing for a racial state analysis. I have found within the fields of political ecology and environmental justice; some scholars have identified gaps within their fields regarding critical approaches to the relationships between the environment and the state. Rather than merely identifying gaps or erasures, I bring them into conversation within the context of Katrina, to identify the entanglements of race, the state, and the environment to inform more critical approaches to framing disasters and disaster relief.

Similarly, I bring Black geographies in conversation with critical refugee studies. Critical to conversations engaging a racial state analysis are the ways citizenship is negotiated as an apparatus of the racial state, a process that instructs the codification of racial geographies through state restrictions and controls of the citizen through economic, political, and socio-cultural means. I bring them into conversation to identify questions about the different geographic processes that inform both the commonalities and differences of those experiencing precarious and sub-citizenship.

In dialogue with this literature my project is driven by the interventions that Black geographies provide for examining issues around citizenship, disaster, and the racial state. Through the lens of Black geographies, Katrina as a moment is completely transformed from a “natural disaster” into a crisis of imploding racial state apparatuses, where contradictions of liberal citizenship and the temporalities of disaster itself are turned upside down. Through this lens, processes of erasure and despatialization become overtly apparent as racial state processes and apparatuses are laid out, contextualized, and historicized. It is through these exposed geographies, that Black geographies also unveil the ways contested geographies of struggle produce alternative geographies which challenge the “traditional geographies [which] did, and arguably still do, *require* black displacement, black placelessness, black labor, and a black population that submissively stays “in place” (McKittrick 2006: 9). Situating the crisis of Katrina within Black Geographies allows us to understand how and why the disaster was racialized, and more deeply examine the ways group differentiated vulnerability doesn’t just stop and end with Black life, but examine the ways these lives are intimately tied to “the geographies of the homeless, the jobless, the incarcerated, the invisible, labourers, the underdeveloped, the criminalized, the refugee, the kicked about, the

impoverished, the abandoned, the unescaped” (Braun and McCarthy 2003: 803, as cited in McKittrick & Woods 2007: 2).

Methodology

My research draws on and is informed by the intersection of existing scholarship in Black geographies and critical refugee studies. I examined the ways both literatures critically address the ways citizenship is informed by the racial state, contextualized in the Katrina moment. I focused on Black African-American citizenship noticing a gap in the ways Black displacement and emplacement is conceptualized as different than the global theorization around internal displacement and the refugee. In addition, drawing on literature that conceptualizes the state as one that is racial, I work to create an account of Hurricane Katrina through a racial state analysis. Identifying FEMA as a technology of the racial state, my research draws on governmental and mass media documents, recorded press conferences and interviews. These materials helped me understand the kind of logics that guided their disaster response. Given the parameters and limitations of my research in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, I primarily utilized discourse analysis as my method of analysis. Looking to address the possibilities of addressing alternative futures to state failure, I also turned to pre-published interviews and existing research on the historical accounts of Black feminist grassroots organizing in New Orleans during the Katrina moment.

Historical Background

On August 23, 2005, Hurricane Katrina formed as a tropical storm off the coast of the Bahamas. By August 29, Hurricane Katrina made landfall off the coast of Louisiana as a Category 3 storm with winds over 115mph and reported gusts as high as 130mph. Hurricane Katrina's powerful winds, storm surge, and flooding brought devastation and suffering to Gulf Coast communities in Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama. Hurricane Katrina destroyed a path of 250 miles along the Gulf Coast. Fifty levee breaches or breaks in the greater New Orleans metropolitan area submerged the area in twenty feet of water. Eighty percent of Orleans Parish, ninety-nine percent of St. Bernard Parish, and forty percent of Jefferson Parish were flooded and two weeks later fifty percent of New Orleans remained under water. Seventy-three percent of all homes in the areas most affected by the hurricane were damaged or destroyed, with the majority of the lost housing being low-income housing. Many individuals failed to evacuate because of a lack of resources and were removed or rescued through a combination of federal, state, and local government efforts as well as efforts from private citizens and non-governmental organizations.

This act of nature was not an isolated event, however. The impact of the disaster inequitably impacted minority and low-income individuals and families. Over 100,000 individuals living in those states struck hardest by the Hurricane lived in poverty prior to the storm. More than 90,000 individuals in the affected areas had incomes of less than \$10,000 a year. One third of the people who lived in the areas hit hardest by the storm were African Americans (Pierre and Stephenson 2008: 455). The uneven devastation it brought to communities of color, reveals the consequences of historical and present protracted social crises, culminating in the exposure of the systematic oppression of Black Americans in New Orleans, Louisiana. Complementing the storm was the displacement of nearly 400,000 residents from New Orleans, one year after the storm, a study

estimated that about 53 percent of displaced adult New Orleanians were back again, with less than a third at the home they'd lived in prior to Katrina. Of those who remained displaced, 12 percent were living elsewhere in Louisiana (particularly Baton Rouge), and 40 percent were in Texas (particularly Dallas and Houston, the latter receiving more evacuees than anywhere else). Most of the rest were scattered throughout the South, or New York, Ohio, and California. The study also suggests that Black residents were significantly less likely to have returned to New Orleans in the first year than non-blacks were, at 44 versus 67 percent (Bliss 2015).

After the storm, these displacements were compounded by the destruction of local public infrastructures. For example, the conditions at New Orleans' "Big Four" public housing complexes—B.W. Cooper, C.J. Peete, Lafitte, and St. Bernard—had been deteriorating for years before the levees broke. After the storm, federal funds and increased awareness around the city's decaying housing stock kicked discussions of how to redevelop the Big Four into high gear. In 2006, the city voted to demolish the buildings, and began the slow (and flawed) process of replacing them with mixed-income housing developments. The consequences of these processes further codified black displacement. Census estimates from July 2014 put the city's population at 384,320, about 79 percent of its 2000 population of 484,674. Compared to 2000, about 100,000 fewer African Americans and 9,000 fewer whites lived in New Orleans (Bliss 2015).

This vulnerability to and displacement of Black residents was perpetuated by an incomplete comprehension of disaster and disaster relief, reproduced by the racial state. The racial state apparatuses shape one's vulnerability to disaster and an individual's accessibility of state services during and post disaster. For example, in the case of Katrina, communities that were hit hardest were low-income communities of color and a majority of those unable to return were from the same communities as well. It is no surprise then that recent research also demonstrates that climate

change disasters widen racial wealth gaps as a product of the uneven infrastructural investments and distributions of federal aid (Mccaig 2018).

Underlying the immediate landfall of the hurricane are racial geographic histories that inform a recontextualization of Katrina as a disaster through the lens of a racial state analysis. Such a history reveals the processes by which traditional geographies, render unruly and deviant black bodies as not having the capacity to produce space and needing to be kept “in place” (McKittrick, 2006, p.9). A history of New Orleans contextualized through a racial state analysis, therefore, reveals the long histories of forced emplacement, displacement, practices of spatial segregation and enclosure experienced by those racially categorized as second class-citizenry.

In her book, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall illustrates the varying manifestations of how a vulnerability to displacement has historically been experienced by Black communities in the United States:

Then came the Spanish, the French, the English-speaking Americans, the plantation system driven by kidnapped African labor, and the steamboat, turning the port city of New Orleans into a global center of commerce. A thriving trade in cotton, sugar, and human beings meant more boats, which meant more levees and canals, and more flooding and ecological changes to the wetlands. The swamps around Lake Maurepas, but also in the Atchafalaya basin, became war zones. African maroons who escaped slavery occupied the swamps around New Orleans, their freedom and social banditry posing a constant threat to the plantation system until their military defeat in 1784 (Hall,1995: 203).

Beginning with an overview of plantation geographies, Hall reveals that for kidnapped African labor, their lived experiences most often directly materialized as one of dehumanization and despatialization. Slaves were restricted and controlled in their everyday practices. This example in particular reveals the ways the system of slavery existed as an apparatus of the racial state, reproducing systems that could control and limit the geographies of racialized subjects.

Speaking to the entanglements of race, space, and the environment, McKittrick notes in her piece “Plantation Futures,” “The geographies of slavery, post slavery, and black dispossession provide opportunities to notice that the right to be human carries in it a history of racial encounters and innovative black diaspora practices that, in fact, spatialize acts of survival” (McKittrick 2013: 4). Contextualizing these histories and geographies within New Orleans, therefore unveils a valuable project for understanding how racial systems are reproduced through processes that can be historically traced but updated and upgraded within our present and futures. McKittrick’s offering also suggests and highlights the relevancy of identifying the ever-present tensions of citizenship during a moment like Katrina. Furthermore, Hall’s work also identifies the ways these processes of the racial state were contested through the practices and expressions of survival. Hall points to the African maroons who escaped slavery, surviving among the swamps around New Orleans as an example of Black geographies of struggle. And yet, these geographies are complicated, as decades later, this place that once signaled an opportunity of survival also resulted in a different generations major devastation. For decades, New Orleans’ Black residents have been forced to live in swamps and flood prone areas, revealing both a key factor in vulnerability to displacement and a more nuanced temporality of disaster and crisis.

Across time and space, these entanglements were transformed because of contested geographies of struggle, which challenged the racial state processes that sustained practices like the institution of slavery. The Civil War thus signifies a key a temporary moment in the struggle over the destruction of the slave regime, emerging as an opportunity that stripped the planter class of three-billion dollars’ worth of property in human beings. Formerly enslaved Africans in Louisiana and throughout the South turned a war to preserve the union into a war to end slavery, exposing the possibilities of reimagining democracy and revolution. Men and women came out of

bondage with their own plans to reconstruct the Delta and the nation in direct opposition to that class of men who derived their wealth from unfree labor and ecological devastation. Freed people looked to inherit the very land they tilled for generations—land once held by the “rebels” whose violent defense of slavery was treason. At a minimum, this meant protection from violence and exploitation, free public education, land redistribution, and the application of the rule of law to achieve and defend equality (Woods 2017: 49-56). This signified, among other things, a refusal of the racial state apparatuses that upheld institutions of slavery and the underpinnings of racial capitalist regimes.

Challenging the emergence of the Blues tradition of planning was the Louisiana’s Bourbon Democrat alliance, comprised of the resurrected planter class and New South industrialists. Their plan was simple: overthrow the Republican-Populist alliance, disfranchise Black voters, legalize formal racial segregation, and use whatever means necessary to ensure a steady pool of cheap black labor. The Ku Klux Klan and other white terrorist organizations massacred black citizens, and the state deftly used the convict lease system to implement a new form of slavery. These histories are important because they reveal the particular processes in which racial state power blocs emerge and are reproduced within the political, social, and economic spaces of the state.

After Reconstruction, these policies continued to be codified and reproduced through both local and national legislative means. For example, in 1898, the Democratic party (Bourbons) rewrote the Louisiana state constitution, legalizing the disenfranchisement of Black voters through several provisions: a property tax requirement of \$300, a poll tax requirement, a literacy requirement; grandfather clause. By 1904, 96% of the state’s Black voters were erased from the rolls. (Fairclough 1995: 6; Woods 2017: 71) These statistics are important and expose the ways racialized geographies occur through processes of erasure and despatialization. The practice of

taxing and disenfranchisement for example, produce and inform segregated geographies. These geographies also play a role in the reproduction of precarious and vulnerable citizens, marked by race and class.

The precarity and vulnerability produced by racialized second-class citizenship within the state history of Louisiana is particularly significant, as Louisiana was also the home of the famous Supreme Court case involving Homer Plessy. In 1890, the state government of Louisiana passed the Separate Car Act, requiring all passenger railways to have separate train car accommodations for Black and white Americans. Included in the legislation was a penalty for black passengers and railways that did not comply:

[A] officers and directors of railway companies with the provisions and requirements of this act shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and shall upon conviction before any court of competent jurisdiction be fined not less than one hundred dollars” (Separate Car Act, 1983).

For passengers in violation of the act: “any passenger insisting on going into a coach or compartment to which by race he does not belong, shall be liable to a fine of twenty-five dollars or in lieu thereof to imprisonment for a period of not more than twenty days in the parish prison” (Separate Car Act, 1983).

The legislation, a technology of the state intended to legitimize and institutionalize racial segregation, was quickly challenged by methods of civil disobedience. In 1892, Homer Plessy boarded the “white” car of the East Louisiana Railroad. As an “octoroon,” Plessy was considered seven-eighths white and one-eighth black. When boarding the car, he was not identified as a black man until he identified himself as one, ultimately prompting his arrest. Challenging the arrest on the basis that the state legislation was a violation of both the 13th and 14th Amendments; the case went before the U.S. Supreme Court. Ultimately disagreeing with Plessy, the court decided that the state law was not in violation of the 14th Amendment because equal protection for political rights were not the same thing as social interaction. This case provides a valuable example of racial

state power blocs and the processes by which local and national policy are informed by each other. Originating as a local incident, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision ultimately played a role in codifying racial segregation laws across the country. Beyond the political realm of legislation, this decision signaled culturally a racialized scientific argument for Black second-class citizenship, that Blacks were not the social equals of whites. At the local state level in Louisiana, additional legislation followed that codified racial segregation. In 1894, for example, interracial marriage was outlawed. In 1910, influenced and affirmed by the Supreme Court's decision, Louisiana implemented a "one-drop rule", legalizing segregation among those with any percentage of "Negro" blood. No longer necessitating a slave plantation system, processes and practices of racial terrorism and disenfranchisement were adapted and updated. These policies and laws represent the processes that produce the racial state. As David Theo Goldberg explains, "the racial state, the state's definition in racial terms, thus becomes the racial characterization of the apparatus, the projects, the institutions for managing this threat, for keeping it out or ultimately containing it" (Goldberg 2002: 34).

These processes illustrate the way in which institutionalized racial regimes take place, reflected by the intricate entanglements between precarious citizenship and constricted and regulated racialized geographies. Often codified by legal regimes, they are further legitimized by structural and social reproduction processes.

The history of Louisiana, one deeply informed by and informing the racial state can in no way be separated or disconnected from the disaster that transpired in 2005. A city largely defined along ethnic and racial lines, the historical and present segregated geographies of New Orleans at its heart tells a story of the workings, apparatuses, and technologies of the racial state. It is through these local histories that we can see the direct relationship between the racial violence produced

through second-class citizenship and the ways they inform geographies of the present, marked by displacement, enclosures, and an exposure to vulnerability and precarity as a lived condition. For example, by 2000, Lewis notes that Blacks outnumbered whites by nearly three to one in the central city of New Orleans (Lewis 2003: 127, as cited in Masquelier 2006: 704). Low-income residents occupied the most vulnerable areas especially after higher-grounded neighborhoods on the riverfront became gentrified and as Lewis adds, “of the 28 percent of the city’s residents who, prior to Katrina, lived below the poverty line, 84 percent were African-American.” (Masquelier 2006: 704).

This brief and condensed history of the workings of racial state processes provide an important context for understanding the racial geographies of New Orleans that predate Hurricane Katrina. These histories represent the entanglements of both racialized traditional geographies and Black Geographies of struggle. A history of these entanglements allows for a more nuanced and valuable consideration for how we even start to begin to unpack and conceptualize disasters and crises. A historical analysis that engages these entanglements might instead suggest that the disaster at hand is something much more expansive than a hurricane, a specific administration, or poor infrastructure and planning, but a crisis of the racial state, whose tentacles feed into and compound any and every accompanying disaster.

The value of this historical analysis for the context of disaster relief is best illustrated by Katherine McKittrick’s reflection of the complexities of Black geographies in her piece, “On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place:”

Rather than simply identifying black suffering and naming racism (and opposition to it) as the sole conceptual schemas through which to ‘understand’ or ‘know’ blackness or race, it is emphasized that a black sense of place, black histories, and communities are not only integral to production of space, but also that the analytical interconnectedness of race,

practices of domination, and geography undoubtedly put pressure on how we presently study and assess racial violence (McKittrick 2011: 947).

Evaluating Katrina through a racial state analysis, then, becomes a practice of black geographies, decentralizing black suffering and moving beyond just naming racism, but exploring the specific processes that reproduce it in addition to the practices and survival means that actively challenge it. Centering a Black sense of place in an evaluation of disaster relief lends itself to a critical assessment of the ways racial violence is reproduced and beyond that informs the possibilities of creating more transformative and just futures through the process of reimagination and rebuilding.

Chapter Overview

In chapter 1, I trace FEMA's history as one embedded in the racial state apparatus. Identifying FEMA as a technology of the racial state, I identify specific processes and historical particularities of how race is reproduced and reified during moments of crisis and disaster.

In chapter 2, I discuss the discourses of Black citizenship that emerged during the Katrina moment. Highlighted by the emergence of the characterization of African Americans as refugees, I contend with the possibilities of a black geographic theory of the refugee as a realist characterization of Black citizenship done in an effort to build just futures grounded in this reality.

Finally, in chapter 3, I examine the mobilization of Black feminist activists and survivors during the Katrina moment and consider the many ways their activism exposes sites of disaster relief as significant spaces for centering reproductive justice and human rights struggles.

Chapter 1: FEMA: A Technology of the Racial State Apparatus

I got a check from FEMA for \$2,358. This money is supposed to be for three months of rent. My daughter and I started looking at homes and apartments. Everything we saw was over \$1000, here in Baton Rouge. We couldn't find anything we could afford, so I called FEMA. FEMA gave us a housing referral number, an 800 number that I should call and get apartment referrals. We utilized that number, and the FEMA people gave us referrals to 5 apartments in Baton Rouge

These apartment owners, the landlords, wanted me to prove that my monthly income is three and a half to four times my monthly rent costs. But I have no income because I'm unemployed! Unemployed people cannot rent apartments. This may work after hurricanes in Florida, to give people money to rent apartments, but it doesn't work here. People in Florida lost only their homes; they didn't lose their jobs, too. They didn't have their entire city floating under water.

Then it occurred to me: Why is FEMA referring me to apartments I cannot qualify for? 99% of applicants who need these apartments aren't qualified. They are on unemployment, because they lost not only their homes, they lost their jobs. Why is FEMA sending us to apartments we can't rent? Nobody has answered that question for me (Stewart 2006, as cited in Crowley 2006: 136).

One year after the storm, this testimony was shared at a congressional hearing by a New Orleans resident who had been displaced due the storm and who was still living in a hotel in Baton Rouge, despite receiving a \$2,358 check from FEMA (Crowley 2006:136). Their circumstances were not unique but reflect a broader experience and relationship between people of color, crisis, and federal disaster relief. Many were forced to reckon with the realities that even if their household was approved for assistance and received it, there was no assurance that they would be able to afford to rent a home (Ibid., 136). Indeed, in most urban housing markets, it was reported that the actual rents far exceeded the national Fair Market Rent, the standard used for the FEMA assistance (Torpy 2005, as cited in Crowley 2006).

FEMA regulatory restrictions further burdened Black and poor households. FEMA precluded the use of funds for security deposit or utilities, forcing households to search for resources elsewhere in order to use what aid FEMA did provide (Sard and Rice, 2005, as cited in Crowley, 2006). Furthermore, with FEMA only providing assistance in three-month increments,

many landlords were deterred to rent to evacuees who were dependent on the FEMA rent assistance program (Sard and Rice, 2005, as cited in Crowley, 2006). FEMA's Transitional Housing Program and the Katrina Disaster Housing Assistance Program (KDHAP) could only work in markets where there were vacant units with willing landlords. For displaced residents most impacted by the storm, there were few or no vacancies, with severely increased housing rental costs. (Crowley, 2006). In her analysis, Crowley suggests that "The numbers that FEMA and HUD report about the transitional housing programs tells one of two possible stories. One story could be that people have found their own way and do not need additional assistance. The other story is that the program is so badly designed and implemented that people are unable to use it or have so much trouble accessing it that they give up...." (Crowley 2006: 137).

Many critiques of the response to Hurricane Katrina focus heavily on FEMA's disorganized response to the disaster, noting the inaccessibility of their relief programs for poor and people of color. Additionally, many have also exposed the organization's complicity with other state institutions in producing the conditions for the neoliberalization of disaster and crisis relief efforts (Klein 2017; Adams 2013). The Department of Homeland Security, for example, notes that historically, "programs were seldom able to get ahead of world events, and were ultimately challenged in their ability to answer the public's need for protection from threats due to bureaucratic turbulence created by frequent reorganization, shifting funding priorities, and varying levels of support by senior policymakers" (Homeland Security National Preparedness Task Force 2006: 4). Reflected in FEMA's official historical narration, the "shifting priorities" are most often condensed as a binary challenge of balancing civil defense with domestic disaster relief and management efforts informed by the most current administration in charge.

Offering a more critical critique, across academic disciplines, many have focused on exposing the relationships and alignments between government bureaucracy and the private sector during such critical moments as crises or disasters. Naomi Klein, for example, points to the particular moment of crisis that elicits the “shock doctrine”, what she defines as, “the brutal tactic of using the public’s disorientation following a collective shock – wars, coups, terrorist attacks, market crashes or natural disasters – to push through radical pro-corporate measures, often called “shock therapy” (Klein 2017: 2). Jordan Camp similarly provides a critique of the neoliberal moment through the lens of securitization and criminalization, identifying the criminalization of Black Katrina victims as a “success of the neoliberal carceral-security state in defining domestic enemies in race and class terms facilitated the deployment of military security forces in domestic space” (Camp 2016: 117). Expanding on these critiques, Vincanne Adams details specifically the neoliberalization of disaster relief and the process by which it erases and eradicates public social services, ultimately impacting the most vulnerable:

Emerging out of a half-century commitment to neoliberal policies that favor and advance market-based solutions for our most pressing economic and social problems, we see now a steady transformation of public-sector institutions into market-based consortia wherein fiscal, for-profit transactions become the means by which access to federal resources, even for things like disaster relief, is determined (Adams 2013: 5).

Such an analysis of neoliberalization is useful for identifying the intersections of crisis and capital and the processes by which market-based solutions are instituted to inform the disaster process under the guise of change and rebuilding, while simultaneously eradicating the geographies of the most precarious and vulnerable citizens. However, beginning the story of the Katrina moment with the neoliberalization of disaster still only offers us a limited scope and must also be situated within a longer historical narrative. An alternative narration of this chaos might

suggest that the challenges of disaster management and disaster relief extend far beyond FEMA's embeddedness in governmental and private alignments, instead requiring a consideration of its historical entanglements with race and the state. In this chapter, I offer an additional story to account for the racialized and inequitable experiences of Katrina. Contextualizing FEMA and the histories of U.S. disaster relief as one embedded in the racial state apparatus, I look to consider how FEMA exists as a technology of the racial state, reifying race during opportune moments of crisis and disaster. Through this framing, I seek to move beyond the logistics of particular organizations, instead uncovering the processes and historical particularities that allow for their reproduction of the production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability in the context of disaster relief.

Crisis, Disaster, and the Reproduction of the Racial State

In short, there is no singular modern state, and no singular racial state. Modern states and racial states are deeply intertwined, the conditions of the latter bound up with possibilities of the former, the histories of the former at once accountable in terms of the projected spatialities and temporalities of the latter. Modern states are racial in their modernity, and modern in their racial quality, their raciality. And in that sense any modern racial state is at once a gendered state, and vice versa, its racial and gendered conditions expressed in and through the terms of each other. The modern state is racially conceived and expressed through its gendered configurations, and it assumes gendered definition and specificity through its racial fashioning (Goldberg 2002: 7).

Addressing the differences between modern and racial states, David Theo Goldberg instead explores their co-dependent relationship. His analysis contends with their inseparability, highlighting the ways they necessitate each other in their reproductions and creations of the future. Situating his analysis within the context of disaster relief, the intersections of the modern and racial state become very apparent. Disasters and crises provide critical and crucial moments for the modern state to respond. If we are to understand modern and racial states to be intertwined, then it also must be the case that how the modern state responds it is also informed by its racial

fashioning. The moment of Katrina laid this reality bare as the disaster's impact was inequitably experienced and the state's disaster response was revealed to be uneven and along racialized divisions as well. The racialized experiences of Katrina, therefore, serve as an opportunity to investigate the processes of the racial state apparatus during a confluence of disasters and crises, revealing the historical processes by which technologies of the state become codified and institutionalized.

Exploring the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as a technology of the racial state apparatus, I trace its history, one deeply informed by how race and racism are articulated across time and space. Proving to be a critical component of the process by which state disaster relief and FEMA exist as state technologies, are their mechanisms for controlling and restricting the mobility of racialized subjects during moments of disaster. As McKittrick suggests, "Enforcing black placelessness/captivity was central to processes of enslavement and the physical geographies of the slave system" (McKittrick 2006: 9). Crucial for the sustainability of the slave system, it is imperative to recognize the ways Black placelessness and captivity remain consistent practices within new and updated contexts. This requires a conceptualization of racial and geographic violence among the different state systems and institutions we find ourselves entangled in. It is therefore impossible to understand the gravity of Katrina as a disaster without a conceptualization of the racial state apparatus and its technologies

FEMA: A Historical Account of a Racial State Technology

In their piece, "Stating the Obvious," Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Craig Gilmore define the state as, "[A] territorially bounded set of relatively specialized institutions that develop and change over time in the gaps and fissures of social conflict, compromise and cooperation" (Gilmore and Gilmore 2002: 143). As a technology of the state, FEMA's history reveals the ebbs and flows of

such processes. FEMA, currently the federal agency responsible for coordinating and disseminating relief under the Stafford Act emerged in its current state through various iterations and considerations informed by different frameworks over whose responsibility it was to manage disasters.

Prior to the 1800's, disasters were managed solely with local resources. On the occasions when municipal resources were exhausted, local officials could reach out to state governments for assistance. However, many states were unprepared and ill-equipped. December of 1802 marks a transition in the conceptualization of federal disaster management response as the city of Portsmouth, New Hampshire was engulfed in fire, destroying large areas. Most significantly, however, was the fact that the destruction caused by the fire had a severe impact on national commerce. In response, Congress passed the Congressional Relief Act of 1803, a law that allowed for federal financial assistance for relief efforts (Haddow & Bullock 2003; Adamski, Kline, and Tyrell 2006: 5). Considered the first piece of disaster legislation, the act allowed for Congress to provide Portsmouth with federal assistance. The national response to disasters that took place during the 19th century – such as fires, floods, and hurricanes – was to pass disaster relief legislation for specific events, “Between 1803 and 1950, more than one hundred disasters of various types across the nation were combated with federal resources made available under ad hoc legislative decrees.” (Drabek 1991, 6)

This event is mentioned in FEMA's independent study course, *The Fundamentals of Emergency Management*, but the narration quickly skips to the 1940s. As a result, this condensed historical narrative makes numerous claims about the state's relationship to disaster relief. It might suggest that there were no serious disasters or crises until the 1940's or that wartime disasters and crises must take precedent over domestic disasters and incidents. Furthermore, such an uneven

narration hides the ways race marks and informs these histories in its entirety. A historical account of U.S. disaster relief through a racial state analysis is therefore critical for exposing the ways racial geographies inform state apparatuses and technologies, ultimately influencing our current systems and processes.

Missing from FEMA's historical narrative is the 1927 Mississippi Flood. The Mississippi Flood stands out as a significant historical touchpoint for how we might observe how racial state processes become infused within extended technologies and apparatuses of the racial state. The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 has been recorded as the most destructive river flood in U.S. history. The river overflowed its banks and levees causing the Delta region to flood, impacting several states and leaving more than half a million people displaced for months. The flood overwhelmed seven states from Illinois to Louisiana. The first breaks occurred in the upper valley, near Cairo, Illinois, eventually breaking through many of the levees downstream along the Mississippi River and into Louisiana and Mississippi, where the greatest damage occurred on the lower Mississippi River in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. At a moment when the responsibilities of the federal government had not yet been articulated, there was great debate over whether the disaster was to be handled by individual states or the federal government. President Calvin Coolidge quickly dismissed federal responsibilities. However, then-Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover undertook the challenge of organizing a federal response. Much of his efforts can be articulated through the framework of disaster management; Hoover set up relief headquarters in Memphis and addressed the nation in a radio broadcast soliciting support and donations from the American public. Pulling together agencies like the Red Cross, the Army, the Navy, and the Coast Guard, Hoover helped to orchestrate a relief mission to assist over the 600,000 victims of the flood.

An astounding achievement that required the mass management of multiple organizations and resources, the relief efforts were not experienced equitably across the flood's victims. Overtime, reports began to highlight that while white individuals in relief camps were receiving supplies, food, and tents free of charge, many African Americans had to work for this charity that was being given by citizens across the country. Across local state newspapers were headlines that read,

"Refugees Herded Like Cattle to Stop Escape From Peonage" - *The Chicago Defender*.

"Conscript Labor Gangs Keep Flood Refugees in Legal Bondage" - *The Pittsburgh Courier*.

Historian Richard Mizelle, author of *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination*, interviewed by Ramtin Arablouei details the accounts of African Americans in the Red Cross Relief camps, which were rampant with racial violence that particularly was expressed through the restricted mobility of African Americans:

If you were African American and you arrived at one of these Red Cross relief camps, then you would have to give the name of a white person that you worked for. And if you did not work for a white person as a sharecropper or as a domestic or in any other capacity, then you had to have some white person to vouch for you before you were given food or a tent.

They were given a tag, which they had to have at all times, and they were prevented from leaving and entering the Red Cross relief camps freely. To not be able to move in and out of the relief camps was an affront to many African Americans across the country, resembling a form of 20th century slavery in many ways.

Many found themselves being held at gunpoint in these Red Cross relief camps, sometimes guarded by National Guardsmen, sometimes guarded by sort of small boys who were given guns by their fathers to guard these individuals. At any given time, if laborers were needed to load sandbags, to lift sandbags, to carry sandbags, these men could be conscripted for labor. And if they refused to do so, then they were subject to violence. (Arablouei, 2020)

Shaping the conditions of the relief camps were underlying white fears of Black migration. Many Black people in the Delta worked as sharecroppers, living, and working on white-owned plantations and paying rent. The institution of sharecropping created a cycle of seasonal, never-

ending debt that Black farmers owed to the plantation owners. There was a growing fear on behalf of white planters that many of these sharecroppers and other workers would use the flood as an opportunity to migrate north as decades prior to the storm, between 1915 and 1970, roughly 3.5 million African Americans, migrated out of Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, other parts of the South to cities like Chicago, Detroit, New York City, Philadelphia (Arablouei, 2020). Shaping the racial conditions of the relief camps were broader systemic racial issues involving the control of Black geographies and life. Embedded in the context of the Jim Crow South, local disaster management operated as a technology for upholding the existing priorities of the racial state - controlling and managing the mobility of Black labor.

Long before the establishment of FEMA, the example of the 1927 Flood illustrates how disaster management processes and policies were shaped and informed by the racial state. David Theo Goldberg calls attention to this process noting not just the ways race is imposed on otherness, but also imposed in the ways it attempts to account for it, know it and control it. Goldberg further details these processes noting, “paradoxically, once racially configured with modernity that threat becomes magnified, especially fraught, because in being named racially in a sense it is named as threat. In being so named the threat is reified, rendered real, realized” (Goldberg 2002: 24). The long-term processes, practices, and institutions that normalize, produce, and manage Black vulnerabilities to emplacement and displacement make race real, helping to inform the response to the consequences of the disaster of producing such racialized vulnerability in the first place. Pre-dating FEMA, the history of the 1927 Flood illustrates the ways policies, processes, and systems of management very quickly become informed by the already existing racial structures and politics, in this case, the Jim Crow South. Situating FEMA as a technology of the racial state

requires us to pay close attention to how race is continually codified through space and time within U.S. disaster management.

Approximately seven years later, the Flood Control Act of 1934 was passed, giving the Army Corps of Engineers increased authority to design and build flood control projects. In addition, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and the Bureau of Public Roads, both federal agencies were given authority to make financial loans for repair and reconstruction of certain public facilities after disasters (Adamski, Kline, and Tyrell 2006: 5). Addressing concerns for infrastructure after the fact, this act suggests little engagement or consideration for how people and local communities could be supported by federal funds in the instance of a natural disaster. During the middle decades of the 20th century, the federal government's priority for disaster management was informed by a concern for civil defense. Heavily influenced by the geopolitics of the Cold War, Congress passed the Civil Defense Act of 1950, creating a nationwide system of civil defense agencies; defense drills became routine in schools, government agencies, and other organizations with a focus on recovery from a nuclear attack. That same year, the Disaster Relief Act of 1950 was passed, which specified "a standard process by which state and local authorities could request federal assistance, focusing on long-term recovery assistance such as grants and loans rather than on immediate disaster assistance" (Adamski, Kline, and Tyrell 2006: 5). Central to this system, was the opportunity for local governments to prepare for possible nuclear attacks.

The Kennedy Administration (1961-1963) marks an important moment within the historical trajectory of disaster management. During his first year in office, Kennedy was the first President to discuss civil defense publicly, “issuing an appeal in the September 7, 1961, issue of LIFE magazine to all Americans to protect themselves, and in doing so strengthen the nation” (Homeland Security National Preparedness Task Force 2006: 11). Kennedy prioritized and emphasized the importance of fallout shelters accompanied by a public education campaign around communicating the administration’s civil defense message. To accomplish this, Kennedy issued Executive Order 10952 on July 20, 1961, which divided the Office of Civil Defense and Mobilization into two new organizations: the Office of Emergency Planning (OEP) and the Office of Civil Defense (OCD). According to FEMA (n.d.), The OEP was part of the President’s Executive Office and tasked with advising and assisting the President in determining policy for all nonmilitary emergency preparedness, including civil defense. OCD was part of the Office of the Secretary of Defense and was tasked with overseeing the nation’s civil defense program. This bureaucratic division separated the policy making decision from programmatic civil defense. Surrounding these prioritizations were tensions with congress regarding whether the federal government should even be involved with the sheltering project when civil defense responsibility belonged to State and local governments (Homeland Security National Preparedness Task Force 2006: 12).

Following Kennedy’s assassination, the focus of civil defense fell from the public radar. This decreased attention and de-prioritization of civil defense was accompanied by a series of major national disasters that required more than just local recovery efforts. Hurricanes Hilda (1964), Betsy (1965), and Camille (1969) devastated the Gulf Coast Region, an Alaskan earthquake produced a major tidal wave in California and a deadly tornado swept through Indian

in April 1965. This history exposes a disaster management system greatly shaped by the local and global disasters of the time. Without a fleshed-out system centering on the preparation for disaster, much of the federal response to crises was occurring after the fact, informed by crisis logics of fear and the remobilization of state powers and control.

Slowly emerging from this context was the conceptualization of an “all-hazards” approach to disaster relief. During the Nixon Administration, this approach was evaluated as an opportunity for a “dual-use” initiative and approach to disaster relief, noting that preparations for evacuation, communications, and survival are common to both natural disasters and enemy military strikes on the homeland. Nixon initiated the establishment of a “dual-use approach” later referred to as an “all-hazards” approach to Federal citizen preparedness programs and the replacement of the Office of Civil Defense with the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency (DCPA) under the umbrella of the Department of Defense. From a practical perspective, the dual-use approach allowed more efficient utilization of limited resources, so planners could address a larger number of scenarios. Following Nixon, the Ford Administration, influenced by the priorities of the Cold War transitioned back to an increased support for civil defense over a concern for preparation and response to national disasters, gearing up again for the anticipation of nuclear attack preparedness. (Homeland Security National Preparedness Task Force 2006: 16-18)

In 1979, President Jimmy Carter issued Executive Order 12127 in an effort to streamline what had become a decentralized disaster management federal bureaucracy. The order, which was part of a broader government reorganization effort, established the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to consolidate emergency preparedness, mitigation, and response activities under a single agency and to strengthen the structure, management, and operations of the

government's disaster relief system (Schneider1995: .6). With this reorganization, newly appointed Director of the Office of Personnel Management, John Macy, worked to emphasize the similarities between natural hazards preparedness and civil defense activities by developing a new concept called Integrated Emergency Management Systems, an all-hazards approach to emergency management that included direction, control, and warning as necessary functions for all emergencies, from small, isolated events to the supreme emergency of nuclear attack (Haddow & Bullock 2003). But true "preparation" ... e.g., addressing the uneven distribution of risk and vulnerability by race was at best implicitly left to local jurisdictions to address.

With the cost of increased federal disaster relief efforts escalating in the 1980s, Congress questioned the President's use of disaster declarations for non-natural disasters –primarily in response to President Carter's use of the Disaster Relief Act to help manage the Cuban refugee influx into Florida and the Three Mile Island accident, among other incidents. To address these concerns, Congress passed the Stafford Act. Enacted in 1988 and last significantly amended in 2000, The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act was passed as the central piece of legislation for federal disaster policy (Moss et al. 2009). The Stafford Act limits the declaration of a major disaster to "[a]ny natural catastrophe (including any hurricane, tornado, storm, high water, wind-driven water, tidal wave, tsunami, earthquake, volcanic eruption, landslide, mudslide, snowstorm, or drought) or, regardless of cause, any fire, flood or explosion" (Robert T. Stafford Act, as amended 2003, p.1). In addition to defining the terms under which the President may authorize the use of federal funds to assist states and localities in need, the Stafford Act did the following:

- Established a 75-percent federal / 25-percent state and local cost sharing plan;
- Provided public assistance for emergency work, repair and restoration, and debris removal; and

- Emphasized mitigation, including the establishment of mitigation grants. (Moss et al., 2009, p.4)

Most significantly, The Stafford Act establishes two incident levels: emergencies and major disasters. Section 102 of the Stafford Act defines the terms *Emergency* and *Major Disaster*:

(1) EMERGENCY - “Emergency” means any occasion or instance for which, in the determination of the President, Federal assistance is needed to supplement State and local efforts and capabilities to save lives and to protect property and public health and safety, or to lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe in any part of the United States.

(2) MAJOR DISASTER - “Major disaster” means any natural catastrophe (including any hurricane, tornado, storm, high water, wind driven water, tidal wave, tsunami, earthquake, volcanic eruption, landslide, mudslide, snowstorm, or drought), or, regardless of cause, any fire, flood, or explosion, in any part of the United States, which in the determination of the President causes damage of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant major disaster assistance under this Act to supplement the efforts and available resources of States, local governments, and disaster relief organizations in alleviating the damage, loss, hardship, or suffering caused thereby (Robert T. Stafford Act, as amended 2003, p.2).

This history of U.S. Disaster Management and FEMA’s inception reveal the intricate nature of state systems and technologies. Evaluating the state as a series of apparatuses, Poulantzas’ analysis can be applied to frame and understand the process by which disaster management was conceptualized within the United States:

[I]ts different apparatuses, selections, and levels serve as power centers for different fractions or fractional alliances within the power bloc and/or as centers of resistance for different elements among the popular masses. It follows that the state must be understood as a strategic field formed through intersecting power networks that constitute a favorable terrain for political maneuver by the hegemonic fraction.” (1978a:135, 138, as cited in Jessop 1999: 47-48).

It is through this lens that the evolution of disaster relief must be framed, its evolution informed by a series of apparatuses and power blocs. Integrated among this system is the process by which race names and informs the different intersecting power networks. FEMA’s history and its culmination as a federal agency hints at the political maneuvers of the state apparatus. Missing,

however, is a clear articulation of how FEMA exists as a technology of the racial state. However, much is revealed when we center what is absent from the political history of FEMA. Missing are the geographic subjects who were most directly impacted by the ebbs and flows of different administrations priorities and concerns, the impacts of segregated neighborhoods and their vulnerability to areas of disaster, or the experience of racialized and targeted disaster relief funds. As noted previously, the 1927 Mississippi Flood provides a critical lens into the workings of the racial state and the power of disaster relief as a technology to control, manipulate, and erase black geographies. These included features of disaster management that emphasized property damage; a type of preparedness focused on rolling out post-disaster aid, the reliance on local jurisdiction and volunteer efforts to address disasters, and local uneven geographies with disparately impacted populations and vulnerabilities to disaster. Katrina then, as a moment also serves as a crucial context to examine these systems and processes.

Conclusion

The history of FEMA is complex, revealing a series of tensions and challenges over the priorities and responsibilities of the management of disaster relief. Missing from this challenge, however, was a critical consideration over the different types of disasters and crises states find themselves exposed to. In a world informed by traditional geographies, the conclusions we are left with is a limited conceptualization of disaster and crisis, and post disaster geographies that are informed and articulated by the Stafford Act. These definitions of “emergency” and “Major disaster” are limited at best, violent in the worlds they produce and reproduce at worst. Offering an alternative, Black Geographies through the tools of a racial state analysis allows us to trace and track the reproduction of racial violence among these technologies of disaster relief, noticing the

ways and methods that “racial captivity assumes geographic confinement; geographic confinement assumes a despatialized sense of place; a despatialized sense of place assumes geographic inferiority; geographic inferiority warrants racial captivity” (McKittrick 2006: 9). Katrina as a moment therefore provides an invaluable context to unveil the ways disaster management has been mobilized as a technology of the racial state, sustaining long-term practices of geographic erasure and despatialization. The exposure of this process further pushes us to consider the stakes of racial violence and its reproduction as a facilitator and influencer of all disasters and crises.

Chapter 2: Black Geographies and Transformative Citizenship

The plight of the unescaped, and their fight to find a safe space within the region, emphasized how processes of normalization – rather than a spontaneous “natural disaster” – are worked out in our geographic system: a broader, and ongoing, history of segregation, violence, and environmental racism, often concealed by partial perspectives and a disregard of the unknowable and unseeable, came clearly into view alongside the spatial and lived, limits of democracy and citizenship. The politics of citizenship, specifically the rights and protection of those residing in the democratic nation-state of the United States, are clearly not available in some communities, which suggest that the black and poor subjects are disposable precisely because they cannot easily move or escape.” (McKittrick and Woods 2006: 3)

McKittrick and Woods highlight the ways in which Katrina as a moment exposed the interconnectedness between the material realities of racial exclusion as a geographic process and the politics of citizenship in the context of the United States. These entanglements of racialized geographies, citizenship, and democratic and liberal principles inform a dialectical relationship between Black mobility and citizenship, informing the lived paradox of Black second-class citizenship. In an effort to explain the ways in which this paradox is sustained and how life is abstracted from this context, theorist Charles Mills presents the concept of racial liberalism:

Racialism liberalism, or white liberalism, is the actual liberalism that has been historically dominant since modernity: a liberal theory whose terms originally restricted full personhood to whites (or more accurately, white men) and relegated nonwhites to an inferior category, so that is scheduled of rights and prescriptions for justice were all color-coded. Ascriptive hierarchy is abolished for white men, but not white women and people of color.” (Mills 2008: 1382).

Mills’ concept of racial liberalism seeks to recognize liberalism as an ideology that functions as an idealized social ontology, distorting the historical relationships between liberalism and white supremacy. Mills further suggests that historically for African-Americans this contradiction has always been quite apparent:

[P]eople of color, and black American intellectuals in particular, have historically had little difficulty in recognizing the centrality of race to the American polity and the racial nature of American liberalism. No material or ideological blinders have prevented blacks

and other people of color from seeing that the actual contract is most illuminatingly conceptualized as a racial one that systematically privileges whites at the expense of nonwhites. “Indeed, with the exception of black conservatism, all black ideologies contest the view that democracy in America, while flawed, is fundamentally good (Mills 2017: 43).

Speaking to these conditions, Mills argues for non-ideal theory as a corrective measure for abstracting liberal ideals. Remaining steadfast to the liberal ideals of universalism and egalitarianism, Mills advocates for a non-ideal theory, informed by the more critical perspective of the subordinate populations within society,

Summing it all up, then, one could say epigrammatically that the best way to bring about the ideal is by recognizing the non-ideal, and that by assuming the ideal or the near-ideal, one is only guaranteeing the perpetuation of the nonideal” (Mills 2017: 81).

Grounded and informing his binary theorization of ideal and non-ideal theory is a greater concern for a reconstruction of liberal theory that is grounded in racial justice and equality. However, contending with the moment of Katrina, I’d like to suggest that liberal theory is beyond redemption, leaving us to critically consider the violence that is produced from a commitment to liberal theory itself. While much of Mills’ framing centers a black/white dichotomy of how racial liberalism is lived and experienced, Katrina also provides an opportunity to consider and center what might arise when the ties between liberal theory and black citizenship begin to unravel and how the unraveling informs Black life and Black ideals of citizenship.

Through an examination of discourses of Black citizenship post Katrina, in this chapter, I seek to explore the stakes of a Black commitment to liberalism. Highlighted by the emergence of the characterization of African Americans as refugees during the Katrina moment, I contend with a black geographic theory of the refugee as a critical characterization of Black citizenship done in an effort to build just futures grounded in its reflection of reality. Informing this moment, I also

work to highlight the historical relationship between mobility and citizenship, tracing out the material geographies that enable and constrain mobility as an aspect of citizenship

Black Citizenship and Mobility

The Katrina moment, marked by historical technologies of the racial state, exposed the processes by which Black second-class citizenship remains intertwined with racial state technologies that control and limit Black mobility. Indeed, displacement, containment, flight, and the denial of citizenship are core themes in African American history. Black histories of displacement reveal a dialectical relationship between flight and Black claims to full citizenship. This relationship is grounded in histories of slavery, Jim Crow, state-sanctioned and extralegal racial violence, the carceral state, as well as Black nationalist imaginaries and Black geographies of maroonage, fugitivity, and Exodus (Kelley 2002: 16-23; Robinson 1997).

Geographer Clyde Woods in particular, worked to highlight the historical and geographic particularities of the relationship between race and mobility in the context of New Orleans. In his book, *Development Drowned & Reborn: The Blues and Bourbon restorations in post-Katrina New Orleans*, Woods identifies centuries-old racial hierarchies as playing a major factor in naturalizing African American lives as inconsequential, illustrating geographic racial state processes of racial exclusion that render African Americans as the racially conceived Other through practices and policies that work to restrict Black mobilities at federal, state, and local city government levels. Woods exposes these practices, calling attention to the erasure of black geographies through the historical development of the suburbs and the construction of the I-10 freeway as a process of segregation and enclosure. Woods illustrates how federal highway funds were used by the city and state to support the suburban real estate boom, which in turn incentivized manufacturing and

retail outlets to settle and move to suburbs, strengthening the economic and political power of suburban enclaves. (Woods, 2017, p.205).

The histories of spatial segregation and enclosure within the macro scale of the United States and micro processes in Louisiana reveal the systemic management of populations vulnerable to displacement by federal and state public policies. These systems work to both manage Black mobilities and immobility in addition to supporting the technologies and processes of racial neoliberalism. As Woods suggests, systemic displacement and the making of populations vulnerable to displacement created the opportunities for capital accumulation through longer term redevelopment policies, tax abatements, privatization of public facilities and elimination of public institutions like public housing, public hospitals, and public schools. I look to analyses of historical processes of segregation and enclosure through the lens of black geographies to explore the long-term processes through which race is reified by the state's management of Black vulnerability to displacement.

In 1946, New Orleans commissioned architect and urban planner Robert Moses to design a plan for a riverfront expressway through one side of the French Quarter that would link downtown to the Pontchartrain Expressway. Moses believed the expressway would not only reduce traffic congestion and increase downtown commerce but facilitate suburban growth. The city's commercial interests were skeptical and historic preservationists did not want to touch the French Quarter, so they ultimately agreed to Moses's alternate plan: to build the expressway above North Claiborne Avenue, through the historic black community of Tremé (Souther 2006; Avila 2017: 93-94; Berry 2018: 305-307). Situated between the Sixth and Seventh Wards, Faubourg Tremé was one of the nation's oldest Black urban neighborhoods. It was home to hundreds of businesses, social clubs, cultural landmarks such as Congo Square, and an elegant tree-lined

median along North Claiborne, the parade route for Mardi Gras and funeral second lines. While preservationists failed to see Tremé's historical value, politicians recognized its *property* value. The city used eminent domain to acquire property in Tremé, demolishing fourteen square blocks with dreams of erecting a "Lincoln Center of the South." The prospect of the I-10 over North Claiborne Avenue incentivized the project, as the city looked to the infusion of federal funds for freeway construction to help bankroll Tremé's redevelopment (Berry 2018: 305-307).

Bringing attention to the absence of enclosure in the vocabularies of city planners, many have identified the ways state management of displacement plays a role in the production of one's vulnerability to displacement. Close attention to the vocabulary by corporate developers, land speculators, or even social service bureaucrats, reveals their use of the term "urban blight." With respect to the life of property, blight is defined as, "a thing that spoils or damages something." Through the reifications of race in the American racial imagination, the source of urban blight are Black residents themselves. Within this discourse, Black people and their unruly, criminal behavior are to blame for depressing property values and destroying infrastructure, not public policy. Therefore, ending urban blight means removing Black people. Most recently, the word that best points to these processes and practices is gentrification, a strategy that was in full bloom after Hurricane Katrina. Buttressed by exaggerated media reports of Black violence, incompetence, and dependency, conservative and liberal policy makers considered the massive displacement of Black residents to be a blessing in disguise (Woods 2017: 181). These geographies of enclosure, representative of long-term articulations of the relationship between race and space, reveal the dynamic ways the racial state codifies, produces, and normalizes vulnerability to displacement.

In 1956, state policies and systems were affirmed by the actions of the federal government. Through the Interstate and Defense Highway Act of 1956, suburban growth was subsidized by

providing government-funded infrastructure and undermining public transit for those who could not afford cars. These policies instructed and shaped Black displacement and mobilities, both in the material erasure of black communities, but also through the institutionalization of racialized segregation through practices of suburbanization and urban development. The massive investments in freeways, which further cut up cities, reinforced segregation, destroyed black and brown communities, and provided incentives for industrial relocation, moving good manufacturing jobs away from core urban communities. This worked to boost the tax bases for those suburban communities at the expense of the central cities and especially Black neighborhoods (Avila 2004: 207-213; Freund 2007: 358; Mohl 2004: 674-706). A serious consequence of these practices is the ways that it disincentivized public housing, a necessary resource for many poor Black communities whose vulnerability and displacement were produced by processes of suburbanization. With this giant subsidy from the federal government, developers and politicians who were never interested in building more low-income housing or revitalizing inner cities, “slum clearance” thus became a justification for building freeways through communities with deteriorating or dilapidated housing. Unsurprisingly, developers purposely targeted “blighted areas” and “our Nation’s worst slums” (quoted in Avila 2004: 207) White flight not only contributed to furthering racial segregation when Jim Crow was supposedly dying, but it contributed to suburban sprawl—which itself is largely motivated by race. Urban renewal (slum clearance) policies were used by developers to remove black residents from choice downtown properties or areas for freeways. In place of destroyed homes, HUD built housing projects in racially segregated neighborhoods. Rather than disperse families throughout the city in subsidized housing, this reinforced segregation (Lipsitz 2011; Rothstein 2017: 16-37; Taylor 2019).

It was hardly a specific set of planning and zoning decisions that lead to the residential segregation of New Orleans but a centuries-long process of white supremacy and devaluing

of human life that would enable New Orleans, Louisiana, and the United States to make such decisions and consider them to be acceptable. In this way, Katrina must be seen as the logical result of such an inhumane social formation.” (Woods 2017: 297)

Calling attention to the spatial processes of the racial state, Woods highlights the ways these longer-term processes of racialization and dehumanization are codified and continue to inform state processes and technologies. In the case of Katrina, these long-term processes helped to instruct who would be most impacted by Hurricane Katrina, in addition to who was and was not most deserving of disaster relief.

Black Citizenship: Criminal or Refugee?

Woods’ scholarship highlights the value of historicizing and contextualizing the Katrina moment as an imperative for understanding the processes of the racial state, also serving as an invaluable moment to contend with the ways race marks the disasters and crises of our present. As a moment, Katrina further illustrates the difficulty of contending with the ways liberalism and race are intertwined. Holding both our racial histories and liberal ideologies produces fissures, lending themselves to challenging and complicated negotiations for conceptualizing the relationship between race and the state, most specifically forcing us to contend with the ways that citizenship is mobilized as a tool and technology of the racial state.

In the aftermath of the storm, the tensions and exclusions of precarious citizenship were prominent and exposed. Multiple discourses circulated surrounding the storm survivors, most of them highlighted by racialized and coded language. The discourses varied, revealing a diverse tapestry of racialization. All simultaneously used to describe Black Katrina survivors, terms like “criminal”, “poor”, “victim”, and “refugee” were used interchangeably without any reference of their legal status as American citizens. Accompanying these terms were manufactured images that

went along with reports and media accounts oscillating from Blacks being passive victims resulting from their naturalized condition of being poor to predatory agents, amplifying already problematic stereotypes of Black criminality. In reflecting on the relationships between race, class, and crisis, Powell (et al) note that racial stereotypes plagued initial Katrina coverage: “Black survival behavior was treated as criminal behavior, while similar acts by others were celebrated. African Americans searching for food, water, childcare necessities, and basic medical supplies were selfish looters, but doctors, police and white tourists doing the same were selfless heroes” (Powell., et al. 2013: 63).

The discourse of “looting” facilitated racialized perceptions of the events. The discourse was codified by popular media discourses representations of Black and poor survivors of the hurricane as criminals and looters. Even though widely circulated photographs depicted whites taking goods, the discourse of looting was mainly reserved for Black people (Camp 2016: 116-117. Jordan Camp, highlighting the relationship between the racialized criminalization discourse and the security state, notes, “Rather than a human rights crisis that necessitated a rescue mission, New Orleans was represented as a ‘war zone’” (2016: 116). This was a consequence of who and what types of people were left vulnerable to displacement and disaster from the storm.

Noting the immediate discourses of criminalization, Camp suggests that these also had policy implications. “The dissemination of such messages legitimated Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco’s issuance of a “shoot to kill” order to National Guard soldiers fresh from Iraq in a domestic mission Blanco described as “urban warfare” (Ibid., 116). Black New Orleans was depicted as being prone to violence, crime, and insurrection following Katrina. Discourses of illegality, violence, and disorder conjured an imagery of “race riots,” as they have been signified in dominant narratives. Read in the context of the proliferation of such narratives following the

Los Angeles revolt of 1992, Camp (2016), suggests that it is easier to see how they have become the legitimating narratives for the buildup of the carceral state. This rhetoric reflected an accumulation of anxieties about the racialized poor representing threats to national security.

The racialized criminalization of Black Katrina survivors is abhorrent, but also not surprising for those attuned to this country's relationship with race, specifically the processes by which anti-Black racism is mobilized by the state. Throughout history, the realities of exclusionary citizenship processes materialized for African Americans as a second-class citizen status (Du Bois [1935] 1992; Sykes 1988; Fields 1990, as cited in Gilmore 2007: 214). The dynamism of second-class citizenship as a tool and technology is also highlighted by the ways that Black life can be recategorized to serve different purposes of the state. Case in point, also, emerging from this landscape of disaster was a discourse that characterized Black American citizens as "refugees". Highlighting this discourse during the moment of Katrina is particularly important because it allows us to contend with the politics of citizenship as a racialized phenomenon having implications at both local and global scales. To identify African-Americans as refugees discursively challenges the assumptions and possibilities of Black liberal citizenship while simultaneously highlighting how histories of Black citizenship also play a role of informing racialized citizenships at a global level. Contending with the realities of the "Black refugee" highlights the violent relationship between liberal constructions of citizenship and race as a paradox that informs and structures crises and disasters, not just within the confines of the United States, but as having serious consequence for geopolitics as well.

The Black Refugee

In 1951, The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, defined the term “refugee”, codifying the term, outlining the rights of refugees, in addition to the legal obligations of States to protect them.

Article 1. – Definition of the term “refugee”

A. For the purposes of the present Convention, the term “refugee” shall apply to any person who:

(1) Has been considered a refugee under the Arrangements of 12 May 1926 and 30 June 1928 or under the Conventions of 28 October 1933 and 10 February 1938, the Protocol of 14 September 1939 or the Constitution of the International Refugee Organization; Decisions of non-eligibility taken by the International Refugee Organization during the period of its activities shall not prevent the status of refugee being accorded to persons who fulfil the conditions of paragraph 2 of this section;

(2) As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

In the case of a person who has more than one nationality, the term “the country of his nationality” shall mean each of the countries of which he is a national, and a person shall not be deemed to be lacking the protection of the country of his nationality if, without any valid reason based on well-founded fear, he has not availed himself of the protection of one of the countries of which he is a national. (Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951).

As defined in its narrowest capacity, African Americans, do not fit this articulation of the term. In 1998, the United Nations provided guiding principles on Internal Displacement,

1. These Guiding Principles address the specific needs of internally displaced persons worldwide. They identify rights and guarantees relevant to the protection of persons from forced displacement and to their protection and assistance during displacement as well as during return or resettlement and reintegration

2. For the purposes of these Principles, internally displacement persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

Broadening the scope, I would suggest that African Americans across time through experiencing second-class citizenship have inhabited the liminal space somewhere within these definitions. This requires that we deepen and widen how we think about the refugee, as Blackness is not written into these definitions. In the case of Katrina, the dichotomies of the citizen and the refugee must also be examined as the Katrina moment illustrates the process in which they were quickly racialized.

Throughout the storm, the word refugee was loosely used by reporters, politicians, and media commentators, to describe Black Katrina survivors (Masquelier 2006). For example, according to Masquelier (2006), CNN's Jeff Koinange had already compared the situation on the ground to that of a refugee camp in a "Third World Country" as early as September 3rd (5 days after the storm first made landfall). Masquelier further notes and highlights the ways this discourse was popularized:

[N]ewscasters routinely spoke of refugees, when referring to Katrina survivors wearing donated clothes, sleeping on the floors of overpopulated shelters, and struggling to connect with family members scattered across the country. With little money, no home to return to, nowhere to go, New Orleans residents who carried the scraps of their lives in plastic bags did look like refugees – at least, to those around the globe who indirectly witnessed their ordeal (Masquelier 2006: 737).

This response and reaction from both a national and global public is significant for what the United States is supposed to represent as a liberal democracy. At the surface, it reveals that the refugee condition was not to be experienced within the borders of the United States. However, the

fact that for Black American citizens that was an actual and real lived experience speaks to a greater issue of a racialized politics of citizenship. Contending with these realities however, it is important to also highlight what this means for both a larger Black public and Black Katrina Survivors. For many, being called a refugee was a slap in the face. As one evacuated New Orleans resident expressed, “I can’t stand people calling me a refugee, I am an American and I love America” (CBS News, 2005, as cited in Masquellier 2006: 737). For many, this disappointment stemmed from a belief in liberalism and an expectation that American citizenship signified something different than the precarity of a refugee:

The image I have in my mind is people in a Third World country, the babies in Africa that have all the flies and are starving to death,” Tyrone McKnight explained while resting outside a Baton Rouge shelter, where 5,000 displaced New Orleanians were being housed . That’s not me. I’m a law-abiding citizen who’s working every day and paying taxes (Pierre and Farhi 2005 as cited in Masquellier, 2006: 737).

As McKnight suggests, it’s almost impossible to contend with this reality if you are beholden to the liberal logics of citizenship and the promises that it espouses. How does one contend with their existence as a paradox? Storm survivors were not alone in negotiating this, as many leading Black liberal representatives expressed similar sentiments of disbelief in the discourses that were circulated. California Congresswoman Diane Watson, for example, stated, “‘Refugee’ calls up to mind people that come from different lands and have to be taken care of. These are American citizens” (CBS Radio News 2005). Al Sharpton reflecting on the moment expressed great disappointment, “They are not refugees wandering somewhere looking for charity. They are victims of neglect and a situation they should have never been put in in the first place” (Chicago Tribune 2005). Echoing similar sentiments, Bruce Gordon of the NAACP found the term

to be offensive, adding, “Using the word refugees makes it sound like they are not of us” (Ibid, 2005).

The discourses, identifying Black life as either associated with criminality or refugeehood both illustrate the dynamic ways in which second-class citizenship can be rendered in racialized ways. As Black Americans, recognizing the ways race is mobilized by the state is particularly critical, because we are often times doubly victimized by this process. Attending to the use of the term refugee during this period, I look to highlight not only the violence produced by insinuating Blackness as a type of sub-citizen, but also the reproduction of racialized categories that followed by Black Americans distancing themselves from those categorized as refugees. This racial categorization in particular is what Ruth Wilson Gilmore cautions as a “repetition [that] is part of the deadly drama of living in a racial state, the particular challenge is to work out the specific realignments of the social structure in a period of rapid change” (Gilmore 2017: 215).

This repetition of race as a tool and technology is further illustrated by Bruce Gordon’s utilization of the term “us” above: “Using the term refugee makes it seem like they are not of us.” Used in this context, it is quite apparent that for Gordon the “Us” he is referring to is “The American Citizen.” However, it is worth considering what changes if the “Us” instead is represented as “the Black citizen”. Regardless, part of what I’m suggesting is that it cannot be both, Katrina as a moment makes that overtly apparent. Instead, I look to offer a black geographic theory of the refugee in an effort to sit and contend with the realities of the racial state and its reproduction of racial categorizations. As Dylan Rodriguez suggests, “[Therefore], we must consider that the popular rhetoric positing the crisis of Katrina’s “(black) refugees” actually bespeaks the white supremacist social truth of the United States, rather than a stubborn racist

refusal to incorporate and assimilate black subjects, lives, and bodies into the vernacular reals of American humanism or “citizenship” (Rodriguez 2005: 137).

This is no easy feat, but a significant and important space to engage with the utility of Black geographies. If black citizenship isn’t one where American liberalism, freedom, justice, or equality can be realized, then maybe it is something else. Maybe as McKittrick suggests, Black citizenship instead looks like “the terrain of political struggle itself, or where the imperative of a perspective of struggle takes place” (McKittrick 2006: 6). And if this is the case, then maybe a black geographic theory of the refugee could inform citizenships that transcend those predicated on the racialized control and restrictions of mobility.

Rethinking Black Citizenship and the Liberal Paradox

It is through this lens of Black citizenship as the terrain of political struggle that I look to consider and highlight the 35th Annual Legislative Conference Town Hall Meeting held by the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) on September 22, 2005. I read this as an important site where the negotiations of Black citizenship struggles took place, and more specifically, where the tensions of liberal citizenship and contradictions of black citizenship were exposed in the aftermath of Katrina. Established in 1971 by the only 13 African American congressmembers at the time, the CBC grew out of the Democracy Select Committee (DSC) of the 1960s, founded by Representative Charles Diggs in an effort to bring African-American Congressmen together to discuss common political challenges among a community that was otherwise feeling isolated and alone. Certainly not the only terrain of political struggle during the post-Katrina moment, the 2005 Annual Legislative Conference is significant as it effectively illustrates the tensions and struggles over American liberalism and where Black citizenship fits or doesn’t fit. During the town hall,

many approach this issue of Black citizenship, through a non-ideal theory ideology that seems to fall short within the context of the Katrina moment. However, revealed, are also speakers that turn to racial realism as an approach to make sense of the Katrina moment and as a strategic pathway for moving forward. As a site, the town hall illustrates an expression of Black citizenship and struggle.

On September 22nd, 2005, during the morning of the second day of the Congressional Black Caucus' 35th Annual Legislative Conference, a town hall meeting was held to address the post-Katrina moment. The panel included a spectrum of participants including the Congressional Black Caucus chairman, Representative Mel Watt, Representative William Jefferson of Louisiana, Representative Danny Davis of Illinois, Representative Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas, Harvard University Law Professor Charles Ogletree, Harry Belafonte, Alfre Woodard, New York State Senator Hillary Clinton, Illinois Senator Barack Obama, and Congressman Charles Rangel of New York.

Contextualizing the Town Hall as a space to reflect on the recent atrocities of the Katrina moment, Representative Mel Watt, a Democrat from North Carolina, and the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, began the meeting by welcoming all and being intentional from the start regarding how to frame the Katrina moment.

I was thinking last evening that we have spent so much time in the last two or three weeks talking about a natural disaster. We call it when I was practicing law, an *Act of God*. A natural disaster. At the same time there are national disasters. National disasters are not *Acts of God*, they are things that we can do something about. And the purpose of the Congressional Black Caucus is to try to do something about those things. National disasters; A terrible response to a natural disaster. A response that yields when African American men represent 8% of the population, 40% of African American Men in the prison population. A response that yields more African American men in prison and jail than in college. A response that yields unsatisfactory healthcare to citizens with no means and the list goes on and on and on. National disasters not natural disasters. And those are the challenges that we are here to talk about today in this national town hall meeting (Congressional Black Caucus 2005).

Watt's articulation of Katrina as a national disaster is grounded in the historical particularities of the racial state. Watt draws attention to the way historical inequalities informed who would be most vulnerable to the storm. His insights and perspective on Katrina as a disaster that was in no way natural, reflect a prominent viewpoint across the African American community. However, unique to this town hall is the illustration of the many different approaches to addressing the challenges to which Watt is referring.

Contributing a reframing of the issue, Representative William Jefferson identifies the town hall as a space to consider the possibilities and opportunities for rebuilding New Orleans, highlighting the imperative for advocating on behalf of Black Katrina survivors in particular, to ensure that everyone is afforded the opportunity to return home.

Now, we have to make some decisions around here. Our foundation and all of us together about the future. We've kind of witnessed what has just happened and it's brought us into a process of thinking through these problems. But at the end of the day, we've got to vision what the future's going to be. Part of it is going to be expressing how we rebuild the region that I'm from. We've got to rebuild New Orleans for everyone that was there in the first place. Not just for the rich folks, for the folks in the middle but for everyone that was there, everybody that was there. A better place, a place filled with more opportunity, a place filled with more hope and a more survivable place for everybody that was there. And all of us have to build a way back home, for all the people that have spent most of their lives and created such a heritage in that city. But it's up to us because so many folks won't find a way back unless we build a way back for them and light a way back for them. It is our job to figure out how we do this in a way that gets everybody back home to a better, a higher place, a place with a brighter future. So, we're here to talk about the paradox that we have in our community. Folks at the very bottom. Folks that are trying to move up. How we work on these things together and how we must. (Congressional Black Caucus 2005)

Jefferson's evaluation of Katrina is representative of a non-ideal ideology, one that is driven by idealist liberal principles and expectations for all citizens. For Jefferson, the political stakes are not that Black liberal citizenship is contradictory in nature, but that there is a wealth gap dividing the very bottom and the very top. As a Black liberal that has negotiated his way to the "top", his perspective on the political struggle at hand becomes skewed, as his framing of the issue

at hand seems to be grounded in the economy alone. However, what is interesting to note is that beyond the contrasting ideologies of the non-ideal and racial realism, there are similar visions and hopes for articulations of the future shared across the spectrum. Jefferson references the hope for rebuilding New Orleans so that those displaced can return in a livable and affordable way. This is significant because, as I will go into detail in the following chapter, they reflect similar hopes and visions shared by those in activist communities. To McKittrick's point, I think this is where the imperative of struggle exists. It's among the intersections of contrasting ideologies and at that convergence of the possibilities of visioning alternative futures. As the next speakers reveal however, the challenge then becomes the negotiation of ideologies and systems that limit the scope of such possibilities.

A major elephant in the room during this town hall is that it simultaneously served as a platform for the Democratic Party. In 2005, the party was gearing up for the next election cycle and in political fashion, both then Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were in attendance, sharing their perspectives on the Katrina moment.

Senator Obama addressed the crowd, citing the ever-present inequality of the disaster relief process, but providing limited solutions for instituting transformative change,

Even as we hold those accountable who showed such ineptitude with respect to hurricane relief, we have to recognize that all of us are complicit in the long-term poverty that continues to exist in our society. And all of us have the obligation to try to move forward and take seriously as a nation the promise that all children will be able to achieve their dreams. In order to make that happen I would suggest a couple of things. Number 1, I suggest our priority has to be with whatever works as opposed to what is the conventional wisdom in our own party, our own groups, or our own organizations. We should be open minded to looking at all the factors that go into poverty. Some of them have to do with structural and institutional barriers to access (Congressional Black Caucus, 2005).

While Clinton provides some historical context to the Katrina moment, as a moment entrenched in racial inequities, Clinton continues to rely on the liberal democratic process to inform the next steps in the process of disaster relief,

Katrina helped to sharpen the focus for many Americans and people around the world about issues that many of us have known about and worked on for a long time.... It did not surprise me that we had a lot of poor people along the coast, after all I lived in Arkansas. And we have the vestiges of a system that has kept people poor and down for a hundred years of more. So, it should not come as a shock. And therefore, we have to be willing to ask these hard questions and the independent commission would be a vehicle for doing that. To make sure we don't just look backwards and it's not a game to me, this is serious business. People lost their lives and people lost everything they owned and maybe we could have prevented some of that damage and devastation and we need to know the answer as to whether we could or not and we also need to have the best minds at work about what to do about going forward.... (Congressional Black Caucus, 2005).

Both Obama and Clinton illustrate the ease in which democratic liberalism can appropriate and subsume racial liberalism and non-ideal theory. Both candidates balance and hold the non-ideal ideological perspective, highlighting inequitable systems and structures of the racial state, while simultaneously uplifting and proliferating state powers. While Obama highlights the connection between long-term poverty and its implication on Katrina survivors, Clinton similarly signals that she is aware and knowledgeable of racial state systems, particularly due to her historical geographic proximity to the South. Both Obama and Clinton therefore illustrate the limits of the non-ideal. As a mechanism for identifying race and poverty as embedded in historical processes, it can be utilized as a useful tool. However, I would suggest that what the Katrina moment makes clear, is that the non-ideal is limited in its capacity to inform transformative futures

Offering an alternative approach to the Katrina moment, actor and activist, Harry Belafonte was also in attendance at the Town Hall. Belafonte, speaking to both his own experiences and

providing a critical analysis to the Katrina moment, illustrates the challenge and struggle of what it means to realistically evaluate the paradox of Black citizenship.

The last thing Dr. King said to me before he was murdered was in my home when he was sitting and planning strategy for the Poor Peoples' Campaign. On the horizon of politics of the day. That's why he went to Memphis. And in the course of that meeting he seemed distracted and under focused and when we asked him what was the matter, Martin said, "You know, I've been thinking long and hard about our struggle. We worked tenaciously for our rights, and the culmination of all that effort will be reflected in what we come to call the integration movement. And I sit here deeply concerned that I suspect we are leading our nation on an integration trip that has us integrating into a burning house." I don't think we quite understood how prophetic that remark was... That reflection has taken longer than I and suspected it would. But it has certainly come to reveal itself fully, when we look at the condition in which we find not only our world, but in particular our nation." (Congressional Black Caucus, 2005).

For Belafonte, the paradox of Black citizenship no longer becomes a paradox once it is disconnected from the promises and ideals of liberalism. Speaking to the weight of this reality, once recognized, for Belafonte, the technologies and apparatuses of the racial state become patterns reflected not only within the nation state, but globally. Belafonte's reflections highlight the possibilities in which I hope to consider and engage with the "Black refugee" as a condition and reproduced category of the world and nation.

This country reveals its moral decay everyday of its existence.... Poverty is in our face all day long. Why is everyone behaving all of a sudden like this is some big great revelation? And I tell you something, there's a lot of people out here who are really pissed off. ... The American people have some decisions to make. Our foreign policy has made a wreck of this planet. I'm always an African, that's my business, I move among the poor, I move among the tragic, I move among those who are the victims of human and moral disaster. And when I move to these places, I see American policy written on the walls of oppression everywhere. And I occasionally see some rep from our congress or from our govt coming to visit, coming to take another look, to get some more facts, to come back and make a report. We don't need another independent committee to find out what happened and what is happening to this country. Our last independent committee told us... We know what they do when the suspend minimum wage and go out and get immigrants to go out and fill and do the dirty work and in suspending minimum wage, are setting Black people and brown people and immigrants and men and women against one and other when we should in fact be reuniting (Congressional Black Caucus, 2005).

Belafonte's reflection can be read as a critique of Black radical liberalism, working to confront the illustriousness of the non-ideal. In many ways, it's devastating to have to contend with the failures of liberal ideology, even more so for communities of color who I think in many ways are supposed to exist as pillars of its success. For Belafonte, the moral decay of the country reveals itself and makes itself known through the Katrina moment, a moment inclusive of the historic reproductions of racial state geographies of despatialization and literal erasure infused among the ideological, structural, and the political infrastructure of the nation. The town hall and its panel participants, however, expose the nuance and challenges of negotiating this as a Black citizen in the United State. As Belafonte highlights, the stakes are high and have implications for the world.

Conclusion

In her piece, "Prison Abolitionist Perspectives on No Borders," Geographer Jenna Loyd points to the necessity of making connections across (post)slavery, settler colonial, and immigration histories, to diagnose the bounds of citizenship, revealing the interconnected relationships more accurately between criminality, citizenship, or refugee status as categories whose creations are political, contested, and tied up in the development of racial capitalism and the racial state (Loyd 2018). This approach, grounded in the conceptualization of the state as a racial state, informs an alternative historical narrative unblinded by the ideals of liberalism and even racial liberalism's limited critique. By introducing a black geographic theory of the refugee," I look to critically diagnose the bounds of Black citizenship in addition to the possibilities of an unbounded Black citizenship that is informed by its historical interconnectedness to other racially categorized and bounded citizenships. To recognize the bounds of Black citizenship as having

commonalities to the condition of the refugee, is to challenge "... a world that has, for the most part, incorrectly deemed black populations and their attendant geographies as "ungeographic" and/or philosophically undeveloped" (McKittrick 2006: xiii). It is to challenge the nation-state system itself and its reproduction of the condition of vulnerability and precarity.

In constructing a genealogy of the "refugee," anthropologist Lisa Malkki argues that the very idea that the refugee is a problem to begin with is representative of sedentarist logics and part of a larger erasure of the historical processes that produce the refugee as a condition:

[R]efugees" do not constitute a naturally self-delimiting domain of anthropological knowledge. Forced population movements have extraordinarily diverse historical and political causes and involve people who, while all displaced, find themselves in qualitatively different situations and predicaments. Thus, it would seem that the term refugee has analytical usefulness not as a label for a special, generalizable "kind" or "type" of person or situation, but only as a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of different socioeconomic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations. Involuntary or forced movements of people are always only one aspect of much larger constellations of sociopolitical and cultural processes and practices (Malkki 1995: 496).

As Malkki and others suggest, the project of identifying processes and practices that produce the conditions of displacement and emplacement are informed by larger historical and political projects of the nation-state. This might suggest that some of the most critical struggles over citizenship and rights exist among the commonalities and socio-historical processes that produce the refugee, the internally displaced, the immigrant, or the racialized second-class citizen.

The Katrina moment, through this lens serves as an opportunity to evaluate the stakes of bounded citizenship. In a moment where black citizenship and the refugee condition were so easily collapsed as one in the same, the Katrina moment behooves us to question the sustainability of such a technology that makes so many vulnerable to processes of displacement and emplacement. Alternatively, contending with the Black geographic theory of the refugee offers us the opportunity

to imagine conditions that might transcend the restrictive and violent natures of bounded citizenships.

Widely critiqued as a term that further constitutes Blackness as second-class, I look to take seriously a Black geographic theory of the refugee as representative of the current and realist condition of black citizenship. The Black refugee, therefore, exposes the tedious and repetitive crises of a paradoxical world where second-class citizenship continues to be perpetuated and reproduced by systems of oppression at both the domestic and global scales. It helps to articulate the ways in which racial state apparatuses reproduce “group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” through different entanglements of race, criminality, and vulnerabilities of citizenship. For African Americans in the eye of the storm, it revealed just how insidious these systems can be and how little citizenship can mean when you’re black and poor. And yet, as Loyd, building on Rodriguez argues, there are solidarities to be built from this acknowledgement and recognition of such a condition,

There is, then, an unintended “social truth of ‘black refugees’” that potentially enables interracial, transnational solidarities against “white life as a system of dominance.” African Americans share with other people’s histories of forced displacement and diasporic communities as a result of the slave trade, colonization of Native peoples and lands, and ongoing imperial military occupations. Thus, “the time of Katrina articulates a global indictment of white life, framed by the possibility of a political and existential identification with the context and substance of a critical common sense of black and third world death.” (Rodriguez 2005: 134, as cited in Loyd 2007: 127)

To sit with this social truth requires that we interrogate the ways global systems of citizenship reproduce a vulnerability to displacement, erasure, and geographic despatialization. As historian Peter Gatrell suggests, in arguing for the historicization of refugee displacement to account for its socio-impacts,

[H]istory can provide perspective and corrective—perspective, because a refusal to confront the historical record suggests an unwillingness to understand both the root causes of mass population displacement and the discursive registers in which responses to crises are articulated, or even to account for fundamental decisions by refugees as to the routes they might follow in moving to a place of relative safety; and corrective, in the sense that history exposes misconceptions (Gatrell 2015: 184).

A corrective perspective of the “Black refugee” therefore, helps to inform how “The ungeographic is a colonial fiction, sometimes cast in real life, thus functioning to determine how we only seem to see black geographies in hierarchical, stereotypical, human/inhuman terms, and therefore as ostensible impossibilities” (McKittrick 2006: 5). The Black refugee therefore exists as an ostensible impossibility within the realm of traditional geographies. However, engaging alternative geographic imaginaries, the Black refugee represents the potentiality of unbounded citizenships and the freedom of mobility and placemaking.

Chapter 3: Reproductive Justice as Disaster Relief

Four and a half months after Hurricane Katrina struck the Southern coast of the United States, destroying communities across Mississippi and Louisiana, survivors, organizers, and activists quickly began organizing and advocating around their right to engage in the reconstruction process on behalf of their communities. These demands encompassed the right to return, the right to housing, the right to accessible health, and a demand for reparations in response to local and national authorities' harassment and neglect. The week of December 4, 2005, culminated in multiple responses of direct action. Katrina survivors gathered at the Survivors General Assembly and Strategy Conference in Jackson, Mississippi. In New Orleans, a special House Select Committee hearing was also held in addition to a march in New Orleans of around 1000 people, centered around survivors' right to return to the city. At the Survivors General Assembly and Strategy Conferences, participants demanded that "local, state and Federal government make conditions possible for our immediate return" (LRP 2006: 1). Other demands included temporary housing, an end to price gouging and evictions, hiring of local residents to do the rebuilding work, immediate debt relief, quality public education and childcare, and quality affordable health care and free prescriptions (LRP 2006). Responding to toxic environmental conditions, the assembly also demanded that the government immediately clean up air, water, and soil to make it safe and healthy for people to return home and provide funds for all families to be reunited.

Echoing many of the same demands later that week, The House Select Committee hearing provided a space for survivors and advocates to address the role that systematic racism and class played in the government's response to Katrina. Originally requested by Georgia Representative Cynthia McKinney, Katrina survivors and advocates testified, specifically pointing to racism as a major cause for their abandonment and neglect. Ishmael Muhammad, an attorney for the

Advancement Project, part of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund, one of the many New Orleans-based organizations instrumental in laying the groundwork for a coordinated network of community leaders and organizations to help meet the needs of Katrina survivors through relief, return, and reconstruction efforts, spoke on behalf of survivors, contextualizing the Katrina moment,

The purpose of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and Mississippi Disaster Relief Coalition is to ensure that those who have suffered the most before, during and after Katrina, and whose voices have been historically disregarded, are empowered to be heard and take charge of the monies being raised in their names, the reconstruction of their communities, and the repairing of their lives. Therefore, the testimony that I'm going to give today on behalf of the legal work that we're doing and on behalf of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund and the Mississippi Disaster Relief Coalition, will be from those voices. And we urge all of you to seek out those voices that we cannot bring you today." (Ishmael Muhammad as cited in, Democracy Now! 2005).

Centering the lived experiences of local residents and survivors, Muhammad illustrated and voiced the material realities of racial state disaster relief that were instrumental in the practice and process of Black erasure through the displacement, criminalization, and abandonment of survivors. Echoing other organizers and advocates, Muhammad worked to contextualize the crisis of Katrina along a longer temporal struggle in which many in the Black community had been engaged in, through the articulation of a human rights framework. Muhammad is careful to highlight both the historical conditions that produced the Katrina moment and the then present atrocities of the relief process that were occurring. Another testimony by New Orleans community organizer, Dyan French, further identified systemic racism as a necessary component for explaining and contextualizing a Black human rights struggle within the context of disaster relief. In this exchange, her views are echoed by another unnamed participant:

DYAN FRENCH: Rita, Katrina, and all of the aftermath, if we are not going to sit here and be honest about the racism...

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: Right. That's right. It don't make no sense.

DYAN FRENCH: — that was perpetrated, then I have really, truly wasted my time coming here.

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: Me, too. And I missed a day's work.

DYAN FRENCH: And I really don't want nobody to get confused. At 60, I just don't want to call you the names that we were called. We have documentation. We don't have to sit in this room. I invite all of you to please come to New Orleans. The proof is there, the proof of what happened... (Dyan French Democracy Now! 2005).

Ms. French's remarks at the hearing speak to the necessity of starting from a place of reckoning around the impact of historical and present racial state processes for African American experiences of disaster. She suggests that without starting from this place, it is not possible to assess the disaster itself. Muhammad and Ms. French's testimony speak to broader demands from survivors and activists within the Black community, whose efforts push for a reconceptualization of the entanglements of race, disaster, crisis, and the state. Identifying the moment as one that is contested, Black geographers, critical scholars, activists, and organizers worked to specifically reframe the disaster--centering historical inequities, vulnerability, displacement, and emplacement--as a human rights crisis. These discourses and agendas provide alternative geographies for how to situate disaster and an organized response to disaster within the historical processes of Black erasure. The processes of the racial state, such as the legislation that dictates the scope and actions of the federal disaster response, therefore were challenged by Black organizers and activists, who sought to articulate the site of struggle within a longer temporal crisis of racial inequality and human rights inequities.

In this chapter, I look to illustrate this struggle within a long tradition of African-American activists making human rights demands, as a practice for exposing the paradoxical crisis of second-class citizenship, articulating black oppression and racism within the larger oppressive state and

global systems of U.S. imperialism. I argue that this tradition is uniquely expressed and reconstituted by the mobilization of Black feminist activists and survivors in the Katrina moment. Their activism suggests that the site of disaster relief presents an opportune space to center reproductive justice within the struggle over basic human rights.

Retracing the Human Rights Regime of the 1940s

Arguably, the articulation of the demand for human rights precedes the human rights legal regime of the 1940's. Emerging out of the conditions of the post-World War 2 era, western leaders began the process of canonizing social rights through the internationalization of global governance, mostly significantly through the apparatus of United Nations and its Charter. The Atlantic Charter, drafted by the Allies' informed the foundations for the discourse of human rights, which promised a commitment to "respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them." However, such claims and demands can be traced historically within communities who have systematically had such protections rescinded or never experienced them to begin with. For example, African Americans, most notably through the encounters of atrocities of slavery, Jim Crow, and racial violence, have for a long time been demanding basic human rights before they were codified by supra national institutions. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I focus on the human rights regime of the 1940's, what historian Samuel Moyn identifies as the global canonization of economic and social rights consecrated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (Moyn 2018). Re-examining the moment, I look to reframe it as a contested site of struggle over the definition of human rights and holding the global regime accountable. Tracing this history and drawing connections to 60 years later in

New Orleans, I focus specifically on how the demands for basic rights to health and housing in the context of the post-Katrina reconstruction period holds roots within the struggles of African-American human rights activists of the 1940's. Both struggles expose the ways crises and disasters are informed and produced by hierarchies of citizenship, specifically the reproduction of precarious citizenship, for what many Black people experience as second-class citizenship.

African Americans have long engaged in struggle and resistance over the contradictions of human rights as a post-war phenomenon, working to reconfigure human rights which center minority oppression. The African American human rights tradition through this lens, can and must be considered a living archive of struggle, as activists and advocates over time work to reconfigure human rights demands as ones that center the contradictions of second-class citizenship that result in the oppressions of minorities both domestic and globally. This can be seen through the ways African American demands for human rights center domestic vulnerabilities around race and class while simultaneously articulating, “the contradictions between the United States’ historic embrace of human rights principles on the international stage and its deep ambivalence about human rights at home” (Soohoo 2007: 2).

Entangled within the contradictions of the legal human rights regime, established by the United Nations, African American leaders identified both the processes of human rights as institutionalizing and legalizing imperial violence, while also grasping the power and importance of economic and political rights in the struggle for equality. As Carol Anderson suggests, “African American leadership seized upon the reality that the needs in black America had converged with the wartime language of human rights to provide the roadmap for freedom” (Anderson 2007: 77). The post-war period was quickly identified as a space for Black political struggle. African

Americans worked to disentangle the contradictions of the legal doctrine, demanding “freedom [and] rejecting [the] idea of racial inferiority” (Ibid., p.77). Building on the framework of the Atlantic Charter’s Four Freedoms and The U.N. Charter on human rights, African American leadership worked to reconfigure rights for a different world, “formulating a program of post war needs for the American Negro” (Ibid., p.77. Illustrating their comprehensive platform, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) outlined their major demands in an appeal to the United Nations, “An Appeal to the World”:

At the top of that list was “first -class citizenship” as defined by “basic civil rights” such as “the right to vote in all parts of the country.” There was also a recurring emphasis on “essential economic rights” such as the “right to compete in fields of employment on equal levels,” “the right to work,; the right to remuneration for work on the basis of merit and performance,” and “the right to advance in rank and salary in terms of ability and productive contribution” In addition, African Americans sought the right to “unsegregated and unrestricted housing” and the right to live without the burdens and embarrassments that are provoked by the unwarranted segregation” in education, health care, and in public accommodations (NAACP, as cited in Anderson 2007: 77).

For the purposes of this chapter, I identify the ways housing and health were mobilized as demands for basic human rights by both the NAACP and the National Negro Congress (NNC). Both organizations grounded their demands and human rights claims within the language of the United Nations charter, identifying paradoxes of juridical Human Rights claims for the protection of minorities in contrast to the realities of Black second-class citizenship at home. Both the NAACP’s “An Appeal to the World!” and the NCC’s, “A petition... to the United Nations on behalf of 13 million oppressed Negro citizens of the United States of America”, are built and informed by the basic claims of protection established by the U.N. Charter,

The determination of the drafters of the Charter of the United Nations to universalize the protection of human rights and of minorities which had previously rested upon agreements with individual nations is manifest from the language of the Charter and the frequency with which the language is repeated. The Preamble states: “We the people of the United Nations determined... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of

the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, ... (NAACP 1947: 86)

...Article 1, paragraph 3, employs language that has probably been more frequently quoted than any other expression from the Charter. It states that one of the purposes of the United Nations is “to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion;...” is repeated in the identical words three times, namely, in Article 13, paragraph 1(b), Article 55, and Article 76(c). Article 2t 62, paragraph 2, uses the same language with the omission of the words “without distinctions as to race, sex, language or religion,” but with the inclusion clearly implied. Thus, the Charter in six different places reveals the concern of the drafters that there should be no mistaking their determination to establish the ideal of equal treatment of all men and women in all the lands.” (National Negro Congress 1946: 5)

Essential to the drafters’ petitions and appeals was their recognition of the paradox of the creation of a human rights regime in the face of systemic racism and oppression that was occurring domestically. As political theorist Ariella Azoulay suggests, “human rights were not devised to endow people with access to a common world, with and among others, but on the contrary, to legitimate the continued existence of a differential world and avoid recognition of violence that has made it so. The fetishized declarations of rights are complementary tools to imperial sovereignties” (Azoulay 2019: 460). And yet, the post-war demands made by African American activists reveal a rearticulation of human rights, which suggests that human rights discourses are a contested site of struggle.

Issuing their petition in 1946, the NNC specifically pointed to the promises of the “protection of minorities” and the “prevention of discrimination on the grounds of race” within the purview of the United Nations Charter. Their petition exposed the contradictory nature of such promises, highlighting the fact that domestically, African Americans were being subject to racial systems of oppression materialized as segregation, racial violence, and second-class citizenship:

These statistics represent, of course, food, homes, life, and death. Official publications have summed up some of the facts in a few succinct lines and figures. Thus, for housing, we are

told: "... most Negroes have been unable to rent or own decent, safe, and sanitary houses in which to live and bring up their children. Figures will make this concrete. In the United States, in 1940, there were 3,293,406 dwelling units for Negroes. Of these over one million (1,082,128) "needed major repairs," and almost two million (1,908,100) had no running water. Over twice as many Negro homes as white (35.1% and 16.3%) needed major repairs and almost three times as many Negro homes as white (62% and 26.6%) had no running water. Twice as many white homes as Negro homes (82.9 and 43%) had electricity. All these figures are, of course, very much worse in the South, where the bulk of the Negro citizens live. Thus, to illustrate, it may be mentioned that well over 70% of all Negro homes in that area have neither electricity nor running water (NNC 1946: 10).

Their figures highlight the ways in which restricted access to human rights informs racialized social and spatial relations. Evidenced by the data, these racialized geographies work to naturalize Black second-class citizenship as undeserving and unequal to their white counterparts. Building on this argument, the petition also illustrates the material consequences of such inequalities as conditions of despatialization and erasure, for example, by pointing to the relationship between safe and functional housing as a basic need for human sustainability. Building this case, the petition makes similar claims for the demand for health as a basic human right, making clear the socio-political stakes for Black Americans.

This oppression cripples and kills. Sickness, which incapacitates for a minimum of one week, is 40% more common to the Negro than to the white. In 1940, while 46 out of every 1,000 white children born alive did not reach their first birthdays, 85 Negro children died during the same period. And the proportion of deaths for children from one to four years of age is almost twice as high for the Negro as for the white, while the maternal death rate is more than twice as high. Finally, while a white man could expect, in 1940 to reach almost 63 years, the Negro man's life expectancy was 52; and the figures for white and Negro women were 67 and 55 respectively. These figures, let this be perfectly clear, are "no more than a difference of mortality for different economic classes," they do not represent some innate "racial" characteristic. Moreover, as the Children's Bureau of the Department of Labor showed, the infant mortality rate for Negro families whose fathers earned less than \$450 per year was practically the same (indeed, a little lower) than that for white families of a similar economic status. The effect upon the mental life of both the victims and the manipulators of this economic, social, political, and physical machine of oppression is only now beginning to be analyzed scientifically, but enough has already appeared to make clear the terrible urgency of the question. (Ibid., p.10).

Formulating the basis for the demands of housing and health as basic human rights is a recognition of the relationship between race and class as oppressive systems that inform the discrimination and restriction of access to those basic rights. Black human rights activists, through the practice of advocating on behalf of minority rights, recognized their domestic struggles as embedded within broader systems of injustice. This practice of recognition and rearticulation also function as a practice of Black place making, articulating Black rights to citizenship within a larger struggle for minority rights.

Speaking directly to the ways racism functions as a process that erases and disenfranchises one's right and relationship to space, community, and a sense of place, the NAACP's "Appeal to the world!" echoes much of the NNC's petition, addressing the blatant patterns of discrimination within the United States that directly contradict the U.N. Charter's articulation of "Fundamental Human rights". Speaking to the nature of these legal structures of discrimination within the United States, the NAACP's appeal echo's many of the same claims made by the NNC noting,

"The overwhelming majority of Negroes in America live in urban slums or rural slums. They are forced to remain bottled up in these blighted areas by the prejudice of the dominant white community, enforced by courts of law, physical force and violence, and the mechanism of organized government..."

"...Uniform discrimination against the Negro by public and private health services makes adequate and proper medical care the exception rather than the rule, even when he has the money to pay for it. The sickness and death rate of the Negro in the United States is much higher than for white persons. This is not due to any innate susceptibility on his part to any specific disease but is the product of the low economic and social status in which he is kept. Proper medical care is usually beyond his reach. His limited financial means cannot provide nourishing food, rest and clean wholesome surroundings needed for prompt recovery" (NAACP, 1947, p.76-81).

Pointing to the paradoxes of second-class citizenship, the demands made by African American human rights activists can be identified as the struggle for the articulation of African Americans as geographic subjects. Identifying the racial discrimination and restrictions to housing

and health as processes employed by the racial state, their human right demands served to both identify the paradox of second-class citizenship, but also counter racial state processes of erasure, once clear form of erasure being that of premature death. Their demands, therefore, expose the ways African Americans historically and presently are forced to struggle to identify themselves as global subject in order to also gain domestic rights.

The relevancy of these struggles in the context of Katrina, signify the importance of an extended temporal framework for considering the implications of Katrina as a disaster. Tracing the disaster outside of the scope of the hurricane, instead extending it within the broader contradictions of second-class citizenship, allow us to consider the disastrous conditions and crises that are produced from the paradoxes of second-class citizenship and the oppressive systems and structures that sustain the racial state. Through this lens, the organizing efforts that took place during Katrina can instead be understood and contextualized as a continuation of resistance to racial state processes of geographic erasure and extermination. Mirroring the opportunity in the post-war era to make demands for human rights, the post-Katrina landscape similarly exposed the site of disaster relief as an opportunity to rearticulate human rights demands, claiming that disaster relief as a process, must be contested and struggled over for the right to black geographies.

Black Feminism and Reproductive Justice: An Intervention

In the Katrina moment, Black feminist activists revealed the ways in which social movements and grassroots activism develops and is transformed overtime through evolving demands and rearticulations based on present contexts and needs. This process is significant as it is representative of the constant struggle that is required for the process of placemaking, a process that works to counteract the processes of erasure and despatialization. Exhibited by the leadership

and advocacy of Black feminist organizers during the moment, one can easily identify the threads of historical basic human rights claims which centered on housing and health. Unique to the moment, however, were the ways in which those claims were rearticulated through a lens of reproductive justice.

Articulated by the Combahee River Collective in 1974, “Black feminist struggles and organizing principles are grounded in the shared belief that “[Black] women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else’s but because our need as human person for autonomy. This may seem so obvious as to sound simplistic, but it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression as a priority or worked seriously for ending of that oppression” (Taylor 2017: 18). Without the need to cite juridical human rights language, there is value in noticing and naming the ways Black feminist struggles directly speak to and reorient human rights claims made in the U.N. Charter itself. For example, stated in Article 1, paragraph 3, “To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion; and...” (U.N. Charter 1945). Actively radicalizing the human rights discourse, Black feminist struggles orient its politics to an attention of the individual and local experiences of violence and oppression, identifying these experiences within the scope of global struggles and the refusal of the violence of geographic erasure. Providing a framework to inform this intervention is Reproductive Justice. Reproductive Justice at its most basic level is a contemporary framework for activism and for thinking about the experience of reproduction and has three primary principles: (1) the right *not* to have a child; (2) the right to *have* a child; and (3) the right to *parent* children in safe and healthy environments (Ross and Solinger

2017: 65) In addition, reproductive justice demands sexual autonomy and gender freedom for every human being. Authors Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger, note that at the heart of reproductive justice is the claim that,

All fertile persons and persons who reproduce and become parents require a safe and dignified context for these most fundamental human experiences. Achieving this goal depends on access to specific, community-based resources including high-quality health care, housing and education, a living wage, a healthy environment, and a safety net for times when these resources fail. Safe and dignified fertility management, childbirth, and parenting are impossible without these resources. (Ross and Solinger 2017: 9)

Highlighted in their definition is an attention to context, or the necessary environmental conditions required to live healthy and safe lives. Centering reproductive justice as a necessary component of human rights demands Black feminist activists and organizers in the Katrina moment brought light to the relationship between state violence and its concealment of reproductive violence. Highlighted by a framework of Reproductive Justice is a reframing of what can and must be included in disaster justice.

This Black feminist orientation of human rights highlights the ways in which Black feminist struggles represent a practice of placemaking. In her book *Demonic Grounds*, Katherine McKittrick suggests that “the interplay between domination and black women’s geographies is underscored by the social production of space. Concealment, marginalization, boundaries are important social processes. We make concealment happen; it is not natural but rather names and organizes where racial-sexual differentiation occurs” (McKittrick 2006: xii). Centering the politics of reproductive justice and violence within the struggle over basic human rights can therefore be articulated as a struggle over placemaking. Critical to this practice of placemaking is not simply the expanded geographies that become possible, but a reorientation of temporality. This is especially significant within the context of disaster relief in the Katrina moment, because it opens

up new geographic possibilities by also exposing the historical and longer-term temporal processes of concealment and marginalization by way of the interlocking policies, institutions, and systems of oppression which operate to control and dominate Black women's bodies, reproduction, sexuality, and motherhood (Griffin 2010).

Building on the historical tenants of human rights demands centered around housing and health, Black feminist organizers in the Katrina moment worked to expand the scope of these demands, articulating the right to livable and survivable conditions. One of the many organizations working to advocate for such demands was Advocates for Environmental Human Rights (AEHR). Founded by local lawyer and activist, Monique Harden, AEHR worked to defend and advance the human right to a healthy environment and advocates for the right of internally displaced hurricane survivors to return home with dignity and justice (Harden 2007). Most significant, is the way Harden specifically situates AEHR's human rights claims within the longer tradition of Black human rights activism,

Advocates for Environmental Human Rights (AEHR) defends and advances the human right to a healthy environment and advocates for the right of internally displaced hurricane survivors to return home with dignity and justice AEHR does not work within the limitations of U.S. exceptionalism but seeks to overcome this exceptionalism by supporting the building of a broad-based human rights movement in the United States. Our work is informed by the lessons learned from social justice movements that abolished slavery in the United States and compelled civil rights protection through grassroots organizing, public advocacy, and litigation (Harden 2007: 85-86).

AEHR's centering of the environmental conditions of the Gulf region highlights a reorientation of the human rights agenda, centrally recognizing the social production of space as a site that must be contested and struggled over. Beyond the basic rights to housing and health, Black feminist activists galvanized the site of disaster relief as a place to engage in placemaking. Important to note as well is their understanding of the global and domestic interconnections of the

struggle. For example, years before Katrina, AEHR participated in the UN World Conference Against Racism (2000). At the conference, they participated with a diverse delegation of activists to develop a policy for environmental justice that was officially adopted by the Conference and the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), in addition to supporting the organization of three sessions on environmental justice in an effort to bridge the gap between “environmental protection” and human rights. (Harden 2017). In addition to their advocacy prior to the storm, AEHR worked to raise the awareness of Americans about human rights abuses taking place by the United States government, highlighting the suffering of mostly African Americans trapped by flooded communities after Katrina and the internally displaced Gulf Coast residents as human rights violations, citing the UN’s Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (Harden 2017).

AEHR and Harden’s advocacy represent some of many activists and organizations making connections between global and domestic human rights issues grounded in the practice of place making at both scales. Shana Griffin, a local Black feminist activist from New Orleans, similarly worked to articulate the relevancy of the Katrina moment as a struggle over Black placemaking. Highlighting the racial state processes active in Black erasure, Griffin highlights the necessity for not just the right to return but under specific conditions that are sustainable for human development:

People didn't just walk away. They were forcibly removed. And many didn't know where they were going. And they are just expected to start over? How can you just start over when your safety net has been destroyed -- your family, friends, neighbors, your church, your schools gone?

...For those who want to return, they should not just have the right to return, but it should be qualified -- they have the right to return to safe, clean environment with the resources to thrive. We need to be talking about sustainable human development. People have the right to return to a city that has quality affordable housing, and schools with the supplies they need to educate our kids (Griffin 2006: 6).

Central to both activists' demands are the recognition of violent historical processes of Black erasure. Highlighting Katrina as a disaster shaped by the historical processes of racialized and gendered violence, their organizing highlights the Katrina moment as an opportunity for transformation and the social production of alternative geographies not based on oppression.

A significant group, particularly active during the Katrina moment, INCITE! a national network of radical feminists of color worked to advance reproductive justice as an essential component of the human rights demands made at the time. INCITE! as an organization organizes from the framework that locates women of color as living in the dangerous intersections of sexism and racism, as well as other oppressions. Noting that women of color who survive sexual or domestic violence are often told that they must pit themselves against their communities to address their experience of violence. INCITE! further works to expose the violence's that sometimes occur within communities of color when women are encouraged to keep silent about sexual and domestic violence in order to maintain a united front against racism (Richie 2012). In addition, highlighting the ways women of color also experience institutionalized violence such as law enforcement violence, incarceration, and sterilization abuse.

Recognizing a gap in the coverage of the racial and gender impacts of Katrina, one of the co-founders of INCITE! New Orleans, Janelle White, wrote a statement connecting the personal and political, highlighting in particular the ways that women and girls uniquely experience violence at the intersection of disasters:

Reports of women and girls who were trapped in New Orleans experiencing sexual and physical violence are common. At times this violence was perpetrated by officials of the state—police, National Guard, FBI. This form of state sponsored violence is not at all surprising as it is a weapon of oppression utilized globally to suppress and maintain

power and control over marginalized communities. However, some gender violence was perpetrated by men and boys of the New Orleans community. This is the more difficult abuse to speak of, especially for women of color, as we have no desire to aid further in stereotyping, demonizing, and criminalizing men, and boys of color, particularly men and boys of African descent. Nonetheless, it is a painful truth that must be spoken. The bottom line that this catastrophe painfully demonstrates is, yet again, how women and girls of color are at the intersection of violence perpetrated upon marginalized communities, both by external social forces and by those within our communities (White 2005).

Identifying the process by which violence is facilitated by the state and reproduced at the intersections of oppression, White suggests that the struggle for human rights requires a framework that centers reproductive justice, because without reproductive justice, the right to housing and health means little to nothing. White also highlights the ways violence is reproduced, especially during times of disaster and crisis. Extremely important in terms of the evaluation of the possibilities of disaster relief was also a reckoning that this change cannot occur while entangled within the racial state apparatus.

Taking this analysis seriously, organizations like INCITE! were active in supporting community needs during government neglect. The local New Orleans chapter of INCITE! for example, established a series of sister projects--The New Orleans Women's Health Clinic (NOWHC) and the New Orleans Women's Health and Justice Initiative (NOWHJI)--articulating the right to health as a human rights demand in the post-disaster landscape of Katrina. This collectively worked to transform the disaster response landscape, making oppression, in particular black female oppression visible, contesting and providing an intersectional framework for the conjunctural crises of Hurricane Katrina. The clinic, located in the Tremé, a historic neighborhood discussed in Chapter One and one of the oldest communities of free people of color in the United States, provided reproductive and sexual health care to low-income women of color, while broadly interpreting reproductive freedom in the context of other struggles for racial, economic, and gender

justice. It worked closely with the Initiative, a community-organizing project that links race-, gender-, and sexuality-based issues of health and violence. Together, the two projects provided political education and worked to strengthen a community of women in the area, while meeting some of its health care needs (Luft 2009). Informed by a larger international collective of women of color organizing, these local organizations actively recentered and articulated these principles within the context of Hurricane Katrina.

The New Orleans Women's Health Clinic was not the only group to identify the value of a reproductive justice framework for informing human rights struggles. Alice Clark Kearney, a registered nurse, and local New Orleans resident, along with her friend Patricia Berryhill, formed the Lower Ninth Ward Clinic as a direct response to the absence of a primary healthcare provider in the Lower Ninth Ward. A project funded by Common Ground Relief, The Lower Ninth Ward Health Clinic was created to support and sustain the community once the Medical Center of Louisiana, Charity Hospital was closed down after Katrina. During an interview on Democracy Now, Alice Clark Kearney spoke to the void that the Lower Ninth Ward Health Clinic was required to fill:

Charity was the safety-net provider for the medically indigent patients in the community, and with that being destroyed, with that infrastructure being destroyed, we knew that many people were going to be caught — the uninsured were going to be caught without any type of medical care. We saw people really just dying on both sides of the street, just because they didn't have access to medical care. And we decided we weren't going to wait. We saw people dying at Convention Center Boulevard, the Superdome, just waiting for the bus, and we decided we weren't going to wait for the healthcare bus. So, we determined we were going to open this clinic (Democracy Now! 2007).

As Kearney suggests, the absence of a health care provider within a community, during an especially precarious time is for all intense and purposes erasure of premature death. By not replacing Charity Hospital, the state was effectively despatializing the community, making it unlivable and not survivable. Organizing in the Katrina moment, this reproductive justice framework helps to highlight

the ways in which the racial state plays a role in facilitating despatialization and erasure during moments of crisis and disaster.

Conclusion

Articulating health and reproductive justice as essential for human rights claims in the Katrina moment, Black feminist organizers were not just reorienting the demands for human rights, but also articulating alternative systems and frameworks to inform placemaking. Struggling against the uneven social relations and material environments in the wake of Katrina, these activists and organizers worked to transform the disaster landscape hoping to inform alternative futures.

In her book *Health Rights Are Civil Rights*, Geographer Jenna Loyd works to redefine health as a set of social and spatial relations, showing:

how health is not simply a result of individual behaviors or medical practices but is a set of social and spatial relations. This is to say that health is not simply bodily or biological, but fundamentally social. Health inequalities can be understood as spatial inequalities to the degree that health is shaped by uneven social relations and material environments. This makes the geographic scales at which people understand “health” and “health promotion” prime areas of conflict” (Loyd 2014: 16).

Originally articulated as processes in the context of peace and justice activism in Los Angeles, 1963–1978, the Katrina moment serves as an invaluable opportunity to reconsider the ways disaster further compounds uneven social relations and material environments. Instrumental in articulating these processes within the context of disaster justice, Black feminist organizers continually highlight and help to ground in different ways why it is so important to see reproductive justice as essential for effective disaster justice practices.

Conclusion: A Moment worth Considering

In her book, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, Arielle Azoulay argues,

Reconfiguring rights after centuries of the imperial regime of human rights involves a resurgence of worlds that were destroyed. This, in turn, must be accompanied by a recognition of the modalities in which people continue to exercise and claim rights even in impaired worlds, even in the master's house that they insist on transforming, at the right to disown the object of others as part of exercising their right not to be perpetrators (Azoulay 2019: 453).

Katrina as a moment is worth considering as an example of the opportunities and challenges that must be grappled with in the struggle for the “resurgence of worlds that were destroyed”. The site of disaster relief, in and of itself, presents an apt space to enact and engage in these struggles as potential histories and futures to be contested and struggled over. However, to even begin to contend with the possibilities of transformative disaster relief, deep reflection and analysis of the Katrina moment is required.

I began my thesis, historicizing FEMA as a technology of the racial state to illustrate the ways in which race marks and orders the state. In this way, it is not unique that FEMA exists as a technology of the racial state. However, what becomes evident through examining FEMA through a racial state analysis are the ways in which disasters, and crises as a result, become opportunities for the racial state to facilitate processes of erasure and despatialization to racially categorized groups. Katrina as a moment therefore provides a diverse archive to examine these processes.

Once established as a priori condition, the racial state apparatus, and the processes necessary for its reproduction reveal the many ways in which anti-black racism informs the ways race is marked in the United States. As I have demonstrated, the geographies of the U.S. racial state are predicated and marked by the historical and present restrictions of black mobility. Culminating in the Katrina moment, this was illustrated by the uneven experiences of the disaster, leaving Black communities and other communities of color vulnerable to displacement,

emplacement, state violence, and death. Part of the utility of the racial state analysis, then, is the ways in which it helps to reframe the disaster of Katrina. If we are to understand the racial state apparatus as a network of systems and processes that reproduce inequities, racial violence, and precarious citizens, then Katrina as a disaster becomes a much more expansive disaster to contend with. Through a racial state analysis, then, the disaster extends far beyond the moment the hurricane struck land or even the disorganized government response after the storm; the disaster instead exists within the racial state itself and the violence of its processes. To contend with this disaster requires us to reconsider the temporalities of disaster and crises in themselves. It requires a longer-term response and a recognition of disaster and crises as routinely protracted for the most vulnerable populations. It requires us to connect the dots between and across disaster like homelessness, refugee crises, police violence, and natural disasters, to contend with the ways that racialized, gendered, and classed geographies reproduce violent worlds in crisis condition.

And yet, Katrina also revealed the ways in which the racial state is always a contested site. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore suggests, “Crisis is not objectively bad or good; rather, it signals systemic change whose outcome is determined through struggle. Struggle, which is a politically neutral word, occurs at all levels of society as people try to figure out, through trial and error what to make of idled capacities” (Gilmore 2007: 54). Indeed, Katrina activists and survivors quickly recognized the political stakes of disaster relief as a necessary site to be contested and fought over in the long struggle for rights of the oppressed. First and foremost, this required a conceptual battle over how to frame and situate disasters and crises. Activists and survivors of Katrina, through struggle, worked to critique and challenge the racial state as responsible for perpetuating systems of oppression and reproducing conditions of second-class citizenship. This critique is essential as it helps to reveal the complicated entanglements of the racial state, citizenship, and crisis. These

entanglements require us to ask more critical questions about the ways categories like race and citizenship are political and contested and the ways the racial state informs connections and oppressive systems across histories of (post)slavery, settler colonialism, and immigration. Examining Katrina through the lens of Black geographies requires a reckoning of these historical connections, understanding how space and place making can enmesh instead of separate (McKittrick 2006: 4).

The placemaking practices exhibited by Black feminist activists during the Katrina moment therefore represents one lens to situate the black refugee. Their struggles and strategies to support the most vulnerable members of their community actively transformed the geographies of crisis, making clear that the ongoing geographic struggle of and by black women is not simply indicative of the adverse effects of geographic domination, but opens up the possibility of conceiving crisis as inconclusive and unfinished (McKittrick 2006). Their interventions, which often took place outside the boundaries of the racial state or as a critique to the racial state, suggest the boundless opportunities of this theory. More specifically, the Black feminist activists struggling to make demands to the right to housing and health opens up questions and considerations for the reorientation of such human rights struggles. While some, like Monique Harden, continued to make claims at the international and supra-national levels, the local organizing efforts suggest a re-orientation of human rights struggles and demands that are articulated outside of claims made directly to the state, instead informing activism and action regarding the processes of reconstruction and sustainable development as taking place through mutual aid practices. Their struggles and demands require that we contend with the opportunities and scope of possibilities for making human right demands and fulfilling them outside of racial state structures and global systems of oppression as an invitation to create just and decolonial futures.

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