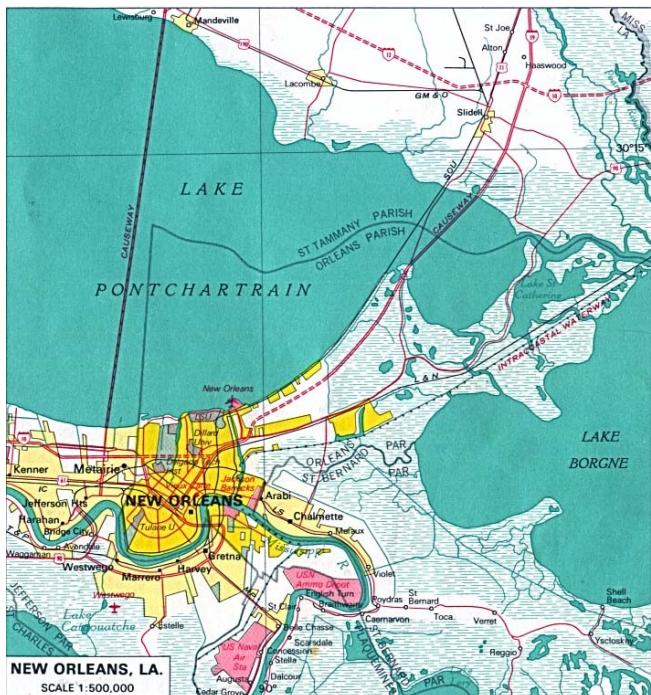


Xavier University Urban Academic Service Learning



November, 2010

Crossing Lake Pontchartrain



About 800 miles and 5 states lie between Cincinnati and New Orleans. Over fall break we drove down to see what similarities this city miles away has to Over-the-Rhine and what we are studying. A community of rich cultural diversity and vibrancy, NOLA was hit by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. The storm and resulting levee failure caused billions of dollars of damage to the city, leveling homes and displacing residents. Five years later, this damage is still apparent in the poorest areas hit the hardest by the water.

We came into the city via a five mile bridge over Lake Pontchartrain, bringing with us our experiences and love of OTR. Both cities are sites of severe social injustice—primarily economic back home but visibly environmental in NOLA. In learning about New Orleans, we gained a more holistic understanding of power relations, not to mention our improved insight into the condition of our own neighborhood, Over-the-Rhine.

Our week was spent rehabbing a home, learning about bayous, and seeing some live jazz. Much like our time here, it was an uplifting look into a dynamic city and culture, but also had us grappling with issues of housing, government, and poverty.

As the end of the semester quickly approach, look for our last newsletter focusing on our service sites and reflections and our semester presentation on December 10th at 4pm in Kelley Auditorium.

Yours on Race Street—

Zach, Kaitlyn, Nick, and Owen

Keep Reading for:

- WHAT THERE IS/ISN'T
- RECOVERY : WHY, HOW, AND CONSEQUENCES
- CULTURE AND PERSPECTIVE
- SEEING OTR IN NOLA



Xavier University has Academic Service Learning Semesters in **Nicaragua and Urban Cincinnati**.

For more information, contact Dr. Irene B. Hodgson at 745-3541 or contact asl@xavier.edu or visit our website <http://xavier.edu/service-learning/>

What There is/isn't

By: Zach Aliberti

Leaving for New Orleans, Louisiana during fall break felt surreal. I wasn't leaving for Spring Break '10 or a summer trip but my Fall Break in order to engage with another community. It was one week before mid-terms, which brought me home on our down time. However, while we were out and about in the community, I was convinced NOLA would be a future home of mine.

I didn't really have any expectations beginning the trip. Any expectations I did have were far exceeded with the help of our wonderful site leader Julia Alexander and a consistency I have found in life—how you imagine something in your mind and how that something plays out in the real world are often very different. Thus, I often leave expectations aside and wait for the surprise, rather than the disappointment.

The structure of the trip provided by Julia and Dr. Christine Anderson introduced us to: the St. Bernard Project (a housing development group), the Brad Pitt houses (The Make It Right Foundation), Tulane University and their engagement program, Preservation Hall, the French Quarter, a woman from Teach for America (I know what I'm doing post-undergrad!), a career development center, and Miss Kathy (a friend of Julia's who made us delicious Cajun food), just to name a few. I felt like I got a comprehensive perspective of NOLA through my short week there; much better than if I were to go with my buddies for a vacation.

While in New Orleans I didn't feel like I was in the United States. NOLA was probably the most socially liberal place I had ever been to. There were no open container laws, the freedom of expression people were comforted in style, and the rich culture provided for a lively atmosphere. A good example of these three components coming to life was when we came across a Second Line march – Second line is a tradition in brass band parades in New Orleans, Louisiana. The Second line's style of traditional dance, in which participants walk and sometimes twirl a parasol or handkerchief in the air, is called "second lining." It has been called "the quintessential New Orleans art form — a jazz funeral without a body"^[1] picture to the right. The weather felt and smelt like Florida. The architecture, from what we were told, is mostly Spanish influence. It's okay, I didn't know what that meant either. Just imagine walking through a place named the French Quarter where there are decorated iron terraces which encase the uninterrupted stretch of porches from building to building. Shutters were often wooden flaps. Shops line the main floor of some buildings; however peeping through the iron gates of others, were beautiful courtyards. The courtyards often had fountains and invariably a plethora of greenery. The façade of the buildings had a rustic look to them and quite a few were my favorite color, burnt orange.

I must admit to you a secret—I am a sucker for culture. You could say it is one of my fascinations and something I thoroughly enjoy experiencing. NOLA couldn't offer enough of it. I was proud to be there, to be a part of the community for a short time; proud of the strong local bond among residents and within communities. With all of the local businesses, myriad of restaurants, events and concerts around town every night, Po-boys, NOLA felt like a home place—a place of support.

However, I haven't mentioned what NOLA is unfortunately most recently known for, Hurricane Katrina. There still very much remains the reality of Katrina and her aftermath. There are parts of NOLA, scattered throughout the community, that are still broken and lack structural support. With these areas, I am able to see an application and need for how I'm imagining I want to spend my life in the areas of community planning, community development, civil advocacy, and public policy. I see systems thinking (a concept developed by Peter Senge), structures, and the impact of broken or productive structures more clearly than ever in New Orleans. For reinforcement, a productive structure would be the French Quarter with its lively environment, strong local business and arts community. A broken structure would be the number of homes near the levies



Second Line Marching



that have yet to be touched since Katrina hit. Although NOLA is held together by its rich, proud culture, she is unfortunately divided by her structural deficits that must be addressed.

I can also see the effects of a dysfunctional system here in OTR, embodied in the poverty, crime, violence, and drug use. To add to these, I also believe that OTR has a crisis of culture that must be addressed along with its structural deficits. NOLA finds strength and the roots of its culture in its rich history and historic housing stock. OTR does not have the same luxury. There have been many groups to move in and out of OTR and with the suburbanization of Cincinnati, the once rich German community began to disperse and the strong cultural ties went with them.

The residents of OTR have been moving out in light of these structural deficits. Though many of these deficits are being addressed with much development within the areas of: art venues, public and private schools, community gardens, Findley Market, and other local businesses, these changes are for a new population. This new group will establish a culture of its own and I envision (maybe ignorantly) a homogeneous community of white middle to upper middle class inhabitants. Let me clarify two things right here before I upset someone, one is that there is not anything particularly wrong with this new community moving in, but I wonder where the roughly 3,000 current residents will be going and how they understand this move. I wonder what message this sends to the disadvantaged and marginalized populations within Cincinnati—get rich or get out? The other is that my language has been heavy with the negatives and incoming positives, but there are in fact many strengths or assets within OTR currently. These assets



The percentage of people in the USA and those under age 18 who weren't covered by health insurance, by year:

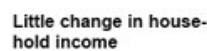
— Total population
— Under age 18



Percentage of people living in poverty, by race/ethnicity:

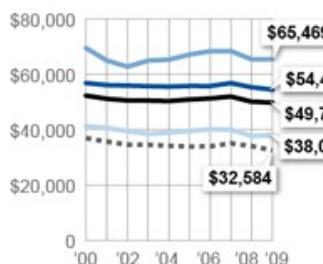
— 2000 — 2009

Note: Hispanics can be of any race



Median household income, by race/ethnicity, in 2009 dollars:

— Overall *** Blacks — Asians
— Hispanics — Non-Hispanic whites



are embraced by a large part of the current residents and are the focal points of OTR's revitalization project.

My struggle is that it is difficult not to acknowledge and question a predominantly African American population that lives in poverty right next to a predominantly Caucasian population that lives a plush lifestyle. I wonder why this divide is there in 2010. I wonder how we as a society should address unearned advantage and unearned disadvantage. Or, if these are

'problems' or facts of life? I wonder if life is meant to be easier for one group over another because you come from a good family or are born healthy? Additionally, how did a divide among something as insignificant as the color of our skin become such a good identifier for generalizing wealth and poverty in 21st century urban environments. Maybe it is me over reacting to something insignificant, as I have been told by some of my peers, but I feel it is a pertinent question to ask. Why the apparently inherent divide among rich and poor, white and black in urban America?

Although this dichotomy concerns me, I do not believe it is the be-all, end-all of OTR and other cities. As with any conflict, there is a way to manage it. The real test is whether or not this conflict will be addressed or skipped over. The latter would be much easier and often is the route taken in the development process. NOLA too will have to face this test of inclusive development. However, in OTR it may be a specific population that we struggle to provide adequate education, opportunity, and support for (what I call a people set-up to fail), whereas in NOLA it is the entire population that has the struggle of structural deficits in their lives. Disasters, in whatever way they come (hurricanes, influx of populations, systems of inadequate opportunity), are testaments to the resilience of a community if they can be overcome. NOLA has been working her way back to normalcy. I say, let's work to rebuild Cincinnati by identifying the disasters that plague our community. Let us come together over our commonalities which transcend any disparities. Our common vision of a resilient, diverse, edgy Cincinnati will be what provides the hope and direction for effective social change for our future.

1 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_line_\(parades\)#cite_note-0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_line_(parades)#cite_note-0)

Recovery: Why, How, And Consequences

By: Nick Pease



"X" always marks the spot.

Usually it is the location of a destination, a target, or a deeply buried treasure. However, in New Orleans, "X" more specifically marks the surviving victims –houses that remain standing after Hurricane Katrina. Quickly sprayed by search mission teams in the months following Katrina, the "X" represents the somber reality of the storm's effects. On top is the date searched, on the side is the search party name, and on the bottom is the total number of dead bodies found.

A surprising number of these



houses and buildings still remain untouched and inhabited. I expected more houses and buildings to be under construction; however, there were a few areas where you could tell very little rebuilding had taken place.. We saw many houses that had been searched in fall of 2005 but still remained inhabitable five years later. Seeing dilapidated houses with a bold "X" painted next to the door exhibited

the deeply devastating effects of the storm and following flood. On the flip side of this, it was encouraging to see people who had rebuilt their houses and kept the "X" as a reminder of what they, as a community, have overcome. These types of responses embody the city's resilience and communal perseverance. I expected the city as a whole to be slower, quieter and less active; however, I was instead swept away by a lively city flowing with diverse and vibrant character, culture, hospitality, and charisma.

As for the service part of the trip, it was tough at first because I felt like our service was not making much of



a difference. I was easily discouraged by the inefficiency and lack of immediate results. By the time we were trained and got everything prepared each day, it didn't feel like we were getting much done. However, after seeing one of the "welcome home" parties and meeting other St. Bernard Project workers, I was able to think of our work as one small step towards that finished project. This helped me realize that this is essentially how all these houses have been rebuilt –relying on different volunteer groups serving for short terms. Despite this optimism that I desperately reached for, I cannot deny an underlying frustration with the whole recovery system. Is this really the best way to go about rebuilding and reconstructing the housing for a desperate city? Yes, a lot of work has

been done, and many people have been able to return to their homes; however, I wonder if there would be a more productive and efficient means of reconstruction. It seems that recovery could be improved by implementing more sustainable, long-term work groups that would eliminate the wasted time of re-training and organizing short-term volunteer groups.

Ironically, this reconstruction and revitalization of residential areas in New Orleans parallels one of the many common issues in Over-the-Rhine. The present conditions of Over the Rhine



and New Orleans have provided great opportunities to revitalize communities that already have abundant character and potential. However, this "clean slate" opportunity has also been seized by some city planners as an opportunity to not only rebuild, but to rebuild more up-scale, potentially more profitable residential areas. Unfortunately, this has led to undergoing, unintended gentrification in both areas because as the residential areas are being greatly improved, the houses' market values subsequently increase, ultimately limiting opportunities for some of the previous lower-income residents to return.

Culture and Perspective

By: Owen Raisch

The city of New Orleans opened up a new world to me. I've gotten to travel from coast to coast in the past, visiting small towns, big cities, eating great food, and serving with great people, but this experience was uniquely engaging.

First of all, the rich culture was astounding and became manifest in the most pleasurable manner: the food of New Orleans is something to remember. Restaurants line the streets offering Mexican, American, Spanish, Cajun, French, and every cuisine in between; I've never seen so much goodness in one place. With the oil spill and growing concerns about the health of our oceans, this food is an asset I'm ready to defend, but one has to wonder why New Orleans is the lucky home of such appealing diversity.



The answer does lie in its history as *the* southern port of our nation, but this city is even more than its past could portend. In fact, I'd say it takes some serious soul to keep the open spirits of New Orleans, and this peculiar trait is evident in so many ways. For one, you might have heard about Mardi Gras or of the many other parades spontaneously passing by throughout the year. These parades are absolutely beyond my understanding: people proudly taking to the street in eccentric song and dance. The food is also a testament to the spirit of New Orleans, of course, but one of the most revealing experiences I had was a simple dinner.

In a beautiful home not far from Tulane University, we met with some locals to eat and chat about the city. While feasting on Cajun beans and rice and sampling some of the favorite hot sauces in NOLA, we heard all about the history of the Big Easy. It was surprising how much everyone knew about their city's past, and I think it's this very unique pride that binds much of the population to each other. Cincinnati also has an amazing history, but few of us seem to really embrace our hometown and the history we represent so much as they do in New Orleans.



These differentiating characteristics of New Orleans add up to make the city a place I can hardly call my own. While I may be able to fit in, and would surely be welcome there, I was fully aware of my alien nature throughout the week. This outsider perspective gave me the ability to finally see some aspects of reality which I've been missing. Hearing the stories of the hurricane, seeing the homes hollow and abandoned, and witnessing the poverty of another place permitted me to really get it. In Louisiana, I was finally able to see beyond the vision of blame.

A community is, in many ways, an extension of the selves that make it up. The community shares history, geography, resources, and has evolved to demand preservation by its collective members, making the community similar in nature and nurture to the individuals within. Patriotism exemplifies our heart for the home, a mysterious love and dedication for something that can't really be defined; patriotism is a manifestation of our instinctual regard for the self in transference to our

community. But as an extension of us, the community receives both our love and the expression of our imperfections.

One of these faults is the tendency to hold ourselves responsible for every decision made, not only those we can fully control. As individuals, this characteristic absolutely makes sense; it holds us accountable, keeps us disciplined, and helps us resist the temptation to point fingers. In the end, it certainly is the individual who makes his decision; but, once applied to a community, the instinctual self-blame is placed on other individuals and becomes more scapegoating than a beneficial response. In fact, the transference of blame from self to community can develop into an excuse for avoiding our responsibilities, our civic duties.

Upon returning to OTR, the seeds of these ideas sprouted into the realization that I may be blaming the poor here instead of taking responsibility for my part of the equation; I'm more capable now of criticizing our governing systems. In witnessing the poverty of New Orleans and hearing about Katrina's devastating blows to helpless families and homes, I more easily found fault in agents beyond the individuals. Because of the divide between myself and the unique culture there, I saw that we, here in Cincinnati, either hold our impoverished fully accountable for their situation or are so removed that we don't hold them responsible at all.

This understanding of the transference of blame is clearly advantageous; I can now begin responsibly challenging systems and questioning methods like the strategies of social services, the impact of minimum wage, or even the consequences of privatized industry. Rather than looking for change in others, I can begin making change myself.

Seeing Over-the-Rhine in New Orleans

By: Kaitlyn Ernst

With sweatpants on and a large supply of snacks, we left early (very very early) the morning of October 9th for a road trip to New Orleans (NOLA). I was stoked. I had been counting down the days to a week in Louisiana with the boys, Julia, and Christine building a house and seeing the city, all while enjoying my favorites – sunshine and flip flop weather. Driving down was long, satellite radio and Bruce Springsteen made it easier, but as we got closer my anxiety started to rise. I had been to NOLA in spring of 2008, so about two and a half years after Hurricane Katrina, and was anxious about the appearance of the city five years after the storm. My heart started racing as we drove past sites that I had passed before, as a much more naïve high school senior. This time my lens was different. Three months living and working in Over-the-Rhine and talking about social justice changed the way I was viewing NOLA, Katrina, and the aftermath of governmental irresponsibility. We were faced with many challenging issues: Why were houses built in neighborhoods known to flood? Why were those neighborhoods predominantly low income black households? Why are areas, five years later, still in utter decay? Why hadn't some people come back?

As I struggled with the ideas of displacement due to the storm, poverty, and (again) governmental irresponsibility, I gained some peace in our service. Working with the St. Bernard Project we helped "mud" a house for future tenants. Similar to spackling, we prepared

dry wall for painting and while the task grew tedious and frustrating, the goal of housing a family got us through (along with flicking mud at each other). Equal parts work and fun, a week of taking in the culture of NOLA was an incredible experience. Jazz, beignets, the architecture, and residents were a unique combination that created a vibrant community and reminded me a lot of OTR. Just



as unique and vibrant, OTR has those components of history, architecture, residents, and arts, and it faces challenges similar to NOLA. The parallel of displacement is drastic – in NOLA a natural disaster and Katrina's aftermath forced many to leave their homes and city, whereas in OTR the displacement is more economic, created by social dynamics. The great proximity to downtown, the arts district, and its many other assets make OTR a great place to live, and developers have realized that. They aren't building low income housing for OTR's current population: they're subtly pushing them farther out by developing lofts, yoga studios, and art galleries. While I have nothing against framed art, loft dwellers, yoga mats or the people on them, it would be ideal if they could

move in and not move the current residents out – there's plenty of room in OTR for both populations to coexist.

The two cities were weighing heavy on my mind as we drove home from the sunshine and mud. The affluent areas of NOLA were less affected by Katrina and could afford to rebuild afterwards. Areas like the Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish were hit the hardest by the

levee breaches, can't pay to rebuild, haven't gotten aid from the government, and are still strewn with destroyed houses and have dramatically fewer residents. And I feel that same level of frustration in OTR. How can we rebuild this city for these residents? I reflected I was pleased to see so much growth in New Orleans since my last visit, but there was still so much to do. The same can be said of Over-the-Rhine. With all the rebuilding happening here, we're getting closer to embracing the vibrant community that's already here, but we still have a long, long way to go.

