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The current events related to the destruction and rebuilding of New Orleans in response to Hurricane Katrina present a real-time case against which one can apply theories of urban growth. Given a normative interest in developing more equitable cities, one could ask: can New Orleans be rebuilt in a new way? And what do our existing theories tell us to expect about the *status quo* rebuilding process? The case is unique in that it presents an opportunity to discuss rebuilding of a major city in a developed, post-industrial country of the 21st century. Yet, it is generally illustrative in that it contains the structural elements of capitalism described (with very different castings) by Jane Jacobs and David Harvey, the sets of actors promoting growth described by Harvey Molotch, and the forces causing partitioning described by Peter Marcuse and Ronald Van Kampen. Narratives rooted in calls for race and class equality that are emerging in the national arena offer a counter to the discourse of the local growth machine. I would argue that while there seem to be opportunities to advance these counter-narratives of redevelopment that make plain the structural inequalities of our system, the mechanisms for turning those narratives into the action of building an equitable city are less clear.

Structural Forces

From a structural standpoint, an inequitable rebuilding of New Orleans that is driven by the forces of capitalism is no surprise. Harvey outlined a theory rooted in the history of how capitalist systems have shaped cities from pre-mercantile to post-industrial times through a process of capital accumulation that oppresses the working class. He notes that one of the main drivers of that system in the post-Fordist context is the consumer demand side of the market; and efforts to redevelop the New Orleans “product” as a consumable item for tourists align with this

theory. As Lewis Mumford notes “capitalism tended to expand the province of the marketplace and turn every part of the city into a negotiable commodity...” (446). Though Mumford was discussing the transition to an industrial economy that stripped cities institutions of arts and religion, we could extend this thinking to the New Orleans case in noting the projected “Disneyfication” of the city. Even the current emergency efforts to get New Orleans’ residents back on their feet, via the lens of Harvey’s theory, could be considered simply an attempt to reactivate the local consumer market. Though that assessment is rather grim, it is not outside the tone that some Marxist theorists have adopted towards attempts at promoting social welfare.

Jacobs describes a similarly market-driven process, but with a more desirable projected outcome. She would argue that one ought to jump start cultural/historic tourism as it was one of the city’s main exports prior to the hurricane. That industry should generate support sectors, jobs, and other spillover benefits to the working class. (And if that industry is not viable any more, the entrepreneurs of the city will need to innovate and ensure that exports remain unique and the city continues to grow). There are certainly ample grounds for critiquing this trickle down approach for its lack of demonstrated equitable outcomes in the past. Yet, this win-win narrative is readily being employed by public officials who are eager to demonstrate that they are “doing something” by stimulating the market. There are currently four different sets of publicly-led rebuilding approaches: the panel of predominantly business leaders assembled by Mayor Ray Nagin, Governor Kathleen Blanco’s taskforce, the efforts of the state’s congressional delegation, and the efforts at the federal level led by President Bush, FEMA, and others (cnn.com 9/30/05). In each of these, is the role of the state primarily to grease the wheels of the economy? Or is it to provide for the general welfare of the populous? President Bush has indicated his belief in the former approach, in saying: "As the federal government meets its responsibilities to the people of

the Gulf Coast, it must also recognize its limitations...The engine that drives growth and job creation in America is the private sector, and the private sector will be the engine that drives the recovery of the Gulf Coast" (quoted in cnn.com 10/4/05). Simultaneously, the city of New Orleans is cutting 3,000 government jobs in order to lessen expenditure, which is hardly a means of protecting the public welfare through employment. The state—at all levels—appears to be primarily serving the interests of capital thus far.

Taking a geographic tack on the issue, theory predicts that New Orleans will be rebuilt as a city no less divided than it was before. Marcuse describes the functional, cultural, and status-based partitioning of the city, with the first two partitions being voluntary and the latter being involuntary. He argues that cities are socially constructed through the interplay of these “social constellations: cultural, functional, status and power” (14). Given that many of the functions (industry, commerce, transport) of New Orleans have broken down and many of the cultural groups have been dispersed and divided, I believe it is likely that power/status divisions will emerge as the dominant partitioning force, at least in the short term. This is a rather pessimistic view for the future of an equitable city. Marcuse and Van Kempen make these predictions even more explicit: “Cities are not ‘naturally’ divided: they are actively partitioned. There are those that do the partitioning, and those that are subject to it” (50). In the case of New Orleans, those that do the partitioning are nested at many levels, including local, national, and global actors. We could even think of the impoverished Deep South/Gulf Coast/ “Cancer Alley” as having been partitioned at the regional scale by the forces of global capitalism.

Agents and Discourses

While putting the rebuilding in its structural context is important, there has also been a great deal of deliberate attention focused on the area by powerful actors whose role must be

understood as well. Molotch theorizes a growth machine that is comprised of local elites (including businesspeople and newspapers, to name a few) acting in their own self-interest as land holders and allies of land holders to promote and develop a city. As Diane Davis noted in lecture, these elites have already risen to the challenge in New Orleans, with the Chamber of Commerce being one of the first groups to advance a plan for redevelopment oriented around growth in the tourism and service sector industries and promotion of the city as a nationally prominent historic place. Indeed, some of the first groups back into the city are the merchants in the French Quarter who are working to reestablish tourism in the city (cnn.com 9/30/05). Furthermore, according to an AP article from September 29, Buddy Roemer, a former Louisiana governor and four-term member of Congress said, "The majority thread I see, unfortunately, from the political forces, are the 'let's-serve-my-interests' thread....Now they see the cash cow of government and they see the prospect of getting the sweet milk of fulfillment." This quote supports an instrumentalist view of the state, whereby elites use local politics for personal gain and, conversely, local politics operates for elites. Molotch's theory predicts a similar circumstance as does Harvey's: the state works in service to the growth of capital. The particular emphasis of how much is systematic and how much is due to agency has little bearing on the core question of equity. The losers still lose.

Growth does not operate in a vacuum of actors and structures; it is propelled forth by discourses, narratives, and frames of thinking as well. Cox's theory shows that by focusing on New Orleans' position in the national arena, local boosters are using a territorial discourse of "us versus them" at the citywide or even regional level. The authors claim this is common in the face of crisis (their example being a factory closing) as the growth machine tries to unite the city and obviate attention to divisions between races or classes. Though the authors are discussing

crises at a macroeconomic scale, Jessop et al note, “narratives of, and the constructions put upon, crisis can actually make a difference to the political responses to political-economic change....failures need [sic] to be translated into specific policy problems that ‘require’ new forms of urban politics” (153). Despite the enormous pressure from many levels of the state, local elites, and industry itself for business-led rebuilding, there are growing counter-narratives of the need for social equity at whatever cost and/or the need for a non-geographic class/race based coalition, similar to that for which Harvey advocates. These narratives have been advanced both explicitly (perhaps most famously through the words of rapper Kanye West: “George Bush doesn’t care about black people”) and implicitly (though the images of poor African Americans depicted on national television) to support a nascent coalition.¹ This is not the affluent, anti-growth countercoalition that Molotch discusses and dismisses; this is a broader, potentially more radicalized movement. It is making clear the race and class based power inequalities that Melissa Gilbert reminds are fundamental to urban processes and urban politics.

Whether or not pointing out the inequities will lead to any real change remains to be seen. There is indication that the growing awareness of race as a core issue in rebuilding likely had a strategic role in Mayor Nagin’s appointment of Barbara Major, a renowned African American advocate, as co-chair to his panel. While this achievement bodes well for further change, tactics

¹ Another discourse I am interested in considering is that of sustainability. The theory we have read so far does not give much thought to this issue, which is not surprising given the time in which the pieces were written. But in some ways we can think of sustainability as the concept of *equity over time*. This type of equity can be layered over goals of socioeconomic and racial equity. One does not have to abandon the anthropocentric view to pursue sustainability if one operates from the Brundtland Commission’s definition: “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The rebuilding of New Orleans as a “sustainable city” is almost an oxymoron, since the city was destroyed by the very forces of nature upon which it was built. Locally, the city was built below sea level and within a flood plain. Globally, its economy was driven largely by oil, the production and consumption of which is leading to the climate change that is causing the increasing frequency of severe weather events like Katrina. The reaction of many environmentalists to this crisis was one of horrified vindication. Perhaps the most “sustainable” solution might be not to rebuild in that place at all. Or at least not in the same way of technological fixes (dikes, levees) for natural problems. Given that neither of these two outcomes is at all politically likely, the New Orleans will likely fail the equity test over time. Whether any sort of coalition forms around this discourse, locally or nationally, will be interesting to monitor.

should not rely on existing political channels alone; Diane Davis suggested that perhaps entirely new institutions (at beyond the neighborhood level) need to be built to attain equitable ends. In order to continue to apply pressure, coalitions at the national scale may need to be built. The structural, economic, and political forces acting as barriers to equity and promoting growth at any cost are myriad; perhaps at a minimum an awareness of these forces, the narratives in which they are couched, and the conscientious development of a counter-narrative are the first steps towards change.