



Project  
**MUSE**<sup>®</sup>

*Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.*

# Looking for Common Ground: Relief Work in Post-Katrina New Orleans as an American Parable of Race and Gender Violence

RACHEL E. LUFT

*Dedicated to Shana Griffin, of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence and cofounder of the New Orleans Women's Health & Justice Initiative, who articulated a concern to me long before anyone else, in February 2006, about colonial modes of organizing occurring in the Ninth Ward in post-Katrina New Orleans.*

*This article provides an interdisciplinary examination of race and gender intersectionality in the context of disaster "recovery" in New Orleans. Based on a case study of a grassroots relief organization, the Common Ground Collective, the findings demonstrate that in the absence of intersectional practice, sexism furthers racism and racism furthers sexism. After a series of sexual assaults were reported by white women volunteers in Common Ground in 2006, participant discourse criminalized the surrounding black community, although almost every accused perpetrator was a nonlocal white man. Contextualizing these events in the broader American history of violence and assistance traditions helps to reveal domestic and global patterns. The challenges Common Ground members faced in producing an antiracist, feminist response to both the assaults and the dominant organizational framing further point to the difficulties of just, intersectional recovery interventions.*

**Keywords:** gender / race / intersectionality / Hurricane Katrina / New Orleans / relief / sexual assault / violence / colonialism

This article tells a story of race and gender in the context of disaster "recovery" in New Orleans. It is an interdisciplinary case study and, as a discrete example of sexism and violence, it is almost generic. Indeed, its familiarity—white women sexually assaulted in an urban environment—is part of the problem. Should we continue to see it and others like it through the single-issue lens of gender, and through the localized space of one American neighborhood, we will miss both the highly racialized dimensions of the events, and their situatedness at the nodal point between past and present models of local and global intervention.

In the months following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flooding of early fall 2005, a large grassroots relief effort emerged in New Orleans called the Common Ground Collective (CG). Composed primarily of white, nonlocal, short-term volunteer activists,

radicals, college students, anarchists, tradespeople, countercultural baby boomers, and others, CG became the temporary home to an estimated thirteen thousand would-be relief workers who came to New Orleans to gut houses, distribute supplies, conduct bioremediation, and offer other services. It was a noble effort, made possible by the volunteers' willingness to stop business as usual, take a leave from work or drop out of college for a semester, and to live in very uncomfortable and unstable conditions.

During March 2006, in an intensive month that CG leadership advertised as Alternative Spring Break, approximately twenty-five hundred people passed through the organization; a significant proportion were college students. Over five hundred at a time stayed in a three-story gutted religious school complex, St. Mary of the Angels, in the predominantly black, poor, and working-class Upper Ninth Ward. At the end of this rush, reports emerged about sexual assaults of some of the white volunteer women. While the leadership of CG downplayed the violence in a classic demonstration of sexist minimization, the white volunteers began to display increased fear and mistrust of the surrounding black community in an equally classic reflex of racism, *although almost every single accused perpetrator was both a nonlocal volunteer and white*. Despite the fact that CG had imported its own class of violent offenders, the difficulty many had in bringing a race analysis to a barely articulate gender framework produced the demonization and increased regulation of the indigenous black neighborhood the volunteers had come to help.

The slippage between the imported white male violence of the relief community and the criminalization of local black men reflects longstanding American traditions: the exporting of violence across local and national borders, the prevalent whiteness and maleness of American violence, the association of relief and violence, increased black male pathologization as the outcome of black/white encounters, the difficulty white women have in justly navigating the duality of their subject positions as both gender victims and race beneficiaries, and the rendering invisible of black women in a script with otherwise distinct and recurring roles for white men, white women, and black men. The incidents of CG's Alternative Spring Break and its fallout demonstrate the complex and historically rooted interaction between race and gender. While Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath is a postindustrial crisis with global dimensions, it also became a staging ground for the reenactment of classic American tropes. In this way the story of race and gender in New Orleans after Katrina is both highly specific and transhistorical, both local and global—a parable of place, power, and an American approach to assistance.

It is in the tradition of parables, then, that I draw several broad social lessons from a few events in a dramatic setting. The first is that sexual assault discourse is a racialized Rorschach<sup>1</sup> because of how frequently sexual violence has been historically produced as a racial problem, even

in white-on-white assault. This has been especially true in periods of heightened racial encounter (slavery, colonialism, Jim Crow), such as we find in the recovery of New Orleans. The second lesson is that because of a local, national, and transnational American history of rationalizing racial regulation with the politics of assistance (to the above list we can add development and humanitarian aid) even progressive recovery efforts participate in practices that are borrowed from these overlapping traditions. Finally, we can learn from these events how in the absence of feminist, antiracist, intersectional frames for understanding social problems, sexism can further racism and racism can further sexism.

A full analysis of these events and their implications cannot occur without centering the voices of the black women of the Upper Ninth Ward, and also the experiences of the black men collectively indicted by the dominant narratives that emerged from this period. This is to say that the meaning of the events must be read in the context of their effects, as well as in the historical matrix of meanings in which they were produced. Such documentation is crucial to “render visible” the recovery encounter as lived by those in whose name it was conducted (Bierria, Liebenenthal, and INCITE! 2006). This important work is beyond the scope of the current study, which focuses instead on the competing frames produced within CG and their resonance with larger global and historical patterns. Examination of the way in which the race and gender scripts of dominant actors (whites, men) play out in a field determined by much broader forces is a valuable, if partial, piece of the story. The subject of my analysis therefore shifts between different configurations of whites and men: CG’s multiracial leadership of black men, white men, and white women; the collective body of mostly white, nonlocal CG volunteers; and its gender-specific subsets of white men and white women.<sup>2</sup> Despite the strategic focus of this discussion, I attempt to decenter its whiteness by continually resituating it in a field of racial difference. While the subjects of analysis are disproportionately white, that is, I juxtapose them to the absent<sup>3</sup> men and women of the surrounding community, and the voices of black feminist theorists who help to situate them in a larger historical context.

In the section that follows, I introduce intersectionality theory, noting that some of the most important work on intersectionality focuses on violence against women. Then I describe the CG case study, and recount the competing frames members used to respond to the incidents of sexual assault that occurred in March 2006. I argue that the inability to achieve intersectional analyses and practice increased both racism and sexism within CG, with implications for the surrounding community. In the next section, I review several past and present transnational paradigms of racial regulation: colonialism, disaster relief, development, and humanitarian aid. I draw on these global paradigms impressionistically here as overdetermining American traditions, and as repositories of symbols and habits

which haunt Hurricane Katrina encounters (Gordon 1996). I suggest that together they establish a field of meanings in which the events of CG took place. I conclude by calling for increased social movement attention to historical forms of social control, and for an antiracism and feminism as interactive as racism and sexism.

## Intersectionality Theory

In order to understand the events that occurred in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina from a perspective that is both race- and gender-conscious, and as a metonym of national trends and global patterns, it is necessary to draw on a variety of literatures and bring them into conversation with each other. I begin here with intersectionality as the theoretical ground of the analysis, and introduce other theoretical traditions after discussing the case study. Coined by legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (1995, 378 fn 5) and popularized by Patricia Hill Collins, intersectionality “denote[s] the various ways in which [social forces] interact to shape the multiple dimensions” of experience (Crenshaw 1995, 358). Collins observes that “[a]s a heuristic device, intersectionality references the ability of social phenomena such as race, class, and gender to mutually construct one another” (1998, 205). Much of the important work on intersectionality has been done domestically in the area of violence against women, overwhelmingly by black feminist scholars (INCITE! 2005, 2006; West 1999; Ritchie 1996; Crenshaw 1995; Carby 1985). These scholars note the inadequacy of gender-only approaches to addressing violence against women, the interplay of race and class in producing violence in women’s lives, and the relationship between broad macro patterns and intimate micro experiences of violence.

Analysis of violence by feminists of color suggests that the meaning and implications of violent acts are informed by their raced and gendered features, as well as by the race and gender context in which they occur. The race and gender identities of perpetrators and victims of sexual assault infuses each violent act with collective raced and gendered meanings, evokes a history of similar acts and cultural narratives of similar acts, and is fueled by them. In the case of CG, it is white-on-white sexual violence that characterizes the bulk of assaults. From a dominant racial perspective that views whites as racially neutral and unmarked, white-on-white sexual violence appears to have little to do with race. My primary argument here is that in a society in which race, gender, sexuality, violence, and power so thoroughly intersect, the meanings and implications of white male sexual assault of white women are deeply racialized. These meanings and implications do not only affect whites, but also communities of color. This argument is not intended to diminish the impact of such events on the

white women survivors of assault, but rather to link them to communities of color who may be indirectly affected. In the specific context of white women being sexually assaulted in a Southern black community, “the Southern rape complex” and “the emotional circuit between interracial rape and lynching” cannot be avoided (Hall 1983, 335, 334). Within this context, “[a] Black man did not literally have to attempt sexual assault for whites to perceive some transgression of caste morés as a sexual threat” (Hall 1983, 334). Under these circumstances, “rape was not simply an act of violence, but a sexual story men told themselves that legitimated other forms of violence” (editor’s note in Hall 1983, 328).

White women occupy multiple subject locations, as both the (gendered) object and (raced) subject of oppression. Historically, sexual violence directed at white women because of gender has been recapitulated in racialized ripples that extend out from it. Here racialized violence includes the transfer of white male culpability (overwhelmingly the greatest class of perpetrators of sexual violence against white women) to black men in the mainstream imaginary, and the array of mainstream and feminist policy measures that follow from this, which criminalize black men, rarely hold white men accountable, and fail to protect women of all races. I am suggesting that this is what happened at CG.

## Methods

Between February and July 2006, I conducted participant observation of CG. I was a member of the Anti-Racist Working Group (ARWG), a small group of mostly white, mostly nonlocal, long-term volunteers in their early twenties. The ARWG had formed in January 2006 to advance anti-racist principles in CG, and to deepen the latter’s accountability to local grassroots organizations of color. As an older, local, white, antiracist feminist with ties to local antiracist organizations, I functioned as a mentor. I attended most weekly meetings during this period, helped to plan the Community Voices speakers series, co-coordinated and co-facilitated antiracism/racial identity caucuses of short-term volunteers, and later in the spring, attended two forty- to fifty-person strategy sessions held by CG for leadership and long-term volunteers to address the issue of sexual assault, among other agenda items. In addition to ongoing individual and collective conversation with ARWG members about these issues at the time, I also interviewed six CG members in the spring and fall of 2007 about the events of Alternative Spring Break. Additional fieldwork for this article came from participant observation in other black-led, local progressive grassroots recovery efforts in New Orleans, specifically The People’s Hurricane Relief Fund, The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, and The People’s Organizing Committee. It is my hope that a discussion of CG

provides useful lessons for other organizations and movements struggling to be both antiracist and feminist.

### **The Case: Making Common Ground In New Orleans After Katrina**

The Common Ground Collective was forged in the early, desperate days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall on Monday, August 29, 2005. As the largest early grassroots relief response to the storm and its aftermath, CG also received the lion's share of alternative press and progressive attention, a fact which sustained its ability to attract large numbers of activist volunteers. At the time of the second anniversary of the storm, CG had gutted over a thousand houses, primarily in the poor and working-class black Upper and Lower Ninth Ward; operated seven distribution centers which gave away food, water, clothing, and tools; offered computer and legal services; and started the Common Ground Health Clinic, now a functioning 501(c)(3) (Hilderbrand, Crow, and Fithian 2006). Over thirteen thousand<sup>4</sup> volunteers have come to New Orleans under its auspices. Despite the concerns about it that I raise in this study, it has clearly also contributed a great deal to the grassroots recovery of the city.

In the days immediately following the storm, former Black Panther, prison and housing activist, and one-time Green Party candidate for local office Malik Rahim put out a national call in radical movement networks for assistance. Within days, mostly white activists arrived at his home in Algiers, just across the Mississippi from the still-flooded New Orleans. They relied on social justice networks; cell phones; the internet; white activist lifestyles and resources that provided spontaneity, flexibility, and mobility; and the white skin privilege that allowed them into the city while both local and nonlocal blacks were turned away at the militarized borders (David 2006; Hilderbrand, Crow, and Fithian 2006). Together Rahim and a swelling group of new arrivals were able to hold off white vigilante mobs, distribute food and water, and found a free health clinic in a mosque. While Rahim and some of the other leaders of CG are black, and there have always been volunteers of color among the CG ranks, the population has been overwhelmingly white because of the conditions of its founding and the resources involved in being able to come to New Orleans and work without pay.<sup>5</sup> The whiteness of CG was particularly noticeable in a city that was sixty-seven percent black before the storm. Despite national black outrage and activity in response to Katrina, as well as the ongoing organizing of local communities of color, the people who composed New Orleans' largest grassroots effort were primarily nonlocal whites.

From the start, CG's motto was "Solidarity not Charity," and it saw itself as a radical movement organization, informed by principles taken from the Black Panthers, Ella Baker, anarchism, and environmentalism. In an article published by some CG members in leadership positions, they described a "two-fold strategy of providing short-term relief for victims of hurricane disasters in the Gulf Coast region and long-term support for rebuilding these communities in more just and sustainable ways," while becoming "part of a new movement, creating a parallel social infrastructure to replace the one responsible for the conditions causing this disaster" (Hilderbrand, Crow, and Fithian 2006, 80). Explicit among the leadership, although not necessarily to all of the volunteers who passed through, the "focus has been to tactically use race and class privileges to bring resources into the city and redistribute them to the communities most in need" (Hilderbrand, Crow, and Fithian 2006, 85).

CG remained fairly decentralized in response to the chaotic conditions and as the embodiment of the anarchist principles of many of its long-term members. At the same time, a leadership hierarchy existed, and was largely organized along race and gender lines, although it also shifted depending on who was in town and the power dynamics of the moment. Rahim, several nonlocal young white men, and a black woman cofounded the organization. Six months later, during the time period of this case study when I was most involved with the organization, the top tier of leadership included Rahim, two middle-aged black male associates, and one middle-aged white man. The second tier consisted of the nonlocal young white men I will call the "pioneers" who would come and go; the third tier was nonlocal mostly white women who ran daily operations and who I will call the "facilitators"; a revolving set of site coordinators; and finally, a largely white pool of nonlocal activist volunteers, some of whom came for a few days, and others of whom remain as of this writing. One of the facilitators explained the leadership hierarchy this way: "Common Ground is a largely white activist organization, and most of the coordinators come from an anti-authoritarian political culture. Malik Rahim and some of the core leadership in [New Orleans], however, come from a radical black political culture with fundamentally different experiences and approaches. The organization incorporates many decentralized characteristics, but at base we are acting in solidarity with local black leadership, and Malik makes many of the final overall long-term decisions."<sup>6</sup>

By the end of 2005, Common Ground was expanding rapidly. In February 2006, CG leadership and long-termers began preparing for what some would refer to as CG's version of March Madness: they had proposed an alternative spring break for college students around the country, and thousands would be arriving. Most would be placed on gutting crews. Housing



these volunteers in a city in which the great majority of housing stock was unlivable and local residents were unable to find places to stay was a major challenge. In February, one of the facilitators worked out a deal with a local priest, offering CG labor to clean out his three-story religious school complex in the flooded Upper Ninth Ward, in exchange for the right to use it as the center of Spring Break operations. The facilitator and other CG members spent days tearing up the moldy floor on the ground level, and cleaning urine, feces, and blood from the rest of the building where locals had spent a week escaping the flood in their neighborhood.<sup>7</sup> The Upper Ninth Ward<sup>8</sup> was ninety-eight percent black before the storm; the average adjusted household income of the neighborhood around St. Mary's was \$24,000 (Greater New Orleans Community Data Center 2007). Almost thirty percent of the households in the surrounding area earned less than \$10,000 annually, although sixty percent of the residents owned the homes in which they lived. This juxtaposition between poverty and home ownership points to the significance of these properties in the lives of the community.

During the first week of March, with hundreds of students and activists sleeping on cots or the floor, the halls of the building were lit only with Christmas lights that someone had found in a closet and hooked up to a generator. The surrounding neighborhood was still largely a ghost town, block after block of sodden homes and no lights to be seen. Soon plywood structures were erected outside of St. Mary's and connected to water lines in order to provide makeshift showers for volunteers who'd been gutting moldy houses all day, a "tent city" had sprung up across the street in the church parking lot, and the Rainbow Family and Seeds of Peace were providing several hot, healthy meals a day with largely donated food. It was under these conditions—grim, uncomfortable, exciting, and full of a countercultural frontier spirit—that a series of sexual assaults occurred.

### **Assault "in the Most Radical Community I've Ever Lived In"**

Feminists have noted the political, legal, and emotional difficulties of defining sexual assault (Ruch 1992; Rhode 1989). Relatedly, it is underreported. Survivors face fear of reprisal, shame, stigma, self-blame, insufficient resources should they need to change their routine, as well as confusion over what constitutes assault. All of these factors make documenting sexual violence at CG in the spring of 2006 difficult. On top of these obstacles, however, were the additional challenges to survivors posed by the postdisaster environment. Volunteers were not in their home cities, rarely had their own transportation, and were well aware of the city's compromised infrastructure. Most city services—buses, hospitals, police force, battered women's shelters—were operating at greatly reduced

capacity if they existed at all. New Orleans was still choked with moldy buildings, downed street lights, and abandoned motorboats by the side of the road. Electricity was not supplied to the Upper Ninth Ward until the late spring, and to the Lower Ninth Ward months after that. Even more important, according to the interviews, was the fact that volunteers had come to provide assistance to a community still reeling from devastation. There was a sense of urgency, a value of not asking for much, and great feelings of solidarity.

It was not until April 2006, after thousands of volunteers had descended on New Orleans to work with CG during Spring Break, that some long-term volunteers began to hear of enough incidents of sexual assault to perceive a trend. By this time, there was a Mediation/Conflict Resolution team, made up of three long-term male volunteers and one long-term female, to whom some of the incidents were relayed. Other survivors simply talked about it with their friends, and some undoubtedly did not disclose at all. Months later, during the summer, long-term volunteers said that women in newly instated gender caucuses were still coming forward to reveal assaults experienced early in the spring.

Because of the nature of sexual assault and the small sample of volunteers I spoke with, I make no claim to having comprehensive quantitative data about incidents that occurred at CG. Instead I draw from the various accounts shared by my respondents in order to provide a qualitative sense of the climate in which they lived. Some of these accounts consist of very reliable reports, and respondents made it clear when they were repeating secondhand information. One respondent who was also a survivor, for example, said six other survivors came individually to speak to her after she talked publicly about her assault. She felt confident that she knew of eight additional assaults, for a total of fifteen (including her own). She described experiences such as a strategy session in May with forty to fifty volunteers and leaders, when she spoke up to demand accountability for the violence, and two other women also stood up and disclosed that they too had been sexually assaulted. While it does not provide us with a final count, I believe the ethnographic description I have compiled is nonetheless useful, for it characterizes the general conditions, as well as volunteers' sense of their environment. Everyone I spoke to for this project knew at least one person personally who had experienced some kind of sexual assault during this period, and so the sense that attacks were happening was not overblown. In fact, as most of them pointed out, because sexual assault is so underreported, my respondents presumed there were many more occurring than they knew about.

All of my interview respondents were long-termers, volunteers who stayed at least six months and in some cases two years (and still counting). All of them also took on some degree of lower-level leadership, some of which put them into direct contact with survivor reports, and therefore

their accounts are at least partly informed by firsthand information. Of the six primary informants I interviewed in 2007 for this study, Wendy was a survivor of assault, and because of her public disclosures was frequently approached by other survivors and friends of survivors; Betsy was a core member of ARWG and regular facilitator of the caucuses, in which some women disclosed; Sam was on the mediation team, to which some of the survivors who reported were eventually sent; Sam and Ben worked in the Common Ground Clinic where some of the cases were relayed; Mona helped to design the sexual harassment and assault policy in response to the incidents that occurred while she was there; and Nancy was part of the St. Mary's leadership team after this period. Almost all of them were members of the ARWG; ideologically they were not necessarily representative of CG short-termers, but were mostly self-identified antiracists and feminists.

After piecing together the details respondents could provide about assaults, this is my tally of the firsthand accounts alone: of the five of my primary respondents who were in CG during this period, one knew six survivors personally, another five, another three, another two, and another one. Wendy, the survivor who knew six, also counted an additional eight assaults during that period that she was convinced had actually occurred. There are, further, stories that recur among the respondents about additional cases not included in these firsthand numbers that were well known and compelling enough to the leadership that measures were taken, which was rare: Omaha Stan was eventually kicked out in January; and a second offender, Cougar, said to have assaulted at least three women in one week, was turned over to the police and arrested in March in a rare involvement of the criminal justice system. Proceeding down the spectrum of reliability, there were still other references to a kind of informed hearsay, such as the comments my informants made about overhearing the shop talk of Common Ground Health Clinic volunteers or members of the Mediation team, both sites to which survivors were sent. Less-informed hearsay included the daily stories and rumors that people living in close quarters share. These categories were sometimes difficult to distinguish or corroborate, and raised methodological questions for me: Did different respondents refer to the same incident? How to determine the meaning of a story no one I spoke to could verify but all had heard about? Respondents took great care to choose their words carefully in relaying these references, each emphasizing the source of their information, and distinguishing the stories from the cases of people they had known personally.

To the extent that I have been able to discern—and in most cases this meant going back to each respondent between two and four times to clarify or cross-reference—the pattern here is clear. Every target of assault during this period who the respondents knew about was a CG female or transgender volunteer, all but one of whom was white. There are no stories

about local black women. Every perpetrator was also a nonlocal volunteer, with the exception of one local offender. And every perpetrator was white, except for the local offender who was black and one volunteer of racially ambiguous identity.

### **Struggle over Framing: Race**

As the reports of sexual assault began to accumulate in CG in April and May, so did volunteers' concern about fear, safety, and danger. Despite the evidence that attacks were largely perpetrated by white male volunteers, CG discourse increasingly focused on an imagined threat posed by the surrounding black community. This was apparent in CG meetings and strategy sessions, conversations among long-termers, and the women's groups for short-termers that formed in response; it was also conveyed in the ARWG meetings. Wendy noted that in the women's groups, "Most of the conversation was about being afraid to walk down the street alone." Mona concurred: "There were feelings of the neighborhood—there was definitely fear, everyone was saying don't walk around by yourself at night, don't walk around at day, because of people coming back, and because day laborers haven't seen women in a long time." One of the white women long-termers who helped to run St. Mary's in the fall of 2006 thought that ultimately this approach had come from white men: "It was mostly the white men who blamed the local men. That was the response of white male volunteers, was that the local men of color were doing it. The white men who were being confronted by the fact of sexual assault assumed the danger was coming from outside."

The facilitators, the white women in leadership, also played a complicated role in this framing. On one hand they were close to the senior male leadership, who were downplaying the accusations. They repeated the latter's position that these kinds of "allegations" were frequently used to undermine radical movements, and they sometimes participated in pitting antiracism against antisexism in a zero-sum equation. Said one, "I come from [an environmental] movement where there were arguments around whether to call someone a perpetrator or an offender, and in the meantime the forest fell. There is shit-time more racism than sexism here." On the other hand, at least one of them contributed to the transference of threat to black men by attributing the source of violence to the local community. Because of her capacity as a leader, these framing acts carried weight. For example, during a heated strategy session that was called for leaders and long-termers in May to address these concerns, she insisted, "People shouldn't think they're coming to New Orleans to a safe place. It wasn't safe a year ago. We shouldn't try to compensate so much that we wear seat belts to dinner." A month later in an orientation session she gave for new volunteers she issued the following warning: "Be careful. It's

lawless here. More people are coming back, and that's good. But there's a more criminal element too. We ask people not to go out at night. People are getting mugged. . . . If something happens to you, our whole operation could be shut down. The community has asked that we not go out alone. The neighborhood here loves us." Not one word was uttered about the real risk of sexual assault specifically, nor that it was overwhelmingly likely to happen at a CG site by a white, nonlocal volunteer.

The racism of the facilitators and volunteers that directed concern out to the community slowed the development of internal measures to prevent violence against women. CG had not prepared itself to deal with internal threats. One of the first services it provided to the Upper Ninth Ward, for example, was a women's shelter. The idea for a women's health center had been proposed by a local female organizer of color, but that alliance was severed and the vision for a holistic center turned into a shelter run by CG for local women. Meanwhile, no one within CG had thought to create something similar for the volunteers, or to anticipate a code of conduct or culture in which assault was intolerable. Demonization of the neighboring community also appeared to contribute to the increased regulation of local blacks who had contact with St. Mary's. In June, the site managers at the religious school began to introduce minimum work hour loads as eligibility requirements for residing there. Members of the ARWG were concerned that this would disproportionately affect the few locals who were temporarily staying at St. Mary's and trying to hold down jobs. Other of the measures explored during this time—identification tags, sign-in sheets—still presumed the threat to come from outside of CG. These policies likely diminished positive contact between CG and the neighborhood, and added tension to the relations that did exist. The American myth that sexual perpetrators are unknown to their victims was in full play here, enhanced by equally common associations of black men and violence.

### **Struggle over Framing: Gender**

While many of the short-termers, some of the long-termers, and at least one of the facilitators channeled their concerns to the neighborhood in an example of racialized displacement, others struggled to frame the events in gendered terms. Several long-term volunteers linked the assaults to a pervasive culture of masculinity that was supported by the hard physical labor of house gutting, which was clearly the most important of the East Bank CG projects. Said Sam, a biracial man who was the first person to articulate the culture's patriarchy to me during the spring of 2006: "I hate to say it, but [the culture] is a consequence of the work being promoted, the hard physical labor that was unending, and thus attracted a lot more men and created a machismo atmosphere in terms of who could get the

most amount of work done, and props to those who can. So the way they were doing the work alone created an environment for it."

Mona described how in the first all-women environment she encountered two weeks after arriving in January, there was a sense of tremendous relief at finally being able to put into words "what I'm feeling about my gender being here, with guys from all over the place, this hard physical labor." Months later she had started a weekly women's group in response to the assaults, and she characterized the kinds of issues raised by the revolving group of women who participated in much the same way. The discussion did not focus on the assaults per se, but "much more about the harassment, feeling uncomfortable, being discriminated against based on gender. The whole place was so male dominated, in terms of decisions being made, in terms of who was listened to, living arrangements, who was being respected in terms of gutting a house, etc." In the burgeoning feminist analyses of the women who perceived these patterns, they struggled to distinguish the internal CG culture from the street attention they received from local men: "Whether or not people were more afraid of the neighborhood or of Common Ground—the longer-term volunteers were more frustrated by the internal workings of Common Ground. For short-termers it was the huge cultural difference of working in this neighborhood. Partly for longer-termers it's that it was something we could control—Common Ground. We had created this, it was this utopian, idealistic creation and it had all these problems. But we always had this sense that we were trying to respect the neighborhood culture, not change it."

Most of my respondents—again not necessarily representative of the larger CG community in terms of gender and race politics—were clear that the sexual attacks were enabled by the general CG climate I will call *disaster masculinity*, as well as by the overall lack of organizational structure and accountability. Said Mona, "It was so blatant that there was no policy for dealing with [sexual assault]. . . . It was like we had created a situation for it, where really awful things were plausible in this environment, and there was no way of dealing with it, no space for it."

### **Struggle over Framing: Intersectionality**

In the struggles over framing that followed CG attention to the assaults, we can see the limitations created by the difficulties in achieving an intersectional analysis. Despite progressive credentials and the sacrifices made to join the recovery of New Orleans, volunteers also internalize dominant racial and gender ideologies. As participants in a structural arrangement redolent of numerous local and global paradigms of racialized assistance, their identities and practices draw by default on these historical models. Those antiracist volunteers able to resist the racialized displacement of fear and blame on the black community and to center a gender analysis,

put their attention on the CG community itself. Still, it was hard for them to identify the specific intersection of whiteness and maleness in the ranks from which the perpetrators came, as well as to envision a feminist, antiracist response.

The difficulty in conceptualizing white masculinity as responsible, in conjunction with CG leadership's attempts to downplay the severity of the incidents, meant that much of the antiviolence response was directed up toward the leadership—not laterally. The consequence was that it focused primarily on black men and white women, who functioned as gatekeepers of discourse and policy, and not on the white male perpetrators of violence, nor on the larger community of white men out of whose ranks they came. There seemed to be little effort to changing the culture of masculinity or curbing the behavior of CG rank and file white men. One of the facilitators addressed this before a May strategy session, saying she wanted to see men become accountable to other men, and suggested the formation of gender groups. But this initiative was delayed for months. American individualism, exacerbated by men's sense of entitlement to autonomy, in the context of the pervasive CG do-it-yourself culture of decentralization, was deployed to resist accountability in the name of rugged freedom. As one white male volunteer with an anarchy symbol on his shirt retorted in response to the facilitator's suggestion about gender caucuses, "So you think homogenization is the key to antiracist growth?" Instead, the bulk of long-term, antiviolence efforts that were not directed at leadership focused on women, such as through support groups and protocols for survivors. They were also characterized by being voluntary, and emphasizing response more than prevention. Eventually, when several antiracist feminists took over site leadership of St. Mary's, they instituted a strong zero-tolerance violence policy and created an orientation session around it.

It was thus an intersectional analysis in the name of both racial and gender justice that proved the most challenging at the time. Ben, a white male long-term, began to make these kinds of intersectional connections a year and a half after the events. In particular, he tried to articulate the ways in which whiteness was an obstacle to accountable masculinity:

For me, anyway, my process around being a white person in the movement strongly outweighed and even overshadowed (because I was and still struggle with understanding intersectionality) my process of being a man in the movement. There was such incredible distancing [of "good" antiracist whites from "bad" whites] happening with all of us. While we all wanted to be close to the radical black leadership, many of us . . . struggled to respect our fellow white non-local volunteers. I remember (and I know lots of other folks felt this way) being ashamed to tell other people in New Orleans that I was with Common Ground. In this way, I think that distancing allowed me to not *really* care as

much about what other white people were going through. . . . In addition, that same distancing and individualism made me incapable of seeing any collective accountability on part of white men in the sexual assaults that were happening.

Both whiteness and masculinity are ideological constructs that obscure their own racialized and gendered specificity. Members of each group tend to see themselves and be seen as individuals, not as participants in a collective identity. The failure of collective identification precludes collective accountability, and, as Ben recognizes, even compassion. The fact that the early stages of race and gender consciousness for dominant groups often include the distancing that Ben observes only exacerbates this mutual reinforcing. It is not incidental that two of the small number of long-term men who spoke out against the assaults during this period were some of the few volunteers of color in CG.

Ben's reflection is instructive for what it reveals about the process through which sexism furthers racism and racism advances sexism. Although unusually thoughtful and conversant about intersectionality, his behavior matches that of many of the CG white men. His identification with black male leadership trumped his concern for gender justice and provided greater social rewards. His distancing from other whites, a common manifestation of white individualist exceptionalism, further prevented his sense of accountability for white male behavior. White distancing is, as Ben recognizes, a racist display in the guise of antiracism, and here it facilitated the exploitation of women, as well as of local black men.

Intersectional analysis was also difficult for the mostly white, anti-racist, feminist young women of the ARWG, many of whom had just recently taken women's studies classes in liberal arts colleges. When one of the facilitators downplayed the sexual assaults in what appeared to be a disidentification with female assault survivors in the name of interracial solidarity, the women in the ARWG struggled for words with which to speak out against both sexual assault and racist displacement. I was moved by their efforts, and noted how difficult it was to get beyond dualistic choices between gender or race primary frameworks, especially in the absence of black women. Christine Stansell observes how "easily snookered even a sophisticated and militant feminist can be when the issue is racial identity" because of the "reverence toward an undifferentiated Afro-American experience" (1992, 256, 254). She warns that revolving single-issue politics have "protect[ed] white feminists from the uncomfortable business" of applying intersectionality to all groups (1992, 267).



## Common Ground as a Parable of American Local and Global Politics of Assistance

Feminist activists and scholars of color have contextualized sexual violence in the broader field of violence in which women of color live, “including extreme poverty, stranger harassment, the loss of their children, criminalization, poor health care, etcetera” (Bierria, Liebenhal, and INCITE! 2006, 36). This reframing complicates an individualistic or gender-only understanding of violence, and helps to shed light on the structural determinants that exacerbate it. Opening up the notion of violence in this way helps us to see the relatedness of certain kinds of acts and social processes. I want to take this approach further by placing gendered, racialized violence on a continuum that includes activity that appears on the surface to be the opposite of violence. I focus here on collective acts of assistance, including the effects of assistance, broadly construed. By assistance I mean a wide array of social interventions by outsiders, in the name of improvement, to a community with fewer material resources.<sup>10</sup> Assistance includes, but is not limited to: uplift, white men’s burden, charity, aid, relief, social services, development, missionary work, and even social movement activity. It can be independent, nongovernmental, nonprofit, or radical, as well as faith based or state supported.

It is helpful to think of the violence that ensues in the name of assistance as the unintended consequences of intervention, though not all such outcomes are unintended. Instead they bespeak the often complicated and competing motives of intervention (Gordon 1996). To understand how the impact of assistance can be a kind of violence is to examine the array of outcomes from the perspectives of people who are the objects of aid. Ultimately this approach signifies the way in which the human beings who are the targets of aid “are produced through these relations” (Mohanty 1991b, 59). So too does it characterize the way in which the subjects of aid are similarly produced.

Because of the particular combination of pre- and posthurricane forces in New Orleans, the city became after the storm the site of multiple modalities of intervention. I am suggesting that because of the failure of the late modern, neoliberal state to respond to the hurricane, older modalities of both social control (unmasked militarism) and assistance (colonial and development interventions, charity) were deployed. Despite the fact that well-meaning progressive relief efforts like CG were explicitly undertaken both to fill the gap created by the state and to resist its methods of social control, they have also furthered racial and gender repression. This is because of the overdetermining structural context as well as the internalization of dominant tropes by volunteers. By exploring the complicated dimensions of assistance, I do not mean to condemn progressive efforts or to be ungrateful. As a resident of New Orleans at the

time of the hurricane, I found the tremendous outpouring of human-to-human offering after the storm to be sustaining and uplifting. Further, it has proven the strength of national social movement networks. Rather, I seek to examine the complexity and risks of these encounters in the hopes that we might develop more just and accountable ways of undertaking them. In order to situate CG in the broader field of assistance traditions, as well as to link the violence of a few specific acts at the CG site to a larger matrix of violence, I introduce some of the traditions of assistance here. Specifically I point to colonialism, disaster relief, development, and humanitarian assistance. They haunt the margins and inform the choices of the participants in CG's project.

### **Colonialism**

Hurricane Katrina activists and scholars have situated the disaster in the context of neoliberal globalization. They point to federal policy before the storm that drained money from emergency management and social services (Dreier 2006; Peck 2006), as well as to the political economy of the recovery which has included controversial awards to transnational corporations (Lipsitz 2006), the tactical importation of foreign migrant workers (see *The Advancement Project*, National Immigration Law Center, and *The New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice*), and the privatization of much of the remaining infrastructure of the city (Dreier 2006). But at the same time that neoliberalism characterizes the macro forces surrounding the social disaster of Katrina, there is evidence that the micro relations of recovery harken back to an older global paradigm.

Colonialism peaked in the nineteenth century, as "the process by which the European nation-states reached positions of economic, military, political, and cultural domination through conquest, direct settlement, and control of 'others'—particularly in terms of occupation of their lands—through both the distant control of resources as well as of direct settlement" (Daniel 2005, 260).

In the North American context, colonialism refers to several transhistorical processes: the original and repeated European colonization of the indigenous land that would become the United States, the establishment of colonies abroad, and the ongoing internal colonization of people of African descent on American soil (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967). Despite its diminished relevance as a descriptor of current domestic economic relations, colonialism helps to illuminate some of the more micro dimensions of the posthurricane recovery.

Where dominant contemporary manifestations of neoliberalism are "predicated on an impersonal bureaucracy and a hegemonic masculinity organized around the themes of rationality, calculation, and orderliness," colonial rule functions according to a more intimate, "visible racialized

masculinity" (Mohanty 1991a, 22, 21). Colonial regimes are "constructed on the basis of a sharp sexual division of labor whereby (white) masculinity [is] inseparable from social authority and masculine adventure [is] followed by masculinized rule" (Mohanty 1991a, 21–2). These themes also characterized American chattel slavery, and the ties are more than analogous, as Nadine Gordimer indicates in a recent introduction to *The Colonizer and the Colonized*: "Slavery was not abolished, it evolved into colonization" (in Memmi [1957] 2003, 27). American chattel slavery was lubricated by the rhetoric of uplift, in what Genovese calls "southern paternalism" (1974, 661). Arguing that people of African descent in the twentieth century continue to "stand as colonial subjects in relation to the white society," Carmichael and Hamilton reframe paternalism with an African saying: "the missionaries came for our goods, not for our good" (1967, 5, 17). Genovese warns that "it would be the purest folly to see [in later liberal, industrial relationships] a continuation of the essentially personal paternalistic relationship of master to servant" (663), and yet these features—intimacy, racialized masculinity, authoritarianism, adventure, and paternalism—are apparent in the culture of CG. Being able to perceive the hybrid nature of the disasterscape—both neoliberal and colonial—is important to understanding the multiple forces shaping the recovery.

The second colonial dimension in the project of CG is the slippage between the threat to white women's bodies and the externalization of that threat to dark local Others. At the core of colonial logic is

racist ideology, fear of the Other, preoccupation with white prestige, and obsession with protecting European women from sexual assault by Asian and black males. . . . Within this frame, European women needed protection from the 'primitive' sexual urges aroused by the sight of them. . . . The 'Black Peril' referred throughout Africa and much of the British empire to the professed dangers of sexual assault on white women by black men. (Stoller 2002, 25, 58)

So great was the anxiety, despite "virtually no correlation with actual incidences of [assault on] European women by men of color," that rabid, racially stratified punishments were frequently codified into law (Stoller 2002, 58). The White Women's Protection Ordinance of 1927 of New Guinea, which "provided 'the death penalty for any person convicted for the crime of rape or attempted rape upon a *European* woman or girl,'" and the "public flogging" decreed in 1934 in the Solomon Islands for the "criminal assaults on [*white*] females" are two such examples (Stoller 2002, 58; emphasis mine). This constitutive element of colonialism, played out on the bodies of white women and black men, has a counterpart in the "colonization of the black female body by white power," although space does not permit this discussion here (Carby 1985, 276). We hear echoes of this pattern, I am suggesting, in CG's displacement of threat to the surrounding black community.

The third colonial feature that describes elements of CG's presence in the Upper Ninth Ward is the relationship to land. As much an approach to land as to people, colonialism involves the appropriation of territory. In a city in which over seventy percent of residences were damaged by the storm and hundreds of thousands of residents displaced, the "right to return" has been largely predicated on a place to return *to*. Just two months after the storm, after volunteering for several weeks with CG and speaking with local organizers of color, Molly McClure posed this question to future CG volunteers: "How did it come to be that we are able to travel to and around New Orleans, while many survivors still can't go home?" (McClure 2005). Local grassroots leaders put it this way: "Unfortunately, white progressive and radical Left volunteers that have come to 'rebuild' in the name of altruism and charity also contribute to the changing demographics of the city" (Bierria, Liebenthal, and INCITE! 2006, 39). Called gentrification in a domestic context, its standard components—the occupation and purchase of limited space, the whitening of culture—are accelerated, with higher stakes, in a disaster zone in which housing is perhaps the greatest resource.

During the peak of its residence at St. Mary's, CG was noted by some locals and visitors to be striking in its presence as a foreign encampment (private conversations). Scantily clad whites with dreadlocks and multiple tattoos roamed the streets around the religious school, playing the guitar, standing in line for the outdoor showers, and eating plates of quinoa and tofu. From February until July 2006, dozens of tents were pitched in the empty lot across the street in an enclave known as tent city, a site that became particularly contested in the debates about CG safety once several assaults were said to have occurred there. Most of the operations were housed in buildings owned by blacks, who were frequently women in a city with higher-than-average female head-of-household rates, and who were themselves not able to return. During the summer 2006, CG was criticized for replacing the storm-destroyed street signs of the Lower Ninth Ward with stenciled replacements that bore the CG logo. While the signs were a much-needed contribution to navigating the severely damaged neighborhoods, the logo was seen as a kind of territory-marking flag. These are only a few of the signifiers that have evoked colonial images.

White radicals have been accused before of a colonial relationship to space. Examples include the way in which, for structural reasons, white queers are often the first to gentrify neighborhoods of color. Or the tendency of the mass antiglobalization movement of the late 1990s and early twenty-first century to establish large temporary encampments in communities of color with little advance relationship building, bringing with them a greater police presence and dissonant culture (Starr 2004).

The final colonial dimension of CG's presence in the Upper Ninth Ward has to do with the complicated identity of the benevolent colonizer, the one who seeks, in Albert Memmi's language, "to refuse":

It is not easy to escape mentally from a concrete situation, to refuse its ideology while continuing to live with its actual relationships. From now on, he lives his life under the sign of a contradiction which looms at his every step . . . one can be, while awaiting the revolution, both a revolutionary and an exploiter. ([1957] 2003, 65, 67)

The duality of this role produces both material and ideological contradictions. Critique of the gross “privileges of the masters of colonization” does not preclude “the lesser privileges of the small colonizer, even the smallest, [which] are very numerous” ([1957] 2003, 55).

By drawing on colonialism here in a national context, I am playing on its primary role as a system of transnational domination, following in the tradition of black liberationists. The outcry by New Orleanians and their allies when the media referred to displaced people as “refugees” following the evacuation threw into relief the instability of black citizenship and the political construction of national boundaries. This is another reason I am suggesting that it is useful to place the storm and its aftermath at the nexus of local and global paradigms.

## **Disaster Relief, Development, Humanitarian Aid**

In the last fifteen years, a new paradigm has emerged in the interdisciplinary field of disaster, called “social vulnerability” (Laska and Morrow 2006; Wisner et al. [1994] 2004). It refers to the way in which “various social and economic attributes and conditions, such as poverty, race and ethnicity, gender, age, health and physical ability, and housing tenancy have affected hazard impact and response” (Laska and Morrow 2006). At its best the concept of social vulnerability brings together approaches to the social construction of disaster, the study of social stratification, and intersectionality theory. With the understanding that “disaster exacerbates pre-existing inequality” (Barnshaw 2006, 49), it is clear that social vulnerability affects both the production of disaster and the experience of recovery.

The new emphasis on social vulnerability and recovery reveals that recovery aid is stratified in both its delivery, and in how it is received, according to the ascribed and achieved identity of the recipient. This body of work emphasizes the gaps in relief disbursement, the ways in which and the reasons that people recovering from disaster do not get the assistance they need (Power 2006; Anderson and Woodrow 1998). Recovery literature does not focus, however, on the deleterious consequences of assistance that *has* been received. Contemporary critics call this “disaster capitalism” (Klein 2007), which gets at the heart of the political economy of Katrina “relief.” The United States has been practicing and exporting

versions of such policies for over a century under the rubric of liberal and then neoliberal aid.

First as development, then as structural adjustment policies (SAPs), and more recently as humanitarian relief, U.S. governmental and non-governmental politics of assistance have provided vehicles of global intervention:

In the nineteenth century, development was understood, philosophically, as the improvement of humankind. . . . Practically, political elites understood development as social engineering of emerging national societies. . . . Unsurprisingly, this social engineering impulse framed European colonization of the non-European worlds as colonial administrators assumed the task of developing, or controlling, their subject populations. Development served as a legitimating function, where, compared to Europeans, native peoples appeared backward. . . . development was a relation of power, elaborated nationally and internationally. (McMichael 2005, 112)

In contrast to domestic disaster literature, critical assessments of “maldevelopment” (Bhavnani, Foran, and Kurian 2003; Shiva 1992; Mohanty 1991a and 1991b), SAPs (Appelbaum and Robinson 2005; Naples and Desai 2002), and humanitarian relief (Okumu 2003; Pirotte, Husson, and Grunewald 2000; African Rights 1997) point to the problems that arise when aid *is* disbursed. For example, observers of the rising power of non-governmental organizations worry about how, “in an important way, the remedy has become of part of the problem: aid has been part of . . . decline” (African Rights 1997, 3). Humanitarian international nongovernmental organizations produce “counter-productive consequences” (Okumu 2003, 125) by extending conflict, intervening politically in choosing who to sustain, bargaining with combatants for the right to intervene, and so forth. Okumu notes that “[a]lthough scrutiny of humanitarian assistance was mainly focused on criticism of its delivery . . . there is now increasing concern over its adverse effects on its beneficiaries and on its role in prolonging or solving the conflicts that produced them” (2003, 120). As with postcolonial discourse, exposés of development, structural adjustment, and humanitarian aid unmask the way in which global social engineering is rationalized through the language of assistance. Domestic recovery projects may function in a similar way.

I conclude this section with three points. First, despite the neoliberal, domestic context of Hurricane Katrina recovery, there are older, global models that inspire it. Specifically we can better understand American treatment of black citizens in a disaster by using a broader framework of American governmental and nongovernmental policy toward the Global South. This argument is made in part to pierce the cool, rational, impersonal language of neoliberal economic policy by linking it to the burn of the more intimate encounters of earlier transnational versions. Second,

the American politics of assistance in its many forms usually has at its core a racial project of social control. This racial project is not the result of error, of projects poorly enacted, but rather is intrinsic to the projects themselves. My intention here is not to conflate disparate systems which have functioned in different times and according to different logics, but to link them together as a backdrop to the major domestic recovery project of this generation. Finally, the historically gendered and sexualized dimension of racial regulation means that assault in the context of heightened racial encounters has both racialized and gendered meanings and effects.

## Conclusion

At the core of the antiviolence work advanced by second-wave feminists is the insight that rape is a “political act by which men affirm their power over women” (Hall 1983, 341). Sexual assault is a method of controlling women, and “the emotional circuit between interracial rape and lynching” has meant it is also a means of controlling black men and black communities. Ida B. Wells had an “analysis of lynching and [a] demystification of the political motivations behind the manipulation of both black male and female and white female sexuality” (Carby 1985, 270). This makes sexual assault a multipurposed tactic, employed strategically: “It may be no accident, then, that the vision of the black man as a threatening beast flourished during the first phase of the southern women’s rights movement, a fantasy of aggression against boundary-transgressing women as well as a weapon of terror against blacks” (Hall 1983, 337). According to this logic, it is plausible that a disaster zone characterized by a culture of heroic male adventure would display ambivalence about the boundary-transgressing women also positioned as disaster heroes.

The fact that the CG community of white volunteers and black and white leaders was unable to wage a concerted campaign against white male violence is, I am suggesting, the result of several gendered and racialized forces. The first, at the broadest level, is the legacy of colonialism, and its contemporary offspring, development and humanitarian aid. As cultural and strategic repositories, these systems continue to inform meso and micro encounters both globally and locally. Specifically, in the context of disaster produced by neoliberal, bureaucratic policy, colonialism as an earlier, more intimate form of intervention returns to fill the gaps.

Secondly, the “Southern rape complex,” long since exported to the North and abroad but perhaps particularly at home in the American South, functions as a cognitive distortion for whites. Despite the discursive evidence available to CG members that almost every accused perpetrator was a white volunteer, the fear of black male violence increased white Othering of the community they had come to assist. Volunteer outrage

and intervention rarely moved laterally to the population of white volunteer men, out of whose ranks the perpetrators came, and who collectively participated in the culture of hypermasculinity that was conducive to the assaults.

Finally, the difficulty all groups had in pursuing intersectional remedies to the intersectional challenges they confronted speaks to the distance we still must travel to justly address the homegrown disasters of racism and sexism. While CG, with its energy and dedication, despite the criticisms I have raised here, has been an inspiring force in New Orleans, “Black feminists understood that the struggle would have to take place on the terrain of the previously colonized: the struggle was to be characterized by redemption, retrieval, and reclamation—not, ultimately, by an unrestrained utopian vision” (Carby 1985, 276).

*Rachel E. Luft is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of New Orleans, specializing in gender, race, and social movements. Since Hurricane Katrina she has been a participant observer in local grassroots efforts for a just recovery. Send correspondence to rluft@uno.edu.*

## Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to the following for their particularly useful suggestions: Shana Griffin, Susan Mann, Sharon Martinas, Jane Ward, and members of the Catalyst Project. I also have much appreciation for the members of the Anti-Racism Working Group of Common Ground, who do their work with great integrity, were willing to be interviewed for this project, and provided thoughtful reflections along the way. Finally, I thank the organizers and members of the Common Ground Collective for their efforts in New Orleans.

## Notes

1. Thanks to Jane Ward who suggested the Rorschach metaphor here.
2. There was also a population of transgender volunteers, some of whom reported harassment.
3. Absence here has two meanings: their absence from my study in the form of primary interviews, and their absence from the neighborhood itself during this period, as the residents of the Upper Ninth Ward were still overwhelmingly displaced from the storm. Real signs of life returned in summer 2006.
4. Because of the decentralization of Common Ground, it has been difficult to gauge precise numbers. An article written by long-term volunteer leaders and published in 2006 claimed more than ten thousand volunteers had passed



through (Hilderbrand 2006), and a long-term former site coordinator estimated the number to be twelve thousand by December 2006 (private conversation 2007). Participation dropped off significantly after that, though it continues to this day.

5. At the same time that Common Ground was emerging, a group of largely black grassroots leaders in New Orleans came together to form a national coalition called The People's Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF). PHRF would continue to be one of the most significant social movement groups enduring in the city. Meanwhile, in the immediate aftermath of the storm, national black organizations like The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM), The National Conference of Black Lawyers, and The National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) put out statements condemning the government's treatment of black citizens, and organized within their own networks.
6. <http://www.infoshop.org/inews/article.php?story=20060313145800704>
7. Because the character of the surrounding community was called into question by some volunteers, the following self-representation deserves mention. When CG volunteers entered the religious school in February 2006, they found the following statement scrawled on one of the chalkboards:
 

Sept. 2, 2005 9:13 A.M.  
 We are sorry for the school, but the shelter was a blessing. We had to bring over 200 people here with no help from any Coast Guard boats. People died and are still in there [sic] house, we had to leave them. We asked the C.G. [Coast Guard] for help and got NONE. Thanks to Micky, McKinley, Eric Phil Tyrone, Karl B., Cory, and J. Richard, Cedric, Jeff D. Jeff, Ben, Big Greg, Rick 10<sup>th</sup>, Al, Lance, and Anthony. We saved the whole project. THEY LEFT US HERE TO DIE.  
 R.I.P. to the ones we lost.
8. Shana Griffin, a local black feminist organizer, notes that this area, the Upper Ninth Ward, was not traditionally distinguished from the Lower Ninth Ward with this name before the storm (private conversation).
9. Excerpted from the zine of a CG assault survivor, called, "This is a Zine About Me. . . . And Something I Never Told You . . . and Not About Me At All" (2006).
10. This definition therefore excludes the broad array of support to the middle class and elites, in the form of public universities and corporate welfare, for example.

## References

- Advancement Project, National Immigration Law Center, and the New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition. 2006. "And Injustice for All: Workers' Lives in the Reconstruction of New Orleans." Retrieved 16 September 2008 from <http://www.neworleansworkerjustice.org/en/doc/workersreport.pdf>.
- African Rights. 1997. *Food and Power in Sudan*. London: African Rights.
- Anderson, Mary B. and Peter Woodrow. 1998. *Rising from the Ashes: Development Strategies in Times of Disaster*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Appelbaum, Richard P. and William I. Robinson. 2005. *Critical Globalization Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Barnshaw, John. 2006. "Beyond Disaster: Locating Hurricane Katrina within an Inequality Context." In *Learning From Catastrophe: Quick Response Research in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina*, ed. National Hazards Center, 47–70. Boulder, CO: Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado at Boulder.
- Bhavnani, Kum-Kum. 2003. "An Introduction to Women, Culture and Development." In *Feminist Futures: Re-Imagining Women, Culture and Development*, ed. Kum-Kum Bhavnani, John Foran, and Priya A. Kurian, 1–21. London: Zed Books.
- Bierria, Alisa, Mayaba Liebenthal, and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. 2006. "To Render Ourselves Visible." In *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation*, ed. South End Press Collective, 31–47. Boston, MA: South End Press Collective.
- Carby, Hazel V. 1985. "'On the Threshold of Woman's Era': Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory." *Critical Inquiry* 12:262–7.
- Carmichael, Stokely and Charles Hamilton. 1967. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1998. "Some Group Matters: Intersectionality, Situated Standpoints, and Black Feminist Thought." In *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*, 201–229. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1995. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." In *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, 357–83. New York: The New Press.
- Daniel, G. Reginald. 2005. "Beyond Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism: Globalization, Critical Hybridity, and Postcolonial Blackness." In *Critical Globalization Studies*, ed. Richard P. Appelbaum and William I. Robinson, 259–68. New York: Routledge.
- David, Emmanuel. 2006. "Emergent Behavior and Groups in Postdisaster New Orleans: Notes on Practices of Organized Resistance." In *Learning From Catastrophe: Quick Response Research in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina*, National Hazards Center, 235–61. Boulder, CO: Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado at Boulder.
- Dreier, Peter. 2006. "Katrina and Power in America." *Urban Affairs Review* 41: 528–49.

- Genovese, Eugene. 1974. *Roll, Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gordon, Avery. 1996. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Greater New Orleans Community Data Center. 2007. Retrieved on 16 September 2008 from <http://www.gnocdc.org/prekatrinasite.html>.
- Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. 1983. "'The Mind That Burns In Each Body': Women, Rape, and Racial Violence." In *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, 328–49. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Hilderbrand, Sue, Scott Crow, and Lisa Fithian. 2006. "Common Ground Relief." In *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation*, ed. South End Press Collective, 80–99. Cambridge, MA: South End Press Collective.
- INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, ed. 2005. "Critical Resistance—Incite Statement: Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex." Retrieved on 16 September 2008 from <http://www.incitenational.org/involve/statement.html>.
- . 2006. *The Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Klein, Naomi. 2007. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Laska, Shirley and Betty Morrow. 2006. "Social Vulnerabilities and Hurricane Katrina: An Unnatural Disaster in New Orleans." *Marine Technology Society Journal* 40:16–26.
- Lipsitz, George. 2006. "Learning from New Orleans: The Social Warrant of Hostile Privatism and Competitive Consumer Citizenship." *Cultural Anthropology* 21:451–68.
- McClure, Molly. 2005. "Solidarity not Charity: Racism in Katrina Relief Work" Retrieved on 16 September 2008 from <http://www.infoshop.org/inews/article.php?story=20060319185418325>.
- McMichael, Philip. 2005. "Globalization and Development Studies." In *Critical Globalization Studies*, ed. Richard P. Appelbaum and William I. Robinson, 111–20. New York: Routledge.
- Memmi, Albert. (1957) 2003. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1991a. "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Struggle." In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, 1–50. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- . 1991b. "Under Western Eyes." In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, 51–80. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Naples, Nancy A. and Manisha Desai. 2002. *Women's Activism and Globalization: Linking Local Struggles and Transnational Politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Okumu, Wafulu. 2003. "Humanitarian International NGOs and African Conflict." In *Mitigating Conflict: The Role of NGOs*, ed. Henry F. Carey and Oliver P. Richmond, 120–37. London: Frank Cass Publishing.

- Peck, Jamie. 2006. "Liberating the City: Between New York and New Orleans." *Urban Geography* 27:681–713.
- Pirotte, Claire, Bernard Husson, and Francois Grunewald, eds. 2000. *Responding To Emergencies and Fostering Development: The Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid*. London: Zed Books.
- Power, Michael P. 2006. "A Matter of Choice: Historical Lessons for Disaster Recovery." In *There is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina*, ed. Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires, 13–36. New York: Routledge.
- Rhode, Deborah L. 1989. *Justice and Gender: Sex Discrimination and the Law*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ritchie, Beth. 1996. *Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of Battered, Black Women*. New York: Routledge.
- Ruch, Libby O. 1992. "Review: Sexual Violence Against Women." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2(4):634–40.
- Shiva, Vandana. 1992. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*. London: Zed Books.
- Stansell, Christine. 1992. "White Feminists and Black Realities: The Politics of Authenticity." In *Race-ing Justice, En-gender-ing Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*, ed. Toni Morrison, 251–68. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Starr, Amory. 2004. "How Can Anti-Imperialism Not Be Anti-Racist? The North American Anti-Globalization Movement." *Journal of World-Systems Research* X(I):119–51.
- Stoller, Ann Laura. 2002. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- West, Traci C. 1999. *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence, and Resistance Ethics*. New York: New York University Press.
- Wisner, Ben, Piers Blaikie, Terry Cannon, and Ian Davis. 2003. *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*. Second Edition. London: Routledge.