

From:

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After the Storm

The Cultural Politics of Hurricane Katrina

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»After the Storm« traces the cultural and political responses to Hurricane Katrina. Ever since Katrina hit the Gulf coast in 2005, its devastating consequences for the region, for New Orleans, and the United States have been negotiated in a growing number of cultural productions – among them Spike Lee’s documentary film »When the Levees Broke«, David Simon and Eric Overmyer’s TV series »Treme«, or Natasha Trethewey’s poetry collection »Beyond Katrina«. This book provides interdisciplinary perspectives on these and other approaches to Hurricane Katrina and puts special emphasis on the intersections of the categories race and class.

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Introduction: The Fire Next Time

SIMON DICKEL AND EVANGELIA KINDINGER

The cover of our book *After the Storm: The Cultural Politics of Hurricane Katrina* shows a photo Lewis Watts took of the veranda of a devastated house in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina had hit the city in August of 2005. Trash bags are visible in the foreground, and on the veranda, there are a few pieces of defunct furniture. The entrance of the house is spray-painted with the phrase “The Fire Next Time” and the initials “J.B.” In the media coverage of the storm, the sight of spray-painted verandas was a familiar one. Images of the so-called x-charts, spray-painted by the search-and-rescue teams, illustrated many media reports about the hurricane. This graffito, however, is different. The initials J.B. point to the writer James Baldwin and his 1963 collection of essays *The Fire Next Time* in which he discusses race and religion in the US. It is an abbreviated line from a spiritual, which refers to the Bible. The full line reads “God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water, the fire next time.”

As a sentence for the graffito, it could not have been more appropriate for the situation of post-Katrina New Orleans, because, after the levees broke, 80% of the city were flooded, which does not let the comparison between the flooded city and the biblical Flood appear far-fetched. By explicitly adding the initials J.B. to the quotation, the spray-painter refers to Baldwin and thus opens a specific perspective on Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath that goes beyond a treatment of the hurricane merely as a natural disaster. The written phrase refers to at least two pre-texts, it signifies on the Bible and the Flood on the one hand, and on James Baldwin, the Civil Rights struggle and the history of race and racism in the US on the other. It opens a perspective that connects African American history and the civil rights struggle to the current political situation in the United States. The x-chart is still visible underneath the word “time.” Thus, the act of spray-painting the wall might also be read as an act of emancipation. Like in a palimpsest, the official sign still shines through the new phrase, but it becomes less important

through the more urgent quotation. Using spray-paint, the writer takes up and appropriates the same technique the officials used to mark the houses with the x-charts.

Lewis Watts's symmetric black and white documentary photo of the house and the veranda enable the viewer to take in these different dimensions of meaning. Watts chooses the frame of the veranda as a frame for the image itself. The veranda appears as a stage with stairs on the left and the right that lead to and from it. Fittingly, the abandoned pieces of furniture, among them a lamp and a tailor's dummy, are reminiscent of stage props. Cultural negotiations of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, the photo seems to suggest, do not take place in a neutral setting. All cultural texts enter a stage that is predetermined by cultural meanings, political struggles, and conflicting discourses. Watts's photo addresses the immediacy of the situation while already pointing at different levels of cultural meanings, for example the official record and the unofficial interpretation of the reason for the disaster. The photo shows a stage with an entrance, an exit, and enough space for new negotiations, and it is for this reason that we consider it the ideal image for this book of essays on the cultural politics of Hurricane Katrina.

Over the nearly ten years since the storm, numerous artists and writers have negotiated the meaning of Hurricane Katrina in a growing number of texts of all genres. Early responses, such as Spike Lee's documentary film *When the Levees Broke* (2006), aimed at presenting personal counter-narratives to the dominant media images that often reinforced stereotypes of race and class. More recent texts, such as Benh Zeitlin's feature film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), tend to approach the storm and its aftermath implicitly. While Zeitlin's film does not even mention Hurricane Katrina, it can still be read as a text that meditates on the central topics of earlier Katrina narratives, such as race, poverty, and ecology. The Academy Award nominations for this film, the 2011 National Book Award for Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* (2011), and the international success of David Simon and Eric Overmyer's TV-series *Treme* (2009-2013) have emphasized the relevance of Katrina for political, cultural, and academic discourses. In addition to documentaries, feature films, TV-series, and novels, authors have turned to genres, such as graphic novel, creative non-fiction, performance art, or music and added other Katrina narratives.

The wide range of cultural texts allows for a manifold access to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermaths. In *Treme* for instance, the creators of the series introduce its audience to a diverse group of characters. Their fate is specified in personal storylines, yet they also share it with all New Orleanians in the city and abroad. This intricate dynamic of individual and communal becomes relevant in the storyline of Creighton Bernette, a university professor who voices his personal

frustration and anger about local, state and national post-Katrina crisis management as publicly, loudly and visibly as he can, speaking for himself and the citizens of New Orleans. In one of his YouTube-‘rants,’ he very pointedly states: “Living now, here, is like a dream, the way that everything in a dream is the same yet not the same. Familiar, yet strange. Not quite right, but you just can’t put your finger on it.” (“All On A Mardi Gras Day,” 50:23-50:39) This collection of essays from different disciplines puts a finger on the effects Hurricane Katrina had on the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, and on the effects it had on writers, filmmakers, and photographers who decided to respond with their art and tell stories of survival, destruction, and perseverance for the local communities, but also for those not directly affected by the storm.

Creighton Bernette’s declaration addresses a state of being left in limbo, of the simultaneous experience of familiarity and alienation in one’s city, one’s home, and even one’s nation. One of the predominant public responses to the images of human and environmental devastation after Hurricane Katrina had swept through New Orleans and the coasts of Alabama and Mississippi was incredulity that this was possible in an industrialized, Western nation-state like the United States. The ways in which Hurricane Katrina made economic and social discrepancies visible by natural force can be understood as an awakening from a dream many Americans strongly believed in: the equal access to opportunity and privilege for all American citizens. This rough awakening came unexpectedly to those who believed in this American cultural narrative, yet not to those who have historically been excluded by it: poor and black Americans.

The majority of publications responding to and explaining the economic, social and cultural circumstances that resulted in the post-Katrina crisis concentrate on the poor African American population of the Gulf Coast and of New Orleans specifically. What they all agree on is that those who had to stay behind in the city and seek shelter in the Superdome and the Convention Center were the most vulnerable residents of New Orleans: They were disproportionately poor, black, old, or of poor health (cf. Hartman/Squires 2006). Another aspect agreed upon is that the disaster, which unfolded, might have been natural in its shape – the winds, the rain, the flooding – but at its core, it was human-made.

Both the cultural texts that offer creative responses to Katrina and the academic work that analyzes these texts are produced within a discourse that is firmly rooted in other academic disciplines, such as political sciences, sociology, and geography. The following brief overview of some important studies that have been published since the storm illustrates the intertwining of different approaches and arguments, which have certainly informed the essays featured in this book and which complement these in return. Michael Eric Dyson’s *Come Hell or High*

Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster (2006), Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires's edited collection *There Is No Such Thing As a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina* (2006), as well as Jeremy I. Levitt and Matthew C. Whitaker's collection *Hurricane Katrina: America's Unnatural Disaster* (2009), all attest to the unnaturalness of Hurricane Katrina, a storm which uncovered "weaknesses, prejudices, and inequalities throughout the Gulf Coast and within the whole of American society" (Levitt/Whitaker 2009: 2). As Dyson persuasively argues, speaking of Katrina as a mere natural disaster masks the disparities and realities it laid bare for everyone to see, not only in the United States, but also around the world. Natural disasters are ironically liberating of responsibility and of prevention. A natural disaster – supposedly – cannot be prevented, and while it invites anger and empathy, while it might even result in public outrage and relief work, it nevertheless implies that its effects can never be wholly predicted and prevented. Yet as the aforementioned publications show to the point, the aftermaths of the storm could have been prevented if the United States was not still structured by institutional inequalities and segregational politics. Responsibility, thus, cannot be so easily repelled.

The question of state and federal responsibility is vital for the future of the affected regions and respectively the nation as a whole. By taking responsibility for the deeply engrained but long avoided or downplayed questions of race and class in the United States, the social and economic landscape could be shaped anew. The redevelopment of New Orleans is therefore of particular interest to both the public and academic sphere. The interim conclusion is ambiguous so far. Cedric Johnson's edited book *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans* (2011) reviews private and governmental rebuilding efforts, while Johnson formulates a rather sobering verdict, namely that "the social, economic, and environmental crises that were rendered visible through disaster have been used to further advance neoliberalization" (2006: xvii). Disaster relief, which was overwhelming after the storm hit, is commonly represented as a sign of public care and interest in the so called victims. Yet as Johnson argues, disaster relief was and is mostly privatized, and the same is true for urban re-development. This privatization highlights and reinforces the neoliberal belief that social responsibility is not in the hands of state and federal government, but in the hands of private institutions and individuals. Without discrediting all the privatized disaster relief work, *The Neoliberal Deluge* aims at exposing the inequalities rendered by neoliberalization and calls for government responsibility in times of crises.

Crisis Cities: Disaster and Redevelopment in New York and New Orleans (2014) by Kevin Fox Gotham and Miriam Greenberg, by comparing post-disaster

relief and redevelopment in New Orleans and New York City, implies that social disparities are uncovered by different ‘kinds’ of crises. They ask whether “post-disaster redevelopment [was and is] linked to broader processes of social and spatial restructuring” (viii) and, similar to Johnson and the essays featured in his *The Neoliberal Deluge*, they conclude that New York City and New Orleans, instead of restructuring urban space in sensible, equal and inclusive ways, “have [rather] emerged as ‘crisis cities,’ representing a ‘neoliberal,’ or free-market-oriented approach to post-disaster redevelopment that is increasingly dominant for crisis-stricken urban regions around the country and the world” (ix). While Fox Gotham and Greenberg acknowledge and refer to moments of important and potent community activism and organizing, they stress that these efforts – unfortunately – have remained in the margins and were unable to be sustained within the cities’ “market-oriented and inequitable redevelopment agenda” (xii).

Hurricane Katrina did not only expose capitalist ideologies, racial segregation, poverty, and governmental mismanagement, it also exposed the fragility of belonging, citizenship, and home. The early media coverage that labeled the residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast who had to leave their homes and their hometowns “refugees” has been widely criticized as deceptive and re-assertive of the segregation and disenfranchisement many African American residents were exposed to before, during and after the storm: “The framing of Katrina victims as refugees helped construct a view of the victims as undeserving of government and resources.” (Fox Gotham/Greenberg 2014: 71) It helped construct them as non-citizens of the United States, a foreign body in their own homes.

A term sought to be more suitable to the state of forced displacement is “diaspora.” The Katrina Diaspora, the waves of people leaving the impacted regions and settling provisionally in other places, spread to every state of the United States (Ericson, Matthew/Tse, Archie/Wilgoren, Jodi 2005: n.p.), and according to journalist Jonathan Tilove, in 2010, 100,000 New Orleanians were still scattered across the United States. Yet “mostly apparent for its absence” (n.p.), the Katrina Diaspora is difficult to grasp, because it is an intra-national and regional diaspora that has become invisible. Supported by organizations devoted to return, such as the federal program Road Home, many diasporans have indeed returned to their homes, but many still live displaced in areas away from home, the road back still difficult for them to take.

In 2012, Lori Peek and Lynn Weber published a collection of ethnographic essays, *Displaced: Life in the Katrina Diaspora*, in which they, among other authors, attempted to give the Katrina Diaspora the visibility it deserves. Interestingly enough, they do not specify how they understand and make use of

the term “diaspora,” subtly making a claim for the self-evidence of a Katrina diaspora, which does not need further conceptualization. The claim does not have to be so subtle though, the Katrina Diaspora is diasporic in the term’s most classic sense: traumatized and displaced by a catastrophic event, a collective, which is (treated like) a minority group is forced to leave the so-called homeland and settle in other, mostly foreign places (cf. Tölölyan 2007; Cohen 1997). The “rhetoric of restoration and return” (Tölölyan 2007: 649), which determines life in the diaspora, is crucial for the community’s preservation and for possible return movements “back home.” The essays we have assembled here take part in this rhetoric; they create visibility and assess the restoration efforts displayed in various cultural texts and practices.

Although featured prominently in Peek and Weber’s book title, the authors do not make further use of the term “diaspora,” but rather refer to the people who had to leave their homes as “internally displaced persons” (2012: 2), preferring this terminology to other labels such as “refugees, victims, survivors, evacuees, exiles, and environmental migrants” (ibid.). To be “internally displaced” suggests displacement within the larger structure of the nation-state, it suggests an intranational diaspora, which imagines the homeland in more regionalized and localized terms, in this case New Orleans and the Gulf region. Internal displacement might also refer to the consciousness and lived experiences of having been displaced, excluded, segregated and kept in the margins of one’s homeland: “Experiences of loss, marginality, and exile (differentially cushioned by class) are often reinforced by systematic exploitation and blocked advancement. This constitutive suffering coexists with the skills of survival [...]. Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension.” (Clifford 1994: 312) We dare to suggest that this tension created by internal displacement, coupled with the realization of living apart from, and having no access to the privileges of hegemonic society as experienced by many poor, elderly and African American New Orleanians during and after the storm is actually a displacement they experienced long before Hurricane Katrina.

Lynnell L. Thomas’s *Desire & Disaster in New Orleans: Tourism, Race, and Historical Memory* (2014) names tourism a distinct sphere of continuous displacement and exclusion, primarily of African American New Orleanians and their history. The city’s tourism narrative has always prioritized the French Quarter and the city’s European heritages, stigmatizing the “black areas of the city as dangerous” (1), and thus reinforcing urban and racial segregation. Thomas formulates two contrasting frames that have been utilized to represent local black culture for visiting tourists: the desire to experience “authentic” and “safe” black culture, and the disaster narratives of poverty, crime, immorality and inadequacy

that have connoted black culture in the American imagination (cf. *ibid*: 7). This duality, so runs Thomas's argument, shaped the media coverage and public perception of Hurricane Katrina: "Those who were most responsible for representing the city and its citizens in the aftermath of Katrina did so from a limited perspective that conformed to a narrative perpetuated in tourist representations of the city." (*ibid*: 2) The focus on a nostalgic, highly fabricated white adaptation of antebellum culture has fostered desire, while displacing and obscuring black history, black agency and inclusive tourist narratives of and in the city. Hurricane Katrina, again, operated as a destructive force laying bare these narratives, as seen in the instant efforts to rebuild New Orleans' damaged tourist attractions like the French Quarter and neglect the poor and black residential neighborhoods such as the Lower 9th Ward.

The question of agency, narrative power, and representation is one we acknowledge in this collection of essays. With regard to diasporas, Khachig Tölölyan emphasizes the importance of "talking back" and becoming "simultaneously objects of knowledge and cosubjects" (2007: 654). Before talking back though, individual and collective voices need to be found, raised and mediated. In the light of all the failures and negligence of federal and state government, and of mainstream (news) media, cultural productions offer space for obscured knowledge and voices, open a dialogue and facilitate "talking back." The conversation this book contributes to is that of the politics voiced by cultural texts. It is also a transnational and interdisciplinary conversation, in which scholars of different academic and biographical origins pay attention to how Hurricane Katrina and its aftermaths are memorized, narrated, structured, visualized and politicized in fictional or personal responses, in the classroom, in the language people use, and in art projects.

This book has evolved from the international conference "After the Storm: The Cultural Politics of Hurricane Katrina" that we organized in Bochum/Germany in December 2013. At the time, many conference speakers from New Orleans and other parts of the United States voiced their surprise that a conference with this particular focus took place in Europe. In turn, we had been surprised and glad about so many participants from the United States and particularly New Orleans who travelled to Bochum to discuss the topic with us. The international and interdisciplinary exchange was so productive that the decision for this collection of essays to document it was an easy one. Our conference and this book are evidence of the growing academic attention to the cultural negotiations of Hurricane Katrina.

Our discussions in this book are inspired by Lloyd Pratt's essay "New Orleans and Its Storm: Exception, Example, or Event?" (2006), in which he warns against

the impulse to treat Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath either as an exception from the ordinary course of history or as an example of the way that race and class inequalities have always manifested themselves historically. Both are tendencies to historicize the storm in opposing ways, which, he argues, pose the danger of being inattentive to what is new about the storm. This volume's interdisciplinary approach considers Hurricane Katrina and the way it has been culturally negotiated from a variety of angles. In line with Pratt's deliberations, our aim with both the conference and this publication is a multifaceted take on the meanings of the storm and its cultural negotiations. A considerable number of the essays in this book address fictional texts of different genres. However, the book's scope is not limited to literary studies or film studies. It is broadened by essays, which belong to one or more other academic disciplines, namely linguistics, pedagogy, music, sociology, and philosophy. What is more, two contributors share their creative photographic work and put it in theoretical perspective.

Throughout the book, placed before each individual essay, you find one photo by photographer Lewis Watts, accompanied by a caption to contextualize it. Together with his statement and self-portrait at the beginning of the book, these photos form his contribution "New Orleans Suite: A Photographic Essay." He took some of these black and white photos in New Orleans over the course of ten days, six weeks after Katrina. Some of the photos are of a more recent date, and others depict the city before the hurricane. At the time Katrina made landfall, Watts was supposed to start his work as an artist in residence at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art. As an artist Watts is most interested in documenting the people and their cultural practices. Consequently, his photographic essay does not only show an abandoned and destroyed city but includes portraits of the people of New Orleans.

In "Documenting Stories of Reconstruction in New Orleans: Spike Lee and Jonathan Demme" Delphine Letort compares the documentary style and cultural politics of two documentaries, Spike Lee's *If God is Willing and da Creek Don't Rise* (2010) and Jonathan Demme's *I'm Carolyn Parker, the Good, the Mad and the Beautiful* (2012). Letort states that even though both films build on the participatory and performative modes of documentary filmmaking as defined by film theorist Bill Nichols, Demme and Lee do not convey the same image of New Orleans and its inhabitants. Both films portray everyday life in post-Katrina New Orleans through the focus on individual characters. Letort analyzes how Lee explores the narrative dynamics of serialization to investigate the individual and collective impact of Hurricane Katrina, whereas Demme personalizes his approach through the focus on Carolyn Parker, whom, as she contends, he celebrates as an American model of resilience. Demme's commitment to Carolyn

Parker, Letort argues, stands in stark contrast to Lee's engagement with collective concerns as expressed by the multimodal narrative structure that allows him to interweave different storylines.

Creative responses to Hurricane Katrina, such a complex and overwhelming disaster (whether natural and/or human-made), avail themselves of different styles and methods of narration. Miriam Strube and Kornelia Freitag discuss two different cultural representations that are narrated in a similar tradition, namely in a realist fashion. Yet, as Strube and Freitag show, realist tales can vary; realism as a narrative aesthetic is versatile. In "Recycling and Surviving in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*: Screening Katrina as a Magic Realist Tale," Strube analyzes Zeitlin's film from 2012. She offers a reading of the film by comparing it to classic features of magic realism, a genre that blends what is considered to be real, in this case the ecological vulnerability of places in the Gulf Coast, with magical elements, the sudden and unexpected appearance of prehistoric animals, which are 'tamed' and sent away by the film's adolescent protagonist Hushpuppy. Next to identifying the magic realist features though, Strube goes one step further and discusses the role of the dump and the relevance of trash in the movie, concluding that Zeitlin creates images of community life, commodities and consumerism that counter mainstream American society without romanticizing or abjecting these as unworthy.

Freitag, in her contribution "Down in the *Treme*: Televising Man-made Natural Disaster in the New Millennium," also attends to the realist method of narrating Hurricane Katrina. She reads *Treme* as a series that uses local color strategies, which captivate the viewers by representing the regional specificities or the Otherness of New Orleans' culture. Yet Freitag goes one step further and considers the role, more precisely the absence, of the hurricane in *Treme* – an absence she explains as an effect of the realist aesthetics deployed by the series, aesthetics that place the human being at the center of interest and representation. The materiality of Hurricane Katrina – the storm, the wind, and the flooding – while being mostly obscured nevertheless resurfaces in eerie narrative moments that rupture the realist mode.

Michael Bucher offers a different approach to *Treme*. In "Where They At? Bounce and Class in *Treme*," he discusses the role of music in the TV-series. But rather than focusing on jazz, Cajun music, or the musical heritage of Mardi Gras, all of which feature prominently in the series, he attends to hip-hop and bounce. Both are current African American musical styles, which New Orleans is well-known for, but which are largely neglected in the series. Bucher analyzes the appearances of artists Katey Red and Lil Calliope and states that both are dependent on and sidekicks to the DJ Davis storyline. Based on this analysis,

Bucher makes the argument that the marginalization of bounce and hip-hop is ultimately an exclusion of queer, female and poor subjects from the TV-series.

In his essay “Dance Back From the Grave: Marc Cohn’s and Jackson Browne’s Musical Responses to Hurricane Katrina” Cyprian Piskurek analyzes two albums about Hurricane Katrina. He argues that among the various representations of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, music occupies a special place because it testifies to the centrality of New Orleans within the national and global music scene. His essay starts out with a discussion of contemporary ‘telethon culture’ which was responsible for many of the most immediate responses to the storm. Whereas songs responding to Katrina are often discussed in isolation as individual tracks, this article calls for closer attention to complete albums influenced by the event, as these texts give more thorough insights into the emergent structures of feeling after the disaster. Piskurek discusses two such responses in detail: Marc Cohn’s *Join the Parade* (2007) and Jackson Browne’s *Time the Conqueror* (2008). He demonstrates how Cohn interprets Katrina as a natural disaster while Browne takes a more political stance and sees the horrendous consequences as man-made. Although the discussion focuses on only two examples, he argues that evolving patterns of representing the storm can be read off these albums and contribute to our understanding of Hurricane Katrina’s cultural politics.

Courtney George’s “Revisiting Place, the Memorial, and the Historical in Tom Piazza’s *Why New Orleans Matters* and Natasha Trethewey’s *Beyond Katrina*” argues for a reconsideration of the binaries history/memory, space/place, and local/global in Southern Studies, which cannot be easily upheld in the aftermaths of Hurricane Katrina. Analyzing two personal approaches to post-Katrina New Orleans (Piazza) and coastal Mississippi (Trethewey), George argues for the physicality of place that has been overshadowed by the understanding that place is merely created in our imagination. There is a crucial interconnectedness of the physical space and imagined place, which Piazza and Trethewey assert in their narratives. Without intending to negate the creation of place through history and memory, George, in a bioregional approach, aims at the reconciliation of imagined, remembered place and the physical space that facilitates imagination and memory. Representations of place, like Piazza’s and Trethewey’s, allow access to the physical space, especially for those who were dislocated by Hurricane Katrina and for those who lived outside the places affected by the storm.

Philipp Siepmann approaches Hurricane Katrina with a didactic approach, asking how the lessons learned and not-learned from the course of events unleashed by the hurricane can be utilized to introduce high school students to global ecological and socio-political challenges and inequalities while fostering

their (inter)cultural and analytic competences. “Natural Hazards, Human Vulnerability – Teaching Hurricane Katrina Through Literary Nonfiction” proposes a didactic model based on the main inquiry of defining Hurricane Katrina as a natural and/or man-made disaster, which students are meant to explore by means of three different texts: the oral history project *Voices from the Storm* (2008), Dave Eggers’s *Zeitoun* (2009), and Josh Neufeld’s *A.D.: New Orleans after the Deluge* (2009). These texts, according to Siepmann, stand at the crossroads of fiction and nonfiction and thus exemplify the fictionalization and appropriation of personal stories, which are relevant for sensitizing students to the meaning of representation and agency with regard to Hurricane Katrina, and more generally, to cultural texts of all kinds.

Katie Carmichael’s essay “Where Y’at Since the Storm?: Linguistic Effects of Hurricane Katrina” offers a linguistic perspective on the effects of Katrina. She has conducted original research on the unique dialects of English in Greater New Orleans, which have long attracted the notice of both linguists and locals alike, but on which only very little research has been conducted so far. In particular, Carmichael asks how the upheaval and large-scale relocation following Hurricane Katrina has affected local speech patterns. In her study, she examines the speech of 57 individuals from St. Bernard Parish, located just east of New Orleans, to determine whether distinctive local linguistic features have remained robust after the storm. In comparing the speech of those individuals who have relocated following Hurricane Katrina and those who have returned to their original homes, she determines that relocation has had little effect on speakers’ language use, providing some hope for the future of New Orleans’ distinctive linguistic heritage. In her analysis, she suggests that part of the reason for this linguistic retention may be a result of the post-Katrina nostalgia movement creating a revaluing of all things local.

As already mentioned, the disenfranchisement and grave stigmatization of African American New Orleanians was widely discussed after the storm, and Nikki Brown adds another perspective to this discussion, considering photography and oral history. In “Life and Luck after Katrina: African American Men, Oral History, and Mentoring in New Orleans, 2010 to 2014” she focuses on African American men in the city, those men who were nationally denounced as “looters” and “thugs” by the media and the images circulated in the aftermath of the hurricane. Brown displays photographs from her own project “Ordinary Lives, Extraordinary Times: African American Men in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, 2010-2014,” and valorizes African American men’s lives in New Orleans. She stresses their agency by visualizing and arguing for a different kind of crisis management and disaster activism: the mentoring of African American

youth by African American men, for example in community-relevant institutions such as the barbershop or in life skills classes offered by Chef Joe at Café Reconcile. Brown's photographs are complemented by interviews she conducted with men who describe their status in the city and counter the mainstream narratives of urban black masculinity.

In his essay "The Landscapes of *Man*: Ecological and Cultural Change before Hurricane Katrina" Demetrius L. Eudell uses Hurricane Katrina as an endpoint to analyze the history of ecological and socio-cultural change in New Orleans. After displacing and transforming Indigenous societies, European settlers had to decide how to establish a different kind of community in such a precarious landscape. Eudell argues that a particular understanding not only of the environment but also a conception of Being Human, that of secular *Man* (if initially only partially so) remained equally relevant. Within the logic of this self/social understanding, a system of levees to address hurricane and storm surge would be implemented, initially with convict and slave labor, and after the Civil War, with poorly-compensated (i.e. 'cheap'), predominantly Black labor. Eudell's analysis asks for a fundamental change: The cultural and environmental questions that emerged in the way of Katrina should compel a rethinking of the viability of contemporary approaches to organizing complex technological societies, especially as it relates to questions of ecological change.

All the essays in this book offer crucial insights to what we have termed the "cultural politics of Hurricane Katrina." We want to thank Hans Niehues, Anne Potjans, and Heike Steinhoff for their help in the various stages of editing this volume. We are grateful to everyone included in this book for their contributions and smooth cooperation on this project. We are happy about the unique opportunity to show Lewis Watts's photographic work on the cover and throughout this book. The graffiti shown in the cover photograph offers a meaningful intertextual reference that sets the stage for this collection.¹ In "The Rainbow Sign," Hanif Kureishi talks about an important photo he remembers from his formative years: "On the cover of the Penguin edition of *The Fire Next Time* was James Baldwin holding a child, his nephew. Baldwin, having suffered, having

1 Baldwin's use of the phrase "The Fire Next Time" has not only inspired the spray-painter who wrote it on the veranda in Watts's photo, but also other writers and artists, who have quoted it once again to question constructions of race and negotiate the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Among them are Hanif Kureishi's long autobiographical essay on Pakistani-British identity, and Randall Kenan's collection of essays *The Fire This Time* (2007), both of which pay explicit homage to Baldwin.

been there, was all anger and understanding. He was intelligence and love combined.” (1996: 77) By referencing Baldwin’s book-title with Lewis Watts’s photo on the cover, we suggest that Baldwin’s intellectual and emotional range of response to racism in the US – anger and understanding, intelligence and love – motivates the creative and academic work in this book.

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