

# **“The Price You Pay”:** Negotiating for Permanence in the Lake Catherine Community of New Orleans



Laura Wooley  
Fellowship Report,  
**Hixon Center for  
Urban Ecology**  
*Yale School of  
Forestry and  
Environmental  
Studies, 2004*

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## **Introduction: to the edge of the edge**

Called “a city on the environmental edge,”<sup>1</sup> New Orleans has probably always seemed (to the outsider) to be both impossible and inevitable. New Orleans’ location in the highly productive but fragile deltaic plain of south Louisiana has proved to be of unparalleled strategic value throughout the city’s history, while at the same time defying human attempts to discipline the landscape.<sup>2</sup> The following interrelated ecological factors affect the biophysical ecosystem of southern Louisiana: the Mississippi River trying to change course, land subsidence, coastal erosion, sea level rise, saltwater intrusion, a predicted increase in destruction from hurricanes, increased incidence and severity of flooding, and a spreading apoxic lesion in the Gulf of Mexico. Whether or not these factors can be treated is a question that will only be answered after billions of dollars are spent on restoration projects.

Due to rapid wetland loss since the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, New Orleans’ and southern Louisiana’s infrastructure and population are said to be more vulnerable to hurricane-related storm surges than they were less than 100 years ago.<sup>3</sup> The scientific consensus is that every 2.7 miles of coastal marsh lost between solid land and open water add one foot to the height of a storm surge reaching solid land.<sup>4</sup> Although hurricane levees brace the New Orleans metro area south of Lake Pontchartrain (See Figure 1: “the limits of urbanized territory” corresponds roughly to the contours of the hurricane levee system), the loss of wetlands means that storm surges are more likely, with the right hurricane, to overtop the levee system and fill up the bowl that is the city: once water fills the area within the levee system, it has nowhere to go.<sup>5</sup> That localized torrential downpours, typical in summer, often overwhelm the city’s pumping system, stranding cars and flooding ground-floor rooms, makes this prospect all the more fearsome.

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<sup>1</sup> From the promotional brochure and web page for the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Society of Environmental Journalists conference in New Orleans, September 10-14, 2003.

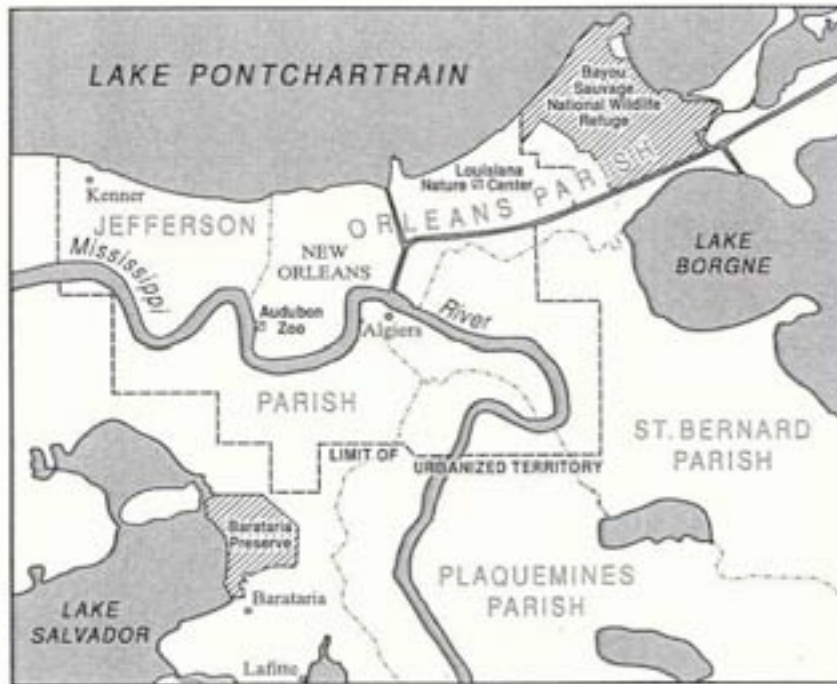
<sup>2</sup> For an excellent overview of the importance of landscape and location in New Orleans’ evolution, see Peirce Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape* (Santa Fe, NM and Harrisonburg, VA: Center for American Places, 2003) 200 p.

<sup>3</sup> Some say that the erection of flood control structures in response to the devastating Flood of 1927 marks the beginning of rapid wetland deterioration [citation forthcoming].

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *1961 Interim Survey Report: Mississippi River Delta at and Below New Orleans, Louisiana*. New Orleans District, December 29, 1961: A-11, IN Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, *No Time to Lose: the Future of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, LA: 2000 revision) 25.

<sup>5</sup> Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, *No Time to Lose: the Future of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, LA: 2000 revision) 39.

Figure 1. Selected Wetlands in the New Orleans Metropolitan Area.



Cartography by Mary Lee Eggart.

Figure 1. Map of New Orleans metropolitan area showing the approximate limits of urbanization. Outside these lines, development is rather sparse.<sup>6</sup>

### **I. Coastal communities in Louisiana—some context**

Statewide, a major anxiety is that coastal erosion, flooding and the threat of hurricane-induced destruction will pose more and more severe constraints on human activities, ultimately leading to extensive displacement of coastal communities.<sup>7</sup> The majority of Louisiana's coastal communities threatened by ecological change are small, ethnically homogeneous, and dependent either on agriculture or on the natural resources of the area. This is perhaps to be expected of a region so rich in organic buildup and moisture: "The Louisiana Coastal Zone...because of its special deltaic character, many cultural-environmental relationships are still apparent and perhaps will persist longer here than in

<sup>6</sup> As displayed IN Craig E. Colten, "Reintroducing nature to the city: Wetlands in New Orleans." *Environmental History* 7(2) 2002: 227.

<sup>7</sup> This is of course to say nothing of the effects of these processes on other locally, regionally and nationally important ecosystem functions: estuarine and marine fisheries, oil and gas infrastructure, migratory waterfowl seasonal habitats, etc.

adjacent areas,”<sup>8</sup> noted geographer Herbert Padgett in 1969. To be sure, hurricanes and flooding are periodic disturbances, and subsidence a natural process that humans cannot prevent entirely. Individuals and communities have adapted to it, and they will continue to do so. But erosion has now accelerated such that some vulnerable coastal communities are beginning to migrate landward.<sup>9</sup> And yet other Louisiana coastal communities are expanding.<sup>10</sup>

This paper will discuss some of the social, economic and cultural characteristics of a part recreational, part residential community of waterfront piling-mounted dwellings,<sup>11</sup> known as “camps,” that lies within New Orleans city limits. There are approximately 1,000-1,100 fishing/boating/residential camps in Orleans Parish,<sup>12</sup> and they are distributed between two main communities, Lake Catherine island<sup>13</sup> and Irish Bayou, Lake Catherine island being the larger by far with approximately 800 camps (1992).<sup>14</sup> The most rapid proliferation of camp structures on Lake Catherine island occurred during the 1960s and early 1970s, despite the setbacks brought about by Hurricanes Betsy (1965) and Camille (1969), which destroyed close to 800 camps.<sup>15</sup> A third segment of Lake Ponchartrain shoreline, along Hayne Boulevard to the west of the Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge, used to be a popular spot for New Orleanians to build camps, not on land but hovering above state-owned water bottoms.<sup>16</sup> However, after Hurricane Georges in 1998, only two camps in this area were left standing, and

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<sup>8</sup> Herbert R. Padgett (1969). Physical and Cultural Associations on the Louisiana Coast. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 59 (3), Sept 1969. 481-493

<sup>9</sup> Shirley Laska, personal communication, 18 Jul., 2003

<sup>10</sup> “Coast is booming despite insurance company flight, hurricane threat,” *Associated Press State and Local Wire*, 17 Aug. 2002 (LexisNexis™ reprint)

<sup>11</sup> In other words, houses on stilts. Raising the ground floor of dwellings above the 100-year flood level is not only an adaptation to frequent flooding, but also a requirement for obtaining building permits and flood insurance.

<sup>12</sup> Burk-Kleinpeter, Inc. *East New Orleans Sewerage Feasibility Study, Hayne Boulevard, Little Woods, Irish Bayou, Lake Catherine; draft report*. (Prepared for Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans and Louisiana Office of Public Health. New Orleans, LA, 1992.

<sup>13</sup> The name of this island is disputed. Arriollia “Bonnie” Vanney insists that the island itself has no name, that only the communities on the island have names, such as Lake Catherine, Chef Pass, etc. But the two organizations whose service area is the entire island, Lake Catherine Community Center and Lake Catherine Camp and Landowners Civic Association, have adopted “Lake Catherine” for self-identification.

<sup>14</sup> Burk-Kleinpeter, Inc. *East New Orleans Sewerage Feasibility Study, Hayne Boulevard, Little Woods, Irish Bayou, Lake Catherine; draft report*. (Prepared for Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans and Louisiana Office of Public Health. New Orleans, LA, 1992: I-1-3.

<sup>15</sup> Don L. Gary and Donald W. Davis, *Recreational Dwellings in the Louisiana Coastal Marsh*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Sea Grant Publication, 1979): 64.

<sup>16</sup> Burk-Kleinpeter, Inc. *East New Orleans Sewerage Feasibility Study, Hayne Boulevard, Little Woods, Irish Bayou, Lake Catherine; draft report*. (Prepared for Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans and Louisiana Office of Public Health. New Orleans, LA, 1992: I-1-1.

campowners were not permitted to rebuild.<sup>17</sup> Some of these displaced individuals chose to build or buy camps on Lake Catherine island.

It is not dismissive or facile to presume that the people who participate in “camp culture” value it enough to make personal sacrifices. Whether they are avid fishers, cherish the scenic and other sensory amenities of the landscape, or derive irreplaceable meaning from the lifestyle or social connections, the economically diverse membership of the Lake Catherine community has a robust survivalist spirit: as one *Times-Picayune* journalist put it, “They believe they turned marshland no one else wanted into their own special paradise.”<sup>18</sup> The time and money these people invest out of physical necessity (i.e., preserving, repairing and rebuilding their structures and land) is simply, “the price you pay to live in paradise.”<sup>19</sup> In the intertwined narratives that follow, the reader will see support for the proposition that, “Groups that seemingly emerge around using, protecting or altering the physical attributes of a location may be engaging in more fundamental processes of defining significant social and cultural meaning to that place.”<sup>20</sup>

The general focus of my inquiry into this community has been the complex of relationships between people and place, which has as much to do with individual and group identity as with natural resource use. Primarily through analysis of the oral and written language surrounding land tenure relationships and local and regional environmental problems, as well as that of local historical narratives, I attempt to bring out political, socioeconomic and social psychological elements that affect and are affected by the island’s landscape. Without wishing to dip this entire paper in the dye of sense of place literature, I have used an emphasis on “place”<sup>21</sup> to help make use of my richest source of data—the language that community members themselves use to talk about Lake Catherine island. The language I try to analyze here reveals much about people-land relationships, but more importantly leads toward questions with wide political, economic and ecological implications: “Research about power relationships in

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Schleifstein, personal communication, 5 Aug. 2003.

<sup>18</sup> “LA law may send fishing camps down the drain,” *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 9 May 1990.

<sup>19</sup> Teri Woolverton, personal communication, 31 Jul. 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Antony S. Cheng, Linda E. Kruger, Steven E. Daniels, “Place as an Integrating Concept in Natural Resource Politics: Propositions for a Social Science Research Agenda,” *Society and Natural Resources* 16 (2003): 96 (Proposition 3).

<sup>21</sup> Yi Fu Tuan’s sense of this word is probably the most often quoted: “a center of meaning” or “field of care” (from Yi Fu Tuan, “Place: An Experiential Perspective,” *Geographical Review* 65 (Apr 1975): 151-165)

social negotiations over places is greatly needed, and the study of (Greider & Garkovich 1994, p. 21) ‘the symbolic creation of landscape, the cultural meanings of aspects of the physical environment and biophysical changes in this environment, and the values and beliefs that sustain these symbols and meanings’ is as warranted in recreation, leisure and tourism as in other contexts.”<sup>22</sup>

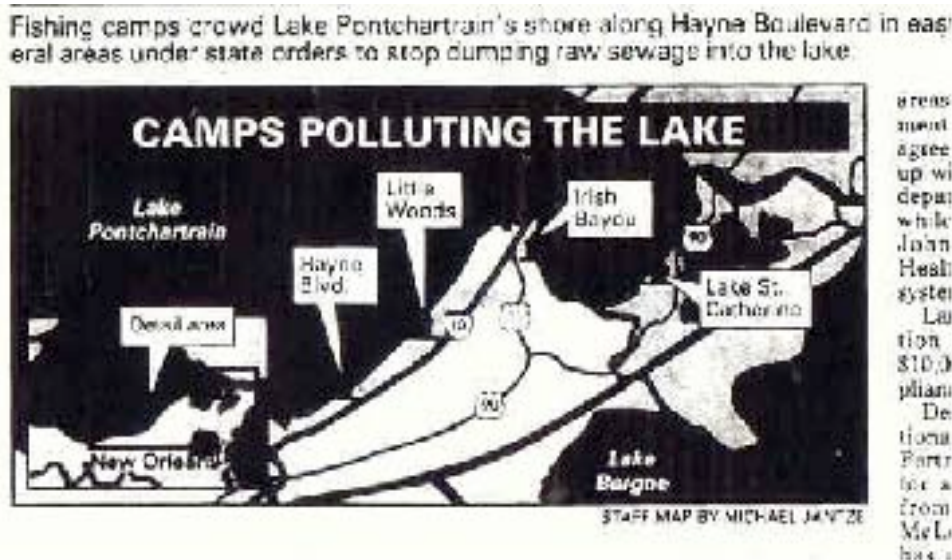


Figure 2: Graphic from the *Times-Picayune* (“Lake camps told to clean up their acts,” *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 13 May 1991: A-8) showing the location of the fishing-camp areas within New Orleans city limits.

## **II. Lake Catherine, the place**

### ***Introduction***

Called Lake Catherine in the New Orleans metro White Pages<sup>23</sup> and Lake St. Catherine by a sign recently installed at key locations, this delicate spine of land permits the high grounded US Highway 90 to thread its way through the marshes from the Chef Menteur Pass to the Rigolets, both of which are deep and fast moving channels carrying tides into and out of Lake Pontchartrain. Known to many locals as simply “the island,” the area has

<sup>22</sup> Stokowski, Patricia A, “Languages of Place and Discourses of Power: Constructing New Senses of Place” *Journal of Leisure Research* 34 (2002): 368.

<sup>23</sup> I was told by Louis Viavant, native resident and owner of Chef Harbor Marina (6/25/03), that the island only came to be considered a consolidated place when the telephone company assigned a common prefix (662) to island customers’ phone numbers. The White Pages lists Lake Catherine separately from New Orleans, “in the back of the phonebook like the other stepchildren” (Louis Viavant, personal communication, 25 Jun. 2003)

provided a stirring landscape for recreational and residential camps since the 1830s.<sup>24</sup> Less than 30 miles from downtown New Orleans, this nine-mile strip of land and marsh, although officially part of the City of New Orleans, is minimally developed, the vista dominated by flood-tolerant shrubs and tall marsh grasses. Camps are not eminently visible to the motorist, who, probably traveling at 55 miles or more per hour, would do best not to try peering through the roadside vegetation just to get a glimpse.

The community, or group of communities, consists of nearly 800 dwellings (54% part time or weekend, 44% full time, 2% commercial or other<sup>25</sup>), arranged more or less linearly along the highway with access in back to the surrounding waterways; a minority of camps (less than 100) are built on diverging roads where the land accommodates such development. Based on my own interpolation, lot sizes typically do not exceed 2 acres.<sup>26</sup> The land tenure arrangement that had held status quo until very recently for the vast majority of Lake Catherine campowners consisted of large tracts leased as unsurveyed parcels<sup>27</sup> to individuals and families who built or purchased—and therefore owned—the structures thereupon. On the western end of the island (on land owned by Chef Menteur Land Company), many of the parcels have been dredged to accommodate boat slips; further towards the Rigolets, campowners have tended simply to build piers for fishing (See aerial photos, Appendices A and B).

This place has existed in its present form only since the 1940s. Lake Catherine island is not culturally, ethnically or occupationally representative of the fishing/shrimping communities that have historically settled the Louisiana coastal marshes. No typical bayou ethnicity or ancestry flavors island life,<sup>28</sup> and the 19:1 ratio of whites to non-whites in Census tract 17.34<sup>29</sup>, makes it an outlier in New Orleans.

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<sup>24</sup> Don L. Gary and Donald W. Davis, *Recreational Dwellings in the Louisiana Coastal Marsh*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Sea Grant Publication, 1979) 56.

<sup>25</sup> A 1992 survey by Burk-Kleinpeter, Inc. asked a sample from each of the two largest campowner groups (Lake Catherine Land Company and Chef Menteur Land Company), as well as a sample of 44 from among the remaining three groups, about their usage and occupancy of camp structures, as part of a Sewer System Feasibility Study carried out for the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans, among other stakeholders.

<sup>26</sup> The Chef Menteur Land Company plot is but 438.79 acres total ( from “Hopes fade for fishing camps; fate hinges on sewer project,” *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 15 April 1995: Real Estate R1), which means that each of the nearly 300 campsites is not even 2 acres on average.

<sup>27</sup> Length of highway frontage has served as a proxy for actual lot size.

<sup>28</sup> Inference based on 1990 Census SF 3-Sample Data: “Ancestry” and a quick survey of surnames in the Lake Catherine section of the New Orleans White Pages 2002-2003.

<sup>29</sup> Census 2000 SF-3 Sample Data: “Race.” Census tract 17.34 includes Lake Catherine island, Irish Bayou and Venetian Isles communities of New Orleans, Lake Catherine island being the most populous.



Commercial fishing is said to have had its heyday, but does not appear to predominate in any sense.<sup>30</sup> Trapping and hunting are not sources of livelihood, either. People have set up and settled in the “Poor Man’s Riviera”<sup>31</sup> primarily for recreational purposes. They have willingly invested in and located themselves in this vulnerable spot outside New Orleans’ hurricane levees, putting their “hearts and souls”<sup>32</sup> into the construction of their camps which can be damaged or destroyed at any time.

Although I was not able to visit more than a few camps on the island, I was able to get some sense of how their location, on the edge of the marsh along the lakes, inspired the possessive love of those who own them. From a camp on Lake Catherine island, one can saturate with the glorious and impossible expansiveness of marsh and lake. The piling-supported, elevated living spaces seem to give camp owners an ideal vantage point from which to actually be entertained by the weather.

### ***“The price you pay”***

Besides flooding, there are many other hazards and inconveniences which must be adapted to. First of all, the island is connected to the mainland (Orleans Parish to the west and St. Tammany Parish to the east) by antiquated swing bridges built in the 1930s, designed to “open” (meaning *close* to vehicular traffic) for the many vessels that travel the Rigolets or the Chef Menteur Pass between Lakes Borgne and Pontchartrain (Please see map, Figure 3). The bridges are said to be inadequate now and to seize up in the “open” position in hot weather (see Figure 4); moreover, boat traffic can be remarkably heavy at times, requiring the bridges to remain “open” for crippling lengths of time. Aside from the inconvenience this imposes on campowners, a fundamental concern is the relative inaccessibility of this island to police and emergency response vehicles.

Fires are more worrisome in marshy areas than in urbanized areas simply because, when allowed to desiccate as during a drought, the highly organic soils associated with marshland are quite flammable, along with the dead and partially decaying marsh

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<sup>30</sup> Caveat 1: Although declining fish stocks in the area—and rumors thereof—are certainly of great significance on several levels, research on this topic does not lend itself well to short-term field research. In the interest of streamlining the variables I have been considering, I decided to leave this question for future research.

<sup>31</sup> Quoting Jimmy Huck, local resident, from: Gary Raymond (webmaster/editor) *Lake Catherine Newsletter*, 2003 (independently-run website) New Orleans, LA, 12 Dec. 2003, <<http://news.arc.tzo.com/lccc/lcnews.php>>

<sup>32</sup> Quoting local resident, Heidi Barker, 25 Jun. 2003.

vegetation of winter months. Some fires have been caused by rabbit hunters who have lost control of burns set to expose rabbits, and some have ignited from sparks coming off the railroad tracks.<sup>33</sup> In response to the city's inability to provide consistent fire response, islanders accepted a donated fire truck from the city and established the Fort Pike Volunteer Fire Department in 1952.<sup>34</sup> Because there are no fire hydrants on the island, the firefighters must pump water out of the surrounding water bodies in order to extinguish fires.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Arriollia "Bonnie" Vanney, *An Island Between the Chef and Rigolets*, (Slidell, LA: self-published with Dudley Smith Printing, 2003)

<sup>34</sup> Arriollia "Bonnie" Vanney, *An Island Between the Chef and Rigolets*, (Slidell, LA: self-published with Dudley Smith Printing, 2003): Chapter 7 (pages unnumbered). See also islander Roy Heyl's "Community needs more volunteer firefighters; Lake Catherine gets help from NOFD," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA) 22 Feb. 2004: OFF THE WHARF 1.

<sup>35</sup> "Benefit ball proceeds aid fire department," *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 25 Jan 2004: ST. BERNARD PICAYUNE 1.

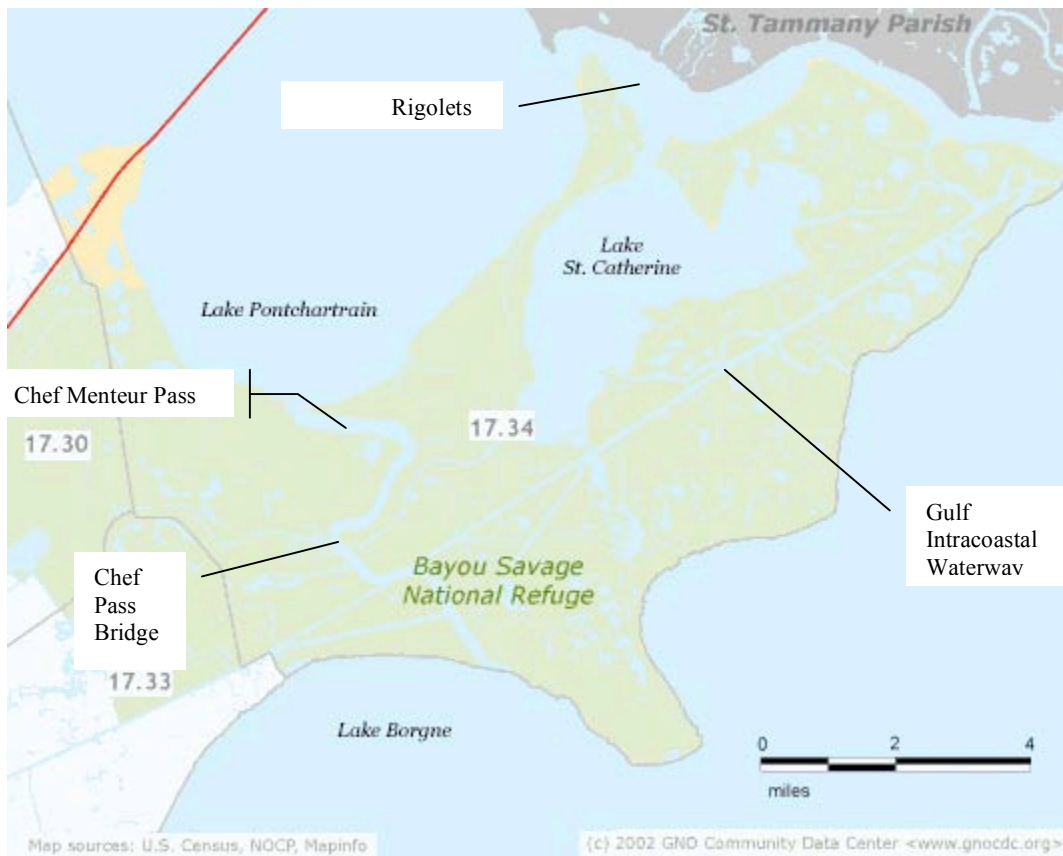


Figure 3. Lake Catherine island starts from the west at Chef Menteur Pass and extends northeast to the Rigolets, but does not include the marshes to the south and east (most of which now belong to the US Fish and Wildlife Service). Lake Borgne is more or less a bay of the Gulf of Mexico.



Figure 4. Line of traffic waiting to cross Chef Menteur bridge onto Lake Catherine island (from the Orleans Parish side). Sometimes the bridge malfunctions, leading to delays of an hour or more.

Because it is such a direct route out of urbanized New Orleans, Chef Menteur Highway (Highway 90) has always drawn a stream of illegal dumping activity out of the city to where potential witnesses are few. People often go no further than the side of the highway to rid themselves of tires, household garbage, unwanted cars, and furniture, but the trash clogs the ditches, marshes and canals throughout this rural zone spatially (and otherwise) beyond the concern of the police. People living on the island, perhaps by virtue of being relatively close to the state line, were more likely to tell me that Mississippi residents (identifiable by license tags) were the dumpers, especially of trash. Bayou Sauvage NWR staff, however, say that residents from all over metro New Orleans (identifiable by discarded mail in household garbage) were the usual dumping culprits.<sup>36</sup>

To this day, none of the camps have street addresses, only camp names on handpainted signs along the roadway (See Figure 5).<sup>37</sup> The mailboxes in front of the camps are numbered, but they are numbered deceptively: the numbers start on the south

<sup>36</sup> Shelley Stiaes, personal communication, 9 Jul, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Examples include “Serenity,” “Dat’s a No-No,” “Camp Sunshine,” and “Less is More.”

side (known as the Lake St. Catherine side) of the highway, go all the way to the end of the island (Rigolets), then curve around and continue on the north side (the Lake Pontchartrain side), rising in the opposite direction. Although some residents have objected to the introduction of conventional street addresses to island culture as an invasion of their anonymity,<sup>38</sup> community leaders in the Lake Catherine Camp and Landowners Civic Organization assert that emergency response is crippled by the confusion in locating residences. The city has the camps divided into 10 numbered zones, with the numbers increasing towards the Rigolets, but it is believed that this is of little use in determining which side of the highway a particular camp is located.



Figure 5. Camp name on a sign along Highway 90, with numbered mailbox to the right. Camp itself is concealed by the vegetation.

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<sup>38</sup> Leo F. Richardson, III, personal communication, 13 Aug. 2003; Gary Raymond (webmaster), *Lake Catherine Newsletter*, 2003, New Orleans, LA, 08 Dec. 2003 <http://news.arc.tzo.com/lccc/lcnews.php#082003>.

Along the span of this island, there are very few businesses that front on the highway—just four bar-restaurants, three seafood sellers, two marinas, and one crane and bulldozer service. There are no supermarkets, convenience stores, pharmacies; nor are there schools, health clinics, police stations,<sup>39</sup> libraries, or other public spaces normally associated with urban, suburban and even many rural communities.<sup>40</sup> The completion in the late 1960s of Interstate 10, running east-west but to the north of US 90, is blamed for the failure of many of the social capital-generating venues, such as family restaurants, general stores and clubs. There is, however, a Catholic church whose priest resides in a trailer beside it, New Orleans' only volunteer fire department, and a fort on the shore of the Rigolets dating from the War of 1812<sup>41</sup> that serves as a state historic park (Fort Pike). The site and some original buildings of the Tally Ho Club, founded in 1836 and said to be the oldest hunting and fishing club in the US<sup>42</sup>, are also crouching somewhere in the marshy fringe along Chef Menteur Pass.

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<sup>39</sup> The nearest police station is seven miles away.

<sup>40</sup> The completion in the late 1960s of Interstate 10, running east-west but to the north of US 90, is blamed for the failure of many of the social capital-generating public spaces, such as family restaurants, general stores and clubs.

<sup>41</sup> Larry Denny, personal communication 23 Jul. 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Chuck Deckleman, personal communication, 22 Jun. 2003; Leo F. Richardson, III, personal communication 13 Aug. 2003.





Figure 6. Photo of LC island residents and regulars at Bizzy Bee bait shop and boat launch, where I did most of my casual participant observation. The casual atmosphere nurtures and is nurtured by mutual trust. Manager Lola Benfield (right, standing) runs tabs for several people, sometimes for hundreds of dollars.

### *Lake Catherine demographic characteristics*

Three striking demographic features of the census tract that contains Lake Catherine<sup>43</sup> are its high proportion of senior citizens and relative absence of children, its nearly 100% white racial composition, and its low median educational attainment compared with other parts of the city of New Orleans.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Caveat 2: I have been unable to obtain Census information about the island of Lake Catherine by itself. The Census tract including the island also includes Venetian Isles (population approximately 300) and Irish Bayou, and it consists of only one Block Group. Although I did not conduct any field interviews or participant observation in Irish Bayou, from what I have read about the community and what Lake Catherine community members have said, it is my impression that this community of less than 150 camps (Burk-Kleinpeter, 1992) is rather similar to Lake Catherine island. I have conducted two key informant interviews of Venetian Isles residents and one of a former resident, and am convinced that this subdivision community also shares demographic and social traits with Lake Catherine island. I hope my readers will agree that despite the fact that approximately one quarter of Census tract 17.34's population are not Lake Catherine islanders, the data I use here is nevertheless illustrative.

<sup>44</sup> Except where indicated, *all* Census 2000 figures in this report are taken from the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center website at <http://www.gnocdc.org>, last accessed on 17 Dec 2003.

**Age structure:** 19.2% of the population in this tract is 65 years of age or over, as compared with Orleans Parish<sup>45</sup> (11.7%), Louisiana (11.5%) and the United States (12.4%). There are very few children (under 18 years of age) living in the area: just 13.6% of the population is under 18, as compared with 26.7%, 27.2%, and 25.7% for Orleans Parish, Louisiana and the US, respectively.

- **Interpretation:** The high percentage of older people reflects the attractiveness of the area for retirees, many of whom purchase or build camps before retirement. Upon retirement, they sell their city homes and move into the camps permanently. Aside from this demographic group, there are also aging fishermen who have remained on the island due to a combination of place attachment and a low cost of living. Besides simply being the other side to the retirement community coin, the small number of children may be due to the area's spatial and infrastructural constraints, which are discussed above. There is only the highway connecting the camps, too dangerous for children to cross alone or for cycling, and there are few public spaces on the island—*none* designed for children. Although there are myriad water-based activities available, there is not much opportunity for children to bump into other children, simply because of the linear arrangement of the community and the distances involved.

**Educational attainment:** Only 13.5% of the population over 25 in tract 17.34 has received bachelor's degrees or higher, compared with 25.8% in Orleans Parish. This group is remarkably undereducated compared with the white population of New Orleans as a whole, 46.9% of which has a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, 26.5% do not have a high school diploma, compared with just 4.7% of New Orleans' white population. Oddly enough, 2000 Census figures show a decrease since 1990 in the percentage of the tract 17.34 population that hold bachelor's degrees or higher.

**Racial composition:** Given New Orleans' Black/African-American majority of 67.0%, a community within city limits that is 97.1% white is unusual.<sup>47</sup> The area's geographic

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<sup>45</sup> Synonymous with New Orleans city.

<sup>46</sup> Census 2000 SF 3-Sample data, "Educational attainment" (Universe: White alone population over 25)

<sup>47</sup> According to the 2000 Census, however, there are 20 individuals in this tract who identify as Black or African-American; there were zero in 1990. I got the impression from an interview with Ken Cowie (22 Jun, 2003), resident of Venetian Isles, that most of these 20 African-American residents moved into the Venetian Isles neighborhood during the 1990s. Cowie also mentioned that Venetian Isles had become popular for suburban-oriented police officers and fire fighters, all of whom must live within Orleans Parish in order to be eligible for promotion.



isolation from the city (23,000 acres of wildlife refuge lie between Lake Catherine/Venetian Isles and urbanized, predominantly African-American New Orleans East), as well as its residents' unconcealed racial attitudes (David Duke for Senate signs posted along the highway during the 1990s<sup>48</sup>) surely deterred non-white potential immigrants to the island.<sup>49</sup> As one camp owner puts it:

You have a very strong black population in Eastern New Orleans. When you cross that bridge, it's totally different racially...A lot of people that are down there have very strong racial feelings and they detest any kind of influence from...New Orleans.<sup>50</sup>

In an older, less educated population that is geographically separate from the rest of the city (and located in the Deep South), it should not be alarming to see evidence of racially-prejudiced attitudes. On numerous occasions, when I asked a community member to discuss reasons for re-locating to the island, I heard this statement repeated almost exactly: "I used to live in [name of lower-class or working class neighborhood in New Orleans], but when it went 99% black, I decided to move out here." Few parents have opted to raise children on the island, so moving residences to the island cannot be interpreted as a direct response to the integration of public schools.<sup>51</sup> However, objection to this aspect of city life, along with fear of crime,<sup>52</sup> have certainly motivated many of the older adults living on the island to relocate to more suburban areas, and island life may represent a second stage removal in many cases.

Given the city's perceived inadequacy, why haven't islanders left Orleans Parish altogether? One reason given by islanders is that many of the people who opt to live on the island or in nearby Venetian Isles are employed by the City of New Orleans (as police officers, fire fighters, etc.) and therefore required by law to reside within city limits;<sup>53</sup> if it were not for this rule, these residents might well have chosen to live in tax-rich St. Tammany Parish just across the Rigolets. Others living on the island full-time are

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<sup>48</sup> Teri Woolverton, personal communication, 31 Jul. 2003

<sup>49</sup> Although no one I've spoken to about Lake Catherine has ever suggested that the land companies who own and lease the land practiced discrimination in the screening of potential buyers or lessees, it would not surprise me in the least.

<sup>50</sup> Ronald Rauber, personal communication, 9 Jul. 2003

<sup>51</sup> See Peirce Lewis' (2003) book for an overview of the consequences of a failed integration: the whites simply enrolled their children in private schools, or took off for neighboring parishes. Middle-class blacks put their children in private schools as well.

<sup>52</sup> None of the interviewees seemed to make any causal connection between the financially drained public school system and the high crime rate, although I did not suggest it, either.

<sup>53</sup> Father Arthur "Red" Ginart has perceived a recent "influx" of police officers because of this law. (Revered Arthur Ginart, personal communication, 31 Jul. 2003)

commercial fishers who sell in New Orleans markets. It is important also to emphasize that the geographic isolation of the island makes it socially quite remote from the big city to its west.

**Informal economy?:** It has already been noted that the population of tract 17.34 is advanced in age compared with the total populations of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana, and so it should not come as much of a surprise that a higher percentage of the population 16 years and over is not in the labor force. However, a figure of 48.1%, compared with 42.2% in Orleans Parish, 40.6% in Louisiana, and 36.1% in the United States, suggests that an unusual proportion of the non-elderly population is also out of the labor force. In one assumes, either correctly or incorrectly, that all the residents of this tract who are over the age of 65 are also not in the labor force, there is still quite a bit of room in that figure for younger persons who are not in the labor force.

Only 58.5% of all households in tract 17.34 receive a wage or salary income (compared with percentages in the 70s for Orleans Parish, Louisiana, and the US), but a hefty 18.8% of households receive self-employment income,<sup>54,55</sup> which is 6.9 percentage points higher than the national figure, in a city and state whose figures for self-employment are lower than the national figure. The percentage of households receiving Social Security income in this tract is also higher than those of city, state and nation: 36.6% as compared with values of 24.7%, 25.2%, and 25.7%, respectively. This, again, is not surprising, given the age structure of the tract's population. The percentage of people receiving public assistance in tract 17.34 (0.7%) is far below the national percentage of 3.4%, whereas 5.4% of Orleans Parish residents receive from this source.

Given that in this area, 13.3% of the total civilian noninstitutionalized population aged 16 to 64 claims an Employment disability (just barely lower than the figure for Orleans Parish, but higher than those for Louisiana and the U.S.), it is somewhat surprising that so few receive public assistance income. Note also that 26.5% of the total civilian noninstitutionalized population 5 years and over claims a disability; although this figure is less than five percentage points higher than those for Orleans Parish or Louisiana, it is 6.8 percentage points higher than the national figure.

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<sup>54</sup> Households may list more than one income source on the Census form.

<sup>55</sup> Although the Census does not give figures for income derived from commercial fishing, this has certainly been an important part of the local economy in the past, and it is said to be much less so now.

If one takes the relatively high rate of self-employment into consideration (even though no indication is given of how much income households are receiving from self-employment), perhaps the figures appear more commensurate with one another. Indeed, a picture begins to emerge from the data, of a community whose population is detached from the mainstream workforce, by virtue of retirement, disability or alternate sources of income. This supports my observations in the field of an informal economy, where crafts, labor, services, game and fish, and other items are traded within a particular social network.

**Wealth and income:** Lake Catherine island could be described as economically diverse: “The mix is of white collar, blue collar, every collar in between and those without any collar at all.”<sup>56</sup> This is reflected in the even distribution of incomes: 23.8% are in the 2000 census’ lowest income brackets (Less than \$10,000 and \$10,000-\$14,999, 28.4% earn between \$50,000 and \$99,999, and a good 9.4% earn more than \$100,000 per year. The diversity in value of homes is also interesting (See Table 1 below), because the upward stretch in range of values is said to have accelerated in recent years. Indeed, the median value of specified owner-occupied housing units increased by 76.6%, from \$66,100<sup>57</sup> to \$116,700, between 1990 and 2000. Higher-income families have either built larger, more expensive camps than their neighbors and predecessors, or have invested in expansion and modernization of camps passed down to them.<sup>58</sup> Several islanders suggested to me that a new generation has been altering the cultural economy of the Lake Catherine area for the past decade or so. However, as is corroborated in Table 1, there are still a significant number of houses in the low-value range.

“Value of specified owner-occupied housing units” <sup>59</sup> 2000	Census Tract 17.34 (pop. 1749)	New Orleans city/ Orleans Parish	Louisiana
Lower value quartile	\$51,900	\$63,300	\$57,000
Median value	\$116,700	\$87,300	\$85,000
Upper value quartile	\$165,300	\$142,100	\$128,900

<sup>56</sup> From an unpublished (as of this writing) article by Roy Heyl, Jr., called “Vintage Louisiana.”

<sup>57</sup> Census 1990 SF-3 Sample Characteristics: “Median value of specified owner-occupied housing units”

<sup>58</sup> Gary Raymond, personal communication, 12 Nov. 2003.

<sup>59</sup> Census 2000, SF 3-Sample data.

Table 1. The range of values for tract 17.34 appears to be wider than those of New Orleans or Louisiana. Unfortunately, upper and lower quartiles are not available from the 1990 Census, but the Median value of houses in tract 17.34 for 1990 was just \$66,100.

**Occupancy of housing units:** The table below shows that recreational camp use is increasing slightly faster than residential use. Some of the Lake Catherine islanders with whom I communicated perceived a recent increase in the ratio of full-time to part-time residents that is not borne out in the table below. According to Gary Raymond, webmaster of the Lake Catherine Newsletter, “The last 5 years has seen many more full time residents appearing as well as several new modern residences.”<sup>60</sup> While this may be true of the Lake Catherine Land Company community, or simply not reflected in the 2000 data, it does not appear that any major shift occurred since 1990 on the island as a whole.

#### Occupancy of housing units in Census Tract 17.34

Count	1990 Census <sup>61</sup>	2000 Census <sup>62</sup>
Total housing units	1145	1308
Occupied	718	817
Vacant	427	491
Seasonal, recreational or occasional use	327 28.6% of total housing units	444 33.9% of total housing units
Ratio of full-time to part-time occupied HU	2.2:1	1.8:1
Increase (1990-2000) in number of F/T occupied HU	99	
Increase (1990-2000) in number of recreational HU	117	

Table 2. Housing unit occupancy in Census tract 17.34.

<sup>60</sup> Gary Raymond (webmaster), *Lake Catherine Newsletter*, 2003, New Orleans, LA, 08 Dec. 2003  
<<http://news.arc.tzo.com/lccc/lcnews.php#082003>>

<sup>61</sup> From 1990 Census SF 3-Sample Data: “Occupancy Status,” “Vacancy Status.”

<sup>62</sup> From 2000 Census SF 3-Sample Data: “Occupancy Status,” “Vacancy Status.”



Figure 7. New construction of larger dwellings on Lake Catherine island. Note that driveways have not been laid down yet; by law, each improvement to a lot requires a separate permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.<sup>63</sup>

### **Erosion and Storm-related Impacts on the Island**

Of all the non-anthropogenic ecosystem disturbances affecting human habitats in southern Louisiana and the New Orleans metropolitan area, hurricane storm surges and chronic erosion seem to cost Lake Catherine islanders the most time and money. Hurricanes are a constant threat, but campowners express more anxiety about loss of property than personal injury or death. Although hurricane and tropical storm casualties seem to be a thing of the past, due to greatly improved advance warning and communications systems, it is clear that virtually all Lake Catherine island campowners must accept varying degrees of property damage as a result of storms. I have no good estimate as to what percent of campowners abandon severely damaged camps after storms, for I only talked to people who remained and rebuilt; hurricanes are a big worry for them from June through November, but they accept having to rebuild camps, and seem to take pride in their adaptability.

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<sup>63</sup> Kelley et al's *Living with the Louisiana Shore* (1984) uses camp construction on Lake Catherine island to illustrate the endless number of bureaucratic procedures required for campowners to reach compliance and apply for insurance.



Figure 8. Photo taken at Fort Pike State Historic Site. The blue lines on the wall, labeled “Isidore” and “Lily,” mark the indoor flood levels brought about by Tropical Storm Isidore and Hurricane Lili, which occurred one week apart in late September/early October 2002.

Hurricane winds and storm surges may destroy property, but islanders also worry that if they evacuate, their homes will be looted (by outsiders, mainly from Mississippi<sup>64</sup>) before they return to the island. Many people store personal property at ground level, and, depending on its direction, any storm surge can deposit these items along the highway, sometimes miles from their original locations. Passersby will take advantage of this situation, and according to residents, there is little that can be done to stop them, short of closing the bridges to outsiders for a length of time after each storm.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> The question of racial composition in these perceived sources of larceny naturally arises, and I regret that I did not probe for the details of this common local perception.

<sup>65</sup> Roy Heyl, Jr., personal communication, 3 Nov. 2003. Heyl is president of the Lake Catherine Land and Campowners Civic Organization.



Figure 9. Rubbish and debris piled close to the road waiting to be picked up. This heap may consist of islanders' refuse, or it may have been dumped by an outsider to the area.

Perhaps out of a desire to “hold down the fort,” many Lake Catherine residents are said not to evacuate during storms, even when the mayor and other city officials recommend doing so. Some of the people I talked to said that they wait and watch a storm’s track, and judge by its reported wind speed, whether or not evacuation is really necessary. If predictions are true—that New Orleans will fill like a bowl given the right storm—then living outside the hurricane levee system (and along a designated hurricane evacuation route) might be an advantage. Nevertheless, as previous storms have proven, even minor storms can cause unexpected damage on the island, and during most hurricane seasons the area really is more vulnerable than the rest of Orleans Parish to damages caused by storm surge (See Figure 9). Residential damages in the Lake Catherine area due to Hurricane Camille (1969) comprised the lion’s share of the cost of all residential damages in Orleans Parish.<sup>66</sup> Together, Hurricanes Betsy and Camille (1969) wiped out close to 800 camps, which were then rebuilt.<sup>67</sup> The authors of *Recreational Dwellings in the Louisiana Coastal Marsh* interpret the phenomenon in this

<sup>66</sup> U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *Hurricane Camille: 14-22 August, 1969* (New Orleans Dist., New Orleans: 1970). Of the \$2,463,000 worth of damage to fixed residential structures in Orleans Parish as a result of Hurricane Camille, damage camp structures on Lake Catherine island added up to \$1,912,700.

<sup>67</sup> U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *Hurricane Betsy: 8-11 September, 1965* (New Orleans Dist., New Orleans: 1965); U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *Hurricane Camille: 14-22 August, 1969* (New Orleans Dist., New Orleans: 1970).

way: “The risk apparently is overshadowed by the area’s convenience and proximity to New Orleans.”<sup>68</sup>

Lake Catherine islanders cope stoically not only with hurricanes, but also with shoreline erosion. Causing some degree of panic only at Fort Pike State Historic Site<sup>69</sup> on the rapidly eroding Rigolets shoreline, erosion and the measures needed to maintain the land area of campsites do not seem to figure very prominently in islanders’ list of concerns. They install bulkheads to protect their land against erosion, and they backfill to reclaim land lost to erosion. Often only storm-related erosion events are cause for alarm, whereas gradual land loss has not been the focus of any grassroots activity in the community.

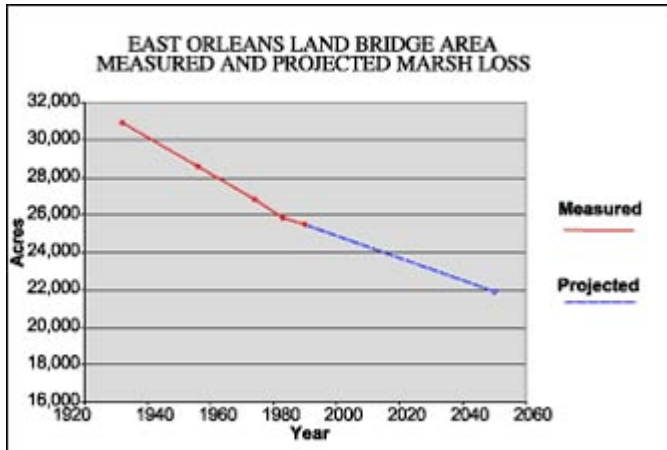


Figure 10. Shea Penland, Maygarden, Beall, “East Orleans Land Bridge Area Measured and Projected Marsh Loss,” *Environmental Atlas of Lake Pontchartrain*, US Department of the Interior and USGS, <http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2002/of02-206/env-status/eastorleans.html>  
Last modified: 10:39:52 Tue 14 May 2002

Opinions have differed on the erosion prognosis for this particular location. Louisiana’s multi-stakeholder comprehensive plan for coastal restoration and land loss prevention, *Coast 2050* (1998), identifies the Lake Catherine area, as well as the marshes to the southeast, as a critical “land bridge,” which “protects the wetlands surrounding Lake Pontchartrain from higher salinity and higher energy waters.” The plan goes on to reassure that, “It is a fairly stable landform at the present time. If it appears that the land

<sup>68</sup> Don L. Gary, Donald W. Davis, *Recreational Dwellings in the Louisiana Coastal Marsh* (Baton Rouge, LA: Sea Grant Publication No. LSU-T-79-002, 1979) 65.

<sup>69</sup> Larry Denny, personal communication, 23 Jul. 2003.



bridge is at risk, major efforts would be made to stabilize it.”<sup>70</sup> “Major efforts” would consist of marsh creation by way of dedicated dredging<sup>71</sup> and plantings of marsh vegetation, along with beds of submerged aquatic vegetation.

The 1959 dredging of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet just a few miles to the south and west is said to have “let in a relentless stream of saltwater that has killed much of the marsh that once protected eastern New Orleans against gulf storms,”<sup>72</sup> but since that time, land loss has slowed considerably<sup>73</sup> and is predicted to continue at this slow rate well into the future (See Figure 10). Just a few years before the *Coast 2050* plan was released, however, a proposal to encourage ecotourism and economic development through recreation and to consolidate various wetland restoration projects within the “Eastern Orleans Wetlands” warned, “Should this land bridge erode substantially, Lake Pontchartrain would become a large ‘arm of the sea’ with higher ranges for both tidal velocities and salinity.”<sup>74</sup>

Recently, an “eat out” on the Lake Catherine side of Highway 90 brought open water dangerously close to the roadway, requiring state intervention (See Figures 7 and 8) to install bulkheads. “Eat outs,” often caused by the erosion of land beneath abandoned camps where no one has maintained the area with infill, also refer to areas where nutria<sup>75</sup> herbivory has eliminated sediment-trapping vegetation, allowing water to take over sometimes large expanses. Lake Catherine Land Company owns most of the lots along the fragile strip of Lake Catherine island, where there is little land between road and water along the shorelines of Lake Pontchartrain and Lake St. Catherine, and eat outs are likely to occur if sites are not maintained. Aware of this possibility, some owners of

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<sup>70</sup> Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force and the Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Authority, *Coast 2050: Toward a Sustainable Coastal Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, LA: Prepared for Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, 1998) 88.

<sup>71</sup> This refers to the dredging of sediments for the purpose of building up land in a specific location.

<sup>72</sup> Mark Fischetti, “Drowning New Orleans,” *Scientific American* 285(4) (2001): 76-85

<sup>73</sup> U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *National shoreline study: Inventory Report—Lower Mississippi Region*. New Orleans Dist., New Orleans IN Don L. Gary, Donald W. Davis, *Recreational Dwellings in the Louisiana Coastal Marsh* (Baton Rouge, LA: Sea Grant Publication No. LSU-T-79-002, 1979) 56. “The resort’s principal problem is not erosion or subsidence, but storm surges.”

<sup>74</sup> Coastal Environments, Inc. *Strategies for Enhancing Water-Oriented Recreation and Ecotourism, Eastern Orleans Wetlands* (Baton Rouge, LA: Prepared for the City Planning Commission, City of New Orleans, 1994) 8.

<sup>75</sup> Native to South America, nutria are introduced rodents that have especially thrived in Texas and Louisiana coastal marshes. Although their pelts are desirable to trappers, they have taken over as an invasive species in many areas, inflicting substantial damage on marsh grasses.

camps adjacent to vacant or abandoned sites have invested in fill or bulkheads for land they do not occupy, in order to protect their own lots from collateral damage.



Figure 11. Photograph taken from Highway 90, looking towards Lake St. Catherine. The lake encroaches closer to the road here than anywhere else on the island. Notice that the abandoned camp on the left is completely over open water.

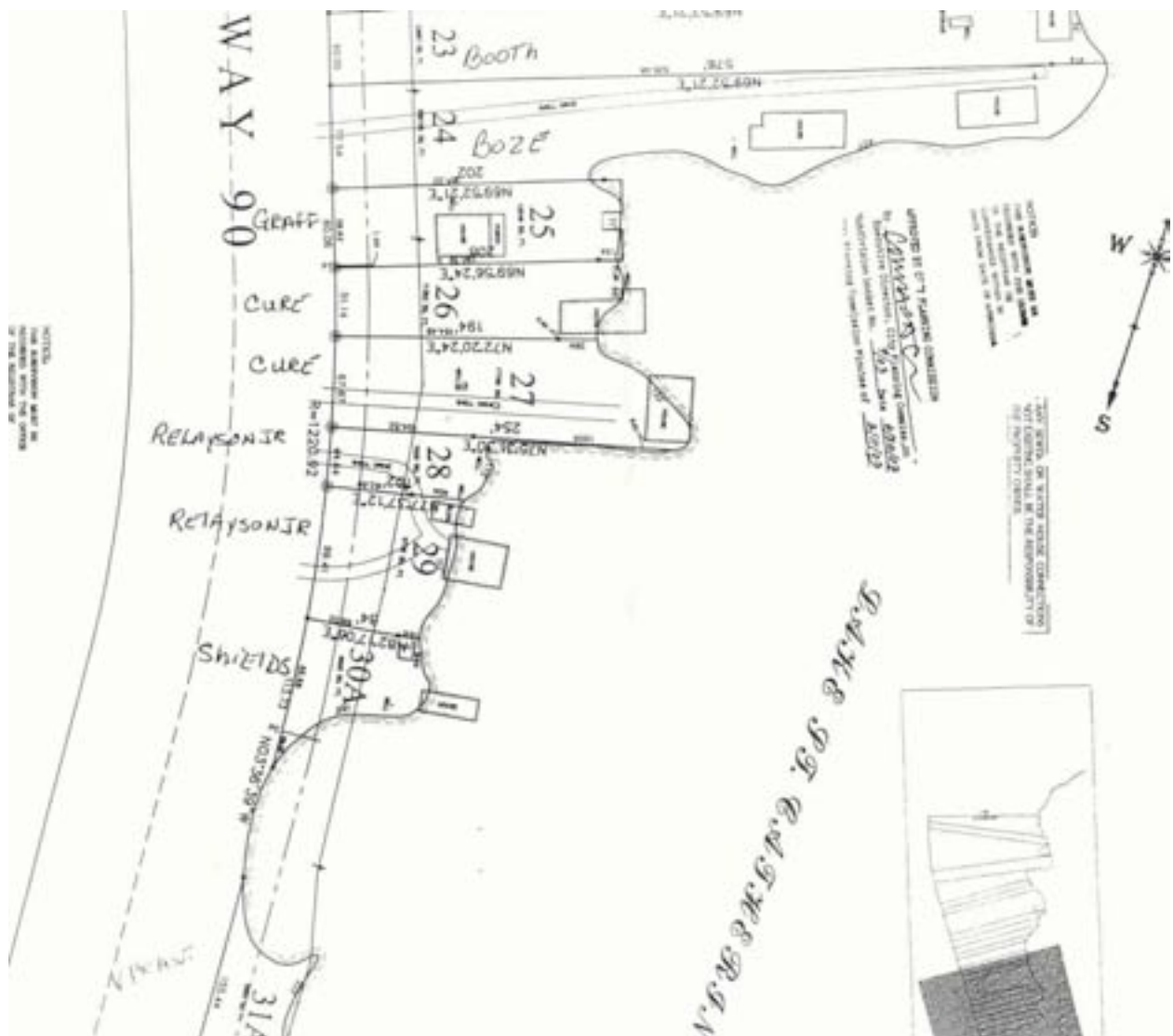


Figure 12. Map showing site of “eat out,” pictured above. The eat out is between lots 30A and 31A, in the lower third of the map.

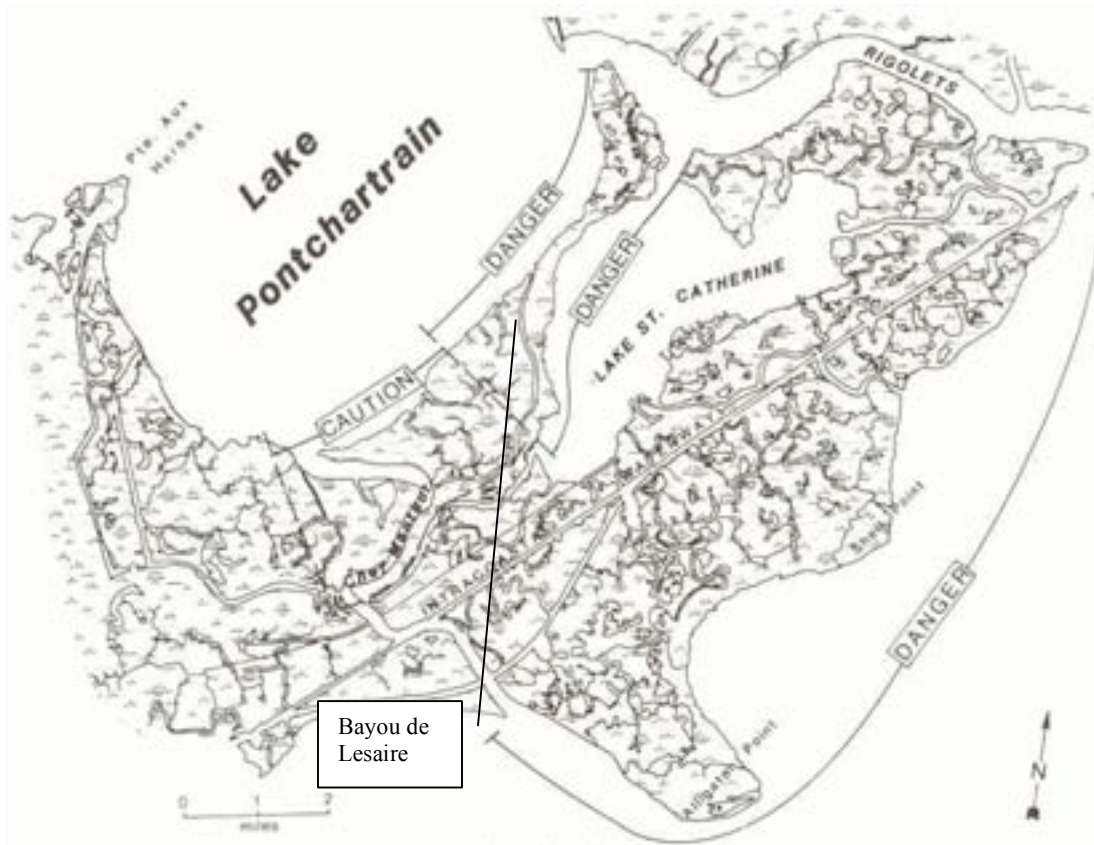


Fig. 4.6. Site analysis of Lake Pontchartrain entrance.

Figure 13. According to the authors of *Living with the Louisiana Shore* (1984), the entire Lake Catherine island is vulnerable, but particularly the upper peninsula, where Highway 90 (not drawn, but running just to the right (east) of Bayou de Lesaire from Chef Pass to the bayou's mouth, then straight through the strip between Lakes St. Catherine and Pontchartrain to its tip at the Rigolets, where it crosses into St. Tammany Parish) is in danger of washing out with a big storm.

### III. Case Studies

#### **Introduction**

I spent approximately 10 weeks in the New Orleans area, with the hope of learning about communities' adaptation to the hurricanes and flooding that plague Louisiana.<sup>76</sup> Having gained a certain measure of trust among a small group of Lake Catherine community members, I began to learn that changes in the relationship between the campowners and the land company from which they leased lots had become a source of some angst and suspicion. Below I present the stories of three Lake Catherine island sub-communities'

<sup>76</sup> For a more detailed discussion of my field research processes, please see Appendix C: METHODS, which also includes a log of my interviews and participant observation experiences.

confrontations with land-related problems. Each vignette attempts to illustrate a different strand in Lake Catherine community members' place-specific identity.

Pursuing my investigation of a lease conflict that had recently emerged between the Chef Menteur Land Company and its Lake Catherine tenants, I eventually began to grasp the overall social structure of the island community. Although I had noticed linear separation of camp sequences along the highway, I did not know that these breaks in continuity also corresponded roughly to land tenure along the length of the island. I learned that there are five distinct campowner groups: Chef Menteur Land Company, Lake Catherine Land Company, Brazilier Island (now officially known as Cedar Bayou), Fort Pike subdivision, and Hospital Wall. At the time of this study, Chef Menteur Land Company, Lake Catherine Land Company and Brazilier Island campowners were all in the midst of negotiations that (they perceived) would bear directly on their future use of the land, and were thus quite alluring as empirical subjects. With varying degrees of cohesiveness (and sense of moral rectitude), all three groups were fighting in overlapping rings, either with landowners (Chef Menteur and Brazilier Island) or state and city government agencies (Lake Catherine Land Company). Activists from each group were appearing in public places, making statements, pumping news through Lake Catherine island's rumor pipelines, so it was natural for me to examine them through the lenses of these controversies.

However, because of limited time and an *apparent* ease of access to this group, I was able to enrich only the account of the Chef Menteur Land Company tenants' ongoing lease negotiations with firsthand observations of public gatherings and longer-term participant observation with tenants and their local network. My accounts of the other two groups' processes were informed primarily by semi-structured interviews and local newspaper coverage. In my investigations I had hoped initially to understand what complex of considerations motivated individuals to invest in homes despite the apparent risks. Through my examination of the lease conflicts, I found a whole new set of considerations relating to campowners' sense of ownership and attachment to place. These considerations constituted the local reality that outsiders, including city and state government officials, not surprisingly, did not use as a guide in planning and policy making.

**Background: campowner groups and conflicts around sewage disposal**

“...because there was no follow-through, the land companies basically would react up to a point and then when nothing happened they’d think ‘Ok, it’s gone, it went away, we don’t have to worry about it anymore.’”—Carlton Dufrechou<sup>77</sup>

“Most people still believe that if you flush it and it disappears, everything’s working fine.”—Frank L. Deffes Jr. (chief of sanitarian services for the New Orleans health department), May 13, 1991<sup>78</sup>

Chef Menteur tenants and Lake Catherine Land Company are the two largest groups of campowners on the island, with approximately 300 and 260 members, respectively. Although Brazilier Island tenants comprise a much smaller group of 41, they have gained notoriety in New Orleans due to the high public profiles of the landowner and one of the tenants.<sup>79</sup>

It is interesting to note that the fulcrum of all of the controversies I am about to summarize was a series of mandates from the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH), beginning in the late 1980s, holding the landowners of the area responsible for the setup of “modern” sewage treatment systems. Around 1989-1990, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation launched a citywide campaign to revive interest in the lake as a recreational amenity. The cessation of dredging activity in Lake Pontchartrain greatly improved the visual quality in the water, and a shift in local environmental attitudes ensued.<sup>80</sup> But as the staff of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation discovered in 1994-95 when they assisted the community in developing a master plan for sewage disposal, Lake Catherine campowners viewed sewage treatment as a burden that they should not have to shoulder. According to a 1991 article in the *Times-Picayune*, one of the most common campowner retorts to DHH state sanitarian Jo McLean’s demands for compliance was to point out that urban runoff from downtown New Orleans constituted a much greater proportion of the pollution in Lake

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<sup>77</sup> (Executive Director, Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation), personal communication, 18 Aug. 2003.

<sup>78</sup> As quoted in “Lake camps told to clean up their acts,” *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 13 May 1991: A-8.

<sup>79</sup> The landowner, Kenneth Carter, is a prominent attorney in the city who previously served as tax assessor under the administration of former mayor Marc Morial. He is also a member of the elite Black Organization for Leadership Development, a group whose political endorsements are taken very seriously in Louisiana.

<sup>80</sup> Mark Schleifstein, personal communication, 5 Jul. 2003. Mr Schleifstein is an environmental reporter for the *Times-Picayune*.

Pontchartrain.<sup>81</sup> Studies conducted on the fecal coliform concentrations at various points in the lake confirmed that despite some risk of algal blooms on the Lake Catherine (west) side of the island, within Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Catherine islanders' effluent was not traveling far from its sources: "as far as the area that's being impacted, it's their own backyards."<sup>82</sup>

From the time of the first mandate up to the present, the problem of sewage disposal tended to fade out of islanders' realm of concern every time their state representative (Jon Johnson) bailed them out by buying more time to work out a plan for compliance. In between mandates, compliance orders, and other ultimatums, water quality becomes an academic point, to most of the community, who would rather the state agencies just go away.<sup>83</sup>

As made apparent by the three case studies—which are really more variations on a theme—each group's confrontation with the issue of sewage disposal was indirect most of the time, discursively centered around land tenure. When the imperative to provide treatment of camp effluents and the fines threatened for non-compliance triggered the land companies to reconsider renewing leases, vocal campowners would employ a variety of rhetorical tools to defend their perceived right to continue occupying the land in the manner to which they had grown accustomed. One of the most of common of these, still repeated in everyday conversation about the island, was the assertion that the taxes they paid did not go towards improving conditions for their community.<sup>84</sup>

The desire for self-determination combined with a somewhat contradictory demand for greater responsiveness on the part of the city, have generally set the tone of group identification. It should become clear in the telling of the following three narratives that ecological/environmental threats themselves, including the presence of raw sewage in the two lakes that flank Lake Catherine island, do *not* represent an assault on campowners' sense of self-determination. If anything, they serve to reinforce

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<sup>81</sup> "Lake camps told to clean up their acts," *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 13 May 1991: A-8.

<sup>82</sup> Carlton Dufrechou, personal communication 18 Aug. 2003. Mr. Dufrechou is the Executive Director of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation.

<sup>83</sup> Carlton Dufrechou, personal communication 18 Aug. 2003.

<sup>84</sup> Burk-Kleinpeter, Inc. *East New Orleans Sewerage Feasibility Study, Hayne Boulevard, Little Woods, Irish Bayou, Lake Catherine; draft report*. (Prepared for Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans and Louisiana Office of Public Health. New Orleans, LA, 1992: I-3-9.

campowners' sense of belonging on the island. The locus of unease lies in the future of their tenure, regardless of what jeopardizes it.

In 2003, the intention of providing the island a hookup to the New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board system has long since been abandoned due to the plan's prohibitive expense.<sup>85</sup> Various financing strategies, including the empowerment of the Lake Catherine Sewerage and Water District with the right to levy taxes on island residents, have been proposed over the past 13 years, but none has gained approval.<sup>86</sup> Though none of the three conflicts I attempt to describe below have come to any final resolution, I believe an exploration of the rhetoric that [fed each campowner](#) group's conflict with outsiders is instructive. Moreover, in the spaces where these contours overlap, one can begin to see the shape of a common place-based ethos. Grasping this would be useful to city and state agencies seeking solutions to this community's environmental problems.

### **Case #1: Brazilier Island<sup>87</sup>: "Your money's no good here."**

Representing more than just a legal dispute, the story of Brazilier Island seems to have raised red flags up and down Lake Catherine island. This relatively well-publicized conflict, which began in December 2001 with the changing of hands of property rights to the treasured island, has since become the platform for a suite of morally-loaded rhetorical offensives on the part of both campowners (and their attorney) and *Times-Picayune* story seekers. Dichotomized as it has been by both the press and the parties involved, the Brazilier Island case is one of clashing currencies. The informal community network and lessor-lessee exchange system that tenants relied upon for decades has been kicked to the curb and replaced by a much less forgiving regime. This shift was characterized by Brazilier campowners' representing attorney Steven Conroy as, "a lifestyle being ruined in the name of a gated community."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> One of the limiting factors is supposedly a law that bars the city from charging differential rates to customers in different areas.

<sup>86</sup> Leo F. Richardson III, personal communication 13 Aug. 2003.

<sup>87</sup> Although my field observations of this secluded sub-community are very limited, I do feel that the rhetorical constructions present in my data and in *Times-Picayune* soundbytes are sufficient material from which to infer the community's discursive construction of the past two years' events.

<sup>88</sup> "Island residents facing eviction; ex-assessor waging battle over Brazilier," *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 10 Feb. 2003: Metro 1.



Acknowledged to be a part of the Lake Catherine community, Brazilier Island is separated from the main island of Lake Catherine by Bayou de Lesaire, its secluded camps accessible by a private drive called Brazellier Island Road. Aerial photographs of the island confirm that only a 20-acre fringe on the southwest corner of the island is developed, and the rest of the island's 2,400 acres is undeveloped marsh that has been classified as protected wetlands.<sup>89</sup> Forty-one camps line this fringe, the owners of which lease lots from a single landowner.

In December 2001, while retaining exploration and drilling rights to the property, Remington Oil and Gas Corporation sold the island for \$150,000 to former employee Kenneth Carter, a prominent New Orleans attorney who had also served as tax assessor for the city. His corporation, Cedar Bayou LLC, had put down \$20,000 to gain possession of the island, while Remington Oil held a note for the remaining \$130,000. Tenants of this secluded tract, most of which are said to be permanent residents, promptly voiced their objections to this transaction, some of them by simply refusing to pay rent to the new landlord. Instead of presenting their payments to Carter, a group of tenants deposited the total amount they owed with the registry of the court.<sup>90</sup> Campowners have been allowed to remain on the land since that time, but many were threatened in February 2003 with eviction for refusing to pay rent on their lots.

One campowner, Paul Silvas, initiated a lawsuit in July 2002 that would eventually include more than 30 of the 41 tenants,<sup>91</sup> against Remington Oil and Gas Corporation, for failing to honor the tenants' right of first refusal, which was written into their leases. Quoting from the suit, "The sale from Remington to Cedar Bayou (the company owned by Ken Carter) was not an arms length transaction, and in fact was an insider deal that violated the rights of the plaintiff and other camp owners to have the first chance to buy the land under their homes."<sup>92</sup> In other words, they asserted that Remington had no right to sell the island to Carter before first offering to sell to the

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<sup>89</sup> "Island residents facing eviction; Ex-assessor waging battle over Brazilier," *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 10 Feb. 2003: Metro 1.

<sup>90</sup> "Island residents facing eviction; Ex-assessor waging battle over Brazilier," *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 10 Feb. 2003: Metro 1.

<sup>91</sup> Actor John Goodman and his wife, Anna Beth, are among the group of tenants who filed suit.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted directly from the suit in a news article dated July 5, 2002 by Gary Raymond, *Lake Catherine Newsletter*, 2003 (independently-run website) New Orleans, LA, 12 Dec. 2003, <<http://news.arc.tzo.com/lccc/lcnews.php>>

tenants. Prior to the lawsuit, Remington's response to this assertion on the part of the wounded campowners was simply that Carter had become the rightful owner and therefore these issues must be taken up with him. That was clearly unacceptable to most of the group, some of whom told the *Times-Picayune* that they were "afraid to anger their new landlord" (6-23-02), whose political connections alone were intimidating, at least according to the spin put on the situation by the *Times-Picayune*.

One article in the *Times-Picayune* reasoned that Silvas' decision not to file suit against Carter himself was based on an apprehension that Carter's local connections would sabotage any actions taken against him in civil court; filing suit against Remington Oil and Gas Corporation, headquartered out of state, would allow tenants to file suit in the more impartial federal court system.<sup>93</sup> Because the lawsuit might otherwise have been dismissed in US District Court, it was amended in August 2002 to include Kenneth Carter as a defendant.<sup>94</sup> A corresponding state suit filed by the same group named Carter as a defendant from its outset.<sup>95</sup>

Since then, Carter has proceeded with his plans for the development of a gated community on the island. During the summer of 2003, his permit application for a community sewage treatment system for the island was approved, a Lake Catherine area first. He has told the press that he expects construction costs to reach \$500,000 to \$600,000.<sup>96</sup> Aside from the fact that Carter's plans apparently do not include the input of current campowners, the 30 or so campowners who have opted to participate in litigation are incensed by his refusal to pledge that he will sell them their lots, or that he would even renew their leases at year's end.

In the minds of Brazilier Island stakeholders, Kenneth Carter has come to embody virtually everything that is wrong with "society" and "corrupt Louisiana,"<sup>97</sup> and at times takes an understandably defensive stance. This stance detracts from the

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<sup>93</sup> "Changes lap at shores of Brazilier Island." *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 7 Jul. 2002: Metro 7.

<sup>94</sup> "Goodman, friends want chance to buy island lots in N.O." *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 17 Aug. 2002: 7-B.

<sup>95</sup> "Permit OK'd for sewerage on Brazilier; Carter wants to develop island." *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 17 Jan. 2003: Metro 1.

<sup>96</sup> "Island residents facing eviction; Ex-assessor waging battle over Brazilier." *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 10 Feb. 2003: Metro 1.

<sup>97</sup> "Island residents facing eviction; Ex-assessor waging battle over Brazilier." *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 10 Feb. 2003: Metro 1. This article quotes Anna Beth Goodman, wife of actor John Goodman, on whose behalf she was also speaking, referring to the provocative nature of Mr. Carter's recent transactions: "Louisiana has always been viewed as a politically corrupt state, and in recent years great strides have been made to end such behavior." The Goodmans have joined the lawsuit against Remington and Carter, and hope that, "In the end, justice and fairness will prevail."

potentially progressive message he could be sending by becoming the first landowner on Lake Catherine island to lay down the capital necessary to install a community sewage treatment system.

Not discussed in the newspapers, nor by either party directly, however, is the implicit racial tension that spikes the conflict: these are white campowners taking refuge in the whitest area of Orleans Parish, and by their logic, Kenneth Carter, a politically powerful African-American, may destroy not just the biophysical ecosystem, but also the social homogeneity of the area. Not only are the campowners of similar ethnic backgrounds—they also likely share a set of reasons for their attachment to the place: first, the informality of relations, including business, which (according to the rhetoric of several of the campowners quoted in the *Times-Picayune*) used to be based on trust and a handshake; second, the Lake Catherine area's major identity was that of a working-class, "common people's" resort area, where wealth was not a prerequisite for membership. A high-roller like Carter having any part of the island is a major threat to this system. An individual's connections in the social network of the community would no longer confer the same status, because Carter's free market requirements would corrode existing reciprocity systems.

The table below presents some of the major rhetorical stances that the local press and Lake Catherine islanders have employed in defining the conflict between Brazilier Island tenants and Kenneth Carter:

<b>Tenants' allegations (paraphrased)</b>	<b>Carter's responses</b>
We were here first and you have no right to take control of our futures.	I own the land now, and I could be charging you "whatever I want" <sup>98</sup> in rent. The rules have changed, so deal with it.
Your acquisition of Brazilier Island for \$150,000 was highway robbery, and now you've come here to gentrify.	Brazilier Island was "fraught with environmental problems..for the past 12 years. I bought all of those problems" <sup>99</sup> (including sewage disposal issues). I can only develop 20 acres of this land because of wetlands regulations, anyway.
Your refusal to offer leases for longer than one year means that you have plans to get us off the island so that you can build and make a profit.	I am not offering longer term leases because I cannot afford to be liable if the sewage treatment plans do not work out for some reason and I am pursued by a regulatory agency. <sup>100</sup>
You are being secretive and have ulterior motives. <sup>101</sup>	You and your lawyer refuse to hear me state my plans. <sup>102</sup>
You should sell us our lots for \$10,000 each. If you did so, you would more than double on your investment. <sup>103</sup>	"[Are] You going to come in and tell me how much I can sell my property for? This is America." <sup>104</sup>
You are power-hungry and you're trampling on our way of life.	"If I want to come out here on the weekend, do I want you to be my enemies?" <sup>105</sup>
The development you are planning will destroy the pristine environment that makes Brazilier Island so valuable.	I will develop responsibly, "by the book." I will be working to protect the Minutes canal, save land being eroded along Chef Menteur Pass, and to save marshland in the area. <sup>106</sup>

Table 3: Rhetorical volleying between Brazilier Island Tenants and their landlord.

Perhaps because Lake Catherine Land Company shareholders were said to have purchased their way into the company for \$10,000, a package which included eventual title to their camp sites, Brazilier Island tenants had presented this figure to Carter, and expected him to accept it. He would, after all, more than double on his investment by doing so, although not after investing in a sewage treatment plant for the island.

<sup>98</sup> "Camp owners get new landlord; Former assessor buys eastern N.O. property," *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans], 23 Jun. 2003: Metro-1. Note that this piece is more or less a blow-by-blow account of the only meeting between Carter and the tenants who joined the lawsuit against Remington Oil and him.

<sup>99</sup> Kenneth Carter, personal communication, 22 Jul. 2003.

<sup>100</sup> Kenneth Carter, personal communication, 22 Jul. 2003.

<sup>101</sup> Ronald Rauber, personal communication, 9 Jul. 2003.

<sup>102</sup> Kenneth Carter, personal communication, 22 Jul. 2003.

<sup>103</sup> "Brazilier Island lawsuit expands; Nearly all residents seek to buy land," *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 16 Aug. 2002.

<sup>104</sup> "Camp owners get new landlord; Former assessor buys eastern N.O. property," *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans], 23 Jun. 2003: Metro-1.

<sup>105</sup> "Camp owners get new landlord; Former assessor buys eastern N.O. property," *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans], 23 Jun. 2003: Metro-1.

<sup>106</sup> Kenneth Carter, personal communication, 22 Jul. 2003.

The bottom line of the tenants can be summarized as follows: “This is not about money. This land is far more valuable to us than it is to you, and yet we can’t buy it.” They are objecting to the fact that their commitment to the place now must be proven with money. They are willing to pay their lawyer in order to prove that they are right, but other principles prevent them from being willing to pay Carter in order to remain on the land in the way they always had.

Perhaps to the detriment of the group’s otherwise watertight populist dialectic, another campowner who spoke to the *Times-Picayune*, took care to remind the public of the bourgeoisie’s presence on Brazilier Island:

Some...invested more in their homes than Carter paid for the island, said camp owner Donna Barnhill. “These are not all rickety, funky camps,” she said.<sup>107</sup> Barnhill seems to have recognized here that it might be rhetorically useful to highlight the advantage that Kenneth Carter enjoyed by virtue of being well-connected; and to suggest that even if one operates under the free-market paradigm (contrasted against the gentler community “lifestyle” theme touted by attorney Steven Conroy), as some Brazilier Island tenants can afford to do, this transaction was not a just one.

The following excerpt from an interview with Ronald Rauber (9 Jul. 2003) reveals something of the breakdown in communication between Carter and his tenants, another type of currency incompatibility. When asked whether or not he had asked Carter directly about his intentions, Rauber recounted:

Well, everybody wanted to know, but I wanted to know the real reason...But he still never tells the *real* reason. The real reason is that he wants to develop it and make a shitload of money...Number one, he’s never even offered to sell it to us...

Kenneth Carter said that he had asked the tenants to record his stated intentions. He said he had written several letters to tenants and outlined his plans exactly. Apparently his word, even in writing, is worth little to them. The social psychological interpretation would hold that this groups objections and protest, whether appropriately directed or not, stem from their perception of a broken promise: “collective protest and ethnocentrism are the direct result of the unexpected violation of expectations.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> “Camp owners get new landlord; Former assessor buys eastern N.O. property,” *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans], 23 Jun. 2003: Metro-1.

<sup>108</sup> Peter Grant and Rupert Brown, “From Ethnocentrism to Collective Protest: Responses to Relative Deprivation and Threats to Social Identity,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 58(1995): 195-211.

It will be interesting to see if the Brazilier Island community disperses or remains intact with Carter's presence and his reconfigurations of the status quo. If Carter sees the sewage treatment project to its completion, inserts himself physically into the community and is willing to go through some sort of newcomer's initiation, then there is a chance antagonisms will lessen. Whether he is willing to do that is quite uncertain, and I am not prepared to speculate. Tenants like Rauber may feel certain that Carter embodies community-obliterating capitalist greed and a corrupt, inner-circle<sup>109</sup> New Orleans politics; but the limitations of the land are inescapable, and the growing momentum of the statewide movement to slow wetland loss can only serve to crystallize cautions against high stakes development. Unless he is planning some glaringly unwise investments with collusion up to the federal level,<sup>110</sup> Carter's valuation of the island cannot ultimately differ so starkly from that of the existing community: if anything, I believe he will display increasing concern for the ecological integrity of his purchase.

**Case #2: Chef Menteur Land Company Tenants: "detrimental reliance"**

No doubt somewhat more vigilant as a result of the course of events on Brazilier Island, some tenants on the Chef Menteur Land Company's property bristled when they received a letter from their landlords asking them to sign a new lease which would multiply their responsibilities and constrict the freedom they had come to take for granted. Over the past 15 years or so the land company's administrative failures had lulled many long-time tenants (especially the financially-challenged) into a slumber, which has been disturbed periodically but temporarily by health department crackdowns and the resulting threats of fines and non-renewal of leases. They did what they had to over the years in order to keep their camps and leases, including accepting an increase in yearly rent in 1990, from \$400 to \$1800. Now that Chef Menteur Land Company has raised the stakes for them, they have begun to wonder if they might claim something in return for what they've invested in order to stay on the land as long as they have.

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<sup>109</sup> In this case, as mentioned in the Brazilier Island case study above and alluded to by several islanders I met, the inner circle's primary characteristic is its perceived-to-be-intentional exclusion of whites.

<sup>110</sup> The Environmental Protection Agency is charged with enforcement of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, which regulates all dredge and fill activities in wetland areas. The proposed zoning classification for Brazilier Island is Coastal Zone 1, minimal development.

### **Unexpected new expectations**

Chef Menteur Land Company has been leasing lots for camp construction since 1947. All of the islanders in this group own their camp structures (as well as any site improvements), but lease the land from the company. Since the late 1940s, the land and the leases for it (now close to 300) had been managed by the company president, Doris Mahler.<sup>111</sup> In early 2003, her younger relatives/heirs succeeded her, as it was felt that at her advanced age, she was losing her capacity to manage the leases and the property in the best interests of the company. For this reason, the company does not have leases on record for many of the tenants, and it has not been receiving lease revenues from all lessees. Some lessees have reported living on the land for several years without being asked to sign a lease. Others report that Ms. Mahler had made allowances for them without ever pursuing them for payment afterwards. According to a stockholder in the land company, this was making it difficult for the company to pay for the insurance and legal protection it needed to have in order to continue leasing the land.<sup>112</sup>

In the spring of 2003, the new management of the Chef Menteur Land Company (CMLC) asked all lessees to sign a new lease,<sup>113</sup> as well as an estoppel certificate with estimates of “back rent” owed by a number of the lessees. Unexpected and unprecedented provisions in the new lease included:

- (1) a requirement that tenants insure their improvements (camp structures and fill) to \$500,000,
- (2) a lease term of only 12 months (compared with longer-term leases in years past)<sup>114</sup>, and
- (3) an expansion of a previous provision (requiring that “All sanitary regulations of the City of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana shall be complied with

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<sup>111</sup> Referred to as “Miss Mahler” by virtually everyone.

<sup>112</sup> Richardson, Leo F., III, personal communication, 13 August, 2003.

<sup>113</sup> Latter & Blum Property Management, Inc., for Chef Menteur Land Co., Ltd. “Ground Lease Agreement by Chef Menteur Land Company, Ltd.” (New Orleans, LA: 2003) 7pp.

<sup>114</sup> This may actually have been the status quo for several years, despite tenants’ grumblings. According to Burk-Kleinpeter, Inc. *East New Orleans Sewerage Feasibility Study, Hayne Boulevard, Little Woods, Irish Bayou, Lake Catherine; draft report*. (Prepared for Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans and Louisiana Office of Public Health. New Orleans, LA, 1992.), the leases were for one year at least as far back as 1992.

at the Lessee's expense.") into a five-paragraph package of new cleanliness standards for all camps.<sup>115</sup>

The estoppel certificate asked tenants to agree with the following statements (among other mundane administrative details), which subsequently became hesitation points for apprehensive tenants:

- "...there are no other agreements between landlord and tenant with respect to the lease, the premises, or any improvements of which the premises are a part."
- "Tenant has no right or option to purchase the premises or to renew or extend the lease, or to expand the premises..."

The response to the new communication was mixed. Many lessees were all "paid up" and insured, and since the amount of rent requested had not increased, a handful saw no reason to hesitate in complying with the landowners' requests. Others may have owed minimal back rent, and could afford to settle accounts immediately without further negotiation. And yet another group of lessees had been in arrears for so long that they could not afford to pay back rent, and therefore feared eviction. Insurance was a matter that would become a problem for some lessees and not others. But more importantly, I had the sense from conversations with various lessees that verbal agreements and other unrecorded mutual understandings had been Ms. Mahler's *modus operandi*; and that being approached by Latter & Blum Property Management, Inc. signaled a shift in the status quo that would eventually force them off the land.

One point that came up with virtually all of the campowners I spoke to was the fact that when the rent was raised from \$400/year to \$1800/year per non-commercial lot in 1990, a letter had also been sent out at that time explaining that the increase in rent was due to the new requirement that an appropriate sewage treatment system be installed.<sup>116</sup> In addition to raising the rent on the leased parcels, CMLC was also forced to switch from long-term leases to one-year leases, out of a desire to protect itself from non-

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<sup>115</sup> "If the improvements should fall into a state of disrepair to the extent that they are uninhabitable, or of excessive trash, rat harborage, debris, derelict vehicles or inoperable water craft are allowed to collect on the premises, or if the property becomes overgrown and unsightly all in the sole discretion of Lessor or Lessor's agent, this lease shall be considered in default and cancelable by Lessor or Lessor's agent." (Article 17: "Conditions and upkeep of premises")

<sup>116</sup> Many of the people who showed interest in legal representation said that they still retained copies of this letter.



compliance liability.<sup>117</sup> The land company would be required to contribute to the development of such a system, and of this it informed the campowners directly. The understanding of the campowners thenceforth<sup>118</sup> was that the additional \$1400 they were paying in rent would go towards the construction either of pipes connecting to the city's system or of a plant that would treat the island's wastes exclusively without hookup to the city system. To this date, no sewerage system has been built or even agreed upon for treatment of Chef Menteur campowners' wastes. It appears that the first clause I listed above from the estoppel certificate was designed to disable tenants from taking advantage of the broken promise.

### **Attorney to the rescue**

However plural the Chef Menteur tenants' attitudes, there was an ample contingent of people who objected to the terms in the new lease and in the estoppel certificate and felt entitled to some sort of redress. An attorney wishing to court clients was able to tempt a sizeable audience (100 lessees perhaps) to a campowners meeting in late June of 2003, just days before the June 30 deadline set by CMLC for return of the new leases<sup>119</sup>. A personal acquaintance of one of the campowners, the attorney, Gerald Calogero of New Orleans, told attendees he wished to help them understand their rights. He had placed a sign-up sheet on one of the pool tables, and had to reassure attendees more than once that it was "just a sign-up sheet." It was clear that those who raised concerns about signing the sheet were apprehensive that it would be used against them later.

Calogero opened the discussion by saying he thought that the new leases which had been sent to campowners had "provisions helping landowners but not tenants." A few attendees raised the point that some people had not signed leases in three or four years, and that they had not been pursued for payment of rent. One gentleman said that

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<sup>117</sup> Burk-Kleinpeter, Inc. *East New Orleans Sewerage Feasibility Study, Hayne Boulevard, Little Woods, Irish Bayou, Lake Catherine; draft report*. (Prepared for Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans and Louisiana Office of Public Health. New Orleans, LA, 1992: I-1-6.

<sup>118</sup> Or so they were claiming in 2003, when the new leases were introduced.

<sup>119</sup> Meeting held on Wednesday, June 25 at 7:00 pm at Crazy Al's, a dimly lit barroom on Highway 90 towards the western end of the island. It was business as usual for the bar staff, who served drinks, mainly beer, through the duration of the meeting. The commotion among attendees gurgled constantly, but would occasionally surge in volume, at which point some attendee who had been straining to hear what Calogero was saying would whistle loudly in an attempt to redirect people's attention. Afterwards one attendee remarked to me that, "You'd think they would be more interested in something that affects them directly."

the land company was no longer collecting rent from him. The lawyer continued, positing that, “a lot of people are in a better position to negotiate a good lease for the whole group.” One of the “bargaining chips” this group of camp owners had in their favor, according to Calogero, was the fact that that no sewage treatment system had been established since 1990, when the letters sent to residents effectively promised that such an improvement would be made to their quality of life. “If push comes to shove,” he said, “that’s the issue I’m gonna raise. If they really want to play hardball [and begin taking actions to evict tenants]...we’ll let them know that they may be facing a...multi-million-dollar lawsuit.”

Although the attorney did not suggest that he would not represent those who weren’t “paid up,” those who were “paid up” seemed to make it clear during the meeting and in conversations with me before and after the meeting, that they would not accept being represented in the same group with those who had debts to the Chef Menteur Land Company.

At a meeting three days later called by a second attorney, Calogero assured everyone that they would not be evicted if they did not return the lease by June 30, and that those who were told they owed back rent for periods of time for which there was no lease in effect, could not legally be held liable for those amounts. One campowner pointed out that without the bulkheads and other improvements that campowners themselves had made over the years to protect the area of their property from eroding to open water, that “there wouldn’t *be* an island...so how is it their land?”<sup>120</sup>

The group continued to identify the moral responsibilities of the land company, and to search for facts about the relationship that would offset their own liabilities. The second attorney, Jeff Grannan, wielded the legalese phrase, “detrimental reliance,” to refer to the tenants’ acceptance of CMLC’s 13-year-old stated but unrealized intent to pay for hookup to New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board services. Another lessee raised the question of land company responsibility for abandoned camps: “They want us to maintain our property...I live next door to a lot that’s not been...Are they gonna

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<sup>120</sup> Data comparing land loss rates between 1956/1958 and 1974 and to those between 1974 and 1983 show that on the western part of the island, land loss rates decreased more than 10% between the two periods; on the eastern part (closer to the Rigolets) rates changed by less than 10% between those two periods. Source: Louis D. Britsch, *Land Loss Rates: Mississippi River Deltaic Plain*, (Vicksburg, MS: Waterways Experiment Station, US Army Corps of Engineers Final Report, 1990) 21.

maintain all the ones that are dilapidated and gone, nobody's livin' there? They need to be responsible for that, as well as we need to be responsible for our property." Whether or not the provision of the new lease delineating stricter standards of camp upkeep could be negotiated to include a reciprocal clause holding the land company responsible for the stabilization and clean up of abandoned campsites, to them was an essential question of equity.

An impromptu speech by outspoken Brazilier Island tenant Ronnie Rauber opened the door on island ethos. The syllogism that brought the Brazilier Island crew to an inflexible position—i.e., that changes in the status quo of our tenancy, plus the perceived high value of waterfront equal plans to remove our camps to make way for condos—was transposed, with dramatic flair, onto the Chef Menteur group's interpretation of a different situation:

Yeah, we're all afraid. You got that same rhetoric—all of a sudden, guess what— "Where'd this provision come from? What do you mean I gotta get insurance? What do you mean I gotta do this, I gotta do that?"

I'm not saying anything against Ms. Mahler; I'm not saying anything against Latter & Blum. But believe you me, they have *ulterior motives!* They have intentions. What do you think waterfront property is worth these days?

This is the last of its kind. There ain't no more on the shores of New Orleans. As for the city of New Orleans, a community like this—we're the endangered species...Everybody out here is connected...If you think you're not, you're fooling yourself.

The last public meeting concerning the Chef Menteur Land Company lease was held at the Fort Pike Volunteer Fire Department on July 2, when Calogero offered tenants the option of hiring him on retainer. Those who wished to benefit from his services were required to sign a contract<sup>121</sup> and pay \$100.<sup>122</sup> It was announced at the meeting that 46 lessees had handed checks to the attorney.

On July 14, 2003, Calogero sent a letter to CMLC's attorney, Dennis H. Carriere, in which he listed the lessees' undiluted desires: a 15-20-year lease option; the right not

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<sup>121</sup> Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain a copy of this contract. The lessees did not retain copies for themselves as far as I could tell.

<sup>122</sup> Calogero also distributed a questionnaire during this gathering, assuring lessees that all responses would be kept confidential, specifically with respect to the Chef Menteur Land Company and their attorneys. Items included personal data, number of years living on the property and current rent, lease status and date of expiration of most recent lease, number of people living on the property, and information about the number, type and executor of any improvements made. I contacted Mr. Calogero later that month to request some general and anonymous information about the lessees' improvements, but received no response.

to purchase insurance for the land; the right to sublease; the right of first refusal; written proof of failure to pay for those who were told they owed back rent; caps on future rent increases; full acknowledgement of lessees' ownership of improvements (to be reimburse if lease is not renewed); and a warning that lessees would sue for what they paid in the name of sewerage if CMLC did not "agree to a lease that is fair and just to all parties" (Calogero, 2003). In the first part of the letter, anxiety surfaces that CMLC tenants will suffer the fate that those of Brazilier Island allegedly suffered, but Calogero also takes care to convey "no hard feelings" for Doris Mahler:

They hold no animosity toward her, her family or even Chef Menteur Land Company. However, they are genuinely concerned with what is and what may be happening in their neighborhood, especially in light of the recent litigation surrounding Brazilier Island.

Many of the other people I spoke to about the Chef Menteur lease changes also emphasized Ms. Mahler's agreeableness and empathy.

It appears that Ms. Mahler was just as stunned by the periodic Department of Health and Hospitals mandates as any of the tenants, if not more so. She and her family had retained the land passed down to them out of a hope for windfall that survived through several years of this limbo of short-term leases and uncertainty about sanctions. "We lived all our lives hoping to get one big oil well, but it never happened," Mahler is quoted as saying in a 1995 article that paints both her and the tenants as passive victims.<sup>123</sup>

Chef Menteur Land Company tenants were caught in the middle in the spring of 2003, in that they had neither the force of Brazilier Island's cause, nor the opportunity to buy their land, as Lake Catherine Land Company did. They had only their identification with their neighbors and a couple of lawyers waiting in the wings. The landowners may have decided to regain management control because of Carter's investment in Brazilier Island; this event, and LCLC's imminent resolution with the city as regarded sewage treatment (detailed in the third case study, below), might have required CMLC to follow suit in investing in some sort of community system. Political pressure to comply with

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<sup>123</sup> "Hopes fade for fishing camps; fate hinges on sewer project," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans) 15 Apr. 1995: REAL ESTATE, R1.

state law would certainly increase, whether from the government, the rest of the community, or the greater New Orleans community. Without predictable revenue from camp leases, it would have been more difficult for the company to survive (or sell) under those conditions.

The lease negotiations for this group of 46 or more lessees were still in progress by the end of that summer. Comprising only about one sixth of the total number of Chef Menteur lessees no doubt weakens their bargaining power. Tenants' rationales for participation or non-participation in the collective negotiations merits further investigation, especially given the high (more than 90%) participation rate of the much smaller Brazilier Island group.

### **Case #3: Lake Catherine Land Company (LCLC): The promise of ownership**

In 1990, approximately 300 campowners, on four large but densely developed tracts on the eastern/northern peninsula jutting out from Lake Catherine island towards the Rigolets, banded together to buy land from which they might otherwise have been evicted. As a result of this crucial first step, the LCLC sub-community has evolved as if by punctuated equilibrium,<sup>124</sup> towards greater legitimacy and permanence, as well as community stability. Ironically, this segment of the island is more vulnerable than both Brazilier Island and the Chef Menteur Pass area to the ravages of hurricanes and to erosion.<sup>125</sup> But because not owning the land has always been the islanders' fundamental source of insecurity, ownership actually seems to solve a lot of problems for them. "Folks have said that whatever they put on the land is not theirs," says Rev. Arthur Ginart of St. Nicholas of Myra Church, "This land can be taken back at any time," by its owners, I assume he means, and not by the waves.

Until 1990, the land now owned by LCLC campowners had belonged to CSX railroad. As in the case of Brazilier Island, the impetus for the sale of these 317 acres along US 90<sup>126</sup> was the owner's unwillingness to lay down capital for sewage treatment, necessary in order to avoid sanctions from the state Department of Health and Hospitals.

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<sup>124</sup> As coined and popularized by the late Stephen Jay Gould.

<sup>125</sup> Note that the "eat out," pictured in Figures 11 and 12, occurred on Lake Catherine Land Company property.

<sup>126</sup> Paula Pechon, personal communication, 8 Jul. 2003. Ms. Pechon is Secretary of the board of the Lake Catherine Land Company.

As the story goes, CSX had originally sent letters to tenants just as Chef Menteur Land Company had, informing them of a comparable rent increase, but tenant opposition convinced them to cut their losses by simply selling the land. Wishing to avoid paperwork, CSX conditioned that it would only sell the land as a single holding, and not as individual lots (of which there were more than 250), thus requiring the tenants as a group to apply for a subdivision in order for individual campowners to receive titles to their lots.<sup>127</sup> In the meantime, the company raised money from campowners on the tract for the purchase and eventual subdivision, by selling shares based on highway frontage measurements, rather than lot area, since erosion made such dimensions unstable.<sup>128</sup>

The New Orleans City Council, responsible for granting subdivisions, cannot allow developers to subdivide unless they have a state-approved sewerage plan. However, according to state law, the smaller-scale sewage treatment units, and individual treatment units, are only approved for properties with lots of record. Because individual mechanical treatment units<sup>129</sup> are said to pollute waters even when running at peak efficiency,<sup>130</sup> they are of little use in areas as populated as Lake Catherine island. Furthermore, the general consensus in the Department of Health and Hospitals and among local environmental professionals, is that weekend and occasional (as opposed to residential) use of camps would render the individual units ineffective by allowing the waste-decomposing bacteria to die for lack of input.<sup>131</sup>

After more than 13 years, the Lake Catherine Land Company was finally granted approval to subdivide its tract and transfer to its shareholders legal titles to individual lots of record. The company has not, however, definitively solved the problem of sewage disposal. LCLC landowners, among other islanders, continue to view the recommended method, a cluster system that would treat small groups of camps, as being prohibitively expensive, despite the recent paradigm change (individual titles), which should have made it a more attractive investment. Part of the group's strategy was to attempt to demonstrate that the city's refusal to accept individual treatment units for LCLC

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<sup>127</sup> "Camp owners battle the odds for the good life," *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 1 Sept. 1990: Real Estate 1, 24.

<sup>128</sup> Paula Pechon, personal communication, 8 Jul. 2003.

<sup>129</sup> Not to be confused with septic systems, which, although widely used at least into the 1990s [see *Burk, Kleinpeter, Inc., 1992*], are illegal in the area because of remarkably poorly-drained soils.

<sup>130</sup> Carlton Dufrechou, personal communication 18 Aug. 2003.

<sup>131</sup> "Lake camps told to clean up their acts," *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 13 May 1991: A-8.

campowners was “arbitrary and capricious,” given that the Fort Pike Subdivision (also on Lake Catherine island) was permitted to use such technology. In the end, actually, LCLC was allowed to subdivide without having submitted a complete sewage treatment system plan. The eighth and final proviso in the City Hall motion granting tentative approval<sup>132</sup> of LCLC’s resubdivision plan, adopted on April 16, 2003 read as follows:

Lake Catherine Land Company shall not be dissolved and shall work with the Department of Health and Hospitals until such time as appropriate arrangements have been made for sewerage treatment systems for all lots of record.<sup>133</sup>

That LCLC remain organized for the purpose of securing proper sewage disposal was not the only conditionality the city rolled into the subdivision motion. The other required LCLC to help keep US 90 intact:

The applicant shall consult with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development and comply with any requirements deemed necessary, in order to prevent further erosion of U.S. Highway 90.<sup>134</sup>

As neglected as this group claims to feel, they are perhaps beginning to recognize their importance to the New Orleans system: US Highway 90 is an eastbound emergency and hurricane evacuation alternative to I-10.

### **What took so long?**

Conflicts of interest were both symptomatic of and contributing factors in the failure to overhaul the camps’ sewage disposal setup in a timely manner. There was one individual on the LCLC payroll who, with the help of the existing LCLC board, managed to drag out subdivision negotiations for several years until she and the other former board members were finally ousted in early 2002 by a new LCLC Board of Directors, who carried the company to subdivision victory.<sup>135</sup> This younger and more resourceful and opportunistic group of campowners charged forward with a contemporary ethical framework on their side—one of transparency and environmental concern. Like the SUV<sup>136</sup> marketers who describe potential drivers as adventurers in close touch with

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<sup>132</sup> Final approval was granted on June 26, 2003.

<sup>133</sup> Cynthia Willard-Lewis (New Orleans City Councilmember). Motion No. M-03-23B (City Hall: Certified by Clerk of Council Peggy Crutchfield, April 16, 2003) Proviso 8.

<sup>134</sup> Cynthia Willard-Lewis (New Orleans City Councilmember). Motion No. M-03-23B (City Hall: Certified by Clerk of Council Peggy Crutchfield, April 16, 2003) Proviso 3.

<sup>135</sup> Roy Heyl Jr., personal communication, 3 Nov. 2003; Paula Pechon, personal communication, 8 Jul. 2003.

<sup>136</sup> “Sport-utility vehicles”

nature, the new board succeeded in their display of a concern that was sincere, unlike that of the former group.

According to one of the officers of Lake Catherine Land Company, the former LCLC board members, aided by local representatives, had developed an informal pact with the Department of Health and Hospitals over the past 13 years, whereby no action would be taken against the land company for their lack of proper sewage treatment, provided only that they did not request approval for a subdivision. Because the installation of individual treatment units requires subdivision status, there were reportedly a fair number of campowners whose effluent was completely untreated. The new board managed to draw the attention of the US. Environmental Protection Agency to the problem, and this dissolved the deadlock with the DHH.<sup>137</sup> According to one of the members of the new board, the old board had an understanding with the agency:

We started complaining about the human feces floating in the lake...so, they [LA Department of Health and Hospitals] knew they had to do something or we were going to go the EPA with them. So they called a meeting, and it was a demand meeting, that the [old] board members appear, to explain to them why they hadn't done anything. And it was plainly stated by the old board, "Well you told us, as long as we didn't bother you all about getting our subdivision, that you all wouldn't fine us and bother us about getting sewerage." Now that is a statement and a half. In other words, "You leave me alone and let me do all the illegal stuff and I won't ask for approval on the subdivision."<sup>138</sup>

While the above quote does not illustrate any major commitment to clean water or other environmental ideals—the new board took action because they sought the financial benefits of individual titles—it is an instance where a group of community members saw a direct connection between environmental quality and their own best interests.

There were five individuals who had dual membership in LCLC and Lake Catherine Sewerage and Water District (LCSWD)<sup>139</sup>, a position which would have required them to take disciplinary action (on behalf of LCSWD) against themselves (as members of the LCLC board). One of the dual members, Roy Heyl Jr., requested an

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<sup>137</sup> This was not the only instance in recent years of EPA wielding threats of takeover of environmental enforcement in Louisiana: in February 2003 it was reported that the EPA had given an ultimatum to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality for excessively lax enforcement of environmental laws. "EPA wants changes in La. DEQ; Agency threatens to strip state of enforcement duty," *Sunday Advocate* [Baton Rouge, LA] 16 Feb. 2003: 1-B (Credit AP Filename epa.wire.aew)

<sup>138</sup> Paula Pechon, personal communication, 8 Jul. 2003.

<sup>139</sup> "Red tape exacerbates longtime sewage problem," *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 16 Dec. 2001: from *Times-Picayune* database, no page given.



opinion from the Louisiana Board of Ethics in late 2001, which determined that the situation did indeed constitute a conflict of interest.

It seems the city's requirement that LCLC devise a plan for a modern sewage treatment system was viewed as a bureaucratic obstacle to the shareholders' anticipated enjoyment of the privileges of land ownership, including the ability to take out equity loans. This may actually have been more of an abstract future possibility to the shareholders, and perhaps even to the old board; these are privileges that most other islanders had not enjoyed or expected to enjoy. More concrete, immediate concerns (including but not limited to flood and storm-related damage) would have drowned out this long-term goal in most people's attentions. The new leadership seems to have much less trouble with the abstractions of subdivisions, land titles and water pollution than did the older generation of LCLC board members.<sup>140</sup> The reasons for this apparent shift in style and attention are worthy of exploration: analysis of these behaviors may prove valuable for designing programs that foster stewardship and environmental self-advocacy.

Another controversy that erupted was whether or not those whose camps were located adjacent to vacant sites, which came to be known to the shareholder community as "promised land," would be given a priority bidding position for those lots after the land was subdivided. The rationale behind their position was that these neighbors had invested in protecting these properties from erosion and other damage, only under the assumption that the value of preservation would accrue to them directly. However, when the issue came up for a board decision, the duty to maximize shareholders' benefits apparently took primacy. This might be considered a break from the island communities' traditional treatment of such relationships, and an action that the old board would not have taken. Whatever the prevailing ethical interpretation of private property, however, the tenacious association between land stewardship and the hope of personal economic gain resurfaces in the question of "promised land."

Speaking of investments that might not yield expected returns, the question arises whether or not Lake Catherine Land Company title holders will be able over the long

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<sup>140</sup> I was inspired to make this comparison by Yale Professor of Sociology Scott Boorman, who referred me to Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, Amos Tversky, eds., *Judgment Under Uncertainty* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 1982) 115-116.

term to reap the benefits they seem to assume will come along with land ownership. To predict on the basis of increasing camp values, there is logic to LCLC campowners' optimism about what land titles may add to those values. However, there is also logic in the notion that land and camp values will never be as stable as property rights. Liability is likely to increase with rising insurance costs,<sup>141</sup> and coastal land values are declining elsewhere in the state.<sup>142</sup>

#### **IV. Defining Lake Catherine**

##### **Lake Catherine Camp and Landowners Civic Organization (LCCO) and "island pride"**

According to its president, Roy Heyl, Jr., the group was formed "for the betterment of the people of the island," with emphases on environmental quality, safety, and "enhancement of the island."<sup>143</sup> To those ends, it advocates for improved sanitation from the City of New Orleans and supports such events as an "Island Pride Trash Bash"; it supports the Fort Pike Volunteer Fire Department through fund- and awareness-raising events and works on collaborations with the New Orleans Police Department to increase security during and after storms; and it sponsors community-building events such as an annual Mardi Gras parade on the island. Last summer, the group commissioned the painting and installation of signs at either end of the island reading, "Welcome to Lake St. Catherine."

Although membership is drawn from every campowner group on the island, with individuals elected to represent each, 85% are Lake Catherine Land Company campowners. Originally, membership applications were only handed out to LCLC campowners and Chef Menteur Land Company tenants only knew about LCCO through word of mouth. Since LCCO began actively soliciting CMLC tenants with flyers and applications placed in all mailboxes, the membership coming from that group has been increasing over the years.<sup>144</sup> Heyl himself is Lake Catherine Land Company campowner.

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<sup>141</sup> The 2003 Blumenauer bill that passed late in that year .

<sup>142</sup> Caffey, Rex H., Kevin Savoie, and Mark Shirley (2003), "Stewardship Incentives for Louisiana's Coastal Landowners." Louisiana State University Ag-Econ Extension. December 12, 2003 <[www.agecon-extension.lsu.edu/CaffeyWeb/Land.pdf](http://www.agecon-extension.lsu.edu/CaffeyWeb/Land.pdf)>

<sup>143</sup> Roy Heyl, Jr., personal communication, 3 Nov. 2003.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

Because this organization met only once during my stay in New Orleans, I was able to observe and record only one of the meetings, the transcript of which I have included as Appendix D. The meeting began with a campaign speech by Louisiana State Senate hopeful Wayne Mumphrey, whose populist rhetoric seemed to burst at the seams. Following his exit, Mr. Heyl began addressing what seemed to be regular items of business, spending the most time on trash disposal. This meeting had followed Tropical Storm Bill by less than two weeks, and the New Orleans Department of Sanitation still had not done a pickup on the island. Apparently, there had already been a considerable amount of trash out along the road and elsewhere out in the open before the storm came. Heyl explained that he had spoken several times with City Council Representative, Ms. Willard-Lewis and believed that they had worked out an acceptable solution, no doubt aided by recent local news coverage of the trash problem. Sanitation workers would be arriving in their trucks the next day. The attendees seemed frustrated, with one proposing, sarcastically but with a hint of seriousness, to burn the lingering eyesores in a large open bonfire. Heyl empathetically assured the skeptics that he had been given confirmation of the city's intentions and that the organization's efforts were not perfunctory:

You see, trying to work with the city is like pulling teeth, you know, it's difficult to do. But we're trying, we're diligently working on the city to go along with the program. You know we argue the point that we pay taxes, but we don't get anything for it.

Heyl's message was one of reconciliation with city agencies for the good of the community. This was difficult at times for him to get across, but he mediated calmly to the end.

In the meeting I have described above, certain comments from among the attendees were familiar in their discursive flavor. The oft-repeated mantra of taxation without representation had made its way into virtually every conversation I had had with Lake Catherine islanders about their community. Also, the proposed communal incineration ritual corresponded with the rebel/outsider image that many people, especially the men, had cultivated living on the island, out of the normal reach of "civilization."

However, given what I have explained in the previous case study about Lake Catherine Land Company's role in the greater Lake Catherine community, it should not

come as a surprise that this organization's members were mostly LCLC campowners (now full-fledged landowners), further embodies the shift that LCLC has made over the past few years—towards legitimacy, cooperation with government, openness towards outsiders and ethical transparency. The sign, motions to assign addresses to all camps, an active collaboration with the police to guard the island against looters after storms hit, and the cooperative stewardship activity of trash pickups, all signal a desire on the part of this group to forge a more stable community.

These activities may comprise a deliberate agenda for securing power, or they may be just a spontaneous natural progression of endeavors arising from the group's desire to sustain a beloved sense of place. The reality is probably somewhere in between the two poles. The evolution of community-oriented activities on the island certainly merits further investigation, although re-tracing footsteps through interviews would likely summon a noble, self-congratulatory construction of actual personal motivations. LCLC's self-image is maturing (although I do not mean this as pejorative of its former state). That newly-empowered landowners would lean towards greater civic engagement conforms perfectly with common wisdom about urban community activism. But I would pay attention to what happens next, because this group may have intentionally used environmental and sense of place rhetoric to maneuver the argument in their favor,<sup>145</sup> and now it is up to the city to ensure that they make good on their word, rather than the other way around.

### **Writing about Lake Catherine the place**

"Local narratives tell us less about 'history' and more about how people construct their sense of place and cultural identity."—S. Elizabeth Bird, 2002<sup>146</sup>

Roy Heyl and another island scribe, Arriollia "Bonnie" Vanney, have each turned out local historical narratives that capture a number of cherished place meanings that have been attributed to the island, so many of them not readable from the landscape, for

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<sup>145</sup> I was led to this hypothesis by the following proposition: "Groups intentionally manipulate the meanings of places hoping to influence the outcome of natural resource controversies." From Antony S. Cheng, Linda E. Kruger, Steven E. Daniels, "'Place' as an Integrating Concept in Natural Resource Politics: Propositions for a Social Science Research Agenda," *Society and Natural Resources* 16 (2003): 97.

<sup>146</sup> S. Elizabeth Bird, "It Makes Sense to Us: Cultural Identity in Local Legends of Place." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 31 (October 2002): 519.

reasons described above. Vanney, who originally set out collecting recipes for a cookbook and ended up self-publishing an oral history bejeweled with thumbnail-sized old photographs, seems to have written as much for Lake Catherine community members themselves as for any other audience (although she did interview with the *Times-Picayune* shortly after its release). Heyl, whose vignettes have been appearing periodically in the East New Orleans section of the *Times-Picayune*, may be attempting more explicitly to revamp the island's image in the eyes of the greater community.

Whatever their respective underlying agendas and personal network boundaries, each of these two spokespersons is a unifier. Both second-generation islanders, they have omitted any mention of the sewage disposal controversy from their narratives. Neither one questions the membership of any individual or group of individuals.

Invitations to controversy were the contribution of Gary Raymond, founder and administrator of the Lake Catherine Newsletter website. The imperative for this new communication tool came from the need to raise awareness among LCLC campowners and open up dialogue about past and future management of the company. As time passed, speculations on the political maneuvers of elected officials (and of Kenneth Carter), sharp criticism of LCLC's former board, a challenge to Roy Heyl to justify LCCO's existence, polls asking islanders to vote on whether Lake Catherine should secede to join neighboring St. Tammany Parish or whether rental camps should be outlawed, angry and defensive editorials back and forth about LCLC's decisions regarding the "promised land" (see p. 47)—all became fair game for discussion. Raymond offers his own, very concise and unsentimental version of the current Lake Catherine narrative<sup>147</sup>, but leaves it to website patrons to insist on the details and meanings. Since LCLC's legal victory, Raymond has pulled the newsletter, with 3 years' worth of archived community dialogue, off the web and replaced it with a relatively

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<sup>147</sup> It goes like this: "Lake Catherine is a natural barrier island situated on the extreme eastern end of Orleans Parish. It separates Lake Pontchartrain from Lake Catherine. It runs roughly east-west, and is connected to land by a bridge at the Chef Pass and another at the Rigolets Pass. The Island wiggles approximately 9 miles in length and varies in width from ½ mile to 2 miles. US highway 90 runs end to end through its center. The Island is owned today by a mixture of companies and individuals. On the far east or Rigolets end is Fort Pike, a historic 19<sup>th</sup> century military landmark. In addition, there is a small village located there known as the Fort Pike community. On the opposite west end, a smaller island, known as Marques Island, is also home to many camp dwellers. Lake Catherine is home to the majority of the area commercial oystermen, crabbers and fishers as well as to a large population of sportsmen who hunt and fish the area. It is currently home to over 1500 camp dwellers. The last 5 years has seen many more full time residents appearing as well as several new modern residences."

sedate and desolate forum where islanders and outsiders may post missives themselves, but the forum has not become the virtual public space that the newsletter once was.

For Heyl, it appears that publishing short features on the island is a natural extension of his efforts to build “island pride” and bridges to the rest of the city. His articles do not seem to have appeared until after Lake Catherine Land Company won subdivision status, an event which certainly exculpated Lake Catherine Land Company, if not the entire island community, of its non-point source crimes. Heyl muses about the local culture (i.e., fishing and crabbing, the amusing names of camps) and draws attention to symbols of the island’s abundant social capital, such as the volunteer fire department, annual festivals and games, and the shared rituals of mutual assistance after storms. He credits early experiences on the island with his own value formation: “As a teenager, the things I learned on those trips were values to live by: like the willingness to help your friends and neighbors without payment except a handshake and smiling thanks.”<sup>148</sup>

Heyl also calls forth the shared mythology of the island’s original camp builders, who saw opportunity in the marsh, labored to maintain the land and make it useful, and stoically endured dreadful storms:

As my grandfather would say to me, ‘Those were the days of iron men and wooden ships,’ and seeing all that was accomplished in their day, I must agree and thank them for their efforts. This dedication has been passed on to my generation and I pray to the generations to come.<sup>149</sup>

His empowering messages of self-reliance and inherited duty serve LCCO’s objectives, attempting to make rebellious cynicism (evident in the repartee among attendees to the July 11 LCCO meeting, transcript included, Appendix D) seem less of a character asset. Most importantly, they reaffirm the existing community’s place claims

Moved by recollections of stories she had heard as a child and that only elderly community members could substantiate, Vanney states her role with urgency: “I wanted to tell this history before it gets away.”<sup>150</sup> While researching this book Vanney hastened to compile and preserve memories of a sense of place that she feels no longer exists and of which there are no physical remnants. While distributing her book, *An Island Between*

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<sup>148</sup> [Roy Heyl] “Community needs more volunteer firefighters; Lake Catherine gets help from NOFD,” *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans], 22 February 2004: EAST NEW ORLEANS PICAYUNE/Off the Wharf 1.

<sup>149</sup> [Roy Heyl] “Islanders help keep erosion at bay; Lake Catherine busy adding barriers, fill,” *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 2 May 2004: East New Orleans Picayune, Off the Wharf 1.

<sup>150</sup> “Chef, Rigolets history chronicled in book,” *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans], 28 Aug 2003: East New Orleans Picayune p.4.

*the Chef and Rigolets*, to various local watering holes, some of which hosted author signings, Vanney sold approximately 375 copies in the first month after release in late August 2003.

Vanney has made a few attempts to politicize the problem of erosion among islanders, writing an open letter on “Inner Coastal Erosion” (a category she may have invented herself) and the government’s failure to recognize its severity and impacts, and inviting comments from community members about the erosion they have been able to observe over the years. She intended to send the letter to local and state elected officials and hoped that the community would join her in voicing concerns about erosion. I do not know how much success she has had since the fall of 2003, when after several private conversations with community members, she said, “It seems that I might have hit on something that they are willing to work toward and talk about. It may be a step in the right direction.”<sup>151</sup> I believe that her apprehensiveness regarding erosion is less about the ecological future of the landmass, and more of a metaphor for the gradual wearing away of cultural memory. By her attempts to mobilize common concern for this loss, she has gotten hold of a tangible, physical trend, which she can persuade community members to monitor and account for, thus compelling them to keep their memories active.

In his articles, especially “Islanders help keep erosion at bay; Lake Catherine busy adding barriers, fill,”<sup>152</sup> Heyl seems to be saying something slightly different: that Lake Catherine islanders are self-reliant and extraordinarily adaptable. He is not, as far as I know, sending an alarmist message, nor is he demanding government action to address erosion in this particular locale. Like LCLC’s negotiators, he is poised to make use of islanders’ instrumental position within the city of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana. His words ostensibly unite the island community by emphasizing shared contributions and assets, costs borne without rational calculation of risks and benefits.

### **Ecotourism: the area is “underutilized”?**

In the mid 1990s, contracted to assist Orleans Parish in developing a plan for their local Coastal Zone Management Program, a private environmental and engineering consulting

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<sup>151</sup> Bonnie Vanney, personal communication, --Nov 2003.

<sup>152</sup> ...*Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 2 May 2004: East New Orleans Picayune, Off the Wharf 1.

group headed by respected Louisianan coastal geologist Sherwood Gagliano, called Coastal Environments, Inc., proposed to promote ecotourism and water-based recreation in eastern Orleans Parish, particularly in the Chef Menteur-Rigolets area (Lake Catherine island). Despite the relative dearth of safe public access points, facilities and infrastructure in these parts,<sup>153</sup> ecotourism was seen at first as a way of attracting attention to the coastal areas of Orleans Parish and obtaining local support for restoration projects<sup>154</sup> funded by the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA, 1990)<sup>155</sup>, which has typically called upon local interests to compete for grants.<sup>156</sup> In the proposal, these coastal areas were dubbed the “Eastern Orleans Wetlands,” whose “natural and cultural resources,” it said, “remain among the most underutilized recreational opportunities in Orleans Parish”<sup>157</sup>—an odd assessment, I think, of an area so beloved and spiked with camps.

The plan prescribed major restoration efforts along the shores of Lake Borgne (on which camps do not actually front), to be coupled with added tourism infrastructure throughout the Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge, encompassing the marshy areas across Lake St. Catherine to the southeast of Lake Catherine island. It seems the city would have liked to see opportunities for economic development in the area, but the project’s proponents were warned by the state (Department of Health and Hospitals) that sewerage would have to be provided for all new developments. Lake Catherine islanders themselves were consulted but apparently not engaged in the planning process, and therefore showed little interest, telling the City Planning Commission that “they [wouldn’t] mind the new developments as long as they [didn’t] cause problems for the camp owners.”<sup>158</sup> A staff member at Coastal Environments, Inc. recalls that, “The general consensus was that they wanted coastal restoration/enhancement, public water

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<sup>153</sup> Swamp tours have had some success in the more wooded St. Tammany Parish, just across the Rigolets from Lake Catherine island, but those who come to the island for day visits come only to catch fish.

<sup>154</sup> Karen Wicker (Coastal Environments, Inc.), personal communication, 3 Oct. 2003.

<sup>155</sup> “Ivan stirs up wave of safety proposals; Hurricane-proofed stadium is one idea,” *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 22 Sept 2004: web address <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-2/1095836168295250.xml> (last accessed 1 Oct 2004).

<sup>156</sup> Karen Wicker (Coastal Environments, Inc.), personal communication, 3 Oct. 2003.

<sup>157</sup> Coastal Environments, Inc. *Strategies for Enhancing Water-Oriented Recreation and Ecotourism in the Eastern Orleans Wetlands* (Baton Rouge, LA: Prepared for City Planning Commission, City of New Orleans, 1994) 1.

<sup>158</sup> “Ivan stirs up wave of safety proposals; Hurricane-proofed stadium is one idea,” *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 22 Sept 2004: web address <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-2/1095836168295250.xml> (last accessed 1 Oct 2004).



and sewer systems, etc., [but] they did not want more people coming to the area to upset their way of life.”<sup>159</sup> In this summary of the situation, I detect some displeasure over campowners’ lack of interest in reciprocity with the government.

It appears that the project’s birth and untimely death cycled as follows: the city had contracted an environmental consulting firm to plan projects also of significance to local environmental interests, who hoped to obtain funding from the federal government (CWPPRA) for wetland restoration; however, when the State of Louisiana pulled rank and the city seemed quite willing at that point to back down, the project was abandoned. By “local environmental interests,” I am referring more to Gagliano himself: he has written about archaeological treasures in Eastern New Orleans since the 1960s or 1970s, and published assessments of area geology discouraging the development of what is now the Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge. In other words, he was attached to Eastern Orleans the place from his own, academic perspective. This attachment, although not powerful enough, or appropriately conveyed, to have inspired the participation of Lake Catherine islanders and/or other potential stakeholders, was strong enough to put protection of the “Eastern Orleans Land Bridge” on the agenda of *Coast 2050* (1998). The campowners on Lake Catherine were treated as peripheral to the creation and operation of the ecotourism project—even though, among all potential stakeholders, they were most familiar with the area’s recreational and scenic amenities and would be affected most directly by any changes. Their definition of the place, therefore, found no publication at that time: perhaps at that time, in the midst of political and fiscal battles over sewerage, the population was at its most withdrawn. For a striking illustration of Lake Catherine island’s marginality in the project of boosting tourism in the area, see Figure 15, below.

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<sup>159</sup> Karen Wicker (Coastal Environments, Inc.), personal communication, 3 Oct. 2003.



Figure 14. This rather distorted souvenir map is the product of a collaboration between the New Orleans East Economic Development Foundation (NOEEDF) and the New Orleans Tourism and Marketing Commission. One of NOEEDF's stated goals is to "Promote New Orleans East with an emphasis on developing tourism." (<http://www.noeedf.org>, last accessed February 15, 2004). The Lake Catherine community is at bottom right. Note that Chef Menteur highway appears to end at Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge and is not even labeled as US 90. All of the cartoon icons represent real places, but the map skews their spatial arrangement.

## **V. Concluding discussion**

Since I began writing I have feared that I would be unable to move beyond a set of conclusions about this community that amounted to one of two unconstructive assessments—an uncritical celebration that appealed redundantly to (remote) protective sentiments or a condemnation of the community's very existence, on both environmental and social grounds. Neither of these two assessments would have justified the time and resources that went into this project. I continually asked myself why anyone should care what happens to this place, or wish to intervene on the community's behalf, where half the dwellings are not even full-time residences, where economic development is both

unlikely and unwise, where there are only 387 votes, and where the population has yet to embrace the idea of collaboration with its neighbors in Orleans Parish (except perhaps Venetian Isles). But I have finally concluded that committing to a balanced portrayal of the community's attributes would reveal something about how such systems persist.

In this last section, I will make predictions as to what might sooner or later affect the community's stability. I will then attempt to explain why this community's overall stability—or non-decline—is in the better interests of the greater New Orleans area, as well as how policymakers, government managers, the media, academics and environmental organizations may stimulate stewardship or, failing that, avoid throwing sticks into spokes for the time being.

### **What next? Permanence, value and the right to define place**

“Most individual camps in Louisiana marshes do not threaten the environment, nor are they seriously threatened by it. Most are temporary shelters used as base camps for hunters and fishermen. Owners are aware of storms and subsidence problems and do not have large monetary investments in the structures.”—Kelley et al, 1984<sup>160</sup>

“One way to deconstruct the activities of place-making is to evaluate the communicative practices used by social actors in advancing their positions. These social behaviors include the use of language and non-verbal imagery in bounding, focusing, and limiting discussion topics; the use of verbal or non-verbal strategies to include or deny participation; and the manipulation of symbols to achieve desired ends. These behaviors, and many others, are circumscribed by the levels of power available to social actors. People have differential levels of access and different skills and abilities relative to participation in public debate and discussion.” —Patricia A. Stokowski, 2002<sup>161</sup>

“[Lake Catherine] residents' fondness for the laid-back lifestyle, the sense of community and the proximity to vast stretches of unbroken sky and open water have stiffened the resolve of most residents to beat back the forces of nature and man.”—Janet Plume, *Times-Picayune*, 1990<sup>162</sup>

In becoming titleholders, LCLC shareholders have opened up a new chapter in the community narrative, and depending on the extent to which their ownership of the land affords them political will not shared by other groups, or entitles them to set themselves apart discursively, the whole-island cohesiveness of the moment may persist or it may not. One thing certain is that the leaders in LCLC's new board, with the help of their

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<sup>160</sup> Joseph T. Kelley, Alice R. Kelley, Orrin Pilkey, Sr., and Albert A. Clark, *Living with the Louisiana Shore* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1984) 50.

<sup>161</sup> Stokowski, Patricia A, “Languages of Place and Discourses of Power: Constructing New Senses of Place” *Journal of Leisure Research* 34 (2002): 368-382.

<sup>162</sup> “Camp owners battle the odds for the good life,” *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 1 Sept 1990: REAL ESTATE 28.

attorneys, have mastered the logic and rhetoric of “enlightened self-interest”<sup>163</sup>: taking a complaint about their own polluted water to the press and to the EPA, and portraying it as the result merely of flawed policy, glosses over the presently irreducible unwillingness of (probably) most campowners to invest more in cluster sewage treatment systems than many did in the dwellings themselves.

By virtue of the deal their lawyers struck with Cynthia Willard-Lewis and the city council, they have leapfrogged over their predecessors’ unproductive stance with respect to sewage treatment and the perceived “catch-22.” Or was it unproductive? Was the limbo between isolated, insecure freedom and staked legitimacy actually more productive of social capital, and comfortable for the island community as a whole, so long as regulatory action remained latent? I posit that it actually benefited LCLC’s relationship with their neighbors to the west, lessees of Chef Menteur Land Company and Remington Oil and Gas Company (Brazilier Island).

Whether the conditions pinned to city council’s concessions actually result in infrastructural changes on the island, or are simply filed away, “enlightened self-interest” is highly unlikely to stimulate the other two groups’ participation in and persistence through community decision-making processes and/or negotiations with the city or state. I have already discussed how Kenneth Carter’s takeover of and development plans for Brazilier Island served to invalidate the community’s entrenched values and norms, those that made the island a true escape. Now that LCLC titleholders’ interests in their property have fully broadened to include outside sources of value, most of which are purely monetary, this more modern worldview may prevail and outcompete those prone to “detrimental reliance”<sup>164</sup> for the right to define Lake Catherine island as a place.

When I asked her if she thought the island community was going through a transition, one LCLC campowner working with the new board plainly replied, “It’s a good transition. It’s bad for some people, but it’s good for the people that do the right

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<sup>163</sup> As put so well by Joseph T. Kelley, Alice R. Kelley, Orrin Pilkey, Sr., and Albert A. Clark [*Living with the Louisiana Shore* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1984) 83], “Enlightened self-interest also demands that we be aware of the minimum requirements of the law and insure that any developed property in which we have an interest meets those requirements.”

<sup>164</sup> This interpretive thread became an option once I read Stephen Gudeman’s *The Anthropology of Economy* (Massachusetts, Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2001) 189 pp. Gudeman would probably attribute Chef Menteur Land Company tenants’ “detrimental reliance” to their community-oriented, non-market understanding of the land tenure arrangement with CMLC.

things in life.”<sup>165</sup> Those who had neglected or failed to pay rent to the Chef Menteur Land Company for several years, and whom Ms. Mahler had presumably allowed to remain delinquent, were the very individuals this campowner felt should be cleansed from the island. They had taken advantage of Ms. Mahler’s sympathy and mismanagement of the company, and were getting something for nothing. “The people that do the right things in life,” therefore, were not necessarily those who helped one another during and after storms and other crises, but those who had settled their accounts properly out of respect for the principles of private property.

Whether or not it will become lucrative for individual LCLC titleholders to sell off their parcels is an immediate question. They have, after all, purchased the legal right to do so. The very option of making a profit by selling alters (but does not necessarily expand) these actors’ repertoire of politically and economically advantageous maneuvers, and therefore also the way that they will come to define and value the land on Lake Catherine; it changes what they will demand from Lake Catherine as a place. By contrast, their neighbors, the tenants of Chef Menteur Land Company and of Brazilier Island will likely retain a construction of Lake Catherine the place that rests on ephemerality of investments and landscape, and the hope for permanent place claims by virtue of their predecessors’ legacy—not for legal rights (and responsibilities) by virtue of land ownership. (As I project these relationships into the future, I do not mean to suggest that all LCLC titleholders share the opinion of the campowner I mentioned above, for I am certain that many of them endorse the same communal virtues that Roy Heyl extols, as I am also certain that there are a number of campowners leasing from CMLC and Kenneth Carter who have set their sights on eventual real estate profits.)

### **Valuation**

The forecast for camp and land values is uncertain. The majority of LCLC camps are on the stretch of the island that is most vulnerable to storm surge damage and severe erosion.<sup>166</sup> So far, camp values have been increasing (discussed on p. 17), and some community members point to the fact that there is no other residential waterfront property

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<sup>165</sup> Teri Woolverton, personal communication, 31 Jul 2003.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 58, also elaborated above, pp. 23-25.

available within New Orleans city limits. However, there is reason to doubt that this trend will continue as anxiety over storm damages mounts. In the wake of Hurricane Ivan (September 2004), the *Times-Picayune* reported that floodgates across the Rigolets and Chef Menteur Pass were again being considered as protection against storm surge entering Lake Pontchartrain.<sup>167</sup> A similar proposal by the US Army Corps of Engineers was struck down in the 1970s, which would have done away with a good bit of Lake Catherine island as well as US 90 had it passed.<sup>168</sup> If proposals such as this are any indication of city, state and federal government's range of options with respect to this landmass, sound investors are unlikely to flock to the island anytime soon. The series of hurricanes in August and September of 2004 calls for a study of land values over the next few years, as New Orleans' luck is perceived to be running out.

I bother to discuss valuation here because some of the literature that concerns the social and economic aspects of wetland loss and rehabilitation stresses the importance of differences among social actors in valuation of wetland properties. Although the number of people who benefit from the functions of coastal wetlands—including flood control, erosion control, land-water interface for fisheries' breeding, and filtration of water pollutants—far exceeds the number of land and owners in coastal Louisiana, there seem to be no incentives, for Lake Catherine island's landowners at least, to maintain and restore wetlands beyond the bare minimum required by law. "Landowners tend to undervalue wetlands," environmental communications specialist Bob Thomas argues. (Recalling Remington Oil and Gas Company's sale to Kenneth Carter, this is conspicuously understated.) "As long as coastal wetlands are in private ownership," Thomas continues, "decisions regarding their fate will be made on the basis of what is best for the owner, not society."<sup>169</sup> A survey taken in 1976 found that those Louisiana residents living closest to the coast were less likely than those living in the northern reaches of the state to answer that coastal marshes' most valuable feature was their role in

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<sup>167</sup> "Ivan stirs up wave of safety proposals; Hurricane-proofed stadium is one idea," *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 22 Sept 2004; web address <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-2/1095836168295250.xml> (last accessed 1 Oct 2004).

<sup>168</sup> Joseph T. Kelley, Alice R. Kelley, Orrin Pilkey, Sr., and Albert A. Clark, *Living with the Louisiana Shore* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1984) 59.

<sup>169</sup> Robert A. Thomas, "Ecology of the Mississippi River Delta Region" course website, New Orleans, Loyola University 15 Dec 2003 <http://www.loyno.edu/lucec/mrderosion.html>.

maintaining ecological balances<sup>170</sup>, and I wonder whether or not similar results would emerge if the survey were administered now.

The market value of coastal wetland real estate, broken down into surface and sub-surface values, has been declining throughout much of the state. Given that oil and gas exploration in the Lake Catherine area has never yielded much revenue, and development is constrained as much by subsidence and unsuitable topography as by environmental regulations and floodplain building codes; it would seem that a new income source could receive a warm welcome among landowners. Even though 75% of projected land loss to 2050 is predicted to occur on privately owned land, the vast majority of landowners have yet to be invited to rehabilitate marshland on their own properties by way of smaller-scale projects such as marsh grass and submerged aquatic vegetation plantings.<sup>171</sup>

### **Perspective**

It is important to point out that Lake Catherine islanders' appropriation of space and creation of place would not have occurred without the multiplicity and inherent instability in the value of Louisiana's coastal lands—to the owners, the government, scientists and natural resource managers. It would not have occurred had Highway 90 not been paved so smoothly, had Chef Menteur Land Company or any other landowner struck oil or gas reserves in the marsh. The island's changing status within the region's systems of natural resource extraction (oil and gas, fish, seafood, fur), economic development (recreational and commercial fishing, entertainment and food services, maritime goods and services, etc.), military security (Fort Pike), urban and regional transportation infrastructure (highway, railroad, waterway, hurricane route), archaeological remains and historical landmarks (Indian mounds, Fort Pike, Fort Macomb), tourism, and ecological conservation (control of the salinity and velocity of water reaching Lake Pontchartrain

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<sup>170</sup> Pinhey, Thomas K and Paterson, Karen W, "Environmental concern as a factor in coastal zone development: a study of Louisiana citizens." *Coastal Zone Management Journal* 2 (1976): 297-310.

<sup>171</sup> Rex H. Caffey, Kevin Savoie, and Mark Shirley, "Stewardship Incentives for Louisiana's Coastal Landowners." *Louisiana State University Ag-Econ Extension*. December 12, 2003 [www.agecon-extension.lsu.edu/CaffeyWeb/Land.pdf](http://www.agecon-extension.lsu.edu/CaffeyWeb/Land.pdf). This paper concludes unequivocally that "coastal landowners represent a largely untapped resource for carrying out small-scale, cost-effective wetland restoration and stewardship." (4)

from the Gulf of Mexico<sup>172</sup>)—has demonstrated, to me at least, its potential ongoing importance, and therefore the New Orleans area's need for its relative stability or sustainability.

Given the island's historical, present, and potential importance to the city, it is curious and troubling how little the City Planning Commission seems to know about the community. In a review draft of the city's comprehensive zoning ordinance, new zoning classifications were proposed for the Chef Menteur-Rigolets area: Coastal Zone-1, which calls for minimum development and near-pristine conditions, and Coastal Zone-2, which allows limited commercial development. Most of Lake Catherine island was to fall under CZ-2 categorization, which is in keeping with the uses of the past several decades. However, the minimum site size that the ordinance proposed was *100 acres*,<sup>173</sup> a patent departure from present reality, for most camp lots are no more than *two* acres in area.

The intermittent dance between the state, city, landowners and campowners, during which many campowners were told they might have to leave, took enough of a toll on New Orleans' only remaining gulf waterfront. The media caught on to this, but this reporter apparently did not catch the irony of her own paraphrase:

"The bulkhead is completely gone now, and the land is falling into the Chef [Menteur Pass]," [campowner Cherie] Pons said. "It would cost about \$10,000 just to replace the bulkhead." *With the fate of the land uncertain, she said, it's not worth investing the money.*<sup>174</sup> [italics mine]

The resurfacing in September, 2004 of the US Army Corps of Engineers' floodgate concept for Chef Menteur and Rigolets Passes (as mentioned above, p. 60), may have sent people packing already.

The community's greatest success stories, in terms of quality of life and environmental improvements and social capital, center around the community's self-

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<sup>172</sup> Coastal Environments, Inc., *Strategies for Enhancing Water-Oriented Recreation and Ecotourism: Eastern Orleans Wetlands* (Baton Rouge, LA: Prepared for City Planning Commission, City of New Orleans, 1994) 8.

<sup>173</sup> Formal Review Draft of Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance §6.14.4 Hunting preserves and fishing camps: "In all zoning districts in which such uses are authorized, the following standards shall apply: (A) The minimum site size is 100 acres."

<sup>174</sup> "Hopes fade for fishing camps; fate hinges on sewer project" *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 15 April 1995: REAL ESTATE 1.



reliant identity. I am willing to wager that “sweat equity” still arouses the idealism in many campowners, including those with very low incomes. This potential is adequate to justify the allocation of funds and materials to campowners willing to perform marsh rehabilitation work on their camp sites, whether they own the land or not. On the basis of the proposed new zoning category (CZ-2), the city seems at least somewhat interested in seeing economic development in this part of Orleans Parish; on the basis of what I have presented in this narrative, I contend that if Lake Catherine islanders are given the option to learn and perform marsh rehabilitation—and the Lake Catherine Sewerage and Water District is successfully revived—then economic development may not need external stimulation, for it will arise organically from “island pride.”

Appendix A: Chef Menteur at western end of Lake Catherine island



Appendix B: Eastern end of Lake Catherine island near Rigolets



Note on Appendices A and B: Aerial photos downloaded from LACoast website:  
<http://www.lacoast.gov/maps/lacw2001/gulfport/index.htm>: Roll #5575 (Acquired 8 Feb. 2001), Plates 946, 925.

## APPENDIX C: Methods

### *The path to Lake Catherine*

Louisiana: Having read the waters were lapping their way up the sole of this boot, and particularly inspired by a piece I had read in *Scientific American*, called “Drowning New Orleans,” by Mark Fischetti, compelled me to pursue some environmental self-education in this part of the country. In this piece, the author described the severely compromised residence of two brothers in Port Fourchon (less than one hour south of New Orleans), whose leased camp site had become completely submerged less than 20 years after they settled there, such that they were forced to collect rainwater for drinking and treat their own wastes. It was the spirit of “making do” in truly adverse living conditions that intrigued me, as I had always assumed that if I knew the sea was approaching my doorstep, I would surely leave before it got close. Given what I had read in the gray literature about the bind New Orleans was in, I began to wonder if people were beginning to give up on that whole place, too. I wanted to try to understand what made people loyal to New Orleans. That was too big of a question to answer in one summer, I so limited myself to attempting to draw case studies from two communities within New Orleans.

Knowing that my time was limited, I wanted to work in communities where: a) my presence would not be so disruptive that the summer would be over before people began to talk to me rather than about me; and b) getting around to the question of environmental threats would not be a long journey beyond people’s fields of immediate concern. These specifications led to me toward the fringes of the city, where the effects of hurricanes and coastal erosion were most immediate. I had meant to collect a second case study in an older, more impervious neighborhood in the center of the city after spending a few weeks in Lake Catherine, but the situation I was exploring grew more and more complex and too fascinating to interrupt. Although the environmental and social attitudes of this island population cannot in any way be called representative of those of the New Orleans population, I think that with further investigation, the case could be made that this area’s ethos represents the expression of New Orleanians’ ethos *taken to an extreme*. For this reason, Lake Catherine was exactly the sort of community I had hoped to find from the time I conceived of this project.

### *Methodology*

My objective as a researcher with limited training in social science methods, was to uncover a complex narrative rooted in an urban/regional human ecosystem which (as an outsider) I perceived as vulnerable to natural hazards worsened by human activity.<sup>1</sup> This narrative would feature a number of grounded theory-style<sup>2</sup> hypotheses recommending future investigations. Given the story-seeking and place-based essence of my research agenda, I gravitated strongly towards emic interpretations in deriving inductive

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<sup>1</sup> I had read that there were inhabited areas on the fringes of the city, at the land-water interface and outside of the hurricane protection levee that keeps most storm surges from rolling straight through the city’s doorways. It was with an admittedly biased curiosity about such exotic features as houses on stilts that I finally settled on the community I will call Lake Catherine island as my study site.

<sup>2</sup> See Brian D. Haig, “Grounded Theory as Scientific Method,” *Philosophy of Education* (1995) <[http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-yearbook/95\\_docs/haig.html](http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-yearbook/95_docs/haig.html)> for a summary of “abductive explanatory inferentialism,” as this probably best describes my basic heuristic mechanism.

hypotheses.<sup>3</sup> To that end, I tape recorded interviews and meetings whenever possible, and tried to capture as many sound bytes as possible in my field notes when recording was not feasible.<sup>4</sup> Because my time in the field was limited, I chose to focus on a community within the New Orleans urban and coastal Louisiana regional ecosystems. I spent an average of four hours at my field site at least three times per week for seven weeks. In the course of those seven weeks, my strategy consisted of a mixture of participant observation,<sup>5</sup> semi-structured key informant interviews (citation), and casual consumption of local news media. When meeting community members for the first time, I introduced myself as a master's student studying the Lake Catherine area as part of my thesis.

Periodically, seeking corroboration for tentative inferences, I turned to census data and to relevant reference materials and government documents, available either online or at the New Orleans Public Library. My rationale for conducting these "reality checks,"<sup>6</sup> during which I also sounded out a few locally engaged academics and professionals in the environmental sciences, was the need to place my observations of the study community within the broader sociopolitical structure of metropolitan New Orleans.<sup>7</sup>

Since returning from the field I have continued to research, using telephone interviews for guidance with newly emerging inquiries, or with key informants whom I did not have the opportunity to meet over the summer.

It is crucial that the reader understand that, as I have stated above, this research project is inductive and meant merely to generate preliminary hypotheses for subsequent testing. I cannot and do not claim to have captured any sort of replicable or representative data about the population I studied.

### ***Public Meetings and Semi-Structured Interviews***

I mentioned in the body of this paper that I had attended a few public meetings on Lake Catherine island, which contributed a great deal to my gaining a sense of the area's social complexity and overall ethos. Because I tape-recorded all of these meetings, I was able to transcribe them and search for common discursive themes. Data from these meetings, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and newspaper coverage combined to form an overall picture, which I have attempted to imbue with something of a quantitative spine and contextual framing. There is still a great deal of work left to be done before any conclusions can be drawn.

Although my ostensible purpose for arranging interviews was to gain important background information, I found, of course, that many of these interviews served better

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<sup>3</sup> An article that provides eloquent vindication of my methodological approach is: Anthony S. Cheng, L.E. Krueger, S.E. Daniels, "'Place' as an Integrating Concept in Natural Resource Politics: Propositions for a Social Science Research Agenda," *Society and Natural Resources* 16 (2003): 87-104.

<sup>4</sup> Within a few weeks, a shared discourse began to jump out at me. I have made an effort to match up the fundamental tenets of this discourse, which I can only describe in lay language, with the specialized intellectual nomenclature of environmental social science disciplines and sub-disciplines. Alas, I am afraid it is at this point that I must apologize for my relative lack of theoretical grounding.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler, "Membership Roles in Field Research," *Qualitative Research Methods Series* 6 (1987).

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, I was aware of the magnetic forces pulling me into the community's ethos and pathos. One frequent contact in the area was fond of saying to me, "Once you drink the water, you keep coming back."

<sup>7</sup> I believe I have, since returning from the field, gained some ground in "placing" Lake Catherine in the context of coastal Louisiana as a region.

as portals to the various conflicts smoldering throughout the island sub-communities. Due to time constraints, I conducted interviews only with those who I felt could serve as key informants, based on their evident involvement in island activities: the priest of the local Catholic church, the secretary of the Lake Catherine Land Company, an outspoken activist on Brazillier Island, the director of the Lake Catherine Community Center, the president of the Lake Catherine Campowner and Civic Organization, the author of a history of the island community, a stockholder in the Chef Menteur Land Company, and the owner of Brazillier Island. I do not doubt that the narrative I have presented here would gain in dimension and sophistication with the addition of more interviews.

#### **Interview and participant observation log**

<i>Group/individual</i>	<i>activity</i>	<i>date</i>
Bizzy Bee: Chuck Deckleman, Lola Benfield (manager), "Frank," "Dave," Richard Bourgeois, "Tony," "Brandon," Heidi Barker	participant observation (~15 times)	6/2003-8/2003
Ronnie Rauber	interview	7/8/2003
Paula and Louie Pechon	Interview, participant observation	7/9/2003, 7/23/2003
Teri Woolverton	interview	7/31/2003
Rev. Arthur Ginart	interview	7/31/2003
Kenneth Carter	phone interview	7/22/2003
Arriollia Vanney	phone interview	9/19/2003, 11/11/2003
Roy Heyl	phone interview	11/03/2003
Larry Denny	participant observation (tour)	7/__/2003
Lake Catherine Land and Campowners Civic Organization	participant observation (meeting)	7/11/2003
Meeting with Atty. Calogero	participant observation	
Meeting with Atty. Grannan	participant observation (meeting)	
Chef Harbor Marina barroom: Louis Viavant, Betty	participant observation (occasional—4 times)	6/2003-7/2003
Joyce Krantz	interview	



**APPENDIX D: Quarterly General Membership Meeting of Lake Catherine Camp & Landowners Civic Organization (LCCO), 7/11/03**  
**Chaired by LCCO President Roy Heyl, Jr.**

*[Comments in italics are mine.]*

There wasn't smoking and drinking at this particular meeting at the Fort Pike volunteer fire department. The officers of the organization sat in a row along the table in the front of the room, and Mr Heyl stood, leaning his body over the table towards the people seated. He used a lot of gentle hand gestures as he spoke, and was dressed very casually in a plaid shirt tucked into blue jeans.

*After ballots were taken for the election of board members (7 were running, but only six would be elected), Mr Heyl began introducing the state senate candidate, Wayne Mumphrey:*

RH—Mr. Mumphrey's expressed to me earlier that the reason he's running is because he started complainin' and he wanted to do somethin' about it. SO—and that's the reason why I got involved in the Civic Association—is because I got tired of complainin' and wanted to do somethin' about it. So, with that Mr. Mumphrey would you please, sir.

WM—First, I want to thank you for sharing your meeting with me and allowing me to come. Let me just start by telling you about this district. First senatorial district used to be all of St Bernard, all of



Plaquemines, Lafitte and Grand Isle and Terrytown in Jefferson. It's now all Plaquemines except Belle Chasse, all of St Bernard, a large portion of St Tammany, Pearl River, almost up to Abita Springs and one glorious precinct in Orleans Parish [*applause*]. When I first thought about running, I called the senate and said would you send me a map of this district—well they sent me a map and guess what's included? This precinct. I sent a letter out to every address I could get recently, from my office just to tell you, that I've found you and wouldn't forget you. I hope some of you got it. [*A few responses poke up from the audience*]. Well all of you were supposed to get it, but you're so left out of all of the computer systems. I didn't think you got it. Believe me, you're gonna get it now. I want to tell you a little bit—my wife Vicki's here right now—I want to tell you a little myself-about myself and why I'm doing this. Five days from now I'll be 56 years old. Our youngest child finally graduated from school last may, so we actually have money for electricity and things. Our children went to school seven years of college a piece, so you can imagine that. I have sat back my entire adult life—I'm a lawyer—a lot of people don't like lawyers—but I was talking to some lawyers Wednesday morning, I said, “You know something, we know more about what's wrong with government than anybody else because all we do is fool with government. We fool with every bureaucrat, every agency.. I read a startling statistic that said Louisiana has more public employees per capita than any state in the United States. If we got that many employees, why can't we get anything done? This area [*inaudible*] is no different—Lake Catherine, Rigolets, the Chef is no different than Delacroix Island, [*inaudible place name*], Reggio. [*Delacroix Island and Reggio are both fishing communities in St. Bernard Parish, immediately to the south and east of Orleans Parish.*] The problems we have in St Bernard, those areas, are the same problems you have. The state of Louisiana has treated these areas like we're in Cuba. They take your tax dollars—when you spend your money in the grocery store, the state gets your taxes. They charge you state income tax, they get a portion of the property tax. And in return, basically you get nothing. I want you to read this brochure because—well, politicians like to say don't put too many words in it, people's not gonna read it. Well, the very [*inaudible*] is I'm against taxes. And people say, well how can be against taxes and try to improve the state? What we need to do is stop wasting money, run the state efficiently, and more importantly, leave the money where you spend it. The further your tax dollar gets from your house, the more inefficient it's spent. The local guy will spend your money right, you can trace it. When it goes to Baton Rouge, who you gonna call and tell them their wasting your money? We've got too much government, too many people on the payroll, we've got corruption from one end of the state to the other. And talk about why are our children leavin'—why can't we get business here? It ain't complicated—to do business in this state, you gotta pay somebody off. Just look around us, I mean we don't have to look far—we had Jazzland--well they basically bribed those people and run them out of the state. Well Six Flags there, they're operating under a total different operation. They don't have to answer to politicians. I've supported some really good friends of mine that had good ideas and good intentions that ran for public office. And six months after they got elected I looked at them and said, “What happened to the good ideas and good intentions?” What I've seen is, people get elected to public office, and the minute they get elected, they forget—one, why they ran—two, who put 'em there—and three what they were gonna do. They joined the club. Now I'm runnin' for state senator—there's 39 senators in this state—if I get elected, when I go to Baton Rouge, you know the first thing they're gonna tell me out there? “Come on, we're gonna tell you how it works.” But if I get elected and go up there and listen to those people, then you've wasted your vote. Because they're gonna do it the way it's been the whole time. People get elected to public office to make a career out of it. Public office is a service—it's not a career. You're supposed to have a real life, other than being a politician. In 1999, judge of St Bernard [Parish], Melvin Perez, passed away. The Louisiana Supreme Court called and said would you serve as judge 'til they elect somebody. I said for how long, he said 4 months. I said well it'll be a burden cause all my children [*inaudible*]. They're in school, they don't know anything, till they get in the real world. Well that four months turned into eight months, so I sat as a judge in the District court for 8 months. Well in that 8 months I saw things that you can't see in an office. I'd never seen juvenile problems, I'd never seen half the things that you see. But you're sitting up there listening to them. When I got in, one of the other judges grabbed me and said, “let me tell you how we do things,” and I listened politely, and when they left I said, “well I'd like to do it that way, but it's because *they* did it that way.” People don't run for public office anymore because the minute you do, you're suspect, you're no good, people are gonna talk bad about you. A young crab fisherman I met about a month ago—man believed politics was bad, politicians were bad [*inaudible*]. He said, “You know what, there's two reasons, Wayne, why people run for public office.” I said, “Well, what's that John?” He said, “Power and money, which one is you runnin' for?” I said, “I sure ain't runnin' for money—this is gonna cost money—I gotta leave

my business.” “So it’s gotta be power, then.” I said, “Power is important to people who are not satisfied with who they are. I’m running, just like I told your brother, because we all sit around in our dens, on our piers on our back porches, and say ‘Ahhh, nobody listens to us, nobody cares about us, they take our money and they ignore us.’” You folks are the most ignored people in Louisiana, except for maybe Delacroix Island, Hopedale and Reggio. One person can’t change what’s wrong with this world. But if one person’s willing to stand up and lead, is everybody else is willing to take an hour or two hours a week, or whatever it takes, and help the one that’s leading—and stand with that person... My Daddy started out raising a tomato farm, he had an old saying, “the squeaky wheel gets the grease,” and unfortunately that’s the way this world works. You don’t grease the wheel that’s not makin’ any noise, you grease the one that’s making noise, and if the people in this state finally stand up and say, “hey, we’ve had enough of this; we’ve had enough of you not [*sic*] takin’ our money and spendin’ it the way it should be spent; we’ve got enough of politicians getting’ rich offa people,” it’ll change. Our officials like to tell you we’re at a crossroads. We are not at a crossroads in Louisiana. We passed that years ago. We’re so far past the crossroads that if we don’t do somethin’, you can’t turn around when it’s too late. Yes our children are leaving, no businesses won’t come—why would a big business come to this state? You gotta bribe your way to get anything, where you’re being taxed beyond belief. I’m willing to stand up and lead. I don’t think I’m the smartest person in the world, but I’m willin’ to listen. I come from very humble beginnings. I was the first person in my family to go to college. And my dad likes to say, “Wayne,”—I’m an only child—“I don’t know how you got into to college, and I don’t know how you got out of college. I sure don’t know how you got into to law school and I have no clue why you got out. But somehow you did it on your own.” Well, to tell you the truth, I got tired of pickin’ tomatoes. When the rest of the kids were playing ball in the summer, I was pickin’ tomatoes and I tell my daddy, “Why can’t I go play ball?” He said, “pick the tomatoes and you will understand.” I can promise you, pickin’ tomatoes in June, July is no fun. So what I’m tellin’ you is, I’m a normal, down-to-earth person. I’m running for the right reasons, because we’ve been ignored for too long. Nobody pays attention to us, and I’m sick and tired of Louisiana being the laughing stock of this country. I can’t do it alone, but I can do it with you. I’m a send you the information, I’ll send this brochure and I’m a ask you to take 10 minutes and read it. Evrything in it, I mean. Why are firemen, policemen and schoolteachers the lowest paid people in our state? Our whole society is based on, you wake up in the morning, you send your child to school. You hope the police allow your child or grandchild to be safe on the way, you hope the schoolteachers there protect your child, teaches, your child. Then you hope they get back on the bus and go home safely and if something happens to your house, you hope the fire people are there. Why in the world are those people the most neglected, unrespected people in our society? You know why, ‘cause they’re not millionaires, and they don’t belong to big groups. So, we need to go back to what this country’s based on. You know what it’s based on? Just good old, honest hard work. Pay the guy that works, come on. You know when I was a judge, I sent people to Angola. You like politicians that say, “I’m tough on crime,”—who’s for crime? Anybody for crime in here? We’re all tough on crime. I had the opportunity to send criminals to prison, and I did. So I’m asking you—and I’m sorry for taking up your time, but I appreciate it—I’d ask you to consider me. Look at my opponent [*Frank Boasso*]*—he’s not me, I’m not him. We took different, we’re different people—I don’t own companies across this country. Everything I own, every relative I got, is in this district. I’m not goin’ anywhere, I’m stayin’ here. You’ll be able to get me phone after I’ve went, and you’ll be able to get me on the phone tomorrow if you got an idea or a criticism. But I thank you and ask you to consider me.*

[*applause*]

RH—Very impressive, Mr Mumphrey.

WM—Thank you, sir.

RH—Thank YOU.

[*The organization president’s customary address to members begins at this point.*]

RH--Old business—we have our signs, finally. As you can see, we have displayed both signs, one here the other located up there. We voted on them at the last membership meeting. Now we have the dilemma of where to install them. Uh, I have contacted the people on Marques and the bridge that attaches Marques Island to Highway 90—they don’t seem to mind if we install it on the bridge, as long as it doesn’t impede

the vision or the traffic, when they're crossing over the bridge to get on highway 90. If we don't impede their vision, the traffic, they don't mind us installing it there. But I'm—before that takes place—I wanna be sure we got it in writing, so they don't have any confusion. This is a verbal thing, but I want to make sure it's in writing before do anything about that. The second location is going to be in front of the firehouse. Now, that should be for cars coming from the Rigolets and the other side from Chef Pass. We have the post—for the signs—were donated—we have the post for the street signs, rigid things, which will stand up pretty well in a storm, probably the post will stay up but the sign will be up in the trees. The sign—both the signs—cost us \$427.28. And Mr Joe Oster made the signs, and Miss Wanda Jensen designed them. So let's give a hand to Miss Wanda [*vigorous applause*].

Now with that out of the way—trash collection—which has been an ongoing problem forever. This Saturday, there will be a trash collection for the entire island, due to Tropical Storm Bill. I had spoken to Cynthia Willard-Lewis' office immediately after the storm, and they said they would give us a date. I tried to get a little more time, but they said the 12<sup>th</sup> would be it, I said, "Okay, fine, we'll do the 12<sup>th</sup>." So when the Civic Association put out flyers, we didn't expect to [*inaudible verb*—"find"?] all the trash we had out on the highway. So what I did was I called Ms Willard Lewis' office back on Wednesday, and told them that, you'd better come check all this trash, because we got tons. So, they came out and checked out the whole situation, and that's why you might have seen WWLTV last night about the trash problem. So WWLTV kind of put the, uh, pressure on the sanitation department, because they mentioned last night on the news, said they probably will make a cleanup this Saturday. So you can rest assured they'll be here tomorrow. Now, I doubt seriously they'll get it all taken care of before Claudette gets here. Hopefully, Claudette's s'posed to go the other way, but the trash will be picked up. Now I may be steppin' a little bit ahead of the trash pickup, but I've also spoken to Cynthia Willard-Lewis, about trash problems along the highway. We have these little hot spot flyers, you can take these and you can mail these in anonymously, and you give them an address, or you can call it in with addresses. And that tells you why the municipal addresses will be more helpful, to locate the problem. The procedure would be, they would send the landowner a warning violation. A warning violation would mean that, "You need to get the trash cleaned up within X amount of time." They might give you a week, they might give you three or four days, depending on the city. If the trash is not cleaned up in that amount of time, they might give you a citation or to put a lien on your property. That's the way that would work. So we need to do something to get the island cleaned up, this is getting ridiculous. Even before Tropical Storm Bill, we had a collection of refrigerators and televisions that I think [*inaudible*] would be proud of [*chuckles*]. So if anyone has a trash problem across the street from them, down the block, if you see it, don't be ashamed to call it in. You can call it anonymously, and the city should take care of it. If they don't, you'll have to complain to them. They have assured me that they'll work with us on that problem. We were in the process of setting up an Island Pride Trash Bash prior to TSB. And what we were trying to do was get together two crews, get some orange shirts, like the city trash guys, you know—put "Island Pride Trash Bash" on it.. And we'd get some bobcats and equipment. Mr McKinney, owns [*inaudible*] owns a camp down the road by the big pink—next door, Camp Sunshine...uh, he assured me he would supply the dumpsters for and I have bobcat and I think Ms \_\_\_ has a bobcat, \_\_\_ has a bobcat,, and we would go along the highway and clean up the trash, but since the city's gonna to do it, we're gonna postpone that to a later date and see how things go...And during that Trash Bash ordeal, we were gonna have some hamburgers and softdrinks and whatever afterwards, we were gonna have a party. [*inaudible fragment*]. Any reason in Louisiana, right?

[*Brief routine business discussion about LCCO by-laws.*]

From what I understand, the camp owners of Chef Menteur Land Company have organized. If anyone doesn't know about it, Ms. Albe is back there and she'd be happy to talk to you about it after the meeting.

Now the hurricane...As y'all know, we had—this was during Lili last year—there's been a debacle with the people comin' across the bridge, that wasn't supposed to. The police wouldn't close the [bridges], and they allowed every Tom, Dick and Harry to come over and loot, do whatever they wanted to do. And if I remember correctly, I had words with police over what's the difference between salvage and looting—if it's all on the highway. Well, the residents of the island were cleanin' the highway up, and the police didn't stop anybody from runnin' across the highway, so we did it all ourselves, basically, as you know we did. So I've been complainin' to the New Orleans police department about closing the highway, in the event we

have another problem, since we had [*inaudible*]. But as of yet I haven't gotten any cooperation from it, because they pas... But we're still trying to get them to cooperate and only allow residents to come onto the island. The other issue is that last year when the mayor recommended that we evacuate, many people did not, and I think we need to pay heed to what the mayor and all the other officials recommend. I was here for Bill and it was nasty, it was downright nasty. Of course it wasn't supposed to be anything, but it turned out—I mean it takes a special person to stay down here. And I for one, I'm gone. I've seen enough. When my roof blew off, I'm standing there watching my roof blow off, in about two seconds, it landed on my truck. That was enough for me. I'm outta here. So that's about all I have, unless anyone has any new business to bring up? [*Acknowledges Gentleman 1, seated in audience.*]

Gentleman 1—I called the city about this trash, and if the trash is out in front of your property, if it's where somebody dumped it from Mississippi—or if you think your trash is gonna be picked up faster by puttin' it across the street where there's no houses—they're not gonna pick it up. That's one thing. Another thing—this is my idea—I don't know if we could do it or not, but they got about 12 [*inaudible*] boats right now along the road, and about six sofas around—along the road. I'll furnish the gasoline, we'll pull this stuff out on—between the road, and the, and the—off the thing. And we'll have fire truck there in case the fire would get out of hand [*Hearty laughter pours from the audience.*]*—and start burnin' stuff. And we burn these boats and these uh*

Gentleman 2—Sofas—

Gentleman 1—Sofas. 'Cause they not gonna pick 'em up. They will be here for the next year—

RH—They assured me they'd pick 'em up starting tomorrow.

Gentleman 1—They have—

RH—So we'll see what happens.

Gentleman 1—They have four boats, right now. [*inaudible*] The truck is where nobody lives.

[*Commotion, individual comments inaudible.*]

RH—Well—you see—ok—

Woman 1—[*Seated in audience, first few words inaudible*]...don't want trash in front of their house—

RH—The way the audit would be is the property owner is responsible for the trash. So that would mean if the trash is on Miss Mahler's property, and it's a vacant lot, Miss Mahler is responsible for it. The same thing is true—Lake Catherine Land Company, on their property—they're responsible for it.

Gentleman 1—Why not once a once a month, get a bunch a guys, and I'll furnish the gas, and we go along and burn this stuff.

RH—That would—

Gentleman 1—I been out here 20 years, and that's the only suggestion I can come up with. If somebody's got a better one, come up and—

RH—You heard me pitchin' the Trash Bash, Lionel—we got a dumpster and a bobcat, we're gonna pick all this stuff up ourselves.

[*Constant voices in the background, rising frequently*]

Woman 1—We never had this trash like we have today—

RH—Yeah, I know it's pitiful, it's pitiful, it's real bad. We got a trash bash...

[*Voices, commotion louder and louder.*]

Officer—[*Seated at table in front of room, strikes table with gavel.*] "Let the president get finished please."

RH—Uh, while I'm at it, I'll remind about the, uh, applications for \$15 a family, uh, tell your friends about, they might want to join the organization. And we all, we're all in this together for the island. We're all here for the good of the island, that's what all our intentions are on the board, is to make things better for this island. Uh, the other thing is, they have a police meeting every third Wednesday of the month, at the, uh, 7<sup>th</sup> District police station on Dwyer. One of us attends every Wednesday night, to receive communication with the police. That's where they were arguing about closing the highway. Uh, I go down about every second or third month. If anyone is interested in going to those meetings, they're every third Wednesday of the month, at the police station on Dwyer, and you're welcome to attend...[*Sees raised hand*] Yes sir—

Gentleman 3—Talk about the abandoned truck, if anyone sees an abandoned vehicle on the road, I'm you could run it through Roy and he could talk directly to the captain of the seventh district. They've had great success in the past of getting those cleared away immediately—

Gentleman 1—Well, we still just—whatever we do—twenty years we still got trash on the road. We gotta do something [*This he says quietly, but someone starts talking over him, so he pipes up*]. If nothin' else, let them pick up everything they supposed to pick up. We got 28,000 in the bank—we can put some money up and get this picked up. When they leave, we can get it picked, at least maybe once a year—or twice a year.

RH—Well, I, I can talk to Mr. McKinney. I don't know how much good it'll do, but I can talk to Mr. McKinney and see if he's willin' to put a dumpster down here for trash. So, they could install—they could dump the trash in the dumpster, but I'm sure it's not gonna change a thing, but we can try.

Gentleman 1—We got people ride down from Mississippi, they bring a truckload of tires and set 'em on the side of the road.

RH—I don't disagree with that at all—

Gentleman 1—You know? No prob—

RH—If anybody sees it, take the license plate number down. No need to confront them, don't need to confront them, just take a license plate number.

Gentleman 1—[*inaudible fragment*] \$500 fine, I don't see a sign out there—

RH—Uh, I'm I'm I'm—thank you for reminding me that that when I spoke to Cynthia Willard Lewis' office today, they they they said they would install some more no dumping signs. And that's right in front of everything [*inaudible*]. The largest dump site is right under the no dumping sign.

Gentleman 1—That's right.

[*Lots of commotion.*]

Gentleman 4—[*inaudible*]...drove by and looked the other way...

RH—Yeah, so, they, uh, are willing to put out more no dumping signs. [*Sees hand*]. Yes sir.

Gentleman 5—Yeah, just a question, that truck's a little far off the road. I know what truck they talking about just appeared in the last couple of days. Is it, uh, at what distance off the road—

RH—Seventy-five feet. 75 feet's the servitude. From the center line of the highway, 75 feet.

Gentleman 5—Well last year they didn't even clean to the tree line by me—

RH—Well, no, they—

Gentleman 5—And that was at, uh, hundred feet or—

RH—They gotta stop where the weeds stop, you know. Technically, the servitude or berm, state property, is from the center line of the highway to 75 feet either side.

Gentleman 6—Gotta get it close enough where the people can't get out there...*[inaudible]*

RH—Yes, yeah, it's kind of difficult to reach way back in the marsh.

Gentleman 5—They, but see they didn't have to left that far, uh, ...the stuff they didn't pass up—

RH—Yeah, I understand, I understand. You see, trying to work with the city is like pulling teeth, you know, it's difficult to do. But we're trying, we're diligently working on the city to go along with the program. You know we argue the point that we pay taxes, but we don't get anything for it.

Gentleman 5—Is, uh, Ms Willard gonna be around here tomorrow by any chance?

RH—Ms. Cynthia Willard-Lewis? I doubt that seriously.

Gentleman 5—Doubt that seriously? Not even—just to see what they gonna pick up and they not gonna pick up, you know—

*[Commotion, individuals' comments inaudible.]*

RH- No, that's impossible, no way...I will call Monday, and let 'em know...How much progress they made with the—that way if they start the following week...

Gentleman 7—What you get *[inaudible]*.

RH—I'm tellin' you there'll be less trash to pick up...*[inaudible]* Yes, Lionel—

Gentleman 1—Yo, Roy, why we can't have a committee to get together tomorrow with them, 3 or 4 of our members, and I'll be glad to chair, too—and watch 'em pick up—and when they don't pick up a refrigerator, or boat, "well why you not pickin' that up?" Well they oughta have a reason fuh it, we'll just write it down. And maybe next time we can give it to you.

RH—You wanna form a motion on it?

Gentleman 1—Yes, I'd like to put that in the form of a motion.

*[Meeting begins to disintegrate, with a few items of routine business left.]*

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