



A Symposium:

Recovering Disrupted Sites

Presented by

The Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement & Development

In collaboration with the Tom Dent Congo Square Symposium of the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation

Friday, Nov. 9, 2012

Basin Street Station

501 Basin Street
New Orleans, LA 70112

The Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development (CSED) is offering a symposium towards re-establishing place, devastated through catastrophic events and the related aftermath tied to recovery efforts. Included are the kinds of catastrophic events that have dismantled or hindered the development of individuals, home, neighborhood, community or national ties particularly for African-Americans and other people of color. Two examples are the consequences of the loss of community and habitats in New Orleans in the last seven years and in Haiti over the past two years.

The multi-disciplined, environmental, planning and design symposium, ***Recovering Disrupted Sites***, will be held Friday, November 9, 2012, with the support and hosting of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and Foundation, Inc., in New Orleans. The day-long symposium will focus on the creative, scholarly and applied expression of predominantly African-American and the African Diaspora communities as a whole, in the rebuild and recovery of decimated living conditions and disrupted senses of place. The symposium will examine and define the decimation of African Diaspora life caused by catastrophic events, and the consequential lack of visible black participation in planning, designing and rebuilding, recovery processes and how this deficit of participation can be addressed.

The recognition of these places and circumstances, will lead to a discussion on creating inclusive best practices form envisioning innovative networks and localized empowerment towards recovery, from events including earthquakes, floods, disinvestment and economic abandonment, toxic environments, and a host of other destructive conditions as they impact specifically on the planning and design of sites identified by specific cultural frameworks, vernacular and aesthetics, health and welfare issues and from the ground up strategies for resilience.

CSED has received the major support for this symposium from the Foundation for Louisiana. The symposium will provide a forum for a discussion on recovery that encompasses the often marginalized voices of creative people, researchers and practitioners focusing on African American and African Diaspora recovery and rebuild of devastated landscapes and other built environments. With the Lower Ninth Ward and a number of other areas within New Orleans, as the catalyst for a broader examination of these places, the long range plan is for the initiation of a permanent institute or mechanism located in New Orleans as a multi-institutional resource for focusing on re-imagining, rebuilding and recovering on behalf of those concerned with or living in affected landscapes, neighborhoods and communities.

Following Hurricane Katrina, the Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development (CSED) emerged as a leading community organization, advocating for and assisting the Lower 9th Ward's residents as they began to restore their neighborhood. CSED is helping to rebuild safe and sustainable natural systems and structures to ensure a strong and resilient community. It has achieved major funding from a variety of foundations and organizations to build capacity and engage Lower Ninth Ward residents on issues of environmental awareness and community sustainability. Because of these efforts, CSED recognizes the need for a forum to bring practitioners and scholars together in fields and disciplines related to rebuilding environments devastated by natural and human made events.

CSED is particularly concerned with these rebuilding efforts as they impact African-American communities, from the rebuilders to the scholars who examine the processes that engage African-Americans in their own recovery. Much of the rebuild of post-Katrina New Orleans was the place of marginalized voices and visions of African-Americans, ranging from individuals to groups of residents, property owners, political activists and politicians, designers, planners, scholars and builders ready to act, but denied the forum or access to the materials, or power to lead in the discussions, arguments or construction of rethinking and recovering from a disaster directly and disproportionately related to the future of their existence in that place.

The best proof of this fact is the lack of recovery in the housing projects, Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans East, coupled with a lack of clarity as to how and why this is the current condition, and what can be done to alter the situation.

The symposium is intended to address the need for an open dialogue centering directly on the lack of diverse participation in the disciplines of urban design, urban planning, landscape architecture, architecture, environmental justice and civil engineering, and how it conversely impacts and slows strategies for recovery in the built urban environment. Simultaneously, the recognition that African-American scholars, theorists, cultural workers and others have extensively studied, commented upon and impacted and reshaped the built environment through their contribution of design,

planning, arts, music, film, communication, dance and literature among other disciplines is a way of inviting a widening of discussions and outcomes in the shaping of the discourse on the built environment and its impact on the cultural foundation of the African Diaspora and a sense of place.

Communities around the country – indeed the world – are increasingly at risk from weather related events due to climate change. How communities adapt and respond to such challenges will increasingly become core to health and human welfare. What lies at the center of this argument is a research arm for planning and designing cities led by planners and designers that understand the science of landscape, urbanism and infrastructure, and yet are able to tie this understanding to an aesthetic and cultural context that involves multiple disciplines and professionals who can form an integrative approach to the problems of the modern city, particularly in a climate challenged by oil spills, hurricanes, flooding and earthquakes as a normal part of daily life.

While these catastrophic events can happen to all, the disproportionate unfolding of these events on spaces defined as African-American or places dominated by people of color, compared to the inability of those communities or their theorists, scholars and professionals and contractors to alter the recovery process needs to be examined, discussed and remediated. The symposium *Recovering Disrupted Sites* seeks this as its primary goal.

Recovering Disrupted Sites is a forum to bring together leading scholars and professionals, to formulate ideas that can lead to solutions for encouraging greater participation of African-Americans in the planning, design and recovery fields through the following **three strategies**:

- **Assessing Cultural Innovations within the Disciplines**

While there is a great under representation of people of color in the design, planning and recovery disciplines and within the environmental justice movement, the creative impact of many of those professionals and scholars have led to innovations and profoundly impacted the urban and rural environments in ways that may not always be credited or even recognized. *Recovering Disrupted Sites* offers an appropriate forum to review a more inclusive gathering of individuals who have built the environment, developed theories and strategies for sustainability, or have designed recovery strategies that have yet to be recognized or celebrated.

Recovering Disrupted Sites invites scholars, professionals and experts who have worked extensively in these impacted communities to share their findings, their projects and ideas, expanding the body of knowledge, for best practices for reimagining and rebuilding the American, Central American and Caribbean urban environment.

- **Redefining the Disciplines**

The current disciplines of planning, design and recovery have marginalized the voices and visions of African-American and people of color creativity and strategic thinking in ways that have led to problematic and sometimes unworkable solutions to rebuild urban places. These places are or were up until the catastrophic event, often predominantly populated by African-Americans or people of color with no viable way to participate other than through protest. While this has strengthened diverse participation in the environmental justice movement, often those being challenged for problematic design, planning and recovery ideas have very little connection to the communities impacted by outsider decisions. Cities like Pittsburgh, Newark, Cleveland, Detroit, St. Louis, New Orleans, Baltimore, and Port au Prince are at critical junctures where more voices and visions at the table could provide more comprehensive solutions to improve urban living conditions, whether one is seeking clarity around issues of sustainability related to technology or social networks.

Recovering Disrupted Sites is an opportunity to discard old definitions that define disciplines letting cultural workers like visual artists, filmmakers, fiction and non-fiction writers and musicians, as well as scholars in other disciplines add diversity to planning, design and recovery, through their specific impressions, interpretations and solutions for creating and living in productive urban environments.

- **Growing, Disseminating and Sustaining Cultural Innovations**

Many African-Americans and people of color who are in high school, undergraduate education, and graduate education have limited or minimal working knowledge of the disciplines of disaster recovery, landscape architecture, planning, architecture, civil engineering, urban studies or environmental justice. They are also limited in their understanding of how the processes of urban development, from infrastructure to building, happen or are dismantled naturally, politically, socially, or within contested ideas of landscape.

Recovering Disrupted Sites is an opportunity to introduce this discourse to a diverse group of potential new voices and visions in planning, designing and recovery. Students are invited to participate through speakers, discussion groups, presenting and attending the symposium, and specifically, a special luncheon designed to recruit students into these disciplines.

A symposium objective is to create a long-term impact towards building more inclusive, and thus more responsive disciplines and practices for rebuilding and recovery. ***Recovering Disrupted Sites*** will be followed with a publication of the proceedings dedicated to keeping people informed about the proceedings and the findings of the event.

Ultimately, the main part of this objective is the formation of an urban entity in New Orleans to be established by community organizations, universities, and HBCU institutions in New Orleans, dedicated to inclusive, resilient and sustainable planning and design related to disaster recovery.

The implementation of an entity dedicated to the findings and proposed solutions of ***Recovering Disrupted Sites***, encouraging the growth of diversity and inclusiveness within the disciplines of planning, design and recovery will happen through the eventual offering of a variety of resources including sustainability research, college courses, training workshops and a host of other resources.

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