

THE EFFECTS OF HURRICANE KATRINA ON
THE BRASS BANDS OF NEW ORLEANS

BY

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Submitted to the faculty of the
Jacobs School of Music in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Music
Indiana University
May 2015

Accepted by the faculty of the
Indiana University Jacobs School of Music,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Music

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24 April 2015

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To those who made it through that water
...and to the memory of those who didn't

Acknowledgements

This document is only in part the result of countless hours spent researching and writing. It also stems from the contributions of many individuals who offered their help and expertise in a variety of ways. I would first like to thank the members of my research committee—Brent Wallarab, Joey Tartell, John Rommel, and Rick Seraphinoff—for agreeing to take the time to read, provide comments, and officiate the public defense. A very special note of thanks is due to Brent for stepping in as research director toward the end of the process and providing astute guidance within a very short time-frame. To David Baker, who helped me navigate through the early stages of this project and who first exposed me to the magnificent music, history, and culture of the New Orleans brass bands. The Graduate Office at the Jacobs School of Music was very helpful throughout the entire process, particularly Brittany Dye, who patiently fielded many calls and emails from me.

The people of New Orleans were an invaluable resource. Their passion for their music and community was inspiring. Bruce Raeburn at the Arthur Hogan Jazz Archive immediately pointed me in the right direction when I started working on this project. He connected me with Matt Sakakeeny, who wrote an outstanding dissertation on the New Orleans brass bands and has since published a book, *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans*. In addition to being a frequently-cited author in this document, Matt also gave me lots of good advice about sources, contacting and interviewing musicians, and the scope of the document. The incredibly knowledgeable staff of the Williams Research Center of the Historic New Orleans Collection provided some great resources on New Orleans history and even helped me find a place to live while I was conducting interviews. Thanks especially to all of the musicians, venue owners/managers, and representatives of charitable organizations who took the time to speak with me:

Joe Bikulege, Gregory Davis, Maryse DeJean, Mark Fowler, Keith Frazier, David Freedman, Jeffrey Hills, Benny Jones, Ellis Joseph, Howie Kaplan, Lumar LeBlanc, Don Marshall, Sue Mobley, Jesse Paige, Donna Poniatowski, Walter Ramsey, Allison Reinhardt, Ron Rona, Charlie Simms, and Dr. Michael White.

My North Carolina network was indispensable throughout the entire process. The NASNTI grant I received through The University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP) allowed me to live in New Orleans for a month while conducting interviews and also provided an honorarium for the musicians I interviewed. The Mary Livermore Library purchased every single book I asked for, and now quite possibly houses one of the best collections of literature relating to the brass bands of New Orleans outside of Louisiana. They also allowed me to keep materials checked out in perpetuity without charging late fees! Thanks also to Dr. Kathryn White, who transcribed hours of interview recordings. My students and colleagues at UNCP provided constant encouragement, particularly department chair and fellow trumpeter Dr. Timothy Altman and Ms. Cindy Campbell in the Music office. A very special thanks goes to my good friend and colleague, Dr. Larry Arnold, for proof-reading and editing the document before it went to committee, and for helping me decide on its structure.

When I reflect on the many experiences of preparing this project and the challenging journey it provided, I am reminded of that which has been constant in my life. To mom, dad, Chris, and Kate, with love.

Preface

I'm from a very small town in northwestern Minnesota—a population of 600 and a graduating high school class of 26. If you want to know what my formative years were like, just listen to a few installments of Garrison Keillor's "News from Lake Wobegon" stories from *A Prairie Home Companion*. My father was my band director from grades 5 - 12. He first introduced me to the trumpet and the music of Louis Armstrong. My grandparents, Don and Linda Barta, gave me my first Harry Connick, Jr. album, the big band feature *We Are In Love*. Not to be outdone, my paternal grandmother, Dolly Mooney, followed up next Christmas with Connick's solo album, *20*. I was hooked. It wasn't until years later that I would discover the music that I loved had an important connection—New Orleans.

Fast forward one decade. With a Biology degree in tow and aspirations of optometry school, the 45-minute one-way commutes to my job as an optician at Pearle Vision were spent listening to Chet Baker and the other eight albums Connick had released since *20*. I knew every note. One of my first improvisation teachers, guitarist Glenn Ginn, gave me some great advice—only be a musician if you HAVE to. It was one wintery evening, while driving my green Mercury Tracer back from work and singing along to a Leroy Jones trumpet solo, that I decided I HAD to be a musician. I enrolled at Kutztown University to study music with trumpet professor Dr. Kevin Kjos, an Indiana University alum. Two years later, I was studying Jazz with David Baker and the esteemed faculty of the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University. It was while working as an Associate Instructor in David Baker's History of Jazz course that I was introduced to the Rebirth Brass Band. Once I heard that second-line beat and those ferocious horns, it was clear to me that the brass bands were going to be my area of primary scholarship. I began reading everything I could about the brass bands and quickly noticed that there was very little published

scholarship available. I also started listening to lots of New Orleans musicians: The Dirty Dozen, Wynton and Branford Marsalis, Terence Blanchard, Professor Longhair, The Neville Brothers, The Meters, Sidney Bechet, Jelly Roll Morton. The fabric that weaves these musicians together was obvious, despite the widely varying styles and time periods. I was intrigued, and ready to visit the city for the first time. Then Hurricane Katrina hit (or missed, actually).

The well-documented devastation was stunning, but so was the outpouring of support for the city, and particularly for the musicians. My first visit was in the summer of 2010, nearly five years after the storm. Though New Orleans was still recovering from the disaster, it did not disappoint. On my first day in the city, I checked into scholar housing, a little dorm room at Tulane University. I unpacked quickly and made my way to the French Quarter. Within 10 minutes, I heard a brass band playing a few blocks away. I quickly found the party and ended up second-lining my way into the gated courtyard of a local establishment. As it turns out, I had crashed a private wedding party. “Are you with the bride or groom?” —um, YES! It was a memorable introduction to the city. A year later, while living on Ursuline and Royal in the French Quarter, I would come to realize that nearly every day in New Orleans was like that. I stayed in the servants quarters of an old house still owned by a French family. It was small, but beautiful, with mahogany floors, high ceilings, and a balcony overlooking a palmed courtyard. I ended up dog-sitting for a neighbor who had a very well-trained German Shepherd named “Santa.” I brought him to a second-line parade one day where I was asked, “Is that a German Shepherd or a canine?” I didn’t know how to respond. A few minutes later I got the same question from another person. After the third time, I finally figured out that they were asking me if it was a police dog (K-9). In retrospect, it probably wasn’t the best idea to bring the dog to the second-line.

It is common to see famous people hanging out in New Orleans. I met Clarke Peters and Wendell Pierce, two of the lead actors from HBO's *Treme* series, in music clubs on Frenchmen Street. Laurence Fishburne, best-known for his role as "Morpheus" in *The Matrix*, followed me around one evening to several brass band shows. It got weird when I headed to the Rebirth Brass Band's long-standing Tuesday night gig at the Maple Leaf bar, seven miles away, and he turned up there, too. I resisted the temptation to tell him that I knew kung-fu. Another afternoon, while tracking down a potential interview, I accidentally met John Swenson, the author of *New Atlantis: Musicians Battle for the Survival of New Orleans*. As I was describing my topic to Swenson, a raggedy fellow heckled from the end of the bar in a raspy voice, "Why you writin' that? This man [Swenson] already wrote the book!" I tried to ignore him, but he taunted me a second time. I looked over to address the situation, only to discover that it was Mac Rebennack, better known as "Dr. John." I decide to give him a pass. The iconic musician "Uncle" Lionel Batiste, of the Treme Brass Band, was a common sight walking the streets of the quarter. He moved slowly and deliberately, always dressed to the nines, complete with derby hat, sunglasses, cane, and a gold watch that he wore around the palm of his left hand. He would often turn up at the Palm Court Cafe to sing a number with whatever band was playing that evening, addressing his verse to the prettiest lady in the audience. One year later, I returned to New Orleans for a second-line in his memory after he had taken ill.

Then there were the degustative experiences: jambalaya, gumbo, alligator cheesecake, po' boys, the obligatory beignets at Café du Monde, and Louis Armstrong's "birthmark"—red beans and rice with fatback. I learned how to eat mudbugs (crawfish) and developed a healthy tolerance for the radiant burn of cayenne pepper underneath my fingernails. I also got to eat Kermit Ruffins' barbecue. Now a well-known trumpeter, Ruffins was a founding member of the Rebirth

Brass Band. He loves to do four things: stay in New Orleans, play trumpet, smoke marijuana, and grill meat at his gigs.

Walking around the quarter was always interesting. I tried to get into Armstrong Park, formerly Congo Square, but it was closed. I stepped into a bar across the street to ask about it and was greeted by the stout, middle-aged bartender, who was dressed in full drag. One early morning while walking to get a cup of coffee on Decatur Street, I passed several men and women made up as zombies in full body paint, otherwise naked. I also fell prey to a petty hustle. “I betcha a dollar I know where you got your shoes.” My shoes were common, available from many stores. I said, “No thanks,” but he insisted. “Okay, where?”—all but certain he wouldn’t name the Shoe Carnival in Aberdeen, NC. “You got ‘em on your feet. Let my lesson be your blessin’!”

Although New Orleans is revered as a cultural Mecca—music, food, architecture, parades, festivals—finding authentic culture can be quite difficult! Bourbon Street is a major tourist draw, once storied for its jazz and other revelry, but it is now largely devoid of any authentic culture. It has devolved into one big boorish frat party, flush with blaring rock bands playing cover tunes, strung out sex industry workers, mediocre food, and souvenir shops, all amid the stench of vomit, urine, and horse scat. Bourbon Street is for people who don’t know anything about New Orleans. Most of the quarter is a tourist trap. Nearly every restaurant advertises the best gumbo or the best po’ boy. Excepting Royal Street, lined with beautiful art galleries, Preservation Hall, and a few other establishments, to find the best and most authentic New Orleans, you must leave the quarter. The best home-grown music—brass bands, funk, rhythm and blues, zydeco, and everything in between—is usually heard off the beaten path. You have to go to The Maple Leaf (Carrollton), The Candlelight Lounge (Treme), Tipitina’s (Uptown), Le Bon Temps Roulé (Garden District), The Howlin’ Wolf (Arts District), or to the recently emergent musical

phenomenon that is Frenchmen Street. Before Katrina, it was a largely residential street, with the notable exception of Snug Harbor and a few other establishments. It now brims each night with live music, unique and fresh.

There are a few things that take some getting used to if you're going to live in the city. Navigating your way around New Orleans can be a tricky task for the non-native. As its boundaries are largely confined by a snaking river (Mississippi), a curved lake shore (Pontchartrain), and a grid for the original settlement that actually points northwest, traditional directions are rendered largely useless. Instead, the four pillars are Uptown (upriver), Downtown (downriver), Lakeside, and Riverside, so substitute "as the river runs" for "as the crow flies" and you will find your destination. The summer is humid and hot—REALLY hot. It got so bad that the only way I found to cool off was to take a cruise down the river on the Steamboat Natchez. \$45 for a ticket was worth the relief from the heat, both physically and mentally. I can't imagine being stuck on the I-10 overpass in that heat for three days, like many Katrina survivors were in 2005. Last, everything is late in New Orleans, and not just a trifle. When a brass band starts a club show at 9:00, you'll probably catch the entire first set if you show up at 10:30.

Living in the city became an important part of my education, connecting all that I had read and heard with the unique and timeless essence of the city. There's no place like New Orleans. It's a mystical city that leaves a lasting impact on the spirit of those who set foot there and give themselves to the whims of its ethos. To those who have traveled there only to see the Mardi Gras festivities or revel on Bourbon Street, go back. The city has so much more depth and beauty than those enticements can offer.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Preface	vii
Table of Contents	xii
Chapter 1: A Brief History of New Orleans	1
Chapter 2: History of New Orleans Brass Bands.....	13
Chapter 3: Hurricane Katrina.....	25
Chapter 4: Effects on the New Orleans Brass Bands.....	34
Bibliography.....	90

CHAPTER 1: A BRIEF HISTORY OF NEW ORLEANS

Introduction and Founding

Lower Louisiana is the geologically youngest part of North America, built by deposits of the Mississippi River. For millions of years, the entirety of Louisiana was part of the sea that extended into the continent.¹ The Ice Age melt of 25,000 years ago created the river that carried the earth and extended the delta. This became the silty foundation of southern Louisiana upon which New Orleans was built. As the sea retreated, it left the brackish Lake Pontchartrain which connects to the Gulf of Mexico via Lake Borgne.²

La Nouvelle Orleans was founded by Jean Baptiste LeMoyne, Sieur d'Bienville, in 1718 under the encouragement of the French crown. Named in honor of the Regent of France, Philippe, Duc d'Orleans, it sits atop a natural levee on a charming turn of the Mississippi River.³ The flood-prone area on spongy ground had been known to indigenous people for thousands of years and was the site of a long-established portage, marking the shortest distance between the Mississippi River and Bayou St. John, which drains into Lake Pontchartrain to the north.⁴ The site was attractive to Bienville, who had dreams of establishing a city that would anchor a new economic empire stretching all the way to modern day Montreal. Access to Lake Pontchartrain meant access to vast interior waterways and great trading opportunities. Access to the Mississippi River provided passage to the largely unexplored American interior and to the Atlantic Ocean via the Gulf of Mexico. The indians warned Bienville against establishing a settlement on the

¹ Joan B. Garvey and Mary Lou Widmer, *Beautiful Crescent: A History of New Orleans* (New Orleans: Gramer Press, 2001), 1.

² Pontchartrain is actually an estuary, not a lake.

³ Martin Siegel, *New Orleans: a Chronological & Documentary History, 1539-1970* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, 1975), 1.

⁴ The portage trail is two miles from the river to Bayou St. John. The trail was situated on Esplanade Ridge, approximately where Esplanade Avenue sits today.

spongy ground infested with snakes, gators, mosquitos, and prone to flooding by river and hurricane, but he was undeterred, even after the “Great Hurricane” of 1722 destroyed the first collection of randomly placed huts he and his men built on the land. He had a safer option for his colony upriver where Baton Rouge stands today, but dismissed the location because the extra 45-mile trek up the river would have proven nearly impossible for ocean-going vessels to navigate, and the crescent at the portage (New Orleans) was accessible not only by the river, but also by traveling west from the gulf coast through Lake Borgne and Lake Pontchartrain.⁵

A Different American City

New Orleans was, is, and will likely remain sui generis among its urban peers because its heritage is starkly different from any other city in the United States. While the east coast of the “New World” was founded almost exclusively by the Anglos, New Orleans was governed by three different nations within 100 years of its founding: France (1718-1763), Spain (1763-1803), and the United States (1803-present).⁶ Each nation had a profound impact on the development of the city and the ethos of its people through a number of factors including language, religious practice, economics, industry, trade partners, architecture and food. From France it would get its first settlers, Catholicism, and a comparatively liberal slave regulation as laid out in the Code Noir. Spanish rule saw the emergence of Latin influences, due in large part to close trade and governance ties with Havana, a Spanish stronghold. The American era ushered in dramatic

⁵ This was prior to the steam engine. Also, shifting sandbars in the river between the New Orleans and Baton Rouge sites would have complicated the issue. In fact, after the port of New Orleans became established, merchants used to drag their wares up the river by walking along the shore, pulling a raft with a rope.

⁶ Spain actually ceded Louisiana back to France in 1800 through the secret Treaty of San Ildefonso, but the Spanish remained in power until just before Napoleon transferred control of Louisiana to the United States.

expansions in commerce and population, as well as gradual immersion into the American aesthetic.

The laissez-faire culture of New Orleans began with its first settlers. Many of these “libertines” were convicts, prostitutes, or other undesirables rounded up and expelled from France for their moral indiscretions.⁷ Add to the mix some adventurers and treasure-seekers who were promised New World mines rich with gold and jewels and you have an interesting foundation for a new colony. Woefully unskilled in matters of colonization and adaptation, the settlers quickly became dependent on the indians for survival, and soon after, on the artisanship of slaves.

Twenty-three slave ships from Africa came to Louisiana while it was under French control.⁸ The first two ships arrived in 1719 and brought with them rice seedlings from Africa and slaves who knew how to cultivate it.⁹ Rice is still a staple in the Louisianan diet, and the very survival of the colony would likely have been impossible without the skills of the African slaves.

Although seven ships came from the “Slave Coast,” noted for its participatory and polyrhythmic music traditions based heavily on drums, the bulk of these ships came from Senegal. There, a French slave-trading post was established inland on the Senegal River, also allowing them to obtain captives that were sold down the Niger River. These “inland” Senegambian slaves came from cultures skilled in farming and metalsmithing. More importantly, with respect to the future

⁷ Ned Sublette, *The World that Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2007), 52.

⁸ Sublette, 57.

⁹ Sublette, 59.

of New Orleans music, their culture featured a bardic tradition with melodic, melismatic music sometimes played on bowed string instruments.¹⁰

A census of 1721 shows that the fledgling New Orleans had a population of 470 people, of which 172 were Negroes.¹¹ By 1723, French slaves ships had imported 2083 African captives into colonial Louisiana. The increased population prompted Bienville to introduce the *Code Noir* in 1724.

Louisiana Code Noir (1724)

Slaves in Louisiana experienced comparatively more freedoms and were subject to less violence than their southern counterparts under Anglo dominance. Slave treatment at the hand of French colonists was governed by the Louisiana *Code Noir*, a collection of 54 articles of law that attempted to define the rights of and manage relationships among slaves, slave owners, and free blacks. This code, largely based on the 1685 edict by Louis XIV governing slaves in the French Caribbean colonies, would regulate interactions in Louisiana, even under Spanish control, until 1803 when Louisiana was transferred to United States ownership. Though the code still allowed for violence, slaves under its jurisdiction were better off than those under Anglo control. The Louisiana *Code Noir* provided several important distinctions between Louisiana slaves and those elsewhere in the South. It made Roman Catholicism the sole religion allowed to be practiced in Louisiana and required masters to instruct their slaves in the religion. Correspondingly, it held strict that no work was to be done by master or slave on Sundays or any other religious holiday, a

¹⁰ The Senegambians would also bring with them “gris gris.” These little charms were the focus of superstitious belief that would later become important in Voodoo. It should be further pointed out that the violin probably developed in Africa before Europe. The banjo, or at least its immediate precursor, is also an African instrument that would factor heavily in New Orleans music.

¹¹ Leonard V. Huber, *New Orleans: A Pictorial History* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1991), 21.

practice that allowed for the phenomenon of slave congregation at Congo Square that was essential to the preservation, exchange and synthesis of cultural ideas, especially music and dance, among the slave class. Masters could not force slaves into marriage against their will. They could not separate husbands from their wives, nor separate children under 14 years old from their parents.¹² They were required to furnish certain standards of food and clothing, and provide for the injured, elderly, and infirm. They could not kill or mutilate their slaves except for punishment as directed by the code under specific conditions such as theft, violence, or escape. Slaves in Louisiana were allowed to earn and keep wages. Most importantly, slaves in Louisiana under French and Spanish control had the ability to become a free person.¹³

The Creoles

Race, ethnicity, and caste were complicated matters in New Orleans. Tradition compels me to describe it as a cultural “gumbo,” and despite its status as regrettable cliché, it really is an apt analogy for the interpersonal and genealogical dynamics in New Orleans. Along with waves of immigrants from France, Germany, Ireland, England, Italy, and the Caribbean, New Orleans also boasted three distinct populations of people of African descent: slaves, free blacks, and Creoles (of color—*gens de couleur*).¹⁴ It is the Creoles that make the African American experience in New Orleans unique.

¹² Under Anglo control, slaves were systematically separated from their families and sold to different plantations. This strategy served to eliminate the incentive for freedom and uprising, and stripped all knowledge of family or religious history/tradition, making it easier to mold the ideas and behaviors of the slaves.

¹³ Slaves could be set free for a variety of reasons, including good deeds and by purchasing their freedom. Article 50 states that masters who are at least 25 years old may free their slaves with the permission of the Superior Council.

¹⁴ It is not difficult to imagine the music of these many ethnic groups being heard by all in the small section of land that was 18th and 19th century New Orleans and eventually evolving into something completely original.

The word “Creole” requires some explanation, as its meaning in New Orleans has changed several times as the political and ethnic landscape evolved. It has variously been used to describe Europeans born in the New World, any mixed-race person in colonial Louisiana (to include European, African, and Indian), any enslaved person born in the territory (to distinguish from those born in Africa), any free person of African ancestry, any mulatto that can trace their family heritage to colonial Louisiana, and other variations.¹⁵ For the purposes of this document, and henceforth in reference, a Creole will be considered to be a person with European and African heritage who grew up in Louisiana and had substantial ties to the French culture.¹⁶ I will also distinguish that “free blacks” are those free people of color, prior to 1865, outside my definition of Creole.¹⁷ They are of primarily African ancestry and either arrived in the New World free, were born free, purchased their freedom, or were otherwise manumitted.¹⁸

The Creoles are centrally important to the identity of New Orleans. Many were formally educated, owned businesses and property, plied a skilled trade, held political power, and spoke French. Some owned slaves. The musicians among them were literate and classically trained, many receiving instruction from musicians of the New Orleans French Opera.¹⁹ The Creoles preserved the Afro-French culture of the city, including an unparalleled flair for parades, balls, “sporting life” and music of many kinds, which secured the *laissez-faire* culture that persists to

¹⁵ Native Americans were the first enslaved people in colonial Louisiana.

¹⁶ For example, Jelly Roll Morton, Isadore Barbarin, and Sidney Bechet meet this definition. Louis Armstrong and King Oliver, on the other hand, come from the lineage of Protestant “freedmen.”

¹⁷ Slavery is abolished by the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1865. After this point, the recently enslaved are known as “freedmen.”

¹⁸ The Louisiana Code Noir allowed for manumission by the prerogative of the owner, pending the approval of the Superior Council. Later, under Spanish rule, a slave could purchase their freedom and that of others regardless of owner consent under the the law known as *coartación*.

¹⁹ The New Orleans French Opera existed from ca. 1860 - 1919. Huber, 153-158.

this day, appropriately captured in the epithet “The City That Care Forgot.”²⁰ This atmosphere of tolerance was instrumental to providing a foundation upon which an ethnically diverse population could co-exist and thrive.²¹ Consequently, life in New Orleans provided significant remission from the oppressive bigotry-driven climate of the southern states for the American and pre-American Negro, a reality that would have substantial implications on the development of the brass bands and, later, Jazz. The Crescent City became a destination for people of color in the South who sought reprieve from the worst of Jim Crow and alternatives to share-cropping with jobs on the docks and in other industries that are the denizen of a major port city.²² The Creoles were very aware of their precarious political position as people of mixed-race, especially under new American government, and they guarded their freedoms carefully.²³

Congo Square

When investigating any music of African American origin or influence, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of Congo Square, about which there is much myth and mystery. Congo Square, which flanked the lakeside boundary of the original settlement (French Quarter), was a large green expanse where slaves were once allowed to congregate en masse on Sundays to interact.²⁴ Congo Square is likely the single most poignant example of how the experience of enslaved Africans in New Orleans differed greatly from elsewhere in the United States.

²⁰ Louis Armstrong refers to sporting life in *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* as a euphemism for people who engaged in drinking, gambling, and prostitution—such as the patrons at Lulu White’s Mahogany Hall or Tom Anderson’s honky tonk.

²¹ 19th century New Orleans was quite small with respect to usable land area. Ethnic and cultural tolerance was necessitated by geographically forced integration.

²² With these people came the Blues and Ragtime, two musical styles that would heavily influence the development of the brass bands and jazz.

²³ The 1896 Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* originated with the New Orleans octaroon Homer Plessy challenging Louisiana’s segregation laws.

²⁴ This location is now encompassed by Louis Armstrong Park in the Treme neighborhood.

Useful accounts of the events at Congo Square are scant and often vague, but it is clear that slaves of various African tribal origins gathered to dance the bamboula and calinda to drums and other instruments, including the banjo (banza), while singing in languages that white observers did not understand. According to Sublette, “The British prohibited African languages, religions, and drums, along with the liberty of enslaved people to gather en masse publicly.”²⁵

It is an exercise in guess-work to determine the year of origin of the dances at Congo Square and when they ended.²⁶ However, we can be certain, from a detailed description by renowned architect Benjamin Latrobe, that Sunday dances at Congo Square were well-established and perhaps at their height in 1819.²⁷

Carnival, Mardi Gras, Krewes

The Carnival season, a highly secularized time of many parades and balls, has been long celebrated in New Orleans and remains a strong foundation of the revelry with which the city is so prominently associated. Observed widely across the world, especially in areas with a substantial Catholic population, New Orleans is renowned for having extravagant festivities with great demand for music. Beginning on January 6th, the season culminates with Mardi Gras, French for “Fat Tuesday.”²⁸ As the name suggests, it is a day of excess before the six week Lenten season of fasting and repentance.

²⁵ Sublette, 74.

²⁶ Some scholars suggest the dances began after the American Era (1803). However, there is evidence to indicate the dances began perhaps as early as the 1780’s. We can be reasonably certain the dances continued until at least 1835.

²⁷ Latrobe described in great detail the location, dances, clothing of the people, and even sketched drawings of the drums.

²⁸ Carnival can last anywhere from four to nine weeks, depending on the date of Easter, which occurs on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox.

Although it is not exactly clear when Mardi Gras celebrations began in New Orleans, there is good reason to believe that some of the same participants at Congo Square dances also participated in Mardi Gras festivities. James Creecy tells us about the 1835 Mardi Gras celebration, describing “fun, frolic, and comic masquerading” by “men and boys, women and girls, bond and free, white and black, yellow and brown.”²⁹ He also mentions all kinds of people in masks and disguises with music to accompany them as they went “up and down the streets, wildly shouting, singing, laughing, drumming, fiddling, fifeing, and all throwing flour broadcast as they wend their reckless way. . .”³⁰

The first official carnival organization in New Orleans, the Mistick Krewe of Comus, paraded in 1857, on a theme from Milton’s “Paradise Lost.” Two more krewes were formed 15 years later, including Rex, the King of the Carnival, who brought with him the now traditional Mardi Gras colors of purple, green, and gold, as well as the official theme “If Ever I Cease to Love.”³¹

Today, the carnival celebration in New Orleans is among the most lavish in the world. The parade schedule for the 2014 carnival season listed 59 parading krewes, along with many more organizations who do not parade, choosing instead to give balls or to engage in other forms of celebration.³² To accommodate all the organizations, parades begin more than two weeks before Mardi Gras and culminate with the parades of Zulu and Rex on Fat Tuesday. The Krewe of Zulu is worth special mention as a predominately African American organization that grew out of the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club. Louis Armstrong, who would have been seven years old

²⁹ James R. Creecy, *Scenes in the South and Other Miscellaneous Pieces* (Washington: Thomas McGill, 1860), 43. The word “frolic” may be very revealing in this quote, as it was often used by the Anglos to describe a small slave gathering with music, sans drums, of course.

³⁰ Creecy, 44.

³¹ Rex is the only unmasked king in the carnival celebration, a reminder that he was originally made to resemble Richard II.

³² <http://www.mardigrasneworleans.com/schedule.html#/>. Accessed July 24, 2013.

when Zulu began parading in 1909, achieved one of his boyhood dreams by becoming King of the Zulus in 1949, as is famously depicted on the cover of Time Magazine's February 21st issue of that year.

The Zulus throw coconuts known as "golden nuggets," often hand-painted, and mask in blackface and grass skirts, a custom that caused their membership to dwindle greatly with pressure from Civil Rights organizations during the 1960's.³³ The organization flourishes today, but is in stark contrast to another African American Mardi Gras tradition, or perhaps more appropriately, counter-tradition—masking Indian.

We Won't Bow Down

Mardi Gras Indians are not Native American—they're African American. Known simply as "Indians" in New Orleans and referred to hereafter, they also parade on Mardi Gras day—but you won't see them on a parade schedule or route map, they won't throw you trinkets, and they won't file for a permit or police escorts. They parade in their neighborhoods and they don't advertise. The Indians, who "mask" in original hand-sewn lavish costumes of beads, sequins and feathers, are a living, evolving symbol of resistance and dignity among the working-class black community in New Orleans, the same community that constitutes the New Orleans brass bands.³⁴ According to Sublette, they are effectively posing the question "Can a black man walk the streets of his own neighborhood without permission from anyone?"³⁵ Native Americans and pre- and post-American negroes are kindred spirits through the common experience of European

³³ <http://www.kreweofzulu.com/>. Accessed July 24, 2013.

³⁴ With few exceptions, Indians do not actually wear masks that cover their faces, instead, ornate "crowns" of feathers and beads. Their costumes are made anew each year and can cost several thousand dollars.

³⁵ Sublette, 297.

oppression.³⁶ The Native American-inspired costumes pay homage to those who fought a similar battle.³⁷

Mardi Gras Indians, who also parade on their own holiday, “Super Sunday,” that nearest St. Joseph’s Day, are organized in “gangs” or “tribes”—independent groups which function as secret society, social club, and mutual aid organization.³⁸ Several members of the tribe mask in elaborate costumes, each with his own title and well-defined role. They are headed by the Big Chief, who leads the organization, has the most ornate costume, and is responsible for the welfare of the tribe.³⁹ Each tribe also has scouts, who keep an eye out for trouble while parading, and percussionists, who play tambourine or other portable hand drums and sing/chant. Confrontations between Indian tribes parading on Mardi Gras day were once violent and bloody, but today they settle their differences through needlework, symbolic ritual and dance. The greatest compliment a Big Chief can receive is that he is the “prettiest.”

For many Indians, the music that accompanies parading is meant to evoke a direct lineage to Congo Square.⁴⁰ Donald Harrison, Jr., well-known jazz saxophonist and Big Chief of Congo Nation, spoke specifically about the Indian link to Congo Square:

The practices were held on Sunday—and they were called practices. We also know that the people gathered by their tribes and they would practice and then they would challenge each other, to see who was the best. . . . And when they met each other it was called being ‘in the circle.’ And you know that the Mardi Gras Indians still have practices on Sundays, and we know that when the Indians meet each other, that’s ‘in

³⁶ The first African slaves in Louisiana, overwhelmingly male, often took Native American wives. Indigenous Americans also fed them, taught adaptive skills, and helped them escape bondage to establish Maroon colonies in the cypress swamps. This is covered in several sources, but see Johnson, Jerah, "Colonial New Orleans: A Fragment of the Eighteenth-Century French Ethos," in Logsdon and Hirsch.

³⁷ The costume style represents the Plains Indians, not the Louisiana Indians. This was likely inspired by the costumes in an 1880’s Wild West Show in New Orleans.

³⁸ Sublette, 295.

³⁹ Other masked tribesman are the Spy Boy, Flag Boy, and Wildman. Sometimes there is a Trail Chief and a Little Chief (young boy). In the 1938 Library of Congress recordings (Lomax), Jelly Roll Morton claimed to have been a Spy Boy. He also performed an Indian tune.

⁴⁰ Known scholarship to date has not been able to prove this link, but it is well within the realm of plausibility.

the circle,' and we know that they still challenge each other to see who's the best. So those are elements that are still alive.⁴¹

But the unique music of the Indians has found a wider audience than the unsuspecting observer who serendipitously stumbles upon an Indian parade. Danny Barker recorded the universal Indian anthem “Indian Red” along with three other songs in 1949. “Jockomo,” a 1953 recording by Sugar Boy Crawford, is an Indian song that became a hit for the Dixie Cups in 1965 as “Iko Iko.” In the 1970’s, the Wild Magnolias with Bo Dollis and the Wild Tchoupitoulas, which introduced the Neville Brothers, recorded electric funk albums of Indian songs to popular acclaim.⁴² Today, the famous New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival (JazzFest), annually employs Indian musicians for the festival.⁴³

As the lyrics to “Indian Red” proudly state, “We won’t bow down”—and that’s what the Indians are all about. They won’t bow down to enslavement, systematic erasure of their history, Jim Crow, segregation, police brutality, or other forms of encroachment upon their freedoms.

As Ned Sublette so eloquently puts it, “Anglo-American slavery was designed to erase African American history. But African Americans made their own history, and in New Orleans, history parades down the street.”⁴⁴ I suspect the author wasn’t only talking about the Indians. He was probably also referring to another parading group from the same community—the New Orleans Brass Bands.

⁴¹ Sublette, 302-303.

⁴² Sakakeeny, “Indian Rulers,” 11-12.

⁴³ They also hire Indians to promenade the grounds in full parading suits.

⁴⁴ Sublette, 288.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY OF NEW ORLEANS BRASS BANDS

Introduction and Definition

A brass band is a musical group made up of wind instruments that often includes percussion. The term is technically a misnomer, as most brass bands include woodwinds. The instruments used in a brass band have changed throughout its history, driven primarily by advances in instrument technology.⁴⁵ Historically, they are closely linked to martial music and evolved out of drum and fife and drum and bugle corps.⁴⁶

19th Century Brass Bands in America

Brass bands in 19th century America were as common as rock bands are today. Every village had a silver cornet band and a bandstand in the square.⁴⁷ Their literature would have varied, but generally included marches, hymns, light classical music, folk tunes, and dance music. William Schafer tells us about the various performing opportunities for these groups:

Brass bands played for circuses, carnivals, minstrel and medicine shows, political rallies, churches, picnics, dances, athletic contests, holiday gatherings. The Salvation Army employed the small brass band as a potent weapon in its evangelistic crusade, and politicians and pitchmen of every stamp used brass bands for ballyhoo. Every military troop, quasi military drill team, volunteer fire squad, lodge, or social club had its auxiliary band to swell holiday pageantry.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Valved instruments gained widespread acceptance by the mid 19th century, allowing for full chromaticism and shorter instruments. It also allowed amateurs to attempt the music as they could play chromatically in the low to mid register. The introduction of the saxophone also had an impact, as these instruments eventually replaced saxhorns.

⁴⁶ Jerry Brock, "Notes On New Orleans Brass Bands," *Offbeat Magazine*, (July 1, 2001).

⁴⁷ William John Schafer, *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz*, (Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 8.

⁴⁸ Schafer, 8.

Brass Bands in New Orleans pre-Civil War

The 1838, the *New Orleans Picayune* reported a “real mania” for horns and trumpet music in the city. There is also evidence of popular brass bands in New Orleans in the intervening time before Louisiana seceded from the Union in 1861, including the Washington Artillery Brass Band and two non-military bands that were popular during the 1850’s: Bothe’s Brass Band and Charley Jaeger’s Brass Band.⁴⁹

Brass Bands during the Civil War

Brass bands were also highly valued during the American Civil War (1861-1865). They were used to give signals in battle and for entertainment of the soldiers and public. Confederate General Robert E. Lee remarked, “I don’t believe we can have an army without music.”

According to E. Lawrence Abel:

[A] brass band was such an integral part of American culture that soldiers on each side felt their regiments and brigades were inferior if they did not have one. A brass band greatly enhanced the prestige of a military unit. Often times officers paid for bands out of their own pockets. Band music lightened a march; it surged a soldier’s adrenaline before a battle; it rallied flagging spirits.⁵⁰

Patrick Gilmore in New Orleans

A particular residency of note in New Orleans during the Civil War was that of Patrick Gilmore’s 24th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Band. Gilmore, known as the father of American brass band music, organized over 300 bands for the Union forces, but the one he brought to New Orleans in January of 1864 may have been especially influential to the

⁴⁹ Brock, “Notes On New Orleans Brass Bands.”

⁵⁰ E. Lawrence Abel, *Singing the New Nation: How Music Shaped the Confederacy, 1861-1865*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stockpile Books, 2000), xiv.

beginnings of the unique brass band tradition in the city. Gilmore's Famous Band, as they were often called in the press, was made up of 32 African Americans. The band performed all over the city nearly every day for two months, including a concert at the French Opera House that was open to all people, regardless of class or race.⁵¹ This certainly would have caused a stir in black New Orleans.

When the war ended, instruments and teachers were widely available. This was especially true in New Orleans, which was of great strategic import to both sides and was occupied by northern and southern bands who performed in the city.⁵² A 1878 book by James M. Trotter provides an early description of black brass bands in the city:

New Orleans has several fine brass bands among its colored population. "Kelly's Band" and the "St. Bernard" deserve particular mention here. The "St. Bernard" is composed of a very intelligent class of young men, studious, and of excellent moral character; in fact, they form a splendid corps of musicians, excelled by none. With these two bands and some others, the names of which I have not now at hand, the people of New Orleans are always well supplied with the best of martial music.⁵³

New Orleans Brass Band Eras

Published scholarship on the general history and literature of the New Orleans brass bands is scant, but we are fortunate to have excellent works by Richard H. Knowles, *Fallen Heroes*, and William J. Schafer in his *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz*. As all scholars do when writing about the history of brass bands in the city before 1970, I rely heavily on these sources.

⁵¹ Brock, "Notes On New Orleans Brass Bands." This was a "promenade concert" on January 26, 1864.

⁵² Schafer, 10.

⁵³ James M. Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People*, (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1878), 351.

From this point, when I refer to New Orleans brass bands, I am referring to bands from the black community, to include the Creoles.⁵⁴ The Creoles maintained separation from the rest of the black community in New Orleans until state laws and the reinterpretation of the 14th Amendment under *Plessy v. Ferguson* eventually forced their integration with black Protestants like Buddy Bolden and Louis Armstrong.

Knowles appropriately divides New Orleans brass band history into four categories, which essentially occur in twenty year intervals beginning in 1880, ending in the 1960's when the brass band tradition became anemic. To update the history, I will add one more period to chronicle the beginnings of the brass band renaissance, starting in 1970 with the Fairview Baptist Church Band, captured nicely by Mick Burns in his book *Keeping the Beat on the Street*.

Pre-Jazz Period (1880 - 1900)

Not much is known about brass bands in New Orleans for the last two decades of the 19th century, which Knowles calls the "Pre-Jazz Period." However, we can be reasonably certain that the organized brass bands of this time would've been indistinguishable from bands elsewhere in the United States. Two of the earliest influential brass bands in the city formed during this time: The Excelsior and the Onward. Both bands formed in the 1880's and were Creole bands known for playing "heavy music," meaning that these were strictly reading bands who played carefully arranged music in the European style.

The Louisianan mentions the Excelsior as one of the city's "champion" bands in 1881. That same year, the *New Orleans Picayune* describes them as a 16-piece band leading a parade for the

⁵⁴ There were many white brass bands in New Orleans at the turn of the century. They are not the subject of this document as their numbers waned and the musical tradition did not evolve into improvised music integral to the culture of the community. A notable exception may be Papa Jack Laine and his Reliance Brass Band, who is credited with influencing the early development of Jazz. Laine's band, however, was not exclusively white.

Pickwick Baseball Club.⁵⁵ The Onward featured about a dozen members, and according to long-time member Isidore Barbarin, played a full program of dance music, including waltzes, polkas, quadrilles, and mazurkas. Barbarin is the patriarch of a great brass band family that continues to perform in New Orleans today. His son, Paul, composed the brass band standards “Bourbon Street Parade” and “Paul Barbarin’s Second Line,” and his grandson, Danny Barker, formed the Fairview Baptist Church Band. Manuel Perez, one of Louis Armstrong’s favorite cornetists, led the Onward for many years, eventually changing its name to the Imperial Brass Band.⁵⁶ Both groups disbanded in the early 1930s, though the Onward was reformed in 1960 by Paul Barbarin and Louis Cottrell, Jr.

Classic Period (1900 - 1920)

The “Classic Period” runs concurrent with the formation of Jazz, from 1900 - 1920, and is said to have featured the finest bands the city had ever heard.⁵⁷ This period is dominated by the Onward and the Excelsior playing their “heavy music,” but as result of the popularity of jazz with its collective improvisation and substantial blues and church influences, some of the first improvising brass bands begin to appear. They were known as “ratty” or “barrelhouse” bands, quickly abandoning music cards, much to the horror of the Creoles.

⁵⁵ Richard H. Knowles, *Fallen Heroes: A History of New Orleans Brass Bands*, (New Orleans: Jazzology Press, 1996), 33.

⁵⁶ Knowles, 52.

⁵⁷ Knowles, 8.

Middle Period (1920 - 1940)

The “Middle Period,” from about 1920 - 1940, begins with soldiers returning to New Orleans from service in World War I and ends with the waning of the Great Depression. It is characterized by the integration of Creole musicians with “barrelhouse” musicians. This was a reluctant state of affairs for both groups as it was more than just antithetical musical approaches merging. The Creoles, who had never considered themselves black and were notorious for being dicty, generally loathed the looseness and lack of musical training of the “ear” musicians who were usually self-taught and didn’t read music. Additionally, religious practice, formal education, and skin tone were also at odds. Louis Armstrong remembers being called to play a parade with a Creole band and leaning over to nudge Kid Ory as if to ask him “You dig what I’m diggin’?”⁵⁸ Armstrong was referring to the snobbish treatment he received from the Creole musicians because he was not reading the music—what a modern musician would commonly call being “vibed out.”

The Tuxedo Brass Band formed in 1917 and became the standard-bearer for combined literature, featuring heavy music as well as popular tunes of the day, typically played by ear and including improvisation. This feat required a special kind of player that could read and improvise and demanded a new standard set of skills for the brass band musician. The popularity of the Tuxedo combined with the ubiquitousness of pop tunes disseminated through radio, record, and sheet music, would inspire the practice of forming “pick-up” bands, rather than keeping and rehearsing a “standard” band. Pick-up bands didn’t care to rehearse or read music. Instead, they learned a common body of “standards” by ear, and according to Knowles, filled most of the

⁵⁸ Louis Armstrong, *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), 142.

available jobs in the 1920's.⁵⁹ This practice is still sometimes used today as it is common for musicians to play in multiple bands and know the literature of the popular brass bands. A notable exception to this trend was the emergence of Eureka Brass Band, which brought back the old reading tradition and its literature. The Eureka remained prominent in the 1930's, despite the Great Depression reducing the number of brass band jobs available.

Modern Period (1940 - 1970)

What Knowles refers to as the “Modern Era,” from approximately 1940 - 1970, is so called because of important stylistic changes resulting from the inclusion of saxophones, replacing the baritone and alto horns, and the development of a “freer rhapsodic” style of trumpet playing.⁶⁰ Saxophones would have allowed for a significant change in both sound and character of the music. By the late 1950's, Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, Lester Young, Johnny Hodges, Charlie Parker, Louis Jordan, and John Coltrane were well-known, and the saxophone offered many soloistic possibilities for any band who didn't rely exclusively on reading heavy music.

This era also saw a dramatic decline in the amount of work available for brass bands, even in the black community. Certainly, social changes catalyzed by the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War had a significant impact on the zeitgeist, with implications on housing, schools, economics, insurance, and segregation laws. Also, the emergence of new popular music in the black community, Rhythm and Blues, displaced some work for the brass bands. By the 1950's, only a small handful of regularly organized bands existed, and among them, only the Eureka was of the caliber of bands of the previous generations.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Knowles, 106.

⁶⁰ Knowles, 8.

⁶¹ Knowles, 8.

Renaissance (1970 - present)

Burns states that “prior to 1970, what few New Orleans brass bands there were consisted mainly of veteran musicians who didn’t work that often” and describes the neighborhood parade scene as “moribund” and “irrelevant.”⁶² The 1970’s saw the beginnings of the brass band renaissance in New Orleans, starting with the repatriation of the ranks of young musicians in the Fairview Baptist Church Brass Band, under the leadership of Danny Barker.

Barker, born and raised in New Orleans, was a well-known jazz musician who had left the city long ago to work with the likes of Cab Calloway, Lucky Millinder, and Jelly Roll Morton.⁶³ He returned to New Orleans and began to lead a youth brass band affiliated with the Fairview Baptist Church, hoping to keep the kids off the streets. The band soon had about thirty teenagers participating, many of whom would become internationally acclaimed musicians, such as Branford and Wynton Marsalis, Leroy Jones, Dr. Michael White, and Nicholas Payton, just to name a few. Barker, unlike most of his contemporaries, was supportive of the inclusion of new sounds into the brass band: “The music changes, and these youngsters want to play something that belongs to today.”⁶⁴ The ranks of musicians Barker encouraged would go on to form the Hurricane Brass Band and, later, the The Dirty Dozen Brass Band.

The Dirty Dozen changed everything by making the brass band relevant to the people again. They incorporated bebop and funk into their music and played regularly in night clubs. According to trumpeter Gregory Davis, “our influences were rhythm and blues, bebop, post-bebop like John Coltrane, Freddie Hubbard, Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers. So we were

⁶² Mick Burns, *Keeping the Beat on the Street: the New Orleans Brass Band Renaissance*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 5.

⁶³ Burns, 15.

⁶⁴ Burns, 17.

hearing music coming from everywhere.”⁶⁵The Dozen formed as a rehearsal band because there wasn’t much work for the brass bands at that time. Eventually, they took their music into the clubs when they got a regular gig at a small venue called Daryl’s. Historian and broadcaster Jerry Brock remembers seeing the Dirty Dozen at Daryl’s for the first time:

I could barely get in—it was only a small black-owned barroom in a poor neighborhood. I mean, the place was just exploding. . . . The people were so exuberant—the floor was covered with people, rolling on the floor! I was afraid to step on them. And there were at least six men in their sixties and seventies dancing on top of the bar. This is what the Fairview band and the Hurricane Brass Band had been leading up to—the Dirty Dozen had renewed this music to speak to the contemporary New Orleans community. The people were going wild. Going to Daryl’s became the weekly ritual.⁶⁶

Soon, they were working Monday nights at The Glasshouse, which lasted for nearly a decade. Davis recalls,

We went for seven years without missing a Monday. Once we started traveling, it became more difficult to get back for that job. That’s how the Rebirth [brass band] got started: they were hired to substitute for us on Monday nights when we couldn’t get there.⁶⁷

The Rebirth Brass Band, who considers the Dirty Dozen’s first album, *My Feet Can’t Fail Me Now*, their “bible,” continued the trend of modernizing the repertoire, notably including rap into some of their music. ⁶⁸ But they are just one of the premiere brass bands of today to draw their inspiration from the Dozen. Other notable bands that formed in the wake of the Dozen’s success include The Soul Rebels, The Hot 8, and The Little Rascals, to name a few.

Just before Hurricane Katrina, Burns noted the robustness of the New Orleans brass band scene, estimating 25 extant groups with about 150 musicians involved. He added, “new bands are being formed all the time, and the scene is constantly changing.”

⁶⁵ Burns, 70.

⁶⁶ Burns, 99.

⁶⁷ Burns, 99.

⁶⁸ For example, “You Don’t Want to Go to War” on their 2001 album *Hot Venom*.

Benevolent Associations, Pleasure Clubs, Funerals

A brief history of the brass bands would not be complete without a discussion of the populace that sustained them. A primary source of work for brass band musicians has always come from their community. Shortly after Reconstruction collapsed in the South, black neighborhoods saw the rapid emergence of benevolent associations as a way to provide a social aid within the community at a time when insurance companies would not sell life insurance to African Americans. A dues paying member ensured that he would receive a proper burial with music and that his dependents would receive support in the event of his sickness or death.⁶⁹ These associations were also a means for social and political exchange. According to Schafer, “benevolent societies and sociopolitical clubs became one medium through which black street bands were born.”⁷⁰

Another type of organization that materialized was the social and pleasure club. These groups existed primarily for fraternization and entertainment, though they also offered burial insurance in the days before it was freely available to black Americans. Social and pleasure clubs parade once per year on Sunday, often nearest the anniversary of their founding. Depending on their size or aspirations, they may hire up to three brass bands to play the event.⁷¹ These parades, known as “second-lines,” wind through the neighborhood of the organization, stopping at locations of significance along the way.⁷² The members often go to great lengths, sometimes at enormous personal expense, to wear lavish, matching clothing and expensive shoes. Their second-line is

⁶⁹ The Young Men Olympians Benevolent Association was founded in 1882 and is still around today. They held their 129th annual anniversary parade in September, 2013.

⁷⁰ Schafer, 12.

⁷¹ Burns, 5.

⁷² The Second Line schedule, typically unpublished in the past, is now widely available online each year, to include information about the social and pleasure club, the parade route, the stops, and the band(s) performing.

the party of the year for them. They are proudly representing themselves, their organization, and their neighborhood.

A third type of community organization is the social aid and pleasure club, which combines the functions of the benevolent association and pleasure club. Likely the most famous example of this type of group is the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club, which parades on Mardi Gras day. The Zulus formed out of an organization of laborers known as “The Tramps” in 1909 and are still going strong.⁷³

All of these community groups have, throughout their history, provided the brass bands work performing “funerals with music” – now commonly, though not quite accurately, called “jazz funerals.” The earliest black brass bands in New Orleans played funerals, but this tradition would have been nearly indistinguishable from white burial practice of the time, including the sound of the music. However, as the practice of burial with a brass band died out around 1900, it began to flourish in the black community just as jazz was becoming established.⁷⁴ This tradition flourished for the first thirty years of the century, keeping most of the city’s brass bands busy nearly every day.⁷⁵ As the music of the brass bands evolved, so did the funeral music practices. Once the hot style of music became established in the brass bands, the “jazz funeral” generally involved the band playing slow, mournful hymns and dirges to escort the body from the church to the cemetery.⁷⁶ Common songs for this portion of the procession were “Flee as a Bird” or “Just a Closer Walk With Thee.”⁷⁷ The interment at the cemetery is referred to as “cutting the body

⁷³ <http://www.kreweofzulu.com/>. Accessed August 7, 2014.

⁷⁴ Knowles, 12.

⁷⁵ Knowles, 7.

⁷⁶ For a detailed description of brass band funeral procedures, see Knowles, 13-14.

⁷⁷ “Just a Closer Walk With Thee” was played at the funeral of New Birth Brass Band tuba player Kerwin James as his casket was escorted out of the church after the service. Kerwin was the brother of Phil and Keith Frazier, founders of the Rebirth Brass Band. A video of this is currently available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krJW2qMVv4M/>. Accessed August 7, 2014.

loose.” At this time, the band will walk a respectful distance away from the cemetery and strike up the hot music, such as “Didn’t He Ramble” or “When the Saints Go Marching In,” and will proceed back to the home, club, or favorite bar of the deceased for food and drink.⁷⁸ The brass band community believes that the bible says one should cry at the birth and rejoice at the death.⁷⁹

The number of jazz funerals in New Orleans has declined rather dramatically since the early days. While, once, many members of a benevolent associations and social aid and pleasure clubs would have had a funeral with music, now the practice is mostly reserved for community dignitaries and brass band musicians.

⁷⁸ *New Orleans Jazz Funerals: ...From The Inside*, Directed by David Jones (New Orleans: DMJ Productions, 1995), DVD.

⁷⁹ This is derived from Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verse 1: “A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth,” (NIV).

CHAPTER 3: HURRICANE KATRINA

History of Hurricanes and Flooding in New Orleans

Hurricanes and flooding are not new to New Orleans. The “Great Hurricane” of 1722 blew down nearly every building in the town, bringing with it a 10 foot storm surge.⁸⁰ The settlement had to start from scratch only four years after its founding. Since 1759, hurricanes have hit the Louisiana coast 176 times, 38 of which have caused substantial flooding in New Orleans.⁸¹ On average, this happens once every seven years.

Even in the absences of a hurricane, New Orleans is still vulnerable to destruction. Flooding can come from both river and sky. In 1927, both happened simultaneously. The Great Mississippi River Flood affected seven states, including Louisiana, and drove nearly one million people from their homes. The river sustained flood stage for five months. To make matters worse, New Orleans received 15 inches of rain on April 15th resulting in flooding of up to four feet in some areas of the city. The levees that are supposed to protect instead trapped the water inside. State and local leaders, concerned about an upriver breach, decided to blow up a downriver section of levee to relieve the pressure and lower river levels, thus sacrificing the homes of nearly 10,000 of the area's poorer residents.⁸² When the levees burst during Katrina in 2005, some people believed they were blown intentionally.

Even in the last 50 years, New Orleans has seen its share of potentially devastating storms. In 1965, Hurricane Betsy was the first storm in the United States to cause over \$1 billion in damages. It hit Louisiana as a Category 3 hurricane, with wind gusts up to 145 mph, and flooded

⁸⁰ According to the National Hurricane Center, a storm surge is “an abnormal rise of water generated by a storm, over and above the predicted astronomical tides.”

⁸¹ Stephen A. Nelson, “Why New Orleans is Vulnerable to Hurricanes: Geologic and Historical Factors,” Tulane University (December 10, 2012).

⁸² Jim Bradshaw, “Great Flood of 1927,” *KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana*, (May 13, 2011).

164,000 homes in New Orleans.⁸³ Betsy was the catalyst for Congress to order the Army Corps of Engineers to build the flood protection system that would notoriously fail during Hurricane Katrina.⁸⁴ In 1969, Hurricane Camille was one of only three U.S. storms to make landfall at Category 5, boasting 190 mph winds. New Orleans was fortunate, sustaining minimal damage. There was also Hurricane Andrew (1992), Hurricane Georges (1998), Hurricane Ivan (2004), Hurricane Rita (2005), and hurricanes Gustav and Ike (2008), each of which caused damage in Louisiana.

Prone

The prognosis for New Orleans being able to defend itself from future flooding is not good and is worsening each year. There are several significant factors involved, including subsidence, loss of wetlands, and rising sea levels.

New Orleans is "protected" by 350 miles of flood walls (levees), built by the Army Corps of Engineers, designed to withstand a fast-moving Category 3 storm.⁸⁵ There were approximately 50 levee failures, despite that Hurricane Katrina was, at most, a Category 2 storm when it hit New Orleans. After numerous investigations into the levee breaches, the Army Corps of Engineers eventually admitted responsibility for design flaws of catastrophic significance.⁸⁶ When I asked him about Katrina, WWOZ's David Freedman, expressing a common sentiment in New Orleans, was quick to correct me:

⁸³ *Storm that Drowned a City*, Directed by Peter Chin and Caroline Penry-Davey (NOVA-PBS, 2006), DVD.

⁸⁴ Mark Schleifstein, "Hurricanes: The Times-Picayune Covers 175 Years of New Orleans History," *The Times-Picayune* (February 1, 2012).

⁸⁵ Fast-moving hurricanes are less dangerous than slow-moving storms as they spend less time over any particular area, and therefore, do less damage.

⁸⁶ Alan Levin, "Levees' Design Caused Deadly Failure," *USA Today*, (June 1, 2006).

I don't call it Katrina. I call it the Federal Flood of '05. Katrina was a hurricane that happened 60 miles east of here, in my mind. We had 17 breaches of three federal levees that flooded 85% of the city. So I considered it a flood.⁸⁷ And it was a flood that, had the Army Corps of Engineers built proper levees, we wouldn't have had.⁸⁸

Think of New Orleans as a bowl surrounded by water with Lake Pontchartrain to the north, the Gulf of Mexico to the south, and the Mississippi River winding around the city.

Approximately half of the city sits below sea level, requiring that any water that accumulates in the "bowl" be pumped out. Thirty feet beneath the spongy ground is not rock, but soft clay.

According to geologist and professor Harry Roberts, the city has sunk 15 feet since 1878.

When you pump the water out of those kinds of soils, they start to collapse, and even more importantly, the organic material oxidizes and goes away. So you've taken one component out of the soil, and that all adds up to subsidence.⁸⁹

Compounding the problem, the city is also sliding toward the gulf. Located on the the wall of a fault system apart from the continent, Southeast Louisiana is separating from the rest of mainland by a few millimeters each year.⁹⁰

According to the National Hurricane Center, "storm surge is often the greatest threat to life and property from a hurricane."⁹¹ The surge is what brings in the most water in the least amount of time, either overtopping the levees or breaking them.⁹² The greatest ally New Orleans has against storm surge is the coastline and miles of wetlands that extend south of the city to the Gulf of Mexico. Hurricanes draw their energy from water, so when a storm makes landfall, it will begin to lose strength. Wetland vegetation and soils absorb the power of a hurricane as it travels

⁸⁷ There were actually at least 50 levee breaches.

⁸⁸ David Freedman, personal interview with author, June 29, 2011.

⁸⁹ *Horizon*, season 42, episode 14, "The Lost City of New Orleans," Produced by Milla Harrison-Hansley (Princeton, NJ: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 2006), DVD.

⁹⁰ Sublette, 9.

⁹¹ National Hurricane Center, "Storm Surge Overview," <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/surge/>. Accessed August 13, 2014.

⁹² National Hurricane Center, "Storm Surge Overview." Katrina had surge flooding of 25-28 feet in some areas.

past, reducing wind speed and storm surge.⁹³ However, the wetlands are in peril, being lost at approximately 23 square miles per year, with even higher rates after hurricanes.⁹⁴ Man's attempt to control the Mississippi River in order to prevent flooding has produced unintended consequences. The river nourishes the wetlands by bringing fresh water and depositing rich sediments. The channeling of the river has undermined this natural process.

Decades of channel dredging at the hands of oil and shipping interests have reduced marshlands and further facilitated destruction of vegetation through salt-water encroachment.⁹⁵ Worse, the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO - "Mister Go"), a 76-mile shipping channel connecting New Orleans to the gulf, acted as an amplifier and delivery mechanism for the deadly storm surges of both Hurricane Betsy (1965) and Hurricane Katrina (2005), destroying several New Orleans neighborhoods.⁹⁶

Sea levels are rising. Although there was very little change before the year 1900, levels since then have increased regularly at up to 0.1 inches per year.⁹⁷ In the last two decades, new methods of measurement suggest that this rate may have increased to 0.12 inches per year.⁹⁸ According to the NOAA, primary causes of rising sea levels include "thermal expansion caused by the warming of the oceans (since water expands as it warms) and the loss of land-based ice (such as glaciers and polar ice caps) due to increased melting."⁹⁹

⁹³ Jeffrey Masters, "Storm Surge Reduction by Wetlands," http://www.wunderground.com/hurricane/surge_wetlands.asp?/. Accessed August 13, 2014. The "rule of thumb" is that every 2.7 miles of coastal wetlands reduce storm surge by 1 foot, on average. However, Masters points out that several recent studies show widely varying amounts of protection and that the calculation is "extremely complicated."

⁹⁴ Masters, "Storm Surge Reduction by Wetlands."

⁹⁵ Sublette, 12.

⁹⁶ Sublette, 13.

⁹⁷ National Ocean Service, "Is Sea Level Rising?," <http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/sealevel.html/>. Accessed August 13, 2014.

⁹⁸ National Ocean Service, "Is Sea Level Rising?"

⁹⁹ National Ocean Service, "Is Sea Level Rising?"

Lack of Preparation

Despite dismal odds of New Orleans being able to weather a powerful storm relatively unscathed, there was no good reason to be so colossally unprepared for minimizing human suffering and loss of life in the event that a major storm did bear down on the city. In his book, *The Great Deluge*, Douglas Brinkley, himself a New Orleans-area resident, points out that locals were not ignorant of the potential for disaster. He cites several high profile publications that occurred within the five years prior to Katrina that tried to sound the alarm. Mark Fischetti's 2001 *Scientific American* article "Drowning New Orleans" called New Orleans a "disaster waiting to happen" and "[at] risk after even minor storms." In 2002, the local *Times Picayune* published a five-part series entitled "Washing Away" that warned of a toxic lake, people trapped in vehicles and in buildings, and a strong possibility of the levees breaking.¹⁰⁰ In 2004, *National Geographic* published "Gone with the Water," detailing the destruction of New Orleans in the face of a Category 3, 4, or 5 hurricane. Its author, Joel K. Bourne Jr., presciently noted those who would be left behind: "the car-less, the aged and infirm, and those die-hard New Orleanians who look for any excuse to throw a party."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, in 2001, ranked the potential damage to New Orleans as "among the three likeliest, most catastrophic disasters facing this country."¹⁰¹ The other two were an earthquake in San Francisco and, eerily, a terrorist attack in New York City.

Hurricane Pam, a mock storm used as a training exercise in 2004, was meant to prepare New Orleans and Southeastern Louisiana for a Category 3 hurricane. 270 officials from all levels of

¹⁰⁰ John McQuaid and Mark Schleifstein, "Washing Away," *Times Picayune*, Five-Part Series (June 23-27, 2002).

¹⁰¹ Eric Berger, "New Orleans Faces Domsday Scenario," *Houston Chronicle* (December 1, 2001).

government participated in the event. This scenario indicated up to 500,000 people may be left stranded in the toxic water, clearly demonstrating that transportation would be a key issue.¹⁰²

The lack of preparedness is well documented and occurred at all levels, from citizen to local, state, and federal government.¹⁰³ Among the residents who were capable of evacuation but did not, a handful of common reasons were cited. Some had never left the city and refused to leave their homes, others believed the levees or "vertical evacuation" would protect them, and many possessed a false sense of security, having successfully weathered previous hurricane scares.¹⁰⁴ Among the older generation, a common mantra was "we survived Betsy." Citizens who resided on high ground near the river were confident that even in the event of a flood, they would be dry.

The city had an evacuation plan called the "City of New Orleans Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan," a 14-page document prepared in 2000. Brinkley notes that a very small percentage of this booklet actually dealt with evacuation. The document states that it is an "all-hazard plan." It calls for evacuation zones to be developed "pending further study." Five years later, they were still undeveloped. The *Washington Times* wrote "the city of New Orleans followed virtually no aspect of its own emergency management plan in the disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina."¹⁰⁵

Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco reacted late and appeared overwhelmed. Although she tried to get state and federal cooperation moving by requesting that President George W. Bush declare a federal state of emergency, her request for aid did not convey a sense of urgency, nor did it indicate the need for assistance with evacuation transportation and rescue boats. Bob

¹⁰² Douglas Brinkley, *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (New York: Morrow, 2006), 18.

¹⁰³ See Spencer S. Hsu, "Katrina Report Spreads Blame," *Washington Post* (February 12, 2006) for an overview of the 582-page US House of Representatives report "A Failure of Initiative," Report 109-377 (February 15, 2006).

¹⁰⁴ Vertical evacuation generally means renting a room in a high-rise hotel.

¹⁰⁵ Brinkley, 19.

Williams wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* that Governor Blanco "failed to send a timely request for specific aid" and also criticized her for failing to "ensure that the state emergency operation facility was in constant contact with Mayor Nagin and FEMA."¹⁰⁶

The federal response was slow and disengaged. President George W. Bush was on vacation and did not return to Washington until two days after the storm hit New Orleans, and his working relationship Governor Blanco quickly became adversarial. However, the organization perhaps most central to the incompetent federal response was FEMA, led by director Michael Brown and under the control of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). He got off to a bad start, waiting for five hours after Katrina made landfall to ask DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff to dispatch 1000 personnel to the region—he also requested they be allowed two days to arrive.¹⁰⁷ FEMA's problems only got worse from there. Inefficiency plagued the agency. They lacked the ability to organize resources—equipment, food, water, medicine, shelters, rescue personnel. Brown, whose previous job was as the Judges and Stewards Commissioner for the International Arabian Horse Association, was a lightning rod for criticism throughout the storm and recovery process. He was infamously praised by President Bush on national television: "Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job."

On the streets of New Orleans, the anger at the federal government manifested itself in the first parade season after the storm, where a popular chant was "Fuck FEMA."¹⁰⁸ While I was conducting interviews in New Orleans six years after the storm, one of the most popular t-shirts in the French Quarter read "FEMA Evacuation Plan: Run, Motherfucker, Run."

¹⁰⁶ Brinkley, 39.

¹⁰⁷ NBC News. "FEMA Director Waited To Seek Homeland Help," (September 7, 2005).

¹⁰⁸ Matt Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power: New Orleans Brass Bands and the Politics of Performance," PhD diss. (Columbia University, 2008), 42.

The Storm

On August 23rd, 2005, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) first warned that Tropical Depression 12 had formed over the Bahamas. The following day, the storm intensified to a tropical storm and was named “Katrina.” On August 25th, Katrina became a Category 1 hurricane, with sustained winds at 75 mph. The eye of the storm made landfall in Florida, killing two people. While over land, Katrina weakened, returning to tropical storm classification. As the storm crossed Florida and entered the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, it rapidly gained power with sustained winds measured at 100 mph. On August 27th, two days before Katrina would hit New Orleans, the winds had strengthened to 115 mph, resulting in Category 3 hurricane status. Just before noon on Sunday, August 28th, Katrina became a Category 5 storm with winds measured at 175 mph. The NHC called the hurricane “potentially catastrophic” and warned that significant storm surge could overtop the levees in and around New Orleans. New Orleans residents who were unable to leave the city began to make their way to the Louisiana Superdome.

On the morning of August 29th, before Katrina even made landfall in Louisiana, there were reports of water flowing over one of the New Orleans levees. As the eye of the storm hit land, the 17th Street Canal levee was breached and the city began to flood. By the afternoon, Katrina began to weaken as winds fell just below 100 mph. The next day, Katrina was no longer a hurricane, but more levees failed and floodwaters continued to flow into New Orleans. On Wednesday, August 31st, Governor Blanco ordered all remaining residents to vacate New Orleans, but there were no transportation resources to accomplish that directive. On September 1st, Mayor Nagin pled for help from the federal government, stating that the people who took shelter in the Superdome and Convention Center were without food. On Friday, September 2nd,

four days after the storm hit New Orleans, National Guard troops arrived with food and water to aid those trapped in the Superdome and Convention Center.¹⁰⁹

Katrina Statistics

FEMA called Hurricane Katrina the “single most catastrophic natural disaster in U.S. history.” It was also the costliest, causing an estimated total damage of \$108 billion in the United States alone, and was among the five most lethal, killing 1833 people.¹¹⁰ Katrina displaced more than one million people. More than 100,000 households lived in FEMA trailers.¹¹¹

Louisiana sustained the brunt of the tragedy. Among the 1577 fatalities that occurred in Louisiana, 40% drowned, 25% died of injury and trauma, and 11% succumbed to heart conditions. Insurance companies paid over \$26 billion for damages to Louisiana homes, vehicles, and businesses.¹¹²

In New Orleans, 80% of the city was under water with 70% of its housing units sustaining damage. The levees breached in more than 50 locations.¹¹³ A year after the storm, the population of the city was less than 50% of the most recent pre-storm count. As of 2012, it had recovered only 75% of its residents.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ National Geographic News, “Hurricane Katrina: The Essential Time Line,” (October 28, 2010).

¹¹⁰ National Hurricane Center, “Tropical Cyclone Report: Hurricane Katrina, 23-30 August 2005,” (September 14, 2011), 13.

¹¹¹ CNN, “Hurricane Katrina Statistics Fast Facts,” <http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/23/us/hurricane-katrina-statistics-fast-facts/>. Accessed August 15, 2014.

¹¹² CNN, “Hurricane Katrina Statistics Fast Facts.”

¹¹³ Levees.org, “Lower Ninth Ward Levee Breaches in 2005,” *New Orleans Historical*, <http://neworleanshistorical.org/items/show/288/>. Accessed January 10, 2015.

¹¹⁴ CNN, “Hurricane Katrina Statistics Fast Facts.”

CHAPTER 4: EFFECTS ON THE NEW ORLEANS BRASS BANDS

Introduction

The brass band tradition in New Orleans has been very dynamic throughout its history, particularly since the renaissance period of the 1970's that eventually produced the Dirty Dozen, the Rebirth, and others. The inclusion of modern musical influences into the brass band repertoire has resulted in a renewed interest from the cultural community, a greatly expanded audience outside the city, and has also inspired many young musicians to participate in brass bands. Consequently, there are brass bands of many stripes in New Orleans, yielding a broad spectrum with regard to style, literature, economic status, fame, musical prowess, longevity, and stability. They run the gamut from workaday brass bands with irregular membership—who play for tips on the streets of the French Quarter or take whatever parties they can get—to long-established and internationally famous bands like the Dirty Dozen, who play most of their gigs outside of New Orleans and almost never play parades, funerals, or parties anymore. The diverse nature of the brass band community bodes well for the future of the bands as it puts these musicians in a good position to adapt and evolve as the political, economic, social and musical climates change. However, the vast scope of everything that comprises the New Orleans brass band community is far too broad to be chronicled in this document. The primary focus is on six brass bands that had been established for at least 20 years at the time of the storm: Treme, Stooges, Rebirth, Soul Rebels, Dirty Dozen, and The Hot 8. This group represents a diverse swath, both musically and economically. Immediately before Katrina hit, the Rebirth and the Dirty Dozen were internationally renowned and made most of their money outside of New Orleans. The Treme and the Soul Rebels had done some traveling and were slowly increasing in popularity. The Stooges and The Hot 8 were considered up-and-coming bands. These groups are

a barometer for the health of the brass band tradition as they are the primary models for young brass bands, remain actively involved in the New Orleans music scene, and continue to create a wide audience for brass band music with a significant national and international presence¹¹⁵. Tracing the fate of lesser-established brass bands is extremely difficult—they don't perform as much, they have irregular membership, they lack promotional infrastructure, and many of their performances are ad hoc or private. Two additional groups will be included in my analysis, The Free Agents and The Survivors, as examples of bands that formed as a direct result of the storm.

The information in this chapter comes almost exclusively from the series of interviews I conducted in New Orleans with leaders or founding members of these bands (June 2011). I provide a brief biography of each band/musician, then discuss the musicians' experience in relation to the storm, both personally and professionally.

Band/Musician Biography

Benny Jones, Sr., also known as “Bass Drum Benny,” has been a central figure in the New Orleans brass band culture for the last four decades. Born in the Treme neighborhood in 1943 and a lifelong resident of New Orleans, he has played bass drum and snare drum with many of the city's most illustrious bands. Like many musicians of his generation from the Treme, he is self-taught. “Where I'm from, the Treme area, we always had musicians in that neighborhood: drummers, and piano players and trumpet players. I was always surrounded by musicians in my neighborhood.”¹¹⁶ Jones, whose father was a brass band drummer, didn't participate in school

¹¹⁵ The Dirty Dozen is the least active in the local music scene, playing most of their gigs outside the city. It would be a rare occasion for them to perform a parade or funeral in New Orleans.

¹¹⁶ Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

music programs, having more interest in sports, but notes that he always followed the brass bands, social and pleasure clubs, and the Mardi Gras Indians. He got his professional start with the Olympia band under the leadership of the legendary Harold Dejan and also performed in the Chosen Few band with Anthony “Tuba Fats” Lacen. Jones went on to found the famous Dirty Dozen Brass Band and is currently the leader of the Treme Brass Band that can be seen on Spike Lee’s documentary *When the Levees Broke* and HBO’s *Treme* series. Jones described how the Treme Brass Band got started (ca. 1990):

A friend of mine had a club called Sidney's Saloon and he used to do seafood on a Tuesday night. So I went down there one Tuesday night and asked them about letting the band perform on a night when you're serving and all that. They said "I don't know." I said, "Well, we'll come down next week and we'll audition." So I rounded up all the guys that wanted to come and we had a big jam session the next Tuesday, and the following Tuesday we went down there again. So he told me, "Look, I'm going to give you a regular gig. How much you charging?" So I gave him a price. Then what happened, I had so many cats sitting in with the band, I couldn't hire everybody. I had to break the band down. . . . But we finally started the Treme Brass Band at Sidney's Saloon.¹¹⁷

Walter “Whoadie” Ramsey is a founding member and leader of the Stooges Music Group (SMG). Ramsey and a few friends formed the band in 1996 while still in high school.

Half of the band went to John F. Kennedy High School and the other half of the band went to Saint Augustine High School, which was rivals. . . . We were the popular kids in high school at the time so naturally we, The Stooges, were performing at talent shows at different high schools; so the Stooges was popular from the start. Then we cut out playing some Rebirth tunes or the Dirty Dozen tunes or the Soul Rebels, some of the bands before us. . . . We [lived in] different neighborhoods but more of the Ninth Ward area, from the upper ninth all the way to New Orleans East.¹¹⁸

Fellow JFK student Brian Gerdes, who would name the band, introduced Ramsey to Ellis Joseph, a student at St. Augustine who came from a family of brass band musicians. Although they hadn’t met before, Walter recognized Ellis from seeing him at second line parades and talked with him about forming their own brass band:

¹¹⁷ Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

¹¹⁸ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

“You should play.” And he was like, ‘Well, I can play the bass drum. And I have a guy that can play the tuba. And I got a guy that plays snare drum. I go to school with him.’ And so he introduced us to his friends and we was like, ‘we got another guy that can play trumpet.’¹¹⁹

When the group came together for their first rehearsal, many had known each other from junior high school and other activities, so there was an immediate energy to the group.

“Something unique about it. So we was all clowns and had fun and that was how that name come about. . . . It should be the Stooges. We always crackin' jokes, fun, like from day one, fun was part of our logo. It's who we are.”¹²⁰ The Stooges usually practiced at the houses of Ramsey’s mother and grandmother, occasionally meeting at Ellis Joseph’s house.

The Stooges is unique among top-tier New Orleans brass bands for several reasons. They call themselves the Stooges “Music Group” instead of “Brass Band” because they view themselves as well-rounded musicians who play brass band music, but are capable of playing other styles, too. Although SMG tends toward the brass band configuration while in New Orleans, they often use drum set, guitar, and congas while on tour, allowing for stylistic breadth while retaining the brass band flavor. SMG is also focused on being a business, not just a band.

Ramsey recalls telling his mother when he decided to be a brass band musician:

. . . My mom was like, “Son, playing music is a hobby. You gonna need a real job. You know, playing brass band music is a hobby.” I was like “Nah, I'm gonna convert this into the business.” And I'm one of the first people ever to do that—like to pay band members in weekly salaries or checks. I am the pioneer of making this a business and running it like a business.¹²¹

According to Ramsey, SMG makes the bulk of its income from audio production work and is the only brass band to own a music studio for recording and production. They have produced music for ESPN, BET, MTV, VH1, and others. The other unusual feature of SMG, much like Art

¹¹⁹ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

¹²⁰ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

¹²¹ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

Blakey did with the Jazz Messengers, is that they function as a training ground for up-and-coming musicians.

The Stooges right now is like really Brass Band 101 for New Orleans. So all the musicians that wanna learn about brass band music, they come either play with the Stooges or check out the Stooges. You know, they get a job in the band, they learn the music. . . . Ellis [Joseph] got his own band that's called the Free Agents. Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue. We got Edward Lee and Erion Williams, they just formed a band called Main Line. You know? And they just started with the Stooges, graduated to the Soul Rebels. Most of the front line, the front row in The Hot 8 brass band comes from the Stooges. . . . So like the new cats come in, we train them. And they go to another band or maybe start their own band. And we keep breeding like that. Like we got a guy right now plays trumpet with us so we gonna help to get his band off the ground I think. Eric Gordon. After a while we have him off the ground and then we pull in some more kids.¹²²

Unlike many brass band musicians of Benny Jones's generation, who learned to play outside of the school (often in the Treme), Walter Ramsey and the SMG musicians cut their teeth in school marching bands. But Ramsey and several other past members also attended the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts (NOCCA), where they received exceptional formal musical training. NOCCA is open to high school students by audition and is tuition-free. Ramsey gained admission to the Jazz Division, which boasts many well-known alumni, including Branford and Wynton Marsalis, Harry Connick, Jr., Donald Harrison, Nicholas Payton, and Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews.

Out of several dozen brass bands in New Orleans, The Stooges have carved out a niche. They entertain beyond the music.

Stooges is known for the party—the most energetic band right now. You know, like you're just throwin' out the water, just like straight fun. You know Stooges gonna march, they gonna sing, they gonna dance, they might pin one of the players and have a three-count on him. It's just like they really livin' up to the band. We have what the people want right now.¹²³

The people obviously agree. The Stooges were crowned "Red Bull Street Kings" in 2010 and won "Best Contemporary Brass Band" in the 2011 Big Easy Music Awards.

¹²² Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

¹²³ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

Ellis Joseph, a founding member of the Stooges, formed his group, The Free Agents, as a direct result of Hurricane Katrina. Joseph describes how the band got started:

We started out about six years ago [2005]. After the storm. All the musicians were scattered and whatnot. There was a void for musicians in the city. However, myself and a couple other cats were in Atlanta. . . . Linked up with the cats that were out there, and we put a band together. . . . There were a lot of people out there that were willing to help us get instruments, get gigs, you know start feeling like ourselves again. We made it happen. That was with some of the cats from Hot 8, some of the cats from Showtime Brass Band, some of the cats from The Stooges; we just all came together, made one band. And we were calling ourselves Free Agents because that's what we were. Everyone was from a different band. We found ourself calling the same people all the time, so we wind up going with the name. . . . We're like, man you know what? We gonna make this a band. It's Free Agents.¹²⁴

Jeffrey Hills began playing with the brass bands when he was 13 years old. He started with the Lil' Rascals Brass Band and began playing with Dejan's Olympia Brass Band at 19. Hills now leads the Survivors Brass Band, that, like the Free Agents Brass Band, formed as a result of the storm.

I've worked around the city and around the world with basically all the brass bands. I've worked with Treme Brass Band, Dirty Dozen Brass Band, Rebirth—I have to leave on the 1st [of July 2011] with the Rebirth Brass Band. I'm like what you call a fill in man. I work with everybody, no one group in particular; so I float around.¹²⁵

The Soul Rebels Brass Band burst onto the scene in 1991, evolving out of the Young Olympia Brass Band. The leader of the Soul Rebels, snare drummer Lumar LeBlanc, describes the emergence of the group:

We were the Young Olympia Brass Band, which was the junior band to the famed Dejan's Olympia Brass Band. Harold Dejan, Milton Batiste, Tuba Fats [Lacen], Edgar Smith, you know, Papa Glass, Boogie Breaux. . . . All those people—Doc Watson, sometime Mr. Wendell Eugene—all those people took us under their wing and let us play.

What happened was basically we were playing the traditional music, being [taught] by Harold and Milton. Mervin Campbell, who's an original Soul Rebel and an original member, through birth of the Olympia family, his sister was married to the grand marshal King Richard. That was Miss Ruby's son, Milton's wife. Merv and Byron Bernard were already playing before I came from college in '90, with the Young Olympia and the Junior Olympia. And the old Olympia was like a revamped version I guess of the Junior Olympia,

¹²⁴ Ellis Joseph, personal interview with author, June 20, 2011.

¹²⁵ Jeffrey Hills, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

cause Tanio [Hingle] and all them were in the Junior Olympia. I think it was Tanio, Fat Man [Kerry Hunter], Kenny Terry, all those cats.

What occurred is that they were, from the story Merv told me, they were the Junior Olympia, and then decided to move on. And Merv and them kinda went in the spot, but didn't take the name of Junior Olympia. They took the name of Young Olympians. And I guess Milton felt that they were men now and maybe the name was a little more appropriate, cause when you think of Junior Olympia, might think of kids. So when I came home from college, Merv, Flea [Byron Bernard], and Stybes [Emmanuel Stybe] asked me to join the Young Olympians. We all went to Saint Aug—Saint Augustine High School here, in New Orleans. Me, Mervin, Flea, Emmanuel Stybe, we all went there together. And me and Merv and Emmanuel went to college together at Texas Southern. I stayed and finished college, up until '90, and Merv and them I think had left right before that. So when Merv and Stybe left, they came straight into the music thing here in New Orleans. So that's when, at the time I was—back at home in New Orleans. And Merv and them saw me and said, “Man, you back home?” And I said, “Yeah.” They said, “Well why don't you come to practice? We got practice every Monday by Milton's house on St. Anthony,” which was, lemme tell ya, it was like brass band central.

What occurred is that Milton let anybody who was in the brass bands practice at his house or come get tutelage, and all of us had been through it: Rebirth, New Birth, Sporty Oldie, Junior Olympia, Young Olympia—so we all knew where St. Anthony Street was.¹²⁶ That's where Milton had bought buku property—like about two, three houses. And like I said, that main house in the back, he had all his artifacts, and he let us practice back there. So I mean, you could go back there, two, three in the morning. Milton wouldn't say nothing. He knew it was probably one of us. So we would practice back there late, and he would come show us tunes, and he would give us jobs. We basically did a lot of jobs, Young Olympia, that Milton couldn't do, 'cause they was so busy. And what we were doing was learning the tradition, wearing the uniforms and everything. But we started to include the new era of music at that time, which was hip-hop. And we also had that Earth, Wind, & Fire funk era, Parliament, you know. So we were incorporating that in the music cause it had a lot of the dexterity and tightness with the horns. Things we learned in the marching band at Texas Southern and Southern University and college and high school. So we didn't wanna disrespect Milton's and Harold's traditional [music], so we was like man, when we do these gigs as Young Olympia, we play the [traditional] music. So maybe we could do it when we get gigs where they want just the funk music, we could be another band.

Cyril Neville helped us with gigs, too. And we were first gonna call ourselves the 8-Ball Brass Band. But Cyril Neville said that connotated negativity—he, Cyril, named us the Soul Rebels. So Cyril would say ‘Why don't you all let the brass band come and open up for us sometime at the Neville Brothers at Tip's?’¹²⁷ And so when we did he said, “What ch'all gonna call y'all self? ‘Cause y'all definitely ain't just playin' the same old traditional music. You know, y'all playing some new funk stuff,” and we was like, “Man we wanna be the 8-Ball.” He was like, “Oh no, man that's too much negativity”—said, “Why not be the Soul Rebels?” We was like, “Oh, that's a tight name,” and we fell in love with that name and from then on, we were the Soul Rebels. So that's how the Soul Rebels got started. It was really the exact same members; they never left it, who played the funk music and adopted it.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ St. Anthony Street is in Gentilly, near University of New Orleans.

¹²⁷ Tipitina's is a premiere live music club in New Orleans, located at 501 Napoleon Avenue.

¹²⁸ Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011.

It didn't take long for the Soul Rebels to attract attention on an international stage. Within a few years, the group had a European tour and a record deal under its belt. LeBlanc describes their early ascent:

My first gig in the early '90's, I went to Europe on tour. And that was because Milton and them had already laid the foundation. It was a gig that Milton and them couldn't do. . . . So we went overseas and immediately the buzz got started. Because when we got over there, we played the tradition music, but we also snuck in some of the goof-off Soul Rebel music. So the people were getting excited about it and Milton heard about it when we got back home. So when Milton heard about it, Milton was like, "Look man, if y'all wanna do a Soul Rebel album, if that's what y'all gonna call y'all selves, Soul Rebels, I'll go talk to Warren Hill, [at] Mardi Gras Records, and see if he'll let y'all record—pay for y'all to record an album." And Warren is, in my opinion, one of the most honest patrons of the music. He pays you—like a legitimate record deal. He puts you in the best studio he can find here in the city. He introduces you to contacts and everything. Other [labels], you know, people just record you, rip ya off, don't tell ya nuttin' about publishing royalties or anything. [Warren taught us], and Milton had already done so, so we already knew what to expect. So that's when things started to catch buzz, when we went overseas and joined Olympia, and then started incorporating that Soul Rebel music. Soul Rebels started gettin' a life of its own. And then when we recorded the album and did "Let Your Mind be Free," by God's grace the song took off. We didn't expect it, but the song took off. Everybody knew the little phrase walkin' 'round in the Sixth Ward. So from that point on is when we kinda started getting a little exposure. Cyril helped us—had a lot to do with it, too, lettin' us open up for the Neville Brothers and exposing us to they clique, because we did gig privates for them, too—where it would be big record people there and everything. So I would have to say the combination of Cyril Neville and Milton and Harold Dejan really helped us to launch a buzz, like an international buzz.¹²⁹

The Rebirth Brass Band, as previously discussed in Chapter 2, was a major player in the brass band renaissance in New Orleans and continues to be important ambassador for New Orleans music on a local, national, and international scale. I was fortunate to get an interview with Keith Frazier, one-half of "Bass Brothers" duo, along with his brother "Tuba Phil" Frazier, who leads the Rebirth. Keith, also known as "Bass Drum Shorty," recounted the early days of the Rebirth Brass Band:

The Rebirth was founded in 1983 with my brother, Philip Frazier, and Kermit Ruffins at Joseph S. Clark Senior High School. It started out as a high school project. Some of the guys were interested in putting a band together in the spring of 1983 to play for a band parent who was part of like a band booster club. She said get some guys together, Philip, and come on over to the Sheraton and play a couple of songs for the club that I'm involved in. So we went over to the Sheraton. They wouldn't let him in cause they were serving alcohol. We were too young to go into the bar, so Phil and Kermit said hey man let's go over to Bourbon Street and play for tips. They left the Sheraton went on Bourbon Street played for tips. We said

¹²⁹ Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011.

man you know that's a pretty good idea we could make a little money and play some tunes at the same time. So, that summer it was maybe like 12 guys that got together. We would go out in the French Quarter and just play for tips. Some of the guys couldn't do it cause they were working in the summer, so the band kinda got smaller.

Tell the truth man, money was playin' in the French Quarter. That was the big gig. We [played] five days a week, one hour, right on Bienville and Bourbon.¹³⁰ [The police] would let us actually go that far down and play—"See you guys set up here from like 7 and 8 o'clock, [then] we have to cut it because we have to close the streets off. People gonna be walking by with drinks." So they would just let us play. The police would never bother us. For one hour every day. Every day after school. We would get together about 5:30 and we would walk to the French Quarter from my mom's house. She was livin' down in the Treme area. So we would walk to the French Quarter, set up and play for an hour. It's like a paid practice session. . . . And here we are 27, 28 years later—The Rebirth Brass Band—from that one little high school band project.¹³¹

The Hot 8 Brass Band formed in 1995, established by current leader and tuba player Bennie Pete, along with trombonist Jerome Jones and bass drummer Harry "Swamp Thang" Cook.¹³² Their record label, UK-based "Tru Thoughts," describes The Hot 8 sound as an "elegant jumble of jazz & soul, thrown in a sack with traditional boisterous brass band music and shaken roughly with unmistakable hip hop attitude."¹³³ The Times-Picayune describes the band as "omnipresent across New Orleans' social strata" and the "heirs apparent" to the legacy of the Rebirth and Dirty Dozen bands. Those with their finger on the pulse of the street will tell you that they are—or rather, were—known for their "jungle beat," unique among New Orleans brass bands. Stooges leader Walter Ramsey describes the popularity of The Hot 8 in New Orleans: "They had this jungle beat that just had the streets just like 'WHOA!' They just had to have The Hot 8 for everything. Hot 8 here, Hot 8 there. Swamp [Harry Cook] and Dinerral [Shavers] created this beat that everybody had to hear."¹³⁴

¹³⁰ This intersection is located in the French Quarter and gets a lot of pedestrian traffic from the nearby hotels and shops on Canal Street, especially from tourists who want to explore Bourbon Street.

¹³¹ Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011.

¹³² Tru Thoughts, "Hot 8 Brass Band," <http://www.tru-thoughts.co.uk/artists/hot-8-brass-band>. Accessed December 28, 2014.

¹³³ Tru Thoughts, "Hot 8 Brass Band."

¹³⁴ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

But the jungle beat is gone now. Although The Hot 8 is enjoying more popularity than ever on an international platform, they have undoubtedly had to endure more adversity than any other band. After much discussion, two representatives of The Hot 8, whom I will not name per their wishes, declined my requests to be interviewed for this document. I don't blame them. Their story is emotionally charged, both tragic and triumphant, and much of it is tethered to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. There were two primary reasons the interviews were declined. After the storm, band members were inundated with questions from national and international media outlets, who generally swooped in to get their stories, profited, then left. The Hot 8 representatives I spoke with, once bitten, had decided to protect their experience. "Our story is valuable," I was told. Although most of this chapter will come directly from the words of the musicians I interviewed, I have decided to include some information about The Hot 8 because their experience related to the storm is stark, probably more so than any other band. It is also well-documented in the media, most notably by Spike Lee in his multi-part film *When the Levees Broke*.

Additionally, even six years after the storm, musicians commonly reported getting questions about Katrina. Although they universally appreciated the concern and any help they were given, they are sick of talking about it—"Katrina fatigue." Musicians have told their stories hundreds of times and want to move on with their lives. Ellis Joseph put it bluntly:

In my mind, because we've been so saturated with that shit, I try to look at it as being dead. It's like nothing else can really come out of it. I mean it just got to the point where it's aggravating, talking about it. Being on the air, saying this, saying that, well pre-Katrina, post-Katrina, and that's annoying. Because you don't really wanna focus on it, you wanna just get over it. We've been through it; we've worked our way through it. You wanna get to a sense of normalcy. And that's basically how most people get by, have gotten by. I'd love to keep saying that Katrina fucked me up and I'm all fucked up, but it wasn't that much better before Katrina, as far as I'm concerned, because I was still a struggling musician. . . . I mean, don't get me

wrong... if somebody was to come up with a lump sum and say this is for you, based on what you went through from Katrina, I'm not gonna reject it. But at the same time I ain't looking for no payment.¹³⁵

Getting Out

In 2005, just before the storm hit, the members of the Treme Brass Band lived in New Orleans. Benny Jones and “Uncle” Lionel Batiste, who literally floated to safety on his bass drum, both lived in the Treme neighborhood. Other band members lived in the 7th and 8th wards. All of those areas flooded. Benny made it out of New Orleans before the storm hit:

Before Katrina I left August 28th. I was going to see my daughter and them. . . . So they left on that Sunday about two or three hours ahead of me. And about two or three hours after I got on highway I started heading on up. . . . We went up to Baton Rouge because my granddaughter is going to college up there. It took us about six-seven hours with the traffic and all, so we just locked the house up and took whatever.¹³⁶ Business papers, a few clothes with us. Some of my instruments I left home.¹³⁷

Stooges leader Walter Ramsey employs an unusual strategy among native New Orleanians—he leaves for every storm. His entrepreneurial approach to music also extended to real estate investments. The income generated from his multiple revenue streams led to significant assets and “a bit of a car hobby.” In short, Ramsey, unlike many in New Orleans, was readily mobile.

So when Katrina hit, I was already into real estate. I had, I wanna say, five or six houses in New Orleans at the time. And I had money, so moving wasn't a problem. . . . I told my band members Saturday night before the storm that I'm leaving. They laughed at me ‘cause I leave for every hurricane. And it was like, “You just left two months ago, and nothing happened.” I was like, “Well, shit, I'm leaving. And y'all should come with me. For those that don't have cars, I got enough cars; I can't even take all of em. I'm taking two and I'm parking three or four in the garage downtown. So you're welcome to have a car, keep a car, it don't really matter. I'm just leaving. I'll see y'all back in a couple of days.” So the storm, you know how that turned out, so I'm in charge of it. And I'm looking like ‘wow.’ I'm looking across the canal where I just built a house. It got finished in June, so two months, just finished the house and now it's under 15 feet of water. . . . By Friday, in Georgia, I went and bought a house.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Ellis Joseph, personal interview with author, June 20, 2011.

¹³⁶ It normally takes about 80 minutes to travel from the Treme to Baton Rouge by automobile on Interstate Highway 10.

¹³⁷ Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

¹³⁸ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

Free Agents leader Ellis Joseph lived in New Orleans East. His mother's house had 10 feet of water. Joseph left on Saturday before the storm, immediately after playing a funeral. Like the Stooges, he ended up in Atlanta. He was initially planning to ride out the storm:

I was gonna stay, because my stepdad had two boats loaded. They had ample enough food, you know just like, I felt like I was good. Momma called me up crying. She's like, "Ellis you have to leave, you gotta leave." Initially I went to Port Allen, which is close to the river from Baton Rouge, with like 50-60 of my family members living there in two houses. It was just a clusterfuck—it was too much. I went to Atlanta and stayed in hotels up until it was time to get an apartment.¹³⁹

Jeffrey Hills wasn't able to make it out before the storm. The horrors of those trapped in the Superdome are well-documented, but the Convention Center was even worse:

We actually tried to go to the Superdome, but it was too hectic. And we rerouted and we went to the convention center. That was an experience I'd rather not go into depth about, but it's not something that I would wish on my worst enemy. We stayed there for two and a half days. My kids started to get dehydrated. I had elderly people [in my family]. There were about 18 to 20 people with me in my care, including my wife, kids, my sister, their children and families. We actually left walking from the convention center and tried to go over the river to get to west bank, and that wasn't happening. They had armed guards up there and they weren't letting you pass. We had to turn around and come back down so the way we got out of the city was there was an RT bus driver—that's the local transit. She was loading people on the buses and taking them over—taking them wherever they wanted. And it just so happens we caught the last trip. She was like, "We're not stopping at the West Bank. We can stop if you wanna stop but my destination is Baton Rouge." I [asked] my family, "You wanna go to the West Bank or Baton Rouge," and everybody's looking at me waiting for me to make the decision. So I said, if it's left up to me I'm gonna get the hell out of the city right now. So we all stood on the bus and on the way to Baton Rouge she made a wrong turn and we all ended up in Lafayette, so that's the first temporary development I went to. It was the Lafayette Cajun dome. I got in contact with some of my siblings who were in Mississippi. It took extra time to come around and get us—took like a day and a half—so they came and got us. The people that were with me, we all got together and we went to Mississippi—my sister, for maybe two weeks. Then I got a call from Arizona from one of my friends. Actually, Benny Jones. He told me that they were sponsoring people and he wanted me, my wife, and my family, but I told him that I couldn't just leave my sister's like that. It wasn't just me, my wife, and my kids involved. So our family house is in Mississippi. Everything in the house is electric, so everything was out. And by me being the person that I am, simply put, everything was physically done by me—cooking for the kids, boiling the water so they could take baths. All this was done on a butane grill. You know, cooking three meals a day for like 30 people, you know, 10 kids, 15 kids and the same amount of adults. So I did that for two weeks, but as the weeks got to go on, I called Benny back and I was like, 'all right, I feel comfortable, but I'm going to have to come by myself first to check it out. I'm not gonna bring my wife and kids into a strange land like that, way in Arizona.' So I go up there and it was okay. It was actually okay. The church up there sponsored us, my family and myself, and we were put into a nice house and everything.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Ellis Joseph, personal interview with author, June 20, 2011.

¹⁴⁰ Jeffrey Hills, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

Gregory Davis, of the Dirty Dozen, also works with JazzFest to book local artists. The Dirty Dozen has been well-established, nationally and internationally, for several decades. Davis recalls leaving the city a day before the storm:

My wife, my daughters, left Sunday before the flood. I decided I wasn't going anywhere. Two of my daughters were home; one of my daughters was away in college. So [my wife] decided she was gonna take the kids to her brother's house in Houston. I had decided, because of a couple of other evacuations, if threats of a hurricane didn't materialize, I wasn't going anywhere this time, because it meant that we would attempt to evacuate and drive 3 or 4 hours somewhere and then have to turn around and come back. So I decided, okay, I'm not doing that this time. So they packed up two of the vehicles, loaded up started to make the drive, and I went back inside and went upstairs, got in the bed, turned on the television, but on every channel was coverage of the coming hurricane. I hadn't really paid much attention to it up until that time. The graphics of what the satellite images were just unreal. And so the first television station that I turned on that had the graphic notice that the storm was so large, I thought it was disproportionate—superimposed over the Gulf. I said 'oh, they got it wrong.' I've never seen that. I turned to another channel—same thing—and then another channel. A voice told me 'maybe you need to leave.' I got up packed a bag, called my mother, and went and picked up my mother and my aunt and decided I was going to go visit my brother in Dallas. But once we saw that it flooded and were told we couldn't come back, I never had a second thought that I was not gonna return. I never had a second thought. I didn't know how bad it was or what it was gonna look like. I didn't care. This is my home. This is where I was gonna come back to.¹⁴¹

Like many New Orleanians, the decisions of Soul Rebels members were influenced by a hurricane scare a few weeks before Katrina. Lumar LeBlanc, who lived in New Orleans East at the time (Ninth Ward), remembers being on tour for a booking agency out of New Jersey, when Hurricane Irene looked like it was going to hit the Gulf Coast:

We were in Colorado. . . . We had got word that a severe storm was possibly hitting the Gulf and hitting New Orleans. So we asked the promoter of that tour—we had about two or three more gigs left—could we please cancel those gigs and fly home early, cause we concerned about our family. They allowed us to do that, and we came home but the storm didn't hit. So through staying home and being prepared, that particular week and the subsequent week, Katrina was really coming. And in New Orleans everybody felt like 'man, we always dodge the bullet, so we ain't gotta leave.' I felt I wasn't gonna leave. Me, the tuba player—at the time was our tuba player Damien Francois—[we thought] 'hell we's gonna stay home in New Orleans. 'But Damien called me and said, "Lumar, I'm telling you bro, this is real. It's gonna be a real storm. You gotta get out of here." He said, "I'm leaving now." And I was like, "Yeah, Damien, I think I'm gonna leave. I'm a gonna go ahead on and make plans to leave," so I said I was gonna go right to Baton Rouge where, once the storm blew over, I could come right back home. But it was beautiful outside. I remember. It was a Saturday. My son, the oldest one, was about to have his football game for St. Aug—the first game of that particular season, the jamboree, and they cancelled it.¹⁴² When they canceled it we got back home and they just kept showing on the news the eye of the storm and they was saying, "You all need

¹⁴¹ Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

¹⁴² Saint Augustine High School is commonly referred to as "Saint Aug" in New Orleans.

to evacuate.” So I just packed a few things up. We took the biggest car we had and left the other vehicles. Me and my mom, my dad, left. We let the kids leave early. They left before us with my brother-in-law. They went all the way to Galveston, Texas. But me and my wife and my father and mother were gonna go to Baton Rouge and then come back home. But what occurred was, when we were leaving that Sunday, the traffic was so bad. And the [radio] broadcasters, were saying ‘look if you do not have a hotel already confirmed in Baton Rouge or if you do not have family members you're gonna stay with or friends, do not come to Baton Rouge. The occupancy is at peak. There are no hotels open. No shelters. Please proceed further west if you're coming west.’ So we couldn't stop in Baton Rouge. And that [trip] took us, man about I ain't lying to you, it took us probably 10 hours. I remember it being 18, but they tell me it was like about 10 hours, to drive from New Orleans to Baton Rouge, which is only a 45-minute drive. And so after that we drove and it took us eight more hours to get to Lafayette. And Lake Charles. To Lake Charles. We finally broke down there. And we stayed in a Harrah's Casino Hotel that they had out there in Lake Charles. And then we begun to see the unraveling of the city on CNN. And we did not know what it was like, and the citizens didn't know, because they didn't have electricity, the ones that stayed back.

All of my band members went different places with their beloved families. I left my drum and everything, because we really thought we was just going to go right home. The tuba player lost his horn, and everybody lost all their instruments. Only one took their horn were the sax players. And sax players are like that, you know—their horns are so delicate, they used to holding their horns and keeping them, I guess. So Erion [Williams] had took his horn with him. But I left my drum, the bass drummer [Derrick Moss] left his, I think Marcus [Hubbard] mighta left his trumpet, and had a spare. And Tannon [Williams], I think, took his horn. But Winston [Turner] and the rest of the members at the time had left theirs, so they got destroyed in the storm. And it was horrible, man.¹⁴³

Rebirth bass drummer Keith Frazier took a different route out of the city. Going east wasn't an option because that's where the storm was coming from. Going west wasn't an attractive option because Interstate 10 was packed with those fleeing to Houston and Baton Rouge. Frazier decided to go north.

I ended up in Dallas, Texas. It was surprising why I ended up there because I was supposed to go to Houston, but the interstate was too crowded. I went to college at Grammercy University, which is close to Dallas, so I knew the interstate system really well. I took my wife. I said the best thing to do is take [Interstate 10] to [Interstate 55]—go north instead of trying to go west because the interstates are gonna be crowded. She said, “Well, where we gonna go?” I said, “Well, we'll just go to Dallas.” A lot of the [band members] went to Houston. One of the guys ended up in Baltimore. Saxophone player ended up in New York City because he was actually in Brazil at the time, so he couldn't get back to New Orleans. He had a girlfriend who had some relatives who were living in New York City so she says ‘let's go live with our relatives.’ So he ended up in New York. One guy in Baltimore. Maybe three guys in Houston. I was in Dallas and a couple of guys in Baton Rouge. And, man, it was crazy, man. It was crazy.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011.

¹⁴⁴ Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011.

Although I was not able to obtain an interview with The Hot 8 Brass Band, their Katrina story is recorded in Tulane professor Matt Sakakeeny's doctoral dissertation, *Instruments of Power: New Orleans Brass Bands and the Politics of Performance*:

Bennie [Pete] had evacuated after playing at a bar on Saturday night, but others in the band - Dinerral [Shavers], Terrell [Batiste], trumpeter Al Huntley, and bass drummer Harry Cook - had stayed behind. When the levees failed and the city filled with water, some were able to walk or swim to safety while others had to wait for helicopters to rescue them from their roofs. They communicated with each other via cell phone text messages and made arrangements to regroup in Baton Rouge a few days after the flood.¹⁴⁵

The Interim

The Treme Brass Band musicians were scattered, but reconvened in Arizona. Benny Jones describes how the band ended up on the other side of the nation:

After I got settled in, a friend of mine was in Arizona, and a guy heard about the Treme Brass Band and we gonna take the band over to Arizona. . . . So I told him all my musicians are scattered out. I can call them up and see if they want to come to Arizona. So I contacted some of my band members. I had a cell phone number. I contacted a bunch of the band members and they said they wanted to go, so we wound up, a group of about six, seven, or eight of us, we wound up going to Arizona and stayed there about eight or nine months.¹⁴⁶

The Treme band in Arizona also included tubist Jeffrey Hills, who remembers playing a few gigs with the band, including some spots on the news. Hills, however, points out that the primary way he was able to make income while displaced was by traveling: "Right after the storm, the Dirty Dozen got in touch with me and I went on the road with them for a few weeks. And then Lincoln Center got in touch with me. They had this Africa tour happening and they needed a brass band. They needed a replacement quick!"¹⁴⁷ Hills immediately put together a band of other displaced musicians living in Arizona and made a CD for the upcoming tour, calling the group the

¹⁴⁵ Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 23.

¹⁴⁶ Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

¹⁴⁷ Jeffrey Hills, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

Survivors Brass Band. The Survivors Brass Band continues to work sporadically, now based out of Preservation Hall. Hills describes the nature of the band:

We all work with other groups and everything. It's just like a party when we come together—like a family reuniting. We always talk about the way we hooked up and the way things got rolling. It's just one of those things that you can say is a higher power. Some of the cats in that band, I don't think I [had ever] had the chance to work with them and they're just amazing musicians.¹⁴⁸

Walter Ramsey of the Stooges was had gotten settled quickly in Atlanta. Only five days after the flood, he had already bought a house.

I didn't wait for Red Cross, FEMA, I didn't give a damn about none of that. I knew one thing: I gotta do music, and my band members need somewhere to stay. Plus they have they own families, too. I went and bought a small property—a lease with the option of buying at the time, 'cause I wasn't sure how long we was gonna stay in it. Then I sent for all my band members. One of the bad parts of sending for one of my members was one of them was stuck on the [Galvez Street] bridge.¹⁴⁹ I had to send a helicopter to get him. I'm glad they was able to rescue them, and everything turned out fine. It took him, his whole family, and they flew the family to Albuquerque, New Mexico or something like that. But it worked out great. When he got there, then he flew to Atlanta [as did] the rest of the band members that could at the time. . . . We was able to keep our band strong in Atlanta. Eventually I bought a bigger house. We had a small studio set up in New Orleans before we went to Atlanta, and so when I bought the bigger house, we built a nice studio, because we started our production work before the storm. And so we built out there and we started doing more production and living in Atlanta. We started working with hip hop artists out in Atlanta, too. It worked out pretty good. Then we just started touring.¹⁵⁰

The Free Agents, who formed from musicians displaced by the storm, played their first gig in Atlanta in mid-2006 at Cafe 290, a restaurant and live-jazz venue. That first lineup featured Ellis Joseph, a few musicians from the Stooges, as well as Bennie Pete and Terrell Batiste from The Hot 8. It became a regular Tuesday gig. Ellis Joseph recalls how the gig helped the musicians beyond the performance fee: "Then a lot of people in Atlanta that were New Orleans natives and understood our struggle, they helped us out. And I'm grateful for that."

¹⁴⁸ Jeffrey Hills, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

¹⁴⁹ www.bridgehunter.com/la/orleans/galvez-street/. Accessed December 28, 2014. This is a steel stringer bridge over the railroad yard on North Galvez Street.

¹⁵⁰ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

Gregory Davis, who played an important role in trying to get brass band musicians back into town for JazzFest 2006, provides some insight into why some musicians ended up where they did and how difficult it could be to locate them:

Where people ended up sometimes was a direct result of who helped them evacuate. I had friends that had gone to the Superdome and I think it was National Guard or whomever was assisting in the evacuations. Some people were being brought to Atlanta, some people were being shipped out to various points in Texas, it was, man, it was just a hodgepodge of everything goin' on. I remember I was watching some footage on television and I was very very much involved in my church, and I didn't know where most of those people were. But I was seeing some of them flashed on the cameras at some of the evacuation centers. And although you might see somebody on television you're talking like—you had put thousands of people at the Houston Astrodome, so I decided to drive over there see if I could locate some of the people I had seen on television. Some of my cousins, I was told, were over there. I drove near the Astrodome, and the line of cars waiting to get in there was just so long that after about two hours, I just had to turn around and go back. I wasn't gonna be able to get in. It took some time to be able to sort all that stuff out.¹⁵¹

It was a difficult job trying to locate musicians and family, and Davis was doing it while trying to get himself and his immediate family back to New Orleans. His comments illustrate the long and difficult process that many musicians endured—and continue to endure—in moving back to the city and trying to reclaim normalcy:

As I said, my wife and my daughters had gone to Houston, and thought they were gonna be visiting there. When I did decide to leave, I picked up my mother and aunt. I was gonna visit my little brother that lived in Dallas. And that's where I originally settled. After we figured out we had to be there, I got my mother and my aunt settled there and I went down to Houston where my family was. So then, in trying to salvage whatever was left in my house, I took all the stuff from the second floor of my house and moved it all to Houston, because I couldn't find a storage facility in New Orleans. So I rented a vehicle and I made so many trips back and forth, four and a half to five hours. Sometimes I did it twice a day, round trips to Houston. Put [my stuff] in storage there and in that same time trying to stock an apartment there. I didn't know how long I was gonna be there. Eventually I was able to get a [FEMA] trailer on my property [in New Orleans]. My mother had a trailer that she was living in. I started the process of moving my stuff out of the apartment into the trailer, or out of the apartment into storage [in New Orleans]. So that was another move. And then once I got in my house, making the move from the trailer to my house and the storage, so I still today have boxes and bags of stuff that I haven't unpacked at my house since the storm. It's just a mess. And life goes on after the storm. My middle daughter was in her last year of college at the time. My youngest daughter was in her junior year of high school at the time. Now she's in her last year [of college]; she has one more semester to complete. My older daughter had already gone to college and was in graduate school. But all of the stuff that's accumulated not only from myself but from my family members, you gotta move that stuff, move it around, you accumulate. Right now my kids are pretty much out of the house, but all their stuff is still there. I don't know what to throw away, what to keep. Eventually I'll sort it out.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

¹⁵² Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

The Soul Rebels were scattered, but like the Rebirth and Dirty Dozen, they were well-established outside of the city. Lumar LeBlanc knew he had an opportunity to get his band working again as the world watched New Orleans struggle back to its feet:

Soul Rebels is my life. That was my main concern, trying to get the band back together playing because I knew the longer we were apart, we were missing valuable time where the world was really willing to help New Orleans musicians. So it was not long after that that a guy called and said, “Look, I’ll rent the instruments. I really want cha’ll to play.” It was an attorney in Baton Rouge. He rented the instruments and we played for him. And then we got grants and money from [Musician's Friend] and the Grammy Organization, and once we got that we started to do other gigs.¹⁵³

The Rebirth Brass Band already had some out-of-town gigs booked through September. They, too, were scattered all over the country, and things were tough—connecting with family and friends, getting temporarily established in a new location, checking on property and possessions, and working with insurance companies. Keith Frazier remembers getting a call from his brother:

Philip called and said, “Hey man, look. We have no jobs. Can't get any money. Best thing to do is get on the road and make some money. Do you have any instruments?” “I left my drum in the house,” I said. “Man, I could borrow a drum.” So he said to me, “Let's get together. Let's go out on the road and do these dates. We have like two weeks of dates.” I said, “Great idea!” You know we could make some money and take care of ourselves and our families.” So what we did is I rented a car in Dallas, I drove to Houston, picked up three guys there. Drove to Baton Rouge, picked up two guys there. The guys in Baltimore and New York met us down in Memphis. Memphis was the first gig. We started playing and, man, that was the craziest time. When we picked those guys up nobody said a word. It was silent for eight hours. It was just shock like, 'did this really happen?' Like, 'yeah.' Man! We started playing and it was like magic. It was. People were like, 'man I never believed I would cry to hear something from New Orleans.' We started some dates in September. That went right up through like late October. We stayed almost a month because people would call say, 'look boss, you guys are on the road, you wanna come to St. Louis?' 'Heck yeah, we're out there already.' 'Wanna come to Northeast?' 'Yeah, well we're already out,' so we just stayed out as long as we possibly could. And it was great because. We would make some money. And that was one of the best thing about being a musician. Your job goes with you.¹⁵⁴

The Hot 8, some of whom would later end up in Atlanta, first collected in Baton Rouge. It was here that a spur-of-the-moment suggestion by leader Bennie Pete would demonstrate both

¹⁵³ Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011.

¹⁵⁴ Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011.

the power of music and the iconic nature of the brass band as the soundtrack of "home" to New Orleansians. According to Sakakeeny:

Hot 8 manager Lee Arnold and musicologist Baty Landis, who had formed the musicians' aid foundation Save Our Brass, arranged to borrow some instruments for The Hot 8. Bennie suggested that they drive over to the River Center where evacuees from the storm were being sheltered. "So we went and there was a lot of people who come to our weekly gig and follow us all the time. So they crying and stuff. We happy. They happy to hear the music." There were also throngs of journalists there to capture the impromptu performance and, for a moment, the images of suffering that barraged television viewers were interrupted by footage of black men and women, young and old, euphorically dancing and singing to the sound of a brass band, "bringing a bit of home to those who don't have any," as CNN reporter Rusty Dornin observed ("Paula Zahn Now").¹⁵⁵

Getting Back

The Treme band members came back to New Orleans at different times, as was a common experience for most of the bands. Benny Jones did not return in time for the first Mardi Gras after the storm, February 28, 2006. Uncle Lionel came back to New Orleans quickly, but couldn't stay. "They had to put him in another apartment because all the projects were closed up and they wouldn't let nobody go into the projects and it was closed up with mold and all that. Everybody was just placed in different areas."¹⁵⁶ Eventually, all band members came back to stay. "It took a while. They might come back a month or two at a time, and they had family. Had to make sure their family got situated and make sure they had a place to come to when they come back to New Orleans." The band began to reform in New Orleans around July of 2006 with their first gig at Donna's Bar and Grill.¹⁵⁷ Jones describes what it was like starting to play again in New Orleans after the storm:

¹⁵⁵ Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 23-24.

¹⁵⁶ Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

¹⁵⁷ Donna's Bar and Grill was located at 800 N. Rampart St in the French Quarter, right across the street from Armstrong Park (formerly Congo Square). Donna's was known as the "home of brass bands" and played a major role in the development of many bands and musicians.

You didn't know much of where you were going. You started performing right, pick up, still running between clubs. . . . Then when Sweet Home and all these people come, they was hiring the band to play a certain club...¹⁵⁸ [The venues] was hurt pretty bad. We had so many people in town trying to drum up business. They was hiring the bands but they couldn't afford to give a band a regular salary, and they had to [rely on the door]. The band tried it sometimes over the weekend. We might have five, six, ten [patrons] come in.¹⁵⁹

It took Walter Ramsey two years to move back to New Orleans. He recalls performing their first gig back in New Orleans in November of 2007—a Stooges Reunion show at the Howlin' Wolf.¹⁶⁰ Before Ramsey brought the band back to New Orleans, he was putting his focus into revitalizing his real estate. The band was in a lull. Ramsey describes the brass band scene in New Orleans after the storm and the catalyst for moving the band back to the city:

So it's kinda like we was back and forth in Atlanta a lot. And the Stooges came back to New Orleans. . . . After the storm, we were tired, and just was like, we gonna do more stage band stuff. We not coming back to New Orleans with the parades and stuff. We just gonna stick around [Atlanta] and do production more than anything. . . . We used to come down here cause we enjoyed the parades, so we'd come down here and listen to the bands that's playing the parades and the people that was back was like, 'these bands don't sound good. These bands not all the way developed yet. We miss the bands.' So, after like maybe a few months coming down here, people begging me to bring the band back to the streets. So when I went to go form the band back, because I stopped doing music like that to deal with working on houses. You see me with a hammer and nail in my hand, learning how to hang sheet rock—not even [doing] music production—just trying to get real estate back up off the ground. So my band members, because I'm the leader and I'm not playing music, so they're not playing music, so they have to go join other bands to play, which was cool at the time. And so when I came back to reform the band, they was gone. I had to start from scratch with all new band members. Two of the older guys who played in the band joined the Free Agents at the time. And when they heard I was coming back, you know Ellis [Joseph] told them they gotta pick. 'You gonna play the Stooges or you gonna play the Free Agents?' And a lot of people doubted [us]. They was like, 'man he'll never be able to put this band back together and have that type of sound they had.' And that really gave me motivation. The doubt. You know, it was like, 'y'all don't wanna see me back? Well cool. Y'all don't like the Stooges for whatever reason?' So we put it back together. And right now we the number one band.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Sweet Home New Orleans was a charitable organization that was founded to help get musicians back to the city and working after Hurricane Katrina.

¹⁵⁹ Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

¹⁶⁰ The Howlin' Wolf is a New Orleans club located at 907 South Peters. They have a large music venue, with an approximate capacity of 1200, and a small music venue called "The Den" where The Hot 8 plays a regular Sunday gig.

¹⁶¹ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

Ellis Joseph brought the band name "Free Agents" back to New Orleans in the summer of 2006. Some of the other musicians he had been playing with in Atlanta decided to come back, too.

It was to a point where everybody was like, 'man, fuck Atlanta, people making money at home, I'm going home. I'm tired of this shit.' Even though it was nice and the city was all clean and everything, people wanted to go home. And we wound up just leaving and coming back home. Myself, Ersel Bogan, Alfred Grove, like I said Bennie Pete, Shannon Haynes, Corey Henry, Floyd Gray, even Walter Ramsey from the Stooges. He pitched in to help us. John Cannon—he was in Jackson Mississippi, but he made certain gigs, like when we needed to get together. . . . Once we came back to New Orleans, I just called whoever was available. We found the same people every weekend. . . . There was a void for bands in the city because everyone was either in Texas or, like the established bands, they were traveling and working already. So the work in the city fell back on us. We actually initiated the drive for other bands to come back, like, for example, the Stooges. I had two of the trombone players from the Stooges playing with me. The Stooges weren't existent anymore. They were gonna do kinda like a sit down set with set drummer, percussion, keyboard, guitars, bass guitars, and still use the horns. However, I gave them the drive to come back.

Joseph found a job working in disaster recovery to earn some money while he tried to get the band working in New Orleans. He remembered when he first got back to the city:

I was staying in hotels. My momma, they were renting a little house across the river. And it was so freaking small, oh man, I stayed in that with them. Did the hotel thing. Then once I got good and established I wound up getting an apartment—a fucking efficiency. Oh man, it was crazy. It was crazy.

The Free Agents band got a regular gig quickly after getting back into the city, playing Sundays at a hip-hop club called the Duck Off Lounge.¹⁶² The band was very young, "none of them over the age of 25," with the exception of Ellis Joseph.¹⁶³ They were performing an original composition called "We Made It Through That Water," which became immensely popular and was recorded in 2008. Joseph recalls the genesis of the song:

I collaborated with older guy named Mr. Waddell and he instilled the creation of "We Made It Through That Water" in my head.¹⁶⁴ And once I got back [to New Orleans] and I was talking to the guys about it, they thought I was [joking] at first. But we put it together—fucking people loved it. Because it was like a testimony of our story and everyone could relate to it.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² The Duck Off Lounge, now permanently closed, was located at 2304 AP Tureaud Avenue.

¹⁶³ Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 211.

¹⁶⁴ I have not been able to otherwise confirm the name "Mr. Waddell."

¹⁶⁵ Ellis Joseph, personal interview with author, June 20, 2011.

Scholar Matt Sakakeeny chronicled seeing the Free Agents perform "We Made It Through That Water" at the Duck Off Lounge in the fall of 2006:

The band plays a short set that culminates in an original composition I have heard dozens of times, despite the fact that it has not yet been recorded. The Free Agents have only performed "Made It Through That Water" at second line parades and other local functions, yet the song is familiar to many at the Duck Off, and their emotional response indicates its success in expressing and synthesizing the experiences of New Orleanians after Hurricane Katrina.

The song begins with a tuba riff, and then a group chant of "I'm so glad we back home," with the horns filling in the spaces in between repetitions. The audience recognizes the song by this point and sings "We made it through that water, that muddy, muddy water" along with the band. The horns and group vocals drop out and a young man raps over the rhythm parts:

... Please Mr. Officer, don't shoot.
'Cause I ain 't in a rage, I was stuck up on that roof
They trying to make an excuse but they running from the truth
We know they blew them levees, man, but we ain't got no proof

Whatever they do I can't turn my back,
I was born right here, so right here's where I'm at
Send them troops home, little daddy's in Iraq
And tell FEMA we going to need more than ten stacks...

After a saxophone solo, the band plays the melody from the spiritual "Wade in the Water" with the crowd joining in. After a group chant of "You know, and I know, there ain't no city like the N.O.," the song ends with a recapitulation of the "made it through that water" melody played instrumentally.¹⁶⁶

Jeffrey Hills came back to New Orleans almost two years after the storm forced his evacuation. He discussed the reasons it took so long to get back and why some musician aren't going to come back:

I had started another life and I didn't have like maybe \$5,000 or \$10,000 to relocate. And who's to say once I come back [to New Orleans] I'm gonna be working, or my wife's going to find a job? The living situations weren't right. I had kids, I had a grandbaby, you know? It was just crazy. . . . There are a lot of musicians in general that aren't coming back. And I can't blame them. But for me, [coming back to New Orleans] is not about just the music. Because you can play the music anywhere. You can go anywhere and be flown out from where you are and go play music. But it's the culture. It's the people.¹⁶⁷

Gregory Davis echoes those sentiments:

¹⁶⁶ Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 211-212.

¹⁶⁷ Jeffrey Hills, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

And now as we were speaking earlier about some of the devastation which took place in the Ninth Ward, still today some of those people haven't returned. Some of them are musicians and haven't returned. So after five, six years of making a life somewhere else, are you gonna pick up, come back, and start over again? Probably not. Some elderly people were flooded out of their homes and were relocated somewhere else. And so now after getting life started somewhere else, they're not gonna pick up and move all of their possessions that they've accumulated and come back. ¹⁶⁸

Davis describes his experience trying to move back to the city, noting reasons for the lengthy process of home repair after the storm:

Well I had gotten the contractor to just start working on my house. Now I'm thinking, I got this guy, he's gonna repair my house and I'll explain to him, 'look my daughter's going through her senior year of high school. Are you gonna be able to get this done so she can finish up her senior year in the house?' 'Oh yeah, no problem.' He started working on my house in September of 2006. I did not get into my house until about October, November 2007. It took him that long. I wanted to wring his neck. But even though he probably was not moving fast enough, the competition for materials, the availability of materials and workers—although there were a lot of workers that had come here—there still just wasn't enough to get stuff done as fast as everybody wanted to get it done.¹⁶⁹

Lumar LeBlanc didn't move back to New Orleans, citing reasons of family, money, and the potential for future storms in New Orleans. He now commutes from Houston.

I would've never left New Orleans had Katrina not hit. But it opened your eyes and your ears once it did hit. I knew life as I knew it would be different, so I had to get some consistency for my wife and kids and family. I still own the property here in New Orleans, so I'm still a resident and pay taxes in Louisiana. I come every week to play my gigs if I'm not traveling, but I bought a new home in Houston and stay out there.

LeBlanc remembers playing the first Soul Rebels gig back in New Orleans after the storm:

I can't remember [the date], but it was early. Right after Katrina. It was a protest. I think it was the Black Panthers and some other people that had a protest on city hall. See we were actually the first to do it, to second line. But a big protest was staged, and because [tubist Damian Francois's] relatives were instrumental members of the Black Panthers. And they was staging a protest on how, you know, the money and the treatment of post-Katrina. So they held a big rally and they hired us to play for the rally. And that was probably the first second line. . . . We came back to New Orleans and we were playing, the city was still under marshal law. At night it would be pitch black in certain areas. We'd wind up coming back, playing a few second lines and protests. We played for the shelters where people were and for the workers

¹⁶⁸ Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

¹⁶⁹ Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

with Timberland company, and all those who were helping rebuild the city. And we played at Le Bon Temps [Roulé].¹⁷⁰

The rest of the Soul Rebels were scattered, but Lumar notes the dedication of the musicians making it back to New Orleans to play with the band:

People commuted. Some of us were in Houston; some of us went as far as Austin, Texas and Alexandria, Louisiana. Some went to South Carolina. Cincinnati, Atlanta. So whenever we had gigs I called to see who could make it down. And slowly people started trickling back toward New Orleans, so it got easier for them to commute. But wherever they had to come from, they were coming.¹⁷¹

By 2011, everyone in the Rebirth Brass Band had moved back to New Orleans except Keith Frazier. Like Lumar LeBlanc, he chose to stay in Texas, primarily because of family life:

Everyone moved back but myself. I've been back and forth. We got to Texas my wife said I was on the road anyway. Schools are real good. Texas life lets the kids stay here and just go back and forth [to New Orleans]. So when I'm home, there's nothing going on, I'm home two weeks at a time, I'm on the road two weeks so once you get used to it, it's just not that big of a deal.¹⁷²

The Rebirth's first gig back in New Orleans was only about two months after the storm hit.

We played Tipitina's. I don't know if it was the weekend before Halloween or the weekend after. Right before the storm hit we were doing this thing at the Maple Leaf called 'Mardi Gras in July,' or something like that. We were supposed to play Tipitina's that night, but the gig got canceled. So the guys at Tip's like, "Hey look man, you know the storm's over and people are coming back. You guys wanna do this gig at Tip's?" We came back and that was the most people we ever had at Tip's before in the history of the Rebirth Brass Band playing Tipitina's. People were just crying, people were paying whatever to get in. It was like, man it was crazy man, it was crazy.¹⁷³

Second Line Dirge

The vitality of the second line organizations, the social and pleasure clubs, was of central economic importance to all but the upper echelon of brass bands before the storm—meaning just

¹⁷⁰ Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011. Le Bon Temps Roulé is a neighborhood bar and music venue located at 4801 Magazine St. in New Orleans. The Soul Rebels have played a regular Thursday night gig here for many years and continue to do so. When I went to see them here, the Free Agents performed in their place [the Soul Rebels were on tour].

¹⁷¹ Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011.

¹⁷² Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011.

¹⁷³ Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011.

about every band except the Dirty Dozen, Rebirth, and the Soul Rebels. These parading organizations provide a steady stream of work for the brass bands, not only stemming from their annual parades, but also for the additional parties, fundraisers, and funerals they get from the members.

The flooding caused by Katrina claimed the lives of many second liners and musicians, yet the social and pleasure clubs reformed quickly.¹⁷⁴ This was a sign to the brass band musicians and other New Orleanians that it was about time to come home. Second lines also served as a place for displaced citizens to locate their friends and family.¹⁷⁵ But, as depicted in the Season 2 premiere of *Treme*, there were problems. Matt Sakakeeny explains:

In the months following Katrina, the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) tripled the fees for mandatory permits and police escorts at second line parades from \$1250 to \$3760. The justification for the increase was that shootings had occurred at two parades since the storm (Reckdahl 2006; Troeh 2006). Representatives of several Social Aid & Pleasure Clubs, some of which were unable to afford the fees and had to cancel their parades, responded that the clubs were not responsible for the shootings. The violence had occurred away from the parade routes and after the parades had disbanded.¹⁷⁶

Eventually, through legal action, parade fees were reduced to \$1985.¹⁷⁷ Still, the higher cost of living in the aftermath of the storm, in addition to the higher fees, meant that there were fewer parades and less money to pay the band.¹⁷⁸

Damage and Loss

Benny Jones, who lived in a relatively high section of the Treme, had high water, but his home didn't flood. It did, however, sustain water damage because of the high winds damaging the

¹⁷⁴ Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 37.

¹⁷⁵ Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 78.

¹⁷⁶ Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 37-38.

¹⁷⁷ Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 38.

¹⁷⁸ Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 120.

roof—a distinction that insurance companies would seize upon when reviewing claims, as depicted in the HBO's *Treme* series.¹⁷⁹ The homes of his band members were all in need of renovation. He described the destruction to the home and property:

Even my house was in bad shape. . . . The area where I live in is in the flood [bed]. We had high water but it didn't flood. . . . We mostly had a bunch of wind damage, and that blow the shingles off the house and the water got into people's houses. Then the houses were closed up about six, eight months and that's how the mold got in there. . . . So when I came back the people, the people that know me, they give me an apartment in the French Quarter. I lived in the French Quarter for about eight, nine months until they got a [FEMA] trailer. . . . My daughter got her trailer in my yard and they were going to bring me one, too. My daughter got her trailer first and about a month after that then my trailer came. . . . I had two cars and a truck in the driveway. I lost that. I lost a bunch of my clothes. I had a bunch of clothes be in the house that got molded, the house closed up with water damage, I lost plenty of furniture, you know I lost a good bit. . . . A bunch of [the band members] lost clothes and things. Some of the instruments and things, you know.¹⁸⁰

Many New Orleanians reported problems getting claims paid by insurance companies, Benny didn't have a problem. "I had Allstate. It was good to me. It could've been better, but like I said, thank God."¹⁸¹

Walter Ramsey, who had five or six properties, reported damage to all. Like Gregory Davis, he had difficulty with contractors, but also described dealing with mortgage and insurance companies:

[I had] two in the Lower Ninth Ward that's 15 feet under water. Two in the Upper Ninth Ward that maybe have five, six feet of water. And one in the Seventh Ward that just had maybe two feet of water, but just wind damage and stuff like that. . . . When it's time to start rebuilding, getting contractors and sending them money from insurance companies or whatever, I wasn't down here. So, it was just like getting burnt all over again. Like, shit, you can't trust people. I can't focus on music because my nerves bad about these houses. From 2006 to 2008 was a terrible experience just going through all that. Fighting with mortgage companies, fighting with insurance companies, feeling that you're not gettin' enough money for your houses. Fighting with mortgage companies cause they feel like the insurance companies should've paid this and the insurance companies not wanna insure your property, and fighting contractors. I had to stop really doing music and learn how to do construction work.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Season 2, Episode 2, "Everything I Do Gonh Be Funky."

¹⁸⁰ Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

¹⁸¹ Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

¹⁸² Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

Ellis Joseph, like most of the musicians he worked with, lost his instruments. "My drum and my tuba was in the garage, so they were totally messed up. . . . But people in Atlanta helped us out a bunch. I went out there and before I knew it I had like 3 to 4 drums."¹⁸³

Jeffrey Hills was living in the Lafitte Housing Projects on Orleans and Claiborne in the Treme neighborhood. "I was on the second level, and the water came up and took my house, so. I lost everything, man. The only thing I have from Katrina is the horn that I'm playin' now. That's it."¹⁸⁴ The Lafitte Projects and several others were demolished after the storm, amid much controversy, with plans to replace them with new mixed-income housing communities.¹⁸⁵

Gregory Davis made his home in Gentilly, an area of New Orleans near Lake Pontchartrain. Although Gentilly is on relatively high ground, it was very badly flooded when the London Avenue Canal was breached by storm surge. Davis spoke of the devastation to his home:

My house, when we built the house that I live in, it's on a slab, but it had to be graded such that it takes about six feet of water to reach the front door. Now standing in the street looking at the front door, it doesn't look like it's up high, so it's I guess a slope grade or something like that. In 1995 there was a flood of sorts; my car that was parked on the street flooded up to the dashboard. The car that was in the driveway on an incline, the water hardly reached the rear tire. This time for the Katrina flood, the water reached the top step on the second floor. So imagine I have an eight-foot ceiling, take eight feet, and there's about another foot above the ceiling to reach the platform on the second floor. So you if you add six feet to actually get to the front door, then those eight feet plus another, that's about 15 feet of water. So everything on the first floor of my house was a wipeout. I lost my piano, I lost a lot of stuff I collected over the years. It was a mess. But I had no thought about not coming back before I saw how devastated it was and then even after I saw how bad it was, my mind was set. I was coming back. And as I contacted other musicians around the country, they also were very very insistent on coming back to New Orleans.¹⁸⁶

A last-minute thought as he was preparing to evacuate saved Davis's instruments, but he was still without access to them for a month after the storm:

Before I left, I was gonna walk out the door—I was not thinking in terms of major flooding or anything like that—but it was like a little voice that said 'maybe you ought to move your instruments upstairs and put

¹⁸³ Ellis Joseph, personal interview with author, June 20, 2011.

¹⁸⁴ Jeffrey Hills, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

¹⁸⁵ Adam Nossiter, "In New Orleans, Ex-Tenants Fight for Projects," *The New York Times* (December 26, 2006).

¹⁸⁶ Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

them in the closet.' And that's what I did. I had a couple of trumpets, a trombone and some other instruments. Thank God I did that. But because we were not allowed to come back into the city for a month or so, I had no instrument to practice on. At the same time we were working on Jazz Fest, Quint [Davis], through his associations with other people, was working on putting on a show at Madison Square Garden, "From the Big Apple to the Big Easy." So we had to kinda work on that too, which was an effort by a whole lot of people, not just musicians, to do a big fundraiser for musicians in those areas and get them back on their feet. I needed an instrument to get ready for that. The Dirty Dozen has an instrument sponsor that sent me out a horn and I was able to use that until I was able to come back to New Orleans to get my instrument.¹⁸⁷

Instruments, homes, and other belongings were not the only things damaged. The emotional trauma caused by the storm was formidable and ongoing. It was not unusual for it to take a week for family and friends to be able to get in touch with each other, often not knowing where their loved ones were or if they were even alive. The process of rebuilding and getting basic services restored took months, sometimes years. Davis comments on returning to his house for the first time after the storm:

When I walked into my house, in my foyer we had some blue and white ceramic tile to the left was the living room. I had a baby grand piano. We had a nice white sofa in there and some other stuff. When I walked into the house, of course the floors were covered in mud. Just driving into the city, everything was gray and brown. There was just no color to anything. So when I got my own house and was walking up to the front door, it was kicked in because the rescue people were looking to see if anybody was in the house. When I walked into the foyer, it was just dried up with mud and I didn't even see the blue and white ceramic tiles that were on the floor. And then, as I was walking, I slipped a little bit on the mud, then I saw the white and blue ceramic tile. It started to come to me, you know, that I'm home and everything's a mess. Then I started walking around into the living room and the sofa—my wife had purchased a really nice white sofa—had floated and was wedged upside down against the French doors that functioned as windows on the front of the house. It was at that moment that I thought to myself, 'I can replace this.' So that kind of settled me. It made me know that all of this stuff can be replaced. I had to be very, very thankful. I didn't lose any relatives or friends, you know, to drowning or anything else. So at that moment it came to me that I'm gonna be all right. I can recover. But on the musical side of things, I wasn't thinking about music or the brass band or anything at that time other than my home has been destroyed and what'll I do next.¹⁸⁸

Lumar LeBlanc had it even worse. He didn't think to take his instruments or other belonging, assuming he'd be back in a few days.

¹⁸⁷ Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

¹⁸⁸ Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

[My house] was totally flooded. The house is just gutted out. I can't afford to rebuild it, so they wouldn't give me the Road Home.¹⁸⁹ That's a whole 'nother story. I lost everything. I couldn't even put a financial figure—I lost everything. My house, everything that was in it, baby pictures, sentimental pictures of relatives from the 1800's and early 1900s. I lost original drums that I had, singular drums, my wedding ring, my class rings. . . . I left my drum and everything, because we really thought we was just going to go right home. The tuba player lost his horn, and everybody lost all their instruments. Only one took their horn were the sax players. And sax players are like that, you know—their horns are so delicate, they used to holding their horns and keeping them, I guess.¹⁹⁰

Keith Frazier was in the process of buying a home in New Orleans when the storm hit. He was living in a house in the Carrollton neighborhood and, fortunately, only renting. "I didn't sustain a lot of loss—I was glad for that."¹⁹¹

Loss of Scholarly Artifacts

Musician, historian, and author Danny Barker passed away in 1994, but had amassed a treasure trove of memorabilia related to brass bands and jazz, whose histories are inextricably linked. His family was getting ready to donate his materials to an academic institution where they could receive proper care and scholarly access, but Katrina didn't wait. Much of his substantial collection was damaged, but is in the process of being salvaged, cataloged and preserved by the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University. Bruce Raeburn, curator of the archive, described the importance of the Barker collection, especially because it contained items from Barker's uncle, legendary drummer Paul Barbarin. "Danny is highly revered," says Raeburn, "but Barbarin is even more intricately related to the development of jazz."¹⁹² Barbarin performed with Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, and Jelly Roll Morton during the formative years

¹⁸⁹ Funded by U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, The Road Home is an organization that helped Louisiana residents rebuild, repair and protect their homes and rental properties in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. It is depicted in HBO's *Treme*, Season 2, Episode 3, "On Your Way Down."

¹⁹⁰ Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011.

¹⁹¹ Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011.

¹⁹² Nick Marinello, "Salvaged Material: Window Into Musical Past," *New Wave* (September 29, 2008).

of jazz. “It is for this period that these materials are rich,” says Raeburn. “They include flyers for battles of the band, photographs and a lot of obscure, localized material that tells the day-to-day story of the music.”¹⁹³

Charismatic trumpeter Milton Batiste was best known for his work with Harold Dejan’s Olympia Brass Band, which he eventually led. Batiste came to the brass bands later in life, beginning his professional career primarily as an R&B musician. He played with Professor Longhair, Big Joe Turner, and worked in Little Richard’s horn section. Batiste was also an entrepreneur, starting his own record label “Dubat Records.” He hosted the documentary film *New Orleans Jazz Funerals from the Inside*.¹⁹⁴ He was also a teacher, forming the Young Olympians Brass Band as a way to encourage young musicians to participate in the brass bands. He had a profound impact on many musicians in the ranks of the Dirty Dozen, Rebirth, and Soul Rebels brass bands, among others. Soul Rebels leader Lumar LeBlanc described Batiste’s collection: “Milton had all kinda artifacts from all of his years of history hung up on the walls. He had—I mean everything—old tunes and fakebooks, old instruments. If you could’ve saw the history this man had collected over his years, it was a museum.”¹⁹⁵

Milton passed away in 2001, but his wife, Ruby, still lived in the house on St. Anthony Street in the Gentilly area. Gregory Davis, who lived close to Milton, confirmed that the house was flooded during Katrina, but I have yet to ascertain the status of his collection.¹⁹⁶

Dr. Michael White is a professor of Spanish and African American Music at Xavier University in New Orleans. He has been widely recognized for his scholarship on jazz and the

¹⁹³ Marinello, “Salvaged Material: Window Into Musical Past.”

¹⁹⁴ *New Orleans Jazz Funerals: ...From The Inside*, Directed by David Jones (New Orleans: DMJ Productions, 1995), DVD.

¹⁹⁵ Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011.

¹⁹⁶ Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

brass bands of New Orleans, and has a particular interest in teaching about the traditional style of jazz and brass band playing. Dr. White is also an elite musician, having performed and recorded with Wynton Marsalis, Harry Connick, Jr., Marcus Roberts, Lionel Hampton, and many others.¹⁹⁷ He also leads his own musicals groups, the Original Liberty Jazz Band and the Liberty Brass Band. White has a rare experiential and scholarly knowledge of the brass bands, and played with two of the groups that were primarily responsible for the brass band renaissance in New Orleans, Doc Paulin's Brass Band and the Fairview Baptist Church Brass Band. White, who lived on Pratt Drive in Gentilly right along the London Avenue Canal, had evacuated to Houston. He started commuting back to New Orleans when Xavier opened for the spring term. He had initially come back about six weeks after the storm: "That's when I first saw the city my house and everything. I came back and everything was destroyed."¹⁹⁸ I interviewed Dr. White primarily for his scholarly expertise on the brass bands across the generations, hoping that he could comment on the loss of primary documents and other artifacts related to the brass band, especially in the storied collections of Danny Barker and Milton Batiste. Barker and Batiste had long since passed, but the families were retaining their collections. When I began to ask about the loss of Barker and Batiste's materials, he was quick to interrupt me:

I lost a lot of stuff, too. I came up in the brass bands musically, jazz-wise. Over the years, I gathered a lot of research. I had a lot of stuff on brass bands. I had memorabilia like drumsticks from certain drummers and I had a collection of hat bands from a number of brass bands. I also had some of the actual music cards that they used to read music from—the dirges. You've heard of *Jazz Begins*? The Young Tuxedo recorded for Atlantic Records on a thing called *Jazz Begins*. They played jazzed up numbers, hymns, blues, but they also played a series of dirges from scores. I had some of the actual score cards that they were reading. They were taped to the back of a piece of cardboard. It was "Flee as a Bird" and [hums to himself to try to remember] and "What A Friend We Have in Jesus." But these were arranged dirges and some of it was like a medley of hymns. Beautiful. They recorded. You could still get those on CD. And I learned a lot of my brass band style from that. But that shows sort of like a transition indication of transition even back then—

¹⁹⁷ Xavier University, <http://www.xula.edu/languages/mwhite.php/>. Accessed January 6, 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Michael White, personal interview with author, June 28, 2011.

it was something like 1958.¹⁹⁹ And I used to collect memorabilia from musicians. I had a Paul Barnes's clarinet, who played with Jelly Roll Morton. I saw him a few times, but when he died I saw him at his funeral. We did jazz funerals for a lot of the older musicians. But I ended up with his E-flat clarinet that he played in brass band. I had musical memorabilia from a lot of musicians—banjo strings, bass strings, stuff like that. The thing that drives me crazy the most is I had that classic white mouthpiece that belonged to Sidney Bechet and I just couldn't find that stuff after the storm. Evacuation was tough but I had over eight feet of water in my house that remained in different degrees for up to three weeks. But everything was just messed up. So I lost everything. I had interviewed a lot of musicians. And I lost all those interviews. I took notes. I used to talk to Doc Paulin and talk about the old days—everything from what parades were like and what funerals were like to things like cutting contests and all of that. And I lost all that stuff. . . . [Everything was] water soaked, waterlogged, bent up. I lost a collection of over 5000 CDs. I had over 4000 books. I lost a lot of video footage, tapes and things like that. I participated in a couple of films, documentaries, actually over two dozen, but in terms of brass bands, I participated in a few and I lost all of those. Some of those I was able to get again like there's a documentary I helped to set up called *Liberty Street Blues*. It was produced by the National Film Board of Canada and some of the older musicians that I knew and was associated with, they deal with a lot of aspects of New Orleans culture from street vendors to Mardi Gras Indians to Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs to jazz. We had a jazz party. They interviewed some of the older musicians that I used to know and played with. And we have a real social aide and pleasure club parade which is a very important part of the film, seen throughout the film. With the Young Men Olympians Social Aid and Pleasure Club and the Young Tuxedo Brass Band. That was one of the last traditional brass band parades because by that time the Young Tuxedo and any other traditional brass band wasn't doing social aid and pleasure club parades. And there was another thing that I did that I lost. It was National Geographic, I think it was called *New Orleans Brass*.²⁰⁰

Gregory Davis, too, lost some significant materials that he had collected from four decades playing in the brass bands.

I collected things that were valuable to me from around the world. And a lot of that stuff was just decimated. I had one album, two passports that had been stamped all over the world, some from some countries in Europe that don't exist anymore. Those things were precious to me. So now they will be in my memory. As I began to try to pick up the pieces and as I had to throw stuff out and decide what was keepable and what was not, it was during those moments that it would come to me that all the music that I had written—the written manuscripts, all that stuff—is gone. All the CDs and albums and recordings that I had accumulated over 25-30 years, all of that's gone. All of the other things that were connected and related to music that I had collected is gone. All the music books that I had from the beginning of my music instruction, all that stuff was gone. You get over it. You don't necessarily forget it, but you get over it.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ The album was released in 1955.

²⁰⁰ Michael White, personal interview with author, June 28, 2011.

²⁰¹ Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

Corruption

Money and credit poured in to New Orleans in the wake of the flood from many sources—governmental (disaster relief), corporate (insurance and banking), and benevolent funds from charitable organizations and individuals. The chaotic post-Katrina environment provided fertile ground for corruption, fraud, advancement of political agenda, and gentrification, a primary theme aptly depicted in HBO's *Treme* series over the course of several seasons. In his article "Catastrophic Economics: The Predators of New Orleans," *Le Monde Diplomatique*'s Mike Davis noted how a 200 billion dollar federal reconstruction program would benefit most some of the same politically connected "corporate looters" (Halliburton, the Shaw Group, Blackwater Security) that were making money in Iraq and will "gentrify New Orleans at the expense of its poor, black citizens."²⁰² It is well beyond the scope of this document to give more than a mention of these topics, but that corruption relates to gentrification and displacement is an important point related to the future of the brass bands. It is the cultural community—the social and pleasure clubs, the black indians, the funeral culture—that spawns and partially sustains the brass bands. If this community is displaced, the brass bands will feel the consequences. In particular, the projects have historically been home to many people linked to this cultural community, including musicians. There was a faction in the city that had wanted to tear the projects down for years because of their reputation for crime and other factors that often accompany subsidized housing.²⁰³ For them, Katrina was an opportunity. Gregory Davis comments:

I think there were mixed signals, mixed emotions of what we as musicians, what we as citizens of New Orleans, we as people of New Orleans, what we were seeing. We were seeing a large outpouring of emotion for how the people suffered through that. But at the same time that was happening, there was still the money grab going on. It was decided by the powers that be that all those people that were devastated in the

²⁰² Mike Davis, "Catastrophic Economics: The Predators of New Orleans," *Le Monde Diplomatique* (October, 2005).

²⁰³ Nossiter, "In New Orleans, Ex-Tenants Fight for Projects."

Lower Ninth, well they don't need that property; they were poorly constructed neighborhoods. Let's make that a big park, like a national park. So the assumption was that those people around there, predominantly the black, were not gonna wanna come back to this. It was completely devastated down there. As bad as my neighborhood looked in Gentilly, as bad as Lakeview area looked, the Lower Ninth Ward was worse. Those that lived here in the projects, as bad as the projects were, and I lived in em, the one on St. Bernard. And early in my life I lived in the Desire projects (Ninth Ward). As bad as the environment in some of those areas, those were some very, very strongly constructed buildings. . . . They didn't let people come back. A plan was already in place to tear that stuff down. They wanted to do that anyway. But now, somebody got paid a lot of money to tear that down. And again somebody that got paid a lot of money to construct something else in its place. The something else in its place is new and it looks good and it's modern but there's no way in the world that it is as strongly constructed, that the quality of construction is as good as what was there before. Now I'm not saying that what was there before was so good that it didn't need fixing. Those buildings were put up in the '40s and '50s but now what's there is new and it looks good. I would bet everything I have in five or ten years, those are gonna look like dilapidated buildings, because it is not really high quality construction. So again, those on the bottom of the totem pole, they're gonna suffer, and they're gonna be saddled with this stuff. If you wanna stay in one of these, you gotta buy the unit. Or there's some other construction, like back where St. Bernard housing project was, we're gonna call that mixed income neighborhoods, so we're gonna make it so a poor person can live next to a person who has a well-paying job. So let's really look at the situation: if you are a person of little means, then moving into something like that means something to you. It really does. But if you are a person of means and you can afford to buy a house, \$200, \$300,000, are you gonna move into one of these mixed-income neighborhoods where you know there's all the crime? It ain't gonna happen. So what that stuff would end up being eventually again is subsidized housing for people who can't afford it. So I just don't believe that our so-called leaders and politicians don't know that that's what that's gonna be. They know that that's what that's gonna be. But I believe the only thing that's really important— I believe— in making that happen was so somebody could get paid. Somebody's gotten paid, the stuff is up, and they've gone on about their business on some island with a pina colada.²⁰⁴

Effects on the Brass Bands

The effects of Hurricane Katrina on the brass bands are numerous and occur at many levels. Some effects are obvious and immediate, such as the scattering of musician, the loss of instruments, homes and artifacts, the devastation of New Orleans and all the gigs and other jobs that musicians relied upon to make a life. Others effects take longer to manifest, such as the number and type of jobs generated from press exposure, tourism, recording opportunities, airplay, and the modified economy that comes with increased demand and mobility outside the city. Some effects are veiled and can be difficult to measure, such as the citizens and leaders of

²⁰⁴ Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

New Orleans rediscovering their valuable creative culture, or perhaps how the psychological impact may manifest itself in the music or in a musician's ability and desire to continue to live in New Orleans, or how musicians may be better prepared to cope with future storms. For the remainder of the document, I try to ascertain differences in the nature, scope, and frequency of gigs and press exposure. I also ask the brass band leaders how they think the storm impacted their bands and brass band community.

Gigs Pre/Post Katrina

Prior to Katrina, the Treme Brass Band had a fairly regular gig at Donna's Bar and Grill on most Fridays, but the bulk of the band's income came from weddings and conventions. Jones described the types of gigs the band was playing before the storm:

We were doing a bunch of weddings, conventions, a few festivals, we were going out of town every now and then doing out of town gigs, too. . . . We were doing a few [second line parades], but we cut back on that a little bit, you know. We started giving that to the young fellas. . . . We always do jazz funerals. Sometimes two, three a month.²⁰⁵

Although Donna's Bar and Grill reluctantly and permanently closed its doors in 2010 due to factors directly related to Hurricane Katrina, Jones notes that the band is doing better than ever.²⁰⁶ "We get more gigs now. I think we play about 10 to 12 [per month], sometimes more."²⁰⁷ Five years after the storm, weddings still make up the largest percentage of their gigs and the band is doing more club and festival work.

We play festivals. Jazzfest, Satchmo Festival, French Quarter Festival. We're doing a bunch of festivals in the city right now. I get more second-lines and weddings because it's a big thing today, and I get a bunch of night clubs: Snug Harbor, Preservation Hall. I play at the Candlelight every Wednesday. People come hear the band, hire the band.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

²⁰⁶ Donna Poniatowski, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011.

²⁰⁷ Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

²⁰⁸ Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

The weekly gig at the Candlelight Lounge is particularly noteworthy because it is in the famous Treme neighborhood that was once the center for a vibrant economic, social and artistic African American culture. Often considered the oldest black neighborhood in the United States, it contains Louis Armstrong Park (Congo Square) and fostered the brass bands, producing many famous musicians. Not anymore. According to Jones, "[The Candlelight Lounge is] the only club. The Treme don't have live anything." Although it is outside the scope of this document to go into great detail about the musical and cultural desecration of the Treme neighborhood, there are a couple of important factors that should be understood. The construction of the I-10 Expressway (Claiborne Overpass) in the 1960's was routed through the Treme. Scores of African American businesses were devastated with a corresponding impact on the neighborhood. According to Jerome Smith, founder of the Tambourine N Fan youth group, "since the expressway was built, much of what Louis Armstrong Park represents is gone now. Kids used to walk around outside, playing instruments and emulating our great, local musicians. But you seldom see that now."²⁰⁹ Another significant factor in attenuating music in the Treme has been the gentrification of the neighborhood after Katrina, bringing with it noise ordinances that prohibit music clubs from opening and brass bands playing on the street.²¹⁰ Nearly 10 years later, this trend continues, prompting former Rebirth member and trumpeter Shamarr Allen to tweet, "Please @ whomever it may concern If you are not "BORN" in New Orleans you have no right to fuss about the how loud the music is. GO HOME!!!"²¹¹

Walter Ramsey described the brass band scene for the Stooges before the storm:

²⁰⁹ Susan Buchanan, "New Orleans Considers Removing Its Claiborne Overpass," *Huffington Post* (January 9, 2013).

²¹⁰ This is another recurring theme in HBO's *Treme* television series.

²¹¹ Shamarr Allen (@shamarrallen), Twitter post, March 24, 2015 (12:15PM).

Right before the storm hit it was the Rebirth, The Hot 8, and the Stooges. Those were the three [top] bands in the city. Like we the three pitbulls that fightin' for all the work. Stooges at the younger end of that stake, but weddings, parties, funerals, and second lines was our bread and butter. Rebirth had been traveling a lot. The Hot 8 and us was the two younger bands, we didn't really travel. We'd have a trip here and there but it wasn't consistent, like Hot 8 is now. And now the Stooges is traveling.²¹²

Ramsey also noted the popularity of the Soul Rebels, but categorized them separately.

They stand alone from us, 'cause they not the same. They quit their parades and they had a different following than us. The Rebirth, Hot 8, and the Stooges, we share the same fans. Soul Rebels are totally different audience from us. We didn't even tap into what they had."²¹³

He also noted the fierce competition between bands for second line parade gigs as a matter of pride and bragging rights. "It was a competition for Sunday parades, us three bands. Most of the times The Hot 8 was the big dog for those because the Rebirth started diminishing off of parades. . . . We compare who has the most parades out there. Right now the Stooges have all of them."²¹⁴

Ramsey says the Stooges are basically playing the same type of gigs after the storm, with one difference. "The money is a little bit higher than what we were making before the storm—I wanna say because of the Free Agents. I'm gonna give 'em credit for that. They came back and they was able to start charging whatever.²¹⁵ The people are gonna pay for it."²¹⁶

The Free Agents band didn't exist before the storm, but Ellis Joseph describes playing most of the same type of gigs as the Stooges, "wedding receptions, parties, second line parades," but also mentions "Katrina remuneration stuff." Six years after the storm, the Free Agents were doing the same types of gigs, but were working a bit more:

It's kinda increased a little bit. We do a lot of conventions now. We get out of town gigs, but not as much as we'd like to. Since the storm, we've been to Brazil as the Free Agents. Every year we do Jazz Fest. We do a

²¹² Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

²¹³ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

²¹⁴ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

²¹⁵ The Free Agents Brass Band was one of the first bands to perform regularly in New Orleans after the storm.

²¹⁶ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

lot of funerals, a lot of work with the Zulu Club, the Mardi Gras Social & Pleasure Club. We do their parade as well as all their work during the year: parties for their [members], funerals, what have you. We do all of it. I'm a member as well—the social club.²¹⁷

As a relatively new band, the Free Agents are a work-a-day group that will play for just about any event. And in New Orleans, just about any event that deserves celebration or commemoration might hire a brass band. Sometimes it can get just downright strange, like being asked to play for a dog funeral:

That was the weirdest thing I've ever played for. There was this dog, it was like a neighborhood dog and everybody knew him, right? So the dude was like, "Man, you 'bout to line for my dog." So I thought he's saying 'my dawg,' like he's talking about his compadre, his friend. I'm like, "All right. Whatchu wanna do?" He's like, "I wanna do a rave thing. Three hours." I said, "We're 800 for an hour." He said, "You know what? I don't care. Come on." When we got there, man, they [had a big] poster with a dog on it. And we were really playing for a dog. People were rolling, crying, everything.

Before the Soul Rebels came to prominence, they, too, played many different kinds of jobs.

Lumar LeBlanc explains the reason for the diversity of work:

We did bar mitzvhas, we did funerals, we played for baby showers [laughs], we played for wedding rehearsal dinners, weddings, we played for—you wouldn't believe—all types of parties. Like bachelorette parties. We played for donation of buildings. . . . Superbowl parties, major sporting events, conventions. We have played for the Democrats and Republicans. . . . See in New Orleans, brass band is like seasoning in our food. It's that we have it, so we use it. They'll have a brass band come play for anything. Like if they donate a street sign—any type of jovial event. They automatically say, 'well call a brass band.' If a famous person's coming in town, if a famous person's leaving town, a birthday party, an anniversary party, anything. People going to jail, I'm sorry to say. We've played for that. Like a big-time criminal—federal jail time. Everybody said, 'well you're going to jail next year on such and such date.' They hired us to play for his going away party. It's done like I said because in New Orleans the brass band is second nature.²¹⁸

When Katrina hit, the Soul Rebels were all still living in New Orleans. They were popular in the city and were developing a strong reputation nationally and overseas. Although they were still doing a lot of different things, LeBlanc recalls a shift in strategy that before the storm that would pay dividends after Katrina hit.

We were doing all kinds of stuff, but we began to get more business savvy. I began to see that playing in the clubs would bring you to a higher business level even though it's not guaranteed money sometimes. Like

²¹⁷ Ellis Joseph, personal interview with author, June 20, 2011.

²¹⁸ Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011.

say if you go to a vendor and give them a proposal where I'll play in your club for x amount of dollars or for the door. It really proves your weight. Because it shows numbers. And that's how booking agencies and vendors and promoters deal—show me your numbers. A brass band can really make money off of just doing privates, like weddings or festivals because they're set prices. [There's] enough work out there to do that, but that could stifle you from going to a higher level. Because then you're just like a private kinda unknown group, whereas groups like a Stevie Wonder, a Jay-Z or an Elvis, they actually fill concert halls to let promoters know these are the numbers they generate. So that's when we started to play the different clubs around the city and around America—going in for crappy door deal money, but we kept going and eventually showed that we could build a following. And so our main thing [in New Orleans] always was places like Le Bon Temps, the Maple Leaf, at the time Blue Nile wasn't fully in swing when Soul Rebels first started—used to Cafe Istanbul. So different places like that, that begins to show your weight. You begin to open the eyes and ears of people who wanna invest in you, rather than just be a band that's hired for all private functions.²¹⁹

The shift in focus to clubs and stage shows began in the late 1990's and is demonstrated by the title of their second album, *No More Parades* (1998, Tuff City Records).²²⁰ This strategy made the band viable outside of the city, which would prove to be important in the aftermath of Katrina. I asked LeBlanc what the band had been doing after the storm:

Traveling. Traveling, festivals, concert halls, and clubs. I guess through soldiering through that post-Katrina thing, people really look at probably only the strong ones gonna survive. So if they still standing doing it on their own, they must be legitimate. So we've been picked up by Ted Kurland and Hep Cat Entertainment.²²¹

But the album *No More Parades* had other significance. It was a message to the second line community and the other brass bands about valuation and the economics of the brass band within the cultural community. Matt Sakakeeny, in his excellent dissertation “Instruments of Power,” investigates the economics of the brass bands in detail, and this topic is also recreated in the debut of HBO's *Treme* series. Lumar LeBlanc described to me the reason for the album title:

See what occurred is that second line has become a business as well as a cultural idiom. Second line is a business in a sense that it costs money. Money has to be exchanged for things to happen. That's where the business element comes in. For the band to play, you gotta pay the band. For the people to get their uniforms and suits, streamers and attire for the parade, that costs money. So Milton and Blodie [Gregory Davis] with the Dirty Dozen used to tell me, 'you know man, we had the price of brass band close to \$2000

²¹⁹ Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011.

²²⁰ Matt Sakakeeny, “Soul Rebels,” <http://mattsakakeeny.com/roll-with-it/brass-bands/soul-rebels/>. Accessed January 8, 2015.

²²¹ Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011. The Kurland Agency and Hep Cat Entertainment are artist management agencies.

back in the late 80s.' And so when we did it, there were a couple of new bands coming along, so competition was a little stiffer. So people felt they had a choice. So a newer group [will play] a second line for just \$100 a man, which is usually about \$800-\$1000 [total] just so they could get their foot in the door. And that would make it tougher on more established bands like us and Rebirth.

So we got tired of all the second line krewes basically not paying brass bands what we felt they were owed. Not only us, but Rebirth. They were tired of it too. So our stance of making *No More Parades* was basically for two reasons: we wanted to be like Dirty Dozen as far as staged brass band. We didn't really wanna just be regulated to the street parade scene. We wanted to be respected as a legitimate act. And two: it was to send a message that if you're not going respect us, the musicians, who basically make the parade happen... because if you didn't have the band, then it'd just be people walking up the street with beautiful clothes on with no music. So that's why *No More Parades* was done. Because once we said, "Gettin' paid, no more parades," meaning that unless we get paid, we ain't gonna play the parade. The same thing kinda goes on today. I mean it's better. See, the idea is that they know they can get away with it because the bands—there's so many of them—the bands feel like the only way to get the second line is if [they] underbid. And they'll hire [them] rather than hire Soul Rebels or Rebirth. Because we have made a pact to charge like \$2000. So it was a little upgrade but not a lot. But when all of the newer bands rose up, some would take it for \$800, \$850, just to get their foot in the door. It was hurting the industry. So we got tired of it, man. You know, second line is like four hours! It ain't like a marching band where you got a hundred people to offset the duty and energy. It's basically eight people pushing all of the energy. So that was the reason we had *No More Parades*.²²²

\$200 to \$250 per man was very respectable pay for brass band musicians, especially in the 1990's, but when the Rebirth Brass Band first started playing, their best payday came as a surprise. "Tell the truth man," said Keith Frazier, "money was playing in the French Quarter. That was the big gig. We played five days a week, one hour right on Bienville and Bourbon."²²³ As the Rebirth evolved and grew to prominence, they played the same kinds of gigs as the other bands previously mentioned. However, once they rose to international prominence, the Rebirth took a different approach than did the Dirty Dozen or the Soul Rebels in that they continued to play a lot of second lines, parties, and funerals in New Orleans. According to Keith Frazier:

We have continued to do all the cultural stuff, all the local stuff, because we just thought that it was important to do something for our own people—to give back to them. My brother Philip and I were just talking about how, you know, because we do so much stuff out of town so many the bigger gigs, we gotta get back to the basics. Because people still wanna come out and enjoy Rebirth because they love the band so much. So we still do the funerals, the second lines, the backyard parties and BBQs, and playing at little bars around town. That's kinda like who we are and how we grew. We love to do that kinda stuff because it gives you a lot of energy to create new stuff all the time. So when somebody calls for a backyard party,

²²² Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011.

²²³ Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011.

we're there. There's no gig too big or too small for Rebirth. It keeps you very grounded as musicians. And it keeps people in the community tied to what you're doing and you don't kinda get away from who you are. The Dirty Dozen is a great band, but they kinda got away from New Orleans. And we understand that as you get bigger you start getting away from New Orleans and things start changing. We were like, 'we don't wanna change who we are.' We wanna continue to have to base from [New Orleans], marching down the street. So we march the shoes off our feet.²²⁴

Although they don't make nearly as much money playing a backyard party in New Orleans as they would playing a stage show on the road, New Orleans still represents a fairly lucrative home base for the Rebirth. They have held down a regular Tuesday night gig at The Maple Leaf Bar for 23 years.²²⁵ Rebirth plays the Maple Leaf for the door, Keith says. "It's one of our biggest paydays. I mean we go in there and the money we make on a Tuesday night can account for an entire week of work."²²⁶ Still, as of 2011, Frazier estimates that most of the band's income is from outside of the city:

I would say like we're probably like 80% comes from touring, national and international, and 20% comes from playing around town. But for a lot of the local smaller bands it's like 80% comes from playing second lines, playing gigs here at home, and 20% maybe out of town. The biggest touring brass bands right now are probably Rebirth and the Dirty Dozen. Hot 8 just started to get out there. But no band does it like we do. Every month of the year we're out of town.

Even though internationally well-known before the storm, Frazier says the storm still had a significant impact on the Rebirth's gig demographics. "Before Katrina it's probably like 50% out [of New Orleans], 50% in [New Orleans]. And after, just kinda like, just blew. Boom! Exploded. We could actually probably play out of town all of the time."

²²⁴ Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011.

²²⁵ Doug MacCash, "Rebirth Brass Band blasts the Maple Leaf on Tuesday nights," *The Times-Picayune* (May 23, 2013).

²²⁶ Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011. The Maple Leaf Bar is located at 8316 Oak St in New Orleans.

Television

When Katrina started to bear down on the Gulf Coast, major national media outlets scarcely covered anything else for days. And of that coverage, the bulk of it focussed on New Orleans, both because of its fame as a center for mystery and pleasure, and because it was a catastrophe waiting to happen. The city's ubiquitous association with Jazz, Mardi Gras, and Bourbon Street meant that whenever New Orleans was depicted in the audio or video-based media, it was extremely likely to feature jazz or brass band music and musicians. As the world watched and listened, musicians often became the face of New Orleans and a barometer through which the rebuilding process was measured. Matt Sakakeeny points out, "With the spotlight on New Orleans, media outlets and relief agencies, politicians and promoters, were all searching for iconic sounds and images of the city and the brass band became an expedient symbol of everything distinctive about New Orleans culture."²²⁷ Sakakeeny goes on to cite a prime example, the first Presidential address of George W. Bush following the storm. He spoke to the nation from Jackson Square, in the heart of the French Quarter:

In this place, there's a custom for the funerals of jazz musicians. The funeral procession parades slowly through the streets, followed by a band playing a mournful dirge as it moves to the cemetery. Once the casket has been laid in place, the band breaks into a joyful "second line" - symbolizing the triumph of the spirit over death. Tonight the Gulf Coast is still coming through the dirge - yet we will live to see the second line.²²⁸

The international media exposure, which continued for several years after the storm, combined with the good will of concerned organizations and individuals across the world, provided much needed help for the brass band musicians.

All of the brass bands I cover in this document received substantial media exposure outside of the city, often by premiere outlets such as CNN, The New York Times, or HBO. The specific

²²⁷ Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 25.

²²⁸ Presidential Address from Jackson Square (2005), in Sakakeeny, "Instruments of Power," 25.

experiences for each band, of course, vary. However, before I discuss each band individually, there are two programs in particular, both by HBO, that highlighted brass bands in a post-Katrina setting, providing informed exposure to millions of viewers: David Simon's *Treme* and Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke*. These projects provided enormous exposure that helped all the brass bands of New Orleans.

Treme is a dramatic television series that began in 2010, spanning four seasons and 36 episodes. It depicts life in New Orleans through the prism of the authentic cultural purveyors. The lead characters include a trombonist, a Mardi Gras Indian Chief, a bar owner, a civil rights lawyer, a chef, and an outspoken, idealistic radio deejay. The show does an excellent job of portraying the problems of rebuilding a life in New Orleans after the storm amid the political corruption, violence, underperforming schools and inadequate public services, yet it also captures the beauty, creativity, and romanticism of the city. *Treme* went to great effort to use actual people from the artistic community in the city in real venues. All of the brass bands in this document that existed before the storm made an appearance on the show in authentic settings: funerals, clubs, second line parades. According to HBO, the cumulative audience for the series premiere of *Treme* was 3.6 million.²²⁹ *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* is a multiple Emmy-winning documentary film (2006) directed by Spike Lee that graphically recounts the chaos and destruction of Hurricane Katrina in and around New Orleans. It premiered on HBO in two parts less than one year after the storm. Much of its narrative is drawn from scores of interviews with people of diverse experiences and varying perspectives. Spike Lee said of the film:

²²⁹ David Walker, "HBO: Cumulative audience for 'Treme' Premiere Episode (so far): 3.6 Million," *The Times-Picayune* (April 28, 2010), http://www.nola.com/treme-hbo/index.ssf/2010/04/hbo_cumulative_audience_for_tr.html/. Accessed January 9, 2015.

New Orleans is fighting for its life. These are not people who will disappear quietly—they're accustomed to hardship and slights, and they'll fight for New Orleans. This film will showcase the struggle for New Orleans by focusing on the profound loss, as well as the indomitable spirit of New Orleansians.²³⁰

Harry “Swamp Thing” Cook of The Hot 8 Brass Band is one of the many people interviewed. The Hot 8 band is also featured prominently in the documentary, including the last poignant scene where they are leading a casket with the name “Katrina” on it in a mock jazz funeral, symbolizing death and impending rebirth after the body is “cut loose.” Lee followed up the film with a fifth part, “Epilogue,” one year later. In 2010, he revisited this topic with the two part film *If God Is Willing and da Creek Don't Rise*, which features Uncle Lionel Batiste of the Treme Brass Band on the cover. This revisits many of those interviewed five years earlier and also focuses on the BP oil spill of 2010 that impacted New Orleans and surrounding areas.

Other Press and Exposure

Before the storm hit, the Treme Brass Band was well-known in the city. Although Jones noted several times that many of the band's gigs came from audience members who had seen them play at various events, they did get some nice local media exposure:

Every now and then when we [did] something kind of big, we always go like on Channel 4 sometimes and promote our business. And plenty of times people see us on TV when we do commercials. We do like a Zatarain commercial.²³¹ We did two or three Zatarain commercials. People know us from that so they call and say "I seen you on a Zatarain commercial."²³²

When the band was displaced in Arizona, Jones and some of the other musicians made appearances on regional television and radio stations.

²³⁰ HBO Documentaries, “When The Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts,” <http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/when-the-levees-broke-a-requiem-in-four-acts#/>. Accessed January 9, 2015.

²³¹ Zatarain is a local company, established in 1889, that sells spices and Cajun-style food products. They were acquired by McCormick & Company in 2003.

²³² Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

People were asking what was going on and what happened. We all read a story to them about what happened to our home and people back in New Orleans. So we got plugs on the TV station, radio station, and that helped build the band up. People been giving us donations toward the band, helping the band out, giving them money to help out family.²³³

After the storm, articles about the band appeared in *Vanity Fair*, the *New York Times*, and on NPR, as well as numerous mentions in other high profile publications. In 2006, the band was awarded a National Heritage Fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) that included a performance at the Music Center at Strathmore in Bethesda, MD.²³⁴ When the iconic bass drummer "Uncle" Lionel Batiste passed away in 2012, articles appeared in many major publications. It is particularly noteworthy, however, that the article appeared in the "Celebrity" section of the *Huffington Post* and was also covered by the *Hollywood Reporter*.²³⁵ On film, the band can be seen in Darren Hoffman's 2011 documentary *Tradition is a Temple*, and, mostly notably, in the first episode of HBO's *Treme*. The band is portrayed playing a funeral and Jones calls out "Oh, Didn't He Ramble," a traditional 'hot' tune played after the body is cut loose. Their version of "Just a Closer Walk With Thee" also graces the Season 1 soundtrack. "HBO helped us out," Jones said. "That really gave the band a lift up."²³⁶

I asked Walter Ramsey if he was inundated with press requests after the storm. "Yeah, everywhere. One time France TV came and lived with us and did a [documentary film] about us, the Stooges. We [also] got a lot of national press."²³⁷ The Stooges were also featured in another documentary, *Red Bull Street Kings I*, as a result of being crowned the 2010 Red Bull Street

²³³ Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

²³⁴ "A Night to Remember: The 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellows Concert," *NEA Arts Magazine* (Vol. 1, 2007), <http://arts.gov/NEARTS/2007v1-%EF%BF%BC2006-nea-national-heritage-fellows/night-remember/>. Accessed January 10, 2015.

²³⁵ Janet McConnaughey, "Lionel Batiste Dead: Treme Brass Band Singer Dies at 81," *Huffpost Celebrity* (July 8, 2012), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/08/lionel-batiste-dead-dies-treme-brass-band_n_1657509.html/. Accessed January 10, 2015.

²³⁶ Benny Jones, personal interview with author, June 11, 2011.

²³⁷ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

Kings, beating out the Free Agents, Soul Rebels, and To Be Continued brass bands.²³⁸ On television, they appeared in HBO's *Treme* in "Sunset on Louisianne" performing their song "Wind it Up" in a second line parade with lead (fictional) character Antoine Batiste on trombone. By 2012, the Stooges became so popular outside of New Orleans that they had to scale back on second line parades and stop performing their regular Thursday night gig at the Hi Ho Lounge on St. Claude Avenue.²³⁹ That year they were also invited to perform as ambassadors on a US State Department tour in Pakistan.

The Free Agents did not enjoy the national press of the other bands, simply because they didn't exist until after the storm. Even so, their popular Katrina-related song "We Made it Through That Water" is featured on the *Treme Season 1* soundtrack.

The Soul Rebels twice appeared on *Treme*, first in the Season 1 finale performing "Drink a Little Poison (4 U Die)" and in Season 4, Episode 2 entitled "This City," performing "Hey Na Na" with Galactic and Corey Glover. Their music has graced the series soundtrack many more times. The Soul Rebels were also getting other major media coverage. Lumar LeBlanc remembers receiving a lot of inquiries:

I got calls from CNN. I was gettin' calls from Montel Williams. All of the major networks, radio stations, major press interviews like the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, all those people were calling by phone constantly. So through the exposure, we took off. People began to see that we're a national, international act. So it skyrocketed for us.

The Rebirth Brass Band was famous before the storm, so it isn't surprising that they were a lightning rod for press features and performance inquiries. I asked Keith Frazier how much attention they got from the media:

²³⁸ Jocelyne Ninneman, "Red Bull Street Kings I Documentary Film Premiere October 3," *Offbeat Magazine* (October 2, 2013).

²³⁹ Matt Sakakeeny, "Stooges," <http://mattsakakeeny.com/roll-with-it/brass-bands/stooges/>. Accessed January 10, 2015.

A whole lot, a whole lot. CNN, BET... we did this big concert in New York City called "From The Big Apple to The Big Easy" that was really huge that got sold on DVD and everything like that. So we had a lot of press out there. That made people more aware of what was going on—not just with musicians, but with everyday people. People love the music and the culture so much. They was like, 'well, since I saw you guys on TV I thought I would come and check it out.' HBO just started doing a series called *Treme* that's based around Hurricane Katrina and musicians and so people'd watch that. That's generated a lot of interest for just the culture of New Orleans. And whenever we got on the road, people who had never heard of a brass band and didn't know much about New Orleans culture would come check it out because they saw a clip of it on HBO.

The Rebirth appears in the *Treme* series more than any other brass band and are heavily represented on the soundtrack.²⁴⁰ In fact, the trombone-playing character of Antoine Batiste, played by New Orleans native Wendell Pierce, got his sound, literally, from the Rebirth's Stafford Agee. Agee also acted as coach to Pierce, teaching him the correct positions for the song clips he would be filmed playing as well as general embouchure movements.²⁴¹ *Treme* stands unrivaled in the category of having actors look like they are *really playing* the instruments. When I first watched the *Treme* series, I expected that actor and non-musician Rob Brown, who plays trumpeter Delmond Lambreaux, would look a bit silly playing the trumpet. I must admit that he had me wondering for a while if he had perhaps learned the trumpet. His embouchure was believable and he was using all of the correct fingerings—especially tricky when playing a bebop tune with Donald Harrison.

Other Effects

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, being away from New Orleans and the regular gig circuit of second lines, parties and funerals allowed the Stooges to put more time and effort into production, which became a primary source of income for the band. Walter Ramsey explains:

²⁴⁰ Internet Movie Database, "Rebirth Brass Band," http://www.imdb.com/name/nm2637509/?ref_=ttfc_fc_cl_t151. Accessed January 10, 2015.

²⁴¹ David Walker, "Treme's' Antoine Batiste gets his horn sound from Rebirth's Stafford Agee," *The Times-Picayune* (December 13, 2013).

We made more money in music production than what we ever made in a brass band period. . . . We able to work for films, we able to do music production. We that band that when people need a New Orleans sound, I'm getting that phone call. BET coming to New Orleans... They gonna contact Walter 'Whoadie' Ramsey first.²⁴²

The Stooges had gotten into production and working with popular artists before the storm, but it wasn't until after the storm that some of the brass bands became more universally recognized as viable collaborators outside of New Orleans:

We started working with people before Katrina, like Jessica Simpson. That article came out after Katrina, but what they writing about in it was before Katrina. You know, of how uniquely we set ourself apart in the hip hop culture. We hip hop horns and we hip hop sounds that producers use—working with Timbaland, working with Mannie Fresh, whoever we work with. We the musicians that behind a lot of these hip hop tracks. . . . And it's getting out, too—like The Hot 8 Brass band's working with Lauryn Hill and Mos Def. Before the storm you couldn't get that collaboration, you know, like that's not happening. Who gives a damn about a brass band? We good at festivals, you know in Europe, Japan, wherever we go, but it's no more than just a street parade. You're not being recognized as a *band* band. That's one of the reasons why we changed our name to Stooges Music Group, because the brass band name was just fucked up. We more than a brass band. We music. We musicians that play brass band music. So we knew that we had to distinguish ourselves from just the regular brass bands. We love from where we come from, but...²⁴³

Ramsey notes that another effect on the band was having to start from scratch with all new musicians. As the pre-Katrina Stooges members were starting to come back to New Orleans, they needed work, and Ramsey had devoted his time to getting his real estate back online, so when he decided to get the band going again, his previous band members had moved on:

That was a challenge. And I like it cause it was like something new. I'm used to getting new players but not a whole band at one time. . . . But getting a whole [band of] new musicians at one time and training them? And you gotta have them prepared quick [snapping]. It was a great challenge, but it worked. And it really tests my knowledge of this music and my musicianship skills on how well I can teach them quick.

For Ellis Joseph, Katrina didn't make that much of an impact on his life as a professional musician, struggling both before and after the storm, but he does point out that it had a motivating effect, leaving only the dedicated musicians left standing: "It made those people that really wanted to be a part of the music want it that much more. And regardless to where you

²⁴² Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

²⁴³ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

were, if you a real musician at heart, you wanted to come back home, and you wanted to get involved and be a musician and make this thing happen.”²⁴⁴

Joseph offered a different perspective than most brass band leaders when I asked him if the media spotlight from Katrina expanded the market for brass bands:

Nah. I think it's 'cause people recognize good music. And I've been all over the world, been around stuck-up people. I've been around exact opposites and once they hear this music, they just cut loose. It'll break them down. In Russia, even though I wasn't with my full band, the people were so cold and stuck up, but you see most of them tapping their feet. It can break a person. Life is too short. . . . Might as well let loose and have some fun. That's what this music is.

Jeffrey Hills echoed his sentiments, suggesting that New Orleans brass bands were already well-known throughout the world. “Brass bands have been abroad and traveling for many years, so it's hard for me to say that a certain part of the world might not be educated to it. It's not that many places that don't know brass bands.” It is interesting to me that Joseph and Hills are the only two musicians I interviewed that expressed this perspective. Perhaps it is because they were not leading bands at the time the storm hit, and therefore were not inundated with calls and media requests as was the experience of other brass band leaders. For them, they were doing what they were always doing, which had involved traveling outside the city on occasion, both nationally and abroad. Hills, though, did note some other effects on the brass bands at the hand of the storm, including a disconnect between younger and older brass band musicians:

A lot of the brass bands that are out now weren't out [before the storm], and after Katrina, it was just an infestation, for lack of a better word. And they don't really understand the cultural side of the brass band. The cultural side of the brass band is dealing with the challenge of the music you choose, the selections. It's basically gospel, marches, and things like that. But a lot of the younger guys have no clue about the music because the people like Tuba Fats, and like all the cats that I just worked with [inside Preservation Hall], those guys would keep us in line as younger musicians and keep us rooted into the tradition. Whereas after Katrina, all those guys came back and they just started picking up instruments and blowing. . . . A lot of the older dudes died. A lot of them didn't leave and they died. Post-Katrina, a lot of them died as well.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ Ellis Joseph, personal interview with author, June 20, 2011.

²⁴⁵ Jeffrey Hills, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

The generational disconnect among brass band musicians that Hills talks about was dealt another major blow when Donna's Bar and Grill closed, largely as a result of the storm.²⁴⁶ Donna's opened in 1993 on North Rampart Street in the French Quarter and was the "Home of Brass Bands." They were the first music club to host brass bands six nights per week. Every brass band in the city played there. Walter Ramsey remembers how essential Donna's was to his development as a young brass band musician:

It was the home of brass bands—brass band headquarters. You could go there any night of the week and see a brass band from old to young, and right now we don't really have that. We don't have a club that caters to brass bands. I knew back in the days on a Thursday night when I used to have a 'real' job working, I could go see the Soul Rebels, or I could catch Treme on different nights. It's where we learned. Before we was old enough to get into the club we would just go stand by the door and listen to the music, and that helped teach us about the music. Right now, the younger guys that's coming into the music don't really have that. Being at Donna's was like, you can get it all and it's one location. It was a great place to check out brass bands. It was that home for us. ²⁴⁷

It was also indispensable to the brass bands for many other reasons. Jeffrey Hills notes that "Donna's was one of the essential places because that's one of the first places, as the Lil' Rascals, where I started playing. She was one of the first people to give us a gig and she did that for a lot of other groups as well."²⁴⁸ Dr. Michael White said that Donna's "provided work for brass bands and visibility that was really unprecedented" and it catalyzed "further steps in the evolution of the brass band from being just a street thing to being stage and night-club suitable."²⁴⁹ Gregory Davis stated that Donna's was profoundly influential on the New Orleans music scene because it influenced other clubs to hire brass bands. "Once the other clubs saw that there was an audience that was willing to go out and see and listen to brass bands they started employing them and started imitating what Donna's was doing."²⁵⁰ Davis also noted that it acted as an information

²⁴⁶ Jan Ramsey, "Donna's Bar & Grill Closes," *Offbeat Magazine* (August 20, 2010).

²⁴⁷ Walter Ramsey, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

²⁴⁸ Jeffrey Hills, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

²⁴⁹ Michael White, personal interview with author, June 28, 2011.

²⁵⁰ Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

center during the storm when telecommunication systems were down: “After the storm it sorta became like a meeting place were the bands knew they could actually go. You can make your connections to who was where, who was in town.”²⁵¹

The Dirty Dozen Brass Band, like the Rebirth, didn’t experience the immediate work stoppage that many other brass bands endured, because most of their work was outside New Orleans. However, Davis notes a few effects:

We were all over the place, so the effect it had on us was instead of meeting up to take a tour bus from some truck stop in the city, it meant that now we had to arrange flights for everyone to get to some central location to start the tour. So the expenses became much greater to have the band on the road. But the band was still being booked a lot around the country and around the world. A lot of people were interested in doing flood-related concerts and that was really a great thing, because it provided a whole lot of work, more so than before the flood. Not only for the Dirty Dozen, but a lot of the other brass bands that normally would not be as much. They just opened up a whole lot of work for those bands in other cities. I remember there were bands doing gigs in Houston—brass bands, blues bands, R&B bands—that had gotten more work in New Orleans before the storm. It led to a rejuvenation of work for bands here in the city that might not have existed before the storm.

All the extra press that was being focused on New Orleans, a lot of people realized that there was a real concern that the heart and soul of the city—it really is a culture. The business drives everything you know, and it was, you know, it's always the business. I'm not talking about the music business—the other industries. What people think of as what creates the economy of the city, but the heart and soul of the city of New Orleans really and truly is the culture. And the culture is the music and the food and the people and the arts and the crafts. That's really what makes up the character of this city. Now there was a real concern by not only people here in New Orleans, but music people in general, industry people in general, that what New Orleans was, it was not gonna be anymore. And whatever could be done to try and keep it close to that, people wanted to help make that happen. It was just so amazing to see the outpouring of love and affection that people had for the city and for the individual musicians and for arts and craft people in the city. All of that attention that was being focused on New Orleans really had a positive effect on the music scene in the city and is still going pretty strong now, years after the storm. The television show *Treme* is providing a whole lot of work for musicians that might not have gotten all of that attention had it not been for the storm and had it not been for HBO’s show, *Treme*.²⁵²

Dr. Michael White pointed to within the city, reminding the people of New Orleans that their culture is distinctive, valuable, and worth protecting. It also sparked an interest in some of the younger brass band musicians to learn about the historic traditions of the brass bands.

²⁵¹ Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

²⁵² Gregory Davis, personal interview with author, June 21, 2011.

I think Hurricane Katrina was very important in making New Orleans people realize the uniqueness and specialness of their culture. I think this place, for most of us, was a pretty horrible experience. It opened a lot of people's eyes up to many things. Some people stayed out of the city for good and did better, because there are a lot of issues and problems here. But some people realized that our culture is so unique that it is something to be treasured and that things like Katrina threatened it. And so it's partly the desire to learn a little more about the history of brass bands. I started a mentoring relationship with The Hot 8. For a couple of years, off and on, we had talks and workshops where I would show them videos of older brass bands, we would talk about the history of brass bands, we would talk about the purpose, the function, and the attire. We talked about songs, playing styles, musical characteristics, and then we practiced some of those concepts. We played three-part trumpet harmonies, which was lost because everyone's playing in unison. And that was one of the most beautiful things you'd hear in the brass bands were the three-part trumpet harmonies. It's beautiful. And two trombones playing riffs in the harmony and vamps in the harmony—just beautiful. And all of that's lost when you have fewer musicians—one trumpet or two trumpets, or even if you have three or four and they're all playing in unison. So that increased their traditional repertoire. . . . We had different concerts together, and we did an all-traditional jazz concert—probably the only time a modern brass band did an all-traditional concert. But it was tough because a lot of the characteristics that go into traditional jazz and brass bands, you have to work on that. It's different. Playing marches with those parts and those key changes is a very different concept from improvising off of one or two chords.²⁵³

The storm also provided a sense of urgency among the brass band musicians, the city's tradition bearers, to nurture the future of the music not only as a way of preserving the culture of the city, but also as a way of teaching values to children. Dr. White noted:

I think Katrina had a lot of different effects on brass bands. One of the things is it put more of an emphasis that we have a unique culture and traditions that are threatened and could be wiped away, and those traditions need to be saved and preserved. And I think that's the impetus behind Derek Tabb's work [with Roots of Music], and the fact that they're trying to get some younger kids to sit in with them and stuff. With my work with The Hot 8, I think we both realized the fragility of the tradition, and there was a coming together. And I just think that I see more and more brass bands crop up these days. I think brass bands have been such an important part of the cultural identity of New Orleans that brass bands represent a degree of normalcy for people. And of course you still see things like kids walking on the street, one or two kids coming from school playing a trombone, trumpet, drums, something. That's the influence of the tradition of the street parades of the brass bands. I think there is a spiritual cultural interest among young people who play in music.

I would like to see more knowledge of the music and traditional style because I think that the traditional style of music is one of the world's great musics of all times and I think that there's a lot of power in that. . . . Because in the traditional music there are a lot of social values as well that are important about teamwork, about professionalism, about individual development, about competition. Values that are clouded or even lost today. And I think the importance of the bands can never be overestimated. I think we have seen it in many ways. I participated in the first major brass band parade; it was like a jazz funeral that came after the storm and it was a massive jazz funeral for a lot of the fallen people and that was really sad and tragic thing. I've played several funerals since then that have been very powerful, like Doc Paulin's funeral, which was played in the same uptown neighborhood where he lived and we started a lot of parades.

²⁵³ Michael White, personal interview with author, June 28, 2011.

I think research, press, emphasis on brass bands, visibility for brass bands have increased [since the storm]. I think that's one of the reasons that brass bands are in the HBO show *Treme*. . . . Brass bands still tour around the world and are still popular. I think for some people the idea of a brass band represents the heart and soul of New Orleans and New Orleans music. It's where most people can have fun, get lost and abandoned, just let go. And that music, is even in the modern forms, it's joyous. It's happy. It's expressive. And it expresses a lot of universal passions and emotions. So there's a rawness to it, but there's also a realness and a purity to it that you don't find sometimes in other forms of jazz.²⁵⁴

Lumar LeBlanc, like many musicians, experienced a wide range of emotions when pondering life after the storm. “It was a two-fold thing for me with Katrina, a bipolar thing. On one side obviously, it was a horrible tragedy that affected us emotionally and mentally. But I can't lie—business-wise for Soul Rebels, we skyrocketed because of the exposure.”²⁵⁵ I asked if, six years after the storm, the Katrina window was closing for the band. “Oh no. It's on automatic pilot,” he said. The Soul Rebels are better off than they were before the storm. “Yes we are. Very excited,” Lumar added.²⁵⁶

Even the bands that were well established before the storm reported a big spike in the amount of attention paid to their bands. Rebirth's Keith Frazier remembered:

It was a big surge, especially people outside of New Orleans. They really wanted to know what happened. ‘Where were you? What can we do to help you?’ It was great that so many people reached out to us. We were just thankful that people were so concerned. Even today people still ask, “Hey man, what's going on in New Orleans? How's everything going?”²⁵⁷

But for all the good will outside of the city, the gentrification inside the city has created some problems for the brass bands. Frazier described how the Rebirth used to practice:

When we first started playing, we would march from the neighborhood, 12 midnight, and people would just come running out instead of saying stop! [They would] implore us like, ‘keep going man, just keep playing, keep playing!’ And that really gave us the courage like, ‘yeah man, let's do this man!’ And people just loved

²⁵⁴ Michael White, personal interview with author, June 28, 2011.

²⁵⁵ Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011.

²⁵⁶ Lumar LeBlanc, personal interview with author, June 17, 2011.

²⁵⁷ Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011.

that. It's a lot different now. After Katrina there was a noise ordinance. But back then we could play as late as we wanted to. People would just enjoy it.²⁵⁸

Frazier also noted an unexpected effect of the storm. Musicians weren't the only ones displaced:

It was an effect that we didn't plan for. People were dispersed everywhere, so when we hit Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, and even places in the north, because people from New Orleans were there we already had like a built-in crowd. We [normally] had 200 people coming to our shows, but now we had 600. Because they were displaced, anything that was coming through from New Orleans, they were going. They didn't care what the ticket price was, how late it was, or what day of the week it was. And so that was great for us because now those people from New Orleans who kind of took it for granted were saying, 'you know what? I think I'd better go listen to some of our own music.' It's still that way because a lot of people are still in Dallas, Houston, and Atlanta. They come out to the show, they don't care—[they] just wanna hear something from home.²⁵⁹

I put it to Frazier point blank. Did the storm help your band? "It actually helped the business, yeah," he said. "It made people more aware that New Orleans was something that you wanted to witness and experience and go see see. . . . It's still helping to this day."²⁶⁰

The school systems, however, are in trouble. The younger generation of brass band musicians don't learn on the streets of the Treme neighborhood like they used to. They come up through school music programs, especially marching band.²⁶¹ Frazier warned:

Schools that was the one thing that New Orleans had affected. The school system is having a very hard time coming back. The schools were going great before the storm but after the storm everything became a charter school. So you don't know a charter school from a recovery school from a public school. There are no music progressive schools. The schools are affecting the musicians. And so now you don't have the music programs anymore. Until they get that straight, it can actually choke off the musicians who wanna play in the brass bands. Cause there's no way for them to start out. After Katrina they dropped the music programs. It was like New Orleans has always had music in every school. Now not one school has a band. Every school had a marching band, football team, concert band, jazz band. And now it's maybe like two or three schools.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011.

²⁵⁹ Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011.

²⁶⁰ Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011.

²⁶¹ For more information on the post-Katrina school systems of New Orleans vis-à-vis music instruction, see Sakakeeny "Instruments of Power," 241, 252, 264-265.

²⁶² Keith Frazier, personal interview with author, June 22, 2011.

Conclusion

Immediately before Hurricane Katrina, author and musician Mick Burns tells us that the brass band scene in New Orleans was robust, musing that there were “probably more brass bands active in New Orleans than ever before,” estimating about 25 bands and 150 musicians involved.²⁶³ Nearly 10 years after the storm, the numbers are similar, if not somewhat augmented. A count of the brass bands appearing on WWOZ’s live music calendar for the month of April, 2015 shows 24 different brass bands with advertised performances. This does not include the handful of young upstarts that play for tips on the sidewalks near Jackson Square or on Frenchmen Street. It also doesn’t include the myriad of club acts that are very much like brass bands, but a bit smaller with slight variations in instrumentation. Jeffrey Hills confirmed the appearance of many new groups after the storm, calling it an “infestation.”²⁶⁴

The brass band tradition in New Orleans can survive at a basal level on second-line parades, parties, and funerals — it always has. However, the health of this industry has increased over the last 35 years, adding revenue streams that were a non-factor for brass bands prior to 1980, like clubs and media play (recordings, television, films, radio). The prognosis for the music is excellent. There are more second line clubs and festivals than ever before. City leaders documented their recognition of local cultural assets just prior to the storm, commissioning the 2005 Mt. Auburn Associates report “Louisiana: Where Culture Means Business.” The carnival season and Mardi Gras is now a well-oiled tourist machine, producing lots of work for brass bands each year with related parties and balls. Local media that covers the brass bands, such as WWOZ Radio and *Offbeat Magazine*, have used technological advances to broaden their audience. Hurricane Katrina amplified that media exposure logarithmically and on an

²⁶³ Burns, 4.

²⁶⁴ Jeffrey Hills, personal interview with author, June 27, 2011.

international platform. Brass bands became sought-after for tours. While once only The Dirty Dozen and the Rebirth had substantial work outside the city, now six or seven brass bands enjoy that popularity.

Although Katrina ushered in many new opportunities for brass band musicians, it also created some new challenges. The gentrification of the Treme neighborhood brought with it ordinances that prohibit live music. Donna's Bar and Grill, "home of the brass bands," closed permanently largely due to damage to the building from the storm. Donna's was the venue that bridged the generation gap between young and old brass band musicians. It's where the kids learned the style and the history of the music and also served as a communication center for obtaining gigs. The school system is a failed enterprise. Poverty is still rampant and violence is prevalent. Documents, photos, and other artifacts from the early history of the brass bands have been lost to the storm. Some musicians died, and some didn't return to New Orleans.

The greatest threat to the New Orleans brass band tradition is and will continue to be the city's inability to withstand a storm. The sinking and sliding bowl that is New Orleans faces danger from flooding, whether brought by rain, river, lake, or storm surge. As ocean temperatures continue to warm and precious wetlands erode, there is no doubt that New Orleans will see regular hurricane activity. If the city is to survive, it must confront these issues — building proper levees will only address part of the problem. If the city survives, so will the brass bands.

At great cost, Katrina provided some important lessons to the people of New Orleans. It removed the veil that hid levee quality, government emergency preparedness, and the arrogance of "the storm always misses us" and "we survived Betsy." Most importantly, it reminded New Orleanians of their cultural treasures and catalyzed a sense of urgency to protect them. The brass bands are stronger than ever and they will continue to parade — proud, joyful, and defiant.

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