

Places that Disasters Leave Behind

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In 2004 Orlando Florida was hit with an almost unprecedented series of storms and hurricanes. Within two months, Hurricanes Charley, Frances, and Jeanne hit, and Hurricane Ivan made a near miss. Billions of dollars of damage resulted from these disasters, and several dozen lives were lost.

It is tempting, in the case of extreme events, to either regard them as having no need of interpretation (that is, as simply given, material events shared by everyone), or as a kind of rare window on the workings of a community.¹ In this paper I want to examine the public construction of the meaning of the hurricane in Orlando, particularly as represented in reports at the time in the major newspaper, the *Orlando Sentinel*. I am especially interested in place-making, that is, the ways in which places gain or fail to gain meaning in times of stress. I will suggest that opportunities for place-making were lost in Orlando because of the frame the events around Hurricane Charley were given. Hurricane Frances, though, was treated differently in the Orlando press, and the discourse around the hurricanes of 2004 provides a contrast to the kind of rhetorical response that circulated during the disastrous hurricane season of 2005.

In the case of some disasters, community is reinforced, and the skills of place-making are exercised. The reaction to Hurricane Charley in Orlando, on the other hand, tended not to reinforce community, and tended not to contribute to place-making. While it is extremely difficult to measure sense of place or sense of community quantitatively, it is possible to make sense out of the interpretive tools people have at their disposal in a disaster. What comes out of all this, I think, is something I want to call “place-making imagination”. This is analogous to the

concept of “moral imagination” in ethics (Johnson). Our moral options extend as far as our imagination will allow. A person might boil the moral universe down to polarized options – fight or flight, kill or be killed, choose A or B – when in fact a more cultivated and aware imagination may have afforded other options, perhaps better ones than either polarized one. But where does moral imagination come from? Under what conditions does it have the maximum possible reach? And, do people bear moral responsibility for their lack of imagination? We might think about education, openness to otherness and difference, tolerance, and other virtues as contributing to moral imagination.

Place-making imagination is similar. Under what conditions can place be made? Only under those conditions in which it can be imagined. If the socially legitimated frame of reference for an event precludes such imagination, places end up emaciated. And if, as Foucault would argue, official discourse imagines heterotopic space, which establishes normative and heteronormative categories, the possibility of place-making imagination become slim. These places function on the most reductionist, individualist, and materialist terms because no other options can be imagined.

Robert Sack presents place-making as follows:

In not accepting reality as it is, we transform it through place-making. The transformations may be large-scale and continuous, or small-scale and infrequent. In place-making, we may create something new, or return to something that once was. Even if we want to keep things as they are, we still transform as we remove things that do not belong and prevent things from entering (Sack: 4-5).

Sack perhaps oversimplifies the issue – he does not consider the possibility of large-scale,

infrequent transformations such as disasters, and he tends to deal with philosophical analysis rather than rhetorical framing. However, his point is legitimate – there is a relationship between our imagination of place and the necessity or opportunity for change. Sack argues that “we can gain moral insight by confronting our geographical nature” (5). In a sense, then, he addresses the connection between place-making and morality. What we see in the example of the hurricanes in Florida in 2004, as well as Hurricane Katrina in 2005, is that we do not simply transform places into what we think they should be as a moral project. Rather, our moral and place-making projects become available to us as we relate place to discourse, that is, as we narrate the nature of place and the events that have gone into constructing or altering place. Sustained newspaper coverage of an event can contribute to the framing of a place, not merely through its inclusions but its exclusions.

Hurricane Charley hit the Florida peninsula late in the day on Friday, August 13, 2004. While its arrival had been predicted several days in advance, its fury surprised most people. It was upgraded from a category 2 to a category 4 hurricane just hours before it hit shore. It left 23 dead, thousands displaced, and billions of dollars of property destroyed. Everyone in the area was affected, either directly or through people close to them.

Understanding the nature of this disaster requires analyzing its representations. Hurricane Charley, I argue, was understood as a disaster for property rather than for community, despite the fact that people were killed and lives were disrupted. As a tragedy of property, the official institutional and media response in Orlando was to very quickly place it in an economic frame (as opposed to Ft. Myers, for instance, where the damage was more severe, and the displacement of people more serious). Events were framed in official terms, rather than community terms.

Individual help to others was discouraged both actively and by lack of coverage. One story, in fact, even pathologized the impulse to excessive help as survivor's guilt ("People suffering survivor's guilt often push themselves to the limit trying to help." (n.a. "Shock triggers emotional roller coaster")) despite the fact that there was little evidence of the excessive compulsion to help. There was, then, a double incentive to be passive - the tendency to highlight official specialization of responders, and an unofficial lack of place-making skills by relatively recent residents.

In Orlando there were few reported incidences of strangers coming together. While strangers would strike up conversations in restaurant lines (which could be prodigious, since so few were open - waits of 2.5 - 3 hours were not uncommon), there was little documented evidence in the media that people looked out for anyone but themselves. I asked a friend, a long-time resident of Florida, whether people in his neighborhood had helped their neighbors, and he snorted, as if the idea was ridiculous. He opined that the disaster had not been severe enough to necessitate such interaction.

The point is not that "Orlandonians did not help each other" - that would require a different kind of study than this, and in any case is probably not true. Rather, comments like this are what made me wonder initially how the print media constructed the disaster. They drew my attention to the relationship between personal knowledge and officially presented accounts of the disaster. It was clear that families helped others in their family, and friends helped friends. In some places, strangers helped strangers. And yet, even in those places, people I talked with mentioned feeling isolated. It would no doubt be possible to perceive a difference of community sentiment in different regions of the city. The observation I make about the relative lack of

community support is really a way of understanding the social construction of the disaster.

There was at least one person who made the *Orlando Sentinel* as “The Hero of Berwick Street” (P. Johnson). This person purchased two chain saws, and was going around the neighborhood clearing trees that had fallen, and in some cases had damaged property. What is interesting about this account is not the laudable effort of an individual, but that it was deemed noteworthy, and that the story reports it as if he was the lone gunslinger coming into town to clear out the riffraff (in fact, the story started with: “He might have resembled Clint Eastwood in a spaghetti western, packing six-shooters ready to save the town, except that he wore a Dave Matthews Band T-shirt, shorts and hiking boots”). In other words, this person’s efforts were understood as the actions of a lone hero, not as those of an individual responding to a community. His comment: "There are people sitting inside their houses and doing nothing," he said. "If you're able to help, I think that you should."

Despite his plea, most of the official media in Orlando encouraged people to do exactly the opposite. In spite of the occasional narrative of individual heroism, there was a kind of enforced and officially mandated passivity. If you tuned in to the radio or read the paper, the message you got was to do nothing. Do not touch anything, do not use the water, do not drive around unnecessarily. Do not eat the food in your fridge, do not do anything to make matters worse. Do not ask when your power will come back on, and do not question when those across the street get their power within hours after the hurricane, while you wait for days. The response to the disaster in Orlando might have been well planned, but one result of that planning was that people were generally discouraged from coming together as a community, and were in the process encouraged to isolate themselves and wait for professional help.

The *Orlando Sentinel* asked and answered the question of public involvement most directly in the title to a story: “Best Way To Help? Stay Out of the Way.” (n.a., “Best Way”). Most of the story discouraged public involvement by describing its rigorous requirements and making clear that “[t]he call for help is not an invitation to send garage-sale junk to the needy,” as if there had been any call for help at all, and as if the first thing potentially generous people needed to know was how to not be generous. The story did go on to add that if a person was willing to help, the best way would be to give money, turning a potential community-building opportunity into something much more anonymous and isolating (n.a., “Here’s How to Find Help”). The contrast to a story in the *Ft. Myers News-Press* (Ft. Myers was hit by the same hurricane) titled simply “List of Relief Efforts”² is quite remarkable – instead of discouraging donations and framing legitimate response as solely official, the *News-Press* story listed places that would accept a range of goods, and managed to portray government, local business, and community as equally mobilized and engaged. No single group was portrayed as the only or official solution to the problem, and the potential of community was not only recognized, but fostered.

Most of the stories in the *Orlando Sentinel* emphasized official help, whether local, national, or corporate.³ The stories of communities helping each other were almost non-existent. General Motors, for instance, was going to send gasoline-electric hybrid trucks, in a story that looked more like an advertisement than an actual news release (Smith). FEMA moved its office to Orlando, emphasizing the speed of federal response.⁴ The heroes were mostly official and corporate ones (Damron). What was missing in the *Sentinel* was a forum for the community to come together. While the *Sentinel* did run a “chat” blog, it was difficult to find, poorly organized,

not specific to the occasion, and hence little used. Compared to the *Ft. Myers News-Press*, there was almost nothing. The *News-Press* set up forums for a variety of topics, ranging from practical matters to discussions on questions like “Did you hide in a strange place?”, “What strange stuff washed up on your lawn?”, “What belongings did you choose to save?” and “Tell us about acts of kindness you saw.”⁵ In other words, the newspaper facilitated an active community, and contributed to place-making, rather than framing the events in official terms, contributing to further isolation among the people.

It is worth considering the tone of stories in the *Orlando Sentinel* in the days that followed, because this too contributed to the general lack of place-making. A story on Tuesday, August 17 began as follows:

Utility-company crews had restored electricity by Monday to half of the 1.5 million Central Florida residents who lost power in Hurricane Charley, but this success spawned new anxiety and envy among those still left in the dark.

"We've been hit heavy, and it seems like nobody's been out here," said Jane Sowers, a 41-year-old accountant and customer of Progress Energy Florida in south Seminole County (Tracy & Salamone).

Note the implication in these lines. The solution to the problems come from official sources (the utility companies), but those solutions were isolating and ended up being divisive. Abandonment meant abandonment by official actors, not by other people. This particular story has some context: there is a history of suspicion toward Progress Energy in the Orlando area (Winter Park had a referendum in the fall of 2003 in which they decided to drop Progress Energy

as the local energy provider⁶). But the beginning of the story establishes in the reader's mind that the solutions are economic ones, dealing with property relations, and that these solutions may not be equitable. Readers are set against other readers, and against the official problem-solvers, even as those official problem-solvers are put forward as the only response to the present crisis. The narrative of conflict is between active and passive agents - the official problem-solvers are ambiguous saviors - they rush to aid, but are perceived to violate principles of distributive justice. The response of the passive agents can only be verbal (the complaint) or emotional (the outburst), since their passivity has been already established. This narrative may sell newspapers (conflict always sells, as does emotion) but it does nothing to foster community or place identity.

In another example of official passivity, a new colleague found herself in a local hotel, because she was in the area for orientation to her new job. When the storm hit, the power went out. The hotel staff deemed it an "act of God", and as such, they refused to help the residents in any way. They did not even replace depleted emergency light batteries (surely an illegal act). There was no community, even a fleeting or virtual one, which the managers could see or which they felt they might have any membership in. Interestingly, the lack of power forced people into the lobby, where they exchanged news and rumors. It became the LNN: the Lobby News Network. People did, in fact, help each other with flashlights, food, and other necessities, but the opportunity for the staff of the hotel to be part of that community was not even recognized, much less acted upon.

While examples exist of this kind of official passivity, there are also examples of groups delivering material aid. Churches fed people who had been displaced, as well as workers. Disney offered to contribute to the hotel costs of employees who had been displaced. Banks and other

businesses helped their employees. And, there are many stories of neighbors helping each other. Official passivity does not mean that no one helped anyone, but that the disaster was constructed in such a way as to discourage or ignore those who assisted others in favor of officially mandated responses.⁷ When spontaneous communities did form in various neighborhoods, they formed in spite of the official construction of the events, rather than because of it.

In fact, we could take this a step further. Foucault argues that there are “other spaces”, heterotopias, which define liminality (e.g., the spaces inhabited during rites of passage) or deviance (Foucault). He imagines a heterotopia as an arrangement of existing space which serves to demarcate social order, and reinforce normativity. He argues that the heterotopias from past times, which he calls “heterotopias of crisis” because they are where people in crisis temporarily retreat to, are giving way to “heterotopias of deviance”, so called because they are more permanent spaces where a person’s very identity qualifies them for otherness. He does not, however, consider the possibility that the space itself moves, that is, that the physicality of space undergoes such a radical change that new discursive forms are required. But discourse does not appear from nowhere, and the changes in physical form amount to a simultaneous imposition of dystopia and heterotopia upon a previously familiar space. The dystopic space is the space of fear and uncertainty, while the heterotopic space is the space of imposed otherness, unfamiliarity, and lack of recognition. Foucault imagined the heterotopia as distinct from the utopia (and by implication, the dystopia), but disaster brings these together. The inscription of this new, liminal, temporary space has the potential to fulfill the fantasies of official narrators (as in Orlando), and reveal carefully hidden fissures and aporias (as in New Orleans in 2005). The fantasies may not be universally shared, of course, and the fissures may have always been apparent to those willing

to look, but the disaster necessitates a new official narrative, that can return things to order, or more likely, opportunistically create a new order.

By August 19, a few stories started appearing in the *Sentinel* which seemed to suggest there was community spirit and place-making imagination. Even these, though, need to be understood as something other than stories that encourage place-making. For example, a story titled “Generating Good Will” (Santich) seemed to be about a community coming together, but in fact was a story about the foresight of the (upscale) inhabitants in having purchased a generator for the community the previous year. The writer emphasizes the bourgeois comforts that these residents could continue to enjoy:

Super and Murray brought margaritas. Churchill Thompson whipped up shrimp in a garlic-curry sauce. Kelley Gangle baked her secret-family-recipe crumb cake. The next night it was Mediterranean pasta with calamata olives, chickpeas and chicken, a mixed green salad with feta and goat cheese, and hot-chocolate croissants for dessert. This -- while half of Orlando hunted for an open McDonald's.

There was also a column on August 19 that praised Orlando’s cohesiveness as a community. What was remarkable about the article was that not a single example was given of this community cohesiveness. The article echoed the received wisdom about disasters, which is that people come together and community is enhanced. As I have argued, even if this happened, the media’s construction of events supported a different conclusion. August 19 brought the first column about citizens’ donations, which had been organized by a radio station and local businesses (Curtis). Promotion of these charity efforts was a step toward place-making, but after five days of discouraging or ignoring such activities, it seemed a small contribution to place,

amidst the continuing stories of official salvation for passive citizens. When the *Sentinel* organized their hurricane stories on a daily basis (a useful thing to do), they subtitled August 22's coverage as "Neighbor helps neighbor as the recovery process continues."⁸ This was more than a week after the hurricane, when one might expect that the "hard" news had all been done, but even at that point, surprisingly few of the stories on the page bore the theme of community response (although some did deal with individual heroism or generosity, which is not the same as place-making).

There is another aspect of the tragedy which seems to contribute to overall passivity, and that has to do with the social construction of the event as essentially an economic tragedy. When the tragedy is human, it is much easier to come together as humans. When the tragedy is framed as one against property, though, especially in the US where property is seen as an individual attribute, it is more likely that people look out for themselves rather than each other. The assumption of economic exchange could be felt in Orlando even before the storm came. There were many radio and television stories on how to prepare for hurricanes.

One of the first and most persistent messages in the media was that price gouging would not be tolerated (Kennedy). People were encouraged to report those who they believed were raising prices opportunistically. Again the tragedy is put in economic terms rather than human ones.⁹ Specifically, it makes it into an issue of individual exchange rather than communal meaning. Price gouging is an affront to the individual, not to the group, and certainly not to any group that might form spontaneously in response to the tragedy. As well, since the tragedy was economic, a central fear was the disruption of the legitimate economic structures by "scam artists". It is noteworthy that the potential problem was given a higher profile in the *Sentinel*,

which framed the disaster as economic, than in the *News-Press*, which framed the disaster differently, as one of community rather than property (Dawson). And, there were many stories about the possibility of looting, even though these stories tended to be about fears of looting rather than actual reports of it (e.g., Mercado). Focusing on the fear of looters tends to create anxiety over one's property, and plays the economic values against community values. The message of the price gouging, scam artist and looting articles is that one's neighbors (or strangers in general) are not to be trusted, an attitude which hardly opens one up to the possibility of place-making in a time of crisis.

The economic nature of the tragedy is underscored by the speed with which officials "re-opened" Florida for tourist business (Jackson). While the governor made a pro forma statement about the need to "be sensitive" to those who had suffered tragedy, the message was that the real tragedy was economic, and the way out of it was to attract tourists. And, the need to be sensitive was interpreted economically by those on the tourist board: "Tourism executives agreed that it is important not to trumpet the state too loudly, in part because hurricane season is still under way and more threats could arise quickly and prompt the need for even more emergency ad spending later on." In other words, the real problem was not that peoples' trials might be trivialized by a rush back to economic business as usual, but that the effort could backfire if another disaster occurred. The economic again trumped the human.

It is worth noting in passing that the story in which Governor Jeb Bush spoke of being sensitive, he also made one of the only calls for community involvement that appeared in the *Sentinel*. The story ends with the sentence, ascribed to the governor, that "it is time for Floridians to 'roll up the sleeves' and help in any way possible." No details were given as to what kind of

help might be possible, and in fact, one would not be any clearer about this in any other reports in the newspaper or on the radio.

The political optics of the situation were not lost on some observers. 2004 was an election year, and Florida is a swing state, governed by the brother of the president. The question was raised in at least one story:

The Republican governor denied his decision to visit heavily Hispanic Poinciana was based on political calculations, though winning support in the area could be doubly important in the November presidential election. His brother President Bush and Democratic candidate Sen. John Kerry are wooing the crucial Hispanic vote, and Poinciana is part of the Interstate 4 corridor where both nominees are waging a fierce battle (Mariano).

The relatively low profile given to political issues in Hurricane Charley is noteworthy. The previous major hurricane which hit Florida, Hurricane Andrew in 1992, also came in an election year, when the previous President Bush was finishing off a first term and running for a second. Michael Salwen did a quantitative rhetorical analysis of stories at the local and national level to identify the kinds of sources used and the resulting stories that were told (Salwen). He was particularly interested in the relationship between local and federal bodies, and found a great deal of tension. Individuals, local, and state officials quoted in stories tended to praise other individuals or local or state officials rather than federal agencies (Salwen: 835). It is no surprise that Hurricane Andrew became a political issue in 1992, when there was a Republican president and a Democratic governor (Lawton M. Chiles, Jr.), and did not become a political issue in 2004 when the president and governor were not only from the same party but from the same family as

well. Instead of vilification of official sources of aid, the *Sentinel* depicted those sources as the solution to the problems that the hurricane created.

As perhaps befits Orlando, while the opportunity to create place was not taken, a kind of simulated place creation did occur. As one might expect when simulated places are concerned, Disney was involved. They had employees stay on site the evening of the hurricane, and they began cleanup immediately after the storm subsided. They managed to open three of the four parks the next day, only two hours late (at 9:30 a.m.). Many hotels in the area had been adversely affected. There is a kind of corporate logic to this - when everything else is closed, the place which is open can make a lot of money. There was also no doubt a human logic here as well - visitors had come from far away, paying a lot of money for their one week in the sun, and would be annoyed if some of that was taken away (or perhaps, pleasantly surprised if Disneyworld managed to open so quickly after a devastating event). But it is not the logic that I am interested in, but rather the image of devastation all around while the colorful fantasy of Disney remained intact. Disney truly must be the Magic Kingdom, it seems, to survive the disaster that laid low everything else in the area. And those who are drawn there (by all accounts, the park was packed) can withdraw from reality into fantasy, safely oblivious to the immediate tragedy and loss.

Understanding a disaster in individualist terms can be translated as psychological. Indeed, several newspaper stories framed it in those terms (Shrieves; Shelton a; Shelton b). These psychological accounts tended to frame the events in cause and effect terms – the hurricane caused a variety of stress-related conditions, and counselors were ready and willing to explain how to deal with these conditions. The reports tended to frame the human effects of the storm in

individual rather than in collective terms. But these psychological accounts of peoples' actions, motivations, and stressors obscure the ways in which place is made socially available. The issue here is to account for how those who have the power to make sense of the events do so, and how these meanings solidify power relationships between state and corporate structures and people in communities. The question is, is place made available in this dramatic set of events, and if so, how? And, given that a disaster is a form of Foucauldian heterotopia, how do official narrators take control of the public narrative about place, and create or fail to create places that are in the interests of those who live in the place. In this case, as I have argued, the narration was quite insufficient to the public imagination of renewed place. There were stories about peoples' reactions to the events (n.a. "Storming the Senses"), but only one of these stories had to do with community or place-making, and it was about patching up long-standing grudges while removing a fallen tree (Patterson).

The point of all this is that an opportunity for place-making presented itself, and was largely lost as the tragedy was constructed as an event to be handled by experts and to be thought of as primarily economic. One colleague mused that the difference between this event and the events of 9/11 was that 9/11 was far worse, in a way that forced people to rely on each other. That event had to be constructed as human, even though the economic loss was vast. This hurricane, bad as it was, was not bad enough in terms of the loss of life (certainly not as bad as the following year in New Orleans) to cause people to turn to each other. In fact, while there was a loss of property, another colleague thought that she noticed a kind of excitement in some people, as if the chaos was a welcome break in an otherwise boring existence.

The significance of disasters for place is in the way in which events make places

available, for better or worse. Dramatic events hold forth the promise of both showing places for what they are, but also of making new places available. This is why we memorialize dramatic events in material ways. We create places where there were none before, or where they have now become available. If the effect of Hurricane Charley will be memorialized, it seems clear to me that Ft. Myers will do that long before Orlando does. In Orlando it is more likely that, once peoples' lives have returned to normal and the city has been cleaned up, Hurricane Charley will be forgotten until it can be used as the yardstick for efficient official response at the next disaster.

Three weeks after Hurricane Charley, on September 4, 2004, Hurricane Frances appeared on the east coast of Florida. Frances was a much larger hurricane, with cloud cover the size of Texas and winds higher than Charley. It also moved much more slowly, which meant that the destructive force had longer to act over land. Florida state officials enacted the largest evacuation in the state's history in the days prior to Frances' landfall.¹⁰

The construction of this second hurricane was framed by the first. People were weary from the first - insurance claims from Charley were still being addressed, and a great deal of debris had yet to be cleared from curbs. Orlando in particular stood to take heavy damage a second time. In fact, Frances did not cause as much physical damage as Charley (the slow movement meant that the coast was hit much harder than Orlando, 60 miles inland), but with a weakened infrastructure, any more damage was too much. It is interesting to note the differences in the public construction of the second hurricane, and to theorize about why these differences may have occurred. Again, these reflections are not based on a sociological analysis of the responses of the public, but on an analysis of media sources in their construction of the second event.

There was a subtle change in the stories leading up to this second hurricane. The construction of the first hurricane was in anonymous official terms; in the second case, there was still a framing of the response as official, but officialdom started to have a face. In “City Workers Leave Their Desks to Pitch In” (Schleub), the response to the threat is shown to be more personal and more community oriented. The mayor urged individuals to help:

Mayor Buddy Dyer urged residents with pickups to help clear their streets of branches before Hurricane Frances can turn them into projectiles. Many heeded the call. By early afternoon, Schaefer said, nearly a hundred residents had dumped loads at just one of three collection sites the city has established (Schleub).

This plea, and its response, stands in contrast to the official framing of Hurricane Charley and the message that passivity was the best response.

As the disaster progressed, the difference in coverage in the *Sentinel* became more apparent. For one thing, the blog which was previously hidden and ineffective became a central feature of the website.¹¹ It contained stories by *Sentinel* staff about people and how they coped with the hurricane. There were fewer stories which framed the disaster in terms of property alone. People were not encouraged to remain passive, and fewer stories framed the response in solely official terms. While not many specific ideas were given as to how a person could participate, the picture of Hurricane Charley was one of a storm that had assailed the community as a whole, not simply individuals or their economic interests.

There were also some stories about communities coming together. “Bowling Alley Rides Out Storm” (Slewinski), for instance, profiled a local business that had a history of providing refuge for local people. “Bar Owner Bounces Back to Feed Fellow Islanders” told the story of

Patty McGee, who stayed near her bar and restaurant and was able to open when there was no other food available (Roy). While these stories were still relatively rare, they did exist.

There were still plenty of stories about property damage due to Frances, but it was notable that there was less emphasis on disruptions to the economic order, in the form of price gouging, scam artists and looters. It is particularly notable since more looters were reported after Frances than were reported after Charley. These activities were treated as actual crimes after Frances, rather than as abstract threats.

Why did the tone of the coverage in the *Sentinel* change from one hurricane to the next? There are some obvious answers to that. First, Charley was the first real hurricane Orlando had endured for decades. To some extent, the editorial staff had to learn how to report a hurricane to their own community. Frances came in Charley's wake, and it is quite possible that the news staff had time to reflect on the overall impression of the stories by the time they had to report on Frances. And, as one journalist for the *Sentinel* mentioned to me, both the staff and the public after Charley were suffering from "hurricane fatigue". Reporting on Frances under those conditions may have allowed some interpretive shift to occur.

But it is also possible that with the second hurricane there came a realization that place did matter, and that it was not well served in the earlier framing. Disasters do not just reveal place, depending on how they are understood, they give occasion for the making of place. But things are not quite so simple, because those narratives about place are not created out of nothing. We narrate place based on the kinds of individual or collective loss that is felt in a disaster. If peoples' roots are shallow in a community (as is the case in Orlando, where there has been explosive growth through an influx of people from elsewhere), then loss is understood in

terms of individual property. There are few places that have shared meaning, and therefore few that have shared loss. I may feel sorry if someone else loses their house, but that house was not meaningful to me in a direct way. If, however, there are public spaces, shared meaningful spaces that are lost, then we can narrate the loss together, and perhaps find a way to come together in that situation. Orlando is not devoid of significant places, but it takes work to find them, they are more easily simulated than created, and it is easier to report on individual, economic losses and official, corporate responses. After these easy stories were done, the more humane stories started to emerge.

Frances was not the final hurricane to hit Florida in 2004. Ivan¹² and Jeanne¹³ both went through, making 2004 the most active hurricane season to date for Florida. But the depiction of hurricanes became a national public concern in 2005 with the arrival of three hurricanes that achieved category 5 status at some point in their lives: Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and Mississippi, Hurricane Rita further west on the Gulf Coast, and Hurricane Wilma in the south of Florida. Especially with Hurricane Katrina, the rhetoric of hurricanes became a much more obvious political issue, as the inflections of race and class became foregrounded, and as the press took up a more traditional and (in recent years) forgotten role as crusader for the downtrodden. The fact that the hurricanes were understood in official and bureaucratic terms in 2004 meant that the absence of such a response in 2005 became all the starker. It was not just that FEMA had failed to respond to Katrina; it was that FEMA had been cast just the previous year as the efficient responder to hurricanes, as the seamless conduit of federal aid to the state and local level. Thus, the response to Katrina could not simply be seen as incompetence, inexperience or even cronyism, but had to be seen as having political overtones. Florida in 2004, a wealthy swing

state with a Republican governor in an election year, mattered more than Louisiana in 2005, a poor, largely black Democratic state in a non-election year.

What was more interesting, in comparing the disasters of 2004 in Florida and 2005 in the Gulf Coast, was the difference in the sense of place that accompanied the rhetoric. The places hit hardest were very different places in both the public and the local imagination. Orlando is highly transient, with most of the population being from somewhere else; New Orleans is a place where generations of a family live within the same few blocks. Orlando is associated with clean, family friendly tourism; New Orleans is associated (at least for some) with decadent tourism. But more importantly, Orlando is a place continually in search of itself, a place that has largely traded history for theme parks. New Orleans, on the other hand, is continually faced with its own well documented and celebrated past.

Place-making imagination was limited in each case, although in different ways. Disasters tend to oversimplify place imagination, as the need to act takes precedence over the need to analyze. In Orlando, though, the simplification of place imagination served to underscore the importance of federal aid, while in New Orleans the simplification of place imagination served to justify the absence of that aid. In New Orleans, the local and state governments were portrayed by federal sources as being incompetent, as not having asked for help. Local people were portrayed as self-interested and violent (even though later media reports of this violence were largely debunked). In Orlando the aid flowed in, while in New Orleans aid was slow in coming, and even when it was promised it was not delivered quickly. All of these depictions reveal a different kind of heterotopia from Orlando, one which could not easily be re-inscribed by an appeal to official and corporate sources. The disaster in New Orleans was far larger. But the

narration in the media took an interesting turn, as New Orleans in general and the Superdome in particular started being compared to a refugee situation. This thinly veiled reference to race (“refugee” rarely is applied to first world whites) established a narrative that was largely absent from Orlando’s situation a year earlier. The heterotopia became inscribed on and by the skin of the people, as the implication circulated that disaster might be the true and natural state for the people who could not leave New Orleans to avoid the storm. Place-making imagination in 2004 in Florida constructed official and corporate places, which served to render social actors passive; in 2005 in New Orleans, it constructed racialized places, which served to render citizens foreign.

In each case, though, the imagination of place became limited, as the crisis forced people to rely on what they thought they knew about the places affected. And this is the central problem in crisis situations of any sort – place-making imagination must be limited, in the interests of action. This is the lingering danger of disasters, that they can tend to solidify existing and problematic senses of place, making what is fluid and provisional into something permanent. In most cases, disasters pass, and places become complex again. But in a country that exists in the wake of terrorist attacks, the representation of a hurricane such as Charley can become metonymical, a small image of the larger limitations of place-making imagination. Places of terror come to pass through narratives of terror, that is, narratives that take the results of threat as a given, and construct places in response to that threat. So, when disaster strikes, the available narratives that can feed place-making imagination have already been limited.

Place-making imagination operates within existing narratives, but is not limited to them. Heterotopias that come to pass in the wake of disasters draw on previous ways of framing disasters. So, while there are surely differences between the hurricanes of 2004 and 2005, and

between these natural disasters and the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, these heterotopias share their narratives, transforming and adapting them for new situations. There is, then, the illusion of community cooperation even as passivity is reinforced in 2004, just as in the aftermath of 9/11 the responses were overwhelmingly framed as official and corporate. In New Orleans, on the other hand, the heterotopia is about the racialized other, mirroring the construction of us/them places, places of civilization vs. places of racially inflected squalor and dirt.

And these heterotopias become a kind of domicide (Porteous & Smith), not in a literal sense of the destruction of home, but in a narrative sense, as the disaster first takes the home away, and then the narrative reconfigures the space left, so that home is no longer possible in the same way. Place-making imagination, in this situation of domicide, must find ways to make discourse rich again, rich enough that the easy, misleading constructions of place cannot easily take root. This place-making imagination begins with alternate media accounts of events of this sort, and must necessarily include artistic, academic, and public attempts to counter the slippery move between heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation.

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NOTES

1.[E]xtreme events...are marked by “an excessiveness which allows us better to perceive the facts than in those places where, although no less essential, they still remain small-scale and involuted.” (Klinenberg: 23)

2.n.a., “List of Relief Efforts”, *Ft. Myers News-Press*, August 18, 2004 <http://www.news-press.com/news/weather/hurricane/stories/reliefforts.html>. For a full list of stories from the *Ft. Myers News-Press* on the hurricane, go to <http://www.news-press.com/news/weather/hurricane/index.html>

3.For all the Hurricane Charley coverage from the *Orlando Sentinel*, go to <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/weather/orl-charley-gallery,0,5070731.storygallery>

4.And, in contrast to the tension between state and federal bodies during Hurricane Andrew in 1992, local officials were quick to downplay divisions in favor of creating a single official response: "I think the response we received from state and federal officials has been very timely, very accurate and reliable," [County Manager Mike Herr] said. (Mahlburg)

5.<http://www.news-press.com/news/weather/hurricane/index.html>

6.One writer did make the connection, jokingly, between the Winter Park vote and the perceived slowness in bringing back their power (Thomas).

7.One story suggests that there was help between strangers, though, amidst reports of jealousy between those who have utilities and those who do not (Kunerth et. al.).

8.<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/local/state/orl-charley-gallery-day11,0,5835426.storygallery>

9.I am fully aware that this contrast is a problematic one for many, that in fact economic activity is the quintessentially human activity for followers of Adam Smith and others (to be human is to trade). I will stand by the contrast, however, since I wish to argue that framing the disaster in terms of property stands against other interpretive frames, and tends to undermine place-making in anything but the most limited sense. The point is not that property should be ignored, but that it should not be the framing principle.

10.For full *Orlando Sentinel* Hurricane Frances coverage, see <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/weather/orl-frances-gallery,1,2699972.storygallery?>

11.It is worth noting that the newspapers’ websites were an important source of information. “At OrlandoSentinel.com, traffic doubled Thursday and continued above normal throughout the weekend, said Anthony Moor, editor of the Sentinel’s Web site.” (Mendelsohn)

¹² **Error! Main Document Only.**For full *Orlando Sentinel* Hurricane Ivan coverage, see <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/weather/orl-ivan-gallery,1,2382534.storygallery>

¹³ **Error! Main Document Only.**For full *Orlando Sentinel* Hurricane Jeanne coverage, see <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/weather/orl-jeanne-gallery,1,4176215.storygallery>