LOCAL NARRATIVES:
AN APPROACH TO PARTICIPATORY PLANNING
IN COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION PROJECTS

A Thesis

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DEDICATION

To my parents and sisters
and in memory of my mentor, Matt Clark.

For showing me how to stitch a good story.
For wishing nothing but success along the way.

Then it hit me. "Loman Happenstance," I said, "what on earth did you ever make? Did you at any time fingerpaint or mold your Pa an ashtray for Christmas? Build a birdhouse in shop class or spray paint your best girl's name on the train trestle? Have you once cooked a good meal from scratch or sung Puccini in the shower? Surely some summer you lifeguard-tanned at the community pool or beer dizzy bunny-hopped your way around a Valentine dance? What have you made, Loman Happenstance, with your hands or your mouth or the waggling of your limbs? What's your momma got magnet-stuck on her Frigidaire that you can call your own?

Everyday I climbed the roof-top and marveled at Loman's masterpiece, wished that he might have stayed on a while longer. You see, I thought for a time that Loman had left mad at me for my attack on his artless life. Then, slowly, I began to realize the picture was changing, and it became obvious in leaves and blooms that Loman had left me with a gift of enormous faith and thanks. Maybe even love. Hopper's night diner was magically filling up with customers. They grew into a laughing crowd of nurses and gangsters and symphony conductors and firefighters and astronauts and telephone operators. Eventually, daylight overtook the diner and the people began to leave, going home in pairs and groups of four.

—Matt Clark, "The West Texas Sprouting of Loman Happenstance"

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores what can happen when planners and designers allow local narratives to inspire and inform all stages of community planning and design processes. Specifically, this paper suggests how local narratives can contribute to the ongoing revitalization efforts underway in Old South Baton Rouge, a historically significant, low-income, African-American community in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

A personal narrative introduces the subject matter at hand. Thereafter, each chapter is preceded with a narrative interlude to add texture to the ideas presented herein. Chapter two underscores the theoretical and practical relationship between place, memory and development, particularly as this relationship applies to planning methods and development practices for low-income neighborhood revitalization projects. Old South Baton Rouge is introduced in chapter three as an example of a community that has the potential to undergo a revitalization that is founded on local narratives. In chapters four and five the public process components of two in-progress revitalization projects in Old South Baton Rouge are assessed in terms of how well they utilize local narratives and to comprehend the current roles and values of local narratives, public participation and historical context. Chapter six seeks to highlight the potential roles and potential values of these factors in revitalization projects by giving examples of designs and plans founded on local narratives and by proposing plans for Old South Baton Rouge based on existing local narratives.

The conclusion asks planners to aim to define success in revitalization efforts within a given area not only by increased private and public investment and increased market values, but equally by the intangible: How many young children in distressed situations are afforded opportunities that help them achieve stability and success against the odds of their own personal circumstances? For the sake of longevity, and for the purpose of developing complex solutions for complex planning matters, this study suggests that revitalization efforts must balance market-

driven and people-driven approaches. Utilizing local narratives in public participation is proposed as a means to that end, and therefore, to viable, rich, lasting solutions for complex planning issues faced in urban revitalization projects.

CHAPTER 1: ALL MY GOOD INTENTIONS

Now the woman was old. And she had a daughter who grew up speaking only English and swallowing more Coca-Cola than sorrow. For a long time now the woman had wanted to give her daughter the single swan feather and tell her, "This feather may look worthless, but it comes from afar and carries with it all my good intentions." And she waited, year after year, for the day she could tell her daughter this in perfect American English.

—Amy Tan, The Joy Luck Club

A series of seemingly unrelated events and observations led me both to study landscape architecture and to this thesis topic. I never imagined that I would pursue landscape architecture as a career. I graduated from LSU with a Bachelor of Arts in English and a concentration in creative writing. I thought that after graduation I would work for a time, continue to write, and eventually pursue my Master of Fine Arts. Later, I would teach and write.

I am from a working class family, and I am a first generation American. Though I was reared in the United States, photographs, countless stories about India, and simply growing up in an Indian household have strongly informed the person I am. I've always felt that I belong to two distinct but often contrary places and cultures, and this is, in part, what sparked an early desire to experience and understand other places and cultures.

As a young girl in Baton Rouge I was always aware of a discomfort I experienced when in public with my parents. When I accompanied my dad in public, I felt my ears burn at the gawking he received in response to the turban on his head. If— in the supermarket, at school, in the mall, my parents spoke to me in Punjabi, their native tongue, I responded in English to alleviate any attention we might draw. I was always quick to speak for my parents, as not to announce their accents, regardless of the fact that they had college degrees and had resided in the US since 1968. It did not matter that a newspaper photo featuring my parents signing their citizenship papers is proudly preserved in a family photo album.

Having grown up primarily in Louisiana and having lived for three formative years in Delaware where I had been part of a much larger community of Punjabi-American[1] children, I later felt anxious to thoroughly experience someplace more diverse, more urban and "otherworldly". About a year before I graduated from LSU I made a commitment to myself to move to Manhattan. My sister lived in New York and had invited me to live with her. This seemed like a simple and exciting solution. When graduation approached and people asked what I was going to do, I answered, "I'm moving to New York." I had a plan. I was going to get a job writing ad copy and live and breathe New York City for a year before I applied to graduate school.

Almost immediately upon setting foot in the city, the thought of working for an advertising agency became unsettling. I could not stop asking myself, "Do you really want to make a living by selling people things they don't need? Is that a worthwhile way to spend your energy?" Saying I would work at an advertising agency was the safe answer I'd been giving to others and to myself. It was the answer that eased my parents' minds, as they could not comprehend why I would move to New York ("Now two daughters in New York?") or what I would do. English is not the straightforward degree that law or medicine or engineering seems to be.

I began wracking my brain, asking myself repeatedly, "What can I do?" and a light went on. If I wanted to eventually be a professional writer, shouldn't I understand the publishing world? I felt comforted that I might be touting books instead of tennis shoes or cosmetics or the latest and greatest prescription drug. Books were noble; I could feel proud saying I worked in publishing, and I would learn. Within one month of being in New York I was hired at Houghton Mifflin Company. I had had a very romantic notion of what working for a publishing house would be— good and

[1] My family originates from the state of Punjab in northwest India. Most Punjabis share a cultural distinction from the majority of Indians, who are Hindus. Punjabis are ordinarily practitioners of Sikhism. Historically, religious differences set Punjabis apart from Hindus in terms of a shared Indian culture. This cultural distinction absolutely exists within Indian-American households.

honorable. Probably the first lesson of my professional life was that, even in books, there are profit margins to be met. Naively, I had not imagined that I would be promoting such titles as The Singing Gynecologist.

I experienced diversity in a new way in New York. One afternoon on the subway I was struck by a conversation I overheard between a young girl and her mother. I was struck because they were both speaking in what I believe was Chinese, and when I looked around the train not one person was staring at the pair. This filled me with a sense of both envy and relief. I thought, "That little girl is so lucky that all eyes are not on her." I began to notice languages spoken all over the city— Spanish, Chinese, Russian. Nobody stared or seemed phased by the foreign conversations occurring all around them. In New York I began to feel comfortable in my own skin.

There was a K-8 school near my Hell's Kitchen apartment, and I frequently passed it during recess time. The playground was completely paved, and it was common to see students playing basketball, jumping rope, simply gathered to socialize. This never struck me as unusual. However, after I moved away I realized that, though the activities were familiar, the setting had been completely unfamiliar. The image of paved parks and schoolyards resonated in my mind. Even Olmsted's Central Park contains strong elements of urbanity. Not only were these spaces in complete contrast to the pastoral parks I'd grown up with, I also observed them in use far more frequently than parks I'd grown up using. In my memory, these paved parks are fully integrated into their urban fabric and into everyday life, rather than existing as distinct and separate entities. While in New York, I did not realize that my observations were impacting my view of place and my career decisions.

The principals that guide my life choices have always been intuition, gut instincts, and the conviction that I exist to serve a purpose. The need to make a positive impact on my surroundings has always tugged at my gut. It is not enough to simply consume space. Up to that point I had

been very lucky to have people and books and ambitions that imparted meaning in my life. In Manhattan I decided to take steps toward contributing to that cycle, rather than being the end of a line. I had an opportunity to volunteer for New York Cares when the organization sponsored its annual day of volunteer work in the city, and I thought this might launch my volunteer service.

On October 18, 1998 my sister and I went to Bryant Park and teamed up with the group we'd been assigned to work with. After taking the train into the Bronx, we spent the day planting flower beds, painting fences, and organizing the book storage room at an elementary school. I will never forget that day. During the subway ride home I felt as if I'd just been fed a home cooked meal. I felt utterly content. I was certain I would plunge into a life of volunteer service.

When we arrived at our apartment that evening there were several messages on the machine. We discovered that our very active, very healthy, very gifted mother had had an entirely unexpected and very severe stroke. That night we took a train to DC, as my parents were living in Northern Virginia.

My mom spent three months in hospitals and in rehab facilities. By February, she was home. My cousin generously spent that month living with my parents to help out. My sister took leave from work and left Manhattan to stay with her in March. Our dad was not in the position to leave his job, and my other two sisters were not in positions to set up camp at my parents' home. Because we had no idea how long my mom might be incapacitated, I decided to leave Houghton Mifflin and live with my mom as long as she needed someone with her. I will not lie; I felt disappointed to quit my first "real" job and to quit Manhattan.

In April I was in Virginia doing the volunteer service of my life, and I realized that the world is primarily designed for one type of person: fit adults. When someone you love is struggling and hurting in the simplest of activities, it is easier to jump in and complete the task for that person rather than to watch her struggle. My mom had been a seamstress her entire life. It was her gift to

eyeball proportions and patterns and to create garments with her own hands. As a child I used to watch her cut long yards of fabric in a straight line without ruler in sight, and her precision always amazed me. Because I did not want my once independent mother to resign herself to a life of dependency, I was determined that I would not simply do for her, but that I would instead aid her in her rehabilitation. I plunged in, and the experience I shared with my mom was powerful and enriching. I used to pray every night: "God help me to have the strength to help my mother help herself." This prayer became my mantra, the one meditation that lulled me to sleep each night.

After a few months I realized that I needed an external force to keep me positive and inspired. I had felt very satisfied after spending the day fixing up that school in the Bronx. I decided to volunteer as a tutor for Fairfax County. I met twice a week with a teenaged girl and helped her prepare for her high school diploma equivalency exam. Soon after, my supervisor offered me an opportunity to teach evening adult education classes to people who were studying to complete their high school equivalencies.

This experience lifted me. I worked with men and women from Peru, Colombia, Pakistan, Jamaica and Mexico, to name a few. My students were between the ages of eighteen and sixty-one. With all of our difference, I never felt discouraged that there may be communication difficulties. Instead, I was excited to interact with people of so many different backgrounds. Everyone was at different skill levels, but I tried to let the class to function as a community. I also wanted the students to have fun and to learn more than how to take a test. I had the notion that my students were all intelligent enough to earn their high school equivalencies. The equivalency exam was merely the means that afforded us the more unique and valuable opportunity to interact and learn from one another.

After eight months in Virginia I returned to Baton Rouge. I had new eyes. I began to notice racial inequities, particularly in the planning of public spaces and services. One place in particular

stands out in my memory. The first time I saw Expressway Park, it was desolate. Though I had grown up in Baton Rouge this park had been outside of my experiential realm. When it caught my attention I was struck that the city had put a park beneath the interstate. Who would want his or her child to play under a highway?

I did not have a car, so I learned quickly that Baton Rouge's public transportation system was unreliable and poorly planned, to say the least. The bus system, like Expressway Park, primarily "served" low-income African Americans. These observations, noticing the inadequacies of Expressway Park and realizing that I could not rely on a city bus to get me to a job interview, locked together in my mind as close relatives.

My earlier experiences collided with these newest observations about community planning and quality of life. This all began to ferment into something new and whole. I began considering landscape architecture as an option that might combine my interests. I knew that I cared for and enjoyed interacting with people, and I wanted to work to make a positive impact on communities. I knew I could not be content doing a job that did not serve people in some manner. I knew I wanted a career that would be creative and intellectually challenging. Finally, a more conscious attention toward the planning of space and place was surfacing. My experiences, my aspirations, and my passions— I thought these all might come together in the field of landscape architecture.

I think that at some point I want to teach; I know that writing is a must for me; but my most immediate goal is to work in community development. I am most interested in working to help people define and design their own community needs. I want to work in such a way that will initiate educational opportunities and economic growth benefits for community members, rather than exploit or displace them. This is the narrative from which my thesis is born. This is the bias from which I operate.

* * *

Speech is my hammer; bang the world into shape. Now let it fall.
—Mos Def, "Hip Hop"

What can happen when planners and designers allow local narratives to inspire and inform all stages of community planning and design processes? This thesis explores how planners and designers can, hand-in-hand with locals, lay a strong foundation for the entire planning process and especially for the implementation stages that follow. This approach is presented as an alternative to excluding locals from visioning and decision-making processes, but it is also considered in contrast to group workshop sessions that tend to be directed by planners and designers, rather than guided by locals. Specifically, this paper suggests that local narratives may contribute to the ongoing revitalization efforts underway in Old South Baton Rouge, a historically significant, low-income, African-American community in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

As it applies here, the term "local narrative" refers primarily to oral histories. However, local narratives exist in many forms. Local narratives encompass any forms that reveal a community's collective or individual memories and backgrounds, personal biases, personal histories, or personal fictions. For example, stories, photographic essays and albums, patchwork quilts, song verse, or poetic verse can all be forms of local narrative. The book Landscape Narratives explains that "Narrative refers to both the story, what is told, and the means of telling, implying both product and process, form and formation, structure and structuration. Narrative is thus a more comprehensive and inclusive term than story" (Potteiger, 3). Person-to-person interviews and conversations are closely related to the oral history form of local narratives, but they are distinct from local narratives in that they are the vessel from which local narratives can emerge and not the narratives themselves.

This investigation has evolved from my personal journey to satisfy both career ambitions and my spiritual and ethical belief systems; it has also evolved out of specific and particularly

formative experiences. The first of these experiences was a project I took part in during a 2002 fall semester community design studio at LSU. The project was a streetscape for Old South Baton Rouge. In our early data collection and inventory process we did not interact with locals on any level. This project had definite funding for implementation, but we only worked in partnership with Baton Rouge Green, the grant holder. Ultimately, we presented the project to Old South Baton Rouge residents, and I realized immediately that in this community design studio project we had eliminated the community and addressed only the design.

The following 2003 spring semester I took part in a regional design studio project to develop a strategy for reconnecting people with the Mississippi River and initiating economic development alternatives to the existing petrochemical industry in St. James parish, just north of New Orleans. Part of our early inventory process involved collecting oral histories. While the oral histories offered a rich and thorough understanding of our site, we never integrated the oral histories with either the typical site inventory data or with the planning and design phases of our project.

Meanwhile, I held an assistantship in the Sea Grant College Program. Sea Grant was embarking on a project whereby business owners in the lower Atchafalya Basin could market themselves as ecotourism providers by developing policies that would evaluate and redesign business practices that negatively impacted the Basin. Over the course of the semester I conducted research to create a catalog of existing businesses that could potentially fall into the "ecotourism" category. That summer, remembering the experiences with oral histories in my regional design studio, I asked if I could conduct oral histories with the Atchafalya Basin business owners whom I had been researching.

My supervisor was interested in engaging these people and particularly, she wanted to see them take ownership of a grassroots ecotourism campaign with the understanding that the Basin

needed to be conserved because it directly provided for their livelihoods. I was able to see that oral history project move to fruition, from gathering a basic understanding of people and their way of life to effectively motivating those same people to act. Ultimately, many of those business owners participated in developing and committing to policies that forced them to take an active role in conserving the Basin as a natural resource while simultaneously enabling them to market themselves as ecotourism providers.

These occurrences, in total, led me to investigate if and how, within planning and design professions, local narratives can be utilized as more than a tool for understanding and documenting history. Instead, can oral histories be an avenue for meaningfully including locals and their narratives in the community revitalization process? I am convinced that Old South Baton Rouge can be a living example of how participating in local narratives can benefit community revitalization efforts in low-income urban communities.

CHAPTER 2: THE MEANING OF TREES

For five centavos she delivered verses from memory; for seven she improved the quality of dreams; for nine she wrote love letters; for twelve she invented insults for irreconcilable enemies. She also sold stories, not fantasies, but long, true stories she recited at one telling, never skipping a word. This is how she carried news from one town to another. People paid her to add a line or two; our son was born; so-and-so died; our children got married; the crops burned in the field. Wherever she went a small crowd gathered around to listen as she began to speak, and that was how they learned about each others' doings, about distant relatives, about what was going on in the civil war. To anyone who paid her fifty centavos in trade, she gave the gift of a secret word to drive away melancholy. It was not the same word for everyone, naturally, because that would have been collective deceit.

—Isabel Allende, "Two Words"

In the fall of 2002 Baton Rouge Green brought a project to my community design studio at LSU. Baton Rouge Green had acquired a grant to implement streetscape improvements in Old South Baton Rouge, and they wanted our studio to present some plans to the community. The community members would then select a plan or aspects of several plans, and Baton Rouge Green would put the grant to use. Our major consideration was how to "beautify" Thomas Delpit Drive, a main thoroughfare in the distressed community. Our primary challenge, so we thought, was to design for very narrow servitudes and within a limited budget.

Our professor shared that in the past Old South Baton Rouge had experienced frustration with its neighbor, Louisiana State University, because the university so often put the community under a microscope, but rarely provided tangible services to the community in return. He boasted that this time they would be given all of the master plans, and Baton Rouge Green, through this grant, would be able to implement something actual. In other words, we had an opportunity to influence positive relations between the school and the community. We were allotted three weeks to complete the project.

My class was comprised of 12 students. Eight students were white-Americans. Three students were international Asian students, and I was the only Asian-American. All twelve of us

were from middle income to upper income families. Most of the American students considered the area along Delpit to be a hopeless "ghetto," and many of the students felt that a streetscape project for a "ghetto" was a waste of time. The fact that we were allotted three weeks to sweep through the project, so that we could spend five weeks on our purely hypothetical final project only helped to reinforce this attitude.

Perhaps they were correct. Perhaps we were wasting time. But perhaps we were missing the point entirely, and in turn, passing up the opportunity to be thoroughly engaged in a more "real-world" project. The project had definite funding behind it and certain plans for implementation, yet in this community design studio, we did not actually meet with any community members until the evening of our presentation. Maybe our professor thought our job was to "wow" them.

That night, at the Leo S. Butler Community Center, we learned a few lessons. First, we, very obviously, were visitors in someone else's community. The community members did not have a clear understanding of why we were there, or what we, strangers to them, could possibly offer. And why should they? We had never asked to explain our intentions or to ask for their input in the first place. As a result, we were last on the meeting agenda, and we were greeted with some degree of skepticism. Another lesson we learned: the community members were hesitant to plant more trees in their neighborhoods. Whether perceived or real, they believed that the city did not attend to trimming their trees as they did in neighborhoods with higher incomes and white residents. The community members viewed trees as a maintenance issue beyond their control, either because of income or capability (most of the people in attendance were elderly folks). This might have been an important issue to address prior to designing for Thomas Delpit Drive.

This project had been so exciting to me, initially. It was the first project that spoke directly to my interests in landscape architecture. I had looked forward to contact, dialogue and interaction. If I were to hire an architect to build my home, I would expect that architect to speak to me, to be

familiar with my needs, my habits, and my wants before she or he created a design. Instead of taking that approach— one so often preached to us as students, we skipped it entirely, and neither professor nor students questioned this method. After all, we only had three weeks. In phase one of the cherished "design process" we took photographs, we measured servitudes and sidewalks, we noted existing plantings; we conducted a typical site inventory. We never thoroughly understood the place or the people who would inhabit our designs, nor did we bother to ask for their input. We relied almost entirely on land surveys and assumptions.

As a result, some areas along Thomas Delpit actually were "beautified." It is commendable that Baton Rouge Green later coordinated enough student volunteers to implement plantings around bus stops. As landscape architecture students we are told repeatedly that we should do more than "decorate" with plants. Yet, this notion was tossed out of the window when an educational opportunity arose to practice beyond decorating. My disappointment is that our project minimized "real-world" issues. We did not address trust issues, the capability of residents to maintain the plantings, the issue of generating ownership and motivation and finally, a means to maintain a new community asset. The short-term class project served as a lovely, but temporary, band-aid for Old South Baton Rouge.

* * *

Human beings desire to participate in a world that validates their own image of self-worth.
—Mitchell Duneier, Slim's Table

To thoroughly explore the role local narratives can play in community revitalization projects, I will begin by underscoring the theoretical and practical relationship between place, memory and development. According to anthropologists Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, "the sense of place and embeddedness within local, mythical and ritual landscapes is important. These senses of place serve as pegs on which people hang memories, construct meanings from

events, and establish ritual and religious arenas of action" (Landscape, Memory and History, 3). This very process guides and establishes heritage within place. Additionally, Stewart and Strathern explain that "heritage and development are brought into alignment" when planners insist "that the needs of heritage be recognized prior to a particular development taking place". They go on to say: "What was at one time 'development' may later become 'heritage'" (Landscape, Memory and History, 229). What these anthropologists successfully convey is not only the relationship between place, memory and development, but also exactly how academic theory and "real-world" practice can and should intersect within planning and design professions.

Given that place and memory converge to form heritage, and given that heritage evolves cyclically— often in response to development projects, we must review how the design and planning of development projects occurs today and if development projects currently address heritage in a way that is beyond superficial. Specifically, I am interested in how heritage, in the form of local narratives, is incorporated into community revitalization projects for low income urban neighborhoods.

In my first semester of graduate school, my studio professor diagramed the design process on the chalkboard. The first part of that process was site inventory and site analysis. At the time, these terms held no meaning for me. However, I have come to understand site inventory and analysis as the basic foundation for most design and planning projects. In the case of community development, June Manning Thomas has written, "some texts suggest that the kind of information systems necessary for neighborhood planning include demographics, history of the neighborhood, land use information, housing quality, and so on. Such texts seldom explain how planners and community leaders can use localized historical information about the neighborhood or the collective memory of residents to prepare for action" ("Neighborhood Planning: Uses of Oral History," 51). This is not to say that demographics and land use information do not have a foundational role in

community development projects, only that local narratives should also play a fundamental role. To make this case, consider the shortcomings of mapping as a conventional form of inventorying and analyzing place.

> While maps have traditionally been regarded as 'objective', and mapping considered as a scientific exercise of accurately describing the 'lay of the land', more critical analysis of maps recognizes their cultural subjectivity. Representations of landscape are culturally determined, dependent on who is doing the 'seeing'. But in mapping this cultural understanding of the world (the perception of the map-maker), what is recorded on the map is justified and legitimized while also influencing and reinforcing what is seen (or not seen) in the actual landscape (Smith, "Landscape Representation," 72).

Just as mapping is not a truly objective form of surveying, neither can we assume that local narratives offer objectivity. However, the incorporation of local narratives into the site inventory and analysis phase of community revitalization projects does offer the inclusion of subjective information that subjectively differing surveys and maps do not convey (because of who is doing the 'seeing'). Accounting for varied perception by using local narratives in the site inventory and analysis phase of such projects, by far, provides a richer contextual understanding of a site than that understanding obtained only through conventional means. "Stories link the sense of time, event, experience, memory and other intangibles to the more tangible aspects of place. Because stories sequence and configure experience of place into meaningful relationships, narrative offers ways of knowing and shaping landscapes not typically acknowledged in conventional documentation, mapping, surveys, or even the formal concerns of design" (Potteiger, Landscape Narratives, ix). Finally, participating in local narratives in the early phases of the planning and design process not only results in much richer, more culturally authentic and more welcome planning and design strategies, it begins to create trust among a local base of people. According to Jesse Wiles, principal of Asset Property Disposition (APD), a firm that specializes in

neighborhood strategy planning, “very seldom is a plan implemented if there isn’t a meaningful community engagement” (Wiles, 3-21-05).

Having focused in on the use of narratives in the inventory and analysis stages of design and planning in development projects, it is valuable to make note of the development process from a broader perspective. For both low income urban development projects and otherwise, there is a real dollars and cents mentality that guides growth. Reinvestment, both at the commercial and residential level, is essential to any revitalization project. However, if it can be said that designers become overly focused on the cosmetic aspects of development, it can also be said that, in courting investors, planners become disproportionately focused on raising property values of homes and, for example, bringing restaurants to the neighborhood as the essential means to revitalization. In comparison, planners focus less on components that address resident fears and components that give rise to residents as essential means to revitalization. Jane Jacobs has commented on place-making and American cities: “Talk has changed, but regulations haven’t; lending systems for these things haven’t changed. The notion…of the shopping center as a valid kind of downtown has taken over. It’s very hard for architects of this generation even to think in terms of a downtown or center that is owned by different people with different ideas” (“Godmother of the American Cities,” 132). Frankly, it is a far greater challenge to develop and implement strategies that create shared ownership by a number of different people who have different ideas. These factors are also more difficult to quantify when measuring success; perhaps this is why lending systems have not changed. After all, the proof is in the pudding, and such accomplishments as commercial businesses and increased home values give rise to visible signs of change.

In fairness, it is impossible to direct community revitalizations without sound design and committed investors. Often, in the case of distressed urban communities, investors bring essential,

formerly non-existent services such as drug stores, supermarkets or fuel stations— the kind of basic access that financially stable communities take for granted. However, successfully revitalizing a community involves more than building beautiful buildings and landscapes or merely creating fabulous shopping centers. Instead, successfully revitalizing a community also involves place-making that renews people's lives and living experiences by building upon local assets and those unique aspects of the community that give it a distinct "flavor."

Further, successful revitalization should carry with it prospects for existing residents to develop skills that help them contribute to and succeed in their revitalized neighborhood. More simply, revitalization that aims to create shared ownership by different people should both attract new investment and generate new opportunities for those already in the communities it seeks to revitalize. Generating new opportunities must involve residents so that local ownership, both literal and figurative, will result. Arguably, approaching revitalization from a market standpoint alone serves merely to shift community decline and poverty to other areas of a city.

Stewart and Strathern have written that "people live in places and communities; they also find a wider field of life and imagination in the landscape that places and communities inhabit. The idea of landscape points to life-worlds, their potentialities, their conflicts and their deep associations with feelings of identity" (Landscape, Memory and History, 236). How then, do designers and planners strike a balance between addressing practical considerations and aiming to create "life-worlds"? Partaking in local narratives in the early stages of the community revitalization process offers the opportunity not only for achieving balance, but also for achieving a complex depth of understanding that will contribute to deeply meaningful and successful, multi-owned community revitalization projects that residents will both carry through to implementation and sustain after implementation has occurred.

As the inventory and analysis phases and the investment climate of community revitalization projects traditionally do not involve local narratives or some form of meaningful public process, it is important to have a basic understanding of the conventional public process that is typically utilized, including its history and its current standing in design and planning. With this knowledge we can begin to ascertain how local narratives might enter the public process in the earliest phases of community revitalization projects and how, in turn, the public process might evolve throughout.

In an article entitled, "A Refrain with a View", Randolph Hester has traced the history of participatory design. It is a very American approach, one that stems from deep rooted ideologies that emerged at "the inception of the nation" (Places, 14). This notion is easily given basis when one considers our earliest history and that "…the Constitution's First Amendment grants not only freedom of speech but also the right to peaceably assemble and the right to petition the government to redress grievances. These rights, along with those embedded in the Tenth Amendment, which empower states and the people, protect local participatory activity" (Hester, "A Refrain with a View," 12).

However, the contemporary execution of participatory design lacks the results that it has the potential to offer. According to Hester, the role of participatory design and planning shifted during the 1800s when "the inability of elected officials to deal with increasingly complex urban problems and widespread corruption led to calls for local government reform" ("A Refrain with a View," 12). Initially, day-to-day operations in cities were managed by elected officials, and civil plans were developed and executed by voluntary efforts supported by local officials. For example, settlement houses played important roles in handling urban sanitation issues, and promoting healthy outdoor spaces. Ultimately, the responsibilities of city management grew, and volunteer efforts could not maintain urban growth issues alone. As a result, city management had to

"professionalize city management," thereby separating citizens from decisions about their own local environments ("A Refrain with a View," 12).

It was not until the late 1950s and early 1960s when "issues of racism and poverty unimagined by the authors of the Thirteenth Amendment exploded into the American consciousness" that participatory community design awoke from its slumber (Hester, "A Refrain with a View," 15). Hester further explains that, "Plans for urban renewal and freeways in low-income black neighborhoods became the focus of civil protests and local participatory design" ("A Refrain with a View," 16). At this point, participatory design evolved into advocacy planning, a kind of inclusive planning process that sought to bring forth just city and community planning by encouraging the vocalization of oppositions, concerns and desires through an inclusive visioning process. "This new approach to planning embraced disorder to achieve justice, forever changing American city design" (Hester, "A Refrain with a View," 16).

Today, community participation is oftentimes merely a condition of politically correct planning. In Wiles' experience, when clients ask for public process, often they actually are referring to careful public relations, because engaging in a meaningful public process is too challenging (Wiles, 3-21-05). Additionally, budgetary and time constraints are real factors that hinder public participation. Generally, public involvement today occurs in the form of a limited number of community workshops or charrettes. Rather than embarking on participatory planning and design in the spirit of seeking complex solutions to complex design, planning and people issues, it is embarked on in the spirit of obligation, or it is avoided all together. Donlyn Lyndon has written:

> …participation in design, once seen as an avenue for the creation of opportunity, has often dissipated or been co-opted into paths of obstruction, confusion and neglect. Participation, to be effective in the construction of places, must be directed and energetic; it must be infused with strong and effective ideas about design possibility and the willingness to engage, rather than to avoid, conflicting views.…It requires real engagement in the design

> issues at hand; it cannot be reduced to the routine processing of information or a means of venting community frustration (Places, 3).

Some may ask, why utilize participatory design and planning at all if it is so ineffective today? RKG Associates is a firm that works to apply real estate principles to urban issues and planning. As Russell Archambault, principal of RKG, explains it, a successful community revitalization strategy melds physical planning, market planning and social planning. These are not all equal forces, but the weight of each depends on what conditions are most impacting a community. While a revitalization strategy might address all of these issues, it could fail completely if people don't "buy-in" (3-22-05). Particularly in the case of low income, urban revitalization planning, public trust and involvement in the process is essential, and participating in local narratives early on can build that trust, generate fresh planning and design strategies and motivate sustained involvement. It is when people "buy-in" to a strategy that it moves to implementation. Additionally, Archambault explains that, while all sectors of the community need to trust and participate actively, more often than not, it is the grass roots folks who will champion a plan and influence what higher political leadership will actually do with a strategy (3-22-05).

Therefore, a more appropriate and more vital question to ask is: How do planners, designers and clients move toward practicing effective participatory planning, with real purpose and to achieve viable solutions? If the desired result of participatory planning today is not justice— or not justice alone, what are the desired results? At a very base level, one desired result is for the client to receive a plan that is both implementable and therefore, effective in generating revitalization. Another desired result is to produce stable, thriving, diverse ownership of communities. Perhaps desired results also lie in less tangible desires, such as fulfilling the practice of a fundamental belief system upon which our own nation was founded. Perhaps the desired results lie in moving toward place-making as a solution for creating "life-worlds" and not merely

communities as shopping centers? Perhaps these goals are all one and the same. After all, didn't our predecessors, through the union of physical planning and directed social policies, set out to create new "life-worlds" in the thirteen colonies?

In aiming to construct "life-worlds," engaging in local narratives offers a revised and purposeful, albeit more time consuming and more expensive, approach to traditional participatory design. As stated earlier, the term "local narrative" is not limited to oral histories and face to face interviews. Instead, local narratives exist in the form of stories, photographic essays and albums, patchwork quilts, song verse, poetic verse, or otherwise. For example, as mapping is typically a narrative exercise in subjective representation from the eyes of community outsiders, asking residents to participate in mapping exercises can produce a local narrative. In this way, a wider public is involved in viewing place through a wider lens. Ultimately, narratives are implicit in our everyday surroundings. To comprehend the inherent validity of narrative in relationship to place-making, consider tangible evidence of narrative in design. "Narratives can reside in very ordinary forms, routine activities, and institutional structures. Behind the uniform setbacks, heights, and materials specified in standard zoning and building codes are social narratives of progressivism and countless adjudications of what determines health, safety, and welfare" (Potteiger and Purinton, Landscape Narratives,19).

Local narratives, both as a concept and a product, may seem to rest more obviously in the professional realms of anthropology and history. However, professional practice, particularly in the design and planning fields, should strive to make multi-disciplinary connections to generate place-making that is market-driven and people-driven, and therefore, more complex, textured and meaningful. Utilizing local narratives in community revitalization projects can actively engage what is conventionally a documentary product. We readily accept the value of economics as a tool for guiding planning, but it has been written that "… we are just beginning to tap the potential uses of

history as a tool for informing and guiding difficult problems in contemporary urban planning in a way that moves beyond description and toward prescription" (Thomas, "Neighborhood Planning," 50). The approach Thomas describes embraces the notion of heritage as a necessary consideration in development, and this approach collaborates with heritage in an authentic and people-driven way.

This chapter aims to put issues of planning and design into a context that builds a case for the need to develop a fresh, intentional approach to community participation in urban community revitalization projects. A revised approach should recognize the needs to merge social heritage and social practicalities (including economic or market forces); address authentic, as opposed to superficial, methods of engaging residents in every stage of the neighborhood design and planning process; and define a relevant purpose for participatory design. I propose that these goals can be achieved if planners participate in local narratives as a problem solving technique. The question to address now is: Exactly how do planners and designers engage in local narratives, and to what end? Old South Baton Rouge provides a living example of the possibilities that exist to incorporate local narratives into the planning process; as well, it offers hope for the best possible outcomes.

CHAPTER 3: ROLLING HILLS, PLANTATION VIEWS, WALKING DISTANCE TO DOWNTOWN

in the inner city
or
like we call it
home
we think a lot about uptown
and the silent nights
and the houses straight as
dead men
and the pastel lights
and we hang on to our no place
happy to be alive
and in the inner city
or
like we call it
home
—Lucille Clifton, Good Woman

In January of 2000, newly returned to Baton Rouge, I was seeking employment that would make sense based on my past job in publishing and my experience teaching adult education courses. To make ends meet while I searched for a job, and also to test the waters of teaching children, I applied to work as a substitute teacher.

I got a week-long job at an elementary school teaching a class of first graders. The class was composed of, as was the school, predominantly underprivileged, African-American children, and there were almost thirty students in the classroom. At the end of my first day the principal pulled me aside to ask how my experience had been, and presumably, to see if I would last for the entire week. I proceeded to tell her about two little girls who had been particularly obstinate throughout the day. I also shared that I was astounded to notice that at this elementary school, unlike my own public elementary experience, the fourth and fifth graders demonstrated no protective regard toward the kindergarteners and first graders. Rather, the older kids interacted with the younger kids as if they were equals. Clearly, it was "every man (every child) for himself,"

and I had a hard time comprehending why, instead of a protective instinct, this survival mechanism was being passed from the elder to the younger children.

To help me put the coming week into perspective, the principal told me about the two first graders who had spent the day trying my patience with disrespect toward their classmates and me. I can literally still envision their faces and remember both of their names: Jordan and Jazz. After speaking with the principal I learned that Jordan was living with her mother in a battered women's shelter. And the other little girl? The principal informed me that the very weekend before that eye-opening Monday, Jazz's father went to her birthday party and pulled a gun on her and her brother. The principal told me, "These are the kinds of challenges we are dealing with."

My experiences as a substitute teacher taught me a vital lesson that has never been conveyed during my landscape architecture studies or during my limited experience in community revitalization efforts. Approaching urban revitalization efforts for distressed communities with the goals of attracting investors, increasing property values and accomplishing physical improvements is overly simplistic. What meaningful success are planners and designers achieving if we primarily serve to revitalize by attracting investment? What if the success of revitalization efforts is measured both by soaring property values, and by the number of young children who gain access to external opportunities and stability that help them succeed against the odds of their own personal, internal circumstances? The lesson I learned is that, even if— maybe especially because, their parents might be dealers, junkies, abusers, the abused or simply unproductive members of a community, young children like Jordan and Jazz should stand to benefit in meaningful ways from revitalization efforts, not only suburbanites transformed to urbanites.

The only way these kinds of children stand to benefit is if planners, designers and their clients understand the specific context of these children's situations— not merely that they are poor, inner-city children, but instead to understand that they face challenges, even at age six or

seven, that community revitalization efforts must address in order to be holistically successful. I realize the practicality of market-driven revitalization efforts, but for the sake of longevity, and for the purpose of developing complex solutions for complex planning matters, revitalization efforts must balance market-driven and people-driven approaches. Acknowledging an issue lays the groundwork to address that issue. To be people-driven, planning and design processes need to acknowledge particulars and not generalities, and this can begin with acknowledging history and social context.

* * *

Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake. But we aren't afraid. We know the guy with the crooked eye is Davey the Baby's brother, and the tall one next to him in the straw brim, that's Rosa's Eddie V., and the big one that looks like a dumb grown man, he's Fat Boy, though he's not fat anymore, nor a boy. All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakety-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That's how it goes and goes.

—Sandra Cisneros, The House on Mango Street

Like many other urban African-American communities in the US and particularly in the South, Old South Baton Rouge is in a state of decline, and it has been heading in this direction for decades. Because so many urban African-American communities have a shared history, we often understand these areas in their most global and abbreviated terms: What once was a thriving black community, what once housed vibrant commercial strips with locally owned shops, what once acted as centers for cultural and social life, has somehow been on the decline since the late 1950s. Often, in the name of urban renewal, a contested interstate highway cut through the community, creating both a physical and social divide. Often, the rise of integration has led to the ultimate demise of African-American owned businesses that thrived in these communities during legal segregation. As African-Americans gained access to commercial districts, the black-owned

neighborhood mom and pop shops became less frequented and eventually closed down. All of this is true of Old South Baton Rouge.

If the basic story is always the same, is there any need to delve further into history to attend to revitalizing such communities? Can successful revitalizations be realized if the communities at hand are gauged only in the most historically general terms? For example, is it wise to define Old South Baton Rouge merely in its context of a southern, urban, African-American community? Is it worthwhile to repeat a story that is told of countless communities across the South, or is it essential to delve deeper than the generalized context? Any community, but especially one on the verge of recovery and renaissance, deserves to be understood in its most complex and deep-rooted terms, in its regional context and in the context of particulars local to the community. If we only view Old South Baton Rouge through general perceptions of history and current context, we would ignore the fact that there are pockets of stable, middle to high income families and homes in the community today. There are also patches of stable, kept homes scattered amongst the worst segments of the community.

As firms like RKG Associates and APD are seeing more and more calls for neighborhood revitalization strategies in southern cities in recent years, it becomes important to address these questions (Wiles, 3-21-05; Archambault, 3-22-05). Equally, it becomes important to address issues of regional identity:

> It is difficult to walk around most southern cities today without wondering what is distinctive about them. Skyscrapers gleam and shimmer as they do elsewhere, and shopping malls pop up in the places you would expect them to, with the same shops that populate malls in Minneapolis or Portland. New subdivisions arise out of distinctive red clay or black loam, but they bear the same English-sounding names and, sadly, the same porchless, generic architecture as elsewhere…one has a sense of loss as the South moves ever closer to resembling the rest of homogenized America" (Goldfield, Region, Race and Cities, 12).

At a time when distinctive regionalism is dwindling from neighborhoods and cities alike, it is all the more imperative to incorporate what can be gleaned from local narratives into active and tangible community revitalization practices.

Old South Baton Rouge, bounded to the north by Louisiana State University's campus, to the south by downtown Baton Rouge and Interstate 110, to the west by the Mississippi River, and to the east by Interstate 10 and City Park, has a long history. This history contributes even to contested agreement upon the community's actual boundaries. How does one recount a history that has been documented piece-meal? And how does one convey the nuances of such a history? Does one begin at the beginning, a time for which the least is known? By moving from present to past? Or should history be revealed in fragments, such as it has been documented? Is it possible to reveal the community's proudest days and move forward from there— or backward, or in whichever direction those proud days guide me? To better grasp how local narratives can serve both as a basis for and as vehicles for community revitalization efforts, perhaps the best approach to conveying Old South Baton Rouge's history is to establish its particular significance to a variety of civic levels. That is to say, it is important to acknowledge that Old South Baton Rouge's history has contributed both to local progress and to accomplishments that are farther reaching than the neighborhood level or even the city level.

Some of Old South Baton Rouge's significance has been captured through the McKinley High Oral History Project. Pamela Dean, former Director of the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History at LSU, has explained that "Since the summer of 1995, groups of young people have been doing oral history interviews to learn about the people and institutions of this community, to fill in the gaps in the written record, and to ensure that those memories are not lost" ("Visions: The Soul and Spirit of South Baton Rouge Churches," i). Dr. Petra Hendry spearheaded this project as part of a partnership between LSU and Old South Baton Rouge.

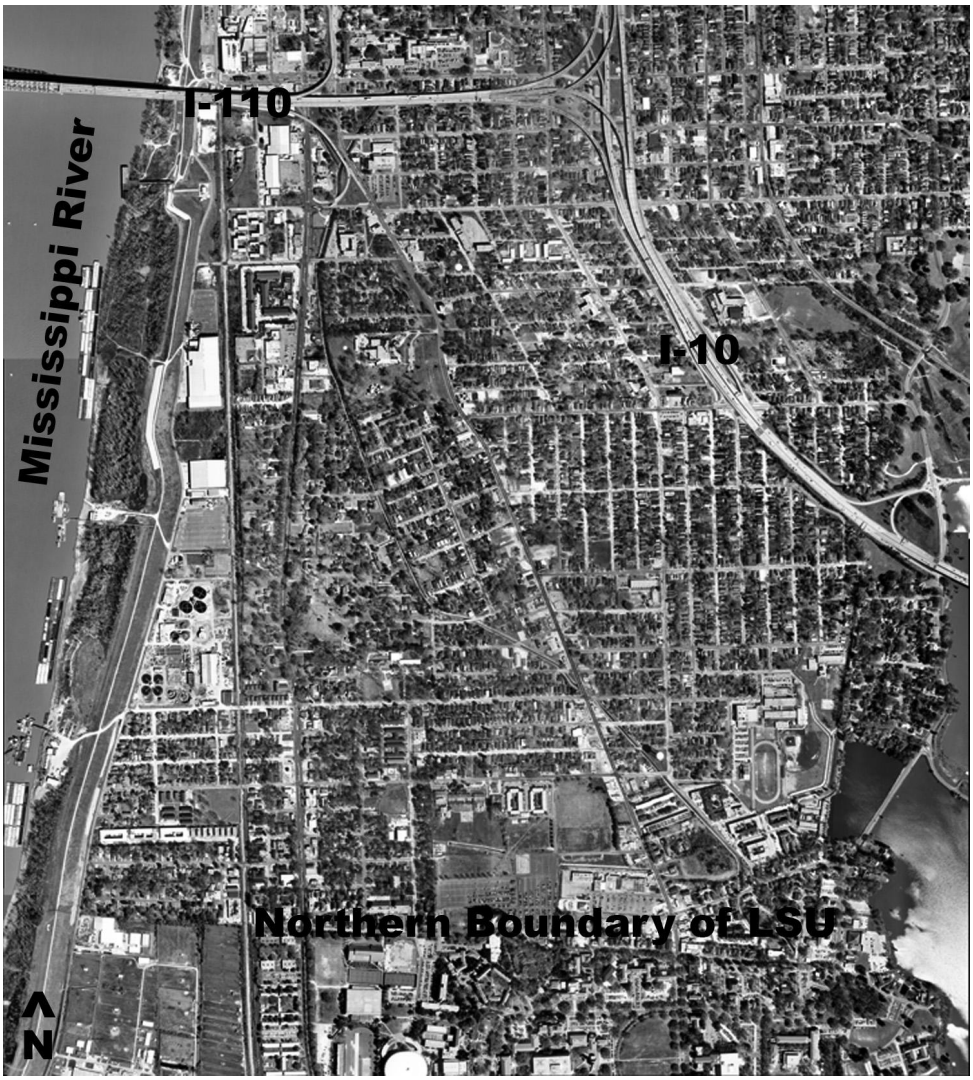

Image courtesy of Plan Baton Rouge

"Concerned about the loss of community identity as a result of crime, neglect, and economic decline, area residents formed the Metropolitan Community Housing and Development Organization and elicited the help of its neighbor, LSU" ("An Entire Race Going to School," 4). Dr. Hendry, an Education and Curriculum faculty member at LSU, took it upon herself to offer coursework that connected graduate students to high school students in Old South Baton Rouge, and further, connected these students to the elders in the community.

For five summers starting in 1995, LSU graduate students worked to train McKinley High School students in conducting oral histories. The students conducted oral histories based on these

themes: McKinley High School, Community Churches, Neighborhood Businesses, the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott, and finally, Social Clubs and Benevolent Societies. In addition to conducting oral histories, students transcribed recordings and prepared public presentations of their learning experiences.

The oral histories demonstrate that there are pockets of the population who lived the experience of and still remember Old South Baton Rouge at its highest points, and these people struggle to make that time known to younger generations, that this knowledge may serve as an inspiration and catalyst to the future. But this is a difficult feat. The current perception of this community within the greater community of Baton Rouge serves as an obstacle. Likewise, there are social realities that serve as obstacles. Even the community's highest points are snarled in a tangle of low and dehumanizing points.

In 1881 a Boston politician, Robert Charles Winthrop stated, "Slavery is but half abolished, emancipation is but half completed, while millions of freemen with votes in their hands are left without education. Justice to them, the welfare of the States in which they live, the safety of the whole Republic, the dignity of the elective franchise, —all alike demand that the still remaining bonds of ignorance shall be unloosed and broken, and the minds as well as the bodies of the emancipated go free" (education.yahoo.com/reference/bartlett, 3-19-05). Old South Baton Rouge serves as a living example of a historical African-American community that understood education as a vehicle to civil liberties. While the Civil Rights movement did not galvanize until the 1950s, from its earliest beginnings in the 1900s Old South Baton Rouge was pioneering the groundwork for this movement, both locally and nationally.

Founded in 1926 at the height of Jim Crow, the KKK and other institutionalized forms of racism, McKinley High School was the first publicly funded, college preparatory, African-American high school to be built in Louisiana, and it was one of twenty-five public high schools for African-

Americans in the Deep South. McKinley remained the only public, African-American high school in the state for twenty-five years, and therefore, provided educational opportunities for students beyond Old South Baton Rouge. Prior to McKinley High, black secondary education was available only through private institutions, and the educational emphasis at these schools was placed on vocational learning ("An Entire Race Going to School," 4-5).

While McKinley High is the first African-American public high school to be built in Louisiana, Old South Baton Rouge is host to a history of public education for African-Americans that has evolved from a time that predates 1926. The very first African-American public school in Louisiana was in Old South Baton Rouge, and it was formed in 1906, just as the community was forming. McKinley High School's predecessor is Old Hickory, a schoolhouse that operated out of "an ancient, wooden, unpainted building on Hickory Street" ("An Entire Race Going to School," 5) and offered an education through the eighth grade. The fact that Old South Baton Rouge was just forming as a community and chose to designate an academic public school during its formative years is noteworthy, not only for the national precedent, but also as a sign of the innate comprehension that "the minds as well as the bodies of the emancipated go free" in order to achieve true progress.

In the face of true progress, it is also vital to note the institutional setbacks that have faced Old South Baton Rouge and many African-American communities throughout their histories. Celebrating progress requires knowing what you are progressing from. You can only honestly glorify where you have gone or where you are going if you acknowledge every aspect of what you have arisen from. More specifically, only through this acknowledgement can a broader public comprehend the multifaceted context of today's Old South Baton Rouge.

This paper has presented the broad notion that wise urban design and planning must incorporate policy planning with physical planning. This notion is demonstrated in how educational

opportunities arrived in Old South Baton Rouge. Education in Old South Baton Rouge evolved from an unpainted wooden schoolhouse to a $175,000 brick building, complete with an auditorium for 1100 people, a central heating system, and landscaped grounds— a monument to learning. Baton Rouge High School, a comparable high school for white students was being erected in the same year. Even with equal and superb physical accommodations, more essential educational opportunities were not evenly distributed to McKinley High School.

> Because McKinley was a black school they always received second hand materials. McKinley would not be allowed to order new textbooks. When the white schools were finished using a book they would send the old book to McKinley. Many of the teachers found these books to be too out of date…so they would go to teacher workshops and get a couple of copies of up to date books…and then run off on ditto paper the book they wanted the students to have. This kept the students up to date, but it also caused another problem. There was a limited amount of ditto paper allotted to the black school. Therefore, if the teacher made too many copies and ran out of paper, there would be no more paper for his or her class ("An Entire Race Going to School", 1-2).

Salary inequities and spending per white students and per black students also served as impediments to African-American educational progress. Teacher salaries in 1912 were seventy-seven dollars per month for white males, fifty-eight dollars a month for white females, and thirty-three dollars a month for African-American educators ("An Entire Race Going to School", 6). In terms of student spending, in 1926, the same year McKinley High was erected, the cost of educational spending in East Baton Rouge Parish was $353 per white student and $11.99 per African-American student. Astoundingly, only .03% of what was being spent on white students was spent for the education of black students. Consider that "the average salary of a black man during the 1930s was six dollars a week" ("An Entire Race Going to School," 6). Consequently, African-Americans had to choose carefully between work and limited educational opportunities. In this light, one realizes that both the less than 20% of southern African-Americans in the mid 1930s who were enrolled in school and the more than 80% who were not enrolled in school— those people

who are septuagenarians and older today— were playing an intense game of "catch up" to the more than 50% of white southerners who were enrolled in school ("An Entire Race Going to School," 6).

In spite of considerable inequities, education in Old South Baton Rouge was valued as a means to advancement, and, according to an oral history with Avis Baker White, a 1943 graduate and later a McKinley High teacher, McKinley served African-American Students from Denham Springs, Port Allen and "all kinds of places." "We had to go to bed at 7:30 or 8:00 because many of us had to walk to school" ("An Entire Race Going to School," 14). Finally, a 1932 graduate, Ed Mae Butler has stated, "To us the classroom was sacred" ("An Entire Race Going to School," 6).

While the provision of education to African-American children as early as 1906 demonstrates precedent to the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and on, what later occurred in Old South Baton Rouge and outlying areas of the city also made substantial contributions to the Civil Rights movement as we know it today. "Almost a decade before Dr. King's vision for our people [African-Americans] had solidified, before Montgomery became synonymous with the words "bus boycott," and [two years] before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, Baton Rouge played the first heroic part in ending Jim Crow laws" (White, Lyman, "Willis Reed," 36).

A series of events preceded the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott. In 1950 African-Americans lost the choice to support black-owned buses when the city declared these bus companies illegal. Three years later, after the city had secured African-Americans' reliance on city buses, fare increased from ten cents to fifteen cents. One month later an Old South Baton Rouge pastor, Reverend Theodore Jefferson Jemison of Mount Zion Baptist Church, went to the City Council to make an official complaint regarding "the fact that there were empty seats on the buses in the white section, while the black people had to stand in the overcrowded back of the buses" (www.lib.lsu.edu/special/exhibits/boycott/index.html, 3-18-05). Soon after, the City Council adopted

an ordinance that allowed for African-Americans to fill busses from back to front and maintained that white Baton Rougeans could fill busses from front to back, but both of these would occur on a first come, first serve basis. In effect, ordinance 222 did away with the dividing curtain that designated a limited number of seats for African-Americans. However, drivers did not enforce the ordinance. These events set in motion the bus boycott that Reverend Jemison soon spearheaded (www.lib.lsu.edu/special/exhibits/boycott/index.html,
3-18-05).

An oral history has captured Old South Baton Rouge resident Olivia C. Huey commenting, "…in some ways, now that I look back on it, it was humiliating for the blacks. Once you get on the bus…and you paid what everybody else paid, but you couldn't sit where everybody else could sit" ("Everyday Life During the Days of Jim Crow Laws in South Baton Rouge", 5). The Baton Rouge bus boycott was the first in the nation to address the humiliation African-Americans were experiencing. It is of particular magnitude for this reason and more. First, in order to make the boycott effective without disrupting African-Americans' earning capacity, the black community and some in the white community came together and organized a free ride system. A route was established and African-Americans with cars volunteered to pick up workers along this route in order to get them to work. Additionally, community members pooled money to collect for the cost of gasoline, and service station owners provided gasoline at cost. The bus boycott lasted only three days, but it affected a national impact. After learning of the Baton Rouge bus boycott, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. contacted and met with Reverend Jemison in 1955 to learn how Baton Rouge had coordinated its boycott and to seek assistance in organizing the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott (www.lib.lsu.edu/special/exhibits/boycott/index.html, 3-18-05).

These advances in educational pursuits and in the pursuit of treatment with human dignity arose in Old South Baton Rouge, but not without irony. On Nicholson Drive, just north of the LSU

campus and just south of downtown Baton Rouge, Magnolia Mound Plantation sits on a small hill. At one time Magnolia Mound was a 900 acre operation that farmed indigo, tobacco, cotton and sugarcane. Today, the plantation occupies only sixteen acres and serves as a monument to French and West Indies Creole vernacular architecture and Creole plantation life. Among the examples of plantation life that reside on the sixteen acres, there is a double slave cabin circa 1830 that contains one furnished living quarter to serve as an educational relic of the period. The adjoining section contains an exhibit of slave life on the Louisiana plantation (www.brec.org, 3-19-05).

The twenty-six neighborhoods that comprise Old South Baton Rouge stand on the other 884 acres that once belonged to Magnolia Mound. The plantation occupied topography of low rolling hills unusual for Baton Rouge. Today, and for many years past, residents of Old South Baton Rouge have distinguished their dwelling places based on whether they live at "the top" of the hills or at "the bottom" in the swamp-land. From this distinction arose a common nick name in one area of Old South Baton Rouge: "The Bottom."

Old South Baton Rouge has been in the makings since the late 1800s. In 1895 "the last family to operate the land as a plantation sold the entire property to Robert A. Hart, an early mayor of the city. He began selling pieces of the property to developers who in turn would subdivide those shares and sell them to individual families….By 1929, Hart had sold all but 75 of the 800 plus acres. He sold the remaining as the subdivision Magnolia Terrace in the 1950s." ("An Entire Race Going to School"). According to Dr. Hendry, not only were the original occupants of Old South Baton Rouge probably African-American, but many of the slave quarters from Magnolia Mound Plantation may have been moved into Old South Baton Rouge as its neighborhoods developed. It is believed that some of these shotguns are still be standing in Old South Baton Rouge (Hendry, 3-15-05).

At the very time that Magnolia Mound slave quarters were being moved into present day Old South Baton Rouge, two other neighborhoods were already established in Baton Rouge: Spanish Town and Beauregard Town. The original plan for Spanish Town dates back to 1805 ("Baton Rouge Story," 9), and the original plan for Beauregard Town dates back to 1806 ("Baton Rouge Story," 15). Until the turn of the century, these were the only two established, planned communities in the city of Baton Rouge. Otherwise, only rural communities were outlying Baton Rouge proper. Early development maps suggest that Old South Baton Rouge may be the city's third planned community. This can be seen in terms of where development moved and in terms of the grid street patterns used as the community grew.

The irony that African-Americans initiated monumental local and national progress within the very setting that had once served to dehumanize them is not lost on residents who are knowledgeable. Yet, many residents do not realize the connection between their Old South Baton Rouge neighborhoods and the plantation next door. For many, Magnolia Mound serves only as a reminder of oppression. Another irony exists as a result of Magnolia Mound; because the plantation was held by Catholics, it is one of very few plantations that maintained careful records of slave births and deaths (Hendry, 3-15-05). These records are rare, in that most southern plantations did not document slave births and deaths; the result is a small percentage of genealogy records for a largely lost population of Americans.

Upon processing that her home is on land that once was part of Magnolia Mound Plantation, Gwen Hamilton, a long time resident of Old South Baton Rouge, could not help but remark, "I'm still living on the plantation! Where have I gone?" Her astonishment offered a worthy reflection. As noted earlier, in spite of owning many milestones of advancement, Old South Baton Rouge is on the decline. Hamilton's reflection is precisely the kind of awareness that can, if

scrutinized through local narratives and if put on the table to digest, catapult Old South Baton Rouge into its next great and regionally distinctive progression.

Earlier, this paper posed the question: How do planners and designers engage in local narratives and to what end? It has also been suggested that Old South Baton Rouge offers an ideal setting in which to explore such an approach. The wealth of local histories that exist in this community is a tremendous asset for historians, planners, and residents alike. The recorded histories of many of the elderly residents whose life stories and observations are documented actually still live in the community. Many of these people have grown children in the community or surrounding it.

Archambault has said of using local narratives as an inventory and analysis tool, "there is a linkage point that is necessary to move local narratives (the way people view themselves and their neighborhoods) into community revitalization" (Archambault, 2-18-05). Introducing narratives to site inventory and analysis is initially an exercise in gathering data, listening and learning but it is also an exercise brainstorming and in building relationships between outsiders (any combination of planners, designers and clients) and the residents, who are not paying clients, but who, by becoming contributing clients, ultimately validate the original clients' initial investment. When locals from communities like Old South Baton Rouge can trust that planners are both listening and working in their best interest, they can also be certain that they have a vested interest in continuing to participate in the process. "The key will be to tap into local people's narratives in a way that they will see themselves in the outcome [rather than seeing only others], and more importantly that they will be convinced that the only way the outcome will be achieved is with their active involvement" (Archambault, 2-18-05). Additionally, when planners participate in and learn from local narratives early on, they build the opportunity to later teach locals capacity building measures. Ideally, planners will have listened well enough to residents to identify their existing capacity weaknesses.

Capacity building based on initial utilization of local narratives ultimately sets the stage for locals to take ownership and to have the know how to implement plans. Local narratives in site inventories and analysis act as a seed for healthy community growth. Narratives also impact physical planning choices: what, where and how developers build will be in response to past remembrances and future visions.

In an oral history interview, Old South Baton Rouge resident Isadore Tansil stated, "I don't know if I can help you. All I can tell you about are the pictures in my mind" ("Pictures in My Mind," 1). Bridget Jackson Brister began her oral history with, "Now let me think back to my history" ("Visions: The Soul & Spirit of South Baton Rouge Churches," 33). It is those pictures floating in the minds of citizens, those memories buried beneath the layers of present matter, that provide largely undocumented histories for many declining urban and rural communities. Once these rich histories are documented, or even as they are being documented, they can be utilized as the basis for regionally and culturally authentic future development and revitalization efforts. These histories can only be gathered when we take the time to speak with people. It is the provision of insight from and into the minds of community members that will supply promise for the future. The kind of in-depth comprehension of Old South Baton Rouge that has been presented in this paper only scratches the surface, but it also suggests an example of the opportunity that exists to approach revitalization with unique solutions that understanding the area in general terms simply does not afford.

CHAPTER 4: 18.6 MILLION MISCOMMUNICATIONS

"They start at the wrong end of love. They begin at the climax. Can you wonder it is so miserable?" Do you know how men should love?"

The old man reached over and grasped the boy by the collar of his leather jacket. He gave him a gentle little shake and his green eyes gazed down unblinking and grave.

Son, do you know how love should begin?"

The boy sat small and listening and still. Slowly he shook his head. The old man leaned closer and whispered:

"A tree. A rock. A cloud."

—Carson McCullers, "A Tree, A Rock, A Cloud"

It has been almost exactly one year since I was sitting at a coffee shop with my thesis chair, Susan Turner, conferring on the project I was soon to undertake. Because of the dissatisfaction I had encountered during my community design studio, I wanted to embark on a project to explore resident or local participation in community revitalization projects. I hoped the sense of possibilities for this project, in large part, would grow from community members who might impart their ideas and knowledge on me. I also aimed to ground this effort in existing initiatives wherever possible.

Through the experience working with Old South Baton Rouge in my community design studio, I had learned of an existing relationship between Expressway Park and St. Francis Xavier Catholic School. Expressway Park is situated beneath a major interstate exchange overpass and serves as the largest neighborhood park in Old South Baton Rouge. To compensate for running the interstate through Old South Baton Rouge in the 1960s, the city built Expressway Park in 1970 and effectively severed the community in two parts. St. Francis Xavier Catholic School, a K-8 parochial school situated in OSBR, is the only remaining African-American Catholic School in Baton Rouge. St. Francis Xavier and Expressway Park hold hands, not only in terms of proximity, but also in terms of a greater, symbiotic relationship. On a regular basis, the private Catholic school utilizes the public park's playground during recess periods. The school also uses the park

for physical education courses in the spring. This interplay between resources serves as a micro-example of how cultivating public and private partnerships can bolster existing resources. Yet, the park's physical character and its physical connection to Old South Baton Rouge leave much to be desired.

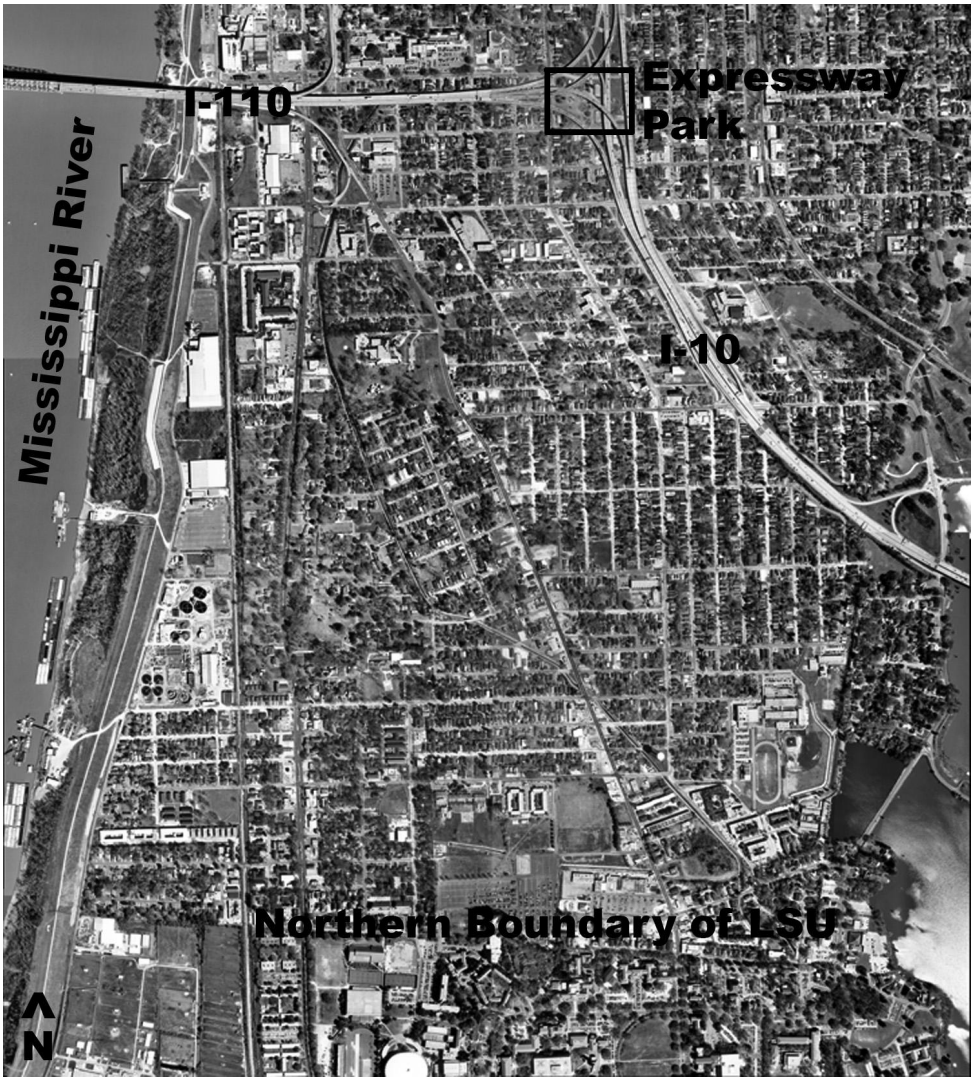

Image Courtesy of Plan Baton Rouge

Based on these factors, I set out to forge a partnership with St. Francis Xavier Catholic School. I thought that the school's students, being the primary users of Expressway Park, might be the best people to work with in regard to considering a more effective and stimulating design for Expressway Park. Ultimately, these students helped my vision to grow, but when I set out to work

with them, I had not realized that the workshop approach to developing a design for Expressway Park that would better and more appropriately serve both St. Francis Xavier School and Old South Baton Rouge was rather simplistic as a form of public process.

In speaking with the principal and a teacher at St. Francis Xavier, I presented my notion that the relationship between Expressway Park and St. Francis Xavier could and should be bolstered. I also suggested that reconsidering Expressway Park could potentially impact the community at large. Ms. Cheryl Domino, the teacher who sponsored the workshops, informed me that most of the students at St. Francis Xavier were, in fact, not residents of St. Francis Xavier. I justified moving forward with the workshops by asserting that, even as non-resident students, these kids, like the school, were extended members of the community. Although I still see value in that justification, the teacher's comment should have triggered another response. I realize now that I should have asked her what she thought might be an appropriate project for the students to undertake as a means to both strengthen their partnership with Old South Baton Rouge and to contribute something useful to the community. In other words, it would have been beneficial for me to brainstorm with the sponsoring teacher, rather than to present to her an already formulated idea. If I had first brainstormed with Ms. Domino, she might have had more vested in the project, and she might have placed more emphasis on motivating the students to be excited and to participate. Unfortunately, I had not engaged her in a real way, and she stepped out of the classroom both times we conducted workshops. She did not demonstrate that she understood how her involvement might impact the students' involvement.

Perhaps as a testament to "real-world" scenarios, time constraints also played a major role in the effectiveness of the workshop format. I was meeting with students toward the end of the school year and could arrange for only two student workshops. If this project could have spanned a semester, and if I had developed a project idea with Ms. Domino, the workshops might have

been more effective. As it was, the two workshops felt too rushed to develop design ideas that were unique to the students' particular world-views and interests, beneficial to Old South Baton Rouge as a whole and beyond generic.

Walter Hood has stated that, "Park planning and design should respond to social circumstances and place. Unfortunately, park designs too often are driven by a park nomenclature that does not represent community needs" (34). I tried to shift students away from conventional thinking by asking them: "If your park could tell a story, what story would it tell?"; "Would your park tell a true story, or would it be fiction?"; "Would your park have a certain theme?" Interestingly, the St. Francis Xavier students, at eleven, twelve, thirteen and fourteen, instinctually approached ideas based on what they had seen, and not on what they could imagine.

The workshops were not a total failure. Students came out with an understanding of the landscape architecture profession and some of its tools. They were able, after being encouraged to imagine a park in extreme terms, to envision parks that were different than what they had personally experienced. They did participate in an active way. As Expressway Park users, they introduced a load of practical concerns: the bathrooms in the park are kept locked; the water fountains do not work; there are not enough shaded paved paths in the park, and after it has rained they have to trudge through wet grass if they want to walk in the shade; there is no direct route from the school to the playground, the part of the park most used by the school; though there is a football field and a baseball field, the school has had problems losing balls to the interstate. I also got a sense of what influences excited the students: sports, music, drama. Interestingly, though the students were not familiar with Old South Baton Rouge's history, many of them suggested marking history in the park. I definitely came out of the workshops with a starting point.

However, the workshops should have grown out of a more carefully planned project. In this paper, I have been advocating local narratives. With the students, I tried to incorporate

narrative by asking them to tell a story through model making exercises. I think they were at an age where this seemed too juvenile a way to begin. I believe their narratives would have come more easily in verbal form. However, time would not have allowed this method. Ultimately, Ms. Domino is the first narrative I should have asked for and listened to. The workshop shortcomings largely resulted from my own inexperience. I offered an idea to the school as if it was a ripe piece of fruit, and I hoped they would bite into it. I should have gone to them much earlier and with a small seed, to ask if they had any ideas about where to plant it and to ask if they might help me plant it, cultivate it and watch it grow.

The afternoon at the coffee shop, when I was merely conferring on the project and before I ever met with anyone from St. Francis Xavier, Susan informed me of a substantial federal grant that had been awarded for Old South Baton Rouge. Because she knew that I wanted to ground the project in reality, she suggested that I meet with someone at the East Baton Rouge Housing Authority, the grant administrators. This would be an opportunity to both learn about the grant and to consider how my project might tie into existing initiatives. My meeting with Ladan Rastin, the HOPE VI Director, proved that my understanding about strengthening the partnership between Expressway Park and both St. Francis Xavier School and Old South Baton Rouge by tying the project into existing initiatives was also rather simplistic.

* * *

She used to read to us without pity; forcing words, lies, other folks' habits, whole lives upon us two, sitting trapped and ignorant underneath her voice. She washed us in a river of make-believe, burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn't necessarily need to know. Pressed us to her with the serious way she read, to shove us away at just the moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to understand.

—Alice Walker, "Everyday Use"

Just as it is vital to understand Old South Baton Rouge in specific, rather than general terms, if we are to understand how narratives can and should contribute to public participation and

to evolving planning and design strategies, we must also evaluate how public process happens in revitalization projects. Chapter two revealed the general development of public process as it is used in planning and design. As there are both on-going and emerging revitalization efforts in Old South Baton Rouge today, the opportunity exists to reveal the particular manner in which public participation is currently occurring. If we can get a sense of how local narratives are not used to inform plans, we can also gain a sense of how they should be used to inform plans.

In March of 2003 the East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority received an 18.6 million dollar grant to invest in Old South Baton Rouge's public housing stock. The grant is part of a twelve-year-old, multi-billion dollar program that is administered by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. The program arose in response to a 1989 study that assessed and formulated solutions for severely distressed public housing nationwide. The National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing conducted the study and set forth a plan to address critical needs in severely distressed public housing; these needs boiled down to modernization, more human services and better management (www.nhlp.org/html/pubhsg/FalseHOPE.pdf).

Baton Rouge made three prior attempts to acquire a HOPE VI grant, but finally received the grant when multiple entities forged a partnership and applied for the grant together in a fourth attempt. The partnership included Baton Rouge Area Foundation, Congressman Richard Baker's office, the Baton Rouge City-Parish, the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae), and the East Baton Rouge Parish Housing Authority. Because the Housing Authority had made three previous attempts, the HOPE VI application process, which included community involvement, actually dates back to 1999. According to the winning 2002 HOPE VI application, "This year, as in past years, there has been no opposition voiced to the project by any resident, community or civic member. There is only galvanized energy anticipating change" (43). Apparently, this energy has

arisen from "more than twenty formal meetings…with the community to solicit feedback," "one 'resident only' training session" and "over 100 hours…meeting one on one with residents and community partners" (43). Finally, the application states that each time HOPE VI funding was not rewarded, the Housing Authority informed residents and advised that the planning process would proceed in anticipation of receiving the grant in the future (43). The HOPE VI 2002 Revitalization Application portrays not only that the Housing Authority spent substantial time interacting with the community, but also that the communication efforts were clear and cohesive from 1999 through 2002. Yet, considered over the span of two years time, 100 hours of one-on-one and only one community resident training session seems insignificant.

The application does not divulge whether community members from Old South Baton Rouge, members of Old South Baton Rouge public housing or residents from the broad community participated in the public process. Because there is no documentation that suggests unsuccessful community interaction, it must be assumed that the information in the application is accurate. Given that community involvement and public input was effective enough to "galvanize energy," what went wrong with public involvement that occurred after the HOPE VI grant was awarded in 2003? Randy Hester wrote that "the dominant form of participation, advocacy design and planning, is so institutionalized and parochialized that it no longer meets many of its goals. At best it subverts creative efforts through conflict mediation and, in fact, is a major contributor to several debilitating problems of our time" ("A Refrain with a View", 12). If ever there is a case to be made for Hester's criticisms, it may very well be found in Old South Baton Rouge.

The only workshop-style community engagement that has occurred since the HOPE VI grant was secured just over two years ago is a three day charrette that took place from July 28th – 30th in 2003. According to the Preliminary Community Revitalization Plan for Old South Baton

Rouge, a document that the Housing Authority prepared to report the charrette results, the charrette came about because:

> In planning the HOPE VI efforts with others, the Housing Authority realized that there were a number of other planning and development efforts underway in the Old South Baton Rouge Neighborhood. The Housing Authority felt that the HOPE VI efforts would have greater success, and there would be an even greater benefit to the City/Parish, if all of the Old South Baton Rouge Neighborhood projects could be coordinated….A consensus emerged that it would be appropriate to step back and look at all of these initiatives collectively, and to see whether an opportunity exists for creating a "whole that is greater than the sum of its parts" (4).

The Preliminary Community Revitalization Plan fails to report that the July 2003 charrette turned so hostile at one point that a participant was compelled to call the police to obtain security if needed, or even that there were trust issues that needed to be addressed. What caused such hostility on the first day of the charrette, and what saved the charrette from breaking down entirely?

The July 2003 charrette occurred during Deron Brown's first week working as an urban planner with Community Action in Neighborhoods Developing Opportunities, also known as "CAN DO." CAN DO is a department in the Office of Neighborhoods, and it is administered by the Mayor's office of Baton Rouge. Can Do's mission is to provide "assistance to East Baton Rouge Parish neighborhood and civic associations" by providing them with policy and procedural information that impacts neighborhoods; to provide education and training to civic associations; to facilitate partnerships between neighborhoods and other entities; and by advocating policies and procedures to advance neighborhood improvements (brgov.com/dept/cando/). Brown was asked to sit in on the charrette as a representative of the Can Do office. However, as the meeting unraveled, his role became much more primary.

According to Brown's observations, the first and most critical miscommunication occurred not at the charrette, but during the application process. Although the application outlines its public process, Brown observed that the residents' understanding was that consultants came to town,

gathered information, and applied for the grant. He suggested that if the neighborhood felt like they had driven the application process, they would have been more vested in the charrette (Brown, 3-18-05).

As noted earlier, the charrette report states that "a consensus emerged that it would be appropriate to step back and look at all of these initiatives collectively, and to see whether an opportunity exists for creating a "whole that is greater than the sum of its parts" (4). The community's attitude that they did not have an active role in the process was reinforced by the Housing Authority's initial reason, as outlined in the report, for holding the charrette. Brown commented that at the charrette the Housing Authority introduced all of the various entities who were involved in the application and who were investing in Old South Baton Rouge, but the community did not see themselves reflected in that group. Community members who attended the charrette felt that HOPE VI was an ill-conceived mandate on Old South Baton Rouge, and not an effort in their best interest or a solution for community decline. As a result, the people at the charrette behaved in a reactionary manner, instead of a responsive manner. According to Brown, "the public wanted to address issues, while the consultants wanted to focus on physical changes in the community" (Brown, 3-18-05). Wiles has noted that it is imperative to acknowledge and listen to residents' most immediate concerns if consultants hope to gain their participation in considering future growth (Wiles, 3-21-05).

Perhaps one of the most difficult facts for the community to comprehend and accept has been that the $18.6 million grant will have its most tangible impact on the physical state of public housing. Though the grant also addresses needs such as job training, life skills, and child care, these needs will be met for public housing residents who are participating in the HOPE VI program. Therefore, residents of Old South Baton Rouge, and even most residents in public housing, will not have direct access to the benefits the grant is funding. The Housing Authority has made soft

commitments to contract skilled residents as construction laborers, but it is yet to be seen whether these commitments will be met.

Confusing messages about HOPE VI revitalizing the whole of Old South Baton Rouge, versus revamping and revitalizing public housing, are lingering both within the community and outside of the community. Brown stated of the charrette, "I really think they [the Housing Authority and its applicant partners] came in with the idea that everyone would turn flips because they were bringing in $18.6 million" (Brown, 3-18-05). Ultimately, the charrette may have served to enhance confusion about the purpose of the grant funds. Because Housing Authority consultants to the HOPE VI project introduced all of the initiatives taking place to help revitalize Old South Baton Rouge, confusion lingered regarding the how the $18.6 million would be invested, and whether that money would impact the entire community. While the HOPE VI grant offers a tremendous investment in Old South Baton Rouge, and while the money being invested is concurrent with other investments within the community, the primary purpose of the HOPE VI grant expenditure is to "eradicate severely distressed public housing" by making physical improvements, management improvements and by creating social and community services to address [public housing] resident needs (www.hud.gov).

At the time the charrette occurred, some of the other investments in Old South Baton Rouge included a new library and head start center; the renovation of the 1926 McKinley High School to serve as a building for community services, including the HOPE VI offices; landscape enhancements by a local non-profit, Baton Rouge Green; a bicycle path on the Mississippi River levee, as well as private affordable housing developments. It is important to acknowledge that, collectively, these on-going initiatives with HOPE VI offer the first significant opportunity to revitalize Old South Baton Rouge in many years. However, the charrette did not manage to clearly communicate the distinctions between these investments. As noted previously, Jesse Wiles of

APD commented that communities often confuse community involvement with public relations (Wiles, 3-21-05. In this case, it seems that the entities administering the HOPE VI grant attempted to overlap community involvement and public relations.

The state purpose of the charrette is a function of public relations. The stated purpose was to make residents aware of the various investments occurring in Old South Baton Rouge as a means to emphasize the importance of the $18.6 million HOPE VI investment. This was intended to lay a foundation for residents to want to be involved in the secondary function of the charrette: community participation that would form the basis of a physical plan of action that could be applied to all the new HOPE VI housing to be built. Unfortunately, the residents did not understand this process to be purposeful engagement, nor did they trust that the application process had meaningfully included them.

Recognizing a weakness in the "let me tell you what is going on in your community" approach that the HOPE VI consultants and the HOPE VI partners had embarked on, Deron Brown stepped in to apply a reverse approach that would still give the consultants what they needed to proceed with planning efforts. On the second day of the charrette, Brown initiated a workshop called "favorite places." The purpose of this exercise was for residents to identify and map those locations that held meaning for them, whether that meaning was historical, sentimental or otherwise compelling. The intent was not only to identify boundaries and locations of importance, but more importantly "to move feelings and ideas to physical places" (Brown, 3-18-05). Brown believed that the public process needed to be driven by the community members, but that the same important information could result. It was only after the community had been asked to teach the consultants about their community that Brown proceeded to explain how the $18.6 million would benefit Old South Baton Rouge. Through this approach, Brown took measures to alleviate distrust that the community held toward the HOPE VI partners and consultants. Two years later,

the HOPE VI team holds a certain degree of distrust in the public meeting process, and possibly as a result, no further attempts at such workshops have been attempted.

There is something to be gleaned from both the St. Francis Xavier workshops and the HOPE VI workshop examples set forth in this chapter. Both efforts lacked a basic necessity: groundwork with the community members that preceded the workshops. The kind of groundwork needed can be accomplished through interacting with residents by conducting local narratives. This needs to occur during the data collection and analysis phase of process. Residents do not want to be contacted for input only after their very communities have been assessed by outsiders. The face to face nature of local narratives can quickly build a trust that is difficult to achieve in the workshop or charrette setting, and if narratives are to be eliminated from data and inventory collections, charrettes must, in a constructive manner, make room for issues to be set forth and for solutions to be considered.

Being a federally funded grant that is administered by city-run housing authorities, HOPE VI presents many constraints. The local housing authorities that administer the grant must report to HUD specifically on the scope of services the grant will cover and on the exact methods that will be used to carry out the scope. Once the local housing authorities have established and reported these methods, it becomes difficult to alter the process as needed. There is little room to improvise or alter courses. On the other hand, HUD does not pre-determine what methods local housing authorities must utilize in administering the grant. This means that the local housing authorities have room to develop a method specific to the neighborhood they are dealing with, but it also means they cannot be wrong about their defined approach.

The fact that the Housing Authority of East Baton Rouge Parish contracted a developer to lead their revitalization process is telling of the market-driven approach they value. They had the freedom to contract a landscape architect or architect as the lead. Interestingly, the developer

realized the need for a strong design component and contracted a landscape architect. It was the landscape architecture firm that led the HOPE VI charrette process. As commendable as it is that the developer saw fit to work with a landscape architect and to incorporate a public process, it is also disconcerting that the charrette approach they used in Old South Baton Rouge was so poorly executed.

HOPE VI reflects a significant and unheard of investment, and it truly is a major opportunity to spark revitalization in Old South Baton Rouge. Yet, HOPE VI does not provide means to spread and sustain a fire. This nuance has never effectively been communicated in the HOPE VI public process. In fact, the public process for the Old South Baton Rouge HOPE VI grant has been ineffective overall, in terms of developing local trust and mobilizing local excitement for the project. The question this poses is: How to you take what is happening in public process today and shift it to what could happen, given the practical realities of planning processes?

CHAPTER 5: HOW CHEAP IS TALK?

"You probably need to eat something," the baker said. "I hope you'll eat some of my hot rolls. You have to eat and keep going. Eating is a small, good thing at a time like this," he said.

He served them warm cinnamon rolls just out of the oven, the icing still runny. He put butter on the table and knives to spread the butter. Then the baker sat down at the table with them. He waited. He waited until they each took a roll from the platter and began to eat. "It's good to eat something," he said, watching them.

…They ate rolls and drank coffee. Ann was suddenly hungry, and the rolls were warm and sweet. She ate all three of them, which pleased the baker. Then he began to talk. They listened carefully. Although they were tired and in anguish, they listened to what the baker had to say."

—Raymond Carver, "A Small, Good Thing"

During yet another coffee shop meeting, I asked Susan Turner if she had any ideas about local job opportunities that might match my interest in community redevelopment. She thought for a minute, and suggested Plan Baton Rouge because they had recently hired someone to work as a liaison between all of the entities involved with the HOPE VI grant. Beyond a name, I did not have a clear notion of what Plan Baton Rouge is, but I was very interested in the revitalization opportunities that were presenting themselves in Old South Baton Rouge. I was also interested in better understanding the HOPE VI grant. At the time, I still did not comprehend that the grant is primarily designed to revamp public housing and serve a percentage of public housing residents.

I met with Plan Baton Rouge's Executive Director, Boo Thomas, and Senior Director, Gwen Hamilton to discuss the possibility of a summer internship, and the possibility became a reality. On my first day at Plan Baton Rouge, I attended a Crime Prevention Task Force meeting with Gwen Hamilton. The meeting was both a first step toward discussing issues of crime in Old South Baton Rouge and toward eventually devising a strategy for crime prevention. The partners involved with the HOPE VI grant had realized that, in order for the grant to have an effective impact on the community, they needed to address issues of crime in the area, both perceived and real. That meeting offered yet another opportunity for me to observe a facet of public participation in planning that I had previously not been exposed to.

Later, I began to grasp what Plan Baton Rouge is and how it came about, and other pieces of the puzzle began falling in place. The office of Plan Baton Rouge arose out of a master planning effort for downtown Baton Rouge. In 1998 the State of Louisiana, the city of Baton Rouge and the Baton Rouge Area Foundation combined resources and hired a team of planners and designers to develop a master plan for downtown Baton Rouge (www.planbr.org). The consultant team led a week long charrette, and the resultant plan, called Plan Baton Rouge, became the blueprint for downtown development. Thomas had served as a liaison between the consultant team and the community. Later, Baton Rouge Area Foundation created the office of Plan Baton Rouge and hired Thomas to oversee implementation of the master plan.

Shortly after I attended the Crime Prevention Task Force meeting, and as I was beginning to comprehend what Plan Baton Rouge is and how it operates, I sat in a meeting with Thomas and Plan Baton Rouge's Assistant Director, Rachel DiResto. They began reviewing the various investments and initiatives that are taking place in Old South Baton Rouge. Plan Baton Rouge, they explained, was in the early stages of devising a comprehensive plan to coordinate all of the various efforts underway in Old South Baton Rouge. I was a bit baffled at the time, because, like so many others, I still thought of the 18.6 million dollar HOPE VI grant as the unifying force in revitalizing Old South Baton Rouge. I thought of Plan Baton Rouge as the liaison between entities.

My impression is that initially, Plan Baton Rouge also thought of the HOPE VI grant as the unifying factor for initiatives in Old South Baton Rouge, and they considered themselves to be a resource that administered communication between entities. Yet, it was becoming clear to Plan Baton Rouge that HOPE VI, even as a massive financial investment in Old South Baton Rouge, simply did not have the capacity to generate a thoroughly comprehensive revitalization of the entire area. In turn, it was becoming clear that hiring a consultant team would be beneficial to achieving success in Old South Baton Rouge.

In that the office of Plan Baton Rouge aims to continue addressing relevant planning issues and well-conceived growth, it has evolved to also advocate the implementation of Smart Growth principals and policies throughout Baton Rouge. Though downtown revitalization is ongoing, the Plan Baton Rouge master plan is near completion in terms of implementation. For this reason, Plan Baton Rouge saw fit to apply the lessons learned downtown to other areas of the city that are in need of revitalization. This had been a stated goal of Plan Baton Rouge at its inception in 1998, and given the Baton Rouge Area Foundation's involvement in the HOPE VI application process, Old South Baton Rouge seemed like a natural area for which Plan Baton Rouge should focus its newest efforts. Many of Plan Baton Rouge's successes with the ongoing Downtown redevelopment lay in the fact they worked closely with a superb consultant who led the process in the beginning stages. Building upon this, but also acknowledging that Old South Baton Rouge would be a different kind of revitalization effort than downtown Baton Rouge has been, Plan Baton Rouge was seeking to hire a dynamic consultant team to work with in initiating an Old South Baton Rouge revitalization strategy.

As plans to hire a consultant team began to solidify, by attending the Crime Prevention Task Force meetings, and because Plan Baton Rouge had invited me to sit in on a number of meetings regarding smart growth, I was gaining exposure to a number of committees. Oversight committees, steering committees, and leadership committees— I did not have a thorough appreciation of the specific roles all of these committees played, but I was beginning to recognize them as a major component of public process. Additionally, I was realizing that there was a great deal I still did not comprehend about public process.

Through working with Plan Baton Rouge, and indirectly with the HOPE VI grant, I knew it was unrealistic to think the Expressway Park project could be tied into a real initiative. As a matter of fact, Expressway Park is not reflected in the physical boundaries that the HOPE VI grant is

overseeing, nor is it entirely reflected in the strategic plan that Plan Baton Rouge is overseeing. My desire to comprehend the public process as it related to local people, those who are not necessarily known "movers and shakers" only grew during my internship with Plan Baton Rouge. I told Susan that I needed to take more time to work through my thesis.

In the meantime, Plan Baton Rouge has continued to move forward with efforts to devise the "Old South Baton Rouge Strategic Neighborhood Revitalization and Economic Development Plan". They also hired me to work full time on the project, and as a result I am gratefully digesting more and more about what may quite possibly become my professional charge: effective public process in community revitalization projects.

* * *

One boy was whistling a tune, at once very complicated and very simple, it seemed to be pouring out of him as though he were a bird, and it sounded very cool and moving through all that harsh, bright air, only just holding its own through all those other sounds.
—James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"

In an article entitled "Dwelling and Rhythm" landscape architect, Frank Chaffin posed the question: "If appropriate and wise building can only come out of authentic dwelling, then how can the designer, usually an outsider to the place and the people living there, appropriately build for others? More importantly, how can we designers, ingrained by modern culture to be objective, achieve a profound experience of dwelling upon which to base our work?" (103). I propose that part of the answer to these questions lies in acknowledging objectivity as a falsehood. Recall Smith's scholarship that "more critical analysis of maps recognizes their cultural subjectivity" ("Landscape Representation", 72). Another part of the answer to these questions is very simply, listen.

In October of 2004 Plan Baton Rouge launched a search for a consultant team who could develop a strategic revitalization plan for Old South Baton Rouge. The request for proposals stated that one goal of the strategic plan is "to spawn new development that both serves the

existing neighborhood, but also attracts a wider, deeper market by capitalizing on the assets of this area" (www.planbr.org). Among the possible components of this strategic plan, Plan Baton Rouge suggested a land-use plan; transportation strategies to improve circulation within Old South Baton Rouge and from surrounding areas; crime prevention design strategies; an economic development plan with business development strategies; an implementation strategy with action steps and a timeline (www.planbr.org). Interestingly, while the plan sought to "strengthen and preserve the residential neighborhoods" (www.planbr.org), the request for proposals made no direct mention of the actual residents or of a public process. Among nine objectives listed in the request for proposals, one called for the plan to "be founded upon a thorough analysis and understanding of the economic realities, and realistic potential of Old South Baton Rouge," and another objective called for "a structure for ongoing communication and collaboration between the various stakeholder groups in OSBR" (www. planbr.org). What is absent from the former objective is a request for the consultant team to analyze and understand the social realities of the community, but social realities are related both to economic realities and to planning. Social realities create either economic and physical limitations or economic and physical opportunities in communities; more often they do both. The latter objective mentions "various stakeholder groups" in the community, but it is not clear, based on the overall context of the request for proposals, whether residents are considered to be stakeholders.

My sense of why the request for proposals lacked direct mention of social realities and public process is two-fold. Plan Baton Rouge has successfully generated revitalization in downtown Baton Rouge that is strongly market-driven. As for the request for proposals' void of language that called for public participation or community engagement, my assessment is that Plan Baton Rouge, having taken a hard lesson from the 2003 HOPE VI charrette, was wary of disaster. In light of the request for proposals' vague references to the residents themselves, it is astounding

that the consultant team who Plan Baton Rouge ultimately selected proposed a strategic planning process that is intent on thoroughly engaging Old South Baton Rouge residents along with other community members.

In that Plan Baton Rouge aimed to apply the lessons learned downtown to Old South Baton Rouge, it makes sense that the request for proposals emphasized a strongly market-driven approach. Yet, even with the lessons of downtown in hand, Plan Baton Rouge recognized that Old South Baton Rouge is a very different starting point than downtown Baton Rouge had been. In acknowledging this difference, Plan Baton Rouge understood that Old South Baton Rouge, which greatly needs economic revival, consequently needs strong residential mobilization if the strategic plan is to actually "strengthen and preserve the residential neighborhoods" and "serve the existing neighborhoods".

The consultant team who is embarking on the "Old South Baton Rouge Strategic Neighborhood Revitalization and Economic Development Plan" is led by an economic and real estate planning firm called RKG of Alexandria, Virginia. RKG specializes in applying real estate principles to urban issues. The team also includes EDSA, APD, and Henry Moore with Baton Rouge-based SSA Consultants and Reverend Jennifer Jones-Bridgett of Working Interfaith Network. EDSA is an urban design firm whose role will focus on preparing the community implementation strategy and presenting land planning recommendations that are clear and understandable to the public. APD has expertise in the areas of community and neighborhood revitalization and public involvement. Henry Moore will be responsible for managing the public involvement process. He will be work with the Old South Baton Rouge community residents to build the capacity needed to support the redevelopment plan. SSA Consultants will serve as liaisons to city and state level officials, and Reverend Jennifer Jones-Bridgett will assist Henry Moore in the public involvement and neighborhood capacity building process. Clearly, the RKG

team has a strong economic and real estate market component in RKG as the team leader. Considered collectively, the team balances its economic and real estate emphasis (seen in the participation of RKG and APD, which has experience both as a developer and a neighborhood strategist), with an equal emphasis on a multi-level public process, as exhibited by the involvement of APD, Henry Moore, SSA, and Reverend Jones-Bridgett.

It is noteworthy that RKG, in its original proposal to Plan Baton Rouge, included a public process component, bearing in mind that the request for proposals did not explicitly require this component. The originally proposed public involvement included five meetings between the consultant team and the general public. Of those meetings, one would be a "Kick-Off," while the others would be "held at the neighborhood level". Another aspect of the public process was media relations. However, media relations were proposed as a separate and distinct aspect of public involvement. The proposal stated that, "Although a more involved public process could be designed for this project, the Consultants have assumed a basic program," and the proposal included an optional task (RKG, "Request for Proposal: Old South Baton Rouge Strategic Plan, 25). The optional task was a neighborhood capacity building" effort called "Asset Based Community Development" or ABCD. According to the RKG proposal:

> ABCD emphasizes that all individuals in a community have valuable gifts to contribute, including people that others might consider marginal to the community. Another belief is that almost all local associations contribute to the benefit of community and that the keys to a strong community are "the producers" inside the community. ABCD focuses on including all people in a community, inviting neighborhood innovation and creativity, developing sustainable initiatives that last, and being neighborhood based. By focusing on the skills and strengths of those that comprise the community, the community itself is able to create solutions for local problems without relying exclusively on larger institutions such as city government (RKG, "Request For Proposal: Old South Baton Rouge Strategic Plan," 26).

Incredibly, in spite of disillusionment of the public process as it had occurred with HOPE VI, and in spite of the de-emphasis on public involvement in the request for proposals, the Plan Baton Rouge

Staff all agreed that the neighborhood capacity building process in the RKG proposal would be valuable.

Yet, when Plan Baton Rouge and the selection team interviewed RKG for this job, one person stated, "this neighborhood has been over-studied, and the neighborhood is skeptical….There is a risk that the neighborhood will feel this is being done to them, not for them." It has become clear over time that the goal is neither that the neighborhood should feel something is being done to them or for them. Instead, the neighborhood should have the experience that the strategic plan is done with them leading the way. Another interviewer remarked to the RKG team: "My fear is that there have been so many false starts. So how do you get people to the meetings? I've sat in the empty room so many times." Yet another interviewer asked, "Even if you get people to a meeting, what if you don't get the leadership or consensus of a majority of neighborhood members?" As a testament to the selection team's piqued interest in neighborhood capacity building, Gwen Hamilton wondered, "Could the neighborhood capacity building precede the kick-off meeting?" It became overwhelmingly evident that the selection team who was conducting interviews was wary of the public process, though highly intrigued by the neighborhood capacity building component. To the RKG team's credit, they did not become defensive, and they did not buckle under the seeming pressure to eliminate the public involvement component. Rather, they began to brainstorm during the job interview. Jesse Wiles noted, "We'll be having to communicate well with people who won't understand the process initially." Wiles also offered, "One of the first things I try to do is talk to people on their front porches."

Though the request for proposals minimized public involvement, and though people were disillusioned with past efforts at public involvement, reading about the process in RKG's proposal and discussing the matter with the team during the interview proved that it is necessary. Plan Baton Rouge did not only hire RKG; incredibly, they deemed it necessary to include the optional

Neighborhood Capacity Building component in the strategic planning process. I believe wholly that Plan Baton Rouge and the selection team who interviewed the applicants recognized the need for public involvement at the community level, but I suspect that they had never been approached with a solution that made room for spontaneity and resculpting according to circumstances and need. Perhaps in Old South Baton Rouge in the past, planners had merely conducted the kind of "institutionalized and parochialized" public involvement that Hester claims no longer meets the essential goals of participatory planning and design.

After RKG had been hired, perceptive that a formulaic approach to public involvement would fail in Old South Baton Rouge, the team requested an opportunity to revise the public process they had originally proposed. In this vein, they came to Baton Rouge and held a series of person-to-person interviews at the YMCA Baranco Clark in Old South Baton Rouge. The consultants, in one day, met with almost twenty-five individuals to learn about Old South Baton Rouge and to ask residents what would prompt them to participate in the strategic planning process. These preliminary interviews occurred prior to, or rather, as part of the data gathering stage in the strategic plan. As a result of the first round of interviews, the consultant team adapted the public process component they had initially proposed.

What they learned through the first round of interviews is that key members of the community need to be thoroughly engaged, including the ministerial community and the educational community. Additionally, they realized that Old South Baton Rouge has a history that must be formally linked to the strategic plan. Another change to the scope of public process is "a series of interviews and workshops with community residents, led by Henry Moore, to gather information about community strengths, capacity building, and their willingness to support the Old South Baton Rouge redevelopment process" (RKG-PBR contract, xvi). Unlike the HOPE VI approach, all of these conversations have begun and are continuing alongside site inventory and

analysis. Most importantly, these person-to-person interviews have opened the door for the consultants to illicit local narratives that will inform the final revitalization strategy.

A spontaneous effort has arisen as a result of personal interviews the consultants conducted with community members. The consultants asked the Old South Baton Rouge school principals how to reach people in the neighborhood who would otherwise remain in the margins during this process. McKinley High School's principal, Mr. Armond Brown's response was, "You need to speak to Felton Anderson." Mr. Brown stated, "You keep asking us how to reach people, but we don't know. We haven't been successful at reaching people. Felton Anderson knows the answers; he has reached the people you're talking about, and he continues to reach those people."

Felton Anderson is a thirty-something resident of Old South Baton Rouge. Approximately five years ago he began throwing a neighborhood block party called the "Bottom Bash." According to many Old South Baton Rouge residents with whom the RKG team spoke, the Bottom Bash is an event everyone attends, and it is where people find out what's happening in the neighborhood. As a result of the conversation with school principals and a subsequent meeting with Felton Anderson, the RKG team is commencing their "official" public process by being on hand at the Bottom Bash to ask for input and to let residents know what they can do to get involved in reviving their community. Archambault admitted that in commencing the public process, he has never done anything of this nature before. He also acknowledged that it might not be successful; but then, it just might. Archambault expounded that public process is largely a function of the budget and size of a project (Archambault, 3-22-05). Astoundingly, approximately one third of the budget for the Old South Baton Rouge Strategic Plan is devoted to many levels of public process— from working at the neighborhood level to engaging the private sector to the partnering with the highest local political levels.

Conversation takes time, and it requires planners to stop planning during that time, and to instead, simply listen to people whom are traditionally not thought of as planners or even as community leaders. Realistically, using conversation in the manner suggested in this paper adds significant expense to a project. The saying "talk is cheap" implies that talk serves no purpose. In this case, directed and individualized talk holds tremendous value because it can establish trusting links and uncover undocumented local narratives. The Old South Baton Rouge Strategic Neighborhood Revitalization and Economic Development Plan that will come about in one year may very well serve as an example of the value of one-one-one conversation and residential engagement early in the revitalization process. In The Tipping Point, Malcolm Gladwell explores what seemingly magical, but truly basic forces cause an idea, product, message or behavior to take hold on a population. According to Gladwell, "it is safe to say that word of mouth is — even in this age of mass communications and multimillion-dollar advertising campaigns — still the most important form of human communication" (32). I suspect that as costly and as difficult as talk may be initially, it will have great tangible and intangible returns in the long run for the outcome of Old South Baton Rouge.

The idea of initiating a public conversation at the Bottom Bash has never been tried, but the idea came out of multiple conversations and a listening exercise. It may promise the best return Old South Baton Rouge has ever experienced in terms of public involvement, and it could not have arisen if Plan Baton Rouge had not committed to investing in conversation. All this talk will manifest itself in the physical planning and renewal of Old South Baton Rouge— in those everyday narratives that exist all around us, quite possibly in a locally, culturally and regionally authentic, instead of generic form. As previously noted, the book Landscape Narratives asserts that narrative implies "both product and process, form and formation" (Potteiger, 3). The book also expresses that "there is in fact a long tradition of narrative design, and it can be argued that any

design inevitably has narratives" (Potteiger and Purinton, x). If, in fact, landscape designs inevitably contain narratives, it is wise to inform designs and plans by narratives.

Looking back on the day my instructor diagrammed the design process on the chalkboard in my first studio course in landscape architecture, I realize that in fact, process cannot be diagrammed. What was drawn on the board was merely a static formula, and formulas alone cannot begin to be effectively applied to the multitude of unique market, physical and social variables that exist in communities in need of revitalization, or in any community.

CHAPTER 6: STORIES ABOUT HOME

The man saved his money to bring her here. He saved and saved because she was alone with the baby boy in that country. He worked two jobs. He came home late and he left early. Every day…

Whatever her reasons, whether she is fat, or can't climb the stairs, or is afraid of English, she won't come down. She sits all day by the window and plays the Spanish radio show and sings all the homesick songs about her country in a voice that sounds like a seagull.

Home. Home. Home is a house in a photograph, a pink house, pink as hollyhocks with lots of startled light. The man paints the walls of the apartment pink, but it's not the same, you know. She still sighs for her pink house, and then I think she cries. I would.

—Sandra Cisneros, The House on Mango Street

As a young man my dad was seeking adventures and opportunities when he left India. Both Australia and Canada turned down his visa applications before the United States granted him a resident visa. In 1968, at the age of twenty-eight, he flew to the US with the maximum amount of money in his pocket that the Indian government would allot in monetary exchange, eight American dollars. On the plane into New York City he struck up a conversation with the woman next to him. She was shocked when she learned that he had only eight dollars, and she offered him fifty dollars. My dad was embarrassed and refused the money, but the woman insisted. She told him he would not get along for very long with only eight dollars. Nervous because of her warning, he accepted the money and wrote down her address with a promise to return the borrowed amount. This is how his history in the United States began.

Almost one year later, he had found his way to Manhattan, Kansas, after brief stints in New York and Washington, D.C. He had secured a job and a place to live, and he finally returned the borrowed money to the woman he met on the plane. She mailed him a letter of thanks, as she had not expected to see the money again. She also noted that she had never heard of any Manhattan other than New York City. It was when he was in Manhattan, Kansas that my mom and my three sisters joined him in the US. For years before I was born, my family lived in a one-bedroom trailer in a trailer park. It was not until 1974 that my parents purchased their first home.

In 1975, shortly after I was born, both of my parents became United States citizens. My dad had seven siblings, and my mom had eight siblings. For years after my parents became US citizens, they shared the benefits their citizenship with their brothers and sisters by sponsoring them, one-by-one, to make their homes in the United States. All of my life I can remember aunts, uncles and cousins living with my family at various times. Even in 1992 when I was in the eleventh grade, my newly widowed aunt and two cousins migrated to the US and lived with my family for a year.

Growing up, I was taught that my cousins were to be thought of as brothers and sisters. My aunts and uncles were to be considered extensions of my parents, with all of the same authority over me. I have always understood extended family to be immediate family. This is a foreign experience for most middle-class and affluent Americans. Yet I have always known I am American, just as I have understood my family to be quintessentially American— as the immigrant experience, being tied to two cultures, is a uniquely American experience.

* * *

Out came Wangaru with the two quilts. They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's Paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War.

—Alice Walker, "Everyday Use"

Crosby Arboretum, in Picayune, Mississippi, contains a sixty-four acre Interpretive Center called Pinecote. Pinecote intentionally reveals an ecological narrative unique to the lower Mississippi region. Its design "retells the region's ecology by reestablishing the structural combination of plants in relation to processes" (Potteiger, Landscape Narratives, 52). Crosby Arboretum exists on the site of an old strawberry farm, but rather than the arboretum telling the story of a strawberry farm, the site is designed around a broad theme that explains the Pearl River

Basin's historical ecology. Each zone of Crosby Arboretum reflects a different stage in the natural succession of plants. For example, a twenty-acre savannah displays grasses, sedges, carnivorous plants and wildflowers that all thrive because of natural lightening fires. Crosby Arboretum manages fires to mimic natural fires and to maintain the savannah. Another zone contains pines that arise in succession after savannah grasses. Pinecote tells visitors a story through a "series of 'journeys' that…weave through the zones, juxtapose edge with edge, move back and forth from different stages of succession, or follow a transect along the moisture gradient in order to develop themes and break down the complexity and build it back up again into an understanding of the whole. Rather than explaining in words, these design devices structure ways of reading signatures and signs in the landscape" (Potteiger, Landscape Narratives, 52).

While an ecological narrative is built upon a different type of story than an urban narrative or a neighborhood narrative, Crosby Arboretum offers an example of how understanding the narratives implicit in the land can suggest ways to design or plan for land use in the future. This paper has asked: To what end can local narratives guide design and planning? Narratives are implicit in people, places, and objects, but planners and designers must challenge themselves to seek out those implicit narratives and to weave them into the future of the sites they are shaping. Narratives should inform plans and designs, not to preserve or mimic the past, but instead by providing insight for how to plan and design a site's most appropriate and meaningful future.

A natural question to ask is: How do we make decisions about a place based on what we hear in other people's stories? This question arises when trying to apply narratives to neighborhood or community planning projects. Consider the example of Melrose Commons in the South Bronx. In 1992 planners unveiled a housing scheme that had been in the making for ten years. In an effort to generate an urban revitalization of a thirty-block area, the plan would displace "78 private homes, 400 tenants, and 80 businesses" and replace them with "2600 new middle-

income housing units, 250,000 square feet of commercial space, a centrally located 4-acre park, and a realignment of streets in one portion to a ninety-degree grid system" (Potteiger, Landscape Narratives, 265). The response from local residents was so overwhelming that the city had to withdraw the plans. According to Potteiger and Purinton "the problem stemmed from certain assumptions about this place, about the 'inner-city,' and about the kind of ideal home to replace it with. During all of the time preparing these proposals, however, the planners and the city never attempted to find and listen to the stories of the community" (Landscape Narratives, 265). Potteiger and Purinton go on to explain that "Nos Quedamos [Melrose Commons] had to counter the ghetto narrative of the area, and tell their own story. Planners had assumed that if offered money, people would leave and they could develop a middle-income, home-ownership-based community" (Landscape Narratives, 265).

Instead, the large and poverty-stricken community renamed itself "Nos Quedamos," which translates to "We Stay," and they asserted ownership over the area. In response planners were forced to take a new approach. They made a spontaneous shift as a result of listening to local narratives. Planners found themselves asking the questions:

> How do you live? What is home....This helped to generate affordable housing types for multigenerational families and the great diversity of cultures. In the existing housing stock it is not uncommon for families to double, even triple up in small apartments. As in much of America, in Melrose the family is no longer a nuclear unit. Here, though the numbers are skewed toward 70 percent single-woman heads of households, and in the context of low wages, unemployment, drugs, crime, and prison: this means the maintenance of home is a difficult struggle. One design prototype offers an adaptable floor plan for changing family configurations, much like the flexibility of a loft. Nos Quedamos and designers also proposed two-family housing, 'mother/daughter" condos with two units on two floors so that a family could buy both (Potteiger, Landscape Narratives, 268).

In this situation, the planners met with an unexpected sense of community and strength in numbers (Nos Quedamos had a population of almost 6000 people.). However, as the planners began to ask questions that revealed narratives about how the community functioned, they were

able to adjust their designs to meet a specific and formerly unrecognized market demand. More often than not, we consider multi-generational, multi-family living to be a sign of laziness or dependency, rather than a valid family structure. Middle-class and affluent American finds it difficult to view this as a legitimate form of family. Low-income, non-immigrant populations do not readily advocate this family structure, though they may live it, because it is ingrained in American culture to be unacceptable. Yet, the possibility exists to accept multi-family households as a valid family form and to further design for that market demand. Particularly in low-income African-American communities, it is common to find matriarchal, multi-generational families. "The story of Nos Quedamos is not just another case of scrappy local resistance to an outside development scheme; rather, it has turned into an extended, open-ended experiment in community authorship of its own sense of identity and control of a place that they call home" (Potteiger, Landscape Narratives, 266).

What can future planners look to, in terms of narrative, if they are planning strategies founded as equally on narratives as on traditional market-driven community data? There are many opportunities to consider as examples. Just as Crosby Arboretum conveys the strong underlying narrative of the land, rather than the particular past narrative of the site as a strawberry farm, Old South Baton Rouge contains strong underlying narrative themes. Education and the sustained pride associated with McKinley High School is one obvious narrative. The use of open space is an underlying and evolving narrative, both in the free-ride route that has been documented, and in the existence of Corporation Canal, a man-made canal, that runs through the community. Rolling hills that distinguish "the top" and 'the bottom," and large public voids of physical space created by Expressway Park and the interstate system contain open space narratives. There is also the narrative themes that belong to the "outsiders" who are sometimes inside of Old South Baton Rouge, such as mine and the students' narratives at St. Francis Xavier. It is possible to braid all of

these narratives together as guides for planning and design? I will offer one example, but the possibilities are countless.

* * *

I have asked myself many times why Expressway Park maintains such a negative impression in my mind. Why does the park appear so out of place and utterly forced into its surroundings? And why should I assume that parents would not want their children to play beneath an interstate? After all, the Manhattan playgrounds I used to walk past fit so naturally into their urban fabric; yet, they sit comfortably beside traffic-congested streets. All day, these parks absorb and meld the sounds of pounding feet, basketballs and jackhammers and the shrieks of children, sirens and car horns.

I have come to realize that it is not because Expressway Park is beneath the I-10 and I-110 exchange that it feels imposed on Old South Baton Rouge. It is because the park does not respond to its physical surroundings. Expressway Park attempts to replicate a 1950s suburban experience beneath a physical structure that reads like a tremendous concrete gash above the park and in the neighborhood. Expressway Park no more responds to the giant physical presence overhead than it responds to the scale of the neighborhood it resides in or to the needs of the people whom it is meant to serve. The interstate, the park and the neighborhood are three distinct and disconnected entities, though they should compose one cohesive and dynamic pattern. Braiding the various narratives at play in Old South Baton Rouge together should result in connecting the disconnected entities that currently comprise the physical composition of Old South Baton Rouge.

In my first workshop with the students at St. Francis Xavier, we talked about places and whether they can tell stories. We also talked about the different kinds of stories there are: stories that are fiction and stories that are true; stories that have themes such as love, the past, the future;

stories that are fantastical; the list went on. At the end of this workshop I gave the students an assignment: Describe your dream park. What is the story it tells? Overwhelmingly, in describing their "dream parks" the students described programmatic elements. One student wrote: "It would also have a gym for basketball and weightlifting. It would also have outdoor courts and football fields." Another student wrote: "I would have snack machines and drink machines." One student clearly could visualize what her park looked like: "My dream park has 2 swing sets. A large slide that won't burn your bottom when the sun is on it. Baby swings, 2 jungle gyms. One monkey bars. A lake where there are always ducks and swans. A machine for duck pellets. Benches, flowers, 2 large trees with flowers around them. The name of the park, made out of flowers. A few bushes, and a large area for children to play" (Transcripts from St. Francis Xavier workshops, 4-22-04).

Students, through the same questions, expressed how they wanted their parks to feel. Students wrote: "A great place for people of all ages. Where people can relax and feel comfortable." "A safe, heartwarming place to all ages. Where families come together. All races are comfortable being there." Some students did try to grapple directly with what story their park would tell. "I will have plaques about the history of my dream park and how I came up with a dream park." "It would tell several stories, such as my life, Adam and Eve, and some stories about the neighborhood. I would like to have a sports theme in my park." "I want to have a park that tells about my idol, Aaliyah. I want it to have a statue with my idol having wings, and a big platform (round shape) telling about her life and how she died" (Transcripts from St. Francis Xavier workshops, 4-22-04). The question, "What story does it tell?" gave students an opening to begin painting a picture. The descriptions of their parks implied their personal narratives. For instance, music, sports and religion have played roles in their lives. It can be gleaned from their responses that they want places to feel safe and to look beautiful, but their narratives are merely implied.

The questions that truly began to illicit personal narratives are "Who are your heroes or idols? How do they inspire you?" and "What members of your family do you live with?" The students' responses, though they are not narratives in and of themselves, begin to say something about their lives to this point; they offer clues to their personal narratives. In response to the question regarding heroes students wrote: "My idol would definitely have to be my mother. She is the strongest person I know;" "My hero is my grandfather because he inspires me to achieve my goals;" "Allen Iverson. Because he is taking over the NBA;" "Martin Luther King is an idol and hero;" "My hero is Aaliyah. She inspires me because she was a great singer. I also like her style;" "Beyonce, she has always been my idol. If there was anyone I would be like, it would be her;" "My hero is someone who is strong and confident;" "My hero is my father, because unlike other men, he takes care of me and my family. He is so funny and he is always there for me;" "Famous black artists and great leaders of the country/world;" "Thomas Kinkade. He is a wonderful painter and his pictures are so realistic;" "My idol is Michael Jordan;" "My heroes or idols are my family because without them, I would be nothing, and I probably wouldn't be here today;" and "My heroes are God, Jesus, Mary, and my family" (Transcripts from St. Francis Xavier workshops, 4-22-04). These responses begin to express who influences the students and who inspires them to dream, and in designing or planning, these influences can inform projects.

Some of the answers to the question, "Who are the members of your family you live with?" begin to reaffirm that students live in a number of different family structures. "The members of my family whom I live with are my mother and my grandparents;" "My mom and brother;" "My brother and my moma;" "I live with my mom, stepfather, and brother;" "I live with my mother, father, and my brother;" "I live with my mother and sister;" "Momma, Daddy, and my 2 pets, a dog and guinea pig;" "I live with my mom and dad;" "My mom, my step dad, my 2 brothers, my 1 sister, and I;" "My mom,

aunt, 2 cousins, and my grandparents;" "Mother, Father, Step Parents, Brothers and Sisters;" I live with my mother and my cousins;" and "I live with my mother, father, and brother."

Just as oral histories are an effective way to illicit local narratives from elderly residents in a community, perhaps one-on-one conversations would have been an effective way to glean the students' personal narratives. The workshops brought out hints of narratives and there recurring themes emerged: God, music, sports, art, drama and history.

Building on both the student insights and the oral histories that exist for Old South Baton Rouge, Expressway Park could be integrated into this urban residential fabric. It is dishonest to impose a suburban park in an urban community and to ignore the interstate that hovers above. The themes of music, sports, art, and drama that emerged from the St. Francis Xavier students suggest a far more dynamic park than Expressway Park provides. While the park currently contains playing fields and basketball courts, they are not used. The park lends itself to exciting paved schemes that incorporate these themes and provide for the activities. The park needs to be designed in such a way that there are no concerns of throwing baseballs onto the highway. Vice versa, the park needs to incorporate design that prevents debris or automobiles from toppling over the interstate and into the park.

One possible way to unite Expressway Park with Old South Baton Rouge is through a trail system. The students brought up the themes of God and history. The oral histories in Old South Baton Rouge document the free ride system that was used during the bus boycott. This route deserves a defined physical presence in the community both as a celebration of achievement and as an acknowledgement of history. The route could become a trail system that links to the Corporation Canal, the Mississippi River, LSU campus, downtown, City Park (to the east of Old South Baton Rouge), to historical churches, to neighborhood schools and of course, to a more appropriately designed Expressway Park. Additionally, the route can trace Civil Rights progress in

Old South Baton Rouge by linking Magnolia Mound Plantation and neighborhood schools. Such a scheme begins to reframe history and begins to reframe progress; the trail in itself could be identified, not as a mark of history, but as a mark of community values and progress.

Perhaps the most significant narrative that surfaced is that children live in both traditional family structures and in non-traditional family structures. While most of the students in the workshop did not live in Old South Baton Rouge, two or three were residents. In asking whom the students lived with, I was essentially asking the same question that drove the plans for Nos Quedamos. How do you live? This question elicits narratives that can inform market considerations and people considerations equally. In this way, it is a vital question to ask in planning and designing for how people will live in the future.

Recently I had a phone conversation with the captain of the district 2 police department that oversees Old South Baton Rouge. I was explaining the HOPE VI grant and its focus on eradicating stacked public housing and replacing it with single-family homes and duplexes. The police captain insisted that supplying single-family housing would not work. "You know what happens," he explained, "the grandmother lives in an apartment, and the daughter moves in with her child. Before you know it, the daughter's boyfriend has moved in, and the grandmother doesn't want to kick them all out. It doesn't matter if it's single family housing; it's not used as single family housing." The police captain spoke of this living arrangement in negative terms, as if it was an unacceptable family structure. He also linked the structure to criminal activity.

The HOPE VI grant attributes improved housing standards to improving lives and to motivating residents to move away from crime toward productive roles in society. In this same line of thinking, if we validate multiple-family structures and strive to produce affordable housing that meets those family structures, varied as they may be, residents' lives will improve. Expanding the definition of "home" in Old South Baton Rouge would not only make room for positive

experiences for children and adults alike, it would also respond to the urban environment inherent in the community. In many ways, multi-generational and multi-family households promote a greater sense of community responsibility. They adhere to the saying, "it takes a village." Yet, when non-traditional families live in dwellings that are not designed to accommodate, this extended family lifestyle can detract from the sense of community. Instead, it can deteriorate a family structure because family members must compete for space.

Old South Baton Rouge is not downtown, and it is not a university neighborhood. However, as the neighbor of both downtown and LSU, Old South Baton Rouge is sandwiched between two areas where housing has many alternative forms, including student housing, loft apartments, forthcoming high rise condominiums. Expanding housing choices in Old South Baton Rouge that also respond to the narratives implicit in the people who live there makes sense in this context. How might it lift the lives of children like Jazz and Jordan— the two children I substitute taught, if planning schemes for low-income urban communities make space for and promote housing opportunities that validate varying family structures?

CHAPTER 7: EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE

The instructor said,

Go home and write
a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you—
then, it will be true.
—Langston Hughes, "Theme for English B"

This thesis has evolved significantly over time, but each morphosis has focused on the same issues and has recalled the same possibility. The issue has been how to meaningfully engage people who are not planners or designers in the planning and design process. The possibility that consistently arises exists in narrative. I began considering this issue unconsciously, but after I entered graduate school, as well as when I began working at Plan Baton Rouge, I found a forum in which to explore the idea with intention and direction.

What began as a study in how the Sea Grant College Program was approaching ecological planning in the Atchafalya Basin, later shifted to relate policy aspects of planning more closely to physical planning and design. In this vein, I began studying how to connect non-professionals to planning and design. I was also interested in the benefits of public/private partnerships. Considering where this paper has landed, working with St. Francis Xavier and Expressway Park was a micro study of both public involvement and public/private partnerships in community revitalizations. Ultimately, I focused my lens on the public process as it has been evolving in revitalization efforts in Old South Baton Rouge.

Susan Turner commented during this long evolution that, so often, students do not give themselves over to the process of developing a thesis. I have come to understand her comment in a profound way. In embarking on a thesis, students instinctively ask to be given the "correct" formula. We look for the "directions" because we are not accustomed to exploring and developing

the most appropriate and authentic approaches for the subject matter at hand. As design students, we should be comfortable developing our own approaches, rather than being comfortable to rely on formulas. Formulas certainly help move projects to completion, but if formulas are to sustain relevance we must be acutely aware of the processes we are utilizing. Otherwise, we run the risk of applying outdated, inauthentic or inappropriate formulas to projects. I have spent a great deal of energy trying to understand the values of all of the necessary elements in revitalization efforts, trying to stitch these different cuts of cloth together and trying to embrace a process. I have discovered that you can allow yourself to veer off course and still travel in a certain direction.

* * *

Magic realism: A term referring to fiction that integrates realistic elements with supernatural or fantastic experiences.…Latin American writers…employed the term to characterize the 'marvelous real,' seeing everyday life as if for the first time. The appeal of magic realism lies in its effective resolution of the tension between REALISM and experimentation, overcoming the limitations of the former while providing an anchor for the latter.

—A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms

In reference to both the HOPE VI grant and to the initial stages of embarking on the Old South Baton Rouge "Strategic Neighborhood Revitalization and Economic Development Plan", I have heard it said more than once that, "developers need certainty." This reality has not been lost on me, nor has the reality that a number of components contribute to successful community revitalization strategies for low income urban neighborhoods. Building a successful strategy requires baseline information about the neighborhood; data for market analysis; creating a vision for what residents want and understanding how residents view their weaknesses and strengths; getting residents to own a strategy; focusing on creating new home owners and developing a strategy for funding the plan once it is complete. An outcome that is both accomplished by these components and that generates a community owned and shared by diverse groups necessarily

includes this component: thorough engagement of existing locals. Revitalizing a community to this end implies social issues must be addressed alongside market issues.

Urban planning and social policies are not two separate initiatives. Rather, just as design is one facet of urban planning, social policy is another facet— if planning is to produce more than a physical setting. This nation's earliest beginnings evidence this essential relationship between planning and policy. As designers, it is our core job to devise creative, visually stimulating schemes for how to shape space into place. As planners we must attend to strategies for both physical and policy logistics to ensure that our design schemes are feasible and livable. Shaping space through design, planning and policy cannot be void of the people who inhabit that space.

Challenging ourselves to involve people and their narratives in the place-making process offers a method for sparking spontaneous incidents and a method for avoiding short-sighted formulas. Landscape architect Ann Whiston Spirn has written:

> Design is a mode of storytelling. Urban design is a process of spinning out visions of the future city that pose alternatives from which to choose; it is a process of describing the shape of the future. The products of design, be they buildings, parks, or sewer systems, not only provide settings for living, they also embody a powerful symbolic language that conveys meaning, expressing the way a society regards itself and the values it upholds or rejects. These meanings are further extended through the process of construction and cultivation, use and neglect, as we dwell in what began as dreams ("The Poetics of City and Nature", 124).

The people, their stories and their ideas that will inhabit spaces and also transform spaces into vessels of heritage, are not predictable, but they are integral to planning and design. It is an elementary necessity to engage people in a meaningful way, to acknowledge and transmit heritage passed through narratives into heritage that will develop, progress and evolve in planned and designed spaces. This cycle is inherent to the way people and spaces are connected. We are accustomed to working with formulas. If planners, designers and their clients give themselves over

to evolving processes, and not only to formulas, meaningful, regionally and culturally authentic place-making will result.

Old South Baton Rouge provides an ideal opportunity to plan a meaningful and regionally authentic revitalization strategy that truly serves the people who live there. Much history has been documented through oral histories, and these histories need not be mummified. Rather, it is important to breathe life into them and let them serve as a catalyst for both reviving and motivating existing younger generations and for attracting forward thinking newcomers. Archambault suggested that the narrative process is the precedent to the most key aspect of moving a plan to implementation, rather than seeing it sit on a shelf in city offices. When residents are engaged from the beginning, they begin to take ownership of an evolving plan. In taking ownership, residents become thoroughly engaged in learning how to build the capacity to actually implement a plan (Archambault, 3-22-05). What good is the creativity or problem solving ability of designers and planners if we do not champion the very people and people-driven processes that both bring strategies and plans to fruition and inhabit the spaces we help shape? Planners and designers need to champion effective public involvement processes so that residents will champion resultant revitalization strategies and move them to implementation. This means planners and designers must emphasize the long-term value of a most basic first step. A tree. A rock. A cloud. A conversation.

Laying the foundation for market certainty that attracts developers who are necessary to bring investment may very well be easy compared to laying the long-term certainty that lifts lives, and that ultimately, benefits communities and cities long after developers have moved on to other communities in other cities. In planning and design, it is possible, ideal and necessary to allow room for spontaneous incidents that lead to directed but unique results. Partaking in narrative processes in the earliest stages of revitalization planning, during inventory and analysis, makes

space for that spontaneity. This also lays the strong foundation required for moving people-driven solutions to a kind of magic realism implementation. This can only occur if planners and designers impress upon clients the ultimate, long-term value of the narrative process.

To be clear, the actions I am advocating for planners, designers, and clients who are embarking on community revitalization efforts are simple: Place a dollar value on talking to people who are not planners, designers, developers, investors, administrators, bureaucrats. Listen. Learn. Invite people to paint a picture of what can be accomplished with their lives, experiences and impressions. Let that basis, along with typical physical inventories and analysis, help formulate viable strategies; do not start talking to people only after agendas have been formulated. What I am advocating takes time and costs money. But the investment is worth the returns.

Flannery O'Connor wrote the story "Everything that Rises Must Converge." In it, she portrayed one woman's inability, during the height of integration, to deal with converging lifestyles. Urban revitalization today must not repeat the results brought by "urban renewal" in the fifties and sixties. In this day and time, if revitalizing struggling urban communities is to attract diverse reinvestment and ownership to neighborhoods as well as actually lift lives of both elderly and very young existing residents, efforts must converge market-driven and people-driven approaches. Underlying this investigation is a striving to merge several key components: idealism with practicality, market-driven approaches with people-driven approaches, academic theory with professional practice and urban planning with urban policy. These mergers are the means to viable, rich, lasting, and lifting solutions for complex planning/people issues faced in urban revitalization projects. These mergers can begin in a very simple place. Every person has a story to tell, and every narrative has the potential to inspire the social and physical planning and design of space and place. This is more than a personal bias; it is also my motivation.

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