From Upper Canal to Lower Manhattan: Memorialization and the Politics of Loss

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The New Orleans Katrina Memorial is located at the upper end of Canal Street, an inexpensive and relatively short trolley car ride from the city's tourist hub in the French Quarter. Despite its ease of access, and close proximity to the more famous cemeteries to which tourists regularly make pilgrimage, the memorial is little visited and largely unknown, even to many of the city's own residents.[1] In this it stands in stark contrast to the National September 11 Memorial in Lower Manhattan, which drew its millionth visitor less than four months after its opening on September 12, 2011.[2] Recent work in political theory on memory, mourning, and memorialization—as well as Ancient Greek concerns about the same—point to the ways in which the manner of remembrance, grieving, and commemoration employed by a democratic polity help to shape political outcomes.[3] In what follows, I trace the history and design of the New York City and New Orleans memorials to suggest the ways in which they embody and perpetuate national strategies of remembrance and forgetting, in which injustices perpetrated *against* the polity are prioritized over injustices perpetrated *within* it.[4] Drawing on John Bodnar's distinction between national and vernacular commemoration,[5] I nevertheless conclude with a counter-intuitive suggestion: that while on a *national* level the public's relative ignorance of the Katrina Memorial is indeed indicative of a polity more concerned with injustices perpetrated against it than within it; on a *local* level the erection and subsequent forgetting of the Katrina Memorial is a manifestation of a mode of *vernacular* memory, mourning and commemoration with far more democratically-productive potential than its counterpart in New York City. In particular, I argue that it cultivates, and historically *has* culti-vated, a more forward-looking, progressive, and polyphonic response to loss than the type of dominant national narratives embodied by the 9/11 Memorial. Whereas the latter continually replays the loss in ways that rob the polity of its capacity to move beyond its initial response, the former acknowledges and incorporates the loss while steeling the community for the challenges ahead.

The essay offers an argument with implications not only for our understanding of the ways in which memorialization can shape democratic outcomes, but also for two recent discussions in political science: first, about the role of neo-liberal policies in both exacerbating the impact of Katrina on New Orleans and shaping the city's reconstruction in the storm's aftermath; and second, related concerns about the efforts of grassroots social movements to organize for justice in the face of the declining desire to employ, and the belief in, the power of government to achieve meaningful social change.

Remembrance of Things Past

"Public memory" argues historian John Bodnar, "is a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future." It speaks, he suggests, "primarily about the structure of power in society."[6] Drawing a distinction between "official"—here reformulated as "national"—and "vernacular" modes of commemoration, he argues that the former "promotes a nationalistic, patriotic culture of the whole," while the latter is "less interested . . . in exerting influence or control over others, and [is] preoccupied, instead, with defending the interests and rights of . . . social segments."[7] His claims are echoed by the political theorist Jenny Edkins. "[M]any contemporary forms of memorialization" she notes, "function to reinforce the nation;" while "resistance to state narratives of commemoration . . . constitutes resistance to sovereign power."[8] Both agree that the predominant form of national memorialization frequently "constitutes a form of forgetting" that seeks to empty traumatic events of their political content and suppress oppositional narratives.[9] In this it is, culture and communications professor Marita Sturken suggests, a manifestation of a "comfort culture" that serves "as

Simon Stow is an Associate Professor in the Department of Government at The College of William and Mary (sastow@wm.edu). He would like to thank Jeffrey Isaac for his extensive comments on an earlier version of this paper and for his considerable patience; Caroline Hanley for her invaluable assistance; and Steven Johnston, Benjamin Morris, Christine Nemacheck, and Mike Tierney for helpful discussions about the essay.

a form of depoliticization and as a means to confront loss, grief, and fear through processes that disavow politics."[10] This very disavowal, nevertheless, serves to promote political agendas which "tend to be politically regressive in that they are attempts to mediate loss through finding the good—a newfound patriotism, feelings of community— that has come through pain."[11]

These claims about the politics of national commemoration are particularly pertinent given Erika Doss's argument that America has recently been overcome by "*memorial mania*: an obsession with issues of memory and history and an urgent desire to express and claim these issues in visibly public contexts." This reflects, she suggests, "a cultural shift toward public feeling as a source of knowledge."[12] While there are an ever increasing number of memorials to point to as support for Doss's thesis, the work of political theorist Steven Johnston on the plethora of memorials dedicated to the bravery and patriotism of animals killed in war is, perhaps, the best illustration of the *manic* nature of this commitment.[13] Such mania—by robbing citizens of their capacity for critical reflection—might be considered a mental state ill-suited to productive democratic engagement. Evidence for this claim would seem to be found in the mode of national memorialization embodied in the commemoration of the September 11 attacks in Lower Manhattan.

"We Will Never Forget"

The National September 11 Memorial is located on the former site of the World Trade Center complex in New York City. The memorial, named "Reflecting Absence" designed by Michael Arad and Peter Walker was chosen after an international competition that elicited some 5,201 proposals from 63 countries. It consists of a large tree-lined plaza whose centerpiece is the square foundational footprints of the former twin towers. Each is approximately an acre in size and features polished granite walls that descend three stories into the ground. Water cascades from all sides and collects in pools at the bottom of the footprints before draining into a further square indentation at their centers. At the plaza level, the walls around the footprints are lined with burnished bronze parapets into which the names of the dead are stencil-cut. While some have argued that the Memorial's design is decidedly banal—"Were it not for the names . . . carved into the barrier surrounding the pools," observed *New York Times* architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff, "you might be contemplating a pair of fountains at a corporate plaza"[14]— others have expressed fears that the Memorial might be *too* emotive. A February 15, 2012 *New York Times* article detailed police concerns that the pools might become locations for suicides by those overcome by grief.[15]

The Ancient Greeks were well aware of the dangers of unchecked grief to democratic politics. Most obviously associated with women, there was a distinct fear that the

private grief of the household would spill over into the public sphere where it could no longer be contained. In *Mothers in Mourning*, Classicist Nicole Loraux offers a detailed account of the regulation of women's role in mourning rituals. Those who laid out and prepared the body were, for example, considered contaminated and kept apart even from those women who attended at the graveside. The latter were, moreover, expected to depart before the men lest the unbridled emotion of their laments were permitted to have the last word over the ceremonies.[16] Although the grief of women was of particular concern, the Greeks were also concerned about that of the city as a whole. Pericles concludes his famous funeral oration by declaring "[a]nd now, when you have mourned for your dear ones, you must depart,"[17] capturing the way in which the city sought to bring mourning to a close by containing it within a formal public ceremony. The Greek fear was that uncontained emotional responses to loss could all too easily become *álaston pénthos*: mourning without end. Loraux argues that the dangers of such mourning for democratic politics are considerable. Most obviously, she writes, when mourning cannot end it all too easily slips over into anger, and "we see the ultimate justification for revenge, for the spirit of vendetta, for all the horrors of retaliation against earlier horrors."[18] Indeed, Loraux identifies a particular kind of response cultivated by an inability to move beyond such losses, the grief-wrath of *mênis,* which clouds good judgment and the capacity for critical reflection: values essential to meaningful democratic engagement.[19]

The way in which such private grief can infect public discourse is suggested both by the role that the families of victims played in the design of the 9/11 Memorial; and in the politics that the Memorial embodies and perpetuates. Although Bodnar argues that vernacular mourning is preoccupied with defending the rights and interests of particular social groups, he also notes that it is uninterested in exerting control or influence over others. As such, the role of the families in the 9/11 memorialization process is better understood as a manifestation of national mourning, not least because of the ways in which they sought control over the commemoration, merging their sectional concerns with a national narrative of loss and victimhood with which they had a clear affinity.

Even before the design of the Memorial was announced, victims' families and other advocacy groups were extremely vocal about what it should and should not contain. First among the design requirements was that the Memorial "[r]ecognize each individual who was a victim of the attacks."[20] Initial plans to locate those names randomly were abandoned after considerable protest from the families. A prolonged and heated debate about how exactly the names *would be* organized followed; just one of many battles waged by the families not only against the Memorial Commission but also against one another.[21] Such deference to the emotionally-laden moral authority of the

families of those killed in the attacks while initially, perhaps, somewhat understandable nevertheless served to demonstrate the validity of the Greek concern about the dangers of private grief to democratic politics.

When the first round of plans for the Memorial site were revealed in 2004, they contained a number of cultural components, among them theater and gallery spaces as well as a proposed International Freedom Center, which would ". . .celebrate freedom as a constantly-evolving world movement in which America has played a leading role."[22] The plans were vehemently opposed by many of the victims' families. In a *Wall Street Journal* editorial titled "The Great Ground Zero Heist," Debra Burlingame, the sister of the pilot of Flight 77, accused the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation of wanting to build "a memorial that stubbornly refuses to acknowledge the yearning to return to that day. Rather than a respectful tribute to our individual and collective loss, they will get a slanted history lesson, a didactic lecture on the meaning of liberty in a post-9/11 world."[23] The editorial inspired "Take Back the Memorial," a campaign led by victims' families whose 49,000 signature petition declared that "Political discussions have no place at the World Trade Center September 11th Memorial."[24] Plans for the center and the accompanying artistic spaces were subsequently withdrawn on the grounds that they "might include exhibits critical of America that would pain families."[25] In this, perhaps, it is possible to see a manifestation of what Hannah Arendt called the rise of "the social": the merging of the public and private spheres in ways that undermine the possibilities for an engaged and thoughtful form of politics.[26]

Indeed, that a narrative so deeply favorable to the United States—combining as it did an Hegelian account of history with a secularized version of America's Puritan mission into the wilderness—was considered too controversial for the site, suggests the ways in which even the most modest attempts to place the attacks in any kind of historical or political context were suppressed by public manifestations of private grief. As the *New York Times* observed, "It's hard to imagine a group of people who have been listened to more intently than this group of family members. Their views have helped to shape or reshape nearly every aspect of the redevelopment of ground zero—and especially the memorial . . . shaping the debate about Ground Zero in ways that were polarizing."[27] Of course, the historical and political decontextualization of the attacks did not serve to depoliticize the Memorial, simply to hide its political content. For if, as both Doss and Sturken argue, our contemporary modes of memorialization are concerned largely with the affective, it is important to note that such experiences need not be as redemptive as Sturken suggests. The flipside of the refusal to reflect critically upon the causes and possible consequences of the object of memorialization is a narrative of national victimhood. In such circumstances, memorials become memorials to an ongoing sense of injustice that, despite claims that memorials are sites of healing, actually exacerbate the affective impact of such losses in ways that are potentially damaging for democracy.

Debra Burlingame's demand for a deeply nostalgic memorial embodying a yearning to return to the day of the attacks suggests the ways in which the Memorial is a manifestation of *álaston pénthos,* the mourning without end. It is a suggestion that would seem to be confirmed by the plans for the as-yet unopened but similarly backward-looking museum to be located at the site. Although the Museum website promises that the "exhibition will . . . explore the background leading up to the events, and examine their aftermath and continuing implications," the experience of the International Freedom Center suggests that such a narrative will have little—if anything—to say about geo-politics and American foreign policy. Indeed, the general tenor of the Museum is suggested by its promise that "[t]he lives of every victim of the 2001 and 1993 attacks will be commemorated as the visitors have the opportunity to learn about the men, women, and children who died."[28] As I have argued elsewhere, this focus upon mourning the individual embodied in, for example, *The New York Times* "Portraits in Grief Series"—which offered short obituaries for the great majority of the New York City victims of the 9/11 attacks—encourages a kind of "pornography of grief" in which the emotional response deliberately cultivated by such detailed individuation serves as a confirmation of the viewer's own victimhood.[29] It is a narrative in which the innocence of the victims of the attacks is merged with a narrative of national innocence—predominant in American history[30]—to perpetuate a sense of injustice that engenders the problematic grief-wrath of *mênis* and the desire for revenge; embodied perhaps in the rush to war following the attacks. To claim that this form of remembering cultivates a sense of victimhood among the living is not, of course, to deny that those killed in the attacks were victims of a cruel and horrendous act. It is, however, to suggest the way in which the status of victim is passed onto the viewer through a grief-laden form of transubstantiation. The decision, in 2007, to change the name of the site from New York's World Trade Center Memorial to the *National* September 11 Memorial and Museum may explain, in part, the popularity of the site. The understanding of 9/11 as a national event means that visitors to the site—or at least *American* visitors to the site[31]—can understand themselves as victims with all the emotional gratification and problems for critically engaged political discourse that such status brings.

The National September 11 Memorial and Museum is, it should be noted, possibly the most expensive memorial in American history, with the final construction costs estimated to be upwards of one billion dollars, and an annual operating cost of approximately $57 million.[32] As such, it suggests the way in which the mode of mourning that it

both expresses and cultivates leads to a self-perpetuating excess. This is not to argue that the families of those who died, or even those of us who watched the events on television, should seek to achieve what the media likes to call "closure"—those who have experienced sudden, violent deaths of loved ones know that no such thing is possible[33]—but rather that the polity should seek ways to incorporate the dead in the more democratically-productive ways embodied, it will be argued, in certain practices of vernacular mourning. The design of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum will, however, never let this happen.

In addition to the Memorial and Museum, the site will also contain a repository—shielded from public view—for the nearly 22,000 pieces of human remains that are so far unidentified. The aim is not to provide a final resting place for these fragmentary body parts, but rather to store and seek to identify them as technology improves. In many cases, body parts have been identified and returned to families long after they have buried the remains originally presented to them in the months and years following the attacks, thereby reopening old wounds.[34] In this it serves as a metaphor for the mode of mourning embodied by the Memorial complex. The politically problematic nature of such remembering is suggested by the 2010 furor over the proposed Islamic Community Center in Lower Manhattan. In a declaration indicating its ahistorical understanding of the attacks, the 9/11 Memorial mission statement proclaimed: "May the lives remembered, the deeds recognized, and the spirit reawakened be eternal beacons, which reaffirm respect for life, strengthen our resolve to preserve freedom, and inspire and end to hatred, ignorance and intolerance."[35] The hostility generated towards Muslim Americans over the plans for the community center, including an outpouring of violence and vitriol, suggests the ways in which the mode of mourning embodied in the 9/11 Memorial is dominated by the grief-wrath of *mênis* rather than the liberal values of tolerance and respect.[36]

In this then, the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum complex constitute a national form of mourning which, while emanating from the manifestation of a private grief in the public sphere, nevertheless cultivates what Bodnar calls "a nationalistic, patriotic culture of the whole." It is a form of *álaston pénthos*—mourning without end—which focuses on injustices perpetrated against the nation, at the expense of any consideration of the nation's possible role in generating that perceived injustice. As such, it stands in stark contrast to the national response to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, marked as it was by a conscious national forgetting.

They're Trying to Wash Us Away

On Thursday September 1, 2005, George W. Bush was interviewed by Diane Sawyer on ABC's *Good Morning America*. Asked to compare the events of 9/11 with the devastation in the Gulf Coast, the President declared: "9/11

was a man-made attack, this was a natural disaster."[37] In the aftermath of Katrina, this reiteration of "natural disaster" was a popular narrative. It nevertheless overlooks the ways in which human error and/or indifference—along with long-standing environmental, shipping, and energy policies—exacerbated the relatively small amount of damage inflicted by the hurricane to cause the levee breaches that were largely responsible for the devastation in New Orleans.[38] "The 'worst natural disaster' characterization" argues Cedric Johnson, "stems partially from the historical amnesia that pervades American publics but persists because of the political cachet the myth carries for the ruling class."[39] The political pedigree of the politics of forgetting is, however, considerably older than Johnson suggests. Nicole Loraux notes that when the Greeks experienced social tensions, they were "usually called in Greek, the events or the misfortunes," and compared to a natural catastrophe. It was, she suggests, a way of forgetting: suppressing the very real social divisions within the *polis* by making the causes of such problems appear external to the city, and as such, beyond human agency.[40]

In helping to propagate this narrative of the devastation of New Orleans as a natural disaster, the Bush administration and others contributed to the erasure of Katrina's impact from public memory. For although the events of late summer 2005 generated an initial outpouring of anger, empathy, and promises of support for New Orleans and the surrounding area, this empathy quickly dissipated and many of these promises remain unfulfilled. Given the rush to memorialization following the September 11 attacks, and the broader "memorial mania" identified by Doss, there is, perhaps, no greater evidence of the lack of national public interest in the ongoing effects of Hurricane Katrina than the so-far-failed attempts to create a Lower-Manhattan style national memorial in New Orleans.

In 2007, the Unified New Orleans Plan, which set out a $14.4 billion blueprint for rebuilding New Orleans, allocated $3.5 million for the construction of a Katrina memorial. The purpose of the project, the UNOP declared, was "to create a memorial to the events surrounding the disaster of Katrina, including the deaths of over 1,000 New Orleanians, but more importantly, to the rebuilding of the City. The scale of the project is Homeric, on the order of the Arch of Triumph on the Champs Elysee in Paris. This project will transform a section of town into a new destination for tourists and locals alike."[41] The proposal urged completion of the memorial by 2018. Despite its relatively modest budget—especially when compared to the National 9/11 Memorial—and an expected annual maintenance cost of only $70,000, there is considerable skepticism about the likelihood of its construction. As a newspaper report detailing the plans observed: "It is not at all clear whether the memorial will ever get built. No money has been secured for the project." Indeed, many residents questioned the

wisdom of building such a memorial when so much of the city faced more pressing concerns including drainage and other reconstruction projects.[42]

The UNOP's was not the only proposal for a memorial. Soon after the hurricane, Rodney Omar Casimire, a self-described educator, artist, poet, and post-Katrina reconstruction volunteer, established the Katrina National Memorial Charitable Foundation.[43] His goal was to build a Katrina National Memorial Park to be located on 25 acres of green space in New Orleans. Despite a five-year plan for the construction of the memorial delineated on the foundation's website, a proposed completion date of 2014 seems highly unlikely.[44] Indeed, it is not even clear that Casimire has secured the land for the construction of his proposed memorial.[45] The foundation is currently operated out of a residential building in New Orleans, and its MySpace page does not seem to have been updated since 2009.[46]

The lack of momentum behind Casimire's quixotic attempts to establish a national Katrina memorial is mirrored by the similar lack of progress made on the proposed National Katrina Museum. To be located in the Lower Ninth Ward, and "designed to be a place of healing," the 12,000 square foot museum is projected to include a timeline of the events; an accounting of the bureaucratic struggles faced by New Orleans residents in their quest for assistance and redress from the federal government; and space for a non-profit organization which will help victims of future natural and man-made disasters obtain the resources available for their assistance.[47] A ceremonial groundbreaking was held at the site on the fourth anniversary of the storm in 2009, and museum was projected to open on the fifth anniversary in 2010. Nevertheless, despite the project being partly backed by local government funding, the building where the museum is to be located remained vacant as late as May 2011.[48]

The disparity between the efforts to memorialize the events of September 11, 2001, and those of August 29, 2005 and the days following the storm could not be greater. While 9/11 is to be remembered with a billion dollar museum and memorial complex, attempts to establish a similar—but considerably more modest—national memorial and/or museum for Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath have floundered without a single proposal moving beyond the planning stage. This would seem to confirm the thesis that while there is considerable interest in memorializing injustices done to the nation, there is an equal and opposite lack of interest in remembering injustices perpetrated within it.

In the face of such national disinterest, residents of New Orleans have nevertheless taken to constructing their own smaller scale memorials. Across from the New Orleans Convention Center—a site of considerable misery during the period following the hurricane—the artist Sally Heller installed "Scrap House," an artwork fashioned from Kat-

rina debris, consisting of a battered shack atop a tree. The project was sponsored by the Arts Council of New Orleans, a non-profit organization partly funded by local government support.[49] Similarly, the victims and survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are remembered in the Lower Ninth Ward by an installation designed by David Lee. Commissioned by the Ward's neighborhood council and completed with donated time and materials, it consists of a partially-devastated or partially-reconstructed house surrounded by empty chairs and blue poles indicating the rising level of the floodwaters that all-but destroyed the surrounding area.[50] The largest of these memorials is, however, the New Orleans Hurricane Katrina Memorial. The location of the memorial, its design, and the apparent lack of awareness of or interest in it are, nevertheless, seen by some as a further manifestation of the public's desire to forget both the storm and its victims.

Dedicated on the third anniversary of the storm in 2008, the New Orleans Hurricane Katrina Memorial consists of a labyrinth of paths whose shape is meant to reflect that of the storm. At its center—the metaphorical eye—is a large black marble plinth inscribed, on one side, with the details of the Memorial's construction and design; and on the other, with an account of the misery, chaos, and death experienced in the storm's aftermath. The paths are lined with Louisiana cypress trees that have traditionally served as buffers against the storms that strike the city and the surrounding area.[51] Most notable, however, are the six mausoleums placed at the perimeter of the pathways. Each consists of 18 vaults, fronted with dark polished granite, arranged in vertical rows of three and horizontal rows of six. Interred within them are the bodies of 85 victims of the storm and its aftermath.[52] The bodies are those of the unidentified or unclaimed. Anonymity is central to the experience. Even those with known identities remain unnamed; nor is it clear which of the tombs are occupied. Unlike the 9/11 Memorial, the remains are to be permanently located at the site. Indeed, it was out of the practical necessity of such a resting place that the Memorial emerged.

Under Louisiana law, the Coroner of a parish is responsible for the interment of unidentified or unclaimed bodies. In 2006, Frank Minyard, the Coroner of Orleans Parish, established the New Orleans Katrina Memorial Corporation, a non-profit charitable organization to raise funds for the construction and upkeep of the site.[53] The final cost of the Memorial was $1.6 million.[54] Lists of the major donors are inscribed on granite markers at the memorial's entrance. They include the City of New Orleans; the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Society; the Sigma Lambda chapter of the black fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha; and the Louisiana State University. Most notably, however, the great majority of donors acknowledged at the site—including a number listed on a separate marker—are part of the death industry: funeral homes; cemeteries; mortuaries; and embalmers. In a city that has such a close relationship

with death—one suggested by the popularity of its cemeteries as tourist destinations; the continued practice of Voodoo; and, of course, by the ongoing tradition of the jazz funeral—it is, perhaps, only fitting that those closest to it should play such a significant role in the memorialization of Katrina. Despite the employment of this considerable expertise and local knowledge in both its design and construction, what little response that has been generated by the Memorial finds it wanting.

Evidence for the claim that the New Orleans Katrina Memorial has largely been forgotten, both by the national public and the city's residents, is supported by the absence of any accounts of the popular response to it. Writing about the design in 2007, Doug MacCash, art writer for *The Times-Picayune,* declared it "almost perfect," while nevertheless proposing some design changes.[55] Since then, however, evidence of the critical and popular response to the Memorial seems to have been confined to the work of two academics: Lindsay Tuggle, a lecturer in American Studies at the University of Sydney, and Benjamin Morris, a resident of New Orleans and researcher at the Open University in the United Kingdom who writes about the role of the arts in post-Katrina reconstruction. Each finds the Memorial problematic. Foremost among their concerns is its location.

The New Orleans Hurricane Katrina Memorial is built on the site of the former Charity Hospital Cemetery. Established in 1848, and one of the few graveyards in the city in which bodies were buried underground, the cemetery was used to inter the remains of the unclaimed, particularly the victims of yellow fever and influenza epidemics that periodically swept through the city. Also buried at the site are the ashes of those who donated their bodies to the Louisiana State Anatomical Board for Medical Education. The public's lack of interest in the cemetery is acknowledged by a marker at the site. "Charity Hospital Cemetery is" it reads, "one of the most historically significant yet least known among New Orleans *[sic]* 'cities of the dead.' " Benjamin Morris concurs. The Memorial is, he writes, "a space for remembrance and reflection which is not just set apart but forgotten, and to which few residents of the city bear any meaningful relation."[56] Expressing a similar concern, Lindsay Tuggle argues:

> The placement of the Katrina Memorial, which commemorates those who died as a result of large-scale government failure and neglect, on the site of the charity cemetery enacts an uncanny symmetry. The displacement of the Charity Hospital dead to create space for the memorial strangely mirrors the Katrina diaspora, and continues to categorize the dead into those who are worthy or unworthy of memorialization. The site enacts an architectural whitewashing, erasing the buried history of racial injustice in New Orleans to memorialize a so-called natural disaster.[57]

Indeed, the Charity Hospital itself—which provided care for over 80 percent of New Orleans's uninsured, of whom 82 percent were economically disadvantaged and 2/3 African American—was also a victim of the storm.[58] Now closed, there are no plans for it to be reopened. The impact of the closing on the city's poor further suggests, perhaps, the ways in which the Memorial enacts a form of social and political forgetting. "The Memorial" writes Tuggle, "operates within the delusion that the unknown dead have been interred, that there is a finality to the process of mourning them."[59]

The concerns expressed by Tuggle and Morris over the location of the Memorial and about the manner in which it seeks to erase both the storm and its victims from public memory may, however, be a manifestation of the "memorial mania" identified by Doss which has served to shape our expectations of the experiences we should draw from monuments and memorials. Tuggle's suggestion that the Katrina Memorial creates the illusion of a finality to the process of mourning bespeaks, perhaps, the desire for the sort of *álaston pénthos* that underpins the 9/11 Memorial. Indeed, to differing degrees, both she and Morris appear to be somewhat backward looking. The Memorial, they both seem to suggest, fails to generate a remembering appropriate to the loss; recreating in its remembrance—or lack thereof—the very marginality and inequalities that proved so devastating when the levees were breached. In this, perhaps, it seems to be a further manifestation of the dominant mode of national remembrance—in this case, a form of forgetting—that appears to have all but erased the storm and its consequences from the national consciousness.

It should, however, be noted that unlike the 9/11 Memorial, the New Orleans Katrina Memorial is local, not national. As such, it might better be viewed through the lens of vernacular responses to loss. From this perspective, the Memorial enacts not a forgetting, but a more productive form of remembering—one which looks forwards, not backwards by situating the body in its proper place as a precursor to social and political engagement.

Turning the Body Loose

The dedication of the New Orleans Katrina Memorial on August 29, 2008 was marked by the internment of seven of the unclaimed victims of the storm and its aftermath. Initial plans to commemorate the event with a full jazz funeral were scrapped in favor of a lone trumpeter who played "Amazing Grace" as the bodies arrived and passed through the Memorial's gates.[60] The presence of the trumpeter nevertheless encapsulated one of the key moments of the jazz funeral known as "turning the body loose." While the graveyard procession in a jazz funeral is marked by slow and solemn music, the last act before the more upbeat songs played during the return from the cemetery is frequently a mournful trumpet solo marking the moment that the body is "turned loose."[61] As Danny Baker, a New Orleans jazz musician observed, "turning the body loose means saying 'Goodbye.' Everybody that passes, say, 'Goodbye . . . Goodbye. You're going to heaven.' "[62] It is a

farewell that consists neither of a forgetting nor of an excessive remembering. Rather than remaining permanently attached to the deceased in the way that *álaston pénthos* demands, turning the body loose allows it to be incorporated into the community in ways that encourage social cohesion and political agency.[63]

In this, the jazz funeral is an expression of a larger tradition of black mourning in the United States that predates even the founding of the republic, one that mourns the dead while also imagining and seeking to generate a better future for those left behind. This tradition was evident in slave funerals, which provided one of the first opportunities for blacks to congregate in a ritualized setting and to experience themselves as people. Recognizing their political potential, white authorities strictly regulated the funerals' timing and content.[64] Similarly, Frederick Douglass offered a number of eulogies—including several for Abraham Lincoln—in which he offered excoriating critiques of the nation. Likewise, the importance of the funerals of Emmett Till, Jimmie Lee Jackson, the victims of the church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, and that of Martin Luther King to the civil rights struggle suggests the ways in which this black mourning tradition seeks to employ mourning and rituals of memorialization to social and political ends.[65] Such mourning embodies a subjunctive mood, serving to forge and steel the community for the struggles ahead. In this—contrary to Marita Sturken's assertions about the importance of redemptive narratives to public mourning—it embodies a tragic ethos, one in which, according to Paul Gilroy, "suffering [is] made productive, made useful but not redemptive."[66]

The tragic ethos underpinning this black mourning tradition is itself best understood as a response to a tragic condition. Tragedy as condition embodies an understanding of the world as one of suffering, irreconcilable conflicts, paradoxical demands, and frustrated human agency, a world in which what is gained is marked by what is lost.[67] Tragedy as response shares the worldview of tragedy as condition, but seeks not to overcome it but rather to act as a coping strategy for those who face it. In this it embodies a sense of hope central to black political thought in the United States. This understanding of hope differs from optimism in that the latter incorporates both the desire for a better future and a belief that it will come into being, whereas hope expresses both the same desire for a better future and a simultaneous recognition that it might, and indeed, probably will not, emerge. The view is expressed by W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* where he identifies "a hope not hopeless but unhopeful;"[68] by Cornel West in his discussion of the tragi-comic;[69] and by Eddie Glaude, Jr. who offers an account of a "hope against hope" captured in "the commonsensical understanding that a radical transformation [is] implausible," but one which nevertheless constitutes "a regulative toward which we aspire but which ultimately defies historical fulfill-

ment."[70] The subjunctive mood and tragic ethos of this black mourning tradition is expressed repeatedly at the Katrina Memorial.

The inscription on the plinth at the center of the Memorial, written by Jeffrey Rouse, M.D., New Orleans's Deputy Chief Coroner and one of the Memorial's designers, begins with an account of the storm's devastation, crucially noting the failure of the levee system. It concludes: "This memorial is dedicated to these individuals [interred at the site] and to all who suffered or died during Hurricane Katrina. Let the victims here forever remind us of those harrowing days and the long struggle to rebuild our city. Let the final resting place call us to constant preparedness. Let their souls join into an eternal chorus, singing with the full might of the indomitable spirit of New Orleans." Similarly, the entrance to the Memorial contains a marker inscribed with the words of Ray Nagin, Mayor of New Orleans during the Hurricane. It reads in part: "This memorial honors those who perished as a result of Hurricane Katrina . . . This storm led to the greatest natural and man-made disaster in our nation's history . . . It . . . serves as a tribute to survivors and their work to rebuild New Orleans and their lives. Together we are creating a stronger, smarter and better New Orleans than before." Contrary to Tuggle's claims, the Memorial explicitly recognizes the ways in which the storm was both a natural *and* a man-made disaster. As such, it fails to enact the architectural whitewashing that she identifies, opting instead for a more polyphonic account of the storm and its consequences, a polyphony that is itself part of a black mourning tradition that includes the jazz funeral.[71]

In its call for the building of a better city, and its desire for the dead to serve as an inspiration to the living in their embrace of that struggle, the Memorial might be considered an echoing of the empty rhetoric of the 9/11 Memorial's mission statement, that which called for the dead to inspire an end to hatred, ignorance, and intolerance. What differentiates the two is first, the willingness of the Katrina Memorial to acknowledge the causes of the disaster whose losses it mourns; and second, the tragic recognition that the challenges faced by the city will not be easily met. There is no expectation—such as that expressed in Lower Manhattan—that the Memorial alone will do the work of the mission statement. As Joseph Lowery declared in 2006, at a black funeral, ". . . we celebrate the life of the dead, but then we challenge those who are living to carry on the work."[72] This is not, of course, to romanticize the mourning tradition embodied by the Katrina Memorial, simply to note the ways in which it offers a more productive response to loss than the mourning without end embodied by the 9/11 Memorial complex.

In their criticism of the Katrina Memorial, both Morris and Tuggle suggest the ways in which it is a manifestation of the national forgetting of Katrina and its aftermath identified at the outset. It is a forgetting that is suggested

by the failure of all the attempts to establish a *national* memorial to the victims of Katrina. The construction of a *local* memorial as a form of vernacular mourning should not, however, be seen as a further manifestation of that forgetting, but rather as a response to it. (It is, perhaps, telling that when applied to architecture, the word vernacular means domestic and functional rather than monumental, capturing the way in which the Katrina Memorial serves a practical rather than purely commemoratory purpose).[73] The dead and displaced of Katrina—and indeed, the brief exposure to the broader American public of the depth of race-based inequalities in the United States—have *already* been forgotten by a nation more concerned about injustices done to it rather than perpetrated within it. The task facing the residents of New Orleans is to use the memory of their losses in productive ways. The constructive response to loss embodied by the tradition of "turning the body loose" is suggested by the ways in which the memory of the deceased is embraced by the living in their hopeful—but not optimistic—struggle against the conditions which produced it.

In this, the tradition offers insight into two recent issues of concern to political scientists, both highlighted by the impact of Katrina and its aftermath. First, explanations of the storm's impact which point to neoliberal policies implemented both before and after Katrina; and second, the prospects for, and possibilities of, the emergence of effective progressive social movements in an era in which faith in the power of government to achieve significant social change has all but dissipated.

Wrecking Ball

Recent work in social and political science suggests the ways in which neoliberal policies enacted both before and after the storm served to exacerbate its impact, facilitate national forgetting, and shape the rebuilding of the city.[74] In this context, neoliberalism is understood as a "theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade."[75]

In the first instance, Neil Smith notes the ways in which the Bush administration, despite being aware of the strong and imminent probability of catastrophic hurricane hitting New Orleans, nevertheless pursued neoliberal policies that eroded New Orleans's natural protection by opening up hundreds of square miles of wetlands to private development. Similarly, they also cut public funding to the New Orleans Corps of Engineers by 80 percent, preventing pumping and levee improvements.[76] The effect of these policies, along with the expansion of the shipping channel, argues Douglas Brinkley, was "the same as if a top-flight team of engineers had been assigned to build an instrument for the quick and effective flooding of New Orleans."[77] In the wake of the storm, the neoliberal policies adopted before it significantly undermined the effectiveness of the government's response. The first head of FEMA in the Bush administration, Joe Allbaugh, previously the president's former Chief of Staff and his 2002 campaign manager, captured the ethos of the neoliberal worldview when he described the agency "as an oversized entitlement program."[78]

In the second instance, Eric Ishiwata argues that neoliberalism was also responsible for the racial inequities inherent in the storm's effects, and for the ways in which it quickly served to obscure race as an issue, thereby facilitating the national forgetting of the events of August and September of 2005. Neoliberalism, he argues, encourages a belief in the existence of a "colorblind America." Its policies were, he suggests, successful "but not in the sense that race no longer mattered. Instead concerns regarding historical and racial inequity were made unintelligible by the 'race neutral' logic of neoliberalism, and the nation *writ large* had collectively turned a blind eye to discrimination, injustice, and ethnographical violence."[79] In this, it permitted and perpetuated what the political theorist George Shulman has identified as a "motivated blindness" on the part of white America to the political exclusion, economic injustices, and racial violence faced by African Americans in the United States.[80]

In the third instance, the prioritization of "private property over life, liberty, and the common good" embodied in neoliberalism, Cedric Johnson suggests, not only exacerbated the damage done to New Orleans, but was itself expanded during both the subsequent cleanup and plans for the city's reconstruction. "Amid widespread criticism of FEMA's failures and public cries for relief," Johnson Argues, "the Bush administration literally capitalized on this disaster and continued its aggressive agenda of corporate privatization by awarding no-bid contracts to political insiders and favored firms."[81] In the initial awarding of contracts for rebuilding, for example, only 1.5 percent of the initial $1.6 billion awarded in contracts by FEMA went to minority owned businesses, even though regular contracting rules require a minimum of five percent;[82] while President Bush signed an executive order on September 8, 2005 suspending the Davis-Bacon Act of 1931, thereby allowing companies involved in the rebuilding to pay workers less than prevailing wages.[83] In this, the expansion of neo-liberal policies is a manifestation of what the journalist Naomi Klein calls "disaster capitalism," in which governments and private firms have taken advantage of moments of social trauma to fast track market-based reforms.[84]

Suggesting, once again, the relevance of Arendt's concern about the rise of the social, many have noted the ways in which rebuilding efforts have been privatized, not just in terms of the no-bid contracts awarded to large companies, but also by the cultivation of privatized forms of relief.

In what has been termed "*do-good capitalism,*"[85] the citizenry is drawn into relief efforts in ways that, it is argued, depoliticize reconstruction efforts. Johnson calls these maneuvers "*grassroots privatization*" that "advance neoliberalization through empowerment and civic mobilization."[86] Thus, much of the reconstruction slack is taken up by organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, Contemplatives in Action, and, most famously perhaps, the actor Brad Pitt's "Make It Right" organization which is providing ecologically-sustainable homes for some residents of the Lower Ninth Ward.[87] That potential residents of Pitt's houses have to demonstrate certain financial capacities in order to be considered as potential occupiers suggests the ways in which fostering self-reliance through market mechanisms underpins even these efforts. Such do-good capitalism, Johnson argues, "[p]rovides participants with an opportunity to express compassion without the political risks of a fight for social justice, use of private and church institutions to facilitate rebuilding carries few guarantees of constitutional rights and protections encourages participation without substantive power—plans have already been made without input of the citizenry."[88] In this, Johnson echoes concerns expressed by Jeffrey Isaac, among others, about the problems faced by politically progressive social movements: a second area in which reflections upon the significance of vernacular mourning practices may be of interest to political scientists.

In the face of a declining belief in the power and role of government to address significant social problems—itself, perhaps, both a cause and a consequence of the triumph of neoliberalism in American politics—Isaac argues, "what civil society offers tends to be ad hoc, localized, voluntarist, and often voluntary." "Such efforts," he continues, "make a difference. But they do not typically mobilize *political power*. They do not generate organizational forms or ideological commitments that might render them capable of offsetting the power of privileged elites and of supporting a substantial political or policy agenda. To the extent that this is true, civil society efforts do not and cannot represent a solution to the problems that neoprogressives seek to address."[89] Particularly problematic for Isaac is the "panglossian optimism" that underpins these voluntarist projects.[90] They lack, he suggests, a sense of realism about the obstacles faced by such piecemeal efforts to overcome significant structural problems. "While such a sense of realism would caution against optimism," he writes, "it would not counsel political despair."[91] He calls, therefore, for "an ethos of pragmatic public engagement;"[92] one that both embodies a recognition of the tragedy of condition faced by such groups—in which their successes are far more ambiguous than their participants suggest—and which cultivates the qualities necessary to continue their efforts in the face of potential failure, a sense, that is, of tragic hope.

The vernacular mourning manifested in the New Orleans Hurricane Katrina Memorial and the funeral traditions that it embodies not only suggest what the tragic ethos identified by Isaac might look like and the ways in which it serves to form community and engender political struggle; it also serves to historicize arguments about neoliberalism in ways that suggest such policies are but the most recent manifestation of longstanding trends in American politics.

How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live?

Although there is some disagreement among historians about when (or whether) the jazz funeral tradition started to decline in New Orleans,[93] there is widespread agreement on when it emerged. The first recorded account of the performance of up-tempo music on the return from a burial was in 1866. As Thomas Brothers notes: "The beginning of the African-American embrace of this ritual thus coincided with the beginnings of harsh post-Reconstruction retrenchment from political rights."[94] In this it cultivated a counter-memory to the romantic narratives of post-war reconciliation between North and South that, as the historian David Blight observes, occurred at the expense of blacks.[95] It also served, as the ethnologist Helen Regis observes, to forge and reinforce a political community in times of hardship and distress.[96] It was a practice imbued with the tragic ethos of the black funeral tradition which played a significant role in the fight against racial violence, injustice, and the struggle for civil rights. The recognition of the importance of that ethos is, perhaps, obscured by dominant understandings of American history which, as Bonnie Honig notes, allow us to "say with satisfaction that the chrono-logic of rights required the eventual inclusion of women, Africans, and native peoples into the schedule of formal rights." Such accounts, she nevertheless notes, miss the very-real conflicts and hard fought political battles that made this supposed "extension of rights" possible. "Those victorious political actors," Honig observes, "*created* post hoc the clarity with which we now credit with having spurred them onto victory ex ante."[97] In this then, the vernacular mourning embodied and perpetuated in the Katrina Memorial suggests not only what the tragic ethos desired by Isaac might look like, but also the ways in which it might still function to shape political outcomes, even when the attempts it cultivates ostensibly seem to fail.

That this vernacular mourning tradition emerged in New Orleans in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and that it was itself but a manifestation of a much older tradition of black mourning, suggests the ways in which—while useful in accounting for many of the causes and consequences of the devastation caused by Katrina—neoliberal explanations are insufficiently historical in their approach. Although Eric Ishiwata is, for example, correct to note neoliberalism's commitment to ostensibly color-blind policies, it is itself—as he would undoubtedly

acknowledge—but a recent manifestation of a longer history of racial discrimination and exclusion. As Strolovitch, Warren, and Frymer observe: "It is no accident that African Americans in New Orleans are disproportionately poor, or that a disproportionate number of the poor in New Orleans are African American. It is the result of centuries of concerted decision-making by political actors at the local, state, and national levels, going back to the days before slavery and continuing up to our current political moment."[98] Indeed, John Barry's account of the 1927 Mississippi Flood, and Eric Klinenberg's book about the Chicago heat wave of 1995, show the ways in which African Americans have suffered disproportionately from supposedly "natural" disasters in ways that predate and/or complicate recent attempts to derive so much explanatory power from neoliberalism as an economic and political philosophy.[99]

In this then, recent literature on the role of public mourning and memorialization is not only useful for demonstrating the ways in which such practices serve to shape democratic outcomes—in this case by a national commitment to remembering injustices perpetrated against the nation and a national forgetting of those perpetrated within it—but it also serves to cast critical light upon two questions of importance to political science. More than this, however, the distinction between national and vernacular mourning suggests the ways in which local political movements might face their ongoing struggles, even in the face of a nation which has disowned or deliberately forgotten them. It is an approach which is both hortatory and tragic. As Derrick Bell observed of those seeking to cultivate local responses to the reconstruction of New Orleans: "The task before us is not easy and may not be achievable. Despair and fatalism, though, were not the option of those forebears whose prospects for the future were no worse than ours. Encouraged by their survival and growth, we can emulate the commitment of the slave singer who wrote the lyric: 'I will go; I shall go, to see what the end will be.'"[100]

Notes

1 Although, as Lindsay Tuggle points out, there is no data on the number of visitors who have visited the memorial, both she and others have noted that the gates to the memorial are often padlocked, and the site "eerily silent, devoid of visitors or even pedestrian street traffic" Tuggle 2011, 66, 70. See also Morris 2011, 18. When my wife and I spent two hours at the memorial on February 3, 2012, there was only one other visitor, despite the steady flow of visitors at the cemetery immediately adjacent to the memorial.
2 Muskal 2011.
3 Booth 2006, Edkins 2003, Johnston 2007, Pool 2012, Stow 2007, Stow 2010.
4 This argument first appears in Stow 2008a.
5 Bodnar 1992.
6 Bodnar 1992, 15.
7 Bodnar 1992, 14,16.
8 Edkins 2003, xiii, xv.
9 Edkins 2003, xiii.
10 Sturken 2007, 4, 5.
11 Sturken 2002, 382.
12 Doss 2010, 2, 50.
13 Johnston 2012.
14 Ouroussoff 2006.
15 A. Baker 2012. I am grateful to Char Miller for drawing this article to my attention.
16 Loraux 1998, 22.
17 Thucydides 1972, 151.
18 Loraux 1998, xii.
19 Loraux 1998, 49.
20 Lower Manhattan Development Corporation.
21 New York Times 2007. Now the names of those killed in each tower, and on the planes by which they were hit, are located on the parapet of the appropriate footprint. In addition, those killed in the 1993 bombing are commemorated along with those killed in the North Tower, while all the first-responders are grouped together on the parapet of the footprint of the South Tower, along with the Pentagon victims, and those aboard Flight 93. Beyond this, in response to a demand from many of the families, the names are further sorted by "requested-adjacencies," whereby employees of the same company, flight crews, and friends, relatives, or even strangers who are known to have responded to the attacks together, are located in the same place.
22 International Freedom Center.
23 Burlingame 2005.
24 Doss 2010, 171.
25 Murphy 2005.
26 Arendt 1998, 43. See also, Pitkin 1998.
27 New York Times, 2007.
28 9/11 Memorial.
29 Stow 2008b.
30 The claims of "lost innocence" that accompanied the attacks were far from unique. As the historian Edward Linnenthal notes, industrialization, the Mexican-American War, Pearl Harbor, and Watergate, were all moments when America had previously claimed to have lost her innocence. Linnenthal 2001, 17.
31 Although the victims of the attacks were overwhelmingly American, the dead were drawn from at least 92 countries. Doss 2010, 120.
32 Doss 2010, 143.
33 See Linnenthal 2001, 94–96, 240.
34 McGinity 2011.

35 Lower Manhattan Development Corporation.
36 Goodstein 2010, Kleinfeld 2010.
37 AP Archive 2005.
38 Brinkley 2006, Smith 2006.
39 Johnson 2011b, xvii, xix.
40 Loraux 2002, 65.
41 Morris 2009, 157.
42 Bohrer 2007.
43 Van Dernoot Lipsky 2010, 127.
44 In February 2012, I emailed Mr. Casimire inquiring about the status of the proposed memorial. His reply simply repeated his plans for the project. Casimire 2012.
45 The project's website states that it will be "hopefully donated by the city of New Orleans, or the State of Louisiana." Katrina National Memorial Park Charitable Foundation.
46 MySpace. The decline of MySpace as a social networking site itself suggests the inertia of Casimire's project.
47 WDSU 2009.
48 Katrinamem.org.
49 Art Council of New Orleans.
50 Curtis 2011.
51 Morris 2011, 18.
52 Funeral Service Foundation.
53 New Orleans Forensic Center.
54 Funeral Service Foundation.
55 MacCash 2007.
56 Morris 2011, 18.
57 Tuggle 2011, 76.
58 Woods 2009, 785–786.
59 Tuggle 2011, 80.
60 Maggi 2008.
61 Magnificent Seventh's Brass Band 1992.
62 D. Baker 1992, 13.
63 Regis 2001.
64 Krüger-Kahloula 1994, 143.
65 Stow 2010.
66 Gilroy 2010, 150.
67 Johnston 2007, 209.
68 Du Bois 2008.
69 West 1999, 90, 93, 102–103.
70 Glaude 2000, 112.
71 Wills 1990,195–206, Brothers 2006, 41, 181.
72 Lowery 2006.
73 Tellingly, perhaps, it is also a word that was used to describe a slave born on his master's estate.
74 See Johnson 2011a.
75 Johnson 2011a, Harvey 2005, 4.
76 Smith 2006.
77 Brinkley 2006, 219.
78 Dyson 2006, 204.
79 Ishiwata 2011, 33, 39.
80 Shulman 2008, 234.

81 Johnson 2011b, xxxi.
82 U.S. News & World Report 2005.
83 Edsall 2005.
84 Klein 2007.
85 Johnson 2011b, xxxii.
86 Johnson 2011b, xxxii.
87 Johnson 2011c.
88 Johnson 2011b, xxxii–xxxiii.
89 Isaac 2003, 129.
90 Isaac 2003 120.
91 Isaac 2003, 140.
92 Isaac 2003, 145.
93 Helen Regis argues, for example, that the tradition has been reappropriated and transformed by a new set of urban mourning practices in the city. Regis 2001.
94 Brothers 2006, 215.
95 Blight 2001.
96 Regis 2001.
97 Honig 2009, 47.
98 Strolovitch, Warren, and Frymer 2006.
99 Barry 1997, Klinenberg 2003.
100 Bell 2006, xv.

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