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Title

Reconnecting to Landscape: An Evaluation of the Post Hurricane Communities of Biloxi, Mississippi and Galveston, Texas

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Abstract

Cultural landscapes are built over time and reflect the direct interaction between political, economic, social, and environmental factors that affect communities on a daily basis. Many communities maintain a fragile daily balance within these landscapes as they are exposed to hazards and risks such as, lack of access to healthcare and affordable housing options, inadequate public health, and lack of fair wage employment and education. These daily hazards and risks create a fragile balance between sustainability and vulnerability within communities. The destructive power of an acute large scale disturbance, such as a hurricane, can shatter this balance and sever the communities connection to their landscape. Communities that lack the entitlement and access to resources necessary to recover and reconnect to their landscape post-disaster may become displaced from their cultural landscape temporarily or permanently. The void left by displacement post-disaster is often filled by different communities permanently altering the cultural landscape, removing an individual's sense of place.

This thesis evaluates the post-hurricane communities of Biloxi, Mississippi and Galveston, Texas, in order to understand the influence of internal and external organizations on the communities' abilities to reconnect to their landscape post-hurricane. The research was done using a mixed method approach that incorporated literature reviews and academic writing reviews, in order to set the framework for site visits to the cities of Biloxi, Mississippi and Galveston, Texas. During the site visits, qualitative data was collected through first-hand observation, photography, and interaction with the various communities and organizations in Biloxi and Galveston. Through this research I gained a better understanding of the paradigms applied to disaster recovery, and the influence of internal and external organizations on the process of reconnecting to the landscape.

The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the factors affecting a community's ability to recover, rebuild, and reconnect to the landscape post-hurricane in order to enable a more holistic approach to preparedness and recovery from disaster in other communities in the future.

The research suggests that designers, policy makers, community members, and other internal and external organizations must take a pre-emptive approach to the destabilizing effect of hurricanes. By empowering communities to reduce daily risk, and by creating a stronger sense of place and connection to the landscape, communities can decrease vulnerability, increase sustainability, and adapt to the uncertain future brought about by the effects of climate change and coastal development on the destructive power of hurricanes.

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