SOCIAL VULNERABILITY AND PARTICIPATION IN DISASTER RECOVERY DECISIONS:

Public Housing in Galveston after Hurricane Ike

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Abstract

Hurricane Ike caused massive damages to Galveston Island's residential structures including four public housing developments in September 2008. These developments were located in neighborhoods with some of the lowest incomes and highest percentages of people of color on the Island. Four months later the Galveston Housing Authority (GHA) decided to demolish all four developments consisting of 569 housing units due to the damages to the buildings. Today, despite federal regulations requiring reconstruction, court orders mandating replacement of the demolished units, and available funding, only 142 low income apartments have been rebuilt. We used the social vulnerability framework to understand these outcomes through the ability of groups to shape post-disaster recovery decisions. This paper argues that one of the overlooked characteristic of social vulnerability is a diminished ability to participate in post-disaster decision-making. There were few local advocates arguing for the preservation of public housing units and even fewer remaining residents to speak up for themselves in the face of strong local resistance to the reconstruction of public housing units or the return of public housing residents. The void of a strong and authentic local pro-public housing perspective in Galveston provided an opening for various local campaigns to claim that their desired plan benefitted the poor. The disaster recovery became an opportunity to remove or reduce public housing units and therefore, public housing residents.

Introduction

On the morning of September 13th 2008, Hurricane Ike crossed between Galveston Island and Bolivar Peninsula in Texas as a Category 2 storm, causing $29.5 billion in damage to the Houston-Galveston area, making it one of the costliest storms in U.S. history (Berg, 2009). The 10 to 15 feet waves generated by the storm damaged more than 75% of the island's residential structures including four public housing developments. These developments were located in neighborhoods with some of the lowest incomes and highest percentages of people of color on the Island and had long been viewed by city leaders as a barrier to revitalization. Four months

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later the Galveston Housing Authority (GHA) decided to demolish all four developments consisting of 569 housing units due to the damages to the buildings. Today, despite federal regulations requiring reconstruction, court orders mandating replacement of the demolished public housing units, and available funding to finance reconstruction, only 282 mixed income apartments have been rebuilt with only half of those set aside as affordable units and less than half of the displaced public housing families remain on the Island.

Disasters magnify pre-existing social and economic trends in places without fundamentally changing them (Kates, 1977). The concept of social vulnerability recognizes that the social inequalities embedded in local sociopolitical systems prior to a disaster inhibit the ability of different groups of people to cope with and rebound from disaster events (Blaikie, Cannon, Davis, & Wisner, 1994). It helps explain how and why residents of public housing, for example, face greater uncertainties and obstacles for housing recovery than the general population. The social vulnerability framework has enriched our understanding of disparities in the quality of pre-disaster housing, exposure to hazards, levels of damage, and access to response and recovery resources and information. However, despite the implicit recognition that pre-disaster conditions shape post disaster outcomes, the literature has little to say about the relationship between social vulnerability and the ability of groups to shape post-disaster recovery decisions. This relationship is especially important for public housing residents whose very ability to remain housed is contingent on an often tenuous social contract.

This papers argues that one overlooked characteristic of social vulnerability is a diminished ability to participate in post-disaster decision-making. Unable to return to their homes after Hurricane Ike, public housing residents in Galveston scattered across the region and most found housing off the Island. When a contentious public process revealed strong local resistance to the repair of public housing units or the return of public housing residents to their communities, there were few local advocates arguing for the preservation of public housing units and even fewer remaining residents to speak up for themselves. The void of a strong and authentic local pro-public housing perspective provided an opening for various local campaigns to claim that their desired plan benefitted the poor. The disaster recovery became an opportunity to remove or reduce public housing units and therefore, public housing residents.

Literature Review: Social Vulnerability, Public Housing, and Recovery Outcomes

Social vulnerability acknowledges that disaster risk is not distributed evenly across a population or a place. Damage levels, for example, are not simply due to the force of the hazard agent itself, but are also related to income, race/ethnicity, housing type and tenure, and neighborhood characteristics (Maly & Shiozaki, 2012; Bolin, 1982 & 1985; Bolin & Bolton, 1983 and 1986; Peacock & Girard, 1997; Van Zandt, Peacock, Henry, Grover, Highfield, & Brody, 2012; Gotham, 2014; Highfield, Peacock, & Van Zandt, 2014; Peacock et al., 2014). The relationship between high levels of damage and social vulnerability (Grigsby, 1963; Myers, 1975) are partly due to the fact that older, lower valued, and poorer quality homes are more likely to house low-income and minority populations (Van Zandt et al., 2012; Peacock et al., 2014). Consequently, the physical and social concentration of damage lead to very different recovery trajectories for housing in lower-income and minority neighborhoods (Chang, 2010; Comerio, 1997; Green, Bates, & Smyth, 2007; Green & Olshansky, 2012; Zhang, 2012).

Post-disaster financial aid programs are usually based on housing loss and are largely oriented toward the needs of home owners (Freeman, 2004). Hence, renters or public housing residents often receive very limited and only short-term housing assistance, which exacerbates socioeconomic inequalities and hinders equitable housing recovery (Oliver-Smith 1990). Furthermore, these groups have little say regarding rebuilding/repair decisions or the potential for remaining in place, regardless of the damage to their home (Comerio, 1997). The literature also suggests a tendency for the owners of rental properties to increase rents once repairs are complete, targeting higher-income renters, perhaps in the hopes of recouping reinvestments more quickly (Quarantelli, 1982; Drabek & Key, 1984; Morrow & Peacock, 1997; Morrow & Enarson, 1997; Bolin & Stanford, 1998). Such decisions may reduce the availability of post-disaster rental housing for lower-income households, revealing a link between social vulnerability and post-disaster recovery.

By definition, public housing communities are socially vulnerable. Public housing in the United States is only available to households with incomes at 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI) or less. Public housing communities often have more residents of color and higher concentrations of poverty than the general population within a given jurisdiction. Furthermore, public housing itself has little political or public support at the local or federal levels. Since the early 1970s, there has been a steady national trend of dismantling public housing communities. Through federal programs such as HOPE VI and Choice Neighborhoods, local public housing authorities (PHAs) have replaced public housing units with mixed income developments or household-based subsidies such as the Housing Choice

Voucher. To date, more than 98,592 public housing units have been lost nationally[2]. A growing number of rent burdened low income households are competing for a shrinking number of housing subsidies, leaving a significant segment of low income households trapped in substandard, overcrowded, and overpriced housing (Kamel, 2012).

Unlike other types of housing, particularly owner-occupied single-family housing, there is no previously agreed upon course of action for permanent recovery of public housing after disasters and consequently their fate is open to discussion by different political agendas. Furthermore, local governments have little economic incentives for rebuilding and sometimes face great political resistance against replacing lost affordable housing units. As a result, PHAs have seized the opportunity to demolish public housing after disasters using emergency disaster funding (Graham, 2012). The most well-known example of this dynamic comes from New Orleans where the displaced tenants of public housing developments and other renters were significantly underrepresented in the city's and state's recovery plans for mixed income replacement despite heavy damage to rental housing (Clark & Rose, 2007) and the large proportion of renters in the pre-Katrina housing market.

Participation in local recovery debates provides the opportunity to shape housing recovery outcomes. Disadvantaged communities are often more vulnerable to disaster impacts not just because of the inherent lack of wealth, but because pre-disaster decisions were made about features of risk and vulnerability in these communities without the input or consent of residents (Dash, Peacock, & Morrow, 1997). Post-disaster, these populations continute to have little access to political power and often face significant barriers to participating in public recovery dialogues. The displacement of public housing residents outside their communities further limits their ability to participate in open forums and enables exclusionary decision making about recovery. Consequently the fate of public housing residents is open to public debate and vulnerable to cooptation by local political agendas.

Methods and Data Analysis Techniques

This study began with the question, "Why has public housing not been rebuilt in Galveston despite court orders and federal regulations requiring one-for-ne replacement of all lost units?" Research for this study began three and a half years following Hurricane Ike and included two data collection techniques: in-depth interviews[3] and archival research. The interviews included representatives of

[2] https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr-edge-research-032017.html

[3] Sara Hamideh, the first author on this paper, conducted these interviews as part of her dissertation research. See (Hamideh, 2015).

organizations involved in recovery efforts and decisions, particularly those related to public housing. These organizations were identified based on media articles and relevant websites. Potential participants including GHA board members, city council members, local advocates and activists, and Long Term Recovery Committee leaders were called or emailed up to three times each to solicit their participation in the study. The first author also identified an additional 10 potential interviewees using referral sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Interviewees were categorized by priority, based on their proximity to Galveston, job position, responsibilities within the city at the time of the study, and sustained involvement in the long-term recovery process and public housing debates in Galveston.

The interviews included a total of 18 individuals representing 21 organizations: representatives of three local government agencies, two local NGOs, two local nonprofit agencies, four churches and charity organizations, two businesses, two universities, and six local officials. Of the organizations interviewed, only GHA was focused on public housing. Fourteen of the organizational interviewees were non-Hispanic white. Four were African American including one representative of a government agency, two reverends, and one local NGO director. Eleven interviewees were men and seven were women. Most interviewees were over the age of 40.

The interviews were all semi-structured, allowing us to gather similar information from each respondent while also allowing new topics to develop (Berg, 2007; Weiss, 1994). Interviews were designed to take between 30 and 45 minutes each, but some interviews lasted up to two hours. Interviews were conducted at the place of the interviewees' choosing, often their workplace in Galveston. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The first author wrote detailed fieldnotes and uploaded these and the transcripts to Atlas.ti sotware which was used for qualitative analysis.

We collected and reviewed 174 documents including Galveston long-term recovery plan, GHA public housing rebuilding plans and annual reports, GHA press releases, lawsuits, legal complaints, and court orders related to public housing, newspaper and other forms of media reporting about public housing in Galveston, professional reports commissioned by Galveston City Council about public housing, blog posts, video recordings of city council meetings, and video recordings of GHA press conferences. City Council and GHA board meetings were of particular importance to our study because they offered the only formal opportunities for former residents to participate in the debates. We reviewed all of the 205 city council meeting minutes posted on City of Galveston official website that cover council meetings between September 2008 and December 2014 and found 24 meetings during which public housing rebuilding schemes were discussed or issues were

raised with respect to public housing. We also reviewed all of the 83 GHA Board meeting minutes between January 2010 and December 2014 posted on the GHA official website and found 23 meetings during which public housing rebuilding schemes were discussed or issues were raised with respect to public housing. We uploaded these documents and recordings to the Atlas.ti software for qualitative analysis.

We coded and recoded the data in three stages (Saldaña, 2009). First, we performed open coding of basic themes only. Then, we examined relationships between basic themes, and performed axial coding to connect similar themes together under larger concepts. Finally, after identifying core concepts from axial coding, we started selective coding of the data in relationship to these larger ideas. Working through the data, we generated theoretical memos that highlighted key issues and their connections in the data. Themes related to the arguments against rebuilding public housing and arguments for replacing it with mixed-income, inclusion and participation of former residents, recovery visions and agendas that involved public housing, and descriptions of former residents and public housing in the debates provide the basis for the results discussed below. Our selective coding focused on understanding whether former residents of public housing were participating in the debates about rebuilding their homes and how social vulnerability limited their participation.

Housing affordability in Galveston

In the past few decades, Galveston's port activities have declined while beach-related and historical tourism has become the Island's fastest growing industry (Angelou Economics, 2008; Gulf & South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, 2010). Service jobs are essential for the operation of this Galbeston's tourism industry and bring a significant amount of revenue to the city, however, they are typically low-skill, low wage work. According to Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) data, 14.7% of the 34,480 jobs in Galveston in 2008 were in the accommodation and food services industries which serve the tourism economy. From all the jobs in the City, 27% earned empolees $1250 or less a month. Also, on a higher estimate, Angelou Economics reported that Galveston's tourism industry provided approximately 9,300 or more than 30% of all jobs in the city prior to Ike. On average, annual earning of employees in Galveston's tourism sector was only $20,610 (Angelou Economics, 2008[4]).

4 Labor and wage calculations were produced using software created by the Minnesota IMPLAN Group (Angelou Economics, 2008).

The city had done little prior to Ike to address the housing needs of low-wage earners. During the three-year period before the storm, almost 46% of the renter households in Galveston were paying more than 30% of their household income for housing, a threshold used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to indicate rent burden. More specifically, 90% of the low income[5] renters and 76% of low income homeowners in Galveston spent more than 30% of their income on housing expenses prior to Hurricane Ike (2007 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates). One resident described housing affordability on the Island before Ike this way:

> *They [are] only paying you minimum wage for all that, and that's not enough money to survive on, on this island. For people like me, especially with four kids, that's not gonna work. You can't survive off of that. That's gonna pay a light bill. If you got a car that's your gas and lights, and you might not even have enough gas to get to work for the whole week.* (As cited in Nolen et al., 2014)

Since the hurricane of 1900, a 10-mile long, 17' high seawall has largely protected residential structures in Galveston during storms. It has also shaped development on the Island, separating year-round and working class neighborhoods from seasonal and affluent neighborhoods. The vast majority of Galveston's year-round residential housing is located behind the seawall in the city's urban core, where housing affordability is greater. The median value of owner occupied housing in the urban core of the city is $122,000, whereas in the Island vacation areas, the median home price for single family homes is $178,000 (2005-2009 ACS, census track data). Increasing market demands for vacation housing have pushed development and investment outside the seawall toward the east and west ends of the Island. In these areas, 55% of the housing is vacant and over 72% of this vacant housing is for seasonal or vacation use. In the urban core, 24.9% of the units are vacant and only 16.8% of those vacancies are due to seasonal or vacation use. Despite the increasing disinvestment in the urban core neighborhoods, they have remained a stable and affordable option for the city's low income residents.

Both housing quality and housing affordability were major issues on the Island prior to Ike and public housing filled a significant gap in the housing market. In 2000, 69.2% of the renters in Galveston were very low-, low- or moderate-income[6] (GHA, 2008). GHA operated 990 public housing units and 1,213 Section 8 units. Most individuals living in public housing have one or more characteristic of social vulnerability. From the 850 families that were living in GHA's public housing

[5] Annual household income less than 20000

[6] Extreme need was determined based on percent of the very low income population that paid more than 30% of income for rent. More than 30% of the very low income population were paying more than 30% of income for rent

units, 82% were extremely low income, 42% had a disability, 86% had children, 39% were elderly, and 67% were African American, as Table 1 shows. GHA had a waiting list almost equal to its total number of existing units and vouchers. As Table 2 shows, the year before Ike, a total of 852 families were on the waiting list for public housing alone, where 93% were extremely low income and 57% were African-American. An additional 824 families were on the Section 8 waiting list with 73% identified as "extremely low income" and 76% as African-American (GHA, 2008).

[Table 1 about here]

[Table 2 about here]

Despite the Island's substantial affordable housing needs, local leaders had been attempting to demolish exisiting public housing since 1980s (Lord, 2011). In 2005, GHA razed Old Palm Terrace, a 228-unit public housing development, and replaced it with The Oaks, a new subdivision with 28 subsidized single-family homes and 10 duplexes. GHA's 2008 5-year plan set a goal to increase rental vouchers, while decreasing the agency's portfolio of public housing units. GHA planned to apply to HUD to receive Replacement Housing Factor funding to demolish and replace units in one of the older complexes, Palm Terrace. Once HUD funding became available, GHA intended to submit HOPE VI applications for both Oleander Homes and Palm Terrace Annex to redevelop those sites as mixed-income developments (GHA, 2008). These projects would have further reduced the city's stock of physical public housing units.

Public housing and displacement after Ike

GHA owned 990 public housing units prior to Ike. Out of those units, 528 apartments suffered substantial damages from the Hurricane, resulting in the immediate displacement of 578 households (GHA, 2011). Approximately four months after the storm, the GHA board decided to raze two large public housing developments immediately, Oleander Homes and Palm Terrace, that made up more than half of of their multifamily units. In addition, the Board proposed renovatation of Cedar Terrace and Magnolia Homes (GHA, 2009) or the rest of multifamily public housing units in Galveston. Referring to a HUD website guideline[7] regarding accidental

[7] HUD, Demolition for an Accidental Loss,

losses and without consulting with the residents, GHA was going to speed up the demolition[8] which would have eliminated all of the 569 multifamily units in the City without providing permanent replacement housing (Lone Star Legal Aid v. Galveston Housing Authority, 2013). In response, an advocacy group, Lone Star Legal Aid (LSLA) filed a complaint with HUD representing displaced residents in an effort to stop the proposed demolition (Lone Star Legal Aid v. Galveston Housing Authority, 2009). LSLA requested that GHA create a plan to that protect the rights of displaced residents during the demolition nd rebuilding process (Lone Star Legal Aid v. Galveston Housing Authority, 2009). LSLA and GHA entered into a Settlement Agreement with Replacement Plan (also referred to as the Conciliation Agreement) in March of 2009 (Galveston Housing Authority v. Lone Star Legal Aid, 2009). Under this agreement, GHA committed to rebuild all 569 demolished public housing units, to provide displaced residents with housing vouchers until rebuilding was complete, and to guarantee the right of residents to return to the rebuilt units (LSLA and GHA, 2009b).

Even though displaced public housing residents were eligible for temporary vouchers from the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP), many families were not able to find an affordable unit where they could use the DHAP subsidy (Wilder, 2008; Vinogradsky, 2009). Because the displaced population was disproportionately minority, many households also faced additional burdens created by unfair housing practices and enduring racial discrimination in the local housing market.

Demolition of these developments intensified the pre-storm shortage of affordable low income rental housing in Galveston (Oakley & Ruel, 2010). According to GHA's 2010-2014 5 year plan, at the time the plan was submitted 2,359 households were on the GHA waiting list for housing assistance (as cited in LSLA v. GHA, 2013).

The loss of public housing in Galveston after Ike decreased the amount of affordable housing on the Island; displaced low income residents, especially people of color; and created disparate outcomes between racial groups. The Kirwan Institute issued a report in December 2011 detailing the "disparities in population losses" between white and African-American residents following the hurricane. According to that report, the city of Galveston lost 16.5% of its population between 2000 and 2010 with a 11.4% loss of White population compared to the 36.7% loss in the African American community (Reece et al., 2011). We compared the pre-Ike racial-

https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/centers/sac/demo_dispo

[8] by March 23, 2009

ethnic composition from 2007 (ACS 3-year) to 2010 to understand how pre-Ike population trend was exacerbated by the Hurricane. Table 3 presents the absolute and relative change in the population of each category along with its aggregate margin of error (margin of error for the difference).[9] The relative change in non-Hispanic Black population is almost twice the non-Hispanic white population during the three years following Ike.

[Table 3 about here]

Three years after Ike, 217 of the 578 displaced households were still active in the DHAP program. While some of the displaced residents were able to use those temporary vouchers or other resources to find housing on the Island (Oakley & Ruel, 2010), a sizeable portion were forced to move outside Galveston or were unable to find a unit where they could use the temporary DHAP subsidy (Vinogradsky, 2009). Moreover, DHAP assistance can not provide permanent housing for displaced families. Demolition of public housing complexes created a major obstacle against return and recovery of former residents and other low income renters.

The struggle over rebuilding

The ability of local officials to rebuild public housing and other low to moderate income housing depends on federal recovery funding, particularly CDBG allocations by Congress. However, rebuilding also requires support from local officials, which can be a significant hurdle for public housing. The Action Plans Texas Department of Hosuing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) had developed for spending CBDG recovery funds gave Councils of Governmemts (COGs) and local jurisdictions significant control over prioritizing the needs for spending (TDHCA, 2009a,b) and lacked state oversight to ensure local jurisdictions will rebuild affordable and government assisted housing lost in Hurricane Ike (TDHCA, 2009b). Consequently, two housing advocacy groups, the Texas Low-Income Housing Information Service (TLIHIS) and Texas Appleseed, filed multiple complaints with HUD in 2009 and 2010 raising concerns about inability of the State to affirmativelt further fair housing in its use of disaster recovery funds and asking HUD to require revisions of recovery plans in accordance with Fair Housing requirements (TLIHIS vs. State of Texas, 2009; Texas Appleseed and TLIHIS vs. State of Texas, 2009). Accepting these concerns, HUD facilitated a conciliation agreement between advocates and the State requiring Texas to set money aside from the CDBG recovery funds for TDHCA's affordable housing programs including public housing. More specifically, the

[9] We used 2007 (ACS 3-year) to 2010

agreement stated that "no less than $50 million from the TDHCA's affordable housing funds shall be available for use in the city of Galveston for the one for one replacement of all family and elderly public housing units destroyed by Ike." (Texas Appleseed and TLIHIS vs. State of Texas, 2010, p16).

Eventhough state and federal agencies eventually committed funding and legal commitment to rebuilding, GHA's demolition decision preceeded any local plans for rebuilding. Initially board members said they hoped to rebuild everything in two years. Later they committed to a time frame of no more than five years (Evans, 2009). In the years following the demolition, the GHA produced multiple plans for rebuilding. Each faced persistent and multifaceted local opposition. Each successive plan reduced the number of public housing units to be rebuilt on the original sites and increased the number of vouchers and scattered site units (See table 4). With each plan, the opportunities for diplaced housing residents to return to their original homes diminished. For example, GHA's 2009 plan proposed replacing 569 public housing units with 340 apartments, townhomes and duplexes on the four public housing sites, with another 229 units scattered throughout the city. In 2011, GHA's *Scattered Sites Initiative* increased number of scattered site units to 247 to be located across Galveston Island in neighborhoods that were not impacted by Hurricane Ike (GHA, 2011a,b).

GHA's 2012 plan, *Mixed Income Communities Initiative*, limited the construction of new public housing units at the original sites to mixed income developments where 51 percent of the units must be public housing and 49 percent market rate. Consistent with both the federal HOPE VI and Choice Neighborhood programs, this approach eandeavored to use GHA's rebuilding efforts to revitalize Galveston's low income neighborhoods and stimulate private investment. Despite persistent local opposition to rebuilding any form of government assisted housing, this last plan ultimately gained support from local authorities. In 2014 construction of the first mixed income development at the Cedar Terrace site began.

[Table 4 about here]

The inability to reach an agreement for a rebuilding plan not only extended the waiting time and uncertainty of return for displaced residents of the demolished units, it also magnified the unmet housing needs of low income Galvestonians. By 2011 at least 186 displaced households were still waiting to return to Galveston, and 1138 new households were on the public housing waiting list (GHA, 2011). Nonetheless, debates about the plans largely disregarded the magnitude and legitimacy of low income housing needs.

Who speaks for public housing?

Involvement in post-Ike recovery planning was shaped by long standing race- and class-based differences among Galvestonians. One local advocate for low income families described the historical exclusion that people of color had experienced in Galveston and its affect on how they viewed post-disaster planning:

> *This is what people of color in Galveston, African American people, have been feeling for years. They have been beat down for so long, that they don't believe anything good is going to happen... The African American population were skeptical because they were like they never have done that and it ain't going to happen, and it didn't.*

When low income Galvestonians, and in particular public housing residents, were given a chance to participate in decision-making, the outcomes were different. For example, GHA's initial committment to rebuild every unit destroyed by Ike at its original location was based on costs, access to jobs and services, and most importantly, input from displaced residents (Oakley, Ruel, & Reid, 2010). In sharp contrast to the Galveston elite and even the general public on the Island, public housing residents spoke on behalf of the preservation of their homes.

Worried about the long wait for public housing, local and state housing advocates raised the issue frequently in city council meetinsg and in interviews with local newspapers. For instance, David Miller, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapter in Galveston, described talking to residents every day who wanted to return to the Island but could not because affordable housing was not available (abcNews, 2012, August 28). Phillips who led Galveston County Coalition for Justice said in a GHA workshop in 2010 *"We didn't need a court to tell us we need to rebuild our public housing ... We don't want to be like New Orleans and wait five years for our new homes but we haven't hit a nail yet"* (White, 2010). In post-disaster surveys conducted by GHA, public housing residents expressed a strong desire to return home.

Two months after Ike, local officials initiated a community-based planning process by forming the Galveston Community Recovery Committee (GCRC) with 330 members. The goals of this large participatory initiative were to unify recovery efforts, achieve consensus on a recovery vision, and develop a long-term recovery plan. GCRC was intended to be inclusive and open, however, public housing tenants had a negligable presence in the committee meetings and many of the approximately 20 African-American participants had to divide their time between the Northside Galveston Taskforce, a minority advocacy group and GCRC (Lord, 2011). Not surprisingly, public housing remained marginal to GCRC concerns and discussions,

and the committee's Long Term Recovery Plan failed to address either public housing or affordable housing issues.

Social vulnerability and barriers to participation

This study began by asking why the demolished public housing units in Galveston had not been replaced fully almost a decade after Ike. We were particularly interested in how the conditions of social vulnerability before the storm contributed to unequal housing outcomes during recovery. We found that social vulnerability limited participation through three distinct mechanisms: the physical displacement of public housing residents, the stigmatization of public housing, and the reduction of residents to housing units in the debates.

Out of sight, out of mind

The limited presence of former residents in the local public housing debates partially explains the failure to rebuild public housing. Residents of public housing, disproportionately African-American and low income, had very limited political influence in the debates. There was a sense that Galveston's elite, sometimes referred to as Born on the Island (BOI) and from wealthier local families, are the only group who can influence decisions and pursuing their interests in recovery. Although BOI referred to wealthy locals in the public vernacular, in reality many public housing residents were BOI as well, with connections to the Island that went back generations.

Physical displacement outside the Island significantly limited the ability of displaced residents to participate in the public housing debates. One of the local reverends from a church on the North Side, where all four public housing developments were located, described for us the absence of displaced residents in debates:

> *My neighborhood are all gone… And those who are gone can't come back because there is no transportation … the ones that are going to be affected the most, are the ones that [can't come back]… They never went back to get them. … You're stuck. You grab whatever you can take on that bus. … If a percentage of people who are actually for it [rebuilding public housing], are not here, who else is going to be back? … Because everybody else is against it. So if you have more against, and they are the ones who are present … [they] are the majority … and in a democratic [system] who's going to win that? The majority. Because you've got the voting power, you've got everything.*

After reviewing all of the City Council and GHA meetings when public housing issues were discussed, we found only one instance of a former resident of the demolished units (self-identified) speaking about replacement of lost units. As

shown in Table 5, during the City Council meetings about public housing 49 people spoke in support of rebuilding either public housing units or in support of the mixed income scheme. Majority of those people were residents of Galveston that lived in private housing or in other forms of government assisted housing on the island such as the elderly housing developments owned by GHA. However, none of those supporters identified as a former resident. From the 18 people that spoke in support of public housing during GHA meetings or press conferences, seven were Galveston residents and two among them were former resident of the demolished developments who expressed their need for returning home.

[Table 5 about here]

When GHA decided to demolish their public housing developments, housing advocates such as LSLA and TLIHIS became involved. They worked to preserve the rights and pursue the interest of tenants through legal actions such as the Conciliation Agreement. That settlement also included an agreement from GHA to "meet and consult with the displaced tenants' representative on at least a quarterly basis regarding the planning and implementation of the demolition and replacement" (National Housing Law Project, 2009). Nevertheless, advocates were not always present or included in local deliberations where some Galveston residents took strong stands against rebuilding or the construction of mixed income developments in lieu of public housing. In a strong anti-public housing environment, even victories of the advocates were difficult to enforce without local political support. For example, GHA's 2012 rebuilding plan made a dramatic departure away from the terms of the Conciliation Agreement. Although the original agreement with HUD was between GHA and LSLA, the new terms contained in GHA's 2012 plan were not negotiated with LSLA and had not been approved by LSLA (LSLA v. GHA, 2013). As a result, even strong advocacy on the behalf of residents was not enough to fill the void created by the absence of the residents themselves.

Using stigma to win: move the weak out and let the strong move in

The presence of stigma related to public housing, even post disaster, is well-established. After Katrina, Baton Rouge area GOP Congressman Richard Baker exulted to the New Orleans Times-Picayune, "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans…We couldn't do it, but God did" (Hirsch & Levert, 2009, p. 212). This stigma is often race and class-based, but also reflects a larger uneasiness with

public housing itself, which has always been marginal within the provisions of the US welfare state (Hackworth, 2006).

Even though public housing residents suffered disaster losses, they were often not considered equally deserving of the right to return home as other Galvestonians. Opponents of rebuilding used the negative perceptions of public housing to put their return against successful recovery for the Island. Several interviewees and local reporters connected opposition to rebuilding public housing to racism. Based on the high percentage of people of color in GHA's public housing developments and on the waiting list, they described GHA's failure to replace all demolished units as a continuation of racial exclusion and discrimination. According to the former chair of a local philanthropic organization,

> *... [R]ight after the storm, some people thought that "this is great, we got rid of all this blighted ugly places, let's just not bring it back. And that has degenerated into a racist classist conversation that is very unpleasant.*

Petitions and campaigns for blocking GHA rebuilding plans with comments like the followings demonstrate that racial and class-based stigmas played a role in objecting to public housing recovery.

> *"The island is a tourist destination and the public housing unfortunately was linked with crime, prostitution, drugs, vagrancy, public drunkenness and loitering in city streets. People felt unsafe especially at night in some areas... Galveston was a dump before Ike and will be a dump after Ike if it is not cleaned up and the people removed that are sucking the life out of the island."* (As cited in TLIHIS and Texas Appleseed v. State of Texas, 2009).

One of the leading local voices against rebuilding described the return of public housing residents in this way, *"this is lose-lose. These people are low income minorities getting here, they have a bad life. It's bad for all of us. Because they don't do well they get into crime and things like that."* Such stigmas were perceived by displaced residents as tools for exclusion. A former resident of Cedar Terrace described active opposition against rebuilding as a method of excluding low income people from the future of the Island: *"They want the people who've lived here the majority of their lives to stay out. They want the tourists to come back. Move the weak out and let the strong move in* (As cited in Wilder, 2008)*."*

Disaster victims reduced to housing units

Displaced and stigmatized public housing residents had little standing in many of the heated arguments both for and against rebuilding. These arguments tended to focus on the benefits or losses that Galveston as a whole would experience from replacing public housing units; whereas benefits and losses to the displaced residents

were often absent from the debates. This subtle distinction is important. In this discourse, displaced residents were reduced to housing units. The debate over rebuilding became a disagreement over the number and type of units to be constructed rather than returning residents to their homes. The people themselves, already marginalized because of their poverty, race, and housing tenure before Ike, were further dehumanized and marginalized after the disaster in the face of broader concerns over the strength of the local housing market and the economic well-being of the city.

Much of the debates over rebuilding public housing was concerned with its benefits to housing market in Galveston instead of displaced residents. One of the arguments used against proposals to rebuild subsidized housing was that the high percentage of vacant properties before the storm meant that there was no demand for new affordable housing units in Galveston. Opponents suggested that*"The agency [GHA] should consider whether it's appropriate to rebuild any subsidized housing on an island with so much vacant property* (TLIHIS and Texas Appleseed v. State of Texas, 2009)." While vacancy rate was approximately 30% before Hurricane Ike[10], it was noted by housing advocates and local planners that such high vacancy did not necessarily reflect oversupply of habitable and available rental properties. A sizeable proportion of vacant properties were either not well-maintained or were only available for occasional rent in the tourist seasonal rental market. This perspective expressed concern with the well-being of Galveston's private multifamily rental housing market and argued that because multifamily landlords and developers suffered losses from Ike they could not compete in price and quality with mixed income developments funded by tax dollars. These free market proponents argued that it should be private developers creating affordable housing in Galveston, not public entities such as the GHA (Oakley & Ruel, 2010). But housing market in Galveston was expanding high end vacation home developments, and clearly failed or were not interested in providing affordable housing for both middle income and lower income households.

One of the long-standingr proposals from the removal campaign was giving displaced residents vouchers so they can decide whether to live in Galveston __where opponnets claimed job opportunities are scarece __or elsewhere with more job opportunities and lower risk of hurricanes. According to Lewis Rosen, who ran for Mayor in 2012 promising to block rebuilding plans, *"The Housing Authority should not be in the business of building homes, especially where we don't have job opportunities for people. We need to provide housing for people who have the opportunity to move where the jobs are. And we can do that through vouchers."* (As

[10] According to 2007 3-year ACS residential vacancy was estimated at 28.9% with a margin of error of 2.4%.

cited in Pitman, 2012). However, without quality affordable housing in Galveston or nearby, vouchers would have failed at providing meaningful choice for displaced residents, especially those employed in low wage tourism jobs on the Island (Smith, 2012).

Public housing rebuilding palns were often evaluated based on goals other than helping displaced residents. When GHA changed their rebuilding plan in 2011—increasing the number of market rate and scattered site units and reducing the number of public housing units at the original sites—the mayor at the time was leading a push to attract middle income professionals and revitalize the city. He argued that replacing public housing with mixed income developments would help both the city and low income residents, *"[Hurricane Ike] gave the city a rare opportunity to start fresh by bulldozing projects that … shouldn't have been around as long as they were* (Pitman, 2012)." Some business interests also saw mixed income developments in the downtown area as an opportunity to attract more tourists to Historic Downtown and facilitate economic development. A downtown-seaport partnership expressed interest in collaborating with GHA to redevelop Magnolia Homes as part of a larger push to improve downtown *"by putting into the mix opening up the streets so it's not a fortress and is walkable and livable* (White, 2010)."

To the extent that the interests of public housing residents were present in this debate, it was focused on ways that redevelopment might provide them with a different, and therefore better future. Supporters argued that these communities would provide low income residents with new opportunities to climb out of poverty. They frequently referenced successful mixed income developments in places like Atlanta and New Orleans, but made little mention of the small percentages of public housing residents that returned after construction (Graham, 2012). With the debate focused on new construction, advocates for public housing residents were left with the reality of further delays before displaced residents would return to Galveston. As one advocate stated,*"I'll bet you a nickel that 24 months from today there will not be a shovel turned* (As cited in Smith, 2012).*"*

Interests of displaced residnets were of secondary importance and misrepresented in the public housing debates. The lack of meaningful participation from former residents allowed mixed income proponents to present their plan as the only solution that can benefit the poor. The removal campaign often argued against bringing displaced residents back to hazard-prone and low opportunity neighborhoods of Galveston. In a petition against rebuilding public housing on the Island signed by more than 2000 people, some people expressed concerns related to flood risk: *"The Island is in a flood zone and is not an appropriate place for public housing as everyone has seen after Hurricane Ike. Building structures on the island*

is more costly because of hurricane building standards and insurance is much more costly. Evacuating low income residents is costly and dangerous to everyone involved."(As cited in Stanton, 2009). The removal policy agenda often ignored possibility of using effective building and design strategies that can mitigate risk of hazards particularly hurricaness to residents of coastal areas, high or low income. In addition, the same group rarely discussed implications of high risk of hurricanes on the Island for bringing back private homeowners or other recovery projects in Galveston.

Conclusion: vulnerable not only to disasters but also to local politics aimed at eliminating affordable housing

Galveston provided a particularly appropriate case to understand lack of representation for vulnerable population in recovery because the poor were physically displaced outside the barrier island. Our study shows that being vulnerable means more than living in hazardous areas and having limited access to recovery resources. It also implies less control and representation in decisions about one's recovery. Hence making recovery of those people a political contest as what is in the best interest of the city rather than what is in the best interest of residents. Consequently, displaced residents of public housing are not seen as disaster victims like everyone else, but as the government assisted units they lived in. Rebuilding that unit is the issue of discussion rather than supporting displaced residents to recover.

Without adequate affordable housing in Galveston, public housing residents were forced to move away from established roots and out of the city of Galveston. The burden of GHA's conduct fell disproportionately on people of color and on families with children (LSLA v. GHA, 2013). The effects of this population decline is evident in local community centers in African-American neighborhoods. Burkley, the pastor of Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church, an African-American congregation near the former public housing sites and many Ike-damged abandoned rental homes described this loss as a race and class issue:

"I'm suffering big time. Members that I had were all gone. We have a smaller number of members at church. You just can't make the determination and say we're not going to let this group of people come back. Because they are the worst set of folks."

Although housing advocates were vocal against both removal of public housing and mixed income schemes, they had little influence in local recovery debates. In the local representation vacuum from displaced residents as the main stakeholders of public housing debates, several agendas filled the void by proposing

plans and claiming to be pursuing the best for those residents and the city. Our analysis shows how lack of representation and stigmas attached to this vulnerable population provided an opportunity to pursue different plans without considering their impacts on displaced residents. Socially vulnerable populations face significant barriers in participating in post-disaster discourse and as a result, face even greater barriers to housing recovery. This study demonstrated that while it is important that all groups have access to and can influence recovery decisions, it is even more important to secure that access and influence for groups that are targeted for elimination such as residents of public housing.

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Table 1 Families in the GHA Public Housing Units, 2008

	# of families	% of total families
Total # of families	852	
Extremely low income (<=30% AMI)	694	82%
Very low income (>30% but <=50% AMI)	128	15%
Low income (>50% but <80% AMI)	23	3%
Families with children	727	86%
Elderly families	325	39%
Families with Disabilities	359	42%
Race/ethnicity		
1. White	274	32%
2. Black	573	67%
3. Native American	9	1%
4. American Asian	0	0%

Source: GHA 5 year Plan for FFU 2008 -20012 (GHA FFY 2009 – 2013)

Table 2 Families on the Public Housing and the Section 8 Tenant-based Assistance Waiting List, 2008

	Public Housing		Section 8	
	# of families	% of total families	# of families	% of total families
Waiting list total	852		824	
Extremely low income (<=30% AMI)	790	93%	598	73%
Very low income (>30% but <=50% AMI)	56	7%	182	22%
Low income (>50% but <80% AMI)	5	.6%	361	4%
Families with children	395	46%	324	40%
Elderly families*	17	2%	1	.2%
Families with Disabilities	114	13.38%	15	2%
Race/ethnicity				
1. White	331	39%	183	22%
2. Black	487	57%	629	76%
3. Native American	12	1.4%	4	.5%
4. American Asian	1	0.1%	1	.1%

Sources: GHA 5 year Plan for FFU 2008 -20012 (GHA FFY 2009 – 2013)

Table 3 Change in population composition after Hurricane Ike

	Absolute change ACS 2007-ACS 2010	**MOE**	**% change ACS 2007-ACS 2010**
Total	-4961	±2568	-9.2%
Hispanic	631	±2433	4.2%
Not-Hispanic White	-2967	±2146	-11.8%
Not-Hispanic Black	-2367	±1723	-22.0%
Not-Hispanic other	-258	±917	-8.7%

Table 4 GHA replacement plans

GHA Plan year	**New units**	**On the same footprints**	**Scatter-site**
2009	1,500		
2009	569	*390*	*179*
2009	569	*340*	*229*
2011			247
2011 mixed income	569	51% public /49% market	
2012 mixed income	141	51% public /49% market	288 in Galveston; 100 Off the Island

Table 5 people speaking in support of rebuilding public housing, 2008-2014

Public Meetings	Total # people speaking	# Galveston residents	# former public housing residents	# organizations rep. or officials
Galveston City Council	49	31	0	18
Galveston Housing Authority	18	7	2	9