

Hurricane Katrina (Rebirth of a City)

Introduction

Hello and welcome to the Free Tours by Foot audio tour on the history and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. I'm Andrew, a guide with Free Tours by Foot.

We've designed this tour to be taken by car. It'll cover a lot of ground, about 25 miles altogether. If you do it all in one go without stopping, it'll take something like 3 hours, depending on traffic.

We also designed it with the safest option in mind – driving to each location, finding a place to stop, and then listening to the track in one place. Street parking is available in all the parts of the city we'll be bringing you to, and it's free unless you see signs that say otherwise.

At the end of each stop, I'll tell you directions to each location and what to watch for along the way, plus where you're likeliest to find a place to pull over. The map included in the app will give you an address for each location, so you can use those to get help from the mapping app of your choice.

About traffic – the tour starts in the French Quarter and then goes into the business district next door, which are some of the higher-traffic areas in New Orleans. So if you're ever going to find heavy traffic or trouble parking, it'll probably be at the beginning.

With that in mind, the best time to take the tour is late morning to early afternoon, so as to avoid the work and school commutes. As far as driving in New Orleans – as of early 2019, it's legal to make a right turn on red, using a cell phone while driving is only illegal in school zones, and pedestrians have the right-of-way in crosswalks.

If you want a local soundtrack as you go, turn your radio to WWOZ, 90.7 FM, a listener-supported jazz and heritage station broadcast from the French Market.

Also, a couple of notes on content. Katrina caused enormous suffering, so some of the subjects we'll get into might be upsetting.

Also, this tour is written and recorded in early 2019. As of that time, many parts of New Orleans are still recovering from Katrina, and the whole city is changing in ways related to the disaster. We'll be addressing some events from a long time ago, but most of what we'll cover is too recent to be called history. So it's worth bearing in mind that stories may have developed by the time you're listening – and also, what you see may look different from what I describe.

You also may or may not see clear visual markers of the storm's effects during most of the tour. For years, most of the buildings in the city had a water line and a Katrina cross – a mark left by the National Guard and other groups that searched buildings in the months after the storm.

By 2019, those are both pretty rare. You may see dilapidated houses, but there's no guarantee Katrina was what made them that way. Our stops are places where important events happened, and it won't always be obvious just from looking. That's what I'm here for.

The tour will also take you into some parts of the city that most travelers don't visit. They're less set up for tourism than the French Quarter, so given the limited options, I'll be recommending restaurants, museums, and other possible stops, all available as of early 2019. Visiting a neighborhood business is a great way to engage with that neighborhood's present, not just the worst moments of its past.

Some of these parts of town never got attention in the news or from visitors before Katrina, and there's an aversion to being defined by the disaster. The Lower Ninth Ward has gone as far as to ban tour buses from entering. But the Lower Ninth Ward still has museums, and groups of travelers still participate in builds there all the time – meaning that visitors are welcome; it's just the buses that aren't.

So the places I'll mention are just some first ideas on where to go if you want to get to know a neighborhood better. And if you meet someone, "How's your day?" is a better conversation starter than "How much water did you get from the storm?"

Last thing – the basics of the story by numbers. Hurricane Katrina was born as Tropical Depression 12 on August 23rd, 2005. August 28th, it became a Category 5 hurricane, peak winds 175 mph. It hit land east of New Orleans, driving a more than twenty-foot storm surge into canals that breached in fifty places, filling 80% of the city with up to 15 feet of water and causing more than \$100 billion in damage.

The city had more than 1200 dead; the region overall, as many as 3000.

After all that destruction, it was easy to predict that New Orleans wouldn't or shouldn't come back. But plenty of what's happened since 2005 would shock the forecasters, not least among them you being here.

The next track is about the French Quarter. The ideal spot to listen to it is Artillery Park, just outside Jackson Square, where you can get a view of the Mississippi. But it's best not to try to get anywhere near there by car, so ideally, I'd say visit Artillery Park on foot and then walk to your car and start.

For convenience and good scenery, you could park your car in one of the two-hour street parking spots in the back of the French Quarter, on Dauphine or Burgundy Streets, but if it's better, you can also listen to the next track anywhere, as historical background. The route firms up with track three.

FRENCH QUARTER

Directions: Artillery Park, 768 Decatur St, New Orleans, LA 70116

The Mississippi River is one of America's great poetic forces of nature. It's shorthand for power; "the mighty Mississippi." By the time you see it here, it's gone most of 2000 miles and it's gathered almost half the raindrops in the continental United States.

Mark Twain, in his book *Life on the Mississippi*, said, "ten thousand River Commissions, with the mines of the world at their back, cannot tame that lawless stream, cannot curb it or confine it, cannot say to it, Go here, or Go there, and make it obey; cannot save a shore which it has sentenced; cannot bar its path with an obstruction which it will not tear down, dance over, and laugh at."

If you'd been standing here on August 29th, 2005, as Hurricane Katrina approached, you'd have seen a sign of how powerful that storm was: for a few hours, the Mississippi flowed backward.

When Mark Twain published that observation in 1883, something was quietly happening to the river that would prove him partly wrong. There's a spot up the river, still in Louisiana, where a smaller stream splits off to the west called the Atchafalaya. About fifty years earlier, that spot was causing trouble for steamboats – there was a tight bend in the course, plus a logjam, both hard to navigate.

So people got to problem-solving, and soon the logs had been burned and there was a canal to straighten out that bend. Those two choices caused a small change in the flow of water, and by the time Mark Twain said what he said, the river was slowly shifting its weight away from the channel you see here and into the Atchafalaya.

Left alone, it would have eventually rerouted completely, and New Orleans, plus plenty more cities and towns that rely on the river, would have been stranded at the bottom of a long, still bayou.

In the 1950s, the Army Corps of Engineers stepped in. They built a control structure, which now regulates a 70-30 split between the two streams and keeps most of the water flowing past Baton Rouge and New Orleans. So today, a spectator looking at the mighty Mississippi from the French Quarter is seeing a force of nature shepherded by human engineering.

And it isn't just the route where human beings have had their say. The river used to flood almost every spring. Sometimes in that time of year, you can stand on the 14' high, man-made levee and clearly see that the level of water in the river is much higher than the land in Jackson Square, but that man-made levee – another Army Corps creation – is holding it back.

Every part of South Louisiana's system of waterways – the bayous, Lake Pontchartrain, the wetlands, all of it – has been altered by human beings, usually with an eye toward convenience, commercial viability, and safety.

The results, especially on the last count, have been mixed. But most New Orleans residents take a pragmatic and sometimes even a lighthearted attitude toward potential disaster. Pre-Katrina New Orleanians on average were some of the less socioeconomically mobile people in the country, and the hand they were dealt with included a hometown where a tropical system hits about every other year.

So preparation becomes routine. You stock batteries, water, and non-perishable food, tape your windows and close your storm shutters. Maybe you cook everything in the freezer before the power goes out and have friends over. And yeah, if you own a car, you have an evacuation plan ready. But more often than not, you shelter in place – because most hurricanes come and go without disaster, and someone needs to be there if a window breaks, and besides, you're expected to be at work the day the storm passes. It's just part of the rhythm of life. You prepare for what is 95% likely to happen.

Going back in time a bit – living with water has always been part of the puzzle for New Orleans. If you look out on the side of Artillery Park opposite the river, you can see Jackson Square and most of the French Quarter. For a long time, this was the entire city. And long before that, the many Native American groups in the area were using this site as a meeting point, thanks to its high elevation and the natural ridges that provide access to it across the swamp.

It was knowledge of that Native American use that led Bienville, the French Canadian who's credited with founding New Orleans, to choose this site for a city in 1718. A port was the idea, and with that in mind, plenty of Bienville's peers would have preferred a spot along the Gulf Coast, where trade vessels could come and go more easily. But he defended the choice of an inland location – because all that land was bound to protect the city from hurricanes.

And as wrong as Bienville clearly was, he wasn't completely wrong. Yes, in 1722, a hurricane flattened everything the French had built here and forced the town to start over. But contrast that with the effects of hurricanes on places closer to the Gulf. In 1856, a group of about 200 New Orleans socialites left the city for the nearby resort island of Isle Derniere, or Last Island, lured there by the prospect of cool breezes and a relief from the stinking, plague-ridden city.

While they were there, a hurricane hit, and the storm surge not only leveled every building – it took almost every life and split the island itself in half. And Katrina obliterated whole towns along

the Gulf Coast, which, since they didn't have New Orleans' size and fame, never got the same degree of attention. So for Bienville, the choice to live further in meant wind and storm surges would at least be weakened by the time they reached the city. The remaining risk was the cost of doing business.

And to his credit, the city as Bienville knew it – the French Quarter – fared relatively well during Katrina. That city was built onto some of the safest ground – the narrow space from the riverfront back to Rampart Street, a few blocks beyond Jackson Square. That bit closest to the river is high ground, because South Louisiana is built from what's called alluvial soil – land created from sediments left behind by millennia of river floods.

The land slopes downhill as you go away from the river, and when you hit Rampart Street, you've gotten down to about sea level. Beyond that was wetlands.

Well after Bienville's time, as the riverfront filled up, the city started draining those wetlands to expand its footprint. That drained area became the 80% of the city that flooded after Katrina. The 20% that didn't includes the French Quarter, the Garden District, and almost everything else the average visitor to town sees.

Those places weren't unaffected by the storm, but they changed in ways more cultural and mental than tangible. You can see one of the most obvious lingering effects on the French Quarter in Jackson Square: a Katrina museum, located in the Presbytere, just right of St. Louis Cathedral.

The rest of our route will take us out of the well-trafficked core toward parts of the city that have had a harder time putting Katrina in the past. The next stop is a view of the Mercedes-Benz Superdome.

Depending on where you're driving from, the best route might vary, but for scenery, I'll recommend exiting the Quarter through the back, along Basin Street. This will take you downhill, and you'll be able to see the shift in building types, from the high-end residences on Chartres and Royal Streets with their cast-iron railings, to the smaller, simpler buildings on Bourbon, Dauphine, Burgundy, and Rampart.

That part of the Quarter was built by and for a more middle- and working-class, mixed-race cohort. Wealthier New Orleanians have historically been able to compete for high ground, meaning more affordable areas tend to be low-elevated and more flood-prone.

The class ladder and the historic racial gradient from mostly European to mostly African descent continue as you leave the French Quarter into the Treme and beyond. While these haven't been common parts of town to visit, they've produced some of our visitors' favorite traditions – jazz music largely comes from around where we'll be visiting next.

If you exit the French Quarter on St. Peter Street, you'll be led directly to Basin Street, where you'll make a left. Basin Street goes in a strange curve – formerly, it was part of the Carondelet Canal, which we'll see more of later.

Shortly on the right you'll pass by St. Louis Cemetery #1, the city's oldest, which you'll be able to recognize by its white walls. It's only accessible with a guide – you can often find one by the gate if the cemetery is open.

Just past the cemetery, you'll see the Bienville Basin Apartments, one of the many former housing projects destroyed and rebuilt after Katrina as mixed-income housing. At the turn into the 20th century, these few blocks were part of Storyville, the city's red light district, which became a focal point of early jazz performance.

When you cross Canal Street, Basin turns into Elk Place, then into Loyola Avenue. Continue until you reach the next large divided road, Poydras.

As you reach it, you'll be passing our City Hall on your right. Take a right on Poydras and immediately start looking on your right for a place to pull over. Anywhere in the next few blocks will do; the Superdome is gigantic, so you won't have any trouble spotting it.

SUPERDOME

Directions: Mercedes-Benz Superdome, 1500 Sugar Bowl Dr, New Orleans, LA 70112

This is the Superdome – home of the local football team, the New Orleans Saints, since 1975. Back then, the team was still new, and so was much of what stands in this part of the city.

Right now you're in the Central Business District. Compared with the French Quarter, it feels a lot more like a typical American downtown. But the Superdome is unmistakably local, and the area is the home of some important history.

The neighborhood first developed as a suburb and became the first area where Americans from the northeast moved after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. There are still a good many 19th-century buildings, but it's had steady new construction as well.

The City Hall you just passed is built over a childhood home of Louis Armstrong, and a couple of hospitals now stand around the corner where we once had a small Chinatown.

And plenty of locals will tell you that the Superdome stands on the former site of the Girod Street Cemetery, New Orleans' first Protestant burial ground, which was deconsecrated and destroyed in the 1950s.

Some Saints fans use this as a premise to argue that the Superdome is haunted – and hence to explain the team's steadily poor performance during its first few decades. In fact, the site of the cemetery lies under one of the Dome's parking lots, not the building itself, but for most of their history the Saints have been underdogs, and faithful fans will find justifications, some more serious than others.

If a dark legacy on the site were enough to doom a football team's chances, the Saints should have done worse than ever in the 2000s and 2010s in the shadow of what happened here after Katrina. And yet, the team and its home field have become some of the most popular mascots for the city's recovery story, in ways that are sometimes heartwarming, sometimes flatteringly distorted.

The Superdome began its Katrina saga in a completely un-symbolic way – on the morning of August 28th, 2005, as the storm approached, the Dome was declared an evacuation point of last resort.

The storm had been setting off alarm bells for a few days. It had struck southern Florida, weakening to a tropical storm as it passed over land, but after reaching the Gulf, its winds leaped to Category Five hurricane strength in two days.

The National Weather Service broke with its usual cool-headed meteorology-speak by saying, "MOST OF THE AREA WILL BE UNINHABITABLE FOR WEEKS... PERSONS... PETS... AND LIVESTOCK EXPOSED TO THE WINDS WILL FACE CERTAIN DEATH IF STRUCK... WATER SHORTAGES WILL MAKE HUMAN SUFFERING INCREDIBLE BY MODERN STANDARDS."

In the face of predictions like that, Mayor C Ray Nagin declared the first mandatory evacuation in New Orleans history. It was justified, but in the context of New Orleans, it was also unsupportable – a huge proportion of residents lived in poverty, with nowhere to go and no way to get there, and the city provided no means of evacuation back then. So, more than 10,000 people made their way to the Superdome, supplies in hand, while tens of thousands more sheltered in their homes.

The storm reached the city the night of August 28th. By the time Katrina reached New Orleans, it had weakened to a Category 3 hurricane. But that still meant sustained winds of over 111mph. By morning, two long holes had appeared in the Superdome's roof, and the rain was pouring in. And water began to rise on the ground level, more than the rain could account for.

Those who were inside started climbing to the upper levels, just as others who had ridden out the storm at home began to climb into upper floors and attics, where many of them became trapped as the water got deeper.

Conditions in the Superdome quickly made clear that city, state, and federal disaster relief agencies had been far from ready. The mandatory evacuation had been announced without much lead time, and the announcement of the Dome as a shelter came even later – meaning that many of the staff who knew the Superdome best had rushed to leave town, and the place was instead staffed mostly with National Guard members well equipped for disaster work, but unfamiliar with the facility.

Food and medical supplies were insufficient; power failed on the first night, putting the Dome on generator power that provided light and little else; the plumbing soon failed too, leaving a building with more than 10,000 people in it with no working toilets or sinks. And the building only became more crowded.

Those who escaped their flooding houses on foot made their way here, or to the similarly crowded and completely unstaffed Convention Center nearby.

Some of the very first rescuers to arrive in town were the people we call the Cajun Navy – unconnected individuals who lived nearby and used their own boats to go from house to house, chopping holes in roofs and pulling hundreds of people to safety. They, too, delivered the people they'd helped to the Superdome.

The dearth of power and supplies made for serious medical risks, and in nearly a week between arrival and evacuation, six people died in the Superdome – five from medical emergencies, one in an apparent suicide.

There was also one well-documented incident of violence. Weapons had been confiscated, but one person jumped a National Guardsman, causing his gun to fire, and from there, the Guard members and civilians were separated by barbed wire.

These are the well-documented problems. Rumors of much more – gang violence, sexual assaults, robberies, snipers shooting at helicopters – were easy to find, and voices of authority, from major news outlets to New Orleans' own mayor, repeated the most extreme rumors credulously.

There will never be an absolute accounting of all crimes that happened after Katrina. It's easy to imagine how many went unreported or were just impossible to prove. And it's easy to imagine how tempting it was to misinterpret some moments of desperation. A gunshot fired in the air may have been an effort to call for help, but became interpreted as a threat.

In the absence of supplies, some able-bodied evacuees made runs to nearby abandoned stores to find necessities like water, medical items, and new shoes for people who had lost theirs trudging through deep water – but it was reported as looting.

It's also easy to imagine how hyperbolic reporting could cause the very problems it was describing. It certainly limited FEMA's ability to problem-solve. The agency had secured buses for evacuation multiple days before they actually used them, but many drivers, having heard rumors of a violent free-for-all, refused to enter the city. The first FEMA delivery to reach the Superdome was two refrigerated trucks meant to act as a morgue for the hundreds of reported dead.

The degree of alarm raised may also have encouraged vigilantism and a shoot first, ask questions later attitude. Then-Governor of Louisiana Kathleen Blanco broadcast a statement saying that officers and military in the city "have M16s and they're locked and loaded. These troops know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so if necessary, and I expect they will."

The best-recorded shootings in New Orleans after Katrina ultimately were committed by police officers. On September 4th, as the Superdome was evacuating, six unarmed black men were crossing the Danziger Bridge on foot, and police opened fire, killing two, one of whom was shot in the back, and wounding the other four. The shooting and a subsequent coverup resulted in a trial process that lasted until 2016 and resulted in guilty pleas and prison sentences for all five officers involved.

Finally, on the fifth day after the storm, FEMA sent buses to the Superdome. The evacuation was a two-day process, and families were often separated, not to find each other again for months. Many residents have never returned to New Orleans, because of lost homes, lost family, limited means, or an unwillingness to return to a place of such trauma. As of 2019, New Orleans' population is still lower than it was pre-Katrina.

After all this physical and symbolic damage, it seemed certain to most involved that the Superdome had seen its last act and would be torn down. In that respect, it stood in for the big question of the city's own fate – do you tear down or rebuild? If you rebuild, will anyone show up?

With these questions in the air, word emerged that Guy Benson, the owner of the Saints, had entered discussions to relocate the team permanently. His doubts were common ones. The water was emptied from the city by the end of October, but by and large, it was a city of a few tenacious residents, living under a nighttime curfew, lodging beside their damaged or ruined houses in trailers issued by FEMA – trailers that would ultimately be found to contain formaldehyde.

Morale was low and symbols were important. The mayor of New Orleans, the governor of Louisiana, and the commissioner of the NFL all made their opinions known to Benson. And ultimately, the team did stay, and the building was restored – at a cost of close to \$200 million dollars. About half that money came from FEMA – the same federal relief agency that many homeowners were struggling with to get a roof over their heads again.

On September 25, 2006, just over a year after Katrina, the first game was played in the restored Superdome – the Saints against the Atlanta Falcons. In an era measured in firsts, this one was exceptional – the stadium was at capacity and the Saints earned a memorable and extremely lopsided victory.

An early moment from that game – the Saints' Steve Gleason intercepting a punt – is now memorialized outside the Dome in a statue titled "Rebirth." It isn't visible from Poydras, but if you want to see it, you can climb the ramp and go around the left side of the building.

That night, nearby restaurants – which are another popular proxy for New Orleans' well-being, and which had been barely hanging on since the storm – reported soaring sales. In 2010, the Saints won the 44th Super Bowl. And in story after story since then, sports writers have strung

these bright points together into a constellation, saying that the Saints and the Dome “saved” New Orleans through a mix of escapism, hope, and economic stimulation.

Yes, there were mixed feelings when Mercedes-Benz bought the naming rights in 2011, but not as much as when the New Orleans Arena next door changed its name to the Smoothie King Center. And yes, there was a citywide cringe in 2013 when the Dome hosted the 47th Super Bowl and the power went out mid-game, but it came back on. Saints fans have always had an easy time accentuating the positive.

On a side note, the story of the Superdome had a lasting impact on disaster management in other places. World Central Kitchen is a nonprofit that provides food in disaster zones and served millions of meals after hurricanes in Puerto Rico, Houston, and South Carolina, and they often base their work in event spaces like the Superdome.

The organization’s founder, Chef José Andrés, has said that the idea came from seeing the suffering and the missed opportunities in the Superdome – sports arenas are built to feed thousands of people in a few hours, and with some planning, can be turned to that purpose better than almost any other facility.

The next stop is just a few blocks away. If you managed to stop on the first block after turning off Loyola Avenue, you’ll take the next right at LaSalle Street. If you had to go further to find a place to stop, just take the next right turn you can, then an immediate right onto Perdido Street, then turn left onto LaSalle. Either way, from LaSalle you’ll take a left on Tulane Avenue and pull over on the right as soon as you can. Get a look at the large building across the street to your left – the Art Deco home of Charity Hospital.

CHARITY HOSPITAL

Directions: 1544 Tulane Ave, New Orleans, LA 70112

This is Charity Hospital. You’re still in the Central Business District, in the middle of a cluster of healthcare-related buildings, old and new. If a break is in order, one of the city’s best-known Vietnamese restaurants, Pho Tau Bay, is right across the street from Charity. Since the Vietnam War, New Orleans has had one of the largest Vietnamese populations in the world.

Charity Hospital the building goes back to 1939 when it was built as a New Deal project, but the institution is much older. This is the sixth location of the second oldest hospital in the country, going back to an original French Quarter location in 1736.

As of this recording, the place has stood empty since Katrina – but it’s been the subject of hot conversation all the while. A passerby in early 2019 would see a fenced and abandoned building clearly showing its age.

By the time you see it, there may be a trickle of foot traffic, maybe in hard hats, or it may be a busy construction site. Or you may see residents, workers, and customers coming and going from a building that looks shiny and new. Its future is still up in the air, but it’s looking eventful.

Charity Hospital was one of the thousands of buildings in the city flooded by Hurricane Katrina and evacuated in the following days. Since it was built, a sign in the foyer has declared this to be a place “Where the Unusual Occurs and Miracles Happen.”

And across almost three centuries, Charity has survived to become the birthplace of countless New Orleanians, including notables like Ray Nagin, the mayor at the time of Katrina.

As one of the largest trauma centers in the US, it prevented countless deaths from accidents and violence. It was also a teaching hospital, so it launched countless careers through the public university system. All while limping along on what was more often than not a very countable budget.

When the hurricane came, the plan was to shelter in place. In the final hours, the hospital accepted a few medical cases from the Superdome, staffed and stocked for emergency mode, and went into lockdown, with over 1000 people inside.

The story was similar to what happened in the Superdome – some wind damage in the night, a switch from the grid to generator power, and encroaching water starting in the morning. Unlike the Superdome, though, Charity was full of people who needed medical support, so power was critical – and unlike the Superdome, Charity stored its generators in a basement. Power was completely lost soon after the flooding began.

And the ground floor held the emergency room – ideal for quick access from the street, but also first to flood. And so, with the power out in most of the building, staff began to carry some of the most unstable patients in the hospital up one floor, sometimes while keeping them breathing by hand.

The circumstances called for bold efforts. After a day, with no help in sight, some of the staff reached news media, who broadcast their calls for help, and a piecemeal chain of assistance came together. One doctor flagged a passing boat, got permission to use a helipad on an adjacent building, and transported four critical patients across the water, one of whom had to be operated on while in motion with no anesthesia, to finally be airlifted out by a private helicopter.

Through efforts on this scale, all but eight of the 360 patients were kept alive. The nearby private hospitals were almost completely empty by the time help came to Charity's doors; it was finally emptied of people on September 4th, five days after the flood began.

Also, like the Superdome, Charity had onlookers watching nervously to see whether this staple of the local health system would come back. Not long after its evacuation, the building received a thorough cleaning of its lower floors, including the flooded basement, by a team of 200+ members of the military, German engineers, and medical professionals. That portion was declared ready for service, with the rest soon to follow.

But after this first phase, administrators of the Louisiana State University system, which owns the hospital, sent the volunteers away, had the power turned off, locked up the complex, and announced it was unfit for use and wouldn't be reopened.

Over the next several years, as the site fell into decay again, the LSU system wrestled with FEMA over their appraisal of the cost of the damage. The number gradually increased until it hit a key benchmark – half the cost of rebuilding, the amount required for FEMA to provide a payout for new construction.

Soon LSU began a more than one billion dollar building project in partnership with the VA. As with the Saints, it was possible to view this as great news – a state-of-the-art facility and a source of new, well-paying health science jobs – or as an example of the flaws in the city's recovery – the backroom deals, the indigent, and psychiatric services the new site has cut back on, and the 27 blocks of small businesses and homes, many only recently restored from flood damage, which were repossessed and destroyed through eminent domain to clear the space for the hospital's campus.

Meanwhile, Charity sat empty.

Finally, in early 2019, the LSU system contracted with a developer to turn the area into a mixed-use complex. Retail, office, and residential spaces are in the mix, and some of it is likely

to become affordable housing and provide services for the homeless and for mental health; how much space each will get is still to be determined.

From here, you'll continue along Tulane Avenue, make a right onto the Claiborne Avenue underpass, and then make a left onto Canal Street, which you'll follow until the road appears to end. It's some distance away, so you'll see quite a bit.

First, you'll be able to see the new hospital complex through the Claiborne Avenue bridge, and you'll continue to border it as you turn onto Canal.

Somewhere along Canal Street, you'll probably see the red and yellow streetcar that runs down the median. It was built post-Katrina, but it's a revival of an old route. In Streetcar Named Desire, besides the car in the title, Tennessee Williams also references a streetcar named Cemeteries – and some of the cars going along this route have that word on the front. They're going where we're going – a cluster of fourteen cemeteries, most of them the traditional above-ground variety.

As the hospital comes to an end on your left, you'll be able to see Warren Easton High School on your right. Warren Easton was one of the many schools in New Orleans shuttered by Hurricane Katrina and one of the quicker ones to reopen in 2006. Its reopening and physical restoration got some high-profile help from Sandra Bullock.

Today, a private company operates Warren Easton as a charter school. At the time of this recording, New Orleans' public school system is 90% charter-operated and set to be completed so in the fall of 2019 – the first time that's been true of a major American city.

In front of Warren Easton, you'll see what looks like a large sculpture of a person waving one arm. This is an Evacuspote, one of seventeen around the city, where, in the event of a future mandatory evacuation, residents without their own vehicles will be able to get a ride out of town to a shelter in Louisiana or a nearby state. The new system is designed to also accommodate seniors with medical needs and pets, who were lost in untold numbers after Katrina.

If a meal or a snack is in order, you'll find some local classics a little ways further along, around the intersection of Canal and Carrollton. In particular, there's an Italian gelateria and bakery called Angelo Brocato's, originally located in the French Quarter, back when it was mostly Sicilian in the early 20th century. In the same vein but more substantial, you've also got a classic restaurant called Mandina's nearby serving Creole Italian since 1898. Institutions like these that reopened after Katrina are particular sources of pride in Mid-City, which around that spot took six feet of water.

You'll see the cemeteries when you're getting close to our next stop. As you start to see monuments to your left, look for a place to pull over. The cemetery you're looking for is on the left side, across the street from a shop called The Herb; the gate says "Charity Hospital Cemetery."

KATRINA MEMORIAL, CHARITY HOSPITAL CEMETERY

Directions: 5050 Canal St, New Orleans, LA 70119

Starting in 1848, this was the Charity Hospital Cemetery. It holds the bodies of those who died unclaimed in the hospital; it was also used repeatedly for epidemic burials, like many places in the city.

It might seem strange that the burials in this once very active cemetery are mostly in the ground, but earthen burial has always been the more economical option, and Charity saved its resources for the living.

If you want to see some above-ground monuments, there are plenty visible from right outside the gate; behind the fence of Greenwood Cemetery at the end of Canal Street, you can see impressive monuments for a firemen's tomb and an Elks Club tomb.

You can also pass under the highway nearby and see Metairie Cemetery, the nearest corner of which is home to the tallest privately-owned monument in the country. But then there's Holt Cemetery, around the corner, which, like this one, was the burial site for people who couldn't afford these sorts of monuments; so its burials are mostly in the earth, and what markers exist are largely homemade.

After Katrina, Charity Hospital Cemetery also became home to a memorial for all those killed by the disaster and particularly for the dead who were never claimed or identified, more than 80 of whom were buried here. For contrast, the United States got through the Vietnam War with all its dead eventually identified.

The funding for this monument came partly from FEMA and partly from fundraising by a nationwide organization of funeral directors, who were particularly sensitive to the numbers and fates of the dead. It's shaped in the spiral form a hurricane organizes into as it gains strength.

It was dedicated on the third anniversary of the disaster in 2008. At that moment, the city was watching the approach of Hurricane Gustav, which set off terrors that the worst would happen all over again. Mayor Nagin again declared a mandatory evacuation, which this time involved testing the new city-assisted evacuation system.

Gustav caused massive damage, but along a slightly different route than was forecast; it left New Orleans mostly untouched and instead hit Baton Rouge, the very city many New Orleanians had evacuated to.

Because of all this, the unveiling of the monument was overshadowed, and it remains largely unknown to locals, plenty of whom are still grappling with losses from Katrina. Again, the disaster directly or indirectly caused more than 1200 deaths in the city. With only a little more than half a million people living in the part of the city that flooded, you can imagine how common it is for a New Orleanian today to know someone who died, never mind the plenty of traumatic experiences that didn't end in death, and what it's like to carry that through their daily role in a city known for offering a good time.

When you're ready to move on, you'll continue to the end of Canal Street. Get in the left lane to make a left turn onto City Park Avenue. Then take an immediate right to get on the highway.

You'll take the first exit, marked Florida Boulevard and West End Boulevard; when it splits, keep left to stay on West End Boulevard.

The street weaves for a second, then straightens out, with a long, narrow green space on the left side. Find a place to pull over when you see that.

WEST END, NEW BASIN CANAL

Directions: From the Katrina Memorial, you'll continue to the end of Canal Street. Get in the left lane to make a left turn onto City Park Avenue. Then take an immediate right to get on the

highway. You'll take the first exit, marked Florida Boulevard and West End Boulevard; when it splits, keep left to stay on West End Boulevard. The street weaves for a second, then straightens out, with a long, narrow green space on the left side. Find a place to pull over when you see that.

6001 West End Blvd, New Orleans, LA 70124

We've been working our way toward Lake Pontchartrain, and West End Boulevard will get you most of the rest of the way there. This'll bring us from the human experience of the disaster into the mechanics of it. And that means canals.

This street is bringing you toward one, but it also used to be one. The long, narrow green space on your left is the former route of the New Basin Canal. The Old Basin Canal, also called the Carondelet Canal, was the one you passed along earlier on Basin Street. That canal was key to shipping in New Orleans' early days.

The lowest part of the Mississippi was treacherous, and for easy access to the Gulf of Mexico, it was safer to rely on Lake Pontchartrain. So goods that came down the river would arrive in the French Quarter, be unloaded and transported overland to the canal, and then be put back on ships to make their way oceanward. That is, if the shippers were doing business with Creoles, the entrenched, pre-American population of the city.

If they were doing business with the Anglo-Americans who came down after the Louisiana Purchase – the ones who largely developed the Central Business District you saw earlier – then they'd make their trip here along the New Basin Canal instead. Building redundant infrastructure was a big part of how the newly arrived Americans supplanted Creole power.

After more than a century of use, the canal was gradually filled in. The part closest to the river is today part of Interstate 10 leading up to the Crescent City Connection Bridge, and this part was filled in 1950 except for a little bit at the end, which you'll see.

As you go along West End Boulevard today, most of what you'll see is middle-class houses, gutted and rebuilt on the inside after Katrina. As of 2019, that work is mostly done on this stretch, but new construction is still common in the Lakeview neighborhood around you. There won't be much to see on your left, but if you keep an eye out, toward the end of the green space is another memorial – a big stone Celtic cross.

At the Katrina Memorial, I said that plague-related mass burial sites are common in New Orleans. West End Boulevard is one of them. Irish immigrants dug this canal by hand over the course of the 1830s. They died by the unknown thousands of yellow fever, cholera, and malaria, and they were often buried unmarked alongside the canal.

Industrialists tended to favor immigrant labor for dangerous tasks like this; the idea was that enslaved people, being property bought and paid for, were too valuable an asset to risk losing. The cross was added in 1990, and as of this recording, a more extensive tribute called the Hibernian Memorial Park is in its earliest phases of construction.

When you reach the end of the park, you'll use the far left lane to make a left onto Robert E Lee Boulevard, then use the middle lane to merge onto Hammond Highway.

In a few blocks, you'll come to an intersection with a divided road, Fleur de Lis Drive. Take a left there, then take the second right onto Stafford Place.

As of 2019, this street gives a sense of the parts of Lakeview that are still in the process of coming back – the road is rough and the street signs are hand-painted. At the end of the street,

a couple of blocks ahead, you can see the wall of the 17th Street Canal, with a brown sign beside the road, marking the place where this canal breached.

You may not find an easy spot to pull over around here, so this may be a track to listen to in motion – but if you want to look at the canal itself from up on the bridge, which you can climb on foot, it may be easier to do from the opposite side. There is a bridge two blocks right of the sign.

17TH ST CANAL BREACH

Directions: When you reach the end of the park, you'll use the far left lane to make a left onto Robert E Lee Boulevard, then use the middle lane to merge onto Hammond Highway.

In a few blocks, you'll come to an intersection with a divided road, Fleur de Lis Drive. Take a left there, then take the second right onto Stafford Place.

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6931 Bellaire Drive, New Orleans, LA

This is the 17th Street Canal. A look at it is one of the best ways to drive home how far below sea level much of New Orleans is – the level of the water is generally much higher than that of the surrounding ground.

The canal forms a border between two parishes – Louisiana's version of counties. So far, you've been in Orleans Parish, which contains New Orleans proper; on the other side of the canal is Jefferson Parish, which is mostly home to suburbs.

In the middle of the 19th century, this area was still wetland, and canals like this one were built to drain it. That opened up space for the city to grow, but the land it created was below sea level and has continued to sink since then. The only thing that keeps it from becoming wetland again is the pump system that daily empties water from the city into Lake Pontchartrain.

Today, this is an outfall canal, the last link in the chain of the pump system, and of the three in the city, the 17th Street Canal is the largest – it can move six billion gallons a day on its own. The overall pump system is the largest in the world, a huge feat of engineering, and its failure would have similarly massive consequences.

August 29th, 2005 wasn't the first time these canals were involved in a flood. Most memorably, there was Hurricane Betsy in 1965, when canal water overtopped what then were shorter earthen levees. After Betsy, federal legislation called for a series of protective measures, including concrete walls added to the outfall canals, to be designed, built, and maintained by the federal Army Corps of Engineers.

Forty years later in 2005, many of the provisions of that legislation had never been executed, but the walls had, and their height added confidence that the canals wouldn't overtop again. So the morning after Katrina, it was a shock to many to see water come bursting from the bottom of the concrete walls.

The pressure of the water in the canal had pushed through the unreinforced earth underneath the wall. With its foundation destroyed, sections of the wall itself soon followed. Most of the water people fled as they climbed stairs in their homes, in the Superdome, and in Charity Hospital came from right here and from similar breaches in the London Avenue Canal to the east.

In the years since Katrina, the canals have gotten a major share of the attention, and their guardians have gotten a major share of the blame. To cut costs back in 1965, the Army Corps had concluded a shallow foundation would do the job.

Their own post-Katrina investigative task force concluded that design and construction flaws in the protective system were to blame for most of the damage. And in 2008, a federal judge agreed, finding the Army Corps responsible, but not financially liable; a previous round of disaster-related legislation in 1928 had absolved federal agencies of financial responsibility for flood damage.

The plaque at the site of the breach on Bellaire Drive notes this fact, and also points out that this was one of fifty places where federal flood protections failed that summer. And that failure wasn't unanticipated – both the Army Corps and a local newspaper, the Times-Picayune, had conducted studies that anticipated the kinds of effects a hurricane like Katrina would have.

Improvements have been made. Throughout the 2010s, the city has conducted a years-long process of rebuilding below-street drainage infrastructure to increase the system's capacity. Valves like the one here at the end of the 17th Street Canal have been strengthened to better shut out surges from the lake. Levees have been heightened, and the bases of floodwalls have been widened to make them less likely to be undermined in the future.

But even so much attention amounts more to upkeep than to a permanent fix. In 2019, the Army Corps determined that the \$14 billion spent since Katrina on improvements, meant to protect the New Orleans area against a hundred-year storm, will only measure up to the task until 2023. That's because the ground in New Orleans is sinking.

The constant emptying of water by our pump system is an impressive accomplishment, but it's also a partial cause of the sinking that weakens buildings, cracks streets, and brings the whole city gradually deeper below sea level. And the rise of the sea level itself puts us on an eventual collision course with another disaster.

In light of all that, there are plenty who claim that the problem is the fundamental design of the system. Alternatives have been proposed through events like the Dutch Dialogues, a series of conversations between designers and engineers from Louisiana and the Netherlands, where similar challenges around living with water have been dealt with very differently. The organizers of those conversations have proposed a plan that centers around keeping water in the city, in widely distributed, highly visible water features.

Whether sweeping ideas like this will get implemented, fully or partially, depends on the same factors that slowed down the improvements in 1965 – questions of cost, politics, the inertia of the status quo, the challenges of collaboration between local and federal agencies, and what else calls out for our attention in the meantime.

When you're ready to move on, you'll get back on Hammond Highway going back the opposite way you came, toward West End Boulevard. When you reach that intersection again, you'll turn left onto Lakeshore Drive. Shortly after that turn, you'll pass through the gate of a floodwall.

There'll be parking areas on your right; pick one that gives you a view of a red-roofed lighthouse just beyond the restaurants on the left side of the street.

LIGHTHOUSE/LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN

Directions: From the 17th Street Canal, you'll get back on Hammond Highway going back the opposite way you came, toward West End Boulevard.

When you reach that intersection again, you'll turn left onto Lakeshore Drive. Shortly after that turn, you'll pass through the gate of a floodwall. There'll be parking areas on your right; pick one that gives you a view of a red-roofed lighthouse just beyond the restaurants on the left side of the street.

8001 Lakeshore Dr, New Orleans, LA 70124

The start of Lakeshore Drive runs along the small remnant of the New Basin Canal. Today it's bordered by a yacht club and some restaurants – Felix's Oysters and Landry's Seafood are both well-known places that also have locations in the French Quarter.

A lighthouse was first built here in 1839 after the completion of the New Basin Canal. Back then, it would have stood on its own, well away from the land; the surface around Lakeshore Drive is manmade infill, all the way back to the tall levee you can see on the opposite side of the road from the lake.

Today's lighthouse was built in 2012 using materials from a previous version, which was destroyed in 2005, along with everything else around you, by a storm surge of between ten and fourteen feet. The rebuilt lighthouse now operates as a museum, covering its own history as well as the ecology of Lake Pontchartrain.

After the lighthouse, Lakeshore Drive becomes a waterfront street with a beachy Gulf Coast atmosphere – water as far as you can see, sailboats, seagulls – just no actual beach.

The east side of Lake Pontchartrain opens into the Gulf, so it's actually an estuary – fresh on its west side, salty to the east, brackish in the middle, with a huge variety of wildlife in it, from gulls and pelicans to redfish to alligators to small sharks.

The lake's connection to the Gulf was part of its danger during Katrina. The storm didn't hit the city as directly as it could have, which spared the buildings of the city from the hurricane's strongest winds, but those winds instead pushed storm surge into Lake Pontchartrain.

As the city was drained after Katrina – a process that wasn't finished until October 11th – the water went back into the lake, adding all kinds of toxins and entailing a whole other recovery process.

The neighborhood on the other side of the levee is called Lakeview, which is a bit of a misnomer – as you can tell from only being able to see the roofs of houses from here, there aren't many views of the lake from those homes, thanks to the levee.

But if you turn off Lakeshore, say onto Marconi Drive or Rail Street, you'll find a mid-century, upper-middle-class garden suburb with streets named for gemstones or birds.

Suburbanization drove the development of this area after World War II and brought far more New Orleanians to live below sea level. Vintage as the look of the neighborhood is, the interiors have been completely rebuilt since Katrina.

You'll see a bit of this aesthetic regardless as you leave Lakeshore to go to the next part of our route. That'll mean turning off Lakeshore just before the second inlet of water you'll see. The first one, which you'll pass over, is the Orleans Avenue Canal, another outfall canal, which didn't overtop or breach during Katrina.

The second one is Bayou St. John, a natural waterway; you'll turn just before the bridge that goes over it, onto Beauregard Avenue.

The homes on the right side of Beauregard Avenue can easily pull the eye, but if you watch on the left, you'll see some brick ruins. You can park on the street opposite those and get a look.

Old Spanish Fort

Directions: 6400 Beauregard Ave, New Orleans, LA 70124

The brick foundations at this spot are the remains of Fort St. John. The elements you see today date to 1808. Before that, French and Spanish forts on this site guarded the colonial city against potential attacks through the lake.

Before that, this was the point of arrival for Gulf Coast Native Americans making their way to the present-day site of the French Quarter for access to the Mississippi. One of the more powerful tribes of the area, the Choctaw, referred to that site as Bulbancha, or "place of many languages," for the numerous groups that traded and communicated there. That trade took place along the site of today's French Market, and Native American vendors sold their creations there well into the nineteenth century.

Later on, we'll have more about Katrina's effects other parts of town, particularly the Lower Ninth Ward – but to get there, we'll be going along one of the oldest continually used routes of travel in the country. We'll follow it most of the way back to the French Quarter, during which time we'll look back to pre-colonial times and how Native American people used this area, both during and outside of flood time.

We mentioned earlier that navigation through the mouth of the Mississippi is challenging, and that goes for Native Americans, too. If you lived along the Gulf Coast and were traveling to points along the Mississippi, it would be much easier to boat into Lake Pontchartrain and Bayou St. John and then walk a ridge from the bayou to the river.

Many people lived in this area, too; housing was made from materials like canes and palmetto fronds, joined with the same clay-filled earth that later plastered many of the Creole townhouses in the French Quarter, but unlike those buildings, they were in some cases made to be disassembled and moved as floodwater demanded.

The word "bayou" is a Frenchification of a Choctaw word, "bayuk." A bayou is a long, narrow, still body of fresh water, in this case, formed by overflow from the Mississippi. Just like the river builds up its own banks through flooding, the water that forms a bayou comes heavy with sediment, and so it ends up bordered with high ground. While some of Lakeview took twelve feet of water, the land along Bayou St. John wasn't flooded at all.

The bayou will take you quite a distance. As you go on from the ruins of the fort, you'll see a Greek Orthodox church on your left. Lakeview is the main place of residence for the city's Greek community today – and from there, you'll have New Orleans City Park on your right and some formidable residences across the bayou on your left.

This part of the park is mainly just a golf course, but along its edge, you'll see some mighty impressive live oak trees. These are native trees, found all over the city and the Gulf South, which have weathered Katrina and many hurricanes besides. Many of the trees you'll see along the park are more than a century old, and deeper into the park, along Bayou Metairie, is a live oak that's over 800 years old.

Their resilience is thanks partly to their deep roots and partly to their flexible branches, which bend rather than break in high winds, and which, after enough years of growth, will bend down and touch the ground for added bracing.

You'll turn off of this street as you reach the end of City Park. You'll know it's coming when you pass the main entrance to the park, leading up to the New Orleans Museum of Art, and you'll start to have a streetcar track in the median to your left. Shortly after that, you'll reach the intersection with City Park Avenue and Moss Street, where you'll make a left to keep the bayou on your left side. Continue until the bayou makes a hard bend to the right, then pause.

BAYOU ST JOHN

Directions: 1349 Moss St, New Orleans, LA 70119

This winding section of Bayou St. John brings you back through the neighborhood called Mid-City. The bayou is home to some of the oldest buildings in town. Even as the French Quarter remained the bulk of the city through the end of the 18th century, colonists also built here, along the Native American trade route.

A couple of those buildings are on the opposite side from you. One of them is a pale gray house with green shutters from 1801 called the Pitot House, spelled PITOT – yes, to any French speakers, we say “pea-tot” – which offers tours.

And just a little further down, at the bend in the bayou, there's a gray house with white trim from around 1788, known as the Old Spanish Custom House, which you'll get a closer look at shortly.

These houses are some of the few remaining examples of French colonial architecture in the city, but you can see elements of that architecture on plenty more buildings, particularly the choice to elevate the primary floor of a home well above the ground, so as to accommodate floods.

As you go around the bend in the bayou, you'll be able to see on your left a wooden sculpture – the chainsaw-carved remains of a tree that survived Katrina but was struck by lightning in a subsequent storm.

Just beyond that will be the remains of Lindy Boggs Medical Center, a hospital abandoned after Katrina. This will bring you to the end of the bayou.

A bike path runs perpendicular to it at the end; to the left, that bike path runs along the former route of the Old Basin Canal, now converted into the Lafitte Greenway, a long, narrow park that runs all the way to Basin Street, the former end of the canal.

Colonists built that artificial canal as an extension to the natural bayou, but the Native American use of this pathway changed over from water to land around here.

To get to that spot, you'll be turning around at the end of the canal – right on the other side of the Lafitte Greenway, you'll make a left on Conti, then an immediate left again onto North Jefferson Davis Parkway.

Continue straight as that street turns into Hagan Avenue – you'll pass by Parkway Bakery and Tavern, one of the best po-boy places in town – and then make a left onto the first divided road, which is Orleans Avenue.

This will take you back to the bayou, where you'll make a right. As you come to the hard bend to the left in the bayou, look for the intersection with Grand Route St. John; pause there and get a look at the Old Spanish Custom House, the first building on the other side of that intersection.

OLD SPANISH CUSTOM HOUSE

3399 Grand Route Saint John St, New Orleans, LA 70119

From the last stop, you'll be turning around at the end of the canal – right on the other side of the Lafitte Greenway, you'll make a left on Conti, then an immediate left again onto North Jefferson Davis Parkway.

Continue straight as that street turns into Hagan Avenue – you'll pass by Parkway Bakery and Tavern, one of the best po-boy places in town – and then make a left onto the first divided road, which is Orleans Avenue.

This will take you back to the bayou, where you'll make a right. As you come to the hard bend to the left in the bayou, look for the intersection with Grand Route St. John; pause there and get a look at the Old Spanish Custom House, the first building on the other side of that intersection.

The description of this building as a Spanish custom-house may not be accurate to its history, but “old” certainly is. Built in 1788, this is one of the earliest remaining buildings in the city, and it looks the part.

French colonial structures were built with above-ground basement floors, plastered walls over a mix of wood and brick, and a shape that's all about circulating air.

The house also stands at the spot where Bayou St. John meets a natural ridge that runs all the way to the French Quarter. On a map, the roads that run along the natural ridge look like they're in strange defiance of the otherwise orderly street grid, whereas in fact the grid was built around them.

The next part of the route will bring you roughly along the ridge, or the portage, as the French colonists would have called it – the route along which Native Americans carried their goods and their boats toward the Mississippi.

As you go, you'll be passing near some excellent Creole restaurants, including Café Degas for something a bit fancy or Liuzza's by the Track for something less so. The track in the name is the racetrack at the New Orleans Fairgrounds, home of the annual Jazz and Heritage Festival.

If you proceed along Grand Route St. John, you'll come in a few blocks to Esplanade Avenue. Make a right there, where you'll be briefly diverging from the portage.

Enjoy some more live oaks and some whimsical buildings and watch for when you cross a large divided road called Broad Street.

Shortly beyond that on Esplanade will be two museums on the right side, the Free People of Color Museum and the Degas House, then some particularly bright-colored buildings.

Just past those, you'll see a street called Bayou Road splitting off of Esplanade to the right at a narrow-angle. Turn onto Bayou Road, rejoining the portage, and continue until you reach Claiborne Avenue, another large divided road with an elevated highway running above it.

Here the portage continues ahead toward the French Quarter in the form of Governor Nicholls Street, but rather than follow it, make a left onto Claiborne Avenue.

Continue three blocks to Columbus Street and watch on your right for a colorful building called Kermit's Treme Mother-in-Law Lounge.

CLAIBORNE AVENUE

Directions: 1500 N Claiborne Ave, New Orleans, LA 70116

The Mother-in-Law Lounge has murals of its former owner – a New Orleans musician named Ernie K-Doe, regarded as a one-hit wonder by the larger world for his song “Mother in Law,” but much better remembered here, both for his music and for his life. His wardrobe was as flashy as his home venue, and he referred to himself as “Emperor of the Universe.”

He died in 2001, but his wife Antoinette, who had been the engine behind the venue and much of Ernie's public image, kept the building, installed a decked-out mannequin double of Ernie, and ended up riding out Katrina on the second floor.

Antoinette became an example of the kind of remarkable fortitude some people showed through the storm – she took in family and strangers, waded in a swimsuit through her flooding downstairs to save as much memorabilia as she could, and made a cross-country trip to get some of her guests home.

After all that, in 2006 she went back to doing PR for her dead husband by submitting him to the public as an unofficial candidate for mayor. It was a field of more than twenty candidates, and with Louisiana's jungle primary system, every voice was on air at the same time. Ray Nagin was up for reelection, and it was an open question, given failures in the city's response to the storm as well as some public relations gaffes on his part. But there were other big questions about the city's future on the line. Candidates' platforms included ideas like restricting rebuilding in certain neighborhoods, actively preventing poor residents from returning, and eliminating all local taxes.

And since this was a matter of months after Katrina, many of the stakeholders in that future were scattered across the country, opening up questions about how voting should work. But alongside all that, Ernie K-Doe's mannequin made public appearances, and the campaign took donations and sold t-shirts, with the money going to the New Orleans Musicians' Clinic, a nonprofit providing healthcare assistance to artists.

The K-Doe campaign made it clear that the city's satirical, irreverent, and sometimes gallows sense of humor wasn't going anywhere. And the need for that sense of humor was perennial; Mayor Nagin went on to a second term, only to be charged with fraud and money laundering related to recovery funds, and he went to prison in 2014.

Today, Ernie K-Doe's old venue has a longer name: Kermit's Treme Mother-in-Law Lounge. The "Kermit" is Kermit Ruffins, a trumpet player, singer, and bandleader of jazz and New Orleans music more broadly, and the venue's owner since Antoinette K-Doe's death in 2009.

If you visit the Mother-in-Law on a Thursday or Monday evening, chances are you'll find Kermit performing with his band, the Barbecue Swingers, and serving red beans and rice made by the man himself.

If that sounds appetizing, but today isn't the day, you're not far from some other excellent restaurants – just around the corner on Esplanade is Lil' Dizzy's, which viewers of the HBO show *Treme* may recognize as a filming location, and a little further away in the Treme are Dooky Chase, the restaurant of renowned chef Leah Chase, born in 1923 and still active as of 2019, and Willie Mae's Scotch House, famous for its fried chicken.

Murals are a feature of Claiborne Avenue apart from just the lounge. The columns supporting the highway are covered in images of notable people from the neighborhood, African history, and local traditions like Mardi Gras Indian masking. Along some parts, the murals are mainly of live oak trees.

Before the addition of the interstate in 1969, this stretch, like Esplanade Avenue, was lined with trees like these. In the era of commercial segregation, this was one of the main hubs for businesses serving black customers. The city's strategic plan has included an intention to eventually tear the overpass down and reroute highway traffic to the I-610 spur north of here, but the question of when and what would follow remains open.

When you're ready to move on, you'll be continuing along Claiborne. From the Mother-in-Law, you can see just ahead on the right the Spanish-tiled roof of a white building with an arched colonnade. This is Circle Foods.

Opened in 1938, the store has been a model of small-business resilience, surviving the rise of the department and big box stores, the construction of the overpass, and multiple floods. Its name suggests a grocery store, but Circle Foods was famously comprehensive for a locally owned small business – the owner once said in an interview that they sold everything but funeral caskets.

That interview was on the occasion of the store's post-Katrina reopening in 2014. Neighborhood meeting points like this one, when they were available, were critical to the social rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina, providing a place for chance encounters where people could share their burdens and strategies and plans.

The absence of such places – and of places to find basics like fresh produce in your own neighborhood – has been a major obstacle to the progress of places like the Seventh Ward.

The reopening of Circle Foods in 2014, after a bank-financed, taxpayer-subsidized renovation, was a source of hope for the neighborhood, and its presence made their life easier for almost five years.

But in 2018, on a day of extreme rain, the pump system failed to activate and the Treme and Seventh Ward flooded again. In its precarious position, this was more than Circle Foods could bear, and it closed again, presumably for good, later that year.

Claiborne bends right after Circle Foods. Stay on Claiborne as the highway descends – you'll see a few surviving live oaks. The street will bend right and merge with N. Robertson St. right by Melba's Poboys.

Continue on N. Robertson. You'll also cross a small bridge over railroad tracks and you'll cross Desire Street, the namesake of one of the city's bygone streetcar lines.

Turn left when you reach Alvar Street. Go four blocks to North Johnson Street, where you'll make a right, then an immediate second right onto Bartholomew Street.

Go a block to the intersection with North Prieur Street – it may not be marked – and look for a place to stop. There'll be a playground to the right, a stone plaque to the left, and a row of bright-colored houses.

MUSICIANS VILLAGE

Directions: 1901 Bartholomew St, New Orleans, LA 70117

The houses here are part of Musician's Village, one of the many facets of the post-Katrina rebuild.

Music is essential to New Orleans culture – a New Orleans that recovered physically but lost its musicians wouldn't be New Orleans – and they also, directly and indirectly, provide much of the city's livelihood, driving traffic to bars, hotels, and restaurants.

Central as it is, music was a less-than-stable career before Katrina, and many institutions in the city existed to help make life affordable, like the New Orleans Musicians' Clinic.

With the added blow of Katrina, there was a fear that the loss of homes, instruments, and audiences might cripple the local music scene. Tourism agencies worked on pulling audiences back; the Tipitina's Foundation worked on putting instruments back in hands, and Musicians' Village appeared to provide homes.

It's the creation of Branford Marsalis and Harry Connick Jr., two New Orleans-born musicians who embody the greatest possibilities of career success – a kind of success which, like that of Louis Armstrong, Mahalia Jackson, and many others, is often only available to musicians who leave New Orleans.

Musicians' Village was conceived late in 2005. It was placed on land bought from the New Orleans public school system, the former site of a demolished junior high school. It was financed largely through benefit concerts, performed by local and non-local musicians alike, across the US and Canada, and through the sales of albums put together for the purpose, plus, as the monument on the left side of the street notes, a donation from the nation of Qatar, which supported lots of local institutions after Katrina.

And it was built in partnership with Habitat for Humanity. The houses are in classic New Orleans styles, like double shotguns, and are raised above the flood plane to keep safe from future flooding. Habitat also organized the building of the Ellis Marsalis Center for Music, a hub for performance, recording, and music education, named for Branford's father, the great modern jazz pianist.

Music is often passed down through families in New Orleans, and so the neighborhood is designed both to bring back the current generation and take care of the next one.

Like the work of Habitat for Humanity across the world, labor has been provided by volunteers. The organization estimates that 70,000 volunteers have worked on construction in Musicians' Village. Even once Katrina stopped making headlines, it still remained at the front of the public consciousness as a place to visit and lend a hand.

In 2019, it's still common to see religious groups, school groups, and social clubs make a service trip to New Orleans to help build a house or paint a school or otherwise get their hands

dirty. These kinds of trips, nicknamed “voluntourism,” have been a major part of the rebuild, and if number of hands involved is the primary metric, then the recovery of New Orleans from Katrina is one of the biggest and most successful efforts of its kind in world history.

It’s not an efficient way to recover – a dollar donated to a local organization tends to go a lot further than a dollar spent on a volunteer trip – but it lets people with limited means give their time, it lets them see the impact of their kindness and meet the people it benefits, and it creates memorable experiences and sometimes lasting ties.

In the larger geography of the city, Musicians’ Village falls in the Ninth Ward. Wards are a political division, and the ninth is by far the largest – about half of the city’s land mass – and the most sparsely populated.

Some New Orleans residents only think about their ward when they vote, but for others, your ward is a huge part of your identity. A musician at a dance club might call out ward numbers and get shouts of pride back from the people born and raised there. Specifically, this is the Upper Ninth Ward – meaning the part that’s on the upriver side of the Industrial Canal – but next, you’ll be moving on to the Lower Ninth Ward by crossing that Canal.

Both areas flooded badly, but the Lower Ninth Ward was hit particularly hard and got particular attention in the storytelling. For the next few stops, road quality is going to be lower and street signs may be missing, so drive carefully.

When you’re ready to leave, continue on Bartholomew Street through North Prieur. Make a left back onto North Robertson and continue a few blocks until you reach a large, divided road, Poland Avenue.

On the other side of this intersection, the road bends left to climb up onto a bridge. The body of water you’ll be passing over is the Industrial Canal, another manmade shipping canal and the one used today for access between the river and the lake. It was the site of more levee breaches, on both sides. Most of the flooding in the Lower Ninth Ward came from these breaches.

As you come down the bridge, you’ll see a monument in the median of the road ahead – a red structure like the frame of a house with blue columns indicating the depth the water reached here.

You’ll take the first right turn you can, onto Tennessee Street. From there, you’ll take the second right onto Urquhart Street, then an immediate left onto Deslonde Street.

Immediately on your left, you’ll see a duplex house – what we’d call a double shotgun. The unit on the left is the Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum.

LOWER 9 LIVING MUSEUM

Directions: 1235 Deslonde St, New Orleans, LA 70117

From Musicians Village, continue on Bartholomew Street through North Prieur. Make a left back onto North Robertson and continue a few blocks until you reach a large, divided road, Poland Avenue.

On the other side of this intersection, the road bends left to climb up onto a bridge. The body of water you’ll be passing over is the Industrial Canal, another manmade shipping canal and the one

used today for access between the river and the lake. It was the site of more levee breaches, on both sides. Most of the flooding in the Lower Ninth Ward came from these breaches.

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Immediately on your left, you'll see a duplex house – what we'd call a double shotgun. The unit on the left is the Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum.

Before Katrina, most visitors to New Orleans would never have heard of the Lower Nine. For those who had, and for those who loved the place as their home turf, this museum captures some of the reasons why.

This small neighborhood is the birthplace of some great musicians, including Kermit Ruffins, the proprietor of the Mother-in-Law Lounge, and most famously Fats Domino; the gospel singer Mahalia Jackson also spent part of her childhood here.

It's also one of the homes of the city's Mardi Gras Indian masking tradition, in which some residents spend all year working on a suit of beads and feathers to pay tribute to the Native American parts of their history or ancestry. You can see some of those suits on display at another nearby museum, the House of Dance and Feathers, which opens by appointment.

Even being as close as it is to the French Quarter and the core of the city, the Lower Nine has a more suburban or even rural feel. If you went further downriver, before long you'd leave New Orleans completely, first going into a couple of suburbs, Arabi and Chalmette, and then into the fishing communities of St. Bernard Parish. Some residents remember hunting in Bayou Bienvenue, just a few blocks from their urban dwelling, as a regular food source when they were growing up.

The Lower Nine was famously the site of some of the worst damage from Katrina, and, less famously, some of the slowest recovery. As of the 2010 census, around the same time when Hollywood South and the Saints' Super Bowl victory were being used to tell a comeback story, only one in five of the Lower Nine's roughly 15,000 pre-Katrina residents had come back to live here.

Before the storm, this was still a neighborhood where a house would be passed down through several generations of the same family, and losing that house meant losing your biggest connection with home and history.

This museum was founded in 2011 in part to document oral histories. The displays inside cover the time from the area's use in the 18th century by a maroon community – hidden communities of people who had escaped from slavery – through its post-Katrina struggles. If you'd like to take some time to explore, the museum is open from noon to five every day but Monday, and admission is free.

Otherwise, in brief – there's been a pattern of hardship in the Lower Nine. Part of that is its location. The Lower Nine is downriver from the rest of town, and back when dumping in the Mississippi was the usual means of waste disposal, everything the rest of town threw away passed by here.

For that same reason, waste-heavy industries like slaughterhouses tended to be placed here so as to minimize water contamination for other residents of the city.

The neighborhood is also cut off from the rest of the city, so it's easy to ignore. That's because of the Industrial Canal that you passed over to get here, added in 1923. Besides isolating it socially, the canal also traps the neighborhood in its own separate physical bowl.

That had consequences in 1927, the year of one of the worst documented river floods along the full length of the Mississippi. A group of local bankers, fearing a financial panic if the flood-threatened New Orleans, arranged to have the levee of the Mississippi dynamited in the Lower Ninth Ward, flooding the Lower Nine itself, plus much of the next two parishes down the river – a gesture that turned out to be purely symbolic as the height of the water ended up dropping above New Orleans.

Only the Industrial Canal made it possible to flood a neighborhood with such precision. In 1965 during Hurricane Betsy, the canal's floodwall broke, putting the neighborhood under water again, and some residents, remembering 1927, suspected more foul play.

Families that remained through all of that were tied to land and community, but often not in any officially recognizable way – Katrina revealed that enormous numbers of Lower Nine residents and other working-class New Orleanians had inherited houses from their families without ever officializing the process.

Those that did prove ownership were often compensated based on the pre-Katrina value of their houses, not on the cost of rebuilding, and in many cases received just a few thousand dollars – money they could easily have concluded was better spent stabilizing a new life they'd begun elsewhere than trying to start from scratch back home.

The leadership of the museum are themselves part of the neighborhood's remarkable story – Leona Tate, a member of the advisory board, was one of four local black girls to begin attending formerly all-white schools in 1960, when she was six years old and the Lower Nine was still a very mixed-race neighborhood.

Six years earlier, the 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, had mandated the integration of schools across the country, but the process was slowed in Louisiana by years of resistance and court challenges. The school Leona Tate attended, McDonogh 19, only opened the day of integration because a judge barred the entire Louisiana legislature and the governor's office from interfering in its operation.

The girls were chosen for academic and psychological readiness and tracked by news crews throughout that first year, and their homes were guarded year-round by police. By the end of the school year, all the white students had been pulled from the school, leaving only Leona and two other girls as the entire student body.

McDonogh 19 was one of the schools rendered unusable by Katrina, but as of this recording, Leona Tate and her foundation are in the process of renovating the school into a community center, intended, among other things, to recreate for visitors the experience of that hostile environment – like hearing the chants of anti-integration protestors while climbing the stairs into the building. By the time you hear this, the project may be under way or complete.

If you'd like to stop for a meal while you're in the Lower Ninth Ward, you're not far from Café Dauphine, a Creole restaurant.

When you're ready, use a driveway to turn around and head back the way you came on Deslonde Street and make a right back onto Urquhart.

Continue for eight blocks. On the way, you'll pass through an intersection with Flood Street – named for a person with an unusual surname, not for the natural disaster.

You'll turn right on Caffin Avenue, the first divided road. Immediately on your right, you'll see a bright yellow house, the former home of Fats Domino.

For a better view, you can do a U-turn and look at it from the opposite side of the road.

FATS DOMINO'S HOUSE

Directions: 1208 Caffin Ave, New Orleans, LA 70117

From the Lower 9 Living Museum, turn around and head back the way you came on Deslonde Street and make a right back onto Urquhart.

Continue for eight blocks. On the way, you'll pass through an intersection with Flood Street – named for a person with an unusual surname, not for the natural disaster.

You'll turn right on Caffin Avenue, the first divided road. Immediately on your right, you'll see a bright yellow house, the former home of Fats Domino.

For a better view, you can do a U-turn and look at it from the opposite side of the road.

Fats Domino owned this house – recognizable from his initials – as well as the pink and white house next door, a clashing duo that provided him a place to both live and work.

As one of the most successful musicians in the country in the middle of the 20th century, Fats Domino's sound, first recorded in a ramshackle studio on the edge of the French Quarter in 1949, attracted droves of both fans and emulators.

You can follow his influence into Motown and soul, into country with artists like Elvis Presley, and across the ocean to international rock and roll, including the Beatles.

After all that, he chose to still live in the neighborhood where he came from, and he didn't even leave to accept the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

He was airlifted out after Katrina, but a piece of graffiti on the house reading "RIP Fats – you will be missed" led observers to think he'd been killed in the storm. He was among the artists who toured after Katrina to rally support for the city. After returning, he went to live with his daughter across the river until his death in 2015.

When you're ready, if you haven't already done so, you'll make a U-turn on Caffin Avenue to put Fats Domino's house on your left. Take Caffin Avenue all the way to its end, where it meets Florida Avenue.

On the way, you'll be going downhill, away from the river and onto lower ground that flooded more deeply. As of 2019, driving this way means more empty lots, more ruins, and more vacant foundations.

When you reach the end of the street at Florida, you'll see a sign reading "Bayou Bienvenue Wetlands Triangle" next to a gravel drive leading to a small parking lot. Pull into it.

Just beyond the parking lot is a viewing platform that looks out over the water.

BAYOU BIENVENUE

Directions: 2677 Caffin Ave, New Orleans, LA 70117

When you're ready, if you haven't already done so, you'll make a U-turn on Caffin Avenue to put Fats Domino's house on your left. Take Caffin Avenue all the way to its end, where it meets Florida Avenue.

On the way, you'll be going downhill, away from the river and onto lower ground that flooded more deeply. As of 2019, driving this way means more empty lots, more ruins, and more vacant foundations.

When you reach the end of the street at Florida, you'll see a sign reading "Bayou Bienvenue Wetlands Triangle" next to a gravel drive leading to a small parking lot. Pull into it.

Just beyond the parking lot is a viewing platform that looks out over the water.

The view here is of the remains of Bayou Bienvenue, or Welcome Bayou. It's another natural waterway, like Bayou St. John, in this case connecting with Lake Borgne, another smaller estuary.

It's not much to see these days, but at one time, you could walk out over much of what's water today. The stumps in the water are what's left of cypress trees. Here again it's easy to see that the level of the water in the bayou is higher than the land in this part of the Lower Nine.

Out beyond Bayou Bienvenue is a manmade body of water called the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Canal, or MRGO, or Mr. Go. It joins into the Industrial Canal and provides another shipping route into the Gulf.

In 2005, it became another path for storm surge. Like the outfall canals, it channeled water into highly populated parts of the city that wouldn't otherwise be exposed to storm surge, and the MRGO breached before any of the other canals we've seen. This part of the Lower Nine was one of the first places to flood, with a second, much deeper deluge coming in from the breaches in the Industrial Canal later on.

A month later, floodwater came in from this side again with the storm surge from Hurricane Rita. In 2009, the MRGO was closed at its mouth, and today, neither boats nor storm surge can enter or leave it.

Besides their role in hurricanes, canals like the MRGO have had another, slower effect: they've provided a place for salt water from the gulf to leach into freshwater areas. Cypress trees prosper in the water, but salt around their roots kills them and many of the other plants native to the Louisiana wetlands. With the death of plants comes loosening of the soil, and after their construction, waterways like the MRGO tend to slowly widen through erosion. Eventually, they can let salt into natural bodies of water like this one, and the destruction spreads. Channels dug to lay oil and gas pipeline have the same effect, and these represent the vast majority of manmade intrusions in Louisiana.

And while our digging causes land loss, our levees prevent land gain – river floods, inconvenient as they are, deposit new sediment, and they're the only reason south Louisiana exists. So today, Louisiana is shrinking, at a rate usually described as a football field every forty-five minutes. That has an impact on nature – those wetlands are the habitat of all kinds of wildlife.

It affects the economy – the south Louisiana fishing industry feeds people worldwide, and ports on the lower Mississippi account for a huge proportion of the country's imports and exports.

It eliminates places to live – land disappears from under towns, and slowly they're removed from the map. And it makes future disaster likelier and more powerful.

Much of the land buffer that Bienville relied on to protect New Orleans just isn't there anymore. There's an arm of the state government responsible for addressing all that: the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority. Its tools are a mix of planting, artificial land-building, selective flooding from the Mississippi, and filling and capping old waterways.

Much of the money for their current master plan comes from legal settlements and fines placed against British Petroleum and their contractors, who were found responsible in many separate cases for damage in the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010. The fines totaled in the billions of dollars – one trial alone resulted in a fine of \$20 billion, the largest legal settlement by any one party in US history – and that money goes to a mix of individual people, businesses affected by the spill, and federal, state, and local agencies working to undo both short and long-term damage in Louisiana and its four coastal neighbors.

When you're ready to leave, head back out of the drive and make a right onto Florida Avenue. You'll see the Industrial Canal ahead of you. Continue until you reach Deslonde Street – the second-to-last one – then make a left.

In a few blocks, starting at the intersection with North Galvez, you'll start to see bright-colored houses, unusually shaped for New Orleans.

These are the work off the Make It Right Foundation. There's no one place to stop, so you can play the next track in motion.

MAKE IT RIGHT

Directions: 2131 Tennessee St, New Orleans, LA 70117

From Bayou Bienvenue, head back out of the drive and make a right onto Florida Avenue. You'll see the Industrial Canal ahead of you. Continue until you reach Deslonde Street – the second-to-last one – then make a left.

In a few blocks, starting at the intersection with North Galvez, you'll start to see bright-colored houses, unusually shaped for New Orleans.

These are the work off the Make It Right Foundation. There's no one place to stop, so you can play the next track in motion.

This part of the tour concerns a cluster of houses – 105 of them, as of recording – built by the Make It Right Foundation, and located mostly along Deslonde Street and Tennessee Street one block to the left. If you'd like, you can weave through both streets, although this is the last stop in the Lower Nine, so you could also listen as you make your way toward the next stop.

In 2006, Brad Pitt was in New Orleans to shoot the movie *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. Hollywood had come to town both because New Orleans was in the national spotlight and because the Louisiana legislature, a few years before Katrina, had passed tax incentives for film and TV productions.

In one of the strangest twists in the post-Katrina story, Louisiana gradually became one of the most active filming locations in the world. The kind of attention we were getting transformed, to

the point where a visitor was more likely to know us from entertainment TV than from a news broadcast.

Some of the high-profile work made here was meant to tell the post-Katrina story, like the HBO show *Treme*, or approached that story metaphorically, like *Beasts of the Southern Wild*.

Benjamin Button was pitched as being in the latter category – a story incidentally set in New Orleans, but showing it as a beautiful place, somewhere a viewer might want to go. And viewers did – to this day, a typical walking tour of the Garden District goes by the Benjamin Button House.

The film accomplished its positive depiction by using locations like the French Quarter and the Garden District, which had escaped flooding. But Brad Pitt's off-camera time brought him to the Lower Ninth Ward, where recovery had barely begun. And this area, right by one of the levee breaches, was ground zero – here, the force of the water coming from the floodwalls had been strong enough to push houses fully off their foundations.

After visiting the Lower Nine, Brad Pitt co-founded Make It Right, which aimed to build 150 houses for people returning to the Lower Nine, although they also opened access to first responders and teachers. The designs came from world-renowned architects, who focused on minimal waste, energy efficiency, and safety from future disasters.

Buyers – residents would buy these houses, although for less than they cost to build – could choose the design that fit their needs. The project launched with huge acclaim, thanks in part to its famous frontman, plus its flashy designs, and partly due to the optimistic idea that with the right mix of minds, a disaster could become an opportunity to build a better, safer system for those who were hit the hardest.

At peak, the foundation had 106 houses standing and had also gone on to other building projects in Newark, NJ and Kansas City, MO.

As of 2019, the story is ongoing. A few of the houses have aged poorly due to construction issues and problems with some of the materials, and some lawsuits are underway. And the foundation has been on hiatus from building since 2015.

On the other hand, this part of the Lower Nine is still one of the most densely rebuilt and repopulated parts of the neighborhood today, in serious contrast with the lonelier scene near Bayou Bienvenue, and in the same way a bright film like *Benjamin Button* enticed visitors, it could be that the sight of new building made it easier for some Lower Nine residents to come home. The legacy is still up in the air.

When you're ready to move on, you'll be leaving the Lower Ninth Ward. The best way is to take Tennessee Street going away from Bayou Bienvenue, with the Industrial Canal floodwall on your right.

Make a right when you reach North Claiborne – you'll see the monument with the blue columns again – and you'll climb up the same bridge you used to get here, passing over the Industrial Canal.

When you come down from the bridge, make a left onto the first street you'll reach, called Poland Avenue. This will take you gradually uphill toward the river. In a few blocks, you'll reach a large, divided road: St. Claude Avenue. Make a right there.

The stop is a ways along the street, so watch as you go for a sense of the area.

In 2019, it looks like a place going through a quick change – art galleries next to disused buildings, street art mixed with tagging, some upscale restaurants alongside convenience stores and fast food.

You'll cross some train tracks – a bit to your left at that point is the place where Homer Plessy boarded a segregated train car and started the court case that became Plessy v. Ferguson, a major piece of American legal history.

Not far past that, you'll see a large brick and stone school building on your left; look for a place to pull over around there.

ST CLAUDE, BYWATER, MARIGNY

Directions: 2331 St Claude Ave, New Orleans, LA 70117

This is the former home of the Charles J. Colton School, a public middle school now operated as a charter.

In 2008 and 2009, for about a year of its long vacancy, the building became rent-free studio space for artists. You might be able to see a driftwood sculpture of a ship just to the left of the school building that's from that time. Converting buildings to use for artists is a theme in this area: today, the blocks around St. Claude Avenue have about twenty art galleries, which host an art walk the third Saturday of every month, and several performance spaces and most of them adapted to the purpose rather than built for it.

Among these are the New Orleans Healing Center, the large, colorful set of buildings about a block to the left of the school; Barrister's Gallery right across from the school, which predates Katrina; Studio Be, the converted warehouse gallery of street artist Brandan "B-Mike" Odums; and the New Movement, an improv theater and school a few blocks down St. Claude toward the Lower Nine.

You're also right by a cluster of bars, including the Hi-Ho Lounge and Siberia, which offer live music in the eclectic style of Frenchmen Street most nights, and the All-ways Lounge, which hosts a mix of music, drag, burlesque, and theater.

It's a neighborhood with lots to do, which wasn't as much the case before Katrina. Even Frenchmen Street, the music destination in the Marigny, which is just steps outside the French Quarter, got almost no tourist traffic before the storm. This is another area that, like the Lower Nine, got a kind of attention after Katrina it had never known before, but in this case, it was about how many people were moving here, not how few.

First, some quick geography: St. Claude Avenue is a dividing line between neighborhoods. On the left side before the train tracks was the Bywater; after the train tracks, the Marigny. On the right side are parts of the Seventh, Eighth, and Upper Ninth Wards. St. Claude itself, like Rampart Street at the edge of the French Quarter, marks about the point of sea level, so the area on the right flooded; the area on the left didn't.

For a few years in the 2010s, New Orleans got called one of the fastest growing cities in the country. Partly, that was just a reflection of people moving home. They'd been doing so since 2005, led in large part by the most tenacious and able, who came back bruised and often deeply scarred by their experiences and went through the unromantic labor of rebuilding a home.

Kids took long bus rides to the few working schools. Important firsts – first Christmas, first Mardi Gras, first Jazz Fest – came and went. Water levels and unresponsive contractors and FEMA frustrations were the stuff of small talk, and you powered through it together – maybe

made a Mardi Gras costume out of the blue tarp you'd been given to cover the holes in your roof, as a way to make light of the whole thing.

But something changed, especially around 2010. From that point, it wasn't just New Orleanians – new people were moving here, too. That was a big shift. Pre-Katrina, New Orleans was one of the major cities in the US where a resident was most likely to have been born and raised there. So given that and the massive disaster not far behind us, it was surprising that people would want to move here.

The boom in TV and film had something to do with it – prices were low after Katrina, and someone from LA might buy a house just in case a work opportunity came up. The volunteer recovery effort had something to do with it, too. We've mentioned how many people came to town to be a part of that effort, whether for a few days to gut a house, or for a few months through something like Americorps, or for a couple of years through Teach for America – visitors often saw a place with an appealing culture and a chance to do a lot of good, and some of them decided to stay.

One sign of that phenomenon came from Tulane University uptown. After Katrina, applications to New Orleans universities predictably plummeted. But as many people as the disaster scared off, Tulane found that those who did apply were often interested specifically because of it. They wanted to participate in the recovery while they studied.

The university responded by creating a public service requirement integrated into its academic curriculum. That unusual move attracted attention, and by 2010, Tulane had more applications than any private university in the country. It was a big shift in students' relationship with New Orleans, and those who graduated after Katrina were more likely to stay in the city than those who had graduated before.

Finally, all of these factors contributed to tourism, and the city has not only seen steadily growing numbers of visitors since 2009, but it's also broken its own pre-Katrina records several times over. And if you ask New Orleanians why they moved here, it's not uncommon to hear that someone came for a trip and just stayed.

All those newcomers needed places to live. And they settled all across town. But the Bywater and Marigny were high-elevated, relatively unharmed, mostly residential, and close to the French Quarter, so they were a natural fit.

Some New Orleanians found all of this exciting, and they might describe it as a useful shake-up; they might talk about the benefits of creativity and brain gain and entrepreneurship.

But naturally, many people who lived in New Orleans before Katrina wanted nothing more than to see the city come back as they'd known it. And naturally, lots of newcomers to town see their first impression of the city as a kind of resting state, the image they fell in love with, and they want it to stay that way.

So change after Katrina could be unnerving, even some of the parts that might be viewed positively. And there's no question that an influx of Los Angeles film professionals, well-to-do university graduates, and leisure travelers with room to make big life decisions spontaneously means a big change in affordability.

Shotgun houses in the Marigny and Bywater, New Orleans' classic working-class house type, which tend to be lovably dilapidated as often as not, today can sell after a renovation for upwards of a million dollars. Add that to the seriously lagging recovery in nearby neighborhoods, and you have a recipe for friction.

So this area has ended up a mascot less for recovery than for the volatile present and the unknown future. And those uncertainties become overtones of every piece of news coming out

of the neighborhood. Like in 2018, when the Marigny got its first Starbucks, or a few years earlier, when the old St. Roch Market, just behind you on St. Claude, reopened, not as an affordable produce market, but as a high-end food hall. Or when that one bar's backyard pool stopped being clothing-optional. And of course, the multiple times when the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Wards have flooded again in recent years just from heavy rainfall, thanks to faults in the pump system.

We've taken you in almost a full loop by now, and if you keep going along St. Claude, you'll end up back at the French Quarter before long. Just a little ways beyond Colton School, you'll see some streetcar tracks. If you stay parallel with those, the street will bend to the left and merge with Rampart Street, which in a few more blocks becomes the edge of the French Quarter. So you can set your destination for whatever is next for you. Thank you for listening and take care.