NEOLIBERALISM AND THE POLITICS OF LAND USE IN POST-KATRINA MISSISSIPPI

A Dissertation in

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by

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ABSTRACT

While scholarly work in critical geography on the neoliberalization of urban governance has been widely influenced by the Regulation Approach, emphasizing the embedded nature of the economy in institutional relationships, it has neglected to explore the role of cultural politics in explaining uneven development and facilitating the stability of capital accumulation. Drawing on three years of research on coastal Mississippi, this study explores the role of cultural politics in explaining the uneven geographies of recovery from Hurricane Katrina. Building on subsequent engagements with “first generation” regulation-theoretic analysis that attempt to flesh out a conception of the relationship between cultural politics and accumulation, I argue that in coastal Mississippi, the material space necessary to remake the built environment in ways more amenable to neoliberal urban governance has been created through disinvestment in poor neighborhoods of color. That disinvestment, in turn, has been legitimized through notions of the alleged pathologies of race and poverty. I then consider the political implications of various modes of engagement with the redevelopment process in light of this theoretical framework.
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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER ONE: THEORIZING THE POLITICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY OF LAND USE

“Indeed, capitalism requires the constant construction and destruction of built environments, technologies, infrastructures, forms of communication, transportation and other spatial practices that facilitate particular forms of capital accumulation and circulation…The boom and bust of cities, regions, industrial systems, national economies, neighborhoods, downtowns, transport systems, technologies, workplaces, and ways of enabling the movement of people and things are all spatial formations subject to constant geographical change: to the devaluation, destruction and reconstruction that accompanies capital’s ‘creative destruction.’” (Gidwani and Chari 2005, page 271)

1.1 Katrina and the politics of land use

Over the course of 48 hours, Hurricane Katrina uprooted trees, buckled highways, swept homes off their foundations, and deposited previously floating casino barges in the midst of the peninsula of East Biloxi, Mississippi. It took the lives of hundreds of people, and displaced thousands, leaving many homeless. It was one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the United States. When the winds died down and the water receded, horrific stories surfaced of tremendous suffering. Incredible stories of survival, courage, and generosity emerged as well. The storm’s damage was so extensive in some places that entire neighborhoods were reduced to piles of rubble.

While the often heard refrain was that “the storm did not discriminate,” statistics do not bear that out (Morse forthcoming). As this study shows, the storm may have wreaked havoc indiscriminately, but it came ashore onto a landscape shaped by legacies of racism, specific power-geometries, and capitalism with disproportionate implications for some populations. For some neighborhoods, surviving the storm turned out to be not nearly as difficult as surviving the recovery and rebuilding process.

While most who surveyed the landscape of Coastal Mississippi after Katrina, especially those who called the coast home, saw loss, devastation, and a grueling recovery process ahead, others saw opportunity in this landscape. City and state leaders, for example, saw Katrina as an opportunity to remake the built environment of the coast in ways more amenable to neoliberal accumulation. Immediately following the storm, Governor Haley Barbour saw an opportunity to remake the built environment of coast, and invited the Congress for New Urbanism to the coast to conduct a series of closed-door planning sessions from which the public was excluded. The plans that emerged from those meetings depicted a bizarre mix of ante-bellum architecture, casino gaming resorts, and the sleepy nostalgia that characterizes the new urbanist aesthetic (Moule and Plyzodies 2005). The storm was an opportunity for the casino industry, as well. One of Governor Barbour’s first priorities in the wake of the storm was to pass legislation allowing casinos to move on to land. Prior to the storm, regulations required that casino gaming floors float on water, whereas the supporting facilities such as the hotel, spas, restaurants and so forth could be located on land. The new legislation was considered a major victory for the casino industry, which promptly rebuilt. Within six months of Katrina, the industry’s revenues
in the city of Biloxi had recovered to pre-storm levels (City of Biloxi 2010). Residents of East Biloxi and other historic, low-income, African American neighborhoods were not as fortunate.

When Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in 2005, I had recently completed a Master’s degree in Community Development and Planning from Clark University. That program had emphasized an asset-based approach to community development and a collaborative research and planning model. I was trained in participatory action research, and taught to think of myself not as an “expert” in planning or community development, but as something of a facilitator and advocate for an organic, authentic, but struggled for and always intensely political, community vision. “Bottom-up” and “grassroots” were buzzwords meant to represent a dramatic shift in the previous “top-down” planning regime, in which urban renewal schemes were imposed on neighborhoods with little input from residents. This approach to planning and community development was no doubt influenced by the post-structuralist turn in the social sciences more generally, and influenced by feminist contributions to theorizing democratic knowledge production (Derickson 2009). I was still digesting this paradigm when Katrina hit, and it sat somewhat awkwardly at times with my undergraduate training in Marxist political economy. After all, I had attended Clark precisely so that I would become an expert in community development so that I could advocate on behalf of socially just outcomes in cities. I understood and embraced the democratic impulse that motivated participatory action research and the development of local knowledge, but was concerned that the eschewing of expertise and the lack of normative content was too contingent and prone to promoting parochialism and NIMBYism.

I was still wrestling with these questions in 2006, when I began a dual PhD in Geography and Women’s Studies and travelled to the Gulf Coast of Mississippi for the first time with a group of students from Penn State. We were introduced to the challenges facing the city of Biloxi largely from the perspective of Bill Stallworth, the city councilor of Ward 2 in Biloxi, which covered much of what is known as the neighborhood of East Biloxi (see Figure 1.1). East Biloxi was (and still is) home to most of the city’s low income, African American, and Vietnamese residents. It was also the area of the city hit hardest by the storm. Over 80% of the neighborhood’s buildings were substantially destroyed (Moving Forward 2006). It is also where the vast majority of the city’s glitzy casino gaming resorts are located (see Figure 1.2). In 2006, the opulence of the casinos stood in stark contrast to the devastation of the neighborhood, which was still in the very beginning stages of recovery. Stallworth was adamant that the city, state, and federal government should be doing everything in their power to “make people whole” and rebuild the peninsula. He viewed the FEMA regulations requiring people to rebuild homes to new, higher elevations to be preposterous, and rejected the idea that it was foolhardy to rebuild a neighborhood in a flood zone. He founded an organization after the storm in partnership with an architecture professor from Mississippi State University to coordinate the relief and recovery effort. The partnership represented a unique blend of grassroots community engagement and leadership with architectural and planning expertise.

The work of Bill Stallworth raised the inherently normative question of how the Gulf Coast should rebuild and whose visions for the coast should prevail. While Stallworth did not quite frame it this way, it was clear that the history and politics of the American South had produced uneven geographies that left some neighborhoods especially vulnerable to encroachment, displacement, and gentrification. I wanted to know what processes, ideologies, and relationships were going to shape the outcome on the coast, and I wanted to evaluate those
outcomes politically from a conception of social justice influenced by both Marxism and feminism. Subsequently, over three years of research which included 5 trips to the region of various lengths, three questions emerged relating to how the region could, and should, recover and rebuild from Katrina.

First, low-income residents of color were expressing a strong desire to rebuild their neighborhoods to their previous configurations, despite the fact these neighborhoods were in places extremely vulnerable to future storms and thus not very well suited for single family housing. This desire on the part of residents was particularly surprising and perplexing given the extent of the damage to life and property that Katrina wrought. And it raised the very difficult question of whether the state should allow people to rebuild in what was clearly a vulnerable area, despite the likelihood that future powerful hurricanes were a near certainty.

The desire for residents to rebuild these vulnerable neighborhoods affected the city as a whole, of course. The ability of residents of Biloxi to qualify for subsidized flood insurance from the National Flood Insurance Program was contingent upon the city as a whole adopting zoning laws that enforced FEMA’s height requirements. But imposing the height requirements meant that the cost of rebuilding single family homes in that neighborhood would be increased by nearly forty thousand dollars, thereby placing an unequal burden on this low-income, largely African American neighborhood. This unequal burden was made more problematic by the fact that these neighborhoods and their socio-economic composition were shaped by the uneven nature of capitalism and the politics of race. Put another way, residents of East Biloxi, or the swampy neighborhood of Turkey Creek in the adjacent city of Gulfport, did not freely chose to locate their neighborhoods in these places, but were, in part, relegated there through the tacit and explicit norms of the racialized culture of the American south (Evans 2010, Morse forthcoming).

Second, one of the things that struck me most from my initial trips to the region was how the process was unfolding in ways that could have been predicted by the robust literature in critical geography of the neoliberalization of urban governance. From the near total emphasis on economic development, infrastructure, growth, intra-urban competition, place making, and revenue generation, to the effort to remake the built environment in ways that would attract a new class of workers and tourists, the recovery process in Mississippi conformed remarkably to many of the trends identified in the critical geography literature on neoliberalism (see Table 3.1). In 2006, that was hardly a revelation. The critical geography literature was exploding with case studies of the ways in which urban governance was shifting from what Harvey (1989) called managerialism to entrepreneurialism, and the ways in which cities were becoming laboratories for the roll out of new state/market/civil society arrangements designed to cope with devolution, deindustrialization, and the retrenchment of the welfare state. Coastal Mississippi was no exception to the trend of cities drawing on neoliberal ideology as they sought to make their way in light of these new political economic realities. What was less immediately apparent, however, was what to do with this information. This raised the question: how can or should the intellectual resources of critical geographic scholarship be operationalized to inform an anti-neoliberal praxis?

Finally, the role of historical structural relations in shaping the social geographies of the region raised a third question regarding the redevelopment process. As I demonstrate in Chapters 2 and
4, not only are low-income African American neighborhoods more vulnerable to storm damage (Morse 2008), they are also economically marginalized and politically disenfranchised. After the storm, nearly everyone in the region considered themselves “victims” and “survivors” of Hurricane Katrina. They made heartfelt appeals about their desires to rebuild their neighborhoods, preserve their environments, and in some cases, preserve their neighborhood’s history and culture. These similar ways of framing issues in very different neighborhoods brought a third question to the fore: how could we analyze the recovery process in ways that took the historic marginalization of some communities into consideration? How might an analysis of this marginalization bring into relief these myriad claims regarding who should rebuild and how? How could we arrive at a perspective, or a location within the power-geometry of the region and the recovery process, from which to both understand the recovery process and advocate for socially just outcomes?

To develop a framework to address these questions, I turned to the intellectual resources of Marxist geography, feminist geography, and feminist political economy. Attempts to reconcile feminism and Marxism will inevitably entail a reckoning with enduring ontological debates in the critical social sciences regarding structure and agency, essentialism and anti-essentialism, discourse and materiality. In the following sections I trace the debates regarding these issues to ground and contextualize the positions that inform this study. In each case, I attempt to navigate a middle ground between these, at times polarizing, debates. This study is influenced strongly by the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham and post-structuralist feminists, which helps us understand the way in which our analyses also contribute to the production of the social phenomena we study. Work in this tradition has pointed out that modernist ways of knowing can construct those very processes we wish to oppose as monolithic and all-encompassing, ultimately strengthening rather than challenging their hegemony. At the same time, however, this study is also strongly influenced by work in the critical realist tradition of feminist and Marxist inquiry, which seeks to expose and forcefully name the structural relations of oppression.

Drawing from both of these theoretical and political traditions, this study was designed with three theoretical principles in mind. The first principle is that knowledge production is at once both a political and constitutive act. To name, categorize, analyze, and make sense of social processes is also to contribute to their production. Thus, how we represent a process, like neoliberalism, for example, will have implications for our ability to conceptualize its contestation. The second theoretical principle is that actors are at once constrained by structural relations but have some agency in the realm of politics to contest and possibly transform structures. The social structures that shape social relations are shaped by capitalism, but, importantly, through other power-geometries as well, such as patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity, and so forth, and those structures interact with capitalism in productive ways. They are further enabled and depoliticized by discourses, or what Wright (2006) calls “myths” that operate to naturalize uneven development and the contradictions of capitalism. Attempts to disrupt these discourses can be an appropriate site for anti-capitalist politics. The third theoretical principle from which this study proceeds is that our theories should enable rather than constrain social justice praxis. That is, academic work that is motivated by a desire to transform social relations must consider the political implications not only of its findings, but of its epistemological and methodological approach.
In the following sections I engage with the relevant literatures to contextualize the theoretical principles that motivate this study, its methodology and design, and its empirical focus. I begin by reviewing the recent literature on neoliberalism in cities, and that literature’s relationship to the Regulation Approach more generally. I then consider how a study of land use politics and reconfigurations of the built environment can be properly situated in a regulation-theoretic analysis. I then turn to the feminist literature to consider the relationship between epistemology and politics, and to flesh out feminist principles that have shaped my engagement with political economic inquiry.

1.2 The political economy of cities: capitalism, neoliberalism, and politics

The term “neoliberalism” is invoked to do quite a bit of theoretical work in Geography and cognate disciplines these days. In the Marxian/Gramscian tradition it has been used to describe an emergent regime of accumulation as distinct from Fordism, as well as an evolving and complementary configuration of the state as distinct from the Keynesian welfare state (see for example Brenner and Theodore 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002; Sparke 2006; England and Ward 2007; Heynen et al 2007). This work has been theoretically and empirically rich and has included extensive investigation of the ways in which neoliberalization (understood as a process) has been articulated in and through a host of social processes, including natural resource management (Heynen et al 2007), trade policy (McCarthy 2004), social service provision (Kingfisher 2002), welfare policy, and urban governance (see for example Brenner and Theodore 2002; Jessop 2002; Keil 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002; Desfor and Keil 2004; Hackworth 2007; Peck 2007; Purcell 2008). This work has often tacitly (and occasionally explicitly) built on the Regulation Approach (RA), which borrows much from traditional Marxist critique and analysis of capitalism, but differs in its interest in the ways in which capitalism’s crisis tendencies are managed through state institutions, policies, and non-state extra-economic actors and institutions.

Though this work has explored in great empirical detail the evolution of state institutions as they relate to a host of processes, firm organization, and production practices, influenced as it is by the Regulation Approach more generally, it has often neglected the cultural (Jenson 1991, 1992, 1993) and political processes (Purcell 2002) and relationships that regularize capitalist social relations. And while close attention has been paid in the policy and think-tank sector to how concepts, ideas, and policies translate from one place to another (England and Ward 2007; Peck 2007), work emerging from the explicitly Regulationist tradition has paid less attention to the role of emerging subjectivities and cultural politics of the mode of regulation (but see Harvey 1989 and Jenson 1991, 1992, 1993).

Of course, there has been a great deal of scholarship in geography and elsewhere concerned with the neoliberalization of culture, politics, and subjectivities, but this work has largely borrowed from the Foucauldian tradition. Working from Foucault’s concept of governmentality, much of this work has explored the relationship between governing practices and emerging and evolving citizen-subjectivities (see for example MacKinnon 2000; Kingfisher 2002; Larner and Le Heron 2002; 2005). In this tradition, neoliberalism is understood less as a political economic permutation of capitalism, than as an approach to governance. Often in such work, the relationship between macroeconomic change and these governing practices and technologies is not explicitly articulated.
Further complicating the theoretical and ontological clarity of the concept of neoliberalism are its roots in the political philosophy of classical liberalism. Classical liberalism as a theory of individual liberty and negative freedoms (“freedom from”) has served as a flanking political philosophy operating in tandem with free market economic philosophy, materialized (albeit incompletely) in the US capitalist democracy with varying swings of the pendulum toward and away from redistributive mechanisms and state involvement (Hackworth 2007). As a referent to the emergent post-Fordist, post-Keynesian period, neoliberalism was so termed due to the ideological and philosophical underpinnings that fueled the reconfiguration of the relationship between the state, civil society, and the market that emerged in the wake of the crisis of Keynesianism in the 1970s. This particular philosophy, promoted most notably by Hayek (1944) and Friedman (1962), invokes the liberalism of Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham and understands the greatest good as arising through limiting the role of the government to the protection of free exchange (Hackworth 2007).

As a consequence of these three theoretical traditions contributing to the development of the concept of “neoliberalism,” the conceptual waters have been considerably muddied, as many scholars borrow liberally from each tradition as they invoke the term. The result has been the proliferation of the concept invoked in academic articles and conference proceedings to describe nearly every social process imaginable, often with little apparent coherence or theoretical grounding (Peck and Tickell 2002; Hackworth 2007). Vigorous criticisms of the usefulness and clarity of the concept of neoliberalism have emerged (Barnett 2005; Castree 2006; 2007) as a result. And while a lack of theoretical sophistication or precision, or the need for a consolatory shibboleth (Barnett 2005), may at times be to blame for the unbridled proliferation of the term and its lack of theoretical coherence, it may also be that the frequency and range of current scholarly invocations of neoliberalism indicates that there is in fact a deep but non-deterministic relationship between political philosophy and ideology, emerging subjectivities and political economic trends.

As Barnett (2005) points out, however, the fundamental ontological assumptions of the Marxist and Foucauldian approaches make it difficult to develop a nuanced conception of neoliberalism as a macroeconomic moment and a governing strategy and technology productive of and produced by emerging subjectivities and discourse. He argues, contra Larner (2003), that these approaches are not, and cannot be complementary, as they “imply different models of the nature of explanatory concepts; different models of causality and determination; different models of social relations and agency; and different normative understandings of political power” (Barnett 2005, 8).

Nevertheless, I argue that there is an available and theoretically sound and consistent (if underdeveloped) way to integrate more thoroughly a conception of the way in which discourse functions to produce new subjectivities that serve to reinforce or produce stability in the capitalist system. Drawing from the work of Jane Jenson, I argue that the Regulation Approach has the as yet underdeveloped theoretical tools to accommodate a richer appreciation of the relationship between cultural politics, state politics, and macroeconomic change. Using Jenson’s theorization of the “double optic” – her term for seeing both the ‘cultural sphere’ and the economic sphere at the same time – I argue that the RA concept of “mode of social regulation” holds promise for a deeper integration of cultural politics, discourse, and subjectivities into its modified Marxist critique of capitalism.
1.3 The built environment as a window into neoliberal capitalism

Major reconfigurations of the built environment, as moments of creative destruction, can provide a particularly telling window into neoliberal capitalist social relations. Indeed, given Marxism’s materialist lineage, it is quite surprising that geographers with roots in that tradition have paid so little attention to the built environment and its reconfiguration in the course of their many efforts to analyze neoliberalism. It is all the more surprising given the strong emphasis on private property that runs through the liberal philosophical tradition, neoliberalism, and contemporary struggles over the built environment alike. The politics, processes, and discourses associated with major reconfigurations of the built environment should be critical sites for the investigation and analysis of neoliberalism because they contain and represent the implementation of ideologically driven imaginations of the city, involve extensive justification and debate, and contain intricate land use decisions and political battles that play out as the larger project itself is debated. Moreover, whatever is eventually built inscribes current social relationships into the material environment in ways that often make them long-lasting, resistant to change, and distant from the social relations and process which created them. Thus, as I flesh out further below, major reconfigurations of the built environment and the associated politics and processes provide great promise for gaining a deeper understanding of the interconnection between large scale macroeconomic shifts, the ways in which capital, the state, and labor position themselves relative to those shifts, and the ways in which citizen subjectivities and cultural politics are articulated in and through the politics of the built environment. As Kathryne Mitchell (2004) has argued, “documenting in detail the transformation of space and consciousness in a particular urban environment makes it possible to understand the tightly interwoven relationship between socio-economic change, urban spatial transformation, and the narratives and practices of contemporary regimes of governance” (5).

The term “built environment” refers to all human-made structures and their configuration. This includes infrastructure such as roads, bridges, highways, subdivisions, and public housing projects, as well as ports, wharves, and train yards. Examples are endless, of course. The built environment encapsulates sites of both production and reproduction, and its configuration is shaped largely by the interplay between the two. Workforce housing, road configuration, and public transportation – to name just a few – are designed to facilitate labor’s access to work, commerce, and the transportation of goods. Each of these elements of the built environment exists in relation to the others – for example, sites of production and reproduction are in a particularly important relationship with one another and their relative location can be manipulated based on available transportation routes. Indeed, the tension between the needs and interests of labor and capital with respect to the built environment are often at the heart of struggles over land use.

Capital accumulation requires particular configurations of the built environment insofar as the means of production are part and parcel of the built environment itself, as are supporting facilities such as ports, industrial parks, and other infrastructure. The cost of construction and maintenance, as well as the management of these features of the built environment is often borne by the state, at times with the explicit purpose of facilitating capital accumulation, and at other

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1 This is not to argue that analysis of the built environment can only contribute to an analysis of neoliberal capitalist social relations, but rather for purposes of this study, the relationship between neoliberal capitalist social relations and the built environment will be explored in particular.
times with the stated purpose of improving quality of life (though often there are profit motives and opportunities attached). The recent allocation of $600 million dollars by the state of Mississippi to the redevelopment and enhancement of the Port of Gulfport to facilitate larger produce shipments with shorter turnaround times and improved handling of produce and access to transportation networks is one such example of the state facilitating and managing infrastructure for the explicit purpose of capital accumulation (Gidwani and Chari 2004; Harvey 2007 [1982]).

The built environment is not only a venue in which capitalist social relations play out, it also provides another window into the internal logic of capitalism. The creation and organization of the built environment represents a contradictory moment for capital. Its development is necessary for further accumulation and innovation, yet it freezes, for a short time at least, a particular configuration that is often outmoded by the dynamic needs of capital. This tension, between the built environment and its material resistance to change and the fluid and dynamic nature of capital, creates friction that is recognizably played out in neighborhoods, city centers, suburbs, and downtowns.

There are two important ways in which the built environment provides a window into the internal logic of capitalism in cities. First, major reconfigurations of the built environment are largely funded by and mediated through the state. As the geographies of production and manufacturing have evolved, so have the place-specific needs of capital. These needs are communicated by capitalists to the state in the form of political pressure to promote change. This evolution can be seen clearly and is well described by Wilson (2007) as he documents the shifting needs of deindustrializing cities seeking their new fortunes by reinventing themselves as “global cities.” By examining these efforts we can understand how the needs of capital are changing and how its relationship with the state is evolving. Second, favorable configurations of the built environment can drive down labor costs and increase relative surplus value. By lowering the cost of social reproduction in the form of housing and transportation, capitalists stand to increase their relative surplus value. In Biloxi, where rising insurance costs threaten the affordability of housing for nearby casinos, business leaders are concerned about travel time to work and the labor market’s access to affordable housing. Of course, the extent to which housing is “affordable” is directly related to regional wages. Thus, any responsibility that the state takes relative to providing affordable housing functions, in part, to allow local employers to decrease the social wage.

To paraphrase Harvey (1989b), capital thus creates artifacts which create a sort of friction with which it must contend in the future. In the case of this study, these artifacts with which capital must contend include established minority and low-income neighborhoods in currently inconvenient locations, and wide swaths of waterfront real estate littered with industrial ruins and outmoded infrastructure. Interestingly, however, it is not just capital that must contend with these things, but also the state. And to some degree, these outmoded or inconvenient configurations are the state’s problem, as it looks to attract capital and develop the regional economy. Still, place-based capitalists with assets in the region, or existing investment, must contend with them as well. Hence we see “growth machine politics” (Molotch 1976; Logan and Molotch 1987) advocating state investment and spending in infrastructure in order to offset capital investment and expenditure and enhance relative surplus value.
Finally, insofar as capital must contend with existing configurations of the built environment that are slow to change, these configurations necessarily shape the possibilities available to capital for accumulation. The built environment is stubbornly material. Perhaps even more than social service programs, institutions, or modes of governance, the built environment is materially resistant to change. Of course, material change to the built environment is possible, and happens all the time. Buildings can be torn down, remodeled, or gentrified – converted from mills to artist “live/work” space. Highways can be torn down, and new ones can be built. But major remakings of the built environment take time, cost money, and confront the vexing challenge of private property ownership, all of which must be dealt with in and through the state. Thus, struggles over the built environment are a relevant but under-explored sphere for understanding the logic of capital accumulation in a given period insofar as they encompasses, to a degree, the evolving relationship between the state, civil society and capital.

1.4 The regulation approach and the built environment

The regulation approach (RA) is a particularly fruitful, though underexplored, body of theory through which to explore the relationship between the built environment and capital accumulation. The Regulation Approach emerged from the Marxist tradition, most notably in Parisian academic circles in the late 1970s. It takes on board almost all of the Marxist analysis and critique of capitalism, while parting ways with Marx’s analysis of crisis in important ways. In particular, the RA school understands systemic crisis as a critical moment during which capitalist social relations restructure in ways that have, so far, enabled capitalism to renew itself rather than undergoing a transformation into a fundamentally different mode of production. During these crises, new social relations emerge that “regularize” or smooth out capitalist exchange, including, for example, new forms of credit, new institutions, or social programs. The correspondence between social relations and the structural needs of capital is in no way a given, and as such, work in the RA tradition is particularly interested in precisely how new relationships emerge in moments of crises, paying particular attention to the relationship between governance, institutions, and the market. While the merits of the approach itself are no longer frequently explicitly debated in contemporary geography, it provides the theoretical architecture for much leftist political economy in geography today, especially that concerned with parsing the nature and implications of the transition from Fordism to neoliberalism.

In very broad strokes, fleshed out more fully in Chapter 2, the RA directs attention toward institutional forms and the ways in which capitalist social relations are regularized (Jessop 1997). “It aims to study the changing combinations of economic and extra-economic institutions and practices which help to secure, if only temporarily and always in specific economic spaces, a certain stability and predictability in accumulation, despite the fundamental contradictions and conflicts generated by the very dynamic of capital itself” (Jessop 1997, 288 emphasis in original). Most notably, scholars in the RA tradition take seriously the socially embedded nature of capitalist economies, as well as the relevance of the variability of capitalisms across space and time. These commitments can be clearly seen in much of the research in the discipline of geography on neoliberalism, and on the role of the state and extra-economic actors and institutions in securing social and institutional conditions that stave off, or postpone, the crisis tendencies inherent in capitalism during the transition from what has been identified at the Fordist-Keynesian period to the present neoliberal period (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002; Wilson 2007; Purcell 2008).
To articulate the relationship between extra-economic and economic relations, RA employs two key concepts: mode of social regulation and regime of accumulation. A regime of accumulation is a “complementary pattern of production and consumption which is reproducible over a long period” (Jessop 1997, 291). RA was first established during the waning of the long period arc of the “Fordist compromise” in which assembly line technology and mass production was ‘regularized’ through the provision of relatively high wages to laborers that facilitated mass consumption. Drawing from the work of Gramsci, early scholars in the French RA tradition, including Lipietz (1986), Boyer (1990), and Aglietta (2000 [1979]) set out to explore the way in which these evolving economic relationships were stabilized by, and embedded in, institutions and social relationships. To describe this non-economic (at least in the orthodox sense) sphere, they developed the term “mode of social regulation” which Jessop (1997) defines as “an emergent ensemble of rules, norms, conventions, patterns of conduct, social networks, organizational forms and institutions which can stabilize an accumulation regime” (291).

Despite the stated interest in extra-economic actors and institutions, however, much work in the regulation tradition does not stray very far from examining the regime of accumulation and state institutions. With a few exceptions (see for example Harvey 1989; Jenson 1991; 1992; 1993 and Chapter 2 for more discussion), the cultural politics that often serve to explain the uneven development of capitalism fail to merit consideration, despite the richness and complexity of the Gramscian concept of hegemony which inspires much work in the RA tradition. Neither does this tradition offer much in the way of an exploration of the materiality of the built environment. Instead, the more malleable forms of social and state institutions are prioritized.

The work of Jenson (1990; 1991; 1993) is notable because of its overt attention to culture and cultural politics within the framework of RA. While David Harvey (1989a) has addressed what he saw as cultural changes as a result of changes in the regime of accumulation, his failure to attribute agency on the part of feminists or others in bringing about cultural shifts (Deutsche 1991; Morris 1992; Massey 1994) means he can also be accused of what Jenson argues is a failure within RA in general to address the question of agency. To develop an RA more attuned to agency, she argues that there are two stories to tell, which she terms the “double optic”: on the one hand, there are the macro-structural relations that play out whether people are conscious of it or not, and on the other, the sphere of everyday life. It is through lived experience and everyday life, she argues, that acceptance of new modes of regulation arise and the contradictions of capitalism are explained. It is at this level of “strategic choices and the unintended consequences of actions” that we can begin to understand how (temporarily) stable arrangements of social relations are constituted and sustained” (1991, 190).

The built environment and its associated politics is one underexplored arena in which to empirically explore Jenson’s double optic insofar as it functions in close relation with those macro-structural shifts that are well documented by the regulation approach, while also being an important site through which everyday politics and subjectivities are produced and play out. This is evident in small scale neighborhood struggles over gentrification, displacement, encroachment, and environmental (in)justices, and in city-wide debates about urban planning, place-making, and the future of cities (Mitchell, K 2004; Purcell 2008).
The shifting configurations of the built environment also tell us a story about the relationship between capitalist production and labor. As I have argued, capitalists are deeply concerned about the configuration of the built environment as it relates to attracting labor, facilitating commutes to work, and housing workers. In the latter two cases, particular configurations and organizations of the built environment stand to generate relative surplus value if the costs can be borne by the state. In coastal Mississippi, capitalists actively intervened in the planning and organization of the built environment with an eye toward facilitating low cost housing options in comfortable commuting distance for their employees or potential labor market. As I argue in Chapter 2, this relationship is particularly relevant for understanding land use politics as class politics.

As seen through Jenson’s double optic, then, the built environment becomes a site where macro-structural changes in production and the labor process are addressed and worked out and a site where subjectivities are produced and contested. It is thus possible that we can see these processes as a window to begin to understand how contestation could possibly have an impact on structural relations. Certain configurations which are no longer politically viable or socially acceptable pose limits on the possibilities for configuration of the built environment amenable to capital accumulation. Examples of these politically contentious processes and configurations include dense high-rise public housing, taking properties by eminent domain in low income and minority neighborhoods, and the siting of environmentally hazardous facilities in low income and minority neighborhoods.

Finally, the RA is a useful lens for analyzing the political economy of the built environment, as it has strongly theorized the relationship between post-crisis stabilization and the search for relative surplus value. French regulationist Aglietta (2001) explicitly recognized that the reorganization of relations between state, market, and civil sectors involves profound urban environmental changes that have the potential to radically affect the course of primary and social forms of (re)production within cities (2001), and discussions concerning the reorganization of spatial relations between the state, market, and civil society sectors feature prominently in the regulationist literature (Jessop and Sum 2006). As argued above, both the organization of, and state investment in, the built environment functions to create relative surplus value for capitalists, by decreasing the cost of social reproduction, enhancing relative location for production, and contributing to “space-time compression” (Harvey 2007 [1982]) in the production and distribution of goods.

With respect to social reproduction, reconfigurations of the built environment can lower commuting times and costs, lowering the social wage, and subsidized housing costs leads to lower costs of social reproduction which allow capitalists to pay lower wages while maintaining the rate of surplus value. Any decrease to the cost of social reproduction results in an increase in relative surplus value, at least temporarily. Further, space-time compression can be achieved and relative location enhanced by major state investment in transportation infrastructure like public transit or highway projects, or the provision of amenities and utilities to areas to facilitate housing construction. States can also manipulate zoning codes and land use regulations to create new opportunities for increased profitability, or sell state property to developers for below market value. These possibilities for realizing relative surplus value through manipulations in the built environment make capitalists particularly interested in the politics of land use.
The configuration of the built environment is of equal importance to labor. Not only are its configurations relevant to social reproduction and its associated costs, the built environment is imbued with history, culture, and symbolic landscapes that represent, produce, and reproduce identities and subjectivities. As this study demonstrates, residents derive a sense of identity and belonging from their neighborhoods, which is manifested in a strong desire to preserve the configuration and “character” of the built environment. These desires are not merely symbolic or nostalgic, however. As Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate, residents of low income neighborhoods see the preservation of their neighborhoods as a matter of survival, as well as a mechanism for building and maintaining wealth. Finally, as feminist geographers (Hanson and Pratt 1995; Gilbert 1998) and others (Logan and Molotch 1987; Briggs 2005) have shown, the configuration of the built environment produces and limits opportunities for various segments of the population.

Thus, the regulation approach provides a solid and fruitful theoretical framework in which to ground an investigation into the relationship between major reconfigurations of the built environment and neoliberalization. When augmented by the work of Jenson (1990; 1991; 1993), whose work has expanded the concept of the “mode of social regulation” to include a meaningful theorization of cultural politics, and Purcell (2002), who emphasizes the need to consider the state’s complicated relationship with both capital and citizens in a democracy, the framework of RA becomes an especially promising lens for a more thorough and convincing theorization and empirical analysis of the interplay between cultural politics and political economy.

1.5 Feminist principles

This study has also been shaped and influenced by a series of political insights that arise from feminist thought. Not all of these insights sit comfortably with Marxist inquiry, and the following chapters represent attempts to reconcile and integrate them to various degrees. The first insight is that knowledge production is always intensely political, and knowledges that emerge from critical inquiry are necessarily partial and situated. While Marxist inquiry is nearly always motivated by a desire to change and influence social relationships, it is seldom self-consciously aware of its constitutive role in discursively producing the social world, or of the ways in which its constructions and representations of reality can be politically constraining. The second, related insight that informs this work is that discourse is not “merely cultural” (Butler 1997) and as such, it can be appropriately understood as a meaningful site of anti-capitalist praxis. Traditional Marxist inquiry has had a long and contentious engagement with the politics of representation and the immaterial as a site of politics, intensified by the “cultural turn” in social science. A sustained commitment by feminists in this respect has measurably influenced Marxist critical geography (see for example Harvey 1996) in this respect. Finally, feminists interested in normative questions of social justice have been insistent that a conception of justice has to engage with both questions of distribution and recognition. In the following sections I flesh out these insights.

1.5.1 The politics of epistemology

Though there is little in the way of agreement or consensus with respect to the value of a perspective of knowledge as partial or situated (following Haraway 1991), Kwan (2002a) argues “feminist geographers recognize the partiality and situatedness of all knowledge and the importance of critical reflections on one’s own subject position relative to research participants,
the research process, and knowledge produced” (Kwan 2002a, 646; see for example Hanson 1992; Gilbert 1998; Rose 1997; see Walby 2001 for a dissenting view). According to Rose (1997), the aim of situating knowledge is to “produce non-overgeneralizing knowledges that learn from other kinds of knowledges” (315). The need to situate knowledges, she argues, is based on the argument that the knowledge produced depends very much on who produces the knowledge.

Inspired by what she sees as the standpoint of the proletariat as an epistemological starting point for the production of liberatory knowledge, Nancy Harstock (1997) proposed a Marxist inspired feminist standpoint epistemology which takes as its starting point the material division of labor in women’s lives, rather than the traditionally male productive sphere. Such an analysis, she argues, “could form the basis for an analysis of the real structures of women’s oppression, an analysis which would not require that one sever biology from society, nature from culture, an analysis which would expose the ways women both participate in and oppose their own subordination” (234). While feminist standpoint epistemology has been strongly criticized as essentializing, Harding (1991) argues that it is not making, as it is sometimes argued, transhistorical claims based in biology as to the validity and privilege of women’s ways of knowing. Rather, standpoint epistemology is materially ground in women’s lived experiences.

In part out of a desire to avoid what she sees as reductionism in Marxism, Donna Haraway (1991) has developed an epistemological approach that she argues simultaneously understands knowledges as partial and situated, but retains what she argues is strong objectivity. The practice of producing situated knowledges is inspired by the Marxist privileging of the proletarian “view from below” but critical about the possibility that position provides for seeing everything. Thus, situated knowledges take as given the limitations and positionality of the knower, but strives to “knit” together partial knowledges in order to develop knowledge and critique of systemic oppression.

Harding (1991), Hartsock (1990), and other standpoint feminists have been particularly critical of the usefulness and objectivity of quantitative methods. They argue that they represent a view from a position of power, or a “view from above,” which is inherently distorted (Hartsock 1990). “When people speak from opposite sides of power relations,” Harding argues, “the perspective from the lives of the less powerful can provide a more objective view than the perspective from the lives of the more powerful” (1991, 269).

Hartsock, in particular, has distinguished between theories of power about women, and theories of power for women (1990). For Hartsock, theories of power for women are generated by women from their material experiences. She argues that transformative knowledge should be generated from the material experiences of the marginalized. Similarly, Haraway argues, “we are...bound to seek perspective from those points of view, which can never be known in advance, which promise something quite extraordinary, that is, knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination” (1991, 192). In Chapter 3, I use the intellectual resources of feminist standpoint epistemology and Haraway’s situated knowledges to consider one way of grounding social justice praxis as it relates to land use.
Work by Graham (1990; 1992) and Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006) has taken a somewhat different approach to theory building, similarly inspired, however, by post-structuralism and Marxism. Rather than develop a Marxist inspired epistemology for producing feminist knowledges, Graham and Gibson-Graham develop a post-structuralist inspired approach to producing Marxist knowledge, which they call “anti-essentialist Marxism.” Anti-essentialist Marxism, or “neo-marxism” as some call it, understands all socio-economic-political processes to be overdetermined, such that it is impossible to isolate. Further, such processes do not exist independently of the other processes by which they are overdetermined, and with which they are mutually constitutive. That is, without the myriad other processes, the concept of “class” for example, does not exist. For neo-marxists, the goal of theory is to create a narrative rather than the narrative. The purpose of theory is not to explain and represent, but rather to disrupt the hegemony of totalizing, oppressive narratives.

Neo-marxism navigates through the complexity of overdetermination by singling out certain processes for “attention and exploration” (Graham 1990: 59). “In other words, theorists pick one or several processes as ‘entry points’ into the infinitely complex and ceaselessly changing social totality. Starting with a particular entry point cannot give us a ‘better’ understanding of the social totality than we would have if we started somewhere else. But it will give us a different understanding, which produces different effects” (Graham 1990: 59). Neo-marxists have chosen class processes as entry points, and in so doing understand class to be central to Marxist theory but make no claims that it is central to social life. Further, neo-marxists understand their own relationship to the desire to study class processes as overdetermined. They challenge traditional Marxists with mistaking their own studies of a few processes with a totalizing conception of all social processes. Thus, the work of Gibson-Graham directs attention to the ways in which theory building is itself a political process.

1.5.2 Discourse is not merely cultural

Feminism has had a long, productive, and at times contentious, relationship with Marxist inquiry. Early engagements included attempts to direct analysis to the sphere of social reproduction and to integrate a conception of patriarchy into a conception of capitalist exploitation as something of a “dual system” (Eisenstein 1990; Hartmann 1990; Mitchell, J 1990; Rubin 1990). As feminism became increasingly influenced by postmodernism, socialist feminism fell out of fashion and feminists who remained concerned with class processes and exploitation sought to integrate postmodern attention to difference with an analysis of class and exploitation within a framework known as “materialist feminism.”

Materialist feminism is deeply concerned with political economy, but parts ways with Marxist feminism with respect to the causal force of the mode of production. Instead, materialist feminists understand cultural, social, and economic relations to function in a mutually constitutive relationship. Materialist feminists have argued that we need to put humans back in the equation as “agents of culture” (Landry and MacLean 1993). Moreover, Landry and MacLean argue, that unlike Marxist feminism, which holds class conflict as central, “materialist feminism should recognize as material other contradictions as well. These contradictions also have histories, operate in ideologies, and are grounded in material bases and effects.... they should be granted material weight in social and literary analysis calling itself materialist.... these
categories would include...ideologies of race, sexuality, imperialism and colonialism and anthropocentrism, with their accompanying radical critiques" (229).

Gimenez (1998) critiques materialist feminism for failing to specify some other essential and totalizing conception of history and material relations. But what Gimenez sees as a failure or shortcoming of materialist feminism signals the fundamental difference between Marxist and materialist feminism. Whereas Marxist feminism grounds all social relations in direct reference to the mode of production, materialist feminism works from a conception of social processes as overdetermined. Materialist feminism takes seriously and investigates the relationship between the mode of production and social relations, but it does not understand the mode of production as the determining base upon which an epiphenomenal superstructure is founded. With the social world conceptualized in this way, cultural politics become a possible site not only for the achievement of cultural recognition, but as a possible location for a reorganization and contestation of capitalism. This study attempts to show how neoliberal approaches to redevelopment draw on myths (Wright 2006) and cultural politics in order to gain legitimacy. These cultural politics explain or justify neoliberalism’s particularly revanchist and uneven accumulation and distribution. The empirical investigation of the ways in which cultural politics and discourses work to facilitate the implementation of neoliberal urbanism allows for an understanding of the disruption of these discourses as a promising site of anti-neoliberal activism.

1.5.3 Justice, distribution and recognition

Liberal conceptions of justice, the most dominant in the Western world, are primarily concerned with developing a universal distribution of material goods (see for example Rawls 1971). By contrast, Marx’s method of analysis eschews universals, and proceeds from an analysis of material social relations. And while feminists have attempted to integrate a conception of patriarchy into the relations of production (see above), more recent work on feminist conceptions of justice has been concerned with cultural misrecognition as a type of injustice.

In a now classic exchange, Nancy Fraser (1997) and Iris Young (1998) debated the relationship between a politics of recognition and a politics of redistribution. Fraser argued, quite controversially, that injustice and oppression could be understood effectively on a continuum from misrecognition to maldistribution, and attributed to either questions of political economy or those of culture. Young, however, argued, and I agree, that a politics of recognition is always bound up in issues of redistribution. Such a polarization, she argues, “distorts the plurality and complexity of social reality and politics” (157). The implications of Young’s argument, and by extension, mine, is that politics of recognition are crucial locations from which to address political economic injustice and maldistribution. Thus, this study is informed by Young’s five faces of oppression, and defines social justice as an absence of oppression. While Young identifies five ways in which oppression might be manifested, she argues that the presence of one counts as oppression.

This is the first face of that Young identifies draws from Marx’s theory of exploitation, and stresses the way in which the appropriation of surplus value that through the wage relation that Marx identified ultimately transfers power, as well as material wealth, from one group to another. The result of this transfer of power is not only material deprivation, but loss of self-respect, as well, Young argues. The second face of oppression that Young identifies is
marginalization, which she argues is the form that much racial oppression takes. Those who are marginalized, in Young’s conception, are those who the labor system cannot use. Marginalization has implications not only for material deprivation, but for rights and freedom as well. While most advanced welfare capitalist countries have addressed, to at least a minimal degree, the issue of material deprivation, dependence on the welfare state, Young argues, limits peoples’ ability to “exercise capacities in socially defined and recognized ways”(54), and represents an intrusion of privacy by social service organizations and welfare bureaucracies.

The third face of oppression that Young identifies is powerlessness. To identify the form that powerlessness takes in American society, Young turns to an analysis of the professionalization of the middle-class in America. Professionals, while still exploited in a Marxist sense, do have some opportunities to participate in decision making and some power over others. They are also more able to present themselves in the public sphere in ways that generate more “respectability” with important implications for recognition and self-respect. Cultural imperialism is the fourth face of oppression in Young’s framework. To experience cultural imperialism, she argues, is to “experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other” (59). The dominant group in society projects their own experience and culture as the norm by controlling what Fraser (1987) calls the means of interpretation and communication in society. The final face of oppression that Young identifies is violence. While acts of violence in and of themselves are of course grotesque and problematic, what makes their existence oppressive is the set of social relations that surround them and make them acceptable and systemic. These five faces function as criteria for determining whether groups are oppressed, and the presence of any of them is sufficient grounds for calling a group oppressed. Young’s conception of oppression serves as the foundation for the conceptualization of a grounded social justice praxis in Chapter 4 and is operationalized to assess historic marginalization and oppression in coastal Mississippi’s African American neighborhoods.

1.6 Coastal Mississippi

Though comparatively small with a population of 50,000, Biloxi is the third largest city in the Mississippi, and for much of the state’s history it was second only to Jackson, the state capital. Biloxi is bordered by Gulfport, the state’s second largest city with a population of 70,000. Taken together, the Biloxi-Gulfport region is one of two major metropolitan areas in the state.

Though Biloxi had long been a destination for tourists escaping the cities of New Orleans and Mobile, its boom and growth came as a seafood company town. By the turn of the 20th century, Biloxi was home to 12 large canneries that packed and shipped more than 15 million cans of oysters per year (Durrenberger, 1996). Immigrants from Eastern Europe arrived by train from Baltimore, and, as is often the case with chain migration, sent word home to relatives to settle in Biloxi. Work in canning factories was plentiful, and children as well as adults worked long hours in the inhumane industrial conditions characteristic of the period. To house the new immigrants, companies built housing on the peninsula, just south of the African American neighborhood of Back Bay. The seafood industry was vibrant in Biloxi, and it was not only central to the economic base of the city, but also deeply engrained in the cultural identity of the place.
While redlining was not a prominent practice in the region, other legacies of post-WW II urban policy, practice, and social unrest did shape Biloxi’s politics. In 1960, Gilbert Mason, a prominent African American doctor, led a series of wade-ins at the local beach to protest beach segregation policies on county-owned land. Local police stood by and allowed a gang of white residents to brutally beat waders with impunity (Mason and Smith 2000). Many interviewed for this study indicated that racial violence in the city center coincided with a host of other development circumstances that led to white flight to the west and north of the city center. These factors included the development of an air-conditioned and car friendly mall in the Western portion of the city, as well as an expansion of the city’s boundaries (and hence, services) through annexation to the north and west. Thus, Biloxi, despite being a relatively small city, was not immune to the hollowing out of the city center that characterized many larger US industrial cities. The city consequently took advantage of urban renewal funds from the federal government, and, like many other urban renewal projects, its resulting efforts disproportionately displaced low income and minority residents and built modernist edifices that were resolute failures at attracting development or reviving the downtown. The legacy of Biloxi’s urban renewal project, in which historic downtown buildings were made to look uniform and the downtown walking mall was surrounded by a sea of parking and cut off from the waterfront, still characterizes the city’s downtown.

In the post-Vietnam War period, a substantial number of Vietnamese immigrants were attracted to the city’s fishing industry, and by some accounts were recruited to the area by a canner who drove to New Orleans to try to attract Vietnamese families to work shucking oysters (Schmidt 2009). The Vietnamese population settled on the point in small bungalows that had previously housed European immigrants, within walking and bicycling distance of their fishing boats. They quickly made an imprint on the landscape, building a Catholic church and a Buddhist temple next to each other and opening grocery stores, restaurants, and other amenities to serve the growing immigrant community. However, growing competition from Asian seafood imports, coupled with federal regulations governing fishing technologies, threatened the profitability of the fishing industry in the 1980s and 1990s (Durrenberger, 1996). By the time Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, fishing was increasingly unprofitable and most of the canneries were defunct.

By the early 1990s, with declining tax revenues resulting from the withering of its largest industry, the city of Biloxi was broke. The newly elected mayor pursued an economic development strategy based almost entirely on the development of a casino district that, coupled with other infrastructure investment and development, was designed to make Biloxi a premier vacation and tourism destination. By 2005, Biloxi had 9 casinos, and the Mayor claimed that the city was in the midst of an “urban renaissance.” Due to strict regulations regarding casino siting all of the casinos in the city of Biloxi were on the peninsula of East Biloxi.

By 2005, the peninsula of East Biloxi was a palimpsest of the social, economic, and cultural geographies that characterized it over time. Working class African Americans occupied shotgun styles homes that had been passed down through generations. Deteriorated public housing, formerly mandated as Black only, was still largely occupied by low income African Americans. Working class European-Americans lived in small bungalows near the seafood factories, but many had been either sold to Vietnamese families or were being rented out by adult children, who had inherited these small homes, to low-income and working class whites and African Americans. The peninsula was largely the “inner city” to the rest of Biloxi’s suburbia, and its
2000 demographic statistics confirm the uneven geographies of the city. Much like other city centers in post-industrial cities, East Biloxi had been, in some respects, “hollowed out.” Highlighting and dramatizing the uneven development of the city, however, were the corporate casino resorts that hugged the coastline and surrounded the crumbling neighborhood. This socio-economic geography was in some ways more reminiscent of Caribbean resort communities than post-industrial inner cities.

Gambling had long been a part of Biloxi’s identity, likely influenced in part by the New Orleanian culture. In the 1970s the main commercial strip in Biloxi featured unambiguous signs advertising gambling that was technically illegal but allowed in practice (Humes 1994). These seedy gambling parlors were overseen by Biloxi’s “Dixie Mafia”. “The Strip,” as the commercial district was called, was home to prostitution rings and was occasionally targeted by elected officials in Biloxi for clean up. Gambling attracted attention from the state of Mississippi in the mid-1980s, when a Panamanian ship began offering so-called “cruises to nowhere” from the shores of Biloxi that sailed into international waters to allow gambling. In response, the Mississippi attorney exploited a grey area to expand the distance from the shore that was considered international waters (Herrmann 2006). This expansion of the boundaries of state control of the water effectively made it too costly and long to make the cruise profitable, and it went out of business. But the actions of the Attorney General of the state signaled a scalar cultural divide that would profoundly shape the future of gambling in the state of Mississippi. Whereas the state of Mississippi as a whole was profoundly opposed to gaming, considering it a sin and a vice, the coastal areas were far more comfortable with it and more willing to pursue it as an economic development strategy.

Reeling from cuts in federal dollars and declining economic bases, legislators from the Delta and the Gulf teamed up to write gaming legislation in ways that created geographic limitations which ensured that benefits would be realized in their own districts – conservatives were also assured that it would not be in theirs. Supporters also argued that casinos were a “local matter,” not a state one. The boundaries built into the legislation effectively “confined the sin” and allowed local constituents to vote on the issue in their counties (Herrmann 2006). The boundary created in the bill, passed in 1990, defined “navigable waters” – the definition of which has been in flux since then. Biloxi’s first casinos opened in 1992.

The devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005 had the potential to profoundly disrupt existing settlement patterns and functionally reinvent the social geographies of the region. For at least six months after the hurricane, planners, residents, city officials, developers, state officials, and federal government emergency managers considered the geography and settlement patterns of Biloxi to be completely up in the air. This period of upheaval in the entrenched systems that shape cities, including historic settlement patterns, property ownership, zoning laws, environmental regulations, and homeowners’ insurance, for example, was seen by some as an opportunity to variously remake the city in a more efficient, well-planned, or growth-oriented way. But low income and minority residents, as well as their advocates in the local, regional, national, and international nonprofit, social service, and civil rights sectors concluded early on that opportunities to remake the city in these ways would almost certainly disrupt the lives of the city’s most economically and politically marginalized residents.

Three distinct (though not unrelated) visions for the future of the city emerged. Each vision was produced, embraced, and adopted from different vantage points at various scales of governance.
Immediately following the storm, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour tapped the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) to head up a series of charrettes that would provide a vision for the redevelopment process. New Urbanism is a movement within planning that combines a particular (fetishized) nostalgic aesthetic, with specific techniques for organizing land development ordinances to ensure desired results. The resulting plan, entitled “Reconstruction Plan for Biloxi” and authored by leaders of the New Urbanist movement, reflects the sense that existing configurations, settlement patterns, architectural standards, infrastructure, and land uses might be dramatically reimagined, as evidenced by a call for housing development where golf courses currently exist, a set of design standards that would drastically transform the facades as well as architecture of casinos, and would introduce quaint shopping markets in areas where industrial seafood production had previously occurred. At the same time, however, the plan calls for the retention of a certain kind of settlement pattern – those that pre-date World War II and are considered “historic patterns” that would enable Biloxi to become “more of its true self” (Moule and Polyzoides, 2005).

In this context, culture and tradition become code words for Biloxi’s antebellum history, its social and racial hierarchies, and its architecturally inscribed classification of neighborhoods and building types such as the shotgun house and Creole cottage. The lack of participation by Biloxi’s African American community, although not unprecedented, offended many East Biloxi residents and caused resentment and suspicion toward planning that continue today.

After it became clear that the governor’s New Urbanist proposal was politically untenable in Biloxi, a second planning process was initiated in early 2006.² This process included the generation of a report by professional planners, funded by a host of national urban and civic oriented organizations and most of the corporate casinos in the city. This report, entitled “Moving Forward,” addresses the part of the city known as East Biloxi, where the heaviest damage was concentrated, and where the casinos were concentrated. This plan took the future threat of storm surge and hurricane damage seriously, and used FEMA’s advisory Base Flood Elevations (BFEs) as a taken for granted starting point,³ whereas the New Urbanist plan had proposed alternatives to raising houses above projected storm surge. The Goody Clancy plan more explicitly addresses environmental vulnerability than does the New Urbanist’s Reconstruction Plan. The plan, aimed at attracting tourists, is full of amenities that would flank the casinos, including the development of a central park over a wide swath of land that was home to many Vietnamese families before the storm, a minor league baseball stadium, museums and marinas. The plan is also concerned with promoting pedestrian and traffic flows throughout the peninsula. Many residents of East Biloxi were viscerally opposed to the new configurations – they were skeptical of the requirement that they pool their land to make way for a large scale high rise development, did not believe that multifamily homes would accommodate their desired lifestyles, and resented the fact that the plan did not seem to acknowledge the social geographies of the space in question (perhaps best illustrated by the plan to displace many Vietnamese without any acknowledgement therein).

² Andres Duany, a leader in the New Urbanist movement called Biloxi’s rejection of the approach “urban suicide.”
³ Advisory Base Flood Elevation Levels were the initial guidelines for cities to adopt into their planning and zoning regulations in order for the city as a whole to qualify for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). NFIP requires that the city as a whole adopt FEMA’s flood elevation levels in order for residents to qualify for insurance.
Unsatisfied with the extent to which existing plans addressed the concerns of long-time residents, the East Biloxi Coordination and Relief Center, the community based organization founded by city councilor Stallworth immediately in the wake of the storm, embarked on a third planning process. Leaders in this organization immediately recognized that any effort to rebuild the peninsula in a way that would allow the previous inhabitants to return would require innovative, cost-efficient, creative construction to meet the new flood elevation requirements while retaining a sense of community and rebuilding affordably and quickly. They embarked on their own planning process, which cast the previous residents of East Biloxi as the privileged subjects who ought to determine the future of the peninsula, and identified affordable housing as their number one priority. The plan emphasized the community’s desire to remain in place and rebuild their homes along the lines of the previous settlement pattern.

While this study is primarily concerned with the redevelopment of the city of Biloxi, the politics of the neighboring city of Gulfport are discussed as well. During Katrina, the city of Gulfport also suffered tremendous damage. Unlike the city of Biloxi, Gulfport has embraced New Urbanism as an approach to redevelopment. They hired famed architect Andres Duany, co-founder of the Congress for New Urbanism, to develop five city-owned properties that city leaders expect will catalyze other development and recreate the city in the likeness of a tourist destination such as Charleston, South Carolina.

Originally established as a lumber and port city, Gulfport has sought to capitalize on its infrastructure to attract jobs and foster economic development. This has included investments since the post-World War II period in developing big-box retail development, fostering growth and sprawl to the north, and attempting to grow the city limits through annexation of county territory. As continues to be the case today, that growth and development has historically encroached upon or attempted to marginalize low-income neighborhoods of color in the city. For example, development and expansion of the airport during World War II eradicated the African American neighborhood of Correlton, and the widening of Highway 49 created a nearly impassible gulf through the middle of the African American neighborhood of North Gulfport (Evans 2010). While casino development in East Biloxi has threatened to displace residents in that neighborhood, residents of Gulfport’s low income, African American neighborhoods are finding themselves vulnerable not only to redevelopment and gentrification strategies, but infrastructure growth and expansion, as well.

1.7 Methods

This study is an interpretive, intensive case study that blends critical ethnographic methods, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews, along with interpretive textual analysis of planning documents. I traveled to the region five times over the course of three years from 2006 to 2009 and spent the Fall 2008 semester living in a volunteer village in East Biloxi. During that time, I conducted 71 interviews with city leaders, residents, activists, and business leaders. I also forged working relationships with five community-based organizations, including a neighborhood organization, a women’s activist organization, a community planning and design studio, an umbrella organization of social-justice oriented nonprofit organizations, and a social-justice legal advocacy organization. In exchange for access to their meetings, staff, and archives, I exchanged volunteer labor for these organizations. That labor included making maps, conducting small research projects, assisting with computing skills, mundane office work such as filing, and in one case, developing an institutional history. I also approached the city of Biloxi
about such an arrangement but my requests went unanswered. It was through my work at these organizations that I approached and identified many of my interviewees. My work at those organizations also provided me with a reason to spend time in various neighborhoods and meet and talk with residents, as well as to attend closed-door strategy sessions and member meetings.

I also attended over 20 public meetings, including planning charrettes, city council meetings, and public hearings, and recruited interviewees at those meetings as well. Finally, as the contours of the issues become clear, I approached relevant city officials and business leaders who were active in the recovery process.

As Wright (2006) has noted, it is impossible to know how you are being perceived in these settings, yet in various situations it is clear that some categories become relevant. I can say with confidence that someone who did not share some of my identity categories (white, female, northerner, in my early 30s) would have elicited different reactions from different interviewees in different settings. In multiple cases I was profoundly aware of my race, specifically at times when I felt as though white interviewees were viewing me as “one of them” – a reception that a person of color would likely not have received. While my race made me an insider in some settings, it of course made me an outsider in others.

Due to what I suspect was a combination of my age, gender, race, and my general countenance, I was often received in an avuncular fashion by business men and male city leaders. Not only did this mean that I was often invited to have dinner with their families or attend social events with their social networks, I believe it influenced the way they answered my questions, making them more forthcoming with information at times. I don’t believe that a middle-aged male, for example, would have been received in this way. None of this is to say that another person would not have come to the same conclusions that I do, or would not have been able to obtain the same data. Rather it is to acknowledge that a human being is an imperfect research instrument that cannot be calibrated. In some cases this may produce certain unique insights, in others cases, unavoidable blind spots.

1.8 Theorizing the politics of land use

This study builds on the theoretical contributions of feminist theorists and political economists in a number of ways. Following Young and Jenson, this study works from an understanding of the politics of recognition as a radical and potentially transformative politics. Insofar as misrecognition is psychological oppression (see Young 1990), full recognition is a precondition for redistribution, and ideology and the lack of recognition it produces is necessary to explain inequality in under capitalism (Hennessey 2000). As this study shows, racism, an insidious form of misrecognition, is a nontrivial force in creating the conditions for neoliberal reform. In so doing, this study contributes to the political economy literature in geography by expanding its understanding of the significance of cultural relations for producing and enabling neoliberalism.

Further, this study is deeply influenced by materialist feminism and anti-essentialist Marxism. As I argue above, a materialist feminist analysis does not privileged economic relations, either in the first or final instance, but rather holds them all to be mutually reinforcing. At the same time, I see value in anti-essentialist Marxism, as well. The difference is that an anti-essentialist Marxist approach holds class analyses constant for the sake of analysis and investigation, but does not make claims that such an analysis is the best or most accurate assessment. As such,
materialist feminism provides an ontological claim of the mutually constitutive relationships between cultural and economic relations, whereas anti-essentialist Marxism provides an epistemological framework for doing research.

Following Jenson, I approach the study of the relationship between local, urban experiences and political economic relations by arguing for an expanded conception of the “political” to include a politics of representation and social relations that play out in what are sometimes dismissed as “nonclass” processes. Following Young, I understand cultural and identity based experiences of the everyday as profoundly shaped by capitalist social relations, and see these sites as promising locations for political action and resistance. Finally, like Gibson-Graham and Leitner et al (2007), I understand our ways of knowing as being profoundly implicated in creating or disabling political possibility.

Thus, my research is designed in a way that understands economic and political processes in a dialectical and mutually constitutive relationship, with respect to economic, political, and social relations. To do so is to recognize that urban actors are constrained, to some extent, by the structural relations of capitalism, but is to also explicitly acknowledge that those relations are constituted, at least in part, through discourse and social relations, not through the inevitable and endogenous powers of capitalism. Such a conception allows for the possibility that activism at the scale of the city has at least some possibility of shaping, influencing, or disrupting capitalist relations and the neoliberal rationality that informs them, both at the scale of the city, and perhaps, at the larger scale. It is to acknowledge, as Molotch (1976) argues, that there is agency on the part of urban actors, and that growth regimes are not inevitable, and their power can, and indeed ought to be, contested. Such a conception also opens space for the simultaneous consideration of the political economy of land use and the social and cultural politics of gender, race, and sexuality (to name a few) that are bound up in the discourses that justify and contest the legitimacy of neoliberal growth discourses and shape urban political and economic outcomes.

My hope and intention is to provide the theoretical tools to foster a greater integration between feminist geography and political economy in order to expand conceptions of the political employed by political economists, as well as further integrate political economy into feminist urban geography.

The study is presented in three stand-alone articles, each intended for publication in a different academic journal. Chapter 2, intended for submission to the Annals of the Association of American Geographers proposes the Regulation Approach as a particularly salient and productive framework for apprehending the relationship between cultural politics and neoliberalism. I take as a starting point a series of critical interventions in “first generation” Regulation-theoretic analysis that flesh out the underdeveloped concept of the mode of social regulation to understand it as meaningfully comprised of cultural politics and locally variegated. With that framework established, I analyze the redevelopment process in Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi, showing how low-income African American neighborhoods are targeted for neoliberal redevelopment. I show that in coastal Mississippi, the material space necessary to remake the built environment in ways more amenable to neoliberal urban governance has been created through disinvestment in poor neighborhoods of color. That disinvestment, in turn, has been legitimized through notions of the alleged pathologies of race and poverty. Working from these findings, I argue that calling attention to the racialized nature of the recovery process and
proposed redevelopment schemes holds promise to contest the recovery process. Further, I argue that because these neighborhoods have been targeted for neoliberal recovery, efforts by residents to rebuild them can further be understood as resistance.

Chapter 3, intended for submission to *Urban Geography*, attempts to read “glimmers” (Mitchell, Marston and Katz 2004) of resistance in actually existing urban politics during Biloxi’s recovery process. Based on data culled from public meetings, interviews, and planning charettes, I identify four modes of engagement and consider the promise they hold to contest the ideology of neoliberal urban governance. While none of the modes I identify are self-consciously anti-neoliberal, or even anti-capitalist, I argue that at least three of the modes of engagement hold some kernel of resistance to the neoliberal script. This method of analysis is an attempt to reorient political analysis in the academy toward actually existing urban politics, and to begin to consider how academic work on neoliberalism and the neoliberalization of urban governance might inform a more hopeful reading of urban politics.

Chapter 4, intended for submission to *Antipode*, develops a theoretical framework for establishing a grounded social justice praxis of land use. The need for such a praxis is made clear by the complexities of redevelopment and land use politics along the Coast in the wake of Katrina, as low-income neighborhoods of color and predominantly white, middle- and upper-middle class neighborhood make similar claims regarding their desire to preserve their neighborhoods and rebuild them to their pre-storm state. I wrestle with the ethical and political challenge raised as these two very different types of neighborhoods both seek to preserve the cultural and racial continuity of their neighborhoods, and invoke concerns about the environment to shield their neighborhoods from unwanted development. Having established that two prominent approaches to theorizing urban politics are insufficient for addressing the difference between these two neighborhoods and their claims, I argue for a modified standpoint theory which draws on Marxist epistemology and feminist standpoint theory to identify a privileged position from which to produce knowledge and normative claims regarding land use politics.

In Chapter 5, I conclude by discussing the promise and challenges associated with linking radical academic scholarship and actually existing anti-capitalist praxis. I reflect on my own research process, detailing my efforts and shortfalls as I attempted to balance the dual objectives of producing academic scholarship and advancing or aiding in the pursuit of social justice in the post-Katrina recovery process. Finally, I propose some possibilities for future research that would build on and enrich the arguments developed here.

Taken together, these chapters represent an attempt to understand how the rich body of empirical literature on neoliberalism in the critical geography tradition might be applied to actually existing urban politics. The intent is to provide an intermediate step in forging more productive links between academic theorizing and everyday life by placing in productive tension deep structural analysis of capitalism and post-structuralist theories of knowledge production, theory building, and epistemology. In so doing, this work contributes a theoretical framework for evaluating and grounding politics and praxis around issues of land use in cities.
Figure 1.1 Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi (map by Paulo Raposo)

Figure 1.2 Casinos in East Biloxi (Map by Paulo Raposo)
CHAPTER 2: THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF NEOLIBERAL REGULATION IN POST-KATRINA MISSISSIPPI

2.1 Hurricane Katrina as an “opportunity”
Five years after Hurricane Katrina, some neighborhoods in the coastal cities of Biloxi and Gulfport, Mississippi are still struggling to recover. In East Biloxi, the devastated landscape that emerged immediately after the storm, has given way to a more subtle and uneven landscape in which empty lots and abandoned buildings are interspersed with tidy, reconstructed homes. The emptiness and eerie quiet of this low-income neighborhood that is home to most of the city’s African American and Vietnamese residents (see Figure 2.1) is made that much more dramatic by the bright lights and noise of the opulent, high-rise casino gaming resorts that line the peninsula and tower over the neighborhood (see Figures 2.2 and 2.3).

In 2006, the year after Katrina, the national economy was booming and so were the casinos. Residents of East Biloxi were not fairing quite as well. Many had been living out of FEMA trailers and operating their businesses and organizations out of make-shift structures, and had begun to feel abandoned by the city, state, and federal government. Of particular concern were the new FEMA Advisory Base Flood Elevation (ABFE) maps that imposed onerous and costly height requirements for rebuilding residences (see Figure 4). East Biloxi residents were also fighting with insurance companies to pay their claims, like everyone else in the region. But unlike many of their fellow citizens, residents of East Biloxi and other historically African American low-income neighborhoods in the region were also contending with a revanchist recovery process, immense pressure on their neighborhoods from redevelopment schemes, and a profound lack of political power and capital to shape the future of their city. In the face of these challenges, residents of East Biloxi and other low-income minority neighborhoods in the adjacent city of Gulfport expressed a strong desire to rebuild their neighborhoods to their pre-storm state, with modest ideas about minor improvements, including enhanced park space and small business development.

City leaders and boosters in both Biloxi and Gulfport, meanwhile, were giddy with possibility. Appropriately somber in public, in interviews they spoke about the “possibilities” that the storm created. These “possibilities” primarily centered around the opportunity to remake the built environment in ways more compatible with neoliberal approaches to urban governance and economic development. In Biloxi, these “possibilities” coalesced into a vision for the city that included the development of a high-end tourist destination with luxury high rise condominiums, museums and shops on the peninsula of East Biloxi. These new land uses on the peninsula would be made possible, they imagined, in part because residents would have a difficult time rebuilding as a result of new FEMA regulations requiring residences be elevated as much as 17 feet in the air, as well as the skyrocketing cost of insuring property in the flood zone. These new regulations and costs privileged commercial development and made rebuilding single family homes both undesirable and cost prohibitive. At the same time, the damage from the storm made it easier to assemble small parcels for large scale development, while federal recovery dollars flowed in to the region and tax credit programs incentivized private development. In short, the

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4 FEMA stands for Federal Emergency Management Agency. The term “FEMA trailer” refers to the travel trailers that the agency distributed to provide temporary housing immediately after the storm. They became iconic representations of the discontent of many Katrina victims with the federal agency.
storm had accomplished what these elites could not have otherwise, creating conditions under
which rapid and sweeping redevelopment and gentrification was possible. The city of Gulfport’s
website likens the city to the “New World” and invites entrepreneurial “captains” to come and
write the city’s future:

“Like the artist with the blank canvas or an explorer who steps foot in a brand
new land – as residents of Gulfport, Mississippi, we eagerly await the authors
who will write the future chapters of our beloved hometown… From the fury of
Mother Nature comes the opportunity to redefine our city as a progressive new
enterprise of hope and prosperity. When you bring your vision to the shores of
Gulfport, you will take your place among the other captains and watch your own
ship come in” (City of Gulfport, 2010).

While the storm and resultant regulatory, economic, and environmental hurdles created these
“possibilities,” the outcomes that urban elites imagined were in no way a foregone conclusion. Despite efforts to discursively construct these cities as a “blank slate” by some planning
documents (Moving Forward 2006, A Reconstruction Plan 2005), in reality, these spaces were in
no way a “blank slate” on which the will of “captains” might be imposed. Rather, efforts to
realize these possibilities had to contend with the social geographies, histories, and existing land
use patterns of these cities. Thus, efforts to either dramatically remake these cities or to preserve
pre-storm configurations were political struggles that turned on both the discursive construction
of the space, as well as its material reconfiguration. In the course of these political struggles,
some spaces – specifically, low-income African American neighborhoods – were discursively
constructed as problematic, blighted places better suited for alternative uses more aligned with
neoliberal urbanism.

In this article I use the cases of these two cities in Mississippi to consider how land use politics
have articulated with neoliberal urbanism in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. While studies of
neoliberalism have drawn from a variety of theoretical traditions, I propose the Regulation
Approach (hereafter, RA) as a particularly salient body of theory in which to ground such an
analysis. Yet, while the “first generation” RA might have argued for an understanding of the
economy in its “integral sense” (MacLeod 1997), subsequent engagements with the approach
have been necessary to draw out both a conceptual and methodological framework for
considering how cultural politics at the local level might be understood within the framework of
the RA. Supplemented by these interventions, I argue that the RA can provide a broad
theoretical framework for bringing together what at times seems to be theoretically
incommensurable analyses of neoliberalism. Further, by broadening the conception of the mode
of social regulation and bringing cultural politics to the fore, I argue that politics aimed at
disrupting those socio-cultural relationships and discourses that regularize neoliberal capitalist
accumulation can be properly understood as holding promise to disrupt and contest
neoliberalism.

The theoretical building blocks of the RA – the regime of accumulation and the mode of social
regulation – were developed to assess the ways in which a historically specific set of capitalist
social relations achieve some semblance of stability and regularity, despite capitalism’s inherent
crisis tendencies. While neoliberalism might not represent a long period of stability, and may in
fact be better understood as a period of instability (Brenner and Theodore 2002), the theoretical framework of the RA is nevertheless relevant for analysis of neoliberalism insofar as it directs attention to the way the embedded nature of the economy and the role of norms, culture, patterns of conduct, and so forth enable a particular form of accumulation. Further, working within the broad framework of the RA, I argue that land use politics are an appropriate and relevant subject of analysis, despite, or indeed because of, the RA’s concern with the labor process specifically (Jessop, Peck and Tickell 1999). While the struggle over the future of these cities has been explicitly spatial, the politics of land use remains a relatively underexplored realm within the literature on neoliberal urbanism (but see Mitchell 2004; Hackworth 2007; Wilson, D 2007; Purcell 2008), despite the centrality of land development in neoliberal approaches to governance (Fainstein 2001; Massey 2005; Lake 2010).

Having established a theoretical framework for understanding land use politics and neoliberal urbanism, I then turn to an empirical analysis of land use politics in Biloxi and Gulfport, Mississippi in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. I show that in these two cities, the cultural politics central to making processes of neoliberalization ‘work’ locally at the urban scale turn, in part, on racial politics, and particularly strategic discourses and silences about race. I show how the visions and associated policies for the redevelopment of the region make low-income neighborhoods of color vulnerable, while, at the same time, actively delegitimizing race as a meaningful subject of politics. These discursive moves have enabled the material reconfiguration of the built environment in ways more amenable to neoliberal urbanism by explaining away the uneven impacts of recovery spending, with disproportionate implications for the ability of low-income African American neighborhoods to rebuild.

Racialized neighborhood struggles, and the idea that race shapes the landscape and the built environment, are, of course, not new. Neither is the idea that race articulates in dynamic ways with class formation (Hall 1980; Pulido 2006; Gilmore 2007; Mann 2007; Glassman forthcoming). But if we put these struggles in the context of the regulation approach, and explore the ways in which they function to mask or explain the contradictions of capitalism that arise through the regime of accumulation, we can begin to see racial politics as a potential site of anti-capitalist politics. In other words, if the mode of social regulation is necessary to forestall crises in the regime of accumulation, then any politicization and activism that disrupts cultural norms that produce and explain uneven development stands to disrupt what regulationist believe to be a delicate balance between extra-economic processes and relationships and capitalist accumulation. If both racialized discourses and processes, and the denial of racial identities or claims as legitimate grounds for critique or analysis, are central to neoliberalism’s tentative mode of social regulation in these southern US cities, then even talking about race, and identifying processes as racialized, holds promise to challenge the neoliberal nature of recovery and delegitimize neoliberalism as a social and political economic framework. Further, if as I argue below, attempts by urban actors to remake the built environment to respond to neoliberalism target low-income neighborhoods of color to create the necessary spaces, then activism on behalf

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5 In an overview of the most recent work in critical geography on the articulations between race and class, Glassman (forthcoming) argues that a central tenet around which this work is organized is that race is not biologically given, and thus its production is politically, spatially, and temporally varied (see also Kobayashi and Peake 1994, Gilbert 1998). The following analysis of the role of race is premised on the same conception of race.
of residents to remain in the space can also be read as resistance to neoliberalism. As Prytherch and Marston (2005) have argued, by reconciling what they refer to as the “traditionally disparate spheres of culture and the economy” we can begin to theorize new, and more hopeful, political possibilities. While more structuralist readings of neoliberalism might find these particularly weak opportunities for resistance, this type of analysis represents an effort to read resistance in actually existing urban practice, in contrast to determining what might be appropriately directed resistance or contestation based solely on analysis of neoliberalism as an abstracted ideal-type.

2.2 Methods
To understand the ways in which cultural politics played out in the redevelopment process in coastal Mississippi, I made multiple trips of varying lengths to the region over the course of three years, including spending several months at one stretch living and working in the region. I also conducted over 70 interviews with citizens, activists, state actors, and business leaders to understand the political contours of struggles over land use after Hurricane Katrina. I attended over 20 public meetings, including city council meetings and planning charettes, as an observer, and many closed-door meetings and strategy sessions as a participant observer. I exchanged volunteer labor for access to such meetings and to employees to whom I would not otherwise have had access at a variety of local organizations. These organizations included two fledgling grassroots organizations founded immediately after the storm, one well-established social justice-oriented nonprofit, one community-based organization, and one community-based planning and design studio. Organizations for which I volunteered also granted me relatively free access to their archives and libraries. The following is an interpretive analysis based on evidence gathered from planning documents, field notes from attendance at meetings, and interviews.

2.3 The politics of regulation
Developed by Parisian political economists in the 1970s, the Regulation Approach (RA) is concerned with identifying the social and institutional conditions which secure the reproduction of capitalism, despite its inherent structural contradictions (Lipietz 1986; Boyer 1990; Peck and Tickell 1992; 1995a; Jessop 1997; MacLeod 1997; Aglietta 2000 [1979]). Work in the RA tradition is thus primarily motivated by an empirical and theoretical interest in the economy as embedded in social, institutional, and cultural relationships that secure relatively stable periods of capital accumulation and the production and reproduction of those relationships during and following crisis. Much of this work has entailed analysis of what has become known as the Fordist-Keynesian period of accumulation (Aglietta 2000 [1979]), the exogenous and endogenous causes of the crisis of accumulation in the early 1970s (Harvey 1989a), and the

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6 The term “charette” refers to a meeting in which attendees participate to varying degrees in the process of developing a plan for a geographic space.

7 The “Parisian School,” primarily based out of CEPREMAP, is not the only school of Regulationist thought, but it is the one the most influential in critical geography (MacLeod 1997). See Jessop (1997) for an elaboration of the difference between various schools of thought in the RA tradition.

8 While “first generation” RA (i.e. the work of Aglietta 1979) as well as later work in the RA tradition state an interest in and a theoretical and empirical concern with “cultural” relations, as I argue below, little empirical work was done to expand on these relationships.

9 Crisis in the Marxist sense is understood as a structural crisis of accumulation, however in the RA tradition, crisis can also be understood as a crisis in social and cultural relationships and norms that stabilize accumulation, as well (Jenson 1993).
processes, politics, institutional relationships, and implications of the socio-economic relations that emerged after Fordism (see edited volumes Amin 1994; Brenner and Theodore 2002b).

Two conceptual building blocks serve as the foundation for the approach: the regime of accumulation and the mode of social regulation. The ‘regime of accumulation’ refers to an extended period of stability and growth or a “... a way of dividing and systematically reallocating the social product” (Lipietz 1988; 31, qtd in MacLeod 1997, 532). During this extended period of time, there is what Lipietz calls “a certain convergence” between the processes of production and the processes of consumption (1988, 31, qtd in MacLeod 1997, 532). The regime of accumulation, in other words, is a “social structure” that connects decisions made by individual producers with the effective demand with which they must contend (Noel 1987, 311).

The stability of this convergence between production and consumption over time can only occur in mutual constitution with a set of social processes called the mode of social regulation. The mode of social regulation is broadly defined in the regulationist literature as the social norms, habits, conventions, customs, state laws, and patterns of conduct that serve to normalize the accumulation process (MacLeod 1997, Jessop 1997, Peck and Tickell 1992). The mode of social regulation acts to “guarantee that the dominant accumulation system is reproducible in the medium term, through the accommodation, mediation and normalization of crisis tendencies” (Peck and Tickell 1992, 349).

When the regime of accumulation and mode of social regulation are in synch, long periods of capitalist expansion occur. Many regulation-theoretic accounts have directed their analyses toward the period of capitalist expansion from post-World War II to the early 1970s, during which growth in productivity facilitated the growth of real wages, which in turn generated the rapid development of mass consumption (Noel 1987, Peck and Tickell 1992, Aglietta, 1979). The mode of social regulation, including Keynesian welfare state policies (Peck and Tickell 1992), as well as social norms and expectations regarding the “family wage,” (Bakshi, Goodwin and Painter 1995), the suburbanization of housing, and mass consumption secured the conditions that facilitated the reproduction of the labor pool and rising consumer demand and staved off the crisis and recession tendencies in the regime of accumulation.

For regulationists, couplings between the regime of accumulation and the mode of social regulation are always temporary, as the crisis tendencies in the regime of accumulation eventually exceed the stabilizing effects of the mode of social regulation (MacLeod 1997, Peck and Tickell 1992, 1995, Lipietz 1988). Further, and importantly, these couplings are not inevitable. Rather, they amount to what Lipietz (1987) called “chance discoveries” that emerge through social and political struggle (Peck and Tickell 1994; MacLeod 1997).

Unlike orthodox applications of Marxist theories of the relationship between the base and the

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10 The concept is variously referred to throughout the literature as the mode of regulation, the mode of social regulation, the social mode of regulation, and the social mode of economic regulation. Despite the variety of terms, they all appear to refer to the same concept.

11 Though the RA has been accused of functionalism, it is important to note that such couplings are not explained in terms of their effects (Bakshi, Goodwin, and Painter 1995).
superstructure, in the RA, the regime of accumulation and the mode of social regulation are, in theory, accorded equal analytical value (Peck and Tickell 1992), and importantly, equal causal value in contributing to the reproduction of capitalist social relations (Aglietta 2000 [1979]). Nevertheless, in most applications of the RA, neither of these theoretical commitments are borne out. Rather there is a disconnect between the intention of the RA to avoid overt structuralism and its “methodological objectification of the economy” (MacLeod 1997, 535). This objectification of the economic over the non-economic is in part due to methodological shortcomings in the RA (see Purcell 2002) with respect to the mode of social regulation, and in part due to an inadequate theorization of the mode of social regulation itself (Peck and Tickell 1992). As a result of these methodological and theoretical shortcomings and despite the avowed interest in a “politics first” approach (Lipietz 1987), politics remains an afterthought in first generation RA analysis (Jenson 1990, 1991, 1993).

Given the broad theoretical opening to consider the relationship between politics and accumulation and the relative influence of the RA in critical geography, it is somewhat surprising that very few studies have attempted to further integrate empirical analysis of cultural politics and accumulation within the broad framework of the RA. Bhakshi et al (1995) provide one of the only attempts to explicitly situate an analysis of race and gender politics as an important feature of the mode of social regulation during the Fordist period. By turning attention to the relationship between cultural politics, class politics, and accumulation, Bhakshi et al argue that the mode of social regulation can be more properly understood as spatially uneven, dynamic, and contradictory. Further, they argue that a general failure of work in the RA tradition to pay attention to gender and racial politics specifically, and cultural and identity politics more generally, has led to a conception of the mode of social regulation under Fordism as far more settled than it actually was. Working from this set of principles, they offer an analysis of the changing gendered and racial dynamics of the mode of social regulation in Britain during Fordism, as well as the role of discourse and politics in both the stability and eventual crisis of the Fordist compromise between capital and labor.

With respect to gender politics, they argue that the Fordist compromise depended on the nuclear family and the family wage as the foundation for both collective bargaining and mass consumption. The lower wages of women were justified by discourses regarding the reasons women worked, ie for “pin money” as opposed to working to support a family, resulting in the segmentation of the labor market and downward pressure on wages. This segmentation allowed for white male workers to enjoy the relatively high wages that characterized the Fordist compromise. Racist attitudes towards minorities also justified labor market segmentation, while simultaneously supplying low-wage labor necessary to expand the social services that comprised the welfare state.

The “virtuous circle” of rising wages, the expanding welfare state, and increasing productivity was disrupted when women and people of color began to demand equal pay, and make demands on the welfare state, thereby stretching social services to the limit and contributing to discontent.

12 There are studies in the critical geography literature that attempt to explore cultural politics, discourse, and capitalism that do not situate themselves within the framework of the RA explicitly (see for example Mann 2007, Wright 2007).
with the welfare state (Baskhi et al 1995). This discontent undermined the political stability of the Fordist compromise, while demands for equal pay had implications for the profitability of capitalist enterprises. By drawing attention to the role of cultural politics and discourse in securing, at least in part, the necessary conditions for Fordist accumulation, as well as their eventual role in undermining it, Bakshi et al’s analysis provides a useful jumping off point for analyzing the role of racial politics in creating space for neoliberal visions of the city in coastal Mississippi. Their analysis further suggests a potential model for challenging the hegemony of neoliberal visions for the city by politicizing the uneven racial dynamics of the redevelopment process.

What distinguishes Bakshi et al’s analysis from more traditional analyses in the RA tradition of the demise of the Fordist compromise (see for example Harvey 1989a) is its explicit focus on the agency of actors in the sphere of politics to, at least in part, contribute to the undermining of the mode of social regulation, and hence the destabilization of Fordism as a regime of accumulation. Jenson has also attempted incorporate what she considers a “meaningful discussion of politics” into the regulation approach by theorizing a conception of discourse and agency. While she has made a series of compelling contributions to a theorization of politics and the mode of social regulation (Jenson 1990; 1991; 1993; Jessop 1997; MacLeod 1997), most relevant for the purposes of this article is her analysis of the discursive field of politics and its role in temporarily stabilizing contradictory social relations. For Jenson, social relations are simultaneously reproduced both in the structural realm, whether actors are aware of them or not, and in the realm of everyday life. It is in the realm of everyday life, however, that the structural contradictions of capitalist social relations are resolved and explained as actors are variously successful in their struggle to represent themselves and their interests within a discursive field of politics. Conceptualized in this way, all politics are identity politics, as actors struggle to establish and name themselves in order to make new sets of social relationships visible. “Representation of self—that is, a collective identity— involves, among other things, naming oneself, since only an actor with a name is recognizable to others. As a consequence of such naming, social relations become visible and a range of political strategies for sustaining or changing social relations emerges.” (Jenson 1990, 663). As MacLeod observes, “within this perspective, politics is thus as much about conflict over, or acceptance of collective identities about who has a right actually to make claims as it is about distributional conflict between groups and organizations” (MacLeod 1997, 536). While acknowledging that actors face serious structural constraints, Jenson argues that there is agency in the creation of these discourses and norms, and that they do not merely emerge from the needs of capital accumulation.13

Jenson’s theorization of the relationship between structure and agency within the broad framework of the RA provides a productive foundation for analyzing the relationship between discourses and silences about race in coastal Mississippi and the ways in which they articulate with the structural relations of accumulation. Jenson’s analysis directs attention to the ways in

13 Feminists (Deutsche 1991, Morris 1992, Massey 1994) have argued that Harvey (1989), employing a broadly regulationist analysis of the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, mistakenly attributes changing cultural attitudes that characterize the so-called “cultural turn” of post-modernism to a residual effect of changing dynamics of capital accumulation. They argue a more accurate reading would accord feminists, in particular, more agency in their critique of the political possibilities of modernism. See Derickson (2009) for an overview of this debate.
which everyday life, ie planning charrettes, community meetings, or casual exchanges between citizens, all take place and are interpreted within a discursive field that renders such interactions comprehensible. This discursive field, made up of cultural norms and shaped as actors struggle to represent themselves and their interests, is the place where the social contradictions of capitalism (eg, labor market stratification as explored by Bakshi et al 1995) are explained or rationalized. For example, in Mississippi after Katrina, discourses about who behaved “irresponsibly” by failing to carry wind insurance operate to explain the uneven distribution of limited recovery funds. Importantly, however, and contra Barnett’s (2005) reading, this social world is not understood a residual effect of the regime of accumulation, but rather a realm in which actors have some agency to engage in politics. While Jenson argues that all is not possible and actors face serious structural limitations, the discursive field of politics, as conceptualized by Jenson, holds meaningful opportunities for political engagement and intervention.

Finally, a more recent engagement with the RA by Purcell (2002) highlights the ways in which the methodological and analytical privileging of economic imperatives in regulation-theoretic analysis continues to influence work on post-Fordism. Purcell calls attention to the way in which the RA’s theoretical commitment to avoiding economic determinism and reductionism is not reflected in most empirical work in the field, with deleterious and politically disabling implications for a conception of the state, in particular. Work in this tradition, he argues, "depicts a state whose principle role is to intervene to mitigate the economic crises of accumulation that are endemic to the capitalist economy” (300), and, in so doing, fails to consider the ways in which the state must maintain legitimacy within civil society. This oversight has two implications. First, it leads to an overly narrow conception of the state in particular, and of the mode of regulation more generally. Second, it has implications for understanding the proper and appropriate site of anti-capitalist political action. Whereas work in the regulation-theoretic tradition seems to tacitly assume (based on its undertheorization of the state) that the ultimate goal of the state is to ensure the survival of capitalist social relations, it ultimately renders the state an inappropriate target for anti-capitalist politics.

Thus, a handful of engagements with the RA have sought to answer the empirical question that regulation-theoretic work has proposed but seldom empirically investigated regarding the social relationships, discourses, and cultural politics that not only explain the contradictions of capitalism and its uneven development, but enable, in part, the reproduction of capitalist social relations. The engagements with the fundamental principles of the RA outlined above do not necessarily transform its theoretical contours, but rather further develop nascent, if neglected, ideas about the embedded, social nature of the economy.

Other engagements with the RA have sought to further develop the concept of the mode of social regulation as a local, variegated and regionally specific phenomenon (Peck and Tickell 1992; Painter and Goodwin 1995; Peck and Tickell 1995a; Wilson, B 2002). While the nation-state may have been the most relevant scale for the organization of economic activity during Fordism, empirical work on the post-Fordist period has shown that both the local and the global scale have increasingly become relevant scales at which economic regulation is enacted through local

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14 “Regulation” is used here in the RA conception of the term as “regularization” of capitalist social relations, as opposed to a juridico-political conception of the term.
states and international finance institutions (Swyngedouw 1996; 1997; Brenner and Theodore 2002a; Peck and Tickell 2002; Brenner 2004).

As Peck and Tickell (1992) point out, the RA’s methodological and epistemological focus on the scale of the nation state means that it is unable to explain uneven development at the subnational scale. They explore the ways in which regional or local modes of social regulation might arise with respect to labor market geographies and various regulatory practices. Yet while they include culture and politics in their schematic representation of the various scales at which the mode of social regulation may operate, and include gender norms as one such example, their subsequent case study of Thatcherism is directed more toward labor politics, and does not explore the role of race or gender.

As B. Wilson (2002) has argued, cultural norms and practices will vary in important ways from region to region. He uses the phrase “race-connected practices” to get at the ways in which race is implicated in a host of social relationships that, in turn, articulate with accumulation practices. These articulations, he argues, will vary in important ways across regions. “The institutionalization of race-connected practices as a mode of social regulation does not remain unchanged across regions, just as the practices themselves do not remain unchanged across time” (Wilson, B 2002, 189). Thus, while the previous attempt at incorporating race and gender relations in to a conception of the mode of regulation by Bakshi et al (1995) is a productive starting point, more work needs to be done to explore the ways in which they vary from region to region, and the implications therein for anti-capitalist politics.

Finally, conceptualizing the mode of social regulation as a process, rather than an end-state or settled set of relationships, allows for a more nuanced conception of spatial and temporal variability. As Painter and Goodwin argue (1995) argue, “since regulatory processes are the product of social practices, they must be understood in relation to the concrete contexts of practice” (342). At any given moment there will be sites of resistance and disruption as well as sites of regulation, they argue. Thus, it is essential to ground an analysis of social regulation – ie, the norms, habits, and cultural politics that secure the reproduction of capitalism – in places, and to examine the ways in which the potential to resist, disrupt, or regularize capitalist social relations varies over time and across spaces.

In sum, since the articulation of “first generation” RA principles, a handful of compelling interventions have been made to arrive at a more refined theorization of the nature and content of the mode of social regulation that are useful for understanding cultural politics at the local scale. Despite these theoretical interventions, there is a dearth of studies that explicitly work within the RA framework to empirically investigate the cultural and political aspects of the local mode of social regulation and the way in which it articulates with accumulation practices to enable capital accumulation. As Purcell (2002) has argued with respect to the state, this methodological oversight forecloses both the theorization and the empirical identification of opportunities for oppositional politics. This study synthesizes the interventions outlined above to develop a framework for the exploration of the ways in which processes of accumulation are embedded in localized social relations and cultural politics.
2.4 Neoliberal regulation

The general principles of the RA have significantly influenced scholarship in economic and urban geography (Purcell 2002). In the early 1990s, this work engaged with RA on its own terms, particularly as it tried to apprehend the characteristics and dynamics of the crisis of Fordism and newly emergent institutional and regulatory relationships (Harvey 1989a; Peck and Tickell 1992; Tickell and Peck 1992; Amin 1994; Painter and Goodwin 1995; Peck and Tickell 1995a; b; MacLeod 1997). By the late 1990s, however, many concerned with the ontological and epistemological questions relating to the RA specifically had turned their attention to the ways in which the ideology of neoliberalism, popularized by Friedman, Hayeck, and the Chicago School, was not only influencing policy decisions of the Regan and Thatcher governments, but also transforming and rescaling the relationship between the state, civil society, and the market much more widely. This work sought to identify the ways which the Fordist compromise and the social safety net were being dismantled and market logic was increasingly shaping state practices and serving as a normative, ideological foundation shaping social life more generally. Initial engagements in critical geography with neoliberalism focused on urban governance, politics, and social service provision (Castree 2006), but subsequent work has expanded in recent years to include nature-society relations and the management of the natural environment (see edited volume Heynen et al. 2007).

In substantive ways, work on neoliberalism in the political economic tradition in geography draws heavily on principles of the RA insofar as it attempts to understand the economy in its integral sense, explore the qualitative nature of institutional change, and identify discernable periods of capitalist accumulation. Initial research by Peck and Tickell (1992) and others (see for example Harvey 1989a) suggested flexible accumulation might be understood as a possible regime of accumulation that emerged after Fordism. Yet as Peck and Tickell argued in 1992, a crisis of Fordism represented not only a crisis of accumulation, but a crisis of regulation as well, and as of 1992, few were clear on what the regulation of the post-Fordist economy might look like (but see Harvey 1989a).

What has emerged from analysis in this tradition is a conception of neoliberalization as an inherently unstable process of state restructuring, rather than neoliberalism as stable period of accumulation and a clear successor to Fordism. Yet, while neoliberalism may not signal a relatively long, stable period of capital accumulation or a coupling of a coherent regime of accumulation and mode of social regulation, there are clearly institutional relationships, evolving social and cultural norms, and so forth that have, over the past 30 years, temporarily enabled dramatic shifts in the accumulation process. While they may not endure the way Fordist relationships did such that they ought to be understood in the strictest sense as a coupling of the a regime of accumulation and a mode of social regulation, there is analytical and political value in attempting to understand the relationship between accumulation and regulation in the recent past and present. Further, the questions that the regulation approach sets out to ask and the tools that subsequent interventions have developed to understand the economy in its embedded, integral sense are still relevant and applicable for shaping an investigation into the operation and reproduction of capitalist social relations during this relatively long period of instability.

As Purcell (2002) has pointed out, however, work in the RA tradition on neoliberalism and neoliberalization continues to replicate the privileging of the economic over the political. For
example, Brenner and Theodore (2002a) draw heavily on RA principles in their introductory chapter in a widely-cited volume on the relationship between neoliberalism and the scale of the city. Their analysis shows that while neoliberal projects have failed to establish a “coherent basis for sustainable capitalist growth,” they have nevertheless profoundly reworked the Fordist-Keynesian institutional infrastructure, and they attempt to discern the ways in which neoliberal initiatives have been articulated along with “closely intertwined strategies of crisis displacement and crisis management” (351). Yet, while their analysis turns largely on the what they identify as the ways in which capitalist regulation occurs as “systems of rules, habits, norms and compromises are established within particular institutions, thereby embedding these conflictual social relations with relatively stabilized, routinized, and sustainable spatio-temporal frameworks,” cultural politics is notably absent from their analysis or their methodological premises.

While much of the work in the RA tradition tends to focus on the transformation of politico-institutional relationships that are constantly evolving and characterize the dynamic and unstable nature of capital accumulation in neoliberalism, quite a bit of work that has been less directly influenced by the RA has focused on the transformations of political and cultural relationships. There is an extensive body of work that shows the way in which emergent subjectivities, identities, and political engagements articulate with the decline of the welfare state and the ubiquity of market rule (see edited volumes Kingfisher 2002; Laurie and Bondi 2005). For example, Kingfisher (2002) conceptualizes neoliberalism as an “approach to the world, which includes in its purview not only economics, but also politics; not only the public, but also the private; not only what kinds of institutions we should have, but also what kinds of subjects we should be” (13). Kingfisher shows the ways in which the hegemony of neoliberal ideology and its inherent individualism have transformed the delivery of social services. The neoliberal “regime of the self” privileges a responsible, self-sufficient, and autonomous individual. “In its hypervalorization of the ‘individual,’ neoliberalism works to erase all negative and ‘undeserving’ forms of dependency” (27). As a result, poor women and others who depend on the social welfare system are seen as problematic, rather than the systemic or structural relations that produce gendered and racialized poverty. Social service delivery thus becomes concerned with reforming the recipient, rather than reforming the system. Further work by Larner (2000; 2003; 2007), Rocheleau (2007) and others have effectively argued that neoliberalization entails a changing conception of the subject of governance from that of a citizen-subject to that of a client or consumer.

These changing conceptions of the relationship between citizens and the state pervade what Jenson (1993) calls the universe of political discourse more generally. As a result, the individualism that underpins neoliberal ideology weakens group identity-based claims. Group identity and relationships among neoliberal subjects are understood as chosen in a non-coercive environment, rather than determined by exogenous forces, as structuralists often argue (Patterson 2005). The grounds upon which social injustices and class disparities can be contested are thus diminished, and the power of claims based on difference decreased (Gough 2002). But as the case below demonstrates, while the salience of identity based claims in the context of neoliberal regulation may be delegitimized, the consequences of identity-based difference – specifically in this case along racial lines – does not diminish. Thus, while cultural and systemic social
relations are still organized along race and class lines, it is difficult for actors to make claims regarding systemic racism in the discursive field of politics.

The work of Kingfisher, Larner, and others establishes how social norms, identities and subjectivities have been reworked by drawing on neoliberal ideology in ways that articulate with the dismantling of the welfare state and transformation of institutions that have been the focus of work in the RA tradition. One potential stumbling block for the smooth incorporation of work on transforming conceptions of the subject into a conception of social regulation is that much of the work in this tradition has employed a Foucauldian conception of power, particularly his concept of governmentality, to explore the intersection of neoliberal ideology and the evolving relationship between the state, the market, and civil society. Indeed, the relative lack of theoretical coherence in the critical geography literature specifically and in the social sciences more broadly has been widely lamented and powerfully critiqued from a variety of sources (Larner 2003; Barnett 2005; Castree 2006; Ferguson 2009).

Barnett (2005) has offered a particularly trenchant critique of the ways in which Marxist and Foucauldian thought have influenced one another and, in some instances, become integrated in analyses of neoliberalism in critical geography. His critique turns on two main points. First, he argues that Marxian and Foucauldian theories are fundamentally incompatible, and as a result, work that attempts to integrate them is theoretically inconsistent. Marxism and post-structuralist Foucauldian approaches, he argues, “imply different models of the nature of explanatory concepts; different models of causality and determination; different models of social relations and agency; and different normative understandings of political power” (8). Yet Larner (2000), MacKinnon (2000), and others have found a comfortable synergy between Foucauldian conceptions of power and neo-Marxist theories of the state and capital accumulation. MacKinnon, for example, draws on Jessop’s (1990) work in the neo-Gramscian tradition and Foucault’s (1977) capillary notion of power. In Jessop’s neo-Gramscian notion of the state, there is no substantive unity that comprises the state. Rather, the state is only realized through state projects. In this respect, MacKinnon argues, there is a direct correlation with a Foucauldian conception of power and the neo-Gramscian “emphasis on how hegemonic projects are channeled through complex ensembles of institutions that are dispersed throughout civil society” (2000, 297 emphasis in the original). As Sparke (2006) argues, such a combination can call attention to precisely the ways in which economic policy – he uses NAFTA as an example – can both impose and introduce a market logic to multiple places. Further, a capillary notion of power enables new conceptions of resistance to, and reworkings of, neoliberalism. “Bringing together an attention to market-mediated subjectivity formation with a more Marxian examination of economic transformation is not therefore necessarily doomed to creating politically paralyzing pictures of inevitable social shifts ensuing from inevitable economic shifts in regimes of accumulation” (Sparke 2006, 358).

The second point on which Barnett’s critique turns is that Marxian-inspired work in the RA tradition tends to view the social world as a residual result of the implementation of neoliberal hegemony, eliding the relationship between politics and the economy and avoiding difficult questions regarding agency. It is true that much work in this tradition has tended to privilege the economic over the political and failed to explore the role of state or cultural politics. As I argue above, however, this is not a result of inherent theoretical blind spots in the RA tradition as much
as it is an empirical and methodological oversight. Analysis proceeding from the ontological foundations of the RA can accommodate a conception of agency and politics, and the RA’s conceptualization of the mode of social regulation and its correspondence to the regime of accumulation as a result of political struggle further calls attention to, and provides an underdeveloped opening for, an exploration of what Barnett (2005) refers to as “the pro-active role of socio-cultural processes in provoking changes in modes of governance” (10).

Barnett is correct, however, about the theoretical eclecticism that characterizes much work in critical geography on neoliberalism. Because the concept has become discussed on its own terms, without being grounded in any coherent body of theory, neoliberalism has become a “rascal concept” (Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010), often invoked uncritically. Further, it has become the apparent subject of a proliferation of studies of all manner of social relations, state process, and accumulation practices unfolding at a variety of scales (Castree 2006; Ferguson 2009), making it particularly difficult to integrate findings and further develop a rich, theoretically consistent theory of neoliberalization in its economic, institutional, and cultural manifestations. As I argue above, the RA provides an enabling and theoretically consistent framework for such analysis.

2.5 Neoliberalism urbanism and the cultural politics of land use

RA-inspired work on neoliberalism has grown alongside, and in conversation with, empirically grounded literature documenting a qualitative shift in urban governance strategies over the past thirty years. This work has shown that cities are increasingly laboratories for the roll out of new policies and experimental institutional arrangements as city leaders attempt to cope with new political economic fortunes that have arisen from deindustrialization, the retrenchment of the federal welfare state, and devolution of responsibility for social service provision to the local state (see edited volume Brenner and Theodore 2002b). This work has shown convincingly that the role of the local state has been profoundly re-imagined, characterized by Harvey (1989b) as a shift from a managerialist approach to an entrepreneurial one (see also Jessop and Sum 2000; Ward 2003). One of the strategies local states have employed to address the implications of deindustrialization, devolution, and the retrenchment of the national welfare state has been to turn to real estate development and land speculation to shore up local fortunes (Fainstein 2001; Mitchell 2004; Hackworth 2007). While Fordism was characterized by suburban development and disinvestment in the urban core, cities are increasingly attempting to attract producer services and a new class of worker through downtown gentrification (Hackworth 2007; Wilson, D 2007). Given the sedimentation of socio-economic and cultural politics in the landscape, spatial strategies of this nature have uneven implications for politically and economically vulnerable populations who are finding their previously undesirable neighborhoods newly identified as sites for gentrification in the context of neoliberal urbanism (Mitchell 2004; Hackworth 2007; Lake 2010).

D. Wilson (2007) has shown how narratives about race are implicated in this particular approach to urbanism in the context of post-industrial rust-belt cities in the US. The dominant narrative in these cities shaping redevelopment, he argues, is the “global trope.” According to the “global trope,” cities are entirely vulnerable to the whims and desires of footloose capital, embodied by
the global business “man.” As a result, they must remake their physical spaces in ways that are most amenable to the tastes and preferences of the global business class. This trope has particular implications for the downtowns of rust-belt cities, which are newly imagined as potential sites of luxury development, stymied only by their “downtrodden” and eroding built environment and racialized inhabitants. “Downtrodden people are set in deteriorated neighborhoods, these neighborhoods sit beside eroding downtowns, these downtowns are ringed by tired and declining parks, these parks are inhabited by downtrodden people, and on and on” (Wilson, D 2007, 57). Targeted remaking of the built environment of the city will necessarily require a realigning of scarce resources, D. Wilson argues, meaning some spaces of the city will be left out of redevelopment. Thus, “the uneven development that …growth elites desire requires sculpting and resculpting morally uneven cityscapes of the imagination. Withdrawal of public support and resources from areas to concentrate them elsewhere, simply stated, requires a maligning of such areas” (59).

In the context of Vancouver, with a much different racial and political history than US rust belt cities, Mitchell (2004) shows how neoliberal approaches to urban development attempt to elide racial difference and produce space as undifferentiated to facilitate gentrification driven by investments from Hong Kong. To accomplish this, the space of the city was discursively constructed as “pure exchange value – spaceless and free-flowing, without inherent political meaning” (2004, 44).

While the geographies of the global trope that D. Wilson identifies and the race relations of Vancouver do not map on to the Coastal Mississippi case precisely, the work above does call attention to the regionally specific ways in which discourses and silences about race articulate with neoliberal urbanism in different places. As I show below, the post-Katrina redevelopment process has turned, in part, on twin narratives of the vulnerability of the region to footloose capital, and the unworthiness and undesirability of certain groups of people. These narratives are deployed in the context of a discursive field influenced by the neoliberal ideology of individualism and the de-politicization of both the structural relations that produce these uneven geographies and the disparate implications of redevelopment for low-income people of color in the region.

While labor relations have historically been the main concern of analysis in the RA tradition (Jessop, Peck and Tickell 1999), I argue that land use politics are also relevant due to the ways in which they are deeply entwined with the geographies of the labor pool, the production of relative surplus value, and class politics. The ways in which land use politics influence the geographies of the labor pool are relatively straightforward; the availability, accessibility, and affordability of housing in reasonable proximity to work has long been a central concern of capitalists seeking to secure access to a pool of workers. The affordability of housing and associated goods necessary for social reproduction is also important for capitalists insofar as low-cost housing can produce relative surplus value. When the prices and values of material goods and services decrease, the value of labor power is decreased, resulting in relative surplus value for capitalists (Marx 1990; Harvey 2007 [1982]). As Harvey (2007 [1982]) has argued, however, driving down the cost of wage goods in a systemic way is beyond the capacity of individual capitalists. Thus, a “class strategy of some sort,” subsidies for housing, for example, is required if this form of relative surplus value is to be manifested as capital accumulation (31). As a result, capitalists are
particularly interested in organizing as a class to promote policies that provide subsidies that create low-cost housing for workers. Skyrocketing insurance costs and a lack of available housing after Katrina prompted business leaders in coastal Mississippi to actively organize on a number of fronts to develop and promote policies that would both provide housing subsidies from the state and federal government to low- and middle-wage workers, as well as to promote land use policies that would facilitate the development of subsidized housing.\textsuperscript{15} These efforts were intended to “bridge the gap” between wages in the area and the cost of housing.\textsuperscript{17} Commutes and associated transportation infrastructure are also relevant for the production of relative surplus value insofar as travel to work and its associated costs are an element of the process of social reproduction. Thus, the land use politics associated with the development of housing and transportation infrastructure are fundamental to the relationship between capital and labor.

Further, land use politics often turn on confrontations between use values (ie, the costs and practices of social reproduction, including quality of life, affordable housing and neighborhood stability) versus exchange values (ie, the promotion of economic development, the facilitation of capital accumulation and job creation) (Molotch 1976; Logan and Molotch 1987), and the proper role of the state in mediating these struggles. In other words, land use politics represent a sphere of politics beyond the shop floor in which struggles between capital and labor occur, as capitalist attempt to maximize the exchange value of the built environment, while labor attempts to protect use values, and both classes lobby the state for the realization of their own interests.

As Sparke (2006) has argued, “we…need to examine the multiple ways in which neoliberal class projects of ‘upward redistribution’ are underpinned by projects of racial and sexual coding and control” (2006, 359). The analysis above establishes a framework for a localized investigation of the relationship between cultural politics and neoliberal accumulation, and the relevance of land use politics therein. In the following section, I apply this framework to explore the role of racial politics in the cities of Biloxi and Gulfport, Mississippi as city leaders and boosters attempt to implement neoliberal recovery processes in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. I show how discourses and silences about race serve to justify the uneven geographies of recovery and state spending that enable the implementation of neoliberal visions for the cities. I conclude by considering the political implications of these findings.

2.6 Economic development and recovery in Biloxi and Gulfport, Mississippi
The story of the city of Biloxi’s near total orientation toward commercial casino development and luxury tourist amenities will be familiar to observers of urban political economy over the last 30 years. In the early 1990s, the city of Biloxi was broke. The seafood processing and

\textsuperscript{15} The Gulf Coast Business Council, a regional organization of the area’s largest employers, and an influential organization with direct ties to the Governor, established the REACH Mississippi program to promote land development practices and funnel housing subsidies to low- to moderate-income residents and “bridge the gap” between the cost of housing in the region and wages. That program has since been replaced by a similar program called “My home, my coast” \url{http://www.msgcrc.com/loan_program.html} accessed 6/15/2010.

\textsuperscript{16} These efforts meant that social justice advocates and business leaders were often working side by side to combat “NIMBYism” regarding the location of affordable housing after the storm. “NIMBY” stands for “not in my backyard” and refers to the tendency for residents to organize against the siting of various uses they consider undesirable in proximity to their own neighborhoods.

\textsuperscript{17} \url{http://www.msgcrc.com/loan_program.html} accessed 6/15/2010
shrimping industry had bottomed out due to competition from imports and new environmental regulations (Durrenberger 1996). When the state legislature approved casino gaming in the early 1990s, the city jumped on the gaming bandwagon with gusto as a way to climb out of recession (Herrmann 2006). Biloxi boosters saw an opportunity to remake their waterfront, characterized by obsolete canneries and seafood industry infrastructure, into a luxury gaming hotspot. By the time Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005 there were nine major casinos and the city was in the midst of what the mayor called an “urban renaissance.” Due to state-imposed regulations that required casino gaming facilities to float on navigable water, the casinos were largely confined to the peninsula of the city, and ringed the low-income and largely African American neighborhood of East Biloxi (see Figure 2.2). During the transition from an industrial seafood town to a casino gaming hotspot, the built environment was profoundly remade, from a productivist landscape of seafood processing into a consumptive landscape designed to facilitate casino gaming and tourist activities.

During that same time period, Gulfport pursued a different approach to economic development and attempted to capitalize on existing infrastructure to substantially increase its role in global transportation and distribution networks. Its assets included the State Port of Gulfport, an international airport, and a large industrial park with access to the Gulf (see Figure 2.1); improvements to and expanded uses of all of these, along with the aggressive pursuit of big box retail, were the cornerstone of Gulfport’s economic development strategy. As in Biloxi, the city’s redevelopment strategy had begun to encroach on low income neighborhoods of color in the city, most notably the small, historic neighborhoods of Turkey Creek and Soria City. After Katrina this encroachment became more intense, as plans to redevelop the port with 600 million dollars of recovery funds included efforts to gentrify the downtown and expand the airport.

In each case, these cities have attempted to manage their fortunes and respond to the political economic realities that have come to characterize the neoliberal period, including changing geographies of production and shifting ideas about the proper role of local government (Harvey 1989b). These efforts have been inherently spatial projects insofar as they attempt to reconfigure the city in order to realize their visions. But private property norms and laws mean that city leaders cannot usually merely assert their will on the space of the city, even after a devastating storm like Katrina. Instead, in Gulfport and Biloxi, MS, the material space necessary to remake the built environment in ways more amenable to the political economic realities of neoliberal urban governance has been created through disinvestment in poor neighborhoods of color. That disinvestment, in turn, has, in part, drawn on pernicious notions of ‘responsibility’ and ‘irresponsibility’ as well as the alleged pathologies of low-income people of color. legitimized through notions of the alleged pathologies of race and poverty. This process has been particularly acute in the wake of Katrina, as settled land use configurations have been profoundly disrupted, new plans for the city have been crafted and debated, and state funds have poured in to the region.

After Katrina, the city of Biloxi’s orientation toward casino-led tourism as the economic base of the city intensified. Immediately following the storm, the state passed a law that allowed casinos

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18 Of course, cities do have some legal tools, specifically eminent domain, to obtain private land and assemble parcels for development. While city officials in Biloxi and Gulfport articulated an interest in assembling parcels for development through the use of eminent domain in interviews, they considered it too politically unpopular.
to move onshore but required that they remain within a short distance from the coastline in order to ensure that the previous geographies of gaming stayed largely intact. While discussing plans to recover from the storm, city officials and boosters often asserted that the casinos were the “economic engine” of the city, both in interviews and in public meetings. This emphasis on casino-led development was reflected in a planning document primarily funded by casinos and eventually adopted by the city council (Moving Forward 2006, see also A Reconstruction Plan 2005). This document also reflected the oft-repeated notion that some parts of the city were now a “blank slate.” The neighborhood of East Biloxi, in particular, has been targeted for high rise casino development and luxury condominiums to support the casino industry. Renderings in this plan show high rise condominiums and a new “central park” where, prior to the storm, single family homes made up a vibrant Vietnamese neighborhood and the historic center of African American life in the city (see Figure 5).

The targeting of East Biloxi for casino-related amenities is encapsulated in the following “vision” which guided the planning process and around which the plan for the neighborhood was organized:

“An East Biloxi in which a thriving tourist industry creates the economic basis for a vibrant local community whose look and feel are rooted in the city’s historic character. The special combination of hotels, casinos, and other resort attractions and unique and authentic local character will, in turn, set East Biloxi apart from other Gulf Coast and casino resort areas. The gaming industry and local residents will thus realize maximum mutual benefit” (Moving Forward 2006).

This plan and its vision highlight the extent to which the recovery of the local community has been expected to occur secondarily to the recovery of the casino industry, and in a way that provides “local color” or “culture” that differentiates the region from other gaming options.

Interviews with city officials confirmed that this has been the prevailing vision for that neighborhood, as demonstrated by the following quote:

“Now, what we envision happening over the next several years is that with the new flood regulations, the new flood maps that we’re going to be forced to adopt, what we see happening is that in the lower area of town, which is the east end, we see certainly the areas around the peninsula nearest the storm surge being heavy commercial: casino, condo, possibly apartment, but heavy commercial because those are some of the only type of projects that can work well within a flood zone” (Biloxi city official, interview).

Residents of East Biloxi have accused the city of actively disinvesting in their neighborhood in order to make it undesirable or difficult for residents to rebuild, thereby creating space to remake the peninsula in the image outlined in the planning documents. The following quote from an interview with an East Biloxi resident summarizes this point of view.

“[Residents of East Biloxi are] being targeted and obstacles are being thrown in their way that will not allow them to recover. Which works to the plans that have
been developed, primarily by the city in terms of looking at this land and saying, well, we think this land would be better suited for condominium development, this land would be better suited for multi-family development, parks or whatever, and this is the plan we want to implement. Well, the city owns none of the land. So what happens is, you create enough hurdles, people can’t recover. They can’t recover then, of course now the land is up for grabs. Because what happens is, people got to have a place to live, and if they can’t live on that site they’ve got to try and find someplace. At that point, you can come in and get the land…” (Biloxi activist, interview).

In Gulfport, proposals for remaking the built environment have focused on the expansion and redevelopment of the State Port at the edge of the city’s downtown area (see Figure 2.2). Planners and port officials frequently invoke Charleston, South Carolina as a model for their vision of the relationship between the adjacent land and the city’s port, and the way in which the redevelopment of the port might catalyze a major transformation in the city as a whole. The original proposal for the expansion of the port entailed both a port connector road which, at present, is still scheduled to move forward, and an inland port, which was eventually scrapped. As planned, both disproportionately impacted neighborhoods of color. The inland port, a space for storing shipping containers on a short term basis, was proposed for North Gulfport, one of the poorest African American neighborhoods in the city. The port connector road, which will connect Interstate 10 and the port, will cut through the Turkey Creek watershed, requiring a 162 acre wetland fill (Mississippi Business Journal 2010). Residents of the neighborhood are strongly opposed to the road as it has been proposed, arguing it will dramatically impact drainage and flooding in their neighborhood. Finally, in an attempt to increase the capacity of the port, the international airport, also adjacent to the neighborhoods of Turkey Creek and North Gulfport, will undergo an expansion. While expensive mitigation for the impact of airport traffic has been made for wealthier areas south of the airport, according to an interview with the airport officials, nothing has been done to mitigate in the Turkey Creek neighborhood, despite its proximity to the airport (see Figure 2.1).

These proposed reconfigurations of the built environment have assigned new value to the neighborhoods of Turkey Creek and North Gulfport, both low-income, predominantly African American neighborhoods, as they now occupy land that is either targeted for alternative uses or is adjacent to proposed major industrial expansion. As one interviewee active in city politics explains:

“What was traditionally not valuable property where the African American communities were is now valuable property because of development. Like Turkey Creek is affected by .. we haven’t even talked about the airport yet. See, that’s going to be an international trade center, little by little will be encroaching on Turkey Creek. Well, that, you know, everybody thought Turkey Creek was not worth anything, but now it is because that’s where they want to move. It’s the same thing with the inland port. A lot of the properties that were just dismissed are now valuable for development” (Gulfport activist, interview).
Another historic African American neighborhood, Soria City, sits in the midst of a proposed redevelopment plan for Gulfport (see Figure 2.1). Originally established to provide housing for domestic help in close proximity to stately homes along the waterfront, Soria City now sits in the midst of a downtown redevelopment plan and adjacent to the proposed expansion of the port property. Neighborhood leaders are particularly concerned about their ability to retain the character and cultural continuity of the neighborhood in light of the growing number of tax-delinquent properties in the neighborhood and the proximity of the port, which is expected to eventually catalyze gentrification in the area.

Residents of Soria City believe that the city intends to tear down their neighborhood in order to make space for downtown gentrification and redevelopment. One resident articulated her concern that the financial and political vulnerability of residents would be exploited so that the city could realize its vision of a gentrified downtown:

“Because the thing is, now this is owned, by the lady is like 89 or something years old on fixed income. So, since the storm, she can’t afford to fix this up, and wasn’t able to qualify for any of the grant monies. And so the city is going to come along and condemn it, and once they condemn it, they have justification to tear it down. That’s what the intent is for this area – tear as much down as possible” (Soria city resident, interview).

As the following quotes from interviews with Soria City residents demonstrate, residents are also keenly aware of the strategic position their neighborhood occupies in the new development scheme:

“But we have to be very cautious and concerned about the development and everything that’s going on around us, from the VA property to downtown. Because, actually, Soria City is part of the downtown area, because basically you can walk there. You walk two blocks south and you’re on the beach. You walk two blocks west you’re downtown. So its an area that we have to preserve” (Soria city resident, interview).

“You see, this area is very important because of the connection that we have with the South Side, with the West Side, because we have 90, we have 49, and then we’re close to the connections on the East Side, so it’s a very important area, where we are. And most people in this community knows that. But guess who else knows it? Those outside, the developers and everyone else” (Soria city resident, interview).

The redevelopment plans outlined above represent attempts by Gulfport and Biloxi to respond to the political economic realities of deindustrialization by acting enacting strategies of place-promotion and entrepreneurial urbanism. Contrary to assertions by some planners and city officials, however, these spatial strategies are not being imposed on a blank slate, but as the preceding section demonstrates, are being imposed upon low-income minority neighborhoods already made vulnerable by the storm. As I show in the following sections, the disproportionate targeting of low-income minority neighborhoods has been enabled, at least in part, through the mutually reinforcing relationship between active state disinvestment and the discursive
construction of these places as undesirable. As the state directs recovery spending in ways that have made it more difficult for these neighborhoods to recover, notions of these places as problematic, undesirable, and in need of a makeover have gained traction in the discursive field of politics. At the same time, notions of the populations of these places as “undeserving” and “irresponsible” have served to justify uneven patterns of recovery spending. As I show below, this process is enabled by discourses that simultaneously draw on notions of the alleged pathologies of low-income people of color, while simultaneously discrediting race as a meaningful category on which to base claims about the storm and the subsequent recovery process.

2.7 Regulation, class, race, and neoliberal urbanism in coastal Mississippi
Documenting, pinpointing, or clearly demonstrating ‘racism’ is not an easy or straightforward empirical task. While the label ‘racism’ is often reserved for intentional, hateful, racially motivated statement or actions, in practice racism can range from overt, violent acts to the subtleties of what Young (1996) calls ‘misrecognition.’ The subtle workings of misrecognition become amplified through institutions, such as school systems, and public policies, such as urban renewal policies which displaced a number of low-income African American neighborhoods in the United States. At the same time, the dramatic and deeply damaging ill effects of sub-par schools for people of color or the decimating of historic communities of color are overlooked due to the ways in which low achievement among student of color or unstable communities of color have become naturalized.

Likewise, the uneven distribution of state resources and their racial contours are similarly rendered invisible through shared ‘common sense’ understandings about wealth, poverty, and rights. In 2007, 72% of whites and 47% of blacks owned homes in the US, while the mortgage tax break represents one of the largest government subsidies, and the largest housing subsidy (Dreier 2005). Despite the fact that the benefits of this and other government redistribution programs then disproportionately accrue to whites, Regan-era rhetoric about the ‘welfare queen’ (Gilliam 1999) and Clinton era efforts to ‘end welfare as we know it’ (Clawson and Trice 2000) drew on racialized conceptions of the poor to argue against ‘government subsidies,’ a discourse which cemented a common-sense notion of low-income people of color drawing off the system.

In order to get at the structural, pervasive, and often unconscious way in which racism works, Pulido (2000) has argued that we need to focus on ‘white privilege’ by directing our attention away from the attempting to indentify hostile and malicious acts, and instead focusing on the ways structural and institutional benefits accrue to some at the expense of others along racial lines. A critical conception of white privilege can then inform what she calls ‘white racism,’ defined as “those practices and ideologies, carried out by structures, institutions and individuals, that reproduce racial inequality and systematically undermine the well-being of racially subordinated populations” (Pulido 2000, 15).

Thus, the empirical identification of racism should not be solely focused on identifying violent or overt acts of intentional racial discrimination or hateful speech (though those certainly still exist and are worthy of empirical investigation). Rather, empirical research on racism and the ways in which race ‘works’ in relation to social processes must be concerned with the mutually reinforcing processes by which benefit and privilege accrue to whites while the effects of mal-
distribution and misrecognition are naturalized in the dominant social discourse. Understanding the relationship between the mode of regulation and racism will entail an investigation of the intersection between discourses about race and the alleged pathologies of racialized subjects and the way in which those articulate with the approach to governance. It is in this sense that ‘racism’ becomes a relevant element of the mode of regulation, in so far as it is at once a cultural norm that works to smooth out the intense contradiction and uneven effects of the neoliberal capitalist regime of accumulation. Following from Pulido’s conception of racism as a pervasive, often unconscious and subtle process that works to privilege whites at the expense, both culturally and economically. I attempt to shed light in this section on some of the ways in which subtle racisms emerged in planning meetings and follow up interviews, as well as the structural and institutional racism emerged articulated with the planning and redevelopment process.

Over the course of three years of observation in coastal Mississippi between 2006 and 2008, I was much more likely to hear discussions about the nature and proclivities of “low income people” than I was to hear outright racist remarks in public. Yet race and class are deeply connected in the region. Prior to Katrina, in Harrison County, which includes both Gulfport and Biloxi, 27 percent of the African American population lived in poverty, compared with 10 percent of the white population. Median household income for white families was $38,353 in 2000, as compared with $29,394 for African American families (Census 2000). Further, neighborhoods associated with low-income and poverty status are also the historic centers of African American life in the region. Thus, when the specter and pathologies of “low income” housing and families are raised, race is implicated as well. One interviewee active in the social justice community in the region explained the ways in which language about income operates as “code” for unspoken attitudes about race:

“White code words tend to be trying to conflate the unstated thing of race with the stated thing which would be economics, it it’ll be, you know, uneducated, law-breaking, don’t-want-to-work, unambitious, lazy, no-account .. you know, all the southern things” (Biloxi activist, interview).

Interviews with white residents suggested an active effort to limit or discredit public discussions regarding the racial contours of life in Mississippi and the recovery effort in general. One very prominent white business leader told me he was part of an informal network of African American ministers and business leaders and white business leaders that would put pressure on people who were, in his words, “inflaming” racial tensions in the region and call them up and ask them to “cool it.” This is representative of a generalized unwillingness by white people in particular to discuss race and racial issues directly.

White interviewees were particularly skeptical that race was a factor in the recovery process. The following quote is representative of the ways in which white residents actively dismissed the relevance of race in influencing the mobilization and distribution of resources:

“But I do think that the media had a big play on that and that they actually turned it in to a race issue, and I remember saying that on the couch at my in-laws, and going, oh god, I hope they don’t turn this in to that. And sure enough, next thing
you know, people are complaining in New Orleans, they’re not helping us because we’re black” (Biloxi resident, interview).

Indeed, the notion that the “storm did not discriminate” was a widely heard refrain after the storm and during the recovery process. Statistics do not bear this out, however. In East Biloxi, for example, 95% of residents earned below federal median income, and 80% of these residents suffered “extensive or catastrophic” damage (Morse 2008). The most heavily African American census tracts in the cities of Gulfport and Biloxi faced surge elevations of 16 – 22 feet.19

Despite the fact that African Americans are disproportionately both poor and likely to have suffered catastrophic damage from Katrina, claims made on these grounds fail to gain traction in the discursive field of politics in the region. As the following quote from an activist in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) demonstrates, attempts to make claims on behalf of people of color are equated with white supremacist claims.

“The name says ‘National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,’ and even some people kind of relate us to the KKK, you know, on the other side of the stream, you know. When they see NAACP, they think KKK” (Biloxi activist, interview).

The interviewee goes on to explain how the tendency to equate all forms of racial politics has had a disciplining effect on the ways in which the NAACP in the region frames issues and targets its activism, emphasizing that they do not only work on behalf of people of color. His comments reflect a tendency in interviews for activists that represent or work on behalf of people of color to express a desire to not be seen as making an overt argument about the systemic ways in which people of color are disadvantaged.

At the same time that structural racism is delegitimized as relevant in the discursive sphere of politics, in some neighborhoods, race, space, and undesirability are elided in ways that influence perceptions of desirability of both places and their populations. East Biloxi, the historic center of African American life in the city and home to the highest concentration of African American residents, was often cast as a problematic place in interviews with residents and public meetings on post-Katrina redevelopment. In a series of three planning charettes, subtle but persistent notions of East Biloxi as both racialized and undesirable emerged. In these meetings, residents were particularly aware of the slow pace of recovery in East Biloxi and the need to house low-income people in affordable housing in other parts of the city. A concern about where those residents might be housed on a permanent basis motivated much of the discussion at these planning charettes.

One of the three charettes was held in Woolmarket, the rural area to the north of the city that was annexed against the wishes of many residents in the early 1990s. The area is largely white, and there were no people of color present at this meeting. During this meeting, there were strong and

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19 There is an extensive literature on the role of race and class in vulnerability to hazards, but as Cutter, Boruff, and Shirley (2003) have argued, this literature largely fails to seriously consider the ways in which the uneven nature of vulnerability is socially produced (but see Liverman 1990, Davis 1998).
pervasive overtones in conversations that suggested residents saw themselves and their neighborhoods as different from residents in East Biloxi in important ways. Race was seldom referred to directly, though it clearly operated under the surface. After a long discussion about the dangers of high density and the threats that density posed to residents after a hurricane, one resident proclaimed:

“We like diversity but it should stay below I-10 [a reference to the location of East Biloxi]” (Woolmarket resident, public meeting).

Other participants did not flinch or openly reject this statement, and many nodded in agreement. From this exchange, it was clear that race was a largely unspoken specter. Other comments made throughout the events reflected a strong concern regarding density infiltrating the area and the types of people that inhabit dense, low-cost housing. These comments reflected the negative attitudes directed toward residents of East Biloxi that, while not overtly racial in nature, map on to pervasive ideas about urban poverty that interviews with activists in the region confirm stand in for overt racism.

Follow up interviews with participants further revealed the ways in which race and space were co-implicated for residents. For example, one Woolmarket resident stated in an interview that the key to Mississippi’s success as compared to that of Louisiana in recovering from the storm was that even though MS has many African Americans, they aren’t as “densely concentrated” He went on to say that the lack of concentrated black neighborhoods was a strength of the region: “we used to kinda have pockets and concentrations of blacks here, and whites there, but it was pretty mixed up.”

Another charette was held in the Western portion of the city, where neighborhoods are slightly more diverse, but overall and as compared to East Biloxi, are largely white and middle class. At this meeting, East Biloxi was identified as too dense and a place where problems “grow like a cancer that spreads out.” Another participant described East Biloxi as a place where “problems” tend to “fester.”

This negative characterization of East Biloxi exemplifies the ways in which African American neighborhoods in the region are depicted in both in public meetings as well as in interviews. A resident of Soria City explained in an interview that she and her fellow residents struggle to reframe their neighborhood as a positive place, worthy of investment and rebuilding:

“You know, every time we basically are, unless it’s the organization, or a few of the communities, you hear a lot of negative things going on, and you know there are some negative things, just like other communities. But we don’t want to be looked at as only negativity, because we have a lot of positive things, you know, and we have a lot of history” (Soria City resident, interview).

Thus, while these quotes only suggest very subtle ways in which attitudes about places are racialized, these subtleties were present throughout community meetings and one-on-one interviews. Poor neighborhoods of color were present throughout community meetings and one-on-one interviews. Poor neighborhoods of color were consistently, if in veiled ways, deemed undesirable and problematic – places where problems ‘fester’ as a result of their populations and
their density. These negative perceptions shaped the ways in which residents engaged politically in the redevelopment process, influencing their attitudes toward what would constitute a desirable redevelopment process. These subtle but pervasive attitudes work to discursively render these spaces and their inhabitants undesirable. In so doing, they both justify as well as explain the structural and institutional disinvestment facilitated by the state and outlined in the following section.

2.8 The revanchist neoliberal state
As Pulido (2000) has argued, a conception of racism and white privilege is better apprehended by investigating the structural and institutional processes by which benefits accrue to whites in ways that systematically undermine the well-being of people of color. In this section, I argue that the specific policies that characterized the recovery process in Mississippi in the wake of Hurricane Katrina had the effect of directing resources away from low-income communities in general, which has had a disproportionate impact in poor neighborhoods of color insofar as the poor are disproportionately Black in Mississippi. While these neighborhoods have been discursively produced as problematic places, the state has actively disinvested in these neighborhoods by directing Hurricane recovery spending elsewhere. Spending has largely been directed toward supply-side interventions and geared at economic growth and development, with profound implications for poor residents of color and their neighborhoods.

Immediately following Hurricane Katrina, Mississippi was frequently compared favorably to Louisiana for its rapid recovery. Exercising his wide authority to allocate federal dollars, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour channeled funds in ways that specifically targeted economic development and recovery. His administration received a series of waivers for the low-income requirement attached to most funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the federal agency that oversaw the disbursement of most of the recovery dollars. As a result, as of 2008, only 13 percent of Mississippi’s spending had benefited low-income Mississippians, whereas 54 percent of Louisiana’s spending had been directed toward low-income residents in that state (Justice 2008).

Four key decisions with serious implications for low-income neighborhoods of color characterized the overall nature of recovery spending in Mississippi. The first was state legislation prompted by Governor Barbour and enacted immediately after the storm to permit casinos to develop on-shore gaming facilities for the first time. The new legislation no longer required the casino floor to be floating on water, but continued to limit the location of casinos to within 800 feet of the high tide line, effectively ensuring that the pre-storm geographies of casinos would be recreated. This decision emboldened the casino industry, and casinos bought up land to expand and rebuild, prompting intense land speculation on the peninsula and slowing the pace of recovery by creating uncertainty about the neighborhood’s future. According to interviewees, some residents delayed rebuilding their homes, hoping for large paydays from casinos seeking to buy up land, while other small-scale speculators bought up land and attempted to assemble parcels to sell to casinos and luxury condominium developers. This flurry of speculation overheated the market on the peninsula for over a year after the storm, making it difficult for nonprofit housing organizations to obtain low-cost land to develop affordable housing and contributing to a spotty landscape of vacant lots adjacent to rebuilt homes. This
created uncertainty about the future of the neighborhood, which was exacerbated by plans approved by the city to remake East Biloxi as a luxury gaming site for tourists.

The second was a decision early on by Governor Barbour not to provide assistance to homeowners with wind-damaged homes who were not carrying wind insurance. To do so, Barbour stated, would be to “bailout” homeowners that had been “irresponsible” in choosing not to purchase wind insurance (Brady 2007). This decision has left over 7,300 households with substantial wind damage without assistance (Justice 2008). This has disproportionately affected low income homeowners who had failed to carry wind insurance because they could not afford it, and largely left them out of the recovery effort and unable to avail themselves of federal recovery dollars (Justice 2008). Louisiana did not impose the same restrictions.

A third decision Governor Barbour made was to allocate $600 million of the federal funds from HUD, which many understood to be intended for housing, to the reconstruction and renovation of the State Port of Gulfport under the guise of job creation. Yet another waiver had to be obtained to override the HUD-imposed spending limit of $35,000 per permanent job created. The $600 million port project is projected to create 1,300 permanent jobs, costing $451,538 per permanent job created (Justice 2008). Housing advocates and social justice advocates have rallied tirelessly against this spending, arguing that it is a direct diversion of funds intended by the federal government for housing to an economic development opportunity that would have a proportionately small impact in relation to the dollars spent.

A final decision of note was the allocation of much of the funding for building rental capacity to large-scale developers through new construction of high rise, dense apartment complexes, in spite of the fact that most Mississippi renters lived in low density complexes or single family homes prior to the storm. Many small rental units were not eligible for recovery funds, and what was available also went to new construction. This has greatly advantaged professional developers who had available capital to invest in new construction over small-scale landlords. Two results are likely to follow from this decision: first, a reorganization of the region’s renters into higher density apartment complexes; and, second, a redistribution of rental properties into the hands of larger developers and property management companies, and away from the small scale rental property owners.

Unlike Louisiana, which has emphasized housing recovery, Mississippi’s recovery spending has focused on infrastructure and economic development. Whereas Louisiana dedicated 78% of its recovery spending toward housing as of 2008, Mississippi directed 49% toward housing and 42% toward economic development. Spending in Mississippi has also been directed toward homeowners and away from renters. In Mississippi, homeowners make up 70% of the population but had, by 2008, received 81% of the housing funds, whereas renters, who make up 30% of the population had received only 20% of the funding (Morse 2008). As a result of the revanchist recovery process, recovery in low lying predominantly minority communities has lagged considerably (Morse 2008).

Thus, the nature of recovery spending and policy in Mississippi is an institutional manifestation of white privilege as conceptualized by Pulido (2000) insofar as spending has been directed away from low income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color. This uneven allocation of
resources is at once masked by pre-existing notions of these spaces as undesirable, unworthy, and irresponsible, while further cementing those notions by failing to promote redevelopment. As I argue above, the conception of these spaces as problematic not only justify or explain the uneven development and redevelopment in the region, but they also do the discursive and material work of opening these spaces up for neoliberal redevelopment.

2.9 Conclusion: Race, regulation and politics
Racialized neighborhood struggles, and the idea that race shapes the landscape and the built environment, are of course not new. Neither is the idea that racial difference explains class stratification and uneven development. What this study contributes is an analysis of the way in which these cultural politics articulate with neoliberal visions for the city by serving as a legitimating narrative for displacement and disinvestment in low-income and black neighborhoods targeted for neoliberal redevelopment along the lines laid out above. Racialized understandings of these places keep them politically weak and vulnerable, leaving them open to the possibilities of being remade in the image of neoliberal urbanism.

When situated within the larger framework of the RA, it becomes possible to explore the ways in which these social and cultural norms and attitudes articulate with neoliberal urban governance specifically to justify, explain and produce particular outcomes from these struggles over land use. Further, when the RA is enhanced by the contributions of Jenson, Bakshi et al, and Purcell, as outlined above, these struggles can be understood as integral to the maintenance of the delicate balance between accumulation and the social relations that secure and regularize capitalist social relations in the context of neoliberal accumulation. While analysis in the RA tradition has often focused on meso-scale interventions in state and institutional practices for the effective contestation of neoliberalism as governing ideology and the neoliberalization of the relationship between the state, civil society, and the market, Bakshi et al have shown how cultural politics and the politicization of racial discrimination and gender norms undermined the Fordist regime of accumulation. If, as I demonstrate, both racialized discourses and processes, and the denial of racial identities or claims as legitimate grounds for critique or analysis, are central to neoliberalism’s regulation in these southern US cities, then even talking about race, and identifying processes as racialized, holds promise to challenge the neoliberal nature of recovery and delegitimize neoliberalism as a social and political economic framework.

Finally, by exploring the ways in which the repurposing of low-income minority neighborhoods is central to the remaking of the built environment to enact a neoliberal approach to redevelopment, the desire of residents in those neighborhoods can be newly understood as resistance. Whereas neighborhood activism is often understood as parochial and inherently conservative (see for example Harvey 1996), efforts to “defend one’s patch” (Massey 2005) in the face of the “blank slate” rhetoric that shaped the region’s approach to redevelopment after the storm by residents of low-income neighborhoods takes on a new political significance. As Mitchell (2006, page 44) has argued, insofar as neoliberal governance attempts to produce spaces as undifferentiated “spaces of spacelessness” to be shaped by the logic of exchange values, attempts to imbue space with political meaning, history, and culture can provide friction to the smooth implementation of neoliberal visions of the city. It is indeed counter-intuitive that attempts to preserve configurations of the built environment that have evolved in the context of racism and capitalist exploitation can be understood as resistance to neoliberalism. I want to
argue, however, that when we consider the underlying social relationships that produce neighborhoods of color, the articulation of a desire to remain in place by residents imbues the space with new meaning. These historic African American neighborhoods often arose along backwaters, on swamplands, and in flood zones, or in places that suited employers, due to a lack of political power and capital on the part of residents (Morse forthcoming). In the wake of the storm, however, residents of these neighborhoods have articulated a strong desire to remain in their neighborhoods in the face of alternative visions promoted by city boosters and capitalists. As such, the impetus to “defend one’s patch” in these neighborhoods can be understood as resistance to the implementation of configurations of the built environment more amenable to neoliberal accumulation.

It is not clear that without these narratives and silences about race that accumulation would not proceed unabated in coastal Mississippi, or find coherence with some other form of social regulation that explains away uneven development and either justifies the targeting of these specific spaces, or remakes the built environment in other ways. While this study cannot claim to identify the linchpin for undermining neoliberal accumulation in coastal Mississippi, what it does do is provide an example of the much discussed but seldom empirically pursued “social norms” and cultural conventions that, in part, comprise social regulation. Having identified some ways that cultural politics around race and land use articulate with neoliberal visions for the city, as well as the ways associated policies implemented by the state institutionalize the vulnerability of neighborhoods of color, more work needs to be done to further flesh out the relationship between these norms and practices and other cultural norms and social relations that operate to regularize neoliberal accumulation. Such work could include an investigation into the relationship between the gendered nature of labor markets in the casino and tourism industries (Wittman 2006) and associated housing and childcare policies that shape the availability of labor. With a more complete understanding of the ways in which cultural politics operate to regularize neoliberal capital accumulation, a stronger case for how to intervene politically can be made.

Further, there is no guarantee that a subsequent accumulation regime would be more desirable from an anti-capitalist, social justice perspective such as the one that motivates this analysis specifically and energizes much work in the RA tradition more generally. Nevertheless, the destabilization of neoliberal accumulation is desirable for two reasons. First, neoliberalism represents a particularly revanchist accumulation regime insofar as it simultaneously directs wealth upward while dismantling the social safety net (Kingfisher 2002; Harvey 2005; Hackworth 2007). Second, as Jenson has argued, new political possibilities, including those that might promote social justice and redistribution, arise in moment of crisis (Jenson 1990).

An analysis of the cultural politics of land use draws our attention to the way in which neoliberalism functions as an ideological, and indeed normative (Brown 2003) framework that discursively produces poor people of color as “irresponsible” “undeserving” and the way in which those discourses articulate with spatial responses to the political economic realities of neoliberalization. In so doing, this study makes three contributions. First, it provides a broad framework for conducting studies of the local manifestations of the ways in which cultural politics explain uneven development within the broad framework of the Regulation Approach. Second, it introduces land use politics as a relevant site of politics in the context of neoliberal urbanism. Third, it provides a theorization of potential political interventions, including the
possibilities of engaging in cultural politics as a meaningful site of contestation of neoliberal urbanism, and explores the way in which rebuilding historic African American neighborhoods can be understood as contesting the implementation of neoliberal visions for the cities of coastal Mississippi.

Figure 2.1 Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi (map by Paulo Raposo)

![Map of Gulfport and Biloxi](image1)

Figure 2.2 Casinos in East Biloxi (map by Paulo Raposo)

![Map of Casinos in East Biloxi](image2)
Figure 2.3 The Imperial Palace resort and casino

Figure 2.4 Advisory Base Flood Elevations
Figure 2.5 Rendering of the future of East Biloxi
CHAPTER THREE: NEOLIBERALISM AND ITS CONTESTATION IN BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI

3.1 Neoliberalism: theory and practice

The project of studying “neoliberalism” in the social sciences generally, and in critical geography more specifically, has arguably had limited reach outside of the academy. While much of this analysis proceeds from a normative critique of capitalism in general, and of the growing social and economic inequality that the neoliberal permutation of capitalism in particular represents, there has been little documented success in translating this critical assessment of actually existing neoliberalism into actually existing anti-neoliberal politics. A sustained engagement with the critical geography literature on neoliberalism leaves little wonder as to why this theoretically dense body of work does not inspire people to take to the streets.

The shifts in approaches to governance documented in this literature are surely deeply felt and keenly observed by activists and residents; that is not the problem. Indeed, in my field research and in everyday engagements with residents and activists alike, I am often taken by the extent to which their “on the ground” analysis and observations resonate with the empirical findings in the literature. But in all those discussions, I have never heard the term “neoliberalism” invoked, never mind the more esoteric concepts ubiquitous in the academic literature, such as “roll back/roll out” “entrepreneurial urbanism,” “glocalization,” “new state spaces,” “neo-Schumpeterian workfare state” and so on.

What to do, then, about the old problem of the gulf between theory and practice? Clearly, the fact that capitalist social relations endure whether or not people are aware of them is no reason to abandon their empirical investigation or theorization. While the debates that swirl around neoliberalism within the critical geography literature may occasionally veer in the direction of the obscure, on the whole this body of theory represents an impressive contribution to our academic understanding of the current material conditions and ideologies shaping life in this current moment of capitalism. The problem, then, is one of connection.

The problem of connecting academic analysis with policy and activism has been a reoccurring theme in radical and critical social science. Potential solutions have included concern with policy relevance (Tickell and Peck 1992; Tickell 1998; Peck 1999), methods of engagement as a public intellectual (e.g., Gramsci’s “organic intellectual” or Bourdieu’s “collective intellectual”), alternative methodologies and research design (Gibson-Graham 1994; Pain 2004; Burawoy 2005), and focusing on the process of knowledge production (Heyman 2007; Derickson 2009). Often, the proposed methods of connection correspond with ontological commitments. Structuralists and critical realists in the Marxist tradition proposing something akin to vanguardism or what Harvey (1996) has called “productive critique,” in which scholars engage with activists in order to assess and analyze their praxis. By contrast, post-structuralists turn to participatory action research and other alternative methodologies that attempt to challenge what they see as a problematic power dynamic between researcher and researched in positivist and structuralist inquiry (Gibson-Graham 1994; Nagar, Lawson, McDowell and Hanson 2002; Pain 2004; Gibson-Graham 2006; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006; see Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010 for a discussion of tensions that can arise in participatory research). Further, work in this tradition is particularly attuned to the power afforded the very processes critical
scholars seek to contest by their discursive production as powerful, totalizing, and global in their reach (Gibson-Graham 1996; Nagar et al 2002; Hart 2004; Leitner et al 2007).

With this article, I am proposing a mode of analysis that holds in productive tension the observations of post-structuralist and feminist inquiry vis-à-vis power relations and the productive nature of discourse, and the powerful insights of structural analysis. In so doing, I use existing scholarship on neoliberalism and neoliberalization of urban governance in the regulation-theoretic tradition as a lens through which to observe and assess actually existing politics. Rather than attempt to either identify or develop a coherent movement of anti-neoliberal activism, this approach instead attempts to identify existing political critiques and engagements that hold promise for unsettling the hegemony of neoliberal ideology as it shapes politics and outcomes in urban governance. This approach is motivated by an attempt to answer Blomley’s (1994) question: “How can we contribute to and learn from progressive struggles without reinforcing the hierarchies of privilege, silencing those with whom we work?” (31). Following from the work of Gibson-Graham and Leitner et al, however, I look not only to self-identified progressive movements, but rather to the broad field of politics around the redevelopment process more generally.

I do not want to overstate what I believe to be the possibilities of the following analysis. It does not represent the kind of sustained engagement that characterizes the work of Gibson-Graham (1994; 1996; 2006), The Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar (2006), or the ongoing, grounded public dialogue proposed by Bourdieu and Gramsci and echoed in Burawoy’s call for public sociology. As a journal article, it does not have the promise of sparking much public debate or engaging with publics beyond the academy. But by looking to actually existing urban politics and discourses, it is offered as an intermediate step toward fostering meaningful links between the public sphere and academic critical geography.

Drawing on three years of research in Biloxi, Mississippi, this article parses the various modes of engagement that emerged in the wake of the Hurricane Katrina around the city’s redevelopment to identify existing trends that might hold promise for contesting neoliberalism. Building on the work of Leitner et al (2007), who argue that alternative visioning and knowledge production are important sites of contestation, this analysis attempts to direct attention to the political possibilities that inhere in mundane, everyday practices of urban politics. In so doing, I apply the rich body of empirical work in the regulationist tradition on neoliberalism and neoliberalization of urban governance to a reading of actually existing urban politics to identify ruptures in the neoliberal narrative and locations of friction for the smooth implementation of a redevelopment process attempting to further implement neoliberal reforms in the city. The result is instructive both for what it reveals about neoliberalism in Biloxi specifically, and for identifying new possibilities for anti-neoliberal praxis more generally.

There is, of course, no shortage of excellent, detailed, and theoretically sophisticated analysis on neoliberalization and what, precisely it entails (Larner 2000; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Gough 2002; Jessop 2002; Keil 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002; McCarthy and Prudham 2004; Harvey 2005; Castree 2006; McCarthy 2006; Sparke 2006; England and Ward 2007; Hackworth 2007; Peck and Tickell 2007; Kingfisher 2008). And though the word may indeed be thrown around at times, there is, I argue, a core set of practices and ideas to which it refers and around which there is, at least for many authors, a fair amount of agreement (McCarthy and Prudham 2004; McCarthy 2006). As McCarthy (2006) argues, the term itself describes a “near-global project.
over the past few decades to reconfigure economic and political governance in line with many of the founding precepts of liberal theory” (87). These include: faith in the market as the vehicle through which to produce optimal social outcomes, antipathy toward state intervention, and faith in civil society as the best and most appropriate sphere through which to address market failures.

In the Gramscian political economic tradition, neoliberalism can be understood at once as both an ideology and a set of material practices as distinct from Fordist-Keynesian ideology and material relations. Brenner and Theodore (2002) document these change at great length to show how the fundamental social, political, and economic relations that characterized Fordism have been dismantled and new relations have emerged that conform to neoliberal ideology of flexibility, market-rule, and individualism. First, the shift has entailed the dismantling of the “Fordist compromise” in the form of the decline of the family wage and the promotion of “flexibility” in labor practices. Second, national barriers to foreign direct investment have been dismantled and policies and treaties to promote trade liberalization have been established, with important implications for the scaling of economic regulation and governance. Third, the global monetary system established at Bretton Woods has been dismantled and money markets have been deregulated, while the role of global regulatory bodies has been expanded. Fourth, the Keynesian welfare state has been dismantled and responsibility for social service provision has devolved to local scales. Finally, regulatory standards have been delegitimized and undercut while policies that promote inter-urban competition have been rolled out.

Following, then, from the analysis by McCarthy (2006) and Brenner and Theodore (2002), neoliberalism is a dominant, if not hegemonic, conception of the best and most appropriate relationship between the state, civil society, and the market, which has manifested in a host of relatively common, though locally variable, arrangements with important implications for city governments and urban actors. Neoliberalism refers to a very specific and historically grounded shift from Fordist-Keynesian managerial approaches to urban governance, to an emergent and evolved set of relations between the state, civil society, and the market, as outlined above.

The de-centering of the nation state as the most important scale of economic activity and governance has meant that the scale of the city has become relevant in new ways for the analysis of political economy, and as such, the governance of cities has become more relevant, even for more structuralist accounts. The neoliberalization of urban governance has broadly entailed the reorientation of the proper role of the city from the provision of public and social services to what Harvey (1989) and others (Jessop and Sum 2000; Ward 2003) have called the “entrepreneurial city”. An entrepreneurial city seeks to strategically and competitively position itself by pursuing creative approaches to attracting and retaining capital investment (Jessop and Sum 2000). Quasi-public agencies enjoy enhanced status to operationalize the entrepreneurial vision for the city (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Leitner et al 2007). And finally, the neoliberalization of urban governance has entailed a palpable shift in the conception of the role and obligation of citizens, with an emphasis on citizens as individuals responsible for themselves and expected to contribute to the economy (Larner 2000; Keil 2002; Larner 2003; Leitner et al 2007). It is in this last respect that the Gramscian political economic readings of neoliberalism find productive synergies with Foucauldian conceptions of the concept (Larner 2003; Ong 2006; Sparke 2006; but see Barnett 2005; see also MacKinnon 2000).
The above analysis, as well as the work on which it draws, has been largely grounded in the regulation approach (RA). Termed an “approach” rather than a body of theory, RA has attempted to build on Marxist analysis of the reproduction of capitalist social relations and the emergence of new configurations in during and in the wake of crisis (Jessop 1997). The regulation approach analyzes the reproduction of capitalism through an analysis of the process of accumulation in two spheres: the regime of accumulation and the mode of social regulation. The ‘regime of accumulation’ refers to an extended period of stability and growth or a “...a way of dividing and systematically reallocating the social product” (Lipietz 1988; 31, qtd in MacLeod 1997, 532). The mode of social regulation is broadly defined in the regulationist literature as the social norms, habits, conventions, customs, state laws, and patterns of conduct that normalize the accumulation process (MacLeod 1997, Jessop 1997, Peck and Tickell 1992). The mode of social regulation acts to “guarantee that the dominant accumulation system is reproducible in the medium term, through the accommodation, mediation and normalization of crisis tendencies” (Peck and Tickell 1992, 349). The concept of the mode of regulation is not well defined, however, either theoretically or in empirical research in the regulationist tradition.

Work in the regulation-theoretic tradition flows mainly from a structuralist ontology, but work by Jenson (1990; 1991; 1993) has infused regulationist work with a post-structuralist analysis of the role of politics, performance, and discourse. Jenson has directed her analysis toward the ways in which actors represent themselves and their interests in the discursive field of politics during and after crisis. Attempting to expand the concept of the mode of regulation beyond an analysis of the role of the state, she argues that it is in the realm of lived experience and everyday life that the contradictions of capitalism are regularized and smoothed out. If, as Jenson argues, the realm of everyday politics is a site where the contradictions of capitalism are indeed explained in cultural terms, it follows then that it might also be understood as a site where capitalism might also be meaningfully contested.

3.2 Contesting neoliberalism

The neoliberalization of urban governance has troubling implications for quality of life in cities. The near total orientation toward inter-urban competition, economic growth, and austerity in social spending, coupled with the growing influence of business elites and unaccountable quasi-public agencies, has meant a sharp decline in the economic well-being and political influence of the working class in cities (Hackworth 2007; Purcell 2008). Until recently, most theoretical and empirical attention to the contestation and resistance of these problematic trends had focused on scales beyond the city, despite research that shows that the city is the scale at which many neoliberal reforms are implemented (Brenner and Theodore 2002). The orientation of scholars and activists toward the national or global scale as the appropriate and probably most effective scale of contestation is likely not an oversight, however, but rather reflects the structuralist skepticism that local, urban scale contestation can be effective in undermining neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell 2007).

For example, Brenner, Peck and Theodore (2010) propose a series of counter-neoliberal possibilities that might emerge, and emphasize the need for them to be interconnected in order to meaningfully counter neoliberalism. While they acknowledge the ways in which neoliberalism is manifested in particular ways in specific places, they reject the post-structuralist notion that it is a bottom-up phenomenon. The result is an emphasis on linking up local contestations and the emergence of coherent and “plausible vision for an alternative rule-regime,” without which, local
contestations are likely to remain “mere irritants to the global machinery of neoliberalization, rather than genuine threats to its hegemonic influence” (14). This sober assessment may in fact be accurate. But from where is this consciousness expected to come? How can we link this kind of deep structural analysis with actually existing politics? How are these linkages meant to be forged? From what consciousnesses are they supposed to emerge? Empirical studies of practices of contestation have largely focused on transnational collective action against neoliberal globalization (Routledge 2003; Leitner et al 2007) and direct action social movements in the global South (Bond and Mclntees 2007; Oldfield and Stokke 2007) which attempt to various degrees to do precisely the kind of “linking up” that Brenner, Peck, and Theodore argue is necessary. While it may be the case that these are the most effective or promising modes of contesting neoliberalism, to focus on them exclusively is to overlook the possibility that nascent and emergent ways of being and doing politics might hold kernels of anti-neoliberal sentiment. Further, it runs the risk of proposing an ideal-type of resistance that does not correspond with existing politics, while simultaneously discounting trends in urban politics that could, if nurtured, potentially provide the grounds for a politics that does eventually cohere into a “plausible vision” for an alternative to neoliberalism.

Recently, Leitner et al (2007) have taken a post-structuralist approach to theorizing neoliberalism and its contestation. This approach recognizes the role and power of discourse in the theorization, as well as the contestation, of neoliberalism. Leitner et al choose to focus on “contestation” rather than “resistance” to decenter neoliberalism as the primary organizing principle for social life, in order to open up a broader conception of what might “count” as contestation. Leitner et al understand contestation of neoliberalism as any established practices which provide alternative imaginaries, knowledges, social relationships, and values than those of neoliberalism specifically. For example, whereas neoliberalism seeks to annihilate space with time to speed up economic relations and open new markets, practices that could be considered contestation might seek to localize economic relations and slow down economic activity. They offer the Slow Food movement as one such example. Neoliberalism, they argue, articulates an imaginary “that equates freedom with the autonomous individual, with market rationality as the mechanism through which responsible individuals can maximize their rights and wealth, and with a borderless 24/7 world,” whereas contestations draw on other imaginaries that promote different conceptions of the good life and alternative visions for how social life ought to be organized. Theorized as such, they argue, contestation can take a variety of forms, including promoting alternative, non-neoliberal forms of knowledge; lobbying and legislative action; advancing non-neoliberal economic and political relations; and individual everyday practices that do not conform to neoliberal norms.

My analysis in this work proceeds from the theoretical and empirical considerations outlined above. First, it is situated within the broad tradition of the regulation approach and its particular theorization of capitalist social relations and their reproduction. Inspired by Jenson’s work, however, it is directed toward the discursive field of politics and toward the way in which actors represent themselves and their interests as a potential site for the disruption of the hegemony of the neoliberal script. I take as a starting point the rich body of empirical literature in the regulationist/Gramscian tradition, which has documented the interface between neoliberalism as ideology and material practices, to broadly establish that the post-Katrina redevelopment process in Biloxi, Mississippi has been shaped by neoliberalism and been a site of neoliberalization. By integrating an analysis of the field of politics and the ways in which actors represent themselves
and their interests with the existing body of literature on neoliberalization, the intent is to
develop an assessment of the promise and possibilities that various existing modes of
engagement and subject positions hold for contesting neoliberalism in Biloxi, Mississippi.

The following analysis proceeds from a series of normative positions, as well. First, capitalism
as a mode of production is fundamentally exploitative and oppressive, and as such, ought to be
contested. Second, neoliberalism represents a particularly oppressive configuration of capitalist
social relations as compared to the Keynesian welfare state insofar as it entails an increase in the
role and influence of the private sector through changes in governance practices and the
proliferation of public-private partnerships, a shift away in urban governance away from service
provision, austerity measures that decrease social service spending and a series of other
relationships that result in the redistribution of wealth upwards and associated increases in
economic and social inequality. From these normative positions, it follows that the contestation
of neoliberalism as a specific form of capitalism, as well as the contestation of capitalism more
generally are both desirable, if sometimes distinct, forms of political action. Importantly,
however, as I demonstrate below, not all forms of contesting neoliberalism necessarily contest
capitalism more broadly, or promote a social justice agenda or an expanded welfare state. The
analysis below operates from the proposition that more equitable distributions of wealth, a bigger
and stronger social safety net, and enhanced participation and influence by citizens in state
practices hold promise to manifest themselves meaningfully in improved quality of life for the
working class, and as such, are desirable principles and outcomes toward which political activity
ought to be directed.

3.3 Neoliberalism in Biloxi, Mississippi

Naomi Klein (2007) has argued that opportunities for the implementation of neoliberal reforms
are particularly ripe in the wake of disasters of various kinds. She has called attention to the
“clean slate” discourse that city leaders and developers floated and acted upon in New Orleans
immediately following Hurricane Katrina. Yet, while the media and social justice communities
were focused on New Orleans, an arguably even more revanchist recovery process was unfolding
in Mississippi. Whereas Louisiana spent 53% of its total recovery funds20 on lower income
families, Mississippi had only directed 13% of its spending towards the same demographic group
(Justice 2008). The state also applied for a host of waivers to exempt a full 75% of its programs
from income targeting, and has directed far more of its funding toward infrastructure
development than housing as compared with Louisiana (Justice 2008).

To some, the circumstances in the city of Biloxi represented a particularly promising
“opportunity” for the further intensification of the entrepreneurial orientation of the city. Prior to
the storm, the mayor had pronounced the city in the midst of an “urban renaissance,” having
emerged from near bankruptcy in the early 1990s. In 1992 the state legislature passed legislation
allowing casino gaming in the state, yet required that the gaming facilities be floating on water.
This requirement came about partly as a political compromise to limit the geographic reach of
casinos, and partly as a strategy by local boosters for ensuring their cities realized benefits from
allowing casino gaming (Herrmann 2006). The city of Biloxi, which had formerly been home to
a thriving fishing and seafood processing industry, aggressively pursued casino resorts and had
wide swaths of land available for development where defunct factories stood. They city’s

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20 As of late 2008.
physical geography, with a mile-long peninsula in the eastern-most area of the city, was particularly well-suited to the development of a casino agglomeration, and by 2005 the city was home to 9 casino resorts creating a ring around the working class neighborhood of East Biloxi (see Figure 3.2).

The city of Biloxi as a whole, and East Biloxi in particular, was ravaged by the winds and storm surge of Hurricane Katrina. Over 80% of the buildings on the peninsula were substantially destroyed (Moving Forward 2006). Residents of this low income neighborhood where the majority of the city’s African American, Vietnamese, and elderly population live faced a host of financial and logistical challenges to rebuilding, as the Federal Emergency Management Agency imposed substantial new requirements for rebuilding homes after the storm. In some places, residents would be required to elevate their homes 17 feet in the air in order to receive permits to rebuild and state and federal assistance for rebuilding (Moving Forward 2006). Immediately following the storm, the state legislature passed a law allowing casinos to move onto land within 800 feet of the high tide line, and only in locations where they were previously permitted. The effect was to create intense land speculation on the peninsula, as newly emboldened casinos bought up land and rumors of big payouts circulated, making some residents waver about whether to rebuild or to hold out for a potential windfall. Coupled with slow insurance payouts and a general lack of resources in the neighborhood, these factors contributed to the slow pace of recovery on the peninsula, which further contributed to an environment of uncertainty, a sense that the peninsula might in fact be a “blank slate” to be remade.

Taking as a starting point the host of trends identified by Brenner and Theodore that characterize the shift to neoliberal urbanism (2002) and outlined above, it is clear that the regulatory and political environment in which this so-called “blank-slate” might be remade was characteristically neoliberal (see Table 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trends in urban neoliberal urbanism identified by Brenner and Theodore (2002)</th>
<th>Examples in Biloxi, MS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local state infrastructure is reconfigured such that volunteer organizations are more responsible for tasks that used to be the responsibility of the state. Meanwhile, public-private partnerships are “rolled out” and “institutional relays” are established through which businesses directly influence development decisions</td>
<td>In Biloxi, volunteer organizations have served as the primary resource for residents working to rebuild. Through both privately funded redevelopment planning processes, as well as through state-sponsored planning processes, the casino industry and developers have enjoyed considerable access to decision makers and the decision making process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicly funded education is dismantled, while “work readiness” programs proliferate.</td>
<td>Though residents listed public education as one of their primary concerns in the rebuilding process, the education component of the city-wide plan emphasizes city-funded “gaming industry” classes, preparing people to work in the casinos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies of territorial development are restructured, and “enterprise zones” are created while new development areas proliferate.</td>
<td>Rapid land speculation post-Katrina has cause land prices to skyrocket. Meanwhile, the federal government has created the “GO Zone” or Gulf Coast Opportunity Zone to promote economic growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The built environment is transformed through the destruction of ‘working class neighborhoods’ and rapid gentrification.</td>
<td>East Biloxi, the working class neighborhood of Biloxi, is directly targeted for what is referred to in the planning documents as “urban renewal.” In this context, “urban renewal” entails the construction of “condotels” and other amenities to support the casino industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy making approaches shift from context specific, participatory approaches to decontextualized “best practices.”</td>
<td>The involvement of the Congress for New Urbanism, as well as Living Cities and the Knight Foundation in the planning process exemplify the shift in Biloxi away from citizen participation to “best practices” in urban development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal notions of urban civil society in which inhabitants have civil liberties, social services and political rights are replaced by mechanisms of social control and emphasis on insertion of individuals into the labor market.</td>
<td>In the new planning paradigm, subsidized housing of any sort is newly understood as “workforce housing.” Rather than take stock of the needs of the residents in planning the development and location of such housing, the casino industry was the primary collaborator, and the needs of the industry were the driving force behind the housing development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4 How actors engage

After three years of participant observation in the planning and redevelopment processes, four primary modes of representing interests emerged in my analysis. To arrive at these four modes of representation, I analyzed extensive field notes taken over three years from planning charettes, city council meetings, and meetings of local organizations active in the recovery process. I also drew on over 60 interviews conducted over the three year period. Finally, I drew on planning documents and other literature produced by activists, resident groups, and organizations active in the recovery process. Data collection and analysis proceeded in a dialectical process, which is to say that analysis was ongoing and shaped further data collection strategies. Once all the data were collected, they were analyzed for common themes and patterns (Marshall and Rossman 1989). The following represents an interpretive analysis (Potter 1996) of the data collected.

While by no means an ethnography, the method of analysis offered here does engage with ethnographic methods, including participant observation, and is influenced in part by the critical ethnographic tradition in Marxist inquiry (see for example Chari 2003; Gidwani and Chari 2004; Hart 2004; Wright 2006). Working from this tradition, Hart (2004) has called for critical ethnography that sets out explicitly to be done in politically enabling ways. To do so, she argues, entails an engagement with “how multiple forces come together in practice to produce particular dynamics or trajectories, as well as possible alternatives” (97). Such ethnographies are not case studies of how localities are impacted by capitalism, but “windows” into processes and a “means for reconfiguring understandings and practices” (97). Hart argues that critical ethnography moves from the abstract to the concrete in a dialectical process – she wants to call particular attention not just to the way things are experienced, but also how they are produced (see for example Wright 2006). This alternative viewpoint, she argues, grounds these practices and aids in an understanding of them as more contingent. Hart further calls for attention to how fluid identities are produced and changed in relation to one another. While such an analysis is beyond the scope of this article, further work building on this analysis could explore the lineage of the modes of engagement discussed below and the influences of them to better apprehend both their political promise and opportunities for fostering similar modes of engagement elsewhere.

The previous section established that the particular approach to urban governance in Biloxi and post-Katrina redevelopment is characteristic of neoliberal governance, broadly grounded in analyses offered from the regulationist and state-theoretical perspective. Building on the work of Jenson, as well as other feminist observers of urban politics (Gilbert 1997; 1999), rather than narrowly identify contestation in terms of specifically contesting the roll out of those new forms of governance that our theories identify as evidence of neoliberalism, the following analysis attempts to tease out political possibilities inherent in actually existing urban practice. This approach is an attempt to hold in productive tension the power of deep structural analysis to identify the mechanisms of socio-economic life with existing tendencies and modes of engagement in cities, as well as to draw attention to discourse, performance, visioning, and knowledge production as potentially productive sites of contestation.

3.4.1 Regional Booster

It should come as little surprise that business groups and city officials are engaged in regional boosterism and view the city and its prospects for recovery primarily in terms of the health of the economy. In this vein, business leaders and city officials have attempted to generate locational
and comparative advantage for the region through place-making, marketing, and interurban competition for attracting and retaining footloose capital. In the city of Biloxi, this approach to redevelopment has included prioritizing public transportation and infrastructure that supports the rebuilding and intensification of tourist amenities and casino gaming facilities. The enactment of these priorities has meant that the only major public transit investment made in the wake of the storm has been the “Casino Hopper” designed to move tourists from one casino to the next. Other transportation and infrastructure investments have been directed toward the development of a ring road to facilitate movement around the casino district, while surface roads in the adjacent neighborhoods have been neglected. Regional boosters have also strongly emphasized the need to develop tourist amenities, including golf courses, a convention center, a small craft harbor, a Seafood Museum, and an art museum designed by famed architect Frank Gehery, as well as the promotion of events designed to attract tourists, including a car show called “Cruisin’ the Coast” and a boat show called “Smokin’ the Sound.” Further, regional boosters emphasize job growth, economic development, infrastructure development, cultural amenities to attract tourists, and place-making. At the same time, the region’s residents are characterized as employees or the “workforce” whose primary needs are to to be housed and employed. Benefits to residents are assumed to accrue through economic development, although, based on field observations and interviews, there is seldom an explicit linkage made between resident benefits and economic growth in the region. Rather, economic growth is understood as a benefit in its own right.

While this approach to urban revitalization and development is predicted by both the growth machine thesis (Molotch 1976; Logan and Molotch 1987) and literature on entrepreneurial urbanism, there are two trends worth noting for purposes of assessing political possibilities. The first is that while remaining within the broad contours of neoliberal urbanism, there was some disagreement between city leaders and business leaders with respect to the vision for the city and proper approaches to governance. The business coalition was more closely aligned with the governor, who has been actively promoting New Urbanism and its associated bourgeois landscapes, designed to attract the “creative class” and raise Mississippi’s profile, as an approach to recovery (Mississippi Renewal Forum 2010). By contrast, the city was more interested in “setting the table” for economic development by providing infrastructure and regulatory support for intensification of land use and growth with fewer restrictions on types of uses or appearances.

As the following quote demonstrates, business leaders see local officials as having little capacity for creative visioning:

“A lot of your public sector leaders, that’s the best high paying job they’ve ever had, quite frankly, and I think the result of that is they haven’t had that broad breadth of experience (Business leader, personal interview).”

Government officials, meanwhile, chafe at the growing influence of the business community as one city leader explained:

“I disagree with what the business group is trying to do because they’re taking over what the government is supposed to do... When business can hold too much power, they’re not elected. There are no checks and balances. Yeah, they’ve had increasing influence over time. They have been more or less dictating (City leader, personal interview).”
This rift exists despite the fact that both city government and the regional business community are primarily oriented toward economic growth and development as a means to recover from the storm. This includes a focus on jobs over housing, despite the urgent claims of area social service providers who argue that housing has been the immediate critical need for residents.

According to one business leader:

“So we found out that the jobs were much more important than where a person lived because you could live with your parents, your grandparents, a sister or a brother or a cousin; you could sleep on a couch, but to come to this area, you had to have a place to stay, but you didn’t necessarily have to own that facility, so having a job was the most important thing in the recovery (Business leader, personal interview).”

Second, residents were articulating regional boosterism in city council meetings, planning charettes, and interviews. Many of these identified themselves as “property owners” or “land owners” and tended to emphasize the need to think about the economy in a holistic sense, including location of affordable housing for the workforce, the diversification of the economy, and the preservation of the natural landscape for the purpose of attracting tourists and employers. This approach to redevelopment features a clear sense of inter-urban competition and a sense of the vulnerability of the region to “footloose capital.” In one planning charette, a vision of Biloxi as becoming the “diamond of the south” emerged as the dominant vision, echoing the competitive, outward looking perspective of city and business leaders.

3.4.2 Nostalgic Citizens

A second way of engaging with the redevelopment process has been through a notion of nostalgia for how Biloxi “used to be” and a desire to restore it to its past glory. This particular view tended to emphasize the city’s history as a fishing and shrimping community and appeal to the city’s cultural legacy and ethnic heritage. It was often voiced by older, white, middle-class and wealthy residents of the city who attended city meetings precisely to articulate this vision, though, as I show below, it was articulated by others, as well. The dominant vision of what Biloxi actually “used to be” that emerged during planning meetings specifically and in the city’s planning documents was a particularly whitewashed notion that seemed to predate the arrival of the Vietnamese population and ignore the region’s civil rights history. Proponents of this approach emphasized what makes Biloxi a unique place and lamented both the role of the storm and the intensity of land speculation and development in creating threats to that uniqueness. They also tended to emphasize the importance of what they refer to as the “sand beach” – or the miles of manmade beach that make up the southern edge of the region, and a desire to preserve access to vistas, as well as regional architecture. Finally, a common concern of the nostalgic citizens was that the city will become like other tourist destinations that they consider to be less distinctive and to provide fewer amenities for residents. An often heard refrain is “we don’t want to become like Destin!” a coastal city in the Florida panhandle with high-rise condominiums lining the coast and blocking views and beach access.

Some African American residents also voiced this sense of nostalgia specifically as it applied to the portion of the peninsula that served as the historic center of African American life in the region, with black owned businesses, cultural amenities, and a cohesive neighborhood. This
particular conception of what Biloxi “used to be” did not seem to resonate beyond the African American community, however, and was seldom part of the dominant narrative about Biloxi’s former glory.

One resident, in an interview, expressed her nostalgia for the cohesiveness of the African American community of East Biloxi from her childhood:

“We used to be able to walk everywhere. If you misbehaved at school, your bottom would be red by the time you got home because we had a community and the neighbors would give you a spank before your parents could get to you. People looked out for each other.”

Whereas the dominant narrative of nostalgia tended to emphasize the region’s legacy as a center of seafood production, in the African American community there was an emphasis on sites and locations that were central to the African American community and its history, including the homes of Doctor Gilbert Mason, a leading figure in Biloxi’s civil rights struggle, and the building that housed the NAACP offices. Fond memories of schools and a desire to preserve them, both as buildings and as resources for the community, also figured prominently in these discussions.

3.4.3 Defenders of Their Patch

Massey (2005) calls particular attention to the uneasy distinction between the “venerable defending their patch” and those seeking exclusionary environments (see also Harvey 1996). In the course of the planning process, a number of residents and neighborhood leaders emerged to vigorously defend their neighborhoods from a variety of actual or potential changes they perceived as threats. The threats identified varied widely, and included the relocation of affordable housing and density from the peninsula to more affluent areas zoned for larger lots, encroachment from commercial development and infrastructure expansion, exclusion from recovery funding, and displacement through bureaucratic hurdles.

The justifications offered for why a neighborhood ought to be preserved were notable for their similarities. In the middle-class neighborhood in the northern portion of the city, concerns primarily centered on the preservation of home values, environmental concerns, and potential crime or other alleged pathologies associated with the high-density and affordable housing being proposed in the neighborhood. These were articulated in terms of a desire to retain the character, feel, and demographic characteristics of the neighborhood. In the African American community of East Biloxi, concerns about changes to the character of the neighborhood were motivated by fears that residents would have nowhere else to go, and by a desire to retain the cultural and racial continuity of the neighborhood, though preservation of home values was also a concern.

One activist articulated the community’s desire to remain in East Biloxi this way:

“Think about it from the standpoint of a beach head in a war. This particular area contains 90% of the African American population, 90% of the Hispanic population, 90% of the Vietnamese population, and 90% of the poorest population in the city…The reason we fight so hard to keep it here is because we are here. We’ve got this beach head. This is the property that we own, and its important that we keep it” (East Biloxi activist, personal interview).
The East Biloxi Coordination Center has been the most active agent in advocating for the return of residents to the peninsula and promoting a vision of East Biloxi as a revitalized mixed-income neighborhood. This vision is in stark contrast to the vision promoted by the city for commercial redevelopment of the peninsula. The Coordination Center has started a grassroots neighborhood organizing program designed to integrate residents into the process of governing their cities, and provide the architecture for increased citizen involvement in city politics. The Coordination Center’s activities have been directed at “making people whole,” and are founded in large part on an alternative planning process for the peninsula of East Biloxi that was designed to create an alternative vision for the neighborhood’s redevelopment. This document emphasized social networks and human development, and has guided an alternative approach to redevelopment that offers different priorities to the emphasis on job creation, economic and infrastructure development that has characterized the city’s planning documents and approach to redevelopment. The document was based on a survey in which residents indicated that what they liked most about East Biloxi was its “sense of community” “friends and family” and “schools” (Warnke Community Consulting 2006). The Coordination Center has partnered with the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio based out of Mississippi State to produce a series of studies and maps that demonstrate that the peninsula is inhabitable, and to design structures that reflect the community’s vision for the neighborhood as a counterbalance to the renderings that were produced during various state- and private sector-sponsored planning processes (see Figures 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6).

In the wealthier neighborhood to the north of the city, while some articulated their desire to retain the character of the neighborhood for purposes of historical and cultural continuity, others were more concerned to keep out what they perceived to be undesirable populations and prevent the devaluation of their property. Yet while residents would articulate their concerns about low income housing in private, confidential interviews, in public settings or in written materials they tended to couch their objections in environmental terms. Frequent references to the need to be “politically correct” suggest that residents suspect that framing their objections in terms of opposition to low income housing in the public sphere will gain little traction or sympathy for their cause, and thus they have opted to invoke the language of environmentalism to ground their objections publicly. This was particularly evident when residents who were opposed to development on environmental grounds indicated that they would have been happy to have a golf course built in their back yard, but were very concerned about the environmental implications of affordable housing being built adjacent to them.

One interviewee who was a representative of the neighborhood group fighting especially hard to keep out affordable housing put it this way:

“Upper income folks don’t want those lower income folks next door because it will destroy the value of what they’ve worked for their whole life, and that’s their home. And the folks in the littler homes are going to have a higher crime rate. ..I don’t think it’s a good deal to put that high crime rate right next to this quiet environment (Biloxi resident, personal interview).”

3.4.4 Human Rights

While regional boosters could often be heard declaring that the storm was actually an “opportunity” of sorts, a similar refrain echoed among activists in the city concerned with social
justice insofar as the storm brought attention, resources, and capacity to the city. Indeed, a host of progressive organizations with social justice missions and a human rights framework descended on the region looking for local partners immediately after the storm, including Oxfam, the Ms. Foundation, the 21st Century Foundation, and Oprah’s Angel Network, and a series of organizations were created through their funding and support.

Engagement in the recovery process from this perspective has emphasized the primacy of residents’ quality of life, and called government to task for putting economic development over affordable housing development through direct action, policy advocacy, and alternative knowledge production. Residents have been particularly active in contesting what they consider to be the diversion of funds intended by Congress for affordable housing to the redevelopment and expansion of the State Port, with the phrase “People before Ports.” An umbrella organization called the STEPS Coalition was founded after the storm to coordinate among the various neighborhood and interest groups that emerged after the storm. STEPS organized a series of participatory meetings designed to engage residents with visioning for the future of their neighborhoods, and reinforced this visioning with critical analysis of recovery spending to demonstrate that spending does not match residents’ priorities.

Residents and activists who engaged in activism from this perspective strongly critiqued what they believe to be the undue power of the business community and local growth elites. A frequent refrain was that coastal Mississippi was a “plantation society,” in which a small group of elites held all of the power, influence, and money and governed the city through a good-old-boys network.

One activist explained how she saw the plantation metaphor applying to present day politics in the city:

“Well, we don’t any longer have these huge plantations, but those very same people coming from these families went into other kinds of businesses, big businesses, insurance, lawyers and they carry this whole thing, so we have this whole idea that there are some of us that are better whose job it is to tell other people what to do. And the whole economic structure, even the way the grants were devised after the hurricane, just show this whole plantation structure where you have the few in charge of the many. [They] do all, and public input means nothing (Biloxi activist, personal interview).”

Or, as one social justice activist from Biloxi succinctly put it: “It’s laissez faire capitalism with the oligarchy running everything!” (personal interview).

3.5 Analysis

With the exception of the human rights frame, none of these ways of engaging with the redevelopment process are, on the surface, especially promising for the development of a praxis that explicitly contests neoliberalism. But, as Leitner et al (2007) point out, contesting neoliberalism need not entail a direct opposition to neoliberalism per se, but can also include alternative visions for urban governance and the organization of social life in cities. Conceptualized as such, politically promising possibilities for the contestation of neoliberalism
can be parsed from the everyday ways of engaging with the redevelopment process outlined above.

Within these modes of engagement, existing alternative visions for the future of the city emerge that emphasize use values and cultural continuity over exchange values and place-promotion. This impulse emphasizes Biloxi as a place to live, rather than as a site of accumulation. The articulation of alternative priorities for governing emerge as well, with an emphasis on redistribution and social welfare over economic development. Finally, some of these modes of engagement entail alternative forms and sites of knowledge production that contest the warrants that underlie the neoliberal vision for the city. While each of these may seem weak in the face of the power and ubiquity of neoliberalism, there is some evidence that at least some of these positions hold promise for the translation of their militant particularisms into a broader social justice consciousness. And while some are understandably skeptical of the urban as an appropriate or effective scale for the contestation of neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell 2007; Brenner, Peck and Theodore 2010), there is little evidence that regional anti-neoliberal politics are nascent or emerging. Finally, by thinking about the ways in which existing activism and modes of engagement in cities are playing out and could possibly be contesting neoliberalism, we can avoid reifying neoliberalism through our own scholarship, and direct attention toward new sites of politics.

With the exception of the regional booster frame, each of the modes of engagement articulate visions for the future of the city that challenge, at least in part, the smooth implementation of the city as an entrepreneurial space configured in order to maximize capital accumulation and the city’s ability to generate profit. Within the nostalgic view of the city, an emphasis is placed on the city as a space for living, rather than as a tourist destination or a space of consumption. This particular frame contests the maximization of profitable space in the city, and attempts to direct urban visioning toward the maximization of use values over exchange values. While use values in and of themselves are not sufficient grounds for a progressive politics (see Chapter 4), emphasizing the preservation and creation of use values for residents in urban visioning does provide an alternative organizing principle for urban governance and management.

In some important ways, however, the nostalgic citizen’s vision of Biloxi as a sleepy seafood town with lots of local color and culture articulates well with the production of Biloxi as a place to be consumed. Attempts to promote Biloxi as a destination have drawn on this vision as well, as demonstrated in planning documents and tourist marketing materials (Moving Forward 2006, Mississippi Gulf Coast 2010). To meaningfully contest neoliberal visions for the city, then, the nostalgic view of the city would need to include an emphasis on the retention of use values for existing residents, rather than the museumification of the city’s history and culture for the purposes of place-promotion or attracting new classes of workers. An example would include the direction of redevelopment funds to Main Street in East Biloxi, the historic center of African American life in the city, which was once home to a number of small, black-owned businesses that catered to the community’s tastes and desires. There are also a number of landmarks in the city that are important to the African American community as well, including the Nicholls house.

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21 One particularly promising trend to emerge from the latest crisis of capitalism, however, is the networking of activists around predatory lending and problematic banking practices. See for example: http://www.clvu.org/program_campaigns.pdf accessed May 11, 2010 and http://www.righttothecity.org/local-right-to-the-city-coalition-releases-policy-platform-for-new-york.html accessed May 11, 2010
the former home of a very influential educator in the community, and the home of Doctor Gilbert Mason, a civil rights activist. By contrast, the city has largely directed attention and resources to the development of cultural amenities along the waterfront, including museums and the development of harbors to facilitate tourism and commerce.

‘Defending one’s patch’ is precisely the type of activism that Harvey (1996) fears has a tendency to be parochial and conservative. But observations from Biloxi suggest that these militant particularisms can be translated into a broader social consciousness. In African American neighborhoods, the immediate threats to the vitality and redevelopment of the neighborhood activated a critical consciousness on the part of a number of residents, and local and national organizations working to promote a human rights framework have capitalized on this emerging consciousness. Organizations like Coastal Women for Change, the East Biloxi Coordination Center, the Biloxi Block Captains program, and the Amos Network were either founded or injected with new resources and energy in the wake of the storm. These organizations are brought together regularly under the umbrella of the STEPS Coalition, which, along with Oxfam America, is the leading advocate for the Human Rights/Social Justice framework. This network provides neighborhood activists an outlet and opportunity to translate their militant particularisms into common cause with activists across a range of issues, including environmental protection, affordable housing, social service provision, and economic inequality. For example, members of Coastal Women for Change have, with the guidance of Oxfam, become active in a program called Sisters on the Planet, which promotes awareness about the myriad ways women disproportionately suffer from climate change.

The desire to protect one’s patch has also motivated a resistance to the development of affordable housing and smaller lots in the northern part of the city, which has problematic implications for the development of affordable, safe housing for Biloxi’s residents. While in many ways the attempts to block the development of affordable housing appear to be underpinned by an insidious fear of people of color and low income people, this mode of engagement does include a critique of shoddy development and land speculation and profit, and of a lack of power on the part of residents over prevailing land uses. In theory, such sentiments could be put in productive conversation with similar complaints in other parts of the city to generate a systemic critique of land use planning and property development in the city. Regardless of whether there are productive possibilities embedded within this particular mode of engagement, it clearly demonstrates that not all forms of contesting neoliberalism are necessarily compatible with a social justice agenda.

In both cases, these efforts to defend one’s neighborhood hold the potential to variously contest and disrupt the smooth implementation of neoliberal urbanism by providing friction to the reconfiguration of the built environment, and calling attention to the uneven geographies of the growth oriented vision for recovery. Of course, maintenance of the status quo in landscapes shaped by capitalism and racism provides the foundation for a particularly weak form of contestation. Nevertheless, this analysis offers an appreciation for the way in which, in low-income neighborhoods of color especially, articulating a desire to revitalize a neighborhood based on existing strengths, and to preserve social networks and historical ties to the region, can be understood as an act of contestation.

The desire to protect one’s patch has also drawn on environmentalist discourses for justification. As McCarthy and Prudham (2004) have argued, environmentalism and limits on growth have
been an important check on the unbridled growth agenda of neoliberal ideology. In this sense, the activation of an environmental discourse holds promise for contesting neoliberalism. Yet environmentalism also has a long history of articulation with racism and exclusionary practices (and with neoliberalism itself); such articulations appear to be, at least in part, a motivating factor for some invoking environmentalism in the realm of Biloxi politics. This further highlights the way in which not all contestation of neoliberalism is necessarily desirable from a social justice perspective.

In other neighborhoods, the desire to protect one’s patch has motivated alternative knowledge production practices that challenge the prevailing view of East Biloxi as an uninhabitable place that ought to give way to commercial development. In a planning document produced by a nonprofit in the neighborhood, attributes such as “sense of community,” “friends and family,” and “good place to raise children” create an alternative understanding of East Biloxi as a place as opposed to mere space, or a “blank slate” as it is represented in the city’s official plan with renderings showing entirely new uses where housing and communities exist. Further, The Gulf Coast Community Design Studio has produced a host of maps that challenge the notion that much of the peninsula is unsuitable for single-family development. Taking FEMA elevations into account, the studio produced maps that justify redevelopment in the neighborhood by taking a parcel-by-parcel view of the neighborhood. Rather than write off the entire East end of the peninsula as unsuitable for single family development, its fine-grained analysis, which begins from a commitment to responsible, scientifically informed neighborhood development, identified an alternative set of boundaries aligned with the community’s priorities and desires (see Figure 3.3).

The human rights frame is the most straightforward example of the potential to contest neoliberalism. Activists and residents operating from this framework have been active in all spheres that Leitner et al (2007) identify as possible ways to contest neoliberalism, including direct action, policy advocacy, alternative knowledge production, and alternative economic and social practices. This has included direct actions to contest the funds being directed to the State Port as well as the distribution of Community Development Block Grant funds. Activists have traveled to Washington DC and provided the data and information for newspaper articles (see for example Chandler 2007; Eaton 2007; Hesse 2007; Joyner 2007) and editorials in the New York Times (New York Times 2007) and elsewhere (Mississippi Press 2007b; Biloxi Sun Herald 2007a) and published their own op-eds (Morse and Lash 2007) to advocate for what they consider to be a more just distribution of recovery funds away from economic development and toward housing and social services. In addition, activists and residents working in the human rights framework have engaged in alternative knowledge production by generating and distributing annual Katrina “report cards” (see Figure 3.7), reports, and educational videos (Justice 2006) that highlight the ways in which recovery and reconstruction spending has been targeted toward economic development and educational videos. One activist, sponsored in part by Oxfam America, bought a used FEMA trailer on Ebay and dubbed it the KatrinaRitaVille Express and has been driving it around the country to educate people on what it has been like to live in a FEMA trailer, as well as to call attention to the uneven nature of the recovery process (see Figures 3.8 and 3.9). Finally, groups that have been active in engaging with the recovery process from the perspective of human rights and social justice have worked to support, recruit, and oversee volunteer labor directed specifically to the assistance of low income people in the city. While there are important ways in which volunteerism and communitarian ideals have been
co-opted by neoliberalism and facilitate capital accumulation (Joseph 2002), the activists working from the human rights frame have not advocated volunteer labor in lieu of state involvement or redistribution, but rather have attempted to call attention to the ways in which volunteers have been instrumental in redevelopment in the absence of the state.

3.6 Conclusion

While these ways of representing one’s interests in the political sphere in the context of neoliberal urbanism may not be particularly surprising, this article contributes an empirical consideration of each of these modes of representation for providing alternative visions for a city than that of neoliberal entrepreneurialism, and attempts to tease out politically promising possibilities in actually existing urban politics. Importantly, none of these ways of engaging in redevelopment politics set out explicitly to be anti-neoliberal and, with the exception of the human rights framework, none overtly problematize neoliberal capitalism as an ideology or set of material conditions for organizing social relations. Nevertheless it is clear that each of these modes of engagement with the planning process offer some kernel of contestation of a neoliberal vision for the city and friction for its smooth implementation. While this may appear a weak form of contestation in the face of the ubiquity and apparent power of neoliberalism as a guiding ideology and set of material conditions shaping urban governance, as Leitner et al (2007) have argued, by calling attention to alternative visions for urban governance and alternative knowledge production practices, we can better appreciate neoliberalism as one of many ideologies at work in cities. In so doing, we can avoid discursively producing neoliberalism as a fait accompli. Further, when actually existing politics are read alongside abstract theories of capitalist social relations and empirical case studies of neoliberalism as a contingent and locationally specific (Wilson 2004), new potential sites of anti-neoliberal politics can be identified. While a far cry from traditional vanguardism and anti-capitalist praxis, this more fluid conception of politics opens up a plethora of new potential sites of contestation of neoliberalism. While of course not all contestations of neoliberalism are progressive or necessarily promote social justice, modes of engagement that direct visioning toward accountable leadership, transparent decision making, knowledge production that privileges the needs and desires of citizens, and ideas about urban space that emphasizes use values all hold promise to contest neoliberal urbanism as a hegemonic ideology shaping urban governance.
Figure 3.1 Biloxi, Mississippi (Map by Paulo Raposo)

Figure 3.2 Casinos in East Biloxi (Map by Paulo Raposo)
Figure 3.3 Sample map produced by the Design Studio

This map was produced by the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio to guide planning and redevelopment in a way that blends technical expertise with community priorities. Unlike the rendering in Figure 3, taken from *Moving Forward*, a city- and business-sponsored plan, this map shows some opportunities for single family housing in the eastern most portion of the peninsula.
Figure 3.4 Rendering of East Biloxi from a business-sponsored planning document

This rendering, taken from city- and business-sponsored planning document *Moving Forward* depicts a future for the eastern-most portion of the city characterized by high-rise condominiums, a casino gaming district, a museum district, and a central park where low-income African American and Vietnamese neighborhoods were previously located.

Figure 3.5. House in East Biloxi designed by Gulf Coast Community Design Studio
Figures 3.5 and 3.6 are examples of single family homes designed by the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio to suit the FEMA flood elevation requirements in areas of the peninsula considered by some to be no longer suitable for single family home development due to height requirements and the associated costs, as well as the undesirability of elevated housing. The Design Studio used a variety of different building materials and innovative design practices to lower the cost of elevation, generate savings in other aspects of building, and lower the cost of maintaining the home through energy efficiency measures.

Figure 3.6 House designed by the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio

Another example of a home designed by the Design Studio. This home is an example of the efforts by the Design Studio to find new uses for the space underneath elevated structures. In this case, the space below is a workspace for the homeowner, who repairs fishing nets.
Figure 3.7: Sample figure from Hurricane Katrina Recovery Report card

Figure 1: Allocations of CDBG Disaster Funds in 2006 and 2008 (percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Housing</th>
<th>Infrastructure</th>
<th>Economic Development</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Unallocated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>MISSISSIPPI</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>MISSISSIPPI</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>LOUISIANA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>LOUISIANA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GAO-09-541 Gulf Coast CDBG Disaster Assistance, pp. 9-10.

Figures 3.8 and 3.9: The KatrinaRitaVille Express

![KatrinaRitaVille Express](image-url)
CHAPTER FOUR: THE POLITICS OF LAND USE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE PRAXIS

“Horror at local exclusivities sits uneasily against support for the vulnerable struggling to defend their patch” (Doreen Massey 2005, 6)

“Within complex and ever shifting realms of power relations, do we position ourselves on the side of colonizing mentality? Or do we continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed, ready to offer our ways of seeing and theorizing, of making culture, toward that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible? This choice is crucial” (bell hooks 1996, 153).

“They are a bunch of dumb bastards” – Ken Coombs, Mayor of Gulfport, referring to members of a small community of African Americans seeking to block development in their watershed out of concerns that it would further exacerbate flooding in their neighborhood.

4.1 Post-Katrina neighborhood politics: a challenge for praxis
The winds had barely died and the storm surge from Hurricane Katrina only just receded when Mississippi Gulf Coast boosters declared that the coast would build back “better than ever” (Commission 2005). Despite the overwhelming dominance of traditional economic development discourses guiding public policy, working toward a ‘better coast’ arguably represented a promising opening for progressive urban politics. In order to strategically work within this opening to promote social justice, however, a theoretical framework that could address the specificities of the particular histories, power-geometries, and cultural politics of the region would need to be developed in order to inform social justice praxis. Yet the dynamics of the land use struggles that emerged, or in some cases intensified, in the wake of Katrina raised two specific challenges to the development of social justice praxis. First, residents of low-lying, low-income, historically African American and minority neighborhoods that weathered substantial damage from the storm were fighting especially hard to rebuild their neighborhoods to the pre-storm status quo. These seemingly conservative politics were further complicated by the fact that the social geographies and built environment of the region had been largely shaped by the legacies of racial segregation, the effects of which had been exacerbated by uneven investment by capital and the state. It would seem, then, that working in solidarity with these residents would entail engaging politically to rebuild low-income neighborhoods in low-lying areas that were particularly vulnerable to future storm surge, and in some cases, adjacent to undesirable land uses. While on its face this hardly seems like progressive urban politics, it clearly suggests the need for a theoretical framework for understanding power, place, and land use to guide praxis. The second dynamic complicating land use praxis was the curious and counter-intuitive convergence between the discursive framings of land use politics in historically underserved low-income communities of color and relatively privileged, mostly white middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. That is, as residents of these low-income minority
neighborhoods articulated their desire for status quo, they drew on nearly identical discourses to the more privileged neighborhoods. These discourses included environmentalism, community control over development (which included a right to object to the development of affordable housing) and the preservation of the ‘cultural continuity’ of neighborhoods. The latter desire introduces a particular complexity insofar as it maps on to racial identities and hence, racial exclusion, in ways that merit critical analysis. These common claims across racial and class divides could suggest common cause and an opportunity for cross-class, -racial, and -neighborhood organizing, or could signal the political and normative vacancy of such concepts and framings (see Swyengedouw 2009 for a related discussion with respect to the concept of ‘sustainability).

In either case, these circumstances further suggest the need for coherent social justice praxis to guide political engagement. Specifically, they raise the question of how to work strategically toward the realization of social justice in the realm of land use when the desires of marginalized communities do not clearly map on to more typical visions for a socially just city, which would include rebuilding the city in ways that spread out the vulnerability to future storms. Further, these circumstances raise questions about the political possibilities and complications inherent in a politics of what Massey (2005) would call ‘spatial rules’ regarding environmental protection, community control, and cultural preservation.

Though critical geography has largely not been concerned with the configuration of the built environment as such (but see Harvey 2007 [1982]), land use is emerging as a central battlefront in neoliberal urban politics. As city boosters attempt to respond to the changing political economic fortunes facing cities in the post-industrial global north, land use and development is an increasingly central feature of strategies designed to attract capital and raise revenues (Fainstein 2001; Hackworth 2007; Wilson 2007). These efforts often take the form of ‘best practices’ in urban design for the ‘creative class,’ through waterfront development, recreational amenities, office park development and institutional expansion. As Wilson (2007) has shown, such efforts at ‘revitalization’ or economic development intersect in important ways with racial politics. At the same time, despite what some see as the parochial and inherently conservative nature of neighborhood politics (Harvey 1996), they remain a primary way in which residents engage in urban politics.

After months of field work researching the politics of redevelopment in coastal Mississippi, I found that the political realities I touch on briefly above confounded my interdisciplinary academic and practical training for addressing urban social problems which had historically shaped my take on social justice praxis. As an academic, I had largely worked within the theoretical traditions of Marxist political economy and feminist social theory to assess, engage with, and propose alternatives politics and analyses for advancing social justice in US cities (see for example author 2009a, 2009b). And while Marxist political economy would seem to provide a particularly promising foundation for anti-capitalist social justice praxis in the context of growth-oriented neoliberal urbanism, as I argue below, the analyses of urban land use politics in the global north in the Marxist tradition are too broad to direct praxis in the context of post-Katrina Mississippi. Instead, I turn to the intellectual resources of feminist social theory and epistemology to propose a way to ground social justice praxis. Specifically, I engage with feminist epistemology and feminist standpoint theory to argue for a mediated standpoint from
which to produce knowledge about the history and politics of land use in a place in order to ground social justice oriented praxis. This mediated standpoint is a privileged one insofar as it amounts to the ‘view from below’ and as such offers a better, more objective view of the way in which power and oppression are made manifest and operate. The ‘view’ that this mediated standpoint provides offers a perspective that can inform social justice praxis in a way that is responsive to the specific configurations of power and privilege in different places. Thus, the analysis offered here is in effect a geographical intervention in standpoint epistemology, one that renders material the metaphor of space and ‘the margins’ that characterize much work in the feminist tradition (see for example hooks 1984).

Drawing on subsequent engagements with feminist standpoint epistemology as well as Hartsock’s own reformulation of the theory, the ‘view’ from the standpoint of land use politics proposed here is consciously and intentionally partial and contestable. It is partial at once due to the limitations of research and the inherently partial nature of knowledge, but it is also deliberately and self-consciously constructed as partial in response to the political critique of the limitations of totalizing narratives and a concomitant concern to produce knowledge that fosters solidarity along multiple axes of difference (Haraway 1991; Gibson-Graham 1996; Derickson 2009).

In the following section I elaborate on the concept of social justice that motivates this article. I then offer a brief (and inevitably partial) overview of the history and politics of land use in coastal Mississippi as I understand them to be relevant to the question of social justice praxis. I then consider two of the more applicable theories of land use and social justice that have arisen from the Marxist tradition that have informed related geographical inquiry. I use the particulars of the case of coastal Mississippi to demonstrate the ways in which these two frameworks, the Urban Growth Machine Thesis and Lefebvre’s conception of inhabitance, are too broad and diffuse to inform an explicit praxis around land use struggles in the wake of Katrina. Having established what I see as the insufficiency of these approaches for informing urban praxis, I then explore the usefulness of feminist standpoint theory as developed by Nancy Hartsock, as well as subsequent engagements and critiques by feminists. I argue that the challenges that circumstances on the Gulf Coast pose to the development of a social justice praxis can best be addressed by a situated, place-based standpoint politics that borrows heavily from the intellectual resources of feminist epistemology. Following from that argument and based on months of qualitative research around land use politics in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, I consider what it might look like to construct a mediated standpoint or a view of land use politics and power ‘from below’ by drawing on Iris Young’s conception of oppression and domination. In so doing, I show that in the realm of land use and urban politics, low-income, historic African American neighborhoods in Gulfport and Biloxi have been specifically marginalized and oppressed, and as such, provide a view from which to conceive of a social justice praxis of urban land use politics in the wake of Katrina.

4.2 Social justice and geometries of power

As the goal of this article is to develop a foundation for praxis that is intended to advance social justice, let me first expand on what I mean by ‘social justice.’ In contrast to liberal conceptions of justice (see for example Rawls 1971, see Young 1990 for a critique), critical theorists have developed a conception of inequality and justice through an explicit engagement with existing
social relations. Marx, for example, arrived at a conception of injustice specific to the capitalist mode of production through observation and analysis of the social relations of production and subsequent distribution. Through such analysis, he argued that production, not distribution, was the site of exploitation, and hence, the site of injustice. As Harvey (2009 [1973]) puts it, for Marx “production is distribution” and “the definition of income (which is what distributive justice is concerned with) is itself defined by production” (15). The move from a liberal to a Marxist conception of justice, Harvey argues, is a move from a “predisposition to regard social justice as a matter of eternal justice and morality to regard it as something contingent upon the social processes operating in society as a whole” (15).

Many feminists and other critical theorist have embraced a Marxist conception of exploitation as one element of injustice, but have argued that exploitation alone is insufficient to explain the many types of injustice in late capitalism (Young 1990; Fraser 1997; but see Hennessy 2000). Iris Marion Young’s (1990) work in this vein is particularly useful for purposes of identifying the primary ways in which injustice is manifested in the present social context in Mississippi. For Young, the distributive paradigm of justice fails to address the way in which people are “doers and actors” and as such, have values associated with participating, experiencing, feeling and learning. Thus, Young’s conception of social justice reflects not only material distribution of goods, but also concerns the degree to which a society “contains and supports the institutional conditions” necessary for self-expression and self-determination (Young 1990, 37). Young argues that oppression and domination are the primary concepts with which the identification of injustice should be concerned. Toward that end, she identifies what she calls the “five faces of oppression,” which include exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Young’s conception of injustice attempts to get at the ways in which oppression and domination are manifested in a mutually constitutive fashion in the realm of distribution as well as the realm of cultural and social life. For example, her conception of exploitation draws specifically on the Marxist labor theory of value to argue that exploitation is a structural relationship in which the material benefits of the labor of one group are systemically transferred to another, with important implications not only for material deprivation of laborers, but also for the self-respect and political power of the working class. In the remaining faces of oppression – marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence – Young is concerned with the ways in which material deprivation, the traditional concern of liberal conceptions of justice, is co-implicated with non-material political power, self-determination, recognition, and respect. Like Young, Fraser (1997) is concerned with the distribution of material goods as well as cultural and symbolic injustices rooted in “social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication” (14), examples of which include cultural domination, nonrecognition, and disrespect. “Despite the differences between them, both socioeconomic injustice and cultural injustice are pervasive in contemporary societies,” she argues. “Both are rooted in processes and practices that systematically disadvantage some groups of people vis-à-vis others. Both, consequently, should be remedied” (15).

Drawing on the work of Young, Fraser, Marx, and Harvey, a grounded social justice praxis will draw attention to the way in which socioeconomic and cultural injustices have been historically perpetuated and continue to operate, with the intention of mitigating both their occurrence and their implications. The vision for social justice invoked in this article is the absence of oppression and domination and the existence of institutional conditions that encourage and allow
self-determination and self-expression. “Social justice praxis” refers to a politics of action, informed by theory, for achieving that vision. Given these normative commitments, it is not sufficient to appeal to democratic process to arbitrate between various claims in the realm of land use politics. As Young (2000) has argued, “in actually existing democracies there tends to be a reinforcing circle between social and economic inequality and political inequality that enables the powerful to use formally democratic processes to perpetuate injustice or preserve privilege” (17). In light of this observation, an appeal to democracy alone runs the risk of having little prospect of fostering social change.

Whereas the reflexive left response for procedural questions, such as ‘how should the coast develop,’ is to answer ‘democratically,’ Young’s observation poses a particular challenge for the development of social justice praxis around land use struggles. Thus, if an appeal to democracy alone is not necessarily sufficient to promote justice, then we need a theoretical framework to interpret oppression and inform praxis. In the following section I provide further detail to contextualize the land use struggles to which I briefly refer above. I then consider the two more popular and prominent bodies of Marxist theory in relation to this context and show that they are ultimately not sufficient for grounding social justice praxis. Instead, I turn to feminist standpoint theory to argue for a mediated standpoint as a way to ground social justice praxis around land use issues in cities.

4.3 The politics of land use in the Gulfport-Biloxi region
Like most de-industrializing US regions, the Gulfport-Biloxi region along coastal Mississippi (see Figure 3.1) has been struggling to reinvent itself in the wake of a near collapse of the boat building, fishing, and seafood processing industries in the late 1970s. In the early 1900s Eastern Europeans, arriving in Biloxi through Baltimore, migrated to the region for work in the fishing industry and lived in small bungalow style factory housing close to the processing plants that lined the peninsula of East Biloxi, or built their own small homes (Durrenberger 1996). As is often the case with chain migration (see Derickson and Ross 2008), some were able to earn enough to educate their children and move out of their modest homes. Those who stayed shared the peninsula with working class African Americans, many of whom had lived along the Back Bay of the peninsula in small, shotgun style homes, African American-only housing projects, and African American-only military housing. A vibrant Main Street lined with African American-owned businesses, including grocery stores, restaurants, and jazz clubs, served as center for social life in the African American community. Following the Vietnam war, a community of Vietnamese migrants settled along the peninsula and set up their own fishing and shrimping businesses.

Eastern Europeans moved ‘up’ and out in the 1960s and 1970s, as children of fishing families went off to pursue professional lines of work,22 and the peninsula became increasingly associated with low-income African Americans and Vietnamese residents in the late 1970s. A number of interviewees suggested that the peninsula was Biloxi’s “inner city” both demographically and in terms of public perception of safety, crime, and the prevalence of the pathologies of the underclass in that geographical space. West Biloxi remained home to the wealthy families in the city and middle class military families.

22 This demographic shift was verified by a number of interviewees.
The northern portion of the city, called “Woolmarket,” was annexed in what many residents of the area considered a “hostile” takeover in the early 1990s. Formerly a jurisdiction of the county, Woolmarket was subject to fewer building codes and zoning laws. Residents bristled at the zoning laws and building codes imposed by the city and resented being under the more active and, in their opinion, intrusive management of the City of Biloxi. The area was largely white, and more politically conservative. As one prominent resident told me, “We’re a bunch of rednecks up here: we like God, guns, and America, and not necessarily in that order.” Interviewees suggested that there was an emerging divide in the area between relatively newly arrived residents, who identified the rural landscape and large lots as an “executive” or upper middle class landscape, and those who had lived in Woolmarket for generations, who were more inclined to read a libertarian philosophy from the landscape rather than class politics. The newer residents bought their homes after the annexation, and at once resented the development that annexation spurred, but relished the relative security of the zoning policies it introduced. What united these two groups was a strong desire for the area, its large lots, its environment, and its rural feel and “character” to go unchanged.

The desire for stasis in Woolmarket was challenged in the early 1990s by the city’s emerging economic development strategy. The city was facing empty coffers due to the decline of the shrimping and fishing industry as environmental regulations made shrimping practices less lucrative and increasing imports from Asia drove down the price of seafood. The city’s decaying tourism infrastructure could no longer compete with destinations like Disney World, and the once glamorous “strip” of motels and bars along the beachfront in Biloxi was taken over by organized crime known as the “Dixie Mafia” (Humes 1994). Prominent city boosters, many of whom owned land along the shore of the peninsula where the vacant and now obsolete canneries lay dormant, actively pursued a change to the state laws regarding gambling. In part to placate the social conservatives in much of the state, to whom gambling was anathema and a sin, and in part to ensure a limited scope for casino development that would protect casino interests and ensure the value of their land, the enabling legislation for casino gaming required that gaming facilities be floating on water (Herrmann 2006). This legislation effectively limited the geography of casinos to the coast and the banks of the Mississippi River.

The city of Biloxi actively pursued a casino gaming district through infrastructure investments, favorable zoning laws, and a generally welcoming attitude toward casino development (Herrmann 2006). The casino industry responded, and by 2005 there were 9 large casino floors floating in the gulf and ringing the peninsula, along with extensive land-based hotels, restaurants, and amenities common to casino complexes, like those in Las Vegas and Atlantic City. Due to the geographic limitations of the enabling legislation and very strict zoning regulations, the casinos were concentrated in East Biloxi (see Figure 3.2). According to interviews, prior to Katrina, residents were generally supportive of the introduction of casinos to the region and the phenomenal tax revenues that they brought in, which, by 2006 accounted for a third of the city budget (City of Biloxi 2010). Funds were spent on road improvements and widening designed to facilitate further casino and tourist development, new schools, a new public safety facility, and youth sports (personal interview, Mayor AJ Holloway, City of Biloxi 2010). According to interviews, residents appreciated these improvements and the jobs associated with casinos, but they were concerned about associated development in the form of luxury, high-rise
condominiums, which were not as geographically constrained, and which some feared would wall off the view or access to the beach.

Damage from the storm surge, flooding, and winds from Hurricane Katrina were especially severe on the peninsula of East Biloxi, with over 80% of its buildings suffering severe or catastrophic damage (Morse 2008). Immediately following the storm, some city and state officials and urban planners came to regard the city as effectively a blank slate. Two major planning studies, one initiated by the city and local casino and business interests and one by the governor of Mississippi, took for granted that a revitalized and enhanced casino district would drive redevelopment in the region and that residential settlement patterns should be reorganized accordingly. The governor and state legislature immediately passed a bill, just days after the Hurricane, allowing casinos to rebuild, rescinding the requirement that the casino gaming floor be floating on water, yet requiring that they remain located within 800’ of the mean high tide line, a provision which essentially ensured casinos would rebuild in their previous locations. Casino land grabs immediately following the storm created intense land speculation on the peninsula of East Biloxi, which slowed the pace of recovery as land owners held out for large paydays and made it more difficult for nonprofit housing organizations to buy land to build affordable housing on the peninsula. At the same time, flood zones for the area were being redrawn by FEMA, and many homeowners faced onerous, architecturally undesirable, and expensive requirements that they elevate their homes to make them less susceptible to damage from future flooding. Failure to comply meant that homeowners would not qualify for federal recovery funding. Many homeowners had difficulty complying with these requirements, as insurance companies were slow to make payments, and as a result, a number of houses sat vacant. Landlords who did not use their homes as their primary residence were not eligible for housing recovery funds, and so much of the rental stock of the peninsula lay vacant and unrepaiired. Together these circumstances meant that a profound decrease in available housing on the peninsula coincided with an immediate need to re-house residents, and accommodate new inhabitants, if the casino industry was to successfully recover. City officials, planners, and developers thus began to look north to the relatively sparsely settled area of Woolmarket as a site for the development of “affordable housing” for low- to moderate-income families.

Residents of Woolmarket organized to prevent zoning changes that would permit high-density low- to moderate-income subdivisions. Resistance was particularly fierce from those who had settled there more recently, who considered Woolmarket an area of “executive homes” and had been attracted there by the low density and large lots that they equated with upper-middle class lifestyles. Woolmarket residents attended city wide planning meetings, meetings of the planning and zoning committee, and city council meetings to register their objections to the effort to reorganize the social geographies of the region to include more low income people in Woolmarket. To do so, they argued, would be to unfairly impact their quality of life by introducing new densities and the deviant behaviors they associated with high-density, low-income housing.

As one resident explained to me:

Upper income folks don’t want those lower income folks next door because it will destroy the value of what they’ve worked for their whole life, and that’s their
home. And the folks in the littler homes are going to have a higher crime rate…I don’t think it’s a good deal to put that high crime rate right next to this quiet environment” (Woolmarket resident, interview).

Residents also listed concerns relating to water supply, traffic congestion, environmental degradation, and other quality of life issues to oppose the introduction of high-density affordable housing into their neighborhood. During interviews with residents, they frequently couched their objections to development in the region in environmental terms. Residents spoke of the environment both in terms of their concern for its management and well-being, as well as in terms of their ability to derive use value from it:

It is so sad. . .We haven’t seen any deer since they started doing the burning and scraping and that’s sad, because we really used to enjoy that (Woolmarket resident, interview).

We love it out here. Ever since he went through and – excuse the term – raped that land we haven’t seen a deer ever since. We had visions of our grandkids – not that we have them yet – out here watching the rabbits and the turtles and feeding the deer and some of those dreams have been shattered (Woolmarket resident, interview).

As the following quote demonstrates, however, residents of Woolmarket quickly move back and forth between articulating concerns about the environment, and objections to specific types of development:

Well the concerns about land use is they’re going to over-develop it to the point where the community cannot handle, especially with the filling in of the wetlands, cutting down protected trees, bringing in subdivisions that are not appropriate to the area, like right across the street, and you can see what this neighborhood looks like, and for them to put in a low-income subdivision across the street in an area where there are $200,000 homes and properties is just out of the question. And I think really that that is one of the very many concerns that residential areas should be kept as is and whatever building they’re going to do here should be comparable to what is already in the surrounding area (Woolmarket resident, interview).

At the same time, residents of East Biloxi were not eager to relocate, either. Instead, they fought particularly hard to rebuild their neighborhood, despite the myriad challenges from FEMA height requirements for single family housing, encroachment from casinos, and rising insurance costs. Along with the nostalgic desire to preserve a historic community and return it to its pre-1970s grandeur that some residents articulated, there was also a more pragmatic reason residents wanted to rebuild in East Biloxi, which was not unrelated to the developing hostilities in Woolmarket. One interviewee put it this way:

Think about it from the standpoint of a beach head in a war. This particular area contains 90% of the African American population, 90% of the Hispanic population, 90% of the Vietnamese population, and 90% of the poorest population
in the city. What’s unique about it is that you owned a piece of the land. That’s what makes this fight worthwhile. Let’s say they lose that. Do you think anyone else in any of these more affluent communities are going to be opening their arms, saying “oh, by all means, y’all come here? As a matter of fact, let’s build new housing for you? Yes we can!”… because its considered lower income housing, oh heck no. The reason we fight so hard to keep it here is because we are here. We’ve got this beach head. This is the property that we own, and it is important that we keep it (East Biloxi activist, personal interview).

Another historic African American neighborhood, a community just 10 miles to the west, in the adjacent city of Gulfport, was, like Woolmarket, also couching its objections to land use and development in terms of preserving the ‘character’ of their neighborhood and protecting the local environment. Turkey Creek is a small, 320 acre neighborhood in Gulfport (see Figure 3.1). Settled in 1866, its area corresponds approximately to “eight forties,” a reference to the 40 acres and a mule promised to freed slaves after the civil war. Though a portion of the neighborhood was sold to build a creosote plant, much of the original land has remained in the hands of descendants of the original settlers (Evans 2010). This is in part due to an appreciation for the cultural continuity of a sense of pride in the history of the neighborhood. But it is also due, in part, to the fact that many of the properties have been handed down through generations, and residents who occupy the homes do not have a clear title to the land, and therefore cannot sell it without extensive and costly legal maneuverings. The lack of clear title to property has also been an issue for homeowners seeking to avail themselves of recovery funds, which were only available to homeowners with clear titles to their properties.23

Turkey Creek has long been feeling squeezed by the surrounding infrastructure. Whereas the city of Biloxi pursued an economic development strategy based on casino development and tourism, the Gulfport has pursued infrastructure enhancements and big-box retail. Turkey Creek is surrounded by Interstate 10, a large industrial seaway, and a creosote plant to the north, the regional airport to the south, and Highway 49 – an 8 lane road littered with commercial sprawl along the lines of Lowes, WalMart, IHOP, Waffle House, motel chains and car dealerships – to the west (See Figure 3.1).

Turkey Creek and its community based organization, Turkey Creek Community Initiative, have identified a host of commercial and infrastructure development projects to which they object on the grounds that they will create flooding in their communities and compromise their way of life. Much like the Woolmarket community, they have actively protested proposed development in the region on environmental grounds. According to interviewees, this framing is in part due to real objections and concerns about the impact of environmental degradation on the quality of life and safety of residents in the neighborhood, and in part a political strategy for framing their concerns in ways that gain traction.

One interviewee reflected on what he considered to be an unlikely relationship between the community organization and the Audubon society in securing a series of protections for the land along the creek:

23 This example illustrates perfectly Rose’s (2004) point regarding the ways in which property rights, while typically thought of as enabling exchange, can sometimes hinder it as well.
Audubon? What the f*ck does Audubon have to do with a racially embattled black community in Mississippi? That’s supposed to be the NAACP’s job. No, the NAACP doesn’t have sh*t to do with this. They’re not involved, you know what I mean? Perhaps locally if some different people were involved in the Gulfport NAACP the NAACP would be an important element in all of this, but absent the… but its not. So, that’s like the second thing, the map of community real resources – relational resources. What is in this potential pool of resources, and what’s not? (Turkey Creek activist, personal interview).

He goes on to talk about the ways in which the various tools they use, including environmentalism, community planning, zoning, and community benefits agreements, as well as the associated language, are strategies for achieving the ultimate goal of protecting the community more generally:

David went calmly to the creek or whatever and selected five smooth stones. And he went and luckily the first shot killed him, but he picked five stones. Not a big arsenal of rocks, just five smooth stones. Strategic stones. So the way you do this is you gotta find the weak spot, and then you’ve got to find something that can hit it like nothing else and just do it. And be prepared and know in advance what you’re going to do when the thing drops to its knees. And in his case, it was slit the throat. In our case, its like, here’s a community benefits agreement” (Turkey Creek activist, personal interview).

Finally, Soria City is a historic African American neighborhood in the heart of Gulfport characterized by rows of shotgun houses. The lack of sidewalks in the neighborhood lends it a casual and friendly feel, until the poor infrastructure is starkly contrasted with the adjacent neighborhood replete with tidy and well-maintained sidewalks. Like other African American neighborhoods in the city, it suffers from incredibly poor drainage and other signs of neglect from the city, including (according to interviewees) sub-standard city services. The recovery efforts of many residents in the neighborhood have been stymied by a variety of factors, including insurers delaying or denying claims and an inability to avail themselves of recovery dollars because the governor decided to supply them only to people who were carrying wind insurance, or the inability to obtain a clear title to the property. Residents in this small neighborhood, adjacent to downtown and blocks from the beach (see Figure 3.1), are keenly aware of the potential for their location to become far more valuable. Though it is unclear at this stage how likely any of these proposals are to come to fruition, renderings of downtown Gulfport transformed into a southern tourist oasis along the lines of Charleston, South Carolina are being circulated by the city. New Urbanist leader Andres Duaney has been actively participating in the post-Katrina planning efforts, and the city is clearly looking to leverage the 600 million dollar investment in the state port and recovery funds to enliven the downtown.

Faced with the possibility that some tax-delinquent properties or properties with code violations may be seized by the city and sold and packaged to developers, residents clearly articulate a strong desire for the neighborhood to remain an African American neighborhood. They talk
about their way of life, the preservation of their community, and their desire to continue to derive use values and exchange values from its configuration and inhabitants.

Residents couch their objections to development in terms of a desire to preserve the history and character of the neighborhood, as demonstrated in the following quote:

We don’t want a lot of development as far as apartments in this neighborhood because what it’s going to do, it’s going to take away a lot of the history of the community. If someone wants to come in here and build, we want them to build according to surrounding our historical – of the homes in the neighborhoods. We don’t want anything that’s way off basis that is going to change the preservation of the history in the community that we have. We have to really watch our zoning, also in here (Soria City resident, interview).

Residents in Soria City are also concerned with the value of their homes, and their ability to leverage the proposed redevelopment in the region, as one resident explained in the following quote:

But you can see how close we are to the beach. You know. And this is something that we want to make sure that we maintain – that we don’t lose that. If they put, bring that traffic over here to Railroad, and then close down part of the crossings, that would take away our access to the South side, and devalue our property because we don’t have the access. So we’re trying to – increase our value, not devalue it” (Soria City resident, interview).

Recently, residents of the neighborhood have resisted efforts by Habitat for Humanity to purchase tax delinquent properties and develop affordable housing. Residents are uncomfortable with ceding control of the neighborhood to an outside developer, and are little comforted by Habitat’s nonprofit status. Affordable housing activist in the region with ties to the neighborhood have been working with residents and Habitat to come to a mutual vision for the neighborhood.

Thus, as the summary above shows, the visions, priorities, and framings of communities share important and common links across racial and class lines. Further, it seems that the invocation of environmental protection as a desirable goal is not necessarily a motivating factor in its own right, but rather an intention strategy for preserving the status quo and blocking development, with exclusionary implications that, at the very least, need to be critically examined. In the following section, I consider two prominent theories of land use and social justice, the urban growth machine thesis and Lefebvre’s concept of inhabitance, to determine whether and how they might provide a theoretical framework for grounding praxis.

4.4 Theorizing land use politics: growth machines and inhabitance

Molotch’s “Growth Machine” thesis (1976) fundamental argument is that land use struggles arise through a clash between the pursuit of use values and the pursuit of exchange values (Molotch 1976). He argues that urban politics are shaped largely by this clash, and that interest groups with a shared stake in land development work together as a class to “use the institutional fabric,
including the political and cultural apparatus, to intensify land use and make money” (Molotch 1993, 31). Because city governments are largely dependent on tax revenues for fiscal solvency, they are inclined to partner with what Molotch calls “growth entrepreneurs” to promote intensified land use. This partnership, Molotch argues, results in a “growth machine apparatus” that drives urban politics. Original work by Molotch (1976) and Logan and Molotch (1987), as well as work that attempts to operationalize the thesis, are clearly derived from a normative critique of the privileging of exchange values over use values as an organizing principle for urban praxis, and of the idea of “growth” as an objectively beneficial goal. Indeed, as Lake (1990) puts it, Logan and Molotch provide a “clear villain” (179) in the growth machine, as its members attempt to obliterate the “unimpeachable use values” of residents.

But while the concept of use-value can help direct attention to some extent to the necessities of social reproduction, as Logan and Molotch (1987) are clearly attempting to do by focusing on use values, it provides us no normative grounds on which to stake claims regarding different and conflicting use values. Following a Marxian conception of use values, it is impossible to distinguish between the use values of various residents. Marx (1990) is clear in his writing that he is not interested in associating use values with any particular kind of uses, or in judging the social necessity of the uses. “Within the exchange relation,” Marx argues, “one use-value is worth just as much as another, provided only that is present in the appropriate quantity” (127).

Perhaps more importantly, as Lake (1990) has argued and the case above illustrates, there is seldom a clear distinction between efforts to preserve use values and exchange values. Instead, residents are usually simultaneously attempting to preserve both use and exchange values, making it impossible to claim that in one instance, residents are protecting home values and in another, their “community.” Thus, political engagements cannot be clearly distinguish as those concerned with use value and those concerned with exchange values.

Thus, while the growth machine thesis accurately directs attention to the primacy of land use struggles in shaping and driving urban politics – a particularly relevant contribution given the relative lack of concern with land use politics in the geographic research – it does little to help us arbitrate the land use struggles in coastal Mississippi, nor does it help us ground a social justice praxis. Because the concept of use values is normatively vacant, the use value that residents of Woolmarket derive from large-lot zoning that aims to exclude the development of affordable housing cannot be critiqued, nor can it be differentiated from the use values that low income residents of color derive from keeping their communities in tact or warding off commercial development that threatens to displace them. Thus, the urban growth machine thesis and the politics of use values that it suggests are not sufficient for grounding a social justice praxis.

More recently, the phrase “Right to the City” – borrowed from the work of Henri Lefebvre – has exploded in both academic literature and in the discourse of social justice activism in cities. Purcell (2002) points out, however, that in both settings, the phrase is often invoked with little consensus on what a right to the city might actually mean. Purcell (2002) argues that the notion of the Right to the City is gaining traction in both academic and activist spheres due to the increasing sense of disenfranchisement in cities that has accompanied the neoliberalization of urban governance. And while there appears to be a clear affinity between groups that invoke the term, he identifies a gulf between the “frequency with which the right to the city is mentioned
and the depth with which it is explored” (2002, 101). Purcell attempts to ground the concept by parsing out precisely what Lefebvre meant by the “Right to the City” and considering the political possibilities and implications therein. Lefebvre’s conception of the Right to the City, he argues, is “an argument for profoundly reworking both the social relations of capitalism and the current structure of liberal-democratic citizenship” (2002, 101). The set of social relations he envisions would not entail piecemeal reform, rather, “his idea is instead a call for a radical restructuring of social, political, and economic relations, both in the city and beyond. Key to this radical nature is that the right to the city reframes the arena of decision making in cities: it reorients decision-making away from the state and toward the production of urban space” (2002, 101). For Purcell, Lefebvre’s right to the city is contingent, which Purcell finds both exciting and disconcerting: “It is exciting because it offers a radical alternative that directly challenges and rethinks the current structure of both capitalism and liberal-democratic citizenship. It is disconcerting because we cannot know what kind of city these new politics will produce” (2002, 100).

As conceptualized by Lefebvre, the Right to the City is primarily concerned with the process of decision making in cities, and calls attention to the need to “restructure the power relations that underlie the production of urban space, fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state toward urban inhabitants” (Purcell 2002, 102). To articulate a radical conception of participation in making the city, Lefebvre (1996) developed the concept of “inhabitance.” Unlike traditional liberal democracy, which enfranchises people to participate in decision-making in and through the state, the concept of “inhabitance” enfranchises anyone who inhabits the city to participate in all decisions that produce that urban space – many of which are made outside of the state. The right to the city is earned by living out everyday life in the city, which means that anyone who uses, or makes, the city in any way, has a right to participate in decisions that shape urban space. This right extends to all decisions that shape urban spaces, whether they be made by the state, corporations, or international ruling bodies. The right further extends to all types of inhabitants of the city, from the marginal to the privileged (Lefebvre 1991, Purcell 2002). Lefebvre gives little guidance, however, as to how this radical openness might be applied, and whether, for example, those who would be disproportionately affected, or those who had historically been marginalized, would have more of a say than those who would be tangentially affected. In his conception, those who live in the city may not have any more say than those who commute to the city and leave each day.

There is a major disconnect between the theorization of the concept of the Right to the City in the critical geography literature and actually existing struggles in cities in the realm of land use politics. Academics, in their understandable drive to promote connections and solidarity beyond the narrow boundaries of the neighborhood, emphasize the abstract concept of “inhabitance” with surprisingly little emphasis on the rights associated with the material space of the city. By contrast, residents and activists often engage with the concept of the Right to the City in terms of the right to physical spaces as evidenced in the case above, as well as by the overwhelming tendency of activism in cities to be organized around neighborhoods and neighborhood issues. While these organizations may recognize the value of city-wide and national-level collaboration, umbrella organizations designed to facilitate such collaboration often suffer from limited resources and commitments to specific neighborhood issues over city-wide or national issues. There is nothing in Lefebvre’s conception that would give those living adjacent to or directly
affected by the development to have more of a say than those living further away and arguably less immediately or directly affected. While it cannot be taken as given that proximity ought to be relevant to land use decision making, neither can the issue be ignored. For example, politicizing the siting of environmental pollutants adjacent to low-income neighborhoods of color has been an important strategy for the environmental justice movement. If, as Purcell argues, the concept of inhabitance means that all those affected have a right to input in urban decision making, what prevents those who want to breathe clean air in the suburbs or wealthier parts of the city from directing problematic uses to specific areas? Further, the radical openness and contingency of the concept does not correspond with the desire of residents to control their immediate surroundings. Thus, a politics of inhabitance and use value are too loose, too open, and too contingent and do not correspond with the desires of residents to control material space. Further, they are too devoid of normative content to allow for arbitration between competing claims over use values.

4.5 Feminist standpoint
If existing theories that explicitly address urban land use politics cannot provide a sufficiently grounded theoretical framework that can address social and political realities in actually existing land use struggles, then we need to turn to alternative theoretical frameworks to inform social justice praxis in these contexts. In this section, drawing on feminist theory in general and feminist standpoint politics specifically, I argue that the view from below is a better view of power and social relations. In arguing that a mediated standpoint is a productive way to ground a social justice praxis around land use issues in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, I offer a spatial conception of standpoint politics.

Feminist theory is an unlikely but particularly compelling body of theory in which to ground an analysis of how the coast should rebuild from a social justice perspective insofar as it has developed with an explicit concern with the inherent political implications and possibilities derived from theoretical positions. In particular, Nancy Hartsock has drawn on Marxist epistemology to develop what has become known as ‘feminist standpoint theory.’ In so doing, Hartsock brought the relationship between power and epistemology squarely into the political arena in powerful and provocative ways. Whereas politics were traditionally assumed to compromise objectivity, Hartsock argued that all manners of knowing were intensely political, and that there was a privileged place from which to know, particularly about oppression. Working from Marx’s conception of the lives of the proletariat as a privileged site from which to view capitalism, Hartsock expanded on the concept of the ‘view from below’ to argue that there is a ‘standpoint’ that can be achieved through analysis of oppression and domination which can then serve as a place from which to produce knowledge to combat oppression and domination. In Hartsock’s original formulation, that standpoint was the view from women’s lives. She argued that ‘like the lives of proletarians according to Marxian theory, women’s lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy, a vantage point that can ground a powerful critique of the phallocratic institutions and ideology that constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy’ (463). According to Hartsock, ‘a standpoint...carries with it the contention that there are some perspectives on society from which, however well intentioned one may be, the real relations of humans with each other and the with the natural world are not visible’ (464). Hartsock’s is a strong, albeit critical, realist position from which social reality
can be clearly understood, and she argues, a position from which emancipatory action can be taken (Meyers 1997).

Reflecting on her initial formulation, Hartsock writes:

“I was arguing that, like the lives of proletarians in Marxist theory, women’s lives also contain possibilities for developing critiques of domination and visions of alternative social arrangements. By examining the institutionalized sexual division of labour, I argued that a feminist standpoint could be developed that would deepen the critique available from the standpoint of the proletariat and would allow for a critique of patriarchal ideology and social relations that would provide a more complete account of the domination of women than Marx’s critique of capitalism” (229).

The move Hartsock makes above, from the first to the second sentence is telling. While the phrase ‘the view from the lives of women’ is suggestive of a view that is deeply personal, individual, and visceral, Hartsock’s next sentence evidences the extent to which hers is not a the heterogeneous, pluralistic view at all, but a strong realist and structuralist one. What makes Hartsock’s standpoint a feminist one is that it is politicized and critical. The notion of a feminist standpoint has much in common with the purpose of the consciousness-raising groups of second wave feminism – that is, to begin from the personal, individual lives of women, but to translate those individual experiences into a consciousness and critique of patriarchy. Thus, as Hartsock argues, the feminist standpoint is discernable not merely from talking to women, but from ‘examining the institutionalized sexual division of labor.”

In this sense, it is distinct from traditional identity politics, in which claims to know are based merely on one’s inclusion in a group. Rather, a standpoint is a position grounded in historical analysis of oppression that argues not merely for recognition, but for a realigning of social relations. This realignment should remediate past injustices and legacies of oppression, and ground a future vision for just social relations. Expanding on Hartsock’s formulation, Haraway writes:

A standpoint is not an empiricist appeal to or by ‘the oppressed’ but a cognitive, psychological and political tool for more adequate knowledge judged by the nonessentialist, historically contingent, situated standards of strong objectivity. Such a standpoint is the always fraught but necessary fruit of the practice of oppositional and differential consciousness. A feminist standpoint is a practical technology rooted in yearning, not an abstract philosophical foundation (Haraway 1996).

In the intervening years, feminists and other social theorists have made a series of critical interventions in the concept of a feminist standpoint and the relationship between a social location in relation to a power structure and the process of producing knowledge (see for example Scott 1986, Mohanty 1988, Fuss 1989, Butler 1990, Hartsock 1990, Young 1994). The political utility and ontological accuracy of the category ‘woman’ has been called into question, with some arguing that the act of attempting to produce knowledge about women as a group amounts to epistemic violence insofar as it falsely and problematically reifies gender
dichotomies. Yet as Harding (2004) has argued, Hartsock’s conception of women, strong though it might be, is not a transhistorical, essentialized one, but rather is grounded in the material experience of women’s lives.

To find a way forward epistemologically and politically, Haraway (1996) has argued that all knowledges are partial and situated, and that there is no archimedean point, no place outside of structures of power, from which to see or know. Calling into question the hubris of claims to a scientific method which can produce ‘pure’ results, Haraway argues that acknowledging and embracing the inherently partial nature of knowledge resists what she calls the ‘god trick’ of attempting to get outside of power relations to produce knowledge. In practice, acknowledging the situated nature of knowledge has meant that researchers must reflect on their own position in relation to power structures and the process and subjects they are researching. Practicing ‘reflexivity’ has become de rigueur in feminist social science, though what constitutes rigorous reflexivity remains relatively undefined (England 1994, Rose 1997).

A final relevant intervention from feminist theory and epistemology is the rise in the appreciation for the way in which our positions in relation to power geometries are constructed and mediated along multiple axes; a concept for which the term ‘intersectionality' is increasingly invoked as shorthand (Valentine 2007). To acknowledge the intersectionality of our experiences of power and oppression is to eschew the essentializing tendencies of identity politics. Intersectionality poses a particular challenge to Hartsock’s original formulation of feminist standpoint theory insofar as it call into question the validity of her claim that the view from women’s lives specifically provides a better view of the workings of oppression and domination than other standpoints. Hartsock subsequently modified her original position to acknowledge the intersectional nature of social life in later formulations on feminist standpoint (2004).

**4.6 Grounding social justice praxis with standpoint politics**

Having argued that the case of coastal Mississippi illustrates the way in which more traditional left-oriented theories of land use politics rooted in use values or inhabitance are not sufficient for grounding social justice praxis, I want to now suggest a praxis that is rooted in the epistemological tradition of feminist standpoint theory. The standpoint politics of land use that I am proposing here takes on the feminist critiques of standpoint theory, and as such is overtly and intentionally partial and committed to the notion of intersectionality. Whereas feminist standpoint theory is rooted in an analysis of the institutional forms of patriarchy explicitly, with particular attention to the ways in which those forms of patriarchy intersect with the labor process, a standpoint politics around issues of land use is grounded in the analysis of oppression and domination offered by Young (outlined above). As such, it is intentionally grounded in historical and material social relations.

Like feminist standpoint, a standpoint politics around urban land use must reckon with the question of essentialism, as well, insofar as it draws on Young’s conception of oppression and domination that is largely organized around relationships between groups. While identifying, organizing around, and talking about relationships between groups runs the risk of essentializing places (ie, an “African American neighborhood”), and people (ie, resident of an African American neighborhood), without this kind of analysis it would not be possible to identify trends and commonalities that manifest themselves along racial lines. At the same time, however, the
act of essentializing enables, in part, the discursive production of places as problematic, undesirable, or marginal. While it is not at all clear that politicizing the extent to which these neighborhoods share demographic characteristics would necessarily contribute to an oppressively essentialized conception of the inhabitants of that neighborhood, it does bear some attention. Young herself asserted that her conception eschews essentialism, arguing that groups are relationally defined (Young 1990). Yet as Fainstein (2007) points out, if one is considered a member of a group based on how others view them, that leaves little opportunity for individual choice. Borrowing from Kobayshi and Peake (1994), the analysis offered here works from a conception of essentialism which is “built around issues, not biogenetic categories” (Knowles 1992, qtd. in Kobayshi and Peake 1994). They envision a political strategy that engages the particularities of the place and time by focusing on the “specific conditions as temporary historic moments” (Kobayshi and Peake 1994). Such a conception allows the retention of categories that enables an understanding of the structural and systemic manifestations of inequality, while rejecting the notion that these categories are biologically determined.

While a local standpoint might run the risk of reifying identity categories and places, in general, when conducted in multiple places, a standpoint of land use politics need only assume that oppression and domination exist in some places, but it need not be grounded in a particular category or identity. I am proposing an intersectional, locationally specific standpoint that only needs to generally acknowledge that in capitalist modernity oppression and uneven development exist, but take different forms in different locations and are meaningful across different scales. A progressive land use standpoint, then, provides a method and an epistemology for grounding social justice praxis in cities.

Thus, the analysis that I am presenting here is not the single view from below, or the only way of understanding power relations as they relate to the redevelopment of the coast. For example, an inter-racial group called Coastal Women for Change that is premised on the notion that women’s experiences of the hurricane, recovery, and redevelopment process provide a unique and important set of insights. The analysis below does not invalidate women’s lives as a standpoint from which to produce knowledge about the recovery and the needs of people in general and women in particular. Nor does it set out to make a claim that the marginality of residents of low-income neighborhoods of color is qualitatively more severe than women in general. Rather, it is to provide a view that can operate alongside and complement other views from below and other axes.

Potential synergies exist here between standpoint theory, situated knowleges and Katz’s (2001) notion of topographies and counter-topographies. Drawing on her many years of research in Sudan, Katz lays out an epistemology of creating topographies and counter-topographies in order to create a “tantalizing anti-capitalist politics.” In her artful analysis, Katz attempts to straddle the structuralist, anti-capitalist desire to link places through a common politics with a post-structuralist, feminist inspired desire to apprehend and appreciate both the role of place in producing uneven geographies, and the ways in which cultural politics articulate with capitalism to produce meaningfully different axes of oppression, and thus, different avenues for politics. To do a topography, she argues, is to “carry out a detailed examination of some part of the material world, defined at any scale from the body to the global, in order to understand its salient features and their mutual and broader relationships” (1228).
From these topographies, she argues, we can create countertopographies that theorize connections between places that are made “artifactually discrete by virtue of history and geography, but which also reproduce themselves differently amidst the common political economic and socio-cultural processes they experience” (1229). This attempt to promote an anti-capitalist or socialist politics at one scale that is simultaneously attendant to difference shares an affinity with Haraway’s (1991) concept of situated knowledges. Katz argues, however, that while situated knowledges are indeed promising, there are some important theoretical and epistemological problems associated with the concept when it is operationalized. First, she argues that they have become associated with a single point, or a subject position. This collapsed dimensionality, she argues, makes it difficult to get to productive notions of intersectionality. Second, she argues that situated knowledges claim to be a view from “somewhere” but seldom refer to a specific place. Finally, she argues situated knowledges too easily assume the possibilities of connections from location to location. Rather, as with the translation of militant particularisms to broader anti-capitalist consciousness, the possibility of knitting together situated knowledges to develop a broader politics has to be explained, rather than assumed. Katz’s point is to forge connections between places in order to understand the kinds of politics that might connect places in ways that still recognize the territoriality of power networks (see also Cumbers, Rutledge and Nativel 2008).

While there is much to be taken from Katz’s approach, not the least of which is the relevance of and method for tracing the historical trajectory of socio-cultural and political economic relations in and between places for purposes of developing anti-capitalist praxis, my intention is different from hers, and as a result, my approach differs in an important way. Whereas Katz is concerned with fostering anti-capitalist politics between places with different “topographies,” I am interested in attending to claims within places. These are not incompatible projects, rather they represent different moments in the process of identifying potential opportunities for solidarity and the translation of militant particularisms. In the following sections, I offer an analysis of the ways in which neighborhoods of color have been marginalized before the storm, as a result of the storm, and since. I argue that this historic and present marginalization provides a view from which to see oppression in the region, and a location for grounding a progressive urban politics. This particular view allows a differentiation between similar claims around environmental protection, community stability and cultural continuity. Before moving on, however, I offer a brief reflection on my own positionality in relation to the research process.

4.7 A brief reflection on reflexivity
The imperative of situating oneself as a researcher in relation to power structures sits uneasily with the idea that one can never get outside of a power structure, making it particularly difficult to apprehend the truly relevant power dynamics at work in the research process. In many ways, however, the precise contours of the researcher’s relationship to the researched and the research process are less important than the act of acknowledging that the researcher’s view is inherently partial. Nevertheless, there are a few elements of my positionality, experiences, and decision making process that merit a brief discussion.
Each moment of the research process – crafting a research question, designing the study, identifying sources, collecting data, analyzing the results and writing up the findings – is rife with power dynamics and represents an opportunity for reflexivity on the part of the researcher. Throughout the research process, I was acutely aware of the way in which my race (white) as well as my gender (female) influenced my access to various meetings and people, as well as what they would disclose to me. On a number of occasions, white interviewees told me things that I do not think they would have shared with a person of color, including their disgust with the way race was becoming the dominant narrative of post-Katrina recovery, to their fear of going to East Biloxi. People who had an aversion to living adjacent to low-income residents and people of color welcomed me into their home, invited me to dinner, and often hugged me as I left their company. In my efforts to learn more about the relationships between the business community and city leaders I interviewed a large number of white, middle-aged, wealthy men. These men often treated me in a friendly, avuncular and condescending way, winking at me during the interview and using my first name frequently. I was also invited to dine with their families on more than one occasion. While it seems possible that dinner invitations would be extended to a middle-aged man conducting the same interview, it seems highly unlikely that they would be winked at. Though it is impossible to say how this influenced the information that they shared with me, on a number of occasions I reflected that these wealthy, powerful men found me very unthreatening, and seemed to regard me as someone who could cause them no harm. I often doubted that my older male colleagues doing similarly critical work would have been received in the same manner.

Of course, my own positionality does not only influence how people perceive me as a researcher, it also influences what I see. Having spent most of my life in the New England, the racial history of the south looms large in my perception of the region, and things that look normal to people from Mississippi are stark to me. Symbols that southerners may have become desensitized to in particular, like the confederate flag, reify my own sense of the South as a dramatically racialized place. It is inevitably through this lens (and many others) that I have navigated the research process and interpreted the findings. While the preceding analysis is a brief and necessarily incomplete account of the intersection of positionality, power relations, and the research process, it is nevertheless significant as an overt acknowledgement that this study offers an intentionally and self-consciously partial account that has been influenced by the positionality and politics of the researcher.

4.8 Disenfranchisement and disinvestment in Coastal Mississippi’s communities of color
In order to establish a standpoint from which to view social relations and the politics of land use in Coastal Mississippi, and bring into relief what appear on their surface to be similar claims, I base the following topographical analysis loosely on Young’s (1990) five faces of oppression. In so doing, I attempt to establish that low-income communities of color have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised, and as such, provide a privileged standpoint that serves to ground a social justice praxis relating to land use politics.

First, communities of color, including not only Turkey Creek and Soria City, but other neighborhoods of color in the region as well, including North Gulfport and East Biloxi, have been historically marginalized and concentrated in low-lying, environmentally vulnerable spaces with poor drainage in close proximity to uses that are undesirable or environmentally
problematic. Turkey Creek is adjacent to a creosote plant, and East Biloxi was ringed by noxious seafood processing plants which were later replaced by towering corporate casinos. Spatial segregation was enforced through overt practices up through the Jim Crow era, including brutal civil rights era violence when a local chapter of the NAACP attempted to integrate a county-owned white beach. Police officers stood by while white residents beat activists with impunity (Mason 2000). Due to culturally derived land tenure practices in which homes are passed down through generations with no direct heir designated, most of these communities of color are inhabited by descendants of their original settlers. Heirs cannot sell their properties without a clearly held title to the land, which they are often unable to obtain due to the requirement that all possible living heirs sign away their ownership. Thus the historic injustices of slavery and Jim Crow remain concentrated in space.

Cultural imperialism is a second axis along which communities of color have been oppressed. This is manifested in everyday life in myriad ways, ranging from posts to the local newspaper’s comment boards, to the production of the region through a romanticized vision of the ante-bellum south. Celebratory representations of the region’s history and culture focus largely on Confederate history and direct visitors to related sites of interest.

As one interviewee described the cultural imperialism in the region:

> Where else in America are you going to get away with having a sign outside your motor repair place called Jap-Tek? Or a sign with a Native American girl in full garb that says ‘Red Pest Control?’ I’m past being shocked, I’m past being offended, or bemused, amused, or ‘comused’ I mean, this is the last frontier. In fact, the more you know about the social, economic, and cultural history about this region, and the fact that this state’s history began with a land swindle, ever since then… its just like Australia starting as a penal colony has everything to do with the personality of the people in that space, regarded for their wastelands or having it completely backwards. Well, I mean, that’s just where we are. The capital of this state is named after Andrew Jackson, proudly! So that’s where we are.” (Turkey Creek resident, interview).

African Americans in coastal Mississippi also suffer from poverty rates three times that of whites in the region (US Census 2000). While homeownership rates are relatively high, the aforementioned issue relating to titles means that land tenure does not generate wealth in the community. Further, according to interviews, in at least one neighborhood of color, the desire for land ownership is frequently exploited by land owners who self-finance mortgages on vacant lots in the neighborhood to local residents at exorbitant interest rates, and take the property back when purchasers cannot keep up with payments.

People of color have also been marginalized politically in the region through the squelching of dialogue about race relations, minimal representation on city councils and in other spheres of government, and growth strategies intended to keep neighborhoods of color outside the boundaries of newer cities. In 1990, the city of Gulfport attempted what became known as the ‘hourglass’ annexation of the wealthy, white neighborhood of Orange Grove to the North of the city limits, while intentionally avoiding the annexation of the low-income black neighborhoods
on either side of Highway 49. The proposed annexation, which was so discriminatory it was eventually struck down by a judge, would have developed city limits that travelled up the highway without extending into the neighborhoods on either side, avoiding city responsibility for neighborhoods of color and further disenfranchising residents.

Finally, these neighborhoods of color are more vulnerable to storm surge, and hence disproportionately bore the impact of Hurricane Katrina. Ruthless cost-benefit equations undertaken by the Army Corps of Engineers meant that flood control measures in Turkey Creek prior to the storm were stalled because the value of the property protected did not outweigh the costs (Morse 2008). This approach to environmental management has meant that low-income communities have been deemed disposable, whereas equally vulnerable higher-income communities are prioritized (Morse 2008). In East Biloxi, where 95% of households fall below the federal median income, 80% of residents suffered extensive or catastrophic damage to their property. Finally, according to an analysis by The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (Morse 2008), African American communities along the waterfront were more heavily damaged than the general population of the coast.

By taking into account the region’s history of racism and racially based disenfranchisement with respect to land use and neighborhood politics, the grounds for a social justice praxis that privileges historic communities of color can be developed. This standpoint is one from which the social relations and urban politics of land use can be normatively evaluated. Indeed, activists in the region articulated an attempt to ground their politics from the achieved standpoint of communities of color, and the way in which that standpoint reveals power geometries that are otherwise invisible to those in power. In the following quote, one activist articulates Hartsock’s observation that the view from below is different from the view from power, despite the ways in which the view from power materially shapes social life.

“They travel in the same circles, they don’t necessarily .. you know, I’ve take that thing of many realities. Those of us who work in this reality know these other realities, but it’s not vice versa. They live in this reality all the time, and that’s all they associate with, and they make decisions and they look at the politicians as, you know, temporary, and they just march right on, and that’s part of that plantation mentality .. Plantation Economy because they pretty much control the funds. They control who’s elected” (Local activist, interview).

Another activist explains how he attempts to see the politics of the region from the standpoint of people of color who have been marginalized in the region:

“Forrest Heights, in North Gulfport, which is a swamp, that no one in my mind, in their right mind, all things being equal, why would anyone want to live there? But all things aren’t equal because 100 years ago, that was the only place they were allowed to live, and by god its theirs and no one is going to be able to tell them what to do with it. Everybody for eternity has been telling them what to do and controlling their lives, and this is the only thing that’s theirs, and by god they’re going to control it. So I try to understand that… Would not you as a more rational citizen would not you be better off if I said, here’s 200 thousand dollars, go buy a house that doesn’t flood anywhere you want to. Again, I’m talking in
my rational mind, but I’m not talking from their historical perspective, so I’m trying to do my best to understand why someone would want to continue to live in that type of environment” (Local activist, interview).

4.7 Conclusion
An analysis of racial oppression and marginalization, and the particular ways in which those processes have been made manifest in the built environment and articulate with land use struggles, allows for the development of a standpoint from which to see that visions for the future of the city ought to privilege the viewpoint from African American neighborhoods. Prominent left theories of land use struggles, including the concepts of “use value” and “inhabitance,” are insufficient grounds to distinguish between the exclusionary practices in Woolmarket and the politics of survival in Turkey Creek, East Biloxi, and Soria City. The answer, however, is not to create a social justice praxis that attempts to ignore or gloss over difference, as I argue use value and inhabitance do, but to problematize the multiple and various axes and scales along which difference is produced. As I argue elsewhere (Author 2009), the ways in which producing “holistic” knowledge about poor neighborhoods ends up masking the ways in which women are more likely to be poor, and results in the production of knowledge that obscures the feminization of poverty. In an analogous way, a politics of use values or inhabitance creates a social justice praxis that obscures the ways in which – in coastal Mississippi anyway – land use struggles are clearly racialized. This is not to marginalize the other axes, or to delegitimize the impulse for forging what might be productive linkages and coalitions between allies. Rather, it is to make clear the axes along which power operates with respect to land use practices, in order to identify the most potentially promising, empowering, and socially just urban praxis. If these connections are to be forged, power differentials and histories of oppression within places, not just between places, must be understood.

In these cases, what a politics of use value and inhabitance does do is help clarify the ways in which each community is interested in limiting the power of commercial, residential and nonprofit developers to shape the configurations of the built environment, either by building high rises on the peninsula of Biloxi, big box stores in the bayou of Turkey Creek, or high density housing in Woolmarket, or by ceding control to a nonprofit developer like Habitat for Humanity in Soria City. In each case, communities are arguing that they should have more power and control over what happens in their communities, something that use value and inhabitance clearly bring to the fore. What they cannot bring to the fore, however, is the uneven ways in which relative power is distributed among these communities, nor can they arbitrate between how what seem to be similar impulses – environmental protection and community control – can have such different impacts and implications for different communities. By contrast, as I have argued, a partial, mediated standpoint that privileges the ‘view from below’ in a historical and geographical context can ground social justice praxis around land use struggles in a way that is sensitive to the material workings of oppression along multiple axes of difference.
Figure 4.1 Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi

Figure 4.2 Casinos in East Biloxi
CHAPTER FIVE: NEOLIBERALISM, POLITICS, AND PRAXIS

5.1 Crisis and opportunity in poor neighborhoods of color

The latest crisis of capitalism seems to have functioned as an opportunity in more ways than one. In 2010 Goldman Sachs reported its second most profitable quarter on record since going public in 1999 (Jacobs 2010), and at the same time, activists in neighborhood organizations seem to have found the language and examples to translate neighborhood struggles with home foreclosure into a broader critique of capitalism and bank deregulation. Low income neighborhoods of color have been disproportionately affected by the foreclosure crisis, with nearly 8% of African American and Hispanic families having already lost a home, as compared with 4.5% of white borrowers (Bocian, Li, and Ernst 2010). While Wilson (2007) shows how neighborhoods of color are central to remaking Rust Belt cities, and this study shows the ways in which they are central to remaking the post-Katrina landscape in coastal Mississippi, it appears as though marginalized low income neighborhoods of color were also central to the latest round of capital accumulation enabled by neoliberal banking deregulation.

Thus, exploitation of these places is neither new, nor unique to Mississippi. Neither is uneven development and the associated relationships and exploitation unique to the neighborhood scale. The contribution that this study makes is not to document the marginalization, state disinvestment, and exploitation that affect low income neighborhoods of color – that should be obvious to casual observers of cities, never mind critical urban scholars. Rather, what this study contributes is an analysis of the ways in which those obvious trends both provide friction to and create space for the implementation of neoliberal visions for the city. Working from existing struggles over land use and urban politics, this study also sets out to critically engage with theories of urban politics by reading them through grounded cases to assess their political and normative implications. Inspired by feminist epistemology and committed to Marxian critique of capitalism, I have attempted to infuse Marxist analysis of shifting political economic relations with a normative commitment to quality of life for citizens.

There is a sense in which I have tried to ‘have it both ways’ – that is, engage with a structuralist conception of the social world, while identifying and advocating oppositional politics that locate agency in everyday, mundane practices. In ways that I have identified throughout the text, this conception of the relationship between ontology and politics or structure and agency sit uncomfortably with most Marxist analysis (but not all, see for example Resnick and Wolff 1982, Graham 1992, Gibson-Graham 1996). For good reason: if the ostensible purpose of Marxist inquiry to inform potentially meaningful praxis, then structuralists are understandably skeptical of the immediate and direct effectiveness of ‘imaginaries,’ ‘discourses,’ and ‘performances,’ for being the best, most effective way to disrupt and undermine capitalism. What I have argued, however, is that political praxis and associated knowledge production practices that might be most effective for undermining capitalism can themselves reproduce marginalization along other axes of the social world. This tendency is at once politically and empirically problematic. The political problems hinge on the ways in which privileging exploitation in the productive sphere as the most urgent and definitive source of oppression claims authority in part by delegitimizing

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25 These were Jamie Peck’s words upon reflecting on my argument.
or subsuming other claims about the way in which oppression is experienced and produced. In so doing, it forecloses and marginalizes the knowledge of others who identify, experience, and engage politically to oppose oppression in ways that do not privilege the labor process (Massey 1994, Gibson-Graham 1996). With respect to the empirical problem, I have attempted to show through an engagement with the regulation approach the ways in which overlooking cultural politics leads to a less robust appreciation for how capitalism actually works. The result of this oversight, I argue, is to foreclose potential sites of politics, with significant consequences for an inclusive, empowering, and ontologically accurate conception of agency.

I am thoroughly compelled by Marx’s critique of capitalism and his analysis of the nature and process of accumulation and exploitation. I agree that a politicization of the labor process and the social relations of capitalism is an essential component of any attempt to transform social relations toward a more just and equitable society. There is nothing about that proposition, however, that suggests that other forms of exploitation, oppression, and discrimination are not also problematic. There is also nothing about that proposition that means that transforming those relations ought to be the primary, or only, focus of a social justice agenda. And finally, there is nothing about that proposition that suggests the structuralist, modernist ways of knowing that underpin Marxist inquiry are the only legitimate ways of producing liberatory, anti-capitalist knowledge.

A review of the political landscape in search of socialist activism or forms of politics that contest and resist neoliberalization the US and the core countries reveals a bleak picture. There is nothing to suggest that a revolution of any type is imminent, and indeed the most organized and exercised political group in the US at this present moment in time seems to be the anti-government “Tea Party” movement. The emerging language and loose network of activist organizing around the concept of the “Right to the City” is a promising one, but as I argue in Chapter 4, there is little in this movement that is coherent aside from a general sense of dissatisfaction with the way cities are run. This no doubt reflects the rise of private influence in governance and the entrepreneurial orientation of cities, but to date it has failed to generate a sustained critique of neoliberalism, per se, that might hold promise for its meaningful contestation at a regional or national scale. What we do find, however, are localized forms of contestation and alternative practices in everyday ways of living and modes of engagement in cities. To recognize this and see value and political possibilities in it is not to eschew the validity or usefulness of structuralist analysis of urban political economy. Rather, the point here is to try to think about how that empirical analysis might operate in productive conversation with actually existing urban politics.

As critical and radical scholars, both feminist and Marxist alike, the ostensible point of our critique and analysis is social change. What is less clear is how that change is expected to be manifested as a result of our analyses. To be sure, geographers have tried a variety of techniques and methods for translating findings, with mixed results and varying conclusions about the possibilities of such collaborations. These efforts have including policy advocacy (Tickell 1998; Peck 1999), participatory action research (Pain 2004; Collective 2010), collaborative research (Harvey 1996), and other creative forms of community engagement (Gibson-Graham 1994; 1996; Hart 2004; Pratt 2004; Gibson-Graham 2006; Sangtin Writers and Nagar 2006; Wright 2006; Mitchell, D 2008; Collective 2010). Feminists have arguably been more committed and
more successful at fostering sustained community engagements than Marxist scholars (Sayer 2007).

David Harvey, arguably the most influential and prolific Marxist geographer, chronicled his own struggles with developing praxis and fostering connections with labor organizers around the retention of an auto plant in Oxford, England in his book Justice, Nature, and the Geographies of Difference (1996). Harvey was frustrated by what he perceived as the myopia of the activists, who, working from their own militant particularisms, were attempting to save their own jobs — jobs that, Harvey argued, promoted the perpetuation of problematic social relations, including the continued reliance on fossil fuels and the associated uneven geographies of extractive industries. This is an example, Harvey argues, of the ways in which “working class movements may...seek to perpetuate or return to the conditions of oppression that spawned them in much the same way that those women who have acquired their sense of self under conditions of male violence return again and again to living with violent men” (40). The analogy is instructive, Harvey argues. But I while I agree that it is instructive, I do not arrive at the same conclusion as Harvey.

Like the advocate who encourages the abused woman to leave her abuser, Harvey is asking labor activists to take a leap of faith, to give up their “parochial” fight to keep polluting car factory jobs to adopt a politics influenced by a different level of abstraction that recognizes Marx’s conclusion that “the only way to transcend capitalism is through a class struggle waged against the capitalist class and their associated interests across all moments of the social process” (107). This kind of socialist politics advocated by Harvey requires a leap of faith that might be ill advised based on past socialist experiments. Arguably, the advocate who encourages the domestic violence victim to leave her abuser has a responsibility to ensure the victim has a safe place to go. In the same way, radical and critical geographers (and academics in general) have an obligation to propose productive pathways for progressive politics that do not require people in more vulnerable positions than our own to take risks that we ourselves would not, or do not take.

Finally, Harvey talks of the need for “critical distance” when engaging in praxis and evaluating the political possibilities of activism. By contrast, however, I want to advocate for a praxis of solidarity rather than traditional critique when evaluating the promise of actually existing urban praxis. Who can blame the car plant workers for being seriously dubious of the academic with a secure job and livelihood who provides a “critique” based on his theories? Instead, the analysis offered in this study attempts to read our theories of urban neoliberalism and the evolution of capitalist social relations through actually existing modes of engagement and activism. On the face of things, there is little activism in the cities of Biloxi and Gulfport that would provoke hope or excitement for the location as a site of anti-neoliberal praxis. But by exploring the ways in which existing modes of engagement articulate with or provide material or discursive friction to the smooth implementation of neoliberal policies or neoliberalism as the hegemonic ideology of governance, we can begin to pull out some potential threads on which we might pull to facilitate the translation of militant particularism.

These observations create a conundrum for a scholar such as myself, compelled by the extensive empirical analysis of neoliberalism and committed to social justice. Thus, this study attempts to address this gulf in two ways: first, by further contributing to our understanding of how urban social relations articulate with the neoliberalization of urban governance and the implementation
of neoliberal visions for the city. And second, by attempting to read actually existing urban politics through the lens developed by the existing body of literature that clearly establishes the nature and implications of neoliberalism. In so doing I attempt to hold in productive tension structuralist accounts of urban political economy and post-structuralist notions of politics and political life. By acknowledging the role of discourse, ideology, and performativity in perpetuating and smoothing out capitalist social relations, new sites of politics are opened up. This theoretical move is promising and empowering insofar as it allows us to see agency in lives of everyday people (Gibson-Graham 1996; Gilbert 1999). By reading urban politics in post-Katrina Mississippi through and against critical geographic theories, I am attempting to push for a more sustained engagement with the actually existing possibilities of politics in urban social life.

5.2 Theorizing and researching land use politics

The intention of this study is to make a series of contributions to the critical geography literature with respect to understanding urban politics through new modes of analysis and augmented theoretical frameworks. In so doing it also offers some new perspectives regarding ways of fostering links between the academy and activism. With respect to politics, the preceding analysis operationalizes a series of new modes of analysis to aid in theorizing a progressive urban praxis around land use issues. Using the theoretical resources of the regulation approach, I show how interventions in the realm of cultural politics hold promise for meaningfully contesting neoliberal urbanism. Reading the cases through existing theories of land use politics in the critical geography literature, I further demonstrate how an achieved standpoint from which to view the history and politics of land use in places can aid in the development of a grounded social justice praxis. These proposed methods of analysis are intended to at once bring the resources of the academy and academic analysis into more productive conversation with actually existing urban politics, and to bring together the most promising insights from critical theory in both the structuralist and post-structuralist traditions. Finally, this study contributes to a rich body of literature that has attempted to blend the intellectual resources of Marxist and feminist inquiry by bringing the strength of Marxist analysis into productive conversation with feminist insights regarding power, discourse, and epistemology.

This study also includes a series of empirical findings that are relevant to urban and critical geography, as well. In conversation with other studies (Mitchell, K 2004; Wilson 2007) on the topic, I show how discourses regarding race operate to create space for, and justify the uneven implications of, neoliberal urbanism in the context of post-Katrina, Mississippi. These findings allow for the identification of new understandings of various modes of political engagement and their possibilities. In particular, by showing the ways in which the displacement of low income neighborhoods of color is a central front on which the neoliberalization of the built environment turns allows for an appreciation of the desire of residents to remain in their neighborhoods as contestation of neoliberal urbanism. This finding is indeed counter-intuitive, insofar as rebuilding neighborhoods shaped by legacies of racism and capitalist exploitation would appear a dubious and weak form of contestation. But as my analysis shows, the articulation of the desire on the part of residents to rebuild the neighborhoods imbues the space with new meaning and represents a transformation of the social relations that underlie the production of the built environment. The study further offers empirical evidence of the ways in which use values and exchange values are deeply imbricated with one another in urban politics. These findings are
relevant not only to discussions of urban politics that privilege use values over exchange values, but to the broader critical geography literature concerned with grounding progressive politics in use values more generally. And finally, this study begins to suggest the ways in which land use politics and labor politics are intimately connected, and in so doing, contributes to the development of avenues for the integration of land use politics into Marxist analysis.

5.3 The praxis of research

It has been said that critical academic inquiry is a pursuit that often takes more than it gives (Kitchin and Hubbard 1999). The problematic nature of this parasitic relationship is that much more clear in a post-disaster context. I was especially aware of the fact that, in the early days of my research, time spent answering my questions was time not spent building or designing someone’s house, applying for grants, or tending to the pressing tasks of survival. Over the course of the three years during which I was conducting research, the furious and desperate pace of recovery gave way to a slower, more bureaucratic process of rebuilding, yet I was still (self) conscious about the time that I was asking people for, and concerned to find ways to reciprocate. Like the Autonomous Geographies Collective (2010), I have found that the task of attempting to ensure that critical geographic scholarship give back as much as it takes is a messy, complicated, and at times surprising process. As my experience suggests, it may be the case that critical academics should be less timid about what the process of academic inquiry has to offer activism and praxis. This is not to advocate for vanguardism or suggest that the ideas of an analysis which emerge from the academy and academic inquiry should lead or direct activism, rather it is to say that there might be a middle ground where academic scholarship and inquiry and actually existing activism might productively meet.

As a result of these observations, and fueled by a desire to contribute to endeavors to promote social justice through my academic inquiry, I have undertaken three projects over the course of writing this dissertation, which have met with varying degrees of success. First, as I discuss elsewhere, I designed my research intentionally to include a collaborative working relationship with community based organizations in the region. While I benefitted from this approach to research due to the increased access it afforded me, I designed my research this way as an attempt to give something back to the organizations from which I felt I was taking time or resources. At times, when the tasks that the organization asked me to complete meshed well with the data that I needed to collect, such as when I was asked to put together an institutional history or interview community leaders, this design worked well. At other times, such as when I was providing computing support or teaching volunteers and employees how to make powerpoint presentations, I felt as though this collaboration, while not particularly productive from a research perspective, was aligned with my political interest in contributing to the empowerment of low-income and marginalized residents of the Coast. And yet at other times, I was given tedious projects that did little to enhance my understanding of the region and turned me in to a map-maker or data-gatherer for these organizations. Like the Autonomous Geographies Collective (2010), I had mixed feelings about these times. As they put it, at one point they had become market researchers in exchange for access.

The Autonomous Geographers Collective is a group of academics who set out to generate ongoing and productive collaborations with community based organization, and in a paper that
candidly discusses their successes, failures, and lessons learned, they expressed unease with generating research projects about alternative or autonomous spaces and creating and disseminating knowledge and materials that were not explicitly asked for by activists. Based on my own experience I can relate to their discomfort in this respect. I can also identify with a certain awkwardness that arises through the kinds of analysis that are required in an academic setting and their relevance and ability to be translated to “on the ground” activism. Unlike Harvey’s approach, however, in which academic analysis is intended to direct activism toward ostensibly more productive forms of engagement, I am instead proposing that radical and critical academic analysis of politics is better suited to understand and identify opportunities for academic engagement and solidarity with existing activism. For example, after a sustained engagement with the redevelopment process in Biloxi and Gulfport, it became clear to me that rebuilding low-income neighborhoods of color could be understood as a progressive anti-neoliberal praxis. Similarly, the analysis in Chapter 3 suggests that there are glimmers of progressive anti-neoliberal sentiment in existing urban politics in Biloxi, with which academics might align themselves, or which may direct our analysis toward other similar examples.

A second project that provided an opportunity to further contribute to improving quality of life in the region and encouraging progressive social justice praxis came from my empirical findings. While interviewing a number of activists at length, it became clear to me that many of them were only vaguely aware of the successful strategies that other groups had used. At a number of different points a resident or activist referred to a project that another neighborhood group had done, and articulated a desire to learn more about it or do something similar. I approached the STEPS coalition, an umbrella organization for social justice groups in the region, and the Mississippi Center for Justice to gauge interest in producing a repository for information about various groups and the strategies they had used for community organizing and advocacy that had met with success. Though the idea had emerged from my own research, employees at both of these organizations recognized the value of it and agreed to work with me on the project. I obtained a small amount of money from the Africana Research Center at Penn State to fund another trip to the region to collect data. We held a series of meetings with a working group generated from STEPS members and Mississippi Center for Justice employees. We decided the project should ultimately take the form of a web-based community development toolkit that highlighted the successes of various organizations and provided resources for undertaking similar activities or waging similar campaigns.

The project has moved forward slowly, as my collaborators, stretched as they are already, have had difficulty making time for it. While much of the information has been collected, the project has been put on hold while the STEPS coalition redesigns their website, which will eventually host the toolkit. At the time of this writing, all such projects in the coast have taken a back seat to community organizing and activism around the BP oil disaster. Ultimately, my position as a researcher allowed me the opportunity to identify the need for this type of project, and I believe that when the project goes forward it will ultimately be a useful product for community organizations. I learned, however, that such collaborations should not tax the capacity of already stretched organization by creating further tasks for their employees and volunteers, and in future collaborations I will apply for and direct funds differently. I used the small amount of funding I had to travel to the region again, and with the benefit of hindsight, those funds would have been better spent in a way that materially contributed to the final product, such as a contribution to the
cost of the web design or as monetary compensation for an intern or organization employee to work on the project.

The first phase of the toolkit includes an overview of four different community-based organizations in the region and outlines a strategy they have successfully developed or used for fostering change and developing capacity in their neighborhoods (see Appendices A and B). The intent of the project is to ensure that regional activists are aware of, and have an opportunity to learn from, one another. The project is also designed to document the successes of various organizations, which are seldom covered by the mainstream press.

The third project that I undertook as an attempt to fuse activism and academic research on urban land use politics has surprised me by being, in some ways, the most productive. Inspired by conversations at the Summer Institute in Geographies of Justice in 2007, some colleagues and I organized panel discussions at the last three meetings of the Association of American Geographers (in Boston, Las Vegas, and Washington, DC). Each panel was loosely organized around the topic “The Right to the City,” and we approached activists who worked in the conference’s host city to participate on the panel, and to discuss the work that their organizations or groups did locally around issues broadly relating to the “right to the city.” While organizing the first session, I was confident that the academics in attendance at the conference would learn a lot from the panelists, but I was less sure what the activists might gain. After the first session in Boston, however, it was clear that I had underestimated critical geography’s usefulness to activism. The turnout for the panel was high, giving the activists an interested and engaged audience to listen to their discussion of their struggle, which appeared in itself to be a valuable experience for the activists. Further, it introduced them to critical geographic inquiry through the questions and comments of the audience, and a number of the panelists told me that they would turn to their local geography department in the future for data, capacity, knowledge, and potential collaborations now that they knew what (some) geographers studied.

It was at the Las Vegas panel, however, that the more poignant opportunity for critical geography’s contribution became clear to me. My collaborator Peter Hossler had worked particularly hard to get a local doctor who had been active in establishing free health clinics in Las Vegas to participate on the panel. During her presentation, it became clear that despite her commitment to providing free health care, her politics were not necessarily radical. After listening to the other panelists, and the questions from the audience, the doctor said that she had never before thought of health care and its provision as a right, or something to which people were entitled. Despite the endless hours that she had spent ensuring that poor people in Las Vegas had access to health care, it was not until she was invited to discuss her work with a group of fellow activists and academics that she saw her work in that light. The point here is that, as we as critical scholars seek to find the most productive way to “give back” or to find a synergy between activism and scholarship, perhaps we should continue to do what we do best – that is, think, analyze, and research, but in a more public way. As Don Mitchell (2008) has put it,

“It is time to stop seeing the different roles we may play in social movements as a divide between activists and academics, and see it instead as an important and necessary division of labor.” (454). Mitchell has prioritized the development of conduits for communication and

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26 I remain eternally grateful to the People’s Geography Project for the financial support of this project, and to Don Mitchell, who more than once gave me his credit card number to pay for the registration of panelists.
translation within this division of labor, including the development of a “community geographer” at Syracuse University and the establishment of the People’s Geography Project.

To be successful, however, this division of labor must unfold with academic inquiry that is done in ways that engage with actually existing activism. Chapter 2 is one such effort at marshalling the intellectual resources of critical geographic scholarship to identify what might be glimmers of opportunity. The work on neoliberalism could be operationalized two ways. First, it could be used to tell people what to do, or it could be used to help us forge conversations like the one with the doctor in Las Vegas that helps existing activists who do not necessarily share all of our politics to forge new connections or find common ground. The toolkit project discussed above was one effort toward that end.

5.4 New directions

The findings in this study and the theoretical frameworks and methodologies proposed suggest a host of future research opportunities and possibilities. Further analysis of other axes along which the mode of social regulation operates in coastal Mississippi would be instructive for fleshing out the cultural politics of neoliberal regulation. As I mention in Chapter 2, this could take the form of investigating the relationship between the gendered nature of the labor market in the casino industry and the way in which discourses about gender and work articulate with urban redevelopment strategies. Such an analysis could draw on the extensive body of work in feminist geography on women’s urban livelihood strategies and strategies for social reproduction to assess the ways in which discourses and narratives about women’s work and social reproduction interface with configurations of the built environment to facilitate neoliberal accumulation in coastal Mississippi. When put in conversation with the analysis offered here, such a study would enable even further consideration of the possibilities of anti-neoliberal cultural politics.

At the same time, case studies on the local mode of social regulation in the context of neoliberal urbanism in other locations would be instructive for demonstrating precisely what a “knitting together” of such knowledges might look like in practice. Such studies would allow for a consideration of both the commonalities and regional differences between local modes of regulation. These commonalities and differences would be instructive for the development of a regional anti-neoliberal praxis. Katz’s (2001) work on counter-topographies and contour lines, as well as Haraway’s (1991) work on situated knowledges, would be instructive for this kind of analysis.

Further, as Hart (2004) suggests, an explicitly ethnographic study of the land use struggles discussed in this study would provide a better understanding of the lineage of the subjectivities, identities, and ideologies that hold promise for contesting neoliberal urbanism identified in Chapter 3. Understanding how those ways of being and understanding the world are produced would provide insights into how they might be further fostered or cultivated in other settings.

And finally, this study draws further attention to the complex and intimate relationship between the politics of land use and neoliberal urbanism. It suggests, without fully developing, the way in which discourses regarding the natural environment and environmentalism are tied up and operationalized in neoliberal urban politics and land use struggles. One potentially productive
line of analysis would explore this relationship more deeply (see for example Desfor and Keil 2004).

Critical geographic inquiry, specifically that which is influenced by both the Marxist and feminist traditions, holds abundant promise for generating analyses of social relations that provide innovative insights into social justice (see for example Gibson-Graham 1996; Pulido 2000; Gibson-Graham 2006; Wright 2006; Purcell 2008). This study represents an attempt to further contribute to this tradition by at once being vigilant about conducting research that is immediately relevant to communities, and simultaneously bringing to bear the intellectual resources and critical analysis of critical and radical academic inquiry.
Appendix A
Community preservation in Turkey Creek: developing catalytic relationships
The Turkey Creek community faces a host of challenges, many of which it has faced head on and with a good deal of success. One of the essential ingredients to the success of this community in protecting its environment, history, and culture is the development of what Turkey Creek Community Initiative founder Derrick Evans calls “catalytic relationships.” The Turkey Creek community has been extremely successful at framing their concerns in ways that allow them to attract a number of collaborators, funders, and allies, and tap in to existing resources at the city, county, state, and federal levels. Though their successes are too numerous to document here (see www.turkey-creek.org for more information), this profile will focus on one specific catalytic relationship the community developed with a local conservation nonprofit that resulted in a ribbon of protected land along the Creek itself. The creation of this “greenway” was something that could only be accomplished through the innovative and “catalytic” relationship between the Turkey Creek community and the Land Trust for Mississippi Coastal Plains.

When Derrick Evans moved back to Turkey Creek in 2001 to work with the community to protect it from impending commercial expansion, he didn’t imagine that environmental activism and education would become the centerpiece of the community’s action plan. He quickly realized that the host of problems facing the Turkey Creek community, including encroachment from commercial and airport expansion, severe vulnerability to flooding, and loss of cultural and historical resources, were too big for the community to fight alone. But at the heart of the challenges, he was surprised to learn, was a profound threat to the natural environment that would affect the health, safety, and stability of the community.

The community of Turkey Creek is named for the meandering creek that flows in a southeastern direction into Bernard Bayou. The original founders of the community settled along the creek in 1866. It is also the name of the watershed that the surrounding community is located in. The term “watershed” describes an area of land where all of the water in it (streams, rivers) or underneath it (groundwater) empties into the same place. Because all of the water flows to the same place, events in one part of the watershed affect the entire watershed. Evans and other community members began to realize that the rapid commercial development and airport expansion was disabling the wetlands in the watershed from performing their essential drainage function, creating a flooding hazard for residents in the low-lying area of the Turkey Creek neighborhood.

While Evan’s main objective was to ensure that the community of Turkey Creek be stabilized and protected, he and others began to recognize that the threats to their community from wetland fills and commercial expansion was something that other powerful state and federal agencies, as well as local nonprofits were concerned with as well, provided it was framed in terms of environmental protection. Members of the Turkey Creek community were able to identify these threats and make these connections by attending a number of trainings and gaining expertise in environmental issues. Educating community members, not just leaders, in environmental issues proved to be essential for mobilizing the community and generating active, involved citizens who could knowledgeably weigh in on issues as they arose.
Though the neighborhood has had a host of successes worth celebrating and emulating, perhaps the most notable is the development of the Greenway. The Greenway is an innovative solution to the specific set of problems the Turkey Creek residents were concerned about, and follows the model of the conservation land trust with which they partnered. Conservation land trusts, like the Land Trust for Mississippi Coastal Plains (LTMCP), acquire land either through grant-funded purchases or gifts. They also purchase “conservation easements” in which a land owner still owns the land, but has sold or gifted the right to build anything on that land. The goal of the Greenway was to establish an uninterrupted ribbon of land along Turkey Creek itself that was owned or controlled by the LTMCP. In so doing, residents and the staff at LTMCP felt they would be a step closer to protecting the water quality in the creek and retaining and restoring the vital functions of the watershed. This includes protecting the Turkey Creek community from increasing vulnerability to flood from future wetland fills for development in the watershed. The creation of the Greenway also ensures permanent public access to the creek. The Greenway currently includes over 115 acres of land, with members of the Turkey Creek community and the LTMCP working hard to include even more acres.

**Lessons learned:**
The community of Turkey Creek is still vulnerable to commercial, airport, and infrastructure expansion, but the creation of a Greenway was an important and successful step toward limiting the reach of that expansion, making their community and watershed a priority for environmentalists in the region, and developing a successful and productive partnership with LTMCP. There are a number of lessons to be learned from their success:

- Create “catalytic” relationships (see more below).

- Engage your entire community. Says Evans, “When it comes to historically marginalized people – whether low-income white or minority communities – a sense of cultural identity is what they lean on first for community defense. If you don’t honor those traditions, that spirit, those elders and their goals for the future you are not going to engage these people. And without them, you are not going to challenge power effectively or lastingly.”

- Take a broad view of your community’s challenges and assets. While neighborhood preservation might be your main goal, consider a wide range of ways that goal might be met.

- Be strategic. Take note of what initiatives your city, county, state, and federal government are interested in at the moment. Consider how your community’s concerns be framed in a way that harnesses existing energy and resources.

- Be informed. Residents of Turkey Creek attended numerous training on environmental stewardship, which enabled them to weigh in on development issues and identify for themselves when proposals met their objectives. Of course, this kind of training takes time, but it lays the groundwork for an informed, active, and successful community.

**How to: Create catalytic relationships**
Consider the end result that you want to achieve. In Turkey Creek, it was to ensure the culture and history, as well as safety and quality of life for residents in Turkey Creek was protected.
Consider the variety of cross-cutting issues that created the challenges your community face. According to Evans, “Folks here do not have the luxury of deciding whether to be environmentalists, historic preservationists, affordable housing proponents, family service advocates, or urban planners.” Evans and other active residents in Turkey Creek came to realize that their community was located in a watershed with wide-reaching environmental functions – it was an important habitat for a host of plant and animal species, and it served a valuable drainage function for the region. They were able to use this information to reach out to the Land Trust for Mississippi Coastal Plains, a nonprofit organization with a different set of skills, funders, and for the most part, interests. But by focusing on their key area of overlap – conserving natural resources in the Mississippi coastal counties – they were able to develop an important and powerful relationship with another organization to accomplish something they could not have done on their own.

To create catalytic relationships of your own, take a holistic view of the challenges facing your community, or the issues you want to tackle. Identify a variety of different, cross-cutting concerns. For example, if you are interested in providing low-cost day care, perhaps there is a local or even national organization that is concerned with providing career paths for low-income women. Working together on your mutual interests, you can lend each other powerful insight and resources that hold the promise of producing positive outcomes.

One key to creating successful relationships is to think hard about what your organization or community has to offer your partner, and be sure to deliver on it to the extent possible. Be sensitive to the different social and political context in which your partner operates. For example, your community or organization may be comfortable publically criticizing elected officials, while your partner may rely on those officials for financial or political support, or they may not agree with all of your analysis. While these differences may at times be too great for some organizations or groups to collaborate, it is often possible, if you stay focused on the end result you all want to see.

There is no right way to approach another organization or group – how you go about this will depend on the nature of the project or idea that you want to work on. The same principles that apply to fostering any kind of positive relationship apply here: keep an open mind, truly listen to your collaborators, and be willing to compromise when it makes sense.

**Other strategies of note: Historic preservation**

Evans found that when he returned to Turkey Creek from Boston that historic preservation was a high priority for residents. “I had once thought that such an activity was intellectual fluff, a diversion for wealthy dilettantes. But cultural resource mapping enabled us to use provisions of the Historical Preservation Act of 1966 to begin protecting Turkey Creek’s cultural resources – the structures and natural places around which our community is built.” In 2007, Turkey Creek was added to the National Register of Historic Places. It had already been placed on the Mississippi Heritage Trust’s list of most endangered historic places. Being added to the National Register not only provides the community with well-deserved recognition for its unique and important place in American history, it provides the community with even more credibility when citing its historic status as a reason why unsustainable practices that threaten its future should be prevented.
The process of being nominated for the National Register of Historic Places begins with the state preservation office. The Turkey Creek community worked closely with Mississippi Department of Architecture and History to begin their nomination process. Here are some links to help you figure out if your neighborhood, home, or building qualifies.

Mississippi Department of Architecture and History: http://mdah.state.ms.us/hpres/nrfaq.php
National Parks Service: http://www.nps.gov/nr/national_register_fundamentals.htm

**Resources and links:**
“Green” or “open” space is often pitted against affordable housing. Low income communities with significant affordable housing needs are often forced to choose between preserving green space and housing development. Some have argued, however, that this is a false trap. The following links provide some information about how other communities have navigated this quandary.


Learn more about the Land Trust for Mississippi Coastal Plains: http://www.ltmcp.org/

National Trust for Historic Preservation: http://www.preservationnation.org/

Waterkeeper Alliance: http://www.waterkeeper.org/
Appendix B: Community Organizing in East Biloxi: the Block Captains program
The Hope Community Development Agency was famously founded just two days after Hurricane Katrina to coordinate and address the needs of East Biloxi residents immediately following the storm. The organization has grown and changed as the needs of the neighborhood have changed. Now established as a permanent fixture in the neighborhood, the Hope CDA is committed to the residents, small businesses, and neighborhoods of East Biloxi. While the Hope CDA has a number of successful models to emulate and document, this profile will focus on the Neighborhood Block Captains program the organization kicked off in April, 2008.

The Community Empowerment Coordinators at Hope CDA, Trinh Le and Theresa Youngblood began by dividing up East Biloxi into 24 different neighborhoods a few blocks in size. They then set out to find at least 24, if not more, neighborhood residents who would become Block Captains. The job of Block Captains is to:

- Get to know people in their neighborhood
- Welcome new residents
- Stay in communication with residents to learn about any problems the neighborhood is facing, and work with residents to address the proper agency or organization to solve the problems
- Attend monthly Block Captains meetings at Hope CDA to learn about neighborhood resources and attend occasional trainings
- Take the lead on identifying and implementing a neighborhood vision

The ultimate goal of the program, says Le, is to work toward having neighborhoods that people are proud to live in, where they know one another and work together.

Hope CDA held a kick-off block party in 2008 to introduce the program and attract people to sign up. Attracting new residents to become Block Captains has been the most challenging part of the program, Le said, but they currently have a long list of contacts, with about 15 active block captains. Future outreach plans include going door to door in neighborhoods that don’t currently have active Block Captains, working with area social service agencies to attract their clients, and doing outreach through area churches.

Though the program is still relatively new, it has already had some successes. There have been a few block parties thrown, in which youth, families, and the elderly all participated. This kind of intergenerational neighborly mixing is exactly what the program wants to foster. A number of Block Captains have also taken part in wider community meetings, and attended a few city council meetings. This kind of leadership development is also a major goal of the program. Le emphasized that the intent is to develop community leaders and for Hope CDA to merely facilitate their training and lend a hand, not take the lead. The monthly Block Captains meetings have been geared at both introducing Block Captains to area resources, including the local police department and the Weed and Seed program, as well as providing some capacity building and training programs. NeighborWorks has been an important partner for trainings (http://www.nw.org/network/home.asp).
Le suggests that people or organizations interested in starting a similar program be clear at the outset that the Block Captains themselves will be the leaders, visionaries, and the people ultimately responsible for getting things done. This can be challenging or frustrating as people attempt to balance their role as Block Captain with their familial obligations, work schedules, and other civic and church-related activities. But leadership development and local capacity building is a major goal of the program, so Le and other paid staff at Hope CDA try to remember that they are there to facilitate and coordinate, not lead.

Monthly Block Captain meetings have included:

- Information session with the Biloxi Police Department
- Information session with Weed and Seed
- Local advocates with knowledge of different issues
- Coastal Women for Change, a local nonprofit focused on community organizing
- Workshops on healthy homes addressing issues like lead and mold
- Workshop on self-care
- Voting rights/voter education workshop
- Hurricane Preparedness workshop

**How to: Develop a Block Captains program**

Whether you are working with a nonprofit organization, or are just starting a small neighborhood association, a Block Captains program is a great way to get new people involved and get your neighborhood organized.

- Recruit Block Captains. The Hope CDA started out by dividing East Biloxi into 24 areas, and trying to recruit people for each neighborhood. Depending on the size of the neighborhood or area you are trying to organize, it might make sense to determine the area that you want Block Captains from at the outset, but it might also make sense to see who is interested in the beginning and divide the neighborhood up after you gauge initial interest. Hope CDA started their Block Captain program by holding a neighborhood-wide block party. They publicized it by hanging posters at local businesses and through word of mouth. Starting out with a block party is a great way to integrate the social and neighborly mission of the Block Captains program with the organizing and political work.

- Hold monthly meetings for the block captains. The meetings are a great way to keep people accountable to one another and report on developments and achievements. They also provide an opportunity to hold training or information sessions. If you are not affiliated with an organization that has a full time staff person, consider taking turns convening the monthly meetings and taking responsibility for inviting a featured speaker or organizing a training.

- Set small goals and achieve them. Block Captains might set goals for themselves to meet 10 new people in their neighborhood per month, or recruit one new person to a monthly meeting. Share your strategies for success or discuss your challenges at monthly meetings.

- Develop relationships with your local elected officials, police department, and other city service agencies. If your neighborhood has identified an issue you want addressed, whether it’s adding a speed bump to deter people from speeding down your street, filling potholes in your
neighborhood, or support for small businesses, having relationships with the people who can direct resources your way will make a big difference.

Resources and links:
http://www.nw.org/network/home.asp
http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ccdo/ws/welcome.html
Some tips for organizing developed by a community group in Vancouver, British Columbia.

A lighthearted introduction to going door-to-door: http://www.organizinggame.org/
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