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## **“We need your minds, not your money. Come to my home”: An Invitation to Community Literacy from Kamp Katrina**

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With Linda Pearl Scott, Gean Cross, Downriver, Shawn Patrick McDonald, Charles Lavelle Trivette, Michael P. Wille/ Kamp Katrina, New Orleans, Louisiana

..... This article presents The Kamp Katrina Project, a community literacy  
..... partnership with Kamp Katrina residents in New Orleans. Kamp  
..... Katrina is a colony for displaced artists, musicians, and low-wage  
..... earners. In this article, Kamp Katrina residents relate their stories about  
..... life in post-Katrina New Orleans after the levee failures devastated the  
..... city (now exacerbated by the recent BP oil disaster). As part of this  
..... article, we enclose the documentary short Kamp Katrina: A Love Letter  
..... to New Orleans, one of several community texts including a book of  
..... photography and a website (<http://public.csusm.edu/kampkatrina/>)  
..... where visitors can access video biographies and performances and  
..... learn how to support Kamp Katrina.

“I want you all to get this on film. This is a serious thing. One of my brothers and his wife has got two sons. One of them is 17, I think he is now. Down in St. Bernard where the worst catastrophe came. His mother, and him and his brother swam from rooftop to rooftop to get to the Interstate 10. They stayed on Interstate 10 for four days without any food or water. Four days they were on top of a bridge. Didn’t know they were going to get rescued or not. Rooftop to rooftop, and that’s a long way to go from St. Bernard Parish, where they live, to the



Interstate 10 up here in the city. This kid will never forget that the rest of his life. And his little brother, he's maybe 8, he's swimming with his brother on his back and his mama on his side from rooftop to rooftop to get to the Interstate. That's a serious story. That's not a joke."

*Gean Cross (Mr. Dave)*



"There are several types of history.

Unfortunately most history is written

about luminaries such as movie stars and politicians. Thanks to the Internet and blogs and places like MySpace, the history of everyday people will now be there for sociologists and others to study and enjoy.

That is a relatively new development. What I call folk history has always been passed down by regular people."

*Linda Pearl Scott (Ms. Pearl)*

**T**he levees broke five years ago, and New Orleans remains a tinderbox of social and economic unrest marked by slow, selective, politically charged post-Katrina redevelopment.

The New Orleans community is plagued by mounting challenges—a struggling national and local economy, a city ordinance that threatens the livelihood of the street performers, and, most recently, the BP oil disaster. In the shadow of these larger issues is Ms. Linda Pearl Scott (Ms. Pearl) who is actively involved in keeping her community intact while housing artists, musicians, and low-wage earners in her home, locally known as Kamp Katrina.

We (graduate students, Carla Maroudas and Denise Crlenjak, and our professor, Dawn Formo) met Ms. Pearl and the residents of Kamp



Katrina in April 2008 when we attended the “New Orleans Films Presented by their Directors” session at the 2008 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in New Orleans which included a viewing of the film *Kamp Katrina* (2007). The directors, Ashley Sabin and David Redmon, were unable to attend. Instead, four *Kamp Katrina* residents, Ms. Pearl, Mr. Dave, Marzipan, and Jacques, introduced themselves at the film showing. Before the screening, Ms. Pearl explained that the film was about the tent community she created in the yard of her Upper Ninth Ward, storm-damaged home for the displaced musicians and artists who make the streets of the French Quarter unique. “But it doesn’t tell the real story,” she insisted. During the Q&A, Ms. Pearl explained, “The film was extremely inaccurate [...] and unfair in many ways.” The more immediate concern was that two days earlier, the Quality of Life Police, a division of the New Orleans Police Department, had ordered her to collapse the tents in her yard, forcing the fifteen people she was housing in her yard into her tiny home. In addition, the city had threatened to fine Ms. Pearl for not having repaired her wind- and rain-damaged home telling her, “You need to start fixing this...or we could make your life miserable.” The demands and threats from the police and city only exacerbated a difficult situation. As someone who takes pride in her efforts to house displaced people who drive the tourist economy of New Orleans, Ms. Pearl wanted the CCCC audience to understand the real people behind the film and extended an invitation: “I know I’m in a room with smart people. We need your help—your minds, not your money. Come to my home” (3 Apr. 2008). That call was the start of The *Kamp Katrina* Project, a multi-media collaboration among educators and community members to stir up the waves of justice by documenting and publicizing the socio-political struggle that is post-Katrina New Orleans. Though the conference’s civic engagement theme was compelling, it wasn’t until we met the *Kamp Katrina* residents and heard Ms. Pearl’s call that we were moved to



support their agency through whatever skills, resources, or connections we could gather.<sup>1</sup>

After the film and Q&A, we spent the evening in a nook of the Hilton Riverside Hotel asking ourselves how our academic skills as techno-savvy teachers and writers and our economic resources might intersect with Kamp Katrina's needs. As feminist educators, in the words of Gesa E. Kirsch and Jacqueline J. Royster, we strive to adopt rhetorical practices that promote "justice, equality, empowerment, and peace" (644). As writing teachers, we help people develop their rhetorical agency, and we have access to people and technology that can create public spaces for Kamp Katrina residents to tell their own stories. It was clear from the Q&A that the residents had command of the social, political, and economic conflicts of their community. In fact, Ms. Pearl authored a website about her local neighborhood, the focus of which was the restaurants, bars, and festivals in her community. After Katrina, her website served as a message board for people to locate each other. Given Katrina residents' local knowledge, our initial idea, in response to Ms. Pearl's call for help, was to record their digital narratives so that Ms. Pearl could post them on her website.

The next day, after a quick stop to purchase a camcorder, we hailed a taxi. The Kamp Katrina community embraced us, inviting us to join them for dinner at the neighborhood food line for the homeless, followed by a drive through the Ninth Ward later that night (courtesy of a Kamp Katrina volunteer from out of state). From our one question—"What do you want people to know"—we captured over two hours of footage from the ten people who shared their experiences and critical insights about the disaster and their lives after Katrina. The residents repeatedly expressed how much they wanted their story to be told to those outside of New Orleans. In response, we planned a return trip to collect additional footage. As we discussed the partnership that was emerging, we knew we would be building a relationship with the Kamp Katrina residents and working with them to support their goals.<sup>2</sup> Ms.



Pearl and the residents alternated between thanking us for coming, encouraging us to return, and expressing appreciation for working *with* them to support the Kamp.

As such, the Project supports Kamp Katrina residents' critical insight and ability to convey astutely the problems facing their community with first-person accounts. "Stories," Sidonie Smith and Kay Schaffer argue, "provide necessary evidence and information about violations. They put a human face to suffering" because "[...] they issue a call [...] for institutions, communities, and individuals to respond to the story; to recognize the humanity of the teller and the justice of the claim" (3). The Kamp Katrina Project publicizes the residents' stories, allowing them to speak directly to a larger audience than they might reach on their own. We act as what Ms. Pearl describes as "eyewitnesses," people who come to New Orleans, see what's going on, and return to their home communities to create awareness of the issues the people of New Orleans are facing.



*Pictured from left to right: Ms. Pearl, Marzipan, Richard, Carla, Dawn, Butch, Mr. Dave, and Denise. Detailed biographies for each of the contributors to this article and to the documentary film can be found on The Kamp Katrina Project website at: <http://public.csusm.edu/kampkatrina>.*



The next portion of this article is a collection of conversations with Kamp Katrina residents that were recorded when we visited for the first time in April 2008.<sup>3</sup> By way of introduction, Ms. Pearl, an active community member, started Kamp Katrina in her backyard to house displaced artists, workers, and musicians post-Katrina; Gean Cross (Mr. Dave), Ms. Pearl's right hand at Kamp Katrina, works in construction and regularly employs several Kamp Katrina residents; Downriver, a self-described "true blood coon ass" born and raised in the Bayou, found refuge at Kamp Katrina following the storm, but has been missing since the city ordered the tents taken down; Patrick McDonald (Marzipan) lost everything in the storm and was homeless before coming to Kamp Katrina. He is a classical guitarist and street performer who has been missing since 2009; Charles Lavell Trivette (Butch), a semi-retired musician and former resident of the Kamp born in Lafourche Parish, has recorded several albums and traveled the world; Michael P. Wille (Mad Mike), a guitarist, lives by playing his "subversive comedy music" on the streets of the French Quarter. We share these interview excerpts as a dialogue so that our readers can get to know the residents and the issues facing post-Katrina New Orleans.

### **Part I: What is Kamp Katrina?**

Carla: What is this place called Kamp Katrina?

Ms. Pearl: Kamp Katrina, some people call it the Musician's

Bunkhouse, is a community of artists and musicians and others who are trying to hold this culture together, and frankly, we don't have a whole lot of money. [...] I turned [the garden next to my home] into a park for artists, musicians, and filmmakers.

*"I wrote a love letter to my community. And all of a sudden people started show up."*



Denise: How did it start?

Ms. Pearl: We came back in September [after Katrina]. They allowed us to come back. When we came back the city was dark. There was no lights, and I didn't know what that was going to be like. [...] And the soldiers... they escorted us to this door. And we had a truck, and they asked us if we needed some food. And we said, "Yeah!" And the next morning we got up and that truck was full of boxes of MREs [military food rations]. It's just natural that I'd share it with people.

I'm no Mother Teresa. I'm by a huge garden where about twelve houses used to fit that I keep and love... It was only natural that Kamp Katrina happened. [...] I wrote a love letter to my community online called [NewOrleansBywater.com](http://NewOrleansBywater.com) and all of a sudden people started show up.



***"Tents! We'll get tents!"***

Ms. Pearl: The levee broke pretty close. A lot of people came around. [...] We all turned into a bunch of frightened children. It was only natural that people showed up in the yard. And it was only natural since I had all those MREs that I started giving people food. And so they found out I had MREs over here, and they showed up. And we said, "Tents! We'll get tents!" And we put tents all out in the yard.

[...] That's how Kamp Katrina started basically. It wasn't planned. We all just showed up. We were all in the streets together. There were no stores. There was nothing, but every once in a while there was soldiers. You know people congregated together because, you know, because there weren't very many people here. [...] We kind



of circled the wagons.

***“Everyone kind of pools their resources  
and they survive.”***

Dawn: So how does the Kamp work?

Ms. Pearl: What we do for the community is we provide affordable housing for the very people who make all the tourists come here. I mean how many musicians does this place house? There’s six or seven. [...] That’s a lot of entertainment, and as your film clearly shows, these people are talented.



Mr. Dave: Everyone who stays with us—each one of them has a chore. [...] They take our big cans, and they set them out front. Someone might cut the grass; someone might go in and clean the house; someone might wash the dishes. If we busy, they—we don’t have to ask these people. They do it upon themselves because they know these things need to be done. Yesterday when they [the Quality of Life Police] came and closed us down with the tents, every last one of these people that’s with us now stopped what they were doing and came and helped us take down the tents.

Downriver: I make probably \$20-25 in the morning and about \$20-25 in the afternoon. That’s about \$50-60 a day. But it is split up in two, so by the time I make what I make in the morning, I bring home toilet paper, dishwashing liquid, clothes, laundry detergent. Then I’m pretty much down to nothing. Buy me a couple beers or whatever, by then I have maybe \$5 left. Then, I go back to work in the evening. That’s just the way it goes.

***“If you can’t follow the rules, then, you got to go.”***



Dawn: What are the rules?

Downriver: The rules are no drugs, absolutely no drugs. You clean up after yourself. You contribute; you bring something in here no matter how minute. You bring something to the house. If you make \$5, spend \$2 on bringing something to the house. You know—a roll of toilet paper, whatever. Nobody wants to go to the bathroom and there be no toilet paper. Respect everybody's stuff. You do not touch anything that does not belong to you...



*Downriver*

unless you ask. Respect everybody's privacy. You know. Basic, basic stuff man. You know. And it works good. The people that are here. We all good together. We respect each other, you know. We just basically trying to get by. [...] I just can't emphasize so much what this place means for the people who are here and the people who comes along. But there are rules. If you can't follow the rules, then, you got to go.

***“Here baby, you got a house now.”***

Carla: Why do you stay at Kamp Katrina? Why do you need this place?

Downriver: I saw a lot of things that are not cool. Shit that doesn't leave you. I've been here ever since. Kind of messed you up in the head. [...] It's a trauma thing 'cause a lot of us stayed here and never left. The rest of the country says you need to get over this shit. I'll tell you what. When you see a dead body floating by you, then there comes another one, and another one and you rescue little children out of the attics of their house because I'm in a little bitty



boat paddling by and these ladies fucking screaming at me saying, “Please take my kid out of here.” You know, that shit kinda stays with you. I’m sorry. That’s the way it is.

Ms. Pearl: We’re going to be freaked out for the rest of our lives. We feel guilty for even being alive. You guys can’t let that happen again. It can’t happen again. The repercussions of Katrina are going on and on and on. But the healing is going on and on, too. And that’s what we’re trying to do here.

Marzipan: I lost everything. [Bernard Parish] is not wiped out. It’s [just] a shell of what it used to be.

Downriver: Thirty-seven days since I’ve been here. Ms. Pearl gave me the tent. She say, “Here baby, you got a house now.” I was on the sidewalk before that. I came in here; I got cleaned up. I been clean for thirty-seven days. I miss my tent. [...] I’m not going nowhere; that’s for damn sure. Ms. Pearl won’t let me go nowhere. That was my place.

Marzipan: Because of Pearl, of what she’s doing, someone like Butch, a great musician is here now with all these musicians. He’d be in a house, his bed, somewhere rotting away. Now people come to the house and play music with him. People come to photograph and document him, of the beauty that this man creates.

Denise: How did you find out about Kamp Katrina?

Marzipan: After being removed forcibly by the military to Tennessee, when I came back, I lived in an abandoned car on St. Claude and a friend of mine mentioned Kamp Katrina to me. [...] If it wasn’t for Pearl and Dave, it’s a good chance that I could be dead or incarcerated right now. Very good chance.

Butch: Pearl and I have been good friends for twenty or twenty five years. I could live someplace else right now, but I want to help Ms.



Pearl get this place together so it's really nice, so it's really a good place.

Denise: Why did you return to New Orleans after the storm?

Ms. Pearl: I came back to New Orleans because I'm in love with this neighborhood. I always have been.

Marzipan: I made a decision to come back to New Orleans and play music on the streets. Since you all noticed since you been here that you see the artists, the performers, and that's what adds spice to the city.



Downriver: The city's my home. This is my city. We want our people back because that's what makes New Orleans. And the people coming in don't quite understand what this is all about. This is a city like no other.

Marzipan: [I] realized, talking to people from different states and the music, the food, and culture—it's all gone and being raised here you don't realize that you are part of a culture and you are part of a particular type of people with their own certain food and their own certain music.

## Part II: What do you want people to know?

*“Housing is the issue in New Orleans. You have to have housing for low- and mid-level workers because they're the ones that fuel the economy.”*

Carla: For people who have forgotten about Katrina, who think it's



over, what do they need to know?

Mad Mike: The flood did have a major impact on New Orleans. It's like a delicate balance we have with our public relations right now. On the one hand, we want to send the message to people that New Orleans is open. Come and party. Come here. Spend your money, and do the New Orleans tourist thing. And, at the same time, trying to project the idea that there are parts of New Orleans that are devastated.

Marzipan: People need to be aware, like you said, the city, itself, looks like everything is okay, everything is just fine, "Oh look, the city looks just beautiful," or "Oh Katrina. It's over with."

Downriver: It's not over for us. It's not over for us. This city still needs a lot of help.

Marzipan: You just have to travel outside the city lines and you'll see. I can understand them fixing up the city, but after they fixed that, it's kind of like, it's all they did fix, and all they cared about fixing.

***"New Orleans will never be the same again."***

Downriver: You can go right back here. This way. Not far, a five minute drive, and you'll see neighborhoods of thousands of houses that are gutted with no sheetrock in them. They've been pillaged and the people haven't come back. [...] New Orleans will never be the same again, not like it used to be because a lot of our people with our heritage got displaced and found and got started somewhere else, and they can't afford to come back.

Ms. Pearl: History is passed down from neighbor to neighbor like cuttings from a beautiful angel trumpet plant and the recipe for sweet potato pie. They had it. They have it now. One more valuable resource that is almost gone.



***“We are the invisible victims of the storm.”***

Mr. Dave: They have these big, professional movie stars like Brad Pitt come across the canal, which is right on the other side of the bridge here. And he’s building all of these homes for all these people over here. I realize they need these homes because they lost their homes. But also there are a whole lot of other people that need things, too.

Ms. Pearl: We are the invisible victims of the storm. Fifty-seven million acres of destruction, but the entire world looks at the Ninth Ward. There’s been millions of dollars collected for Katrina, and I live in the Ninth Ward. [The Bywater neighborhood] is the Ninth Ward, and I haven’t seen it. I’ve seen a lot of interest in the Lower Nine. [...] Some investigative reporter needs to pick up a camera and come on down here and talk to these people [about Common Ground]. Where is those millions of dollars?

Marzipan: There are no more of these music foundations they say they have. I called several of them just to get a new guitar, and you go online and see, like, you know, two billion music foundations to help New Orleans artists. You gotta be kidding me. I can’t get a new pair of strings. Most of them, a majority of them, say that the donations are going to schools, music schools. Wait a second. I am a musician already. Why do you need to teach someone in New Orleans to be impoverished?

Ms. Pearl: I went to [...] a film festival to answer questions about the film, *Kamp Katrina*. They were having a benefit for Katrina there. I still don’t know where all that money went.

***“It’s a tough neighborhood. This is the Ninth Ward.”***

Butch: A lot of things are still fucked up, like really messed up. Like public transportation’s not back to what it used to be. Every time it rains, the power goes off. A lot of things are messed up. My mother



sent me money for a squeeze box [an accordion]. She said, “This is for your squeeze box. Get you a Cajun squeeze box and start singing in French again because that’s what you do.” And I said, “Okay, I’ll do that.” And she sent me a check yesterday, and it’s going to take me two weeks to cash the motherfucker. [...] It’s

an out of state check, and there aren’t that many banks running right now. We’re still fucked up. They said [the levees are] fixed. But you expect me to believe everything I read in the newspaper? They say it’s fixed, but they’ve said that before.

***“Most people are two, three paychecks away from the street.”***

Dawn: How did the storm and the flood affect housing?

Butch: There’s a housing shortage because the whole Lower Nine is like devastated. So rent skyrocketed. [...] And so we have a lot of homeless people. And so, the criminal element is like 15% of this town because it’s so easy to take advantage of someone when they’re down and out. [...] You don’t want to walk around here at night by yourself. But really, this has always been a tough neighborhood. It’s a tough neighborhood. This is the Ninth Ward.

Ms. Pearl: Housing is the issue in New Orleans. You have to have housing for low- and mid-level workers because they’re the ones that fuel the economy. In the case of these musicians that I keep in the bunkhouse, and these artists, the tourists come here to see them. [...] A lot of artists don’t have cars and this and that. You can’t put them way, way, way, down. They need to be at a close distance. The waiters and waitresses and all of those people need places to live, and there is empty apartment buildings and stuff. People would

# RENT HAS DOUBLED SINCE KATRINA



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prefer that over sleeping in your car. You have to go a ways before you can get rent under \$900 or so. A thousand.

Butch: Used to be able to, in this neighborhood, all of these houses, all these little Creole cottages, you could rent them out for like \$500 a month. It was reasonable. Now they're like \$1500 a month. Well, I can't pay that because I'm on a disability check, so I can't pay it.

Ms. Pearl: I'll tell you who can afford it. Some boys who were selling drugs. They took this young boy into that place, and they shot him, and put him in a trashcan, and rolled him out on Royal Street. And do you know who was living there before? A nice family. They didn't have that much money, but they were waiters in the French Quarter. She was a waitress, and he was a waiter, and they was happy. And they were good people; they just didn't have a lot of money.

Marzipan: They're trying to change [the Bywater] with the high prices in rent. You're going to see people stand up and say, "No. We're artists and musicians and beautiful people." With that apartment over there at \$900, guess what, no artist can afford that. What makes this city so beautiful? The music. The art. The culture. The food. It's all the same thing. That all goes hand in hand. So guess what. If you wipe us out, there goes that.

Denise: The news talks about all of these services they're offering. Have you tried to go through any of those? What I'm hearing, they say all of this is available, but...

Downriver: It's not. They put you through three years of red tape to get \$2,000. You understand what I'm saying? Three years to get \$2,000. I haven't collected a red cent. I'm just the type of guy—I go out and I do for myself.

Marzipan: Because of my lifestyle [...] FEMA didn't give me a single



dime when I got back. When they forcibly removed me from where I was staying, I didn't get any money from FEMA. I went completely broke.

Butch: I don't know what [the homeless] are going to do. They're just getting shuffled around. And some of them, a lot of them, really can't help it. They're like disabled. They're on like a \$600 disability check. Where are they going to go? Except to the streets.

Ms. Pearl: The only people who are staying are the people who are relying on the system, like old people, like me. I mean, I'm getting a disability check. You know we need the people who are going to work. They keep kicking them out.

Marzipan: Before the storm, I was going to open my own business. Everything was going great, and after the hurricane? Well, at least the government's going to take care of us, right? I didn't get nothing. Went completely homeless. Slept in places I never would have thought of sleeping, you know, and always with the cloud of being arrested the entire time.

***“... that to me is inherently un-American.”***

Mad Mike: The police are really brutal here. I would like to point that out to anyone listening on the outside. [...] My perception is that the police tend to go after the homeless people and non-violent criminals whereas they should be focusing on violent crime, the high crime areas.

Marzipan: I've been homeless four times and incarcerated twice for it. The last time I was incarcerated it was only supposed to be for one day, for being drunk in public, but that's their [the police] thing. They see you walking around with a beer. It's an open container, and they'll throw you in jail for it, but that's legal here, and I spent ten days in a mental ward at OPP [Orleans Parish Prison] for carrying an open container.



*Mad Mike*

Mad Mike: I've seen groups of police officers round up everybody in a specific area, like up by the river, round them up, like corral them to where there were twenty people sitting down, and sort of just pick them out at random to go to jail.

Marzipan: They pull up in a van and just throw people in. It's pretty creepy. It's kind of like [the movie] *Soylent Green*. They take them to prison, to OPP, to Central Lock Up.

Mad Mike: That kind of thing goes on all the time. They call them sweeps—homeless sweeps. That used to happen on Tuesdays and Thursdays but it's really much more random than that—where they go through areas where the homeless people congregate and arrest them, ask them for their ID. If they don't have their IDs, they'll arrest them for that. What are we, in communist Soviet Union? Going to jail for failure to present papers? I mean that to me is inherently un-American.

Carla: Is the city afraid the homeless population will deter tourists?

Marzipan: Being homeless here, it's... they're "cleaning up the city," and it's such a small city, they'll see you there every day. [...] They're trying to destroy. They don't even realize the culture they have. When people like us, we're trying to give back to the culture.

Mad Mike: You see a lot of that activity before major festivals. They want to "clean-up" the city. Jazz fest, French Quarter Fest, Mardi Gras, Halloween. You'll see a lot of sweeps, homeless sweeps to "improve the city's image" as it were.



Dawn: Has it always been this way, or did it get worse after the flood?

Mad Mike: It was obviously much worse after the flood. I sort of understood that because there was all of the rampant rioting and looting, but I think that certain forces took the disaster as an opportunity to crack down on what they saw as being non-productive elements of society. I've had a sense of these encroaching forces ever since I've been hanging out a lot in the French Quarter, which has been for about twelve years. I feel like after the hurricane, it became a re-doubled effort.

Marzipan: None of us are lazy vagabonds. We're struggling artists. We're sticking to our work every single day. When I ran into you guys [earlier in the day], I just came from the river, then Jackson Square.

Mad Mike: A lot of New Orleans culture has the danger of going by the wayside because a lot of these business interests see the street culture as potentially injurious to their businesses. [...] We don't really have an industrial base, a manufacturing base, or anything like that in New Orleans, so we do need the tourist industry. You get the impression that a lot of these people own a lot of real estate in the French Quarter, own the chain T-shirt chains, own the hotels. [...] If there is this homeless problem, and if it is injurious to the business of New Orleans, then shutting down Kamp Katrina could only hurt that effort because a lot of these people would be homeless if it wasn't for this place.

***“You can travel all over the world, but you won't find any place like this.”***

Dawn: Why do you stay in New Orleans given the condition of the city?

Butch: You can travel all over the world, but you won't find any place



like this. This place is spiritually magnetic. That's why people don't want to leave here, even when they're under thirty feet of water.

Marzipan: First and foremost this is my home. Second and foremost the food sucks everywhere else. Third and foremost the music sucks everywhere else. Fourth and foremost ... I could keep going. The culture. There's a great artistic culture. This is one of the last bohemian cities—

not the city, but the Bywater where you're sitting right now—people doing wild things. The last portion of a town. I've been all over the United States, and I've never run into a part of town that's strictly bohemian.

*“Like a woman who'll make you lay down and sleep in the streets.”*

Ms. Pearl: They have layer upon layer of culture going on. Five different flags have flown over New Orleans. Five different flags.



Think of the different cultures. What's interesting to me is that there are no poor or rich neighborhoods. Even uptown you have poor houses. The poor and rich are mixed in here. It's not like you go over a track, and now you're in a different...it doesn't work like that. We're all mixed in together and that's why we get along so well.

Butch: Any kind of music goes here. Any kind. As long as it's not bullshit. There's only two types of music. There's good music and bad music. I mean you can play the honkiest, countriest Western stuff that you can think of, and there's going to be a large segment of the community that's going to love it, especially if you do it well.

Ms. Pearl: You'll see musicians sittin' there playin' music, and they're not making a dime. People walking by them, and they're just sittin' and playing, 'cause they have to. She's got 'em. This city's got a spell on you. It'll grab you and sit you down somewhere. It'll make you turn from a waiter into a white-faced Charlie Chaplin. [...] She'll get you.

Denise: So art is the common language? The way you relate to each other and to the city?

Ms. Pearl: I sat down and started talking to [Jacques] when I met him [...] and I said how I loved this city, and he said, "Yeah, she's like [a] woman. She'll make you lay down and sleep in the streets. You know that's exactly what I'm doing." And I said, "What?" [...] He says, "I don't know. I'm in love with this place. I came here on vacation, and stayed." But you have to be careful though because some people, she'll eat 'em up.

Dawn: What would you say to people who think New Orleans is beyond repair? That people should relocate?

Ms. Pearl: This city was built a long time ago. It's so rich in art,



history, and culture. [...] This is an important strip of land here. Not just New Orleans, but the whole Gulf Coast. What about all those oil towns? We have to have that. There's the fishing industry. We have to protect it. We can't afford not to. Culturally or financially for the United States. Let's face it—we're still dependant on oil. To me this is a living museum, and it's important that it's maintained.

### **Kamp Katrina's Community Texts**

"If people really care about the music and culture of New Orleans, maybe people will do what you guys are doing, you know, and actually see what's going down, and actually look into the real people of New Orleans, and not get hyped up by T-shirt shops that say 'Fuck You.'"

*Marizpan, Kamp Katrina Resident*

The Kamp residents want people to see New Orleans as more than just a tourist stop with novelty T-shirt shops lining the streets. When we shared with them that Carla's brother, Richard Holt, is a filmmaker and that we know a film editor and sound designer, they encouraged us to return to bring Kamp Katrina and their city to life on film. Their invitation was the impetus for the Project, a partnership that includes a book, a website, and a film. Because we agree with César Chávez, "The end of all education should surely be service to others," we wanted to use our connections and academic resources to help Ms. Pearl serve her community (online). The final section of this article explains how we partnered with the residents and filmmakers to create collaborative texts, and offers suggestions for ways our readers can support Kamp Katrina.

We spent the months between April and November 2008 planning the trip with Richard and Ms. Pearl via phone and email. She encouraged us:



Record the sad as well and the ugly along with the beauty. Keep the film rolling, even when you feel the subject is too private. You will see post-traumatic stress as it is. ‘Laughing all our laughter, crying all of our tears’ as the poet [Kahlil Gibran] wrote. I’m very interested in aiding women filmmakers. (Scott, email 10 Oct. 2008)

Richard guided us through developing a budget, drafting a shot list, and learning the basics of digital filmmaking. We returned in November to a warm welcome from Ms. Pearl, Marzipan, and Mr. Dave with rented, high-quality audio and video equipment. Some residents had gone (Downriver left Kamp Katrina after the tent community was closed and has not been heard from since), and new residents were living there, including Butch Trivette, whose music is prominently featured in the film.

Over four days, we filmed conversations with the Kamp Katrina residents. With Mr. Dave as our guide, we headed to the French Quarter to meet the residents at work as musicians and artists on the streets. Along the way, we filmed conversations with people on street corners, shop doorways, back porches, and beside FEMA trailers. Our one question, “What do you want people to know?” encouraged people to talk about New Orleans and their Katrina experiences with rage, passion, and humor. Musicians told us the same through their music. We filmed as we walked for miles with Mr. Dave and Ms. Pearl in a second line parade.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Dave guided us through the battered Ninth Ward as we filmed landmarks of his childhood. The nightmarish conditions for capturing footage, coupled with our inexperience as production assistants, were aided by Richard’s expert eye for storytelling and Mr. Dave’s insider view of the city. The resulting footage and photographs were more organic and genuine than any shot we could have prearranged and have contributed richly to three community texts.



Since returning home from our November 2008 trip, we have sustained a long distance partnership with Kamp Katrina using online media. We have done our best to honor the Project's values by making the book of photography, website, and film *with* them, not about them. With each text, Ms. Pearl has been thoughtfully engaged in the revision process, offering crucial suggestions to ensure the texts accurately reflect her community.

**Book of Photography:** We combined photographs, poems, essays, and blog-postings Ms. Pearl shared with us via email, MySpace, and Snapfish with the many photographs and film footage we shot to create a book of photography, *Kamp Katrina: Through Our Lens*, using the self-publishing site Blurb. All proceeds above the publishing costs of the book go to Kamp Katrina. Upon receiving early versions of the film and book, Ms. Pearl emailed to tell us, "I can't describe how thrilled we were about the book" (Scott, email 10 May 2009). She has since posted the film online and uses the book cover as her MySpace profile picture.

**Website:** To capture the history and dynamic nature of Kamp Katrina, California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM) hosts a website designed by student intern Gerald Casanada: <http://public.csusm.edu/kampkatrina>. Visitors can learn more about the residents through biographies, video interviews, and performances by resident musicians. It provides a history of Hurricane Katrina and relates how several residents experienced the days after the levees broke. Visitors can also access the Project's texts from the site. Additionally, the site includes classroom projects for students to learn from and with Kamp Katrina residents to develop their own personal narratives. Together we have also created the Kamp Katrina store on CafePress.com ([www.cafepress.com/KampKatrina](http://www.cafepress.com/KampKatrina)) where Kamp Katrina logo gear is available for purchase. Finally, the website links to the forthcoming Kamp Katrina Etsy Shop where residents offer their own artwork, crafts, and photographs for sale.



**Film:** The final text is the documentary short film, *Kamp Katrina: A Love Letter to New Orleans*, included in this volume of *Reflections* as a DVD. After returning from New Orleans with eleven hours of footage, Richard recruited editor Jeffery Barrick and sound designer Jason Ritz, who jumped at the opportunity to bring Ms. Pearl’s efforts to life on film. And Ms. Pearl is quite pleased by the results: “The film was wonderful. We are very excited about it” (Scott, email 10 May 2009). To give you a sense of the filmmakers’ experiences shooting and editing the film, we’ve included excerpts from an interview with the film team below. The complete interviews are available at the previously mentioned website.

### **An Invitation to Social Action**

With this partnership, we are committed, as Linda Flower advocates, to support “the rhetorical agency, of the people who have been marginalized, silenced, and oppressed by the *status quo*” (Flower, online): the *status quo* represented by the lack of public and political will to rebuild New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina; the *status quo* that perceives the flooding of New Orleans as a natural—and therefore unpreventable, even inevitable—disaster; the *status quo* that is political infighting between competing political and economic philosophies; and the *status quo* that results in “regular people” who lack access to basic city services including affordable housing, utilities, commerce, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions. We hope the residents and the other disenfranchised people of the Gulf Coast continue to speak out against the injustices of a system that repeatedly fails them and, in turn, that others will hear their call for civic action.

As you experience Kamp Katrina’s collection of community texts, may you be reminded of new challenges that face the residents of New Orleans and Kamp Katrina: 1) the BP oil spill that threatens the seafood and tourism industries and the livelihoods of Gulf Coast residents; and 2) city ordinances that bar “anyone from playing musical instruments



on ‘public rights of way’ between 8 p.m. and 9 a.m.” As Ms. Pearl says, “The 8 p.m. curfew will kill us, coupled with the bad economy and the oil spill. Why did they [tight-assed rich people] come down here and buy all the houses then strive to make it like the place they left? We could win this fight” (Scott, email 14 June 2010).

If you believe in Ms. Pearl and her efforts to support the tourist economy and cultural heritage of New Orleans, consider the following simple ways to help Kamp Katrina:

- Visit <http://public.csusm.edu/kampkatrina/>.
- Share the film *Kamp Katrina: A Love Letter to New Orleans* with others.
- Remind friends, family, colleagues, and elected officials that New Orleans should be rebuilt.
- Donate building materials, voluntary labor, or camping gear.
- Donate Home Depot cards. Kamp Katrina does not accept cash donations.
- Purchase a copy of the book *Kamp Katrina: Through Our Lens*.
- Purchase Kamp Katrina gear from Café Press (<http://www.cafepress.com/KampKatrina>).
- Shop Kamp Katrina’s page on Etsy for original artwork, crafts, and photography.
- Contact Ms. Pearl at [orleansbywater@aol.com](mailto:orleansbywater@aol.com).

We dedicate this article and The Kamp Katrina Project to the people of New Orleans whose passion and spirit for their cultural heritage are summed up in the local marching club Krewe du Poux’s motto: “Neither rain, nor cold, nor strike, nor hurricane’s might, Nothing cancels Mardi Gras” (Scott, “Nothing Cancels Mardi Gras,” MySpace). The oil spill in the Gulf will damage the coast, but just as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the levee break did not destroy the spirit of the Crescent City, the disaster will not destroy New Orleans. Only we can



destroy New Orleans, as citizens, if we refuse to support the rebuilding and preservation of a city that lives in the world's imagination: *Laissez les bon temps rouler* (Let the good times roll).



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## Endnotes

1. The 2008 program chair, Charles Bazerman, explained that the conference "offered an unprecedented number of panels on civic and community engagement, [and] writing and rhetoric in the public sphere" (5). At the same conference, *Reflections* debuted *Writing the Blues: Teaching in a Post-Katrina Environment*. The editor's introduction reflected how challenges like Hurricane Katrina "have called us to rethink our identities as scholars, teachers, community members, and citizens" (Parks 3).



2. In partnership, we intended to use a feminist value best described by Leslie Rebecca Bloom, “[F]eminist researchers strive for egalitarian relationships with their respondents by making space for them to narrate their stories as they desire” (18). The Kamp Katrina Project is a partnership, not a research project. Even so, this value is paramount.
3. Kamp Katrina residents were coming and going all day as they headed back and forth to work. We transcribed the video footage and excerpted it, creating a dialog that captures what the residents wanted people outside New Orleans to know. In a few cases, the dialog comes from additional conversations we had with Kamp Katrina residents during a return trip to New Orleans in November 2008.
4. A second line is described in Dan Baum’s *Nine Lives: Death and Life in New Orleans* as “the quintessential New Orleans art form — a jazz funeral without a body” (120).



## A Conversation with Kamp Katrina Filmmakers

Carla Maroudas, Denise Crlenjak and Dawn M. Formo speak with filmmakers Richard Holt, Jason Ritz, and Jeffrey Barrick about the Kamp Katrina Project.

Richard Holt (left) is a Los Angeles filmmaker and graduate of the Art Institute of Los Angeles and is the writer/director of three films.

Jason Ritz (center) is an artist and musician who has worked as a sound designer for television, video games, and live events since 2002.

Jeffrey Barrick (left) is a filmmaker/editor/writer/director of several films who studied at the Art Institute of Los Angeles.





Carla: Each of you donated your time and talents. Why did you get involved with The Kamp Katrina Project?

Jeff: I felt it was an important story to tell. [...] New Orleans lives in the imagination of the world. The music and street performers are the backbone of those dreams. Kamp Katrina is a haven, and it should be documented.

Richard: The cultural and music scene that are so prevalent and made the Bywater and the Quarter so famous and so individual is slowly being chipped away at. I thought this was an important way, an interesting way, to let a lot of people know about it.

Dawn: Music is such an important part of the culture in New Orleans. Jason, as a sound engineer and a blues guitarist, how does New Orleans speak to you? What did you want to bring out in the film?

Jason: New Orleans to me is the home of the street musician. It's really where the really good blues and jazz musicians are. These are guys without recording contracts, recording deals, labels, and they are so extremely talented. [...] The musicians at Kamp Katrina are what you'd expect New Orleans musicians to be, very talented musicians that are just out there doing their thing. [...] These are people who do what they love. They purposefully opted out of a career—good income—to do this. It's the arts. We need to support it. I really hope [the film] benefits Ms. Pearl and what she's doing in New Orleans. That's the kind of people we need. We need people looking out for the heart of the city like that.

Denise: Jeff, you edited the film without having been onsite for the filming, yet you captured the heart of Kamp Katrina and New Orleans. How did you decide what to highlight in the film?

Jeff: The people and the music are crucial to highlight; this is what Kamp Katrina is all about. You can never lose sight of that. These



people have been through a trauma and it shows. The music is what helps to normalize the situation. It helps remind people what New Orleans was like before the hurricane. In regards to the raw footage, the most intriguing thing is the spirit of the people being filmed. No one seems defeated or disparaged. Life goes on and people rebuild.

Carla: Richard, as the director and cinematographer, what do you hope this film will do?

Richard: As an emerging filmmaker, this was one of the first opportunities for me to tell a story. But just as a person, just as a man, it was good for me to see this amazing tapestry of people and places. This city is so old and has so much life to it still. I want them to feel the way I did, and I want them to want to do something, even if it's in a very small way. If it's wanting to know more about the city, great. If it's a desire to visit it one day, just on vacation, and experience what I experienced. If it's getting involved with The Kamp Katrina Project, or other charities in New Orleans, so much the better. Ideally it will make you want to do all of these things. It will make you want to experience New Orleans, and it will make you want to help in just some small way, in any way you can to help rebuild the city because there are a lot of people who still need a lot of help, especially given the recent oil disaster in the gulf. The levees, still after five years now, are still not where they need to be. It's not as if hurricanes are going out of style or anything. So that's what I want, for people to get involved both emotionally and civically.