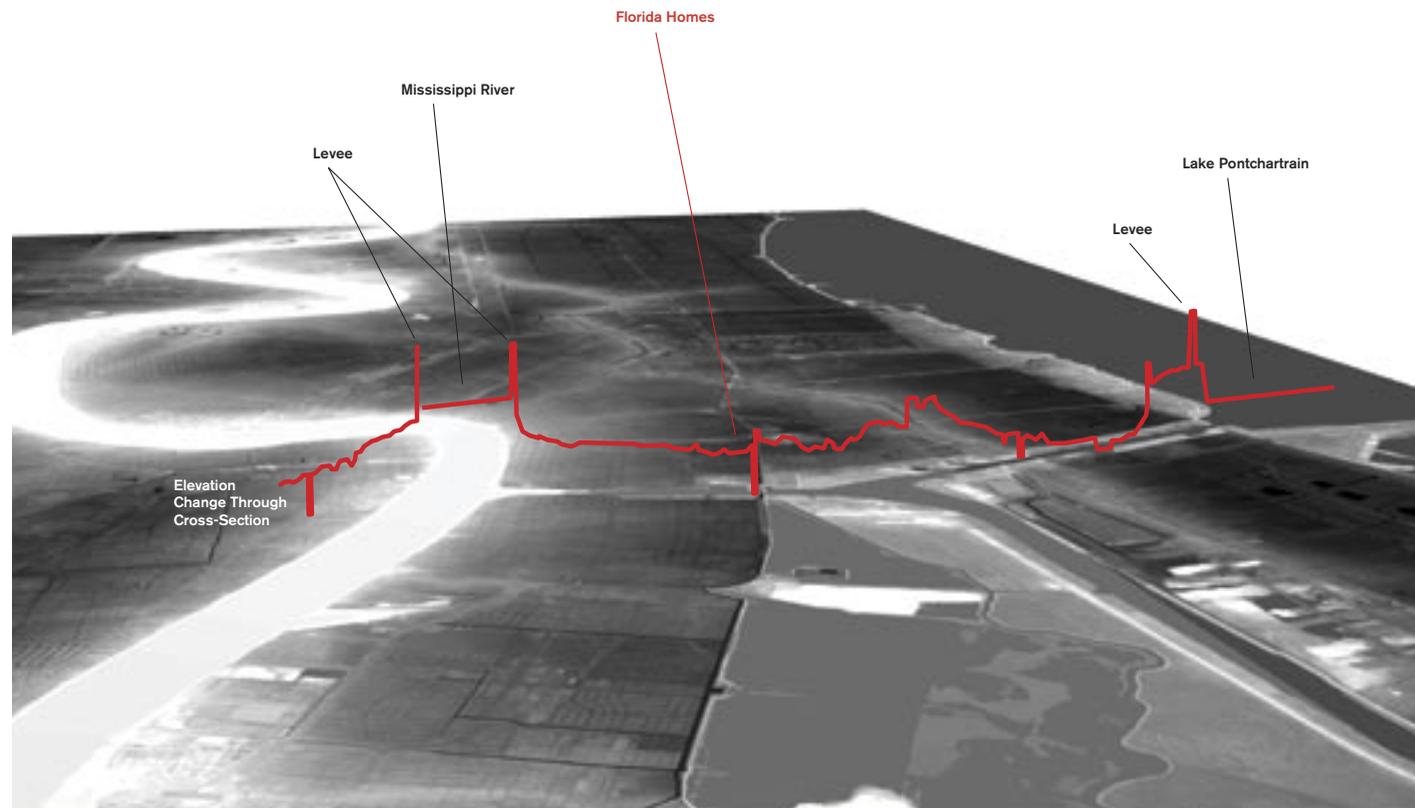
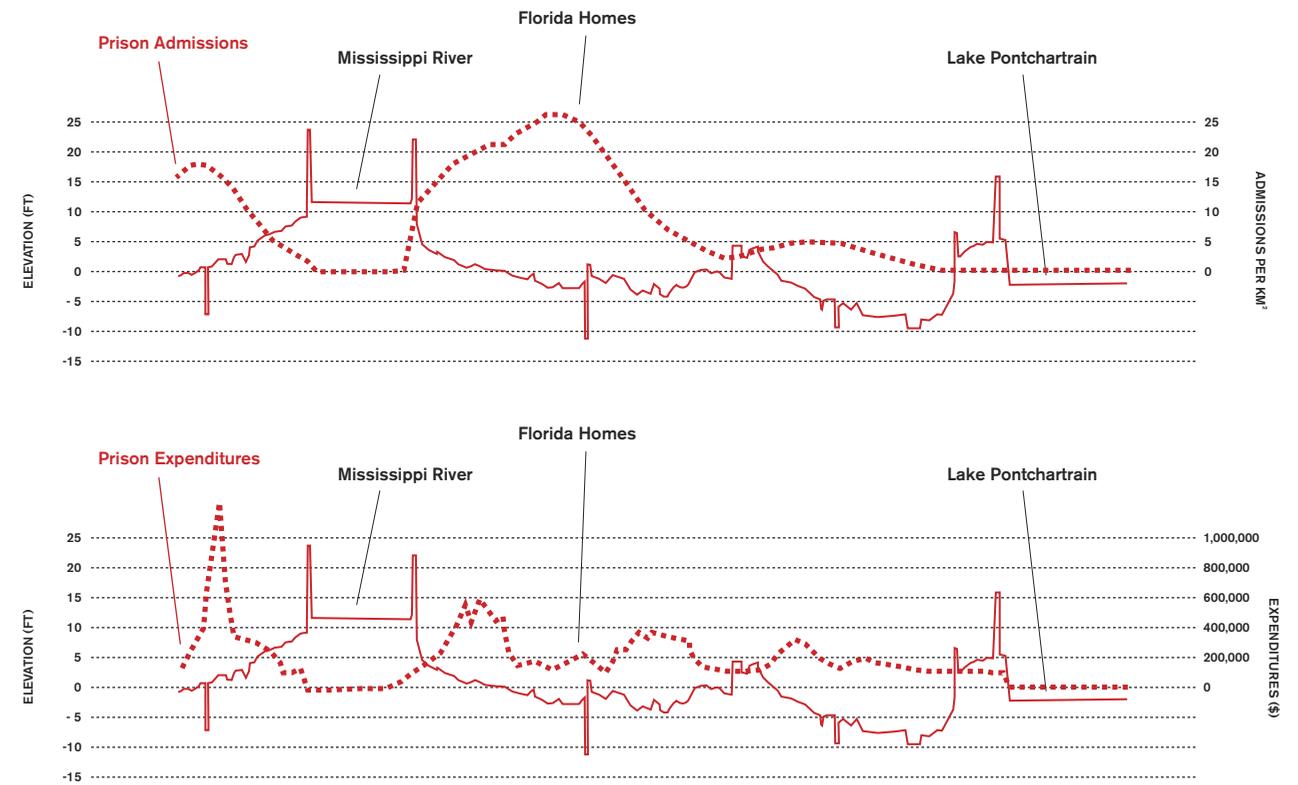


L E A K #1: B E Y O N D T H E B R I C K S



New Orleans, LIDAR elevation image with cross-section from Lake Pontchartrain through Ninth Ward to Mississippi River identified.

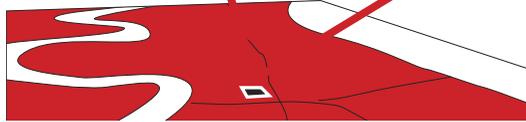


Elevation above sea-level through a cross-section (Ninth Ward, New Orleans) versus Prison Admissions (top) and versus Prison Expenditures (bottom).

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A CITY TO LOOK UP TO THE RIVER?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN IF PRISON ADMISSIONS ARE INVERSELY PROPORTIONAL TO THE TOPOGRAPHIC ELEVATION?

* All images produced by Spatial Information Design Lab, GSAPP, Columbia University and The Justice Mapping Center with The JFA Institute.



New Orleans, Ninth Ward detail with Florida Homes identified, 2003.



New Orleans, Ninth Ward detail with Florida Homes identified, 2005.

BEFORE

In New Orleans, in 2003, upwards of 28,000 city residents (about 4 out every thousand) left the city - because they were sent to prison.

The first satellite photograph, taken on January 11, 2004, shows a public housing project called the Florida Housing Development, a WWII-era complex of buildings in the city's Ninth Ward, occupying about 20 acres. The State of Louisiana spent nearly half a million dollars the previous year incarcerating people from this census block.

And over the course of just a couple years, the state spent millions of dollars to remove and return residents of 'the Florida' back and forth between prison and home. Criminal justice experts call this a 'million dollar block.'

In 2003, Louisiana taxpayers spent \$12.6 million sending residents of a few neighborhoods to prison. Police District 5, where the Florida Homes are located, accounted for 16% percent of the city's roughly half million people, but 26% percent of those incarcerated.

But it's not like they're staying in prison. It is entirely accurate to call them 'residents' of the Florida. Most of them will come out, and re-enter the community. And nearly three-quarters of those will leave the community once again, headed back to prison, most for parole violations.

Years after Pruitt-Igoe, years after HOPE VI, the Florida Homes are still typical of many big city neighborhoods across this country - at least in this regard. In another country, we might call it a refugee crisis, a permanent cycle of displacement and replacement.

From New Orleans to New Haven, Newark to Phoenix, Louisville to Los Angeles, high rates of cyclical imprisonment, re-entry, and re-imprisonment have created communities of near-permanent, constantly displaced, non-citizens.

The institutions of criminal justice - police, courts, prison, parole - dominate these neighborhoods. The least acknowledged, but surest, index of inner-city erosion and public neglect can be measured in the overwhelming presence of the criminal justice system in a few neighborhoods in a few cities in every state.

The traditional response has been more and more criminal justice. In the poorest New Orleans communities, the criminal justice system is both a result of civil neglect, and a cause that further destabilizes these neighborhoods. But the agencies of criminal justice are no substitute for strong civil institutions. The money spent to remove and return residents year in and year out results in no appreciable improvement to the circumstances of those places.

Here's a project: if you had a half million dollars a year to spend on this neighborhood, and the people who live in it, then what would you do? Would you continue to spend it all renting prison cells for a few years at a time? Or would you invest some of that money differently, in the civil infrastructure of the block?

DURING

At least, it was accurate to call them residents of the Florida Homes. In the late 1990s, the city's housing authority started a massive 'redevelopment' project there. The aim was to destroy, overhaul, and rebuild it, almost entirely. At its peak it included more than 700 housing units. Today, very little of the original Florida is left. In April 2005, only 215 people lived there - nearly half of them under the age of 17, twice as many women as men, and 100% African-American.

The story of New Orleans is a story of population

transfers and displacements. Year after year, parts of the population are moved around, dispersed from 'problematic' public housing projects and shuttled between prisons, jails, Section 8 housing, and shelters - moving from one low-lying part of the city to another.

AFTER

Then the hurricane came, brought a huge wall of water over the levee, and the Florida disappeared beneath it. Hurricane Katrina arrived on August 29, 2005. The second overhead image, taken on August 31, 2005 by a NOAA satellite, shows the census block submerged under eight feet of water. What's left of the housing project is practically invisible. Everyone in the Florida who wasn't one already thus became a refugee.

What to do now? In the lively post-Katrina discussion boards at nola.com, more than one contributor had the same idea, summed up in the title of a posting on September 24: 'BULLDOZE the projects'. 'Miss Cee,' who had identified herself as a former schoolteacher from the area and had already inquired twice about conditions in the Florida ('haven't heard anything about the area other than the water was up to the second story there') answered directly: 'public housing... is not the problem...'

as usual people are looking at the immediate solution. tear down the Florida. unfortunately thats just a band-aid on a gaping wound . . . and it wont last.

while i'll concede that yes, the majority of serious crimes happen in concentrated areas, or by residents of concentrated areas around the projects . . . that problem will not be fixed by just leveling them.

instead of debating whether or not to destroy the projects, discussion should be focused on WHY the conditions are the way they are. why is the crime rate what it is? why does it seem to be getting worse? what are the underlying factors BEYOND the bricks. the projects are just a physical manifestation of issues that extend much farther beyond the immediate structure.

While Katrina exposed neglected physical infrastructure, it also exposed a deeper problem - the fragility of civil institutions in New Orleans' poorest neighborhoods, an infrastructure made even more unstable by the constant displacement and resettlement of people in the criminal justice system.

The New Orleans rebuilding effort will pit many competing development approaches against one another. Rebuilding must involve more than the physical infrastructure of the city. Rethinking local and institutional investments requires paying attention to the neighborhood's cyclical refugee phenomenon. Not only the one caused by the storm, but the everyday fact of displacement which defines daily life in so many high-resettlement neighborhoods around the country - a phenomenon we have not been willing to see, but which Katrina has made sorely evident.

The rebuilding effort that New Orleans is facing is one that many city neighborhoods should take note of. Taken together, housing and criminal justice policies amount to a de facto population resettlement policy; but one without an explicit direction. What would it be like to rethink development from the perspective of resettlement?

Justice reinvestment? Miss Cee points to education, jobs, and good government, and concludes: 'without addressing those issues . . . i dont care if you tear down every the florida, the new desire, the st. bernard, the nolia, AND the iberville. aint nothin gon change.'

*'Million Dollar Blocks' is a project of the Spatial Information Design Lab at the GSAPP. Project team: Project Directors: Eric Cadora, Laura Kurgan, Research Associates: David Reinfurt, Seth Spielman, and Sarah Williams. Special thanks to Lionel McIntyre for help with New Orleans, to Charles Swartz at the Justice Mapping Center, and to Thomas Keenan for help with the text.