



Tourists and/as disasters: Rebuilding, remembering, and responsibility in New Orleans

Tourist Studies
9(1) 23–41
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DOI: 10.1177/1468797609360591
<http://tou.sagepub.com>
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Abstract

Although some have begun to study the relationships between national disasters and commercial tourism, practices of touring in the aftermath of disasters warrant closer examination. Marita Sturken argues tourists of disaster provide a metaphor for US contemporary culture, epitomizing an attitude that is superficial, distanced, and uncritical. To identify the hopeful possibilities that we can recuperate from literal practices of touring disaster, I turn to the US city of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina made landfall in 2005 to explore the uses of tours as: first responses, lobbying tools, field reports, organizing tactics, and publicity. To contextualize these acts, I engage public discourses of “Katrina fatigue” and the politics of remembering as it relates to post-Katrina tours. From secondary research and participant observation, I then illustrate how non-commercial and commercial tourist practices after a disaster can offer compelling opportunities for rebuilding, more sustainable memories, and political critique.

keywords

critique; disaster; first responders; Gray Line; journalists; Katrina; memory; organizers; politicians; voluntourists

Disasters often lead to the reassessment of political norms and practices.¹ In *Tourists of History*, Marita Sturken (2007) argues the figure of a tourist can eclipse opportunities for political critique that might otherwise be raised after a disaster. This occurs, she explains, by encouraging a sense of belonging through the consumption of comfort, innocence, patriotism, and security rather than through grappling with the messiness of pain and the responsibilities of accountability. Exploring how disasters enable mourning, cultural memory, tourism, and commercialization, Sturken provides a compelling analysis of citizenship and consumerism, focusing on objects not restricted to tourists (for example, advertising, kitsch,

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and monuments).² Citing MacCannell (1976/1999), Sturken (2007: 11; see also 31) claims she is less interested in what actual tourists do and more interested in using ‘the traditional notion of a tourist as a metaphor to make sense of how American culture succeeds in creating a depoliticized and exceptionalist relationship to the broader issues of global history and politics’. Given that she centers her analysis on ‘tourists’ metaphorically and, at times, literally, tourist studies scholars would do well to engage her argument.

For Sturken, ‘the mode of the tourist’ (p. 10) signifies an attitude of contemporary US culture, one that is superficial, distanced, and uncritical. She asserts ‘the search for authenticity, the role of images and media, the practices of consumerism, and the distanced proximity of the tourist –are all key to my argument that American culture’s relationship to memory and mourning can be defined as a tourism of history’ (p. 12). By gesturing towards, and yet shying away from, the significance of her work in relation to tourist studies, Sturken perpetuates a denigrated stereotype of tourists and befuddles the ways that tourists and disasters do intersect in telling ways. Agreeing that the tourist is ‘an icon of how American culture relates to, processes, and consumes history’ (Sturken, 2007: 4), this essay illustrates that there are a wide range of roles post-disaster tour practices can play that are not depoliticized, if we do not assume from the outset that all tourists necessarily will act *as disasters* – namely, as laughable, offensive, or even destructive social failures.

To do so, I turn to Hurricane Katrina (‘Katrina’), which landed in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, on August 29, 2005 (‘8/29’). The rising waters breached the surrounding levees, flooding eighty percent of the city up to 20 feet (Knabb et al., 2006: 4).³ Coupled with inept government responses, those who could not or chose not to leave were stranded for days –predominantly sick, elderly, poor, and black residents. Locals sometimes call this period ‘the storm’ because, within a month, these events were compounded by another hurricane and two tornados. Approximately 1577 people died, \$81 billion in damages resulted (Knabb et al., 2006: 11–2), and the city’s population has remained at approximately half its previous size since (Nagin, 2007). In addition to raising environmental awareness, Katrina ‘exposed to a global audience New Orleans’s chronic poverty, strained race relations, and intense inequalities’ (Gotham, 2007b: 825).

Kevin Fox Gotham (2007d) persuasively argues that post-Katrina commercial tourism in New Orleans should not be reduced to oversimplified assumptions of destructive homogenization and instead should include consideration of contradictory possibilities. Since critiques of tourists tend to focus solely on commercial tours, I extend previous research by taking into account how a broader range of tourist practices might additionally alter the ways we imagine post-disaster tours. From secondary research and participant observation, I outline the uses of tours as first responses, lobbying tools, field reports, organizing tactics, and publicity. Overall, I argue some tourist practices after a disaster can offer compelling opportunities for rebuilding, remembering, and critique.

Politicizing disaster

For context, I first engage public discourses of ‘Katrina fatigue’ and memory as it relates to post-Katrina tours. This background illuminates part of what Fleetwood (2006: 768) calls the ‘Katrina event’: ‘the material and social impact of the storm, as well as the complex set of social, technological, and economic narratives and processes reported by the news media and through governmental reports’.

Katrina fatigue

After a trauma, disaster fatigue can be one of the most salient rhetorical constraints to mobilizing care, clean up, rebuilding, and accountability. Disasters are ‘a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources’ (United Nations, 2004). Feelings of acute or chronic exhaustion from stress and/or exertion can arise for those who survive and, as will become apparent, for those more indirectly impacted.

Despite the exigencies posed, it is easy to imagine why one might become exhausted by a world constantly in crisis. The US Federal Emergency Management Agency or ‘FEMA’ (2007) lists 17 official categories of disaster: chemical, dam failure, earthquake, fire, flood, hazardous materials, heat, hurricane, landslide, nuclear, terrorism, thunderstorm, tornado, tsunami, volcano, wildfire, and winter storm. From December 24, 1964 to March 3, 2007, US presidents alone declared 1477 disasters. That means someone in the US could witness over 2000 domestic disasters in a lifetime, though likely more given global climate change. Internationally, in 2007, 399 country level disasters occurred, resulting in an estimated 16,517 deaths, 197 million people impacted, and \$62.5 billion in damages (Guha-Sapir, 2008). Further, when we quantify disaster, each abstraction usually references a cluster of incidents and outcomes, as illustrated by the terms ‘the storm’ or ‘Katrina event’. Part of what is at stake in disaster recovery, therefore, is how long attention and resources will be directed to any particular disaster, one that has created profound losses but cannot neatly be declared as ‘over’ and will not be the last to occur.

Sometimes disaster fatigue is offered as an excuse to forget and eclipse possibilities for further political action. Conceding former US President George W. Bush was tarnished by his Administration’s response to Katrina, for example, former White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan (2008: 279) claims:

The problem lay in our mind set. Our White House team had already weathered many disasters from the hurricanes of the previous year all the way back to the unprecedented calamity of 9/11. As a result, we were probably a little numb (What, another tragedy?) and perhaps a little complacent (We’ve been through this before).

It is notable that at least some in the Administration felt the banality of disaster made them less prepared or, at minimum, that McClellan believes disaster fatigue is a socially acceptable explanation for a lack of political accountability.

Discourse about disaster fatigue did arise almost as soon as the storm as an excuse for inaction or forgetting. On September 23, 2005, the conservative US-based Fox News claimed ‘compassion fatigue’ had set in, causing people to be less prepared to deal with Hurricane Rita, which was predicted to make landfall the next day (Lawrence, 2005). By October 20, 2005, Vyan, a writer on *Daily Kos*, a well-known US progressive political blog, declared the arrival of ‘Katrina Fatigue’ as a primary rhetorical constraint to redress. In November 2005, when New Orleans Mayor Ray C. Nagin reported worrying about Katrina fatigue, a local psychiatrist shared: ‘there is a perception the rest of the country is uninterested. People are angry, disillusioned, indignant, insulted’ (Roig- Franzia and Connolly, 2005: A01).

Some advocates also worried that ‘Katrina fatigue’ might cause those outside the community to forget the long-term needs after the storm. In March 2006, New Orleans activist Kevin Powell noted:

[T]here seems to be this kind of Katrina fatigue in this country, from the topdown, where folks are not very supportive of these people. They don’t understand that there’s a difference between charity, giving one time, feeling good about it, and justice, which means this has got to be something we do ongoing, because we’re talking about issues of race and class in this country, and the fact these people’s lives are not valued because they’re black, because they’re poor, you know, because they lived in the Ninth Ward. (Goodman, 2006)

Likewise, when the documentary *When the Levees Broke* was released on the first anniversary of the storm, Lee (2008: 3) said he produced the film because ‘Americans have very, very short attention spans. And, I’ll admit there was eventually a thing called Katrina fatigue’. Further, a coalition of New Orleans activists who call themselves ‘Women of the Storm’ lobbied in the nation’s capital in September 2006 in part to combat Katrina fatigue, stating: ‘we need members of Congress to come down to New Orleans to see that this is not a process that is going to happen overnight and is probably going to take decades to correct, and recognize that this issue must stay on the nation’s front burner’ (Alpert, 2006). Some even reported a drop-off in financial donations and volunteers as signs of Katrina fatigue (Iwaski, 2005; Grabowski, 2006). By 2008, an editor of the New Orleans newspaper, *Times Picayune*, agreed: ‘we face a national feeling of Katrina fatigue’ (Jenkins, 2008).

Yet, the coining of the phrase seems to have come almost as early as resistance to it. In an interview with then Louisiana Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, on November 16, 2005, CNN anchorman Anderson Cooper pointed out the privilege of this response: ‘when I hear people talk about Katrina fatigue, I just want to kind of shake them and say, you know, you want to know who has Katrina fatigue, you talk to the people in Louisiana, you talk to people in the Gulf Coast. People in Washington shouldn’t be talking about Katrina fatigue’. One month later, the governor repeated Anderson’s sentiments as her own (Hsu, 2005: A11). Likewise, in 2006, *USA Today* columnist Chuck Raasch adamantly refuted the *Daily Kos* blog declaration, noting: ‘that was dead wrong. While the political bickering persists, many Americans remain compassionate and concerned. College kids spent spring breaks cleaning and rebuilding. Church missions are still organized. And the federal money still flows’. Regarding his lobbying experiences on the third anniversary of the storm, New Orleans City Council President Arnie Fielkow confirmed, “I don’t sense ‘Katrina Fatigue’ in any way. I sense members of Congress wanting to know where we are, and how they can help us” (Vice, 2008). Given the ongoing flow of volunteer tourists to the area three years later, Kim Durow, who helps run the Greater New Orleans Disaster Recovery Partnership, also declared: ‘there still isn’t any Katrina fatigue’ (Nolan, 2008).

Although it’s hard to reconcile these competing perspectives about if and when Katrina fatigue may or may not have set in and for whom, what becomes apparent is that perceptions of Katrina fatigue matter to the political context of disaster. Whether or not non-residents of the region have become too tired to recall, or to pay attention, is articulated to whether or not the nation will be willing and able to rebuild and to take collective responsibility.

Sustaining memories

Tourist scholars increasingly have theorized tourists' relationships with national crises (Neumann, 1999; Edensor, 2002; Franklin, 2003; Pretes, 2003; Clark, 2004). Although it is hard for some of us to imagine forgetting a calamity like Katrina, responses such as disaster fatigue make memory a salient issue. In this context, tours provide opportunities for Edward S. Casey's (1987: 195) intertwined notions of 'body memory' and 'place memory': 'beyond orienting and situating us in place, the lived body *itself serves as a place*'. Resident Randy Richards, for example, shares the following from his self-described 'lonely tour' back home:

What I remember most about that first moment is the hideous smell. I had never smelled such a putrid odor. . . . There are no words that can sufficiently describe the complete widespread devastation I witnessed. And it wasn't just the sights, as there were no sounds either. . . . All the people, plants, insects, and animals were either dead or gone. . . . I was stunned. (Hanson, 2006)⁴

Although museums, media, and commemorative sites strive to capture these embodied connections, corporeal memories are shaped by the sensuousness and specificity of environments. As Hayden (1997: 48; 45) argues: 'body memory . . . connects into places because the shared experience of dwellings, public spaces, and workplaces, and the paths traveled between home and work, give body memory its social component, modified by the postures of gender, race, and class'; 'place memory encapsulates the human ability to connect with both the built and natural environments that are entwined in the cultural landscape'.⁵ Touring disasters thus promises the possibility of fostering embodied memories for firsthand survivors who wish to co-construct their public stories and for those who arrive on the scene afterwards to imagine what happened and how recovery might occur. As Sturken (1997: 9) notes: 'what memories tell us, more than anything, is the stakes held by individuals and institutions in attributing meaning to the past'.⁶

Only a few months post-8/29, Michael Eric Dyson (2006: 211-12) evoked remembering as a political act:

We must never let the nation forget what it has learned from Katrina, and we must never let those lessons fall flat on our ears. . . . Memory warfare pits us against the forces of cultural, racial, and class amnesia. . . . If we forget, then poor people of color become little more than fodder for the imperial imagination of a nation that has exploited them and thrown them away.

For memory studies scholars, Dyson's imperative to remember resonates with a familiar pattern. As Connerton (2008: 59) points out, intellectual discussions of memory tend to assume that 'remembering and commemoration is usually a virtue and that forgetting is necessarily a failing'. Indeed, despite numerous vernacular and official efforts to rectify, designate, and sanctify what happened, a prevalent societal fear about New Orleans post-8/29 has been that we will fail to remember what occurred and, thus, enable what Davis (2005) calls a 'partial ethnic cleansing', through the permanent removal by design or inaction of blacks and people who are poor. Within this violent context of dislocation and disregard, calling for 'warfare' may be imagined as an appropriate response.

Although war is a powerful discursive frame for demonizing an enemy through creating a rigid binary of us versus them, the ongoing militarization of the globe is unsustainable. Even if we are not literally talking about war, critiques of this trope demonstrate how war metaphors often frame situations in dangerously over-simplified terms (Enck-Wanzer, 2005). Rather than advocating memory *warfare*, therefore, something akin to ‘memory sustainability’ needs to be part of our discussion. In contrast to war, the rhetoric of sustainability ideally connotes the integration of human and ecological concerns to make possible not only the existence of present but also future generations (Peterson, 1997). As such, I’m interested in how cultural memories of disasters can be performed on tours in ways that: nurture communities rather than destroy them; help us imagine our actions in longer timelines rather than in short-term gratification; and foster just relations that recognize the inextricably intertwined fates of humans with each other, as well as humans with the Earth.

Touring disaster

Perhaps the first universally agreed upon public relations blunder of G. W. Bush’s controversial presidency was his photo-op on August 31, 2005. That day, he flew over the impacted area to survey the damage without touching ground let alone any of the people – as opposed to his flight after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (‘9/11’), after which the president walked among, shook hands, and hugged rescue workers. The consequential photograph showed the president looking out the window of his plane: ‘Republican strategists privately call the resulting image – Bush as tourist, seemingly powerless as he peered down at the chaos – perhaps among the most damaging of his presidency’ (Fineman, 2005). This image does epitomize much of what Sturken portrays and many hate about tourists broadly imagined: gazing from afar, acting seemingly detached from what matters, returning to (and having) a home when the journey is done with the privilege to forget it all, and failing to fulfill dominant sensibilities about the ‘proper’ ways to express pain or sorrow (Pezzullo, 2007).

Since disasters appear to be increasing in frequency and impact, and because commercial tourism is the largest industry in the world, it perhaps is not a surprise that tourists and disasters have crossed paths. Although recent studies have begun exploring disasters and touring from a management perspective (Faulkner, 2001; Huan et al., 2004; Volontourism.org, 2007; Hystad and Keller, 2008) and a few have done so from a critical theoretical perspective (MacCannell, 1976/1999; Lippard, 1997, 1999; Pezzullo, 2007), practices of touring disasters warrant closer examination.

Gotham’s (2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2007c) work focuses on the commercial tourist industry post-Katrina in New Orleans, primarily theorizing how questions of authenticity are negotiated in the rebranding of the city and the ways the storm became a spectacle. To expand the conversation to include non-commercial practices and a different – though related – set of concerns, I outline five modalities of touring disaster that have occurred in New Orleans post-8/29. The first three are based on secondary sources from media accounts to congressional hearings; the second two include my participant observation as a tourist studying tours conducted during three visits ranging from one week to five days in March 2007, November 2007, and March 2008.⁷

Touring as a first response

Studying tours as a mode of communication or being in the world should not be limited to commercial frameworks (Franklin and Crang, 2001; Pezzullo, 2007). In the case of disaster, this means we should recognize that first responders, news reporters, urban planners, government officials, museum collectors, researchers, and various other publics (including residents and non-residents) would not be able to assess, record, report on, diagnose, or judge what must be done without tours. In New Orleans, first responders (civilians from around the country, police, fire, medical personnel, and military forces, particularly the Navy, Coast Guard and National Guard) used boats, trucks, and helicopters to survey the area for rescue and recovery missions and to share their findings with those less familiar. An exemplar of how essential tours are to first responders can be offered from the day before Katrina made landfall. Marty Bahamonde, the only FEMA employee in New Orleans at the time, filed a report to his Director Michael Brown based on two tours in a helicopter over the city with the Coast Guard: 'I told him everything I knew and saw. I felt very good. I let the senior guy at FEMA know just how desperate New Orleans and Slidell were'. When the New Orleans mayor had not 'yet to helicopter over his own city – the only way to get a real assessment of the damage', first responders briefing the press and others involved thought: 'it was embarrassing' (Brinkley, 2005: 242).

Further, throughout the storm, tourists, tour guides, tour buses, and the tour industry all became inextricably intertwined. Initially, most of the money spent in the tourist industry (for example hotels, restaurants, and shops) was by first responders, journalists, and others from out of town that do not fit the stereotype of traditional commercial tourists. Further, during the disaster and recovery process of Katrina, first responders appropriated traditional commercial tourist destinations and resources, such as Harrah's New Orleans Casino, which became a primary base for operations, including food distribution and communication networking. Likewise, some tour buses were used to evacuate hurricane survivors (though not enough and not as soon as one would have hoped). Some commercial tour guides also lent their expertise to first responders from out of town, such as those from the Red Cross (for example, the "Tour Di' Lis" Katrina Tour guides who usually work for Plantation Adventure). Further, as the Louisiana governor testified, one of the concerns of first responders was to recover the thousands of commercial tourists who were stranded by the storm.⁸ This entwined set of relations alone illustrates how any rigid distinction between touring and the politics of disaster relief is oversimplified.

Touring as lobbying tool

As noted, disasters require more revenue, political support, and physical labor than the residents who return; they require broader political will. After tours are used for immediate rescue missions, they continue to be helpful to the recovery process. As Knowles-Yáñez (2007: 388) notes, urban planners call their professional tours 'mobile workshop(s)' and consider them 'typical of and an important part of planning conferences . . . [since] nothing beats going out and seeing in person how people have developed their communities' (see also ACORN, 2006).

After her own experiences on tours during the storm, the Louisiana governor began organizing bus tours for other elected officials outside the state, including President Bush, because Blanco felt they ‘could not comprehend the scope of the tragedy until they witnessed it’. Representative Henry Bonilla of Texas responded to Blanco in her testimony before Congress: ‘and I’ve had the privilege of visiting with you briefly when we made a tour down to see some of the devastation. And it’s a nightmare. You can’t really get a sense of it unless you see it yourself’.⁹ Likewise, Senator Thad Cochran of Mississippi testified:

The other day when the majority leader led a delegation of 14 Senators to Louisiana, New Orleans, across the Mississippi gulf coast and into Alabama, ending our tour in Mobile, it brought home to all of us that the entire gulf coast area has been devastated. Businesses are gone. Houses are gone. Churches are gone. Schools have disappeared. It is breathtaking and horrible to observe.¹⁰

Not only moved by what they saw, most political leaders have noted the tours include informational and moving stories. Some also claimed the tours helped navigate not just geographical distances, but political ones. California Congressman Bob Filner, for example, noted:

Mr. Speaker, on Friday September 16th, I had the privilege of joining my subcommittee’s Chairman, Mr. LoBiondo, on a tour of New Orleans and the disaster area impacted by Hurricane Katrina. Mr. LoBiondo and I came together, put aside our political differences, and focused all of our attention on the needs of the Coast Guard. . . . During our visit, we had the opportunity to listen to crew members, pilots, and other Coast Guard Personnel describe to us the horrific and tragic events that happened in the days following the hurricane.¹¹

Presumably adhering to the belief that touring portrays concern and sincerity, every major presidential candidate during the 2008 federal elections also held photo opportunities on tours in New Orleans. Believing tours are important in a time of uncertainty to orient strangers in unfamiliar surroundings, US Congressmen Steve King of Iowa promoted what he calls ‘the tour guide technique’, in which hosts throughout the country identify available housing, schools, and religious support for evacuees.¹²

Given the long-term changes and needs during disaster recovery, most also tour more than once. When supporting the Gulf Coast Hurricane Housing Recovery Act of 2007, for example, Representative Stephanie Tubbs Jones of Ohio explained how each tour she participated in focused on a different stage of the recovery and rebuilding process:

I have traveled to the Hurricane Katrina area on three occasions. The first time I went, I went to visit some of the folks that were put out of their homes and they were staying in arenas across Houston and across Baton Rouge and across New Orleans. The second time I went, I went with Leader Pelosi when a group of us had an opportunity to tour the areas about 9 months later. I sat down and talked with officials. The third time I was there when the people of New Orleans were dying to have an opportunity to vote for the mayoral candidate of their choice.¹³

Touring as a lobbying tool, therefore, becomes a vital mode of interaction between political leaders making decisions about resources for disaster recovery.

Touring as field reports

'Being a spectator of calamities', as Susan Sontag (2003: 18) writes, 'is a quintessential modern experience, the cumulative offering by more than a century and a half's worth of those professional, specialized tourists known as journalists'. Whether or not one is persuaded that journalists are tourists, field reports in any profession are based on the belief that traveling somewhere for 'eyewitness' or 'on location' accounts provides a type of knowledge that can not be gained by staying at home behind one's desk. If you listen to people who have traveled to New Orleans since the storm, many – if not all – will confirm that it is hard to imagine the scale of the impact without touring. Journalists reiterate this message frequently, as one of the many journalists who took a tour to report on the disaster testifies:

And eight months after wind, rain and floodwaters devastated this city, the media – and perhaps a good chunk of the country – are suffering from Katrina Fatigue. . . . But then you come here and see the devastation up close, and discover that things are far worse than you imagined. And you realize that, despite the millions of words and pictures devoted to the hurricane's aftermath, the normal rules of writing, photography and broadcasting are just not equal to the task. . . . Ride around the area and you find yourself staring in disbelief. (Kurtz, 2006: B01)

Tours, thus, offer a reminder to people not living amid a disaster every day how much has been impacted, despite the challenge of translating such experiences for the purposes of communicating them to a broader and proximally distant audience.

Anchorman Brian Williams further reports: 'American life is very complicated, and it's busy. In scope and scale this may be beyond our ability to stay focused on. It's just too enormous. It would be paralyzing if that's all we did'; he added why he feels distance can be a factor as well: 'it's incumbent upon us to keep this story alive. I think there's no substitute for being here. The TV screen doesn't do it justice, but we can try' (Shister, 2005: E08). For those who make their living from reporting, it is notable how often journalists of disasters focus on the inability to communicate the scenes they tour as part of their information gathering process. Marking the impossibility of media to convey place and body memories becomes a way journalists and others describing disasters communicate the presence of what they have witnessed to others in the hopes that they can help re-energize those who may have forgotten about or decided they wish to no longer remember.

Tours not only physically and emotionally move participants and those who hear or read second-hand accounts, tours also provide opportunities to politicize. An exemplar of this transformative possibility was published when *Sports Illustrated* columnist Peter King (2006) interrupted his usual coverage to plea with his readers:

Am I ticked off? Damn right I'm ticked off. If you're breathing, you should be morally outraged. Katrina fatigue? Hah! More Katrina news! Give me more! Give it to me every day on the front page! Every day until Washington realizes there's a disaster here every bit as urgent as anything happening in this world today – fighting terrorism, combating the nuclear threat in Iran. I'm not in any way a political animal, but all you have to be is an occasionally thinking American to be sickened by the conditions I saw.

King's challenge seems worth noting because he claims not to be 'a political animal', and his usual role as a sports reporter suggests that such calls for action are an anomaly for him, motivated only after he took a tour. He also testifies to the privilege of forgetting a disaster: 'and let me just say this: I can absolutely guarantee you that if you'd been in the car with us, no matter how much you'd been hit over the head with the effects of this disaster, you would not have Katrina fatigue'.

Touring as an organizing tactic

Although the numbers are down from the average 10,000 people a week who volunteered to rebuild the city during 2006, many coordinators of major volunteer agencies claim they remain at maximum capacity in 2008 due to word of mouth in person and on-line from former volunteer tourists (Nolan, 2008). Since 8/29, volunteers consistently have traveled from near and far to New Orleans to help residents and organizers, including students on break, religious groups who took time off of work or away from families, and professional conferees who came to discuss some other matter but found themselves spending half a day or a whole one moving debris, cleaning, and re-building. 'While the combination of volunteerism and tourism has a long history', as Gotham (2007a) points out, 'tourism organizations are using voluntourism as a major strategy not only to attract volunteer labor to help in the rebuilding effort but also to reimagine New Orleans as a resilient city'; further, Gotham (2006: 204) confirms that voluntourism in New Orleans 'complicates binary distinctions between 'residents' and 'tourists' and reflects blurrings between migration processes and tourism'.

In addition to negotiating cultural memories of Katrina for residents and non-residents, touring can provide opportunities for collective deliberation around banal but significant matters of rebuilding, such as how to remove mold from a flooded house (for example, ratios of water to bleach and proper gear to protect one's hands from burns). In spring 2008, while cleaning mold off the side of a house, I asked a law student from the Student Hurricane Network why a first-time visitor like him came, and he replied: "when I told some people I was coming here for Spring Break, they were surprised and pointed out Katrina happened years ago. I replied, 'Well, yeah, but don't you think it takes years to rebuild a city?'" That morning, a resident and organizer of the Ninth Ward confirmed that the constant flow of students and other groups working in solidarity with her community helped her remain hopeful and determined to rebuild.

In addition to mobilizing labor, touring as a 'tactic' (de Certeau, 1984: xiv) aims to organize cultural critique at and beyond the destination. As one student testified, her eight days volunteering in New Orleans, which included gutting flooded houses and picketing a hotel that was trying to evict evacuees, were 'completely life-altering' (Teicher, 2006).¹⁴ McGehee's (2002: 139) research on 'volunteer tourism' or 'voluntourism' through the Earthwatch Institute has established that such practices can enable 'participants to become more involved in changing the world'; likewise, her joint research with Carla Almeida Santos (2005: 774 [06 in refs]) found these experiences can foster 'networks for social movement recruitment and mobilization' and 'an individual's consciousness-raising experiences'. Similarly, studying film tourism, Lisa Law, Tim Bunnell and Chin-Ee Ong (2007: 158) found that after the 2004 Indian

Ocean tsunami transformed Koh Phi Phi in Thailand, 'the rejuvenation of this site has largely been through the labour of local residents working together with backpacking disaster volunteers . . . [who] helped clean up debris and help restore the island to its pre-tsunami state'. Political tourism has a longer history in global environmental movements and transnational social justice movements, one that warrants further recognition (Lippard, 1999; Shields, 2003; Brin, 2006; Pezzullo, 2007).

Volunteer tourists also require housing, food, and, usually, entertainment during their stay –including alcohol and places to enjoy music, dancing, or simply relaxation after such emotionally and physically draining labor. Beyond the financial impact, this role of advocates in the tourist industry also reminds us not to make assumptions about who might go on a commercial disaster tour and for what reasons.

Touring as publicity

Although the New Orleans commercial tourist industry is not the only economic sector in need of revitalization, it is a significant one. The city actively has promoted commercial tourism since at least the early 1900s, seeking economic development through capitalizing on its multicultural history and location as a major port (Souther, 2006; Stanonis, 2006). The year before Katrina, the New Orleans tourist industry provided 80,827 jobs, generated \$4.9 billion in revenue, and hosted 10.1 million visitors (Hospitality Research Center, 2005). In 2002, the state was ranked the top domestic destination for African American travelers (The Hospitality Research Center, 2005).

Prior to the storm, commercial tourists tended to visit the area of the city known as the French Quarter for food, cultural events, and more. Many came for conventions and stayed for only a few days. Some might have adventured outside the Quarter to visit the City Park, the Garden District, or one of the college campuses. The Ninth Ward, the area hardest hit by the storm, however, lies beyond those sites and existed outside of the commercial tourist imaginary pre-8/29. After the storm, visitors have a choice: stay in the traditional commercial tourist areas or venture into the neighborhoods most impacted. Generally, visitors have chosen the latter, becoming what some call 'disaster tourists' (Potts, 2006) or people who seek out destinations of calamity by their own means or through a commercial tour operator.

Since at least 8/29, those who participate in commercial tours in New Orleans have included not only vacationers, but also journalists, advocates, and residents. I have observed tourists from a variety of ages, ethnicities, sexes, and professions, as well as a range of motives –from a first-time visitor who became curious about the Katrina event to a couple who has been coming to the city annually for their anniversary since before the storm. As of March 2007, practically all of the tour operators in New Orleans explicitly had begun advertising a Katrina Tour, including Tours by Isabelle (which was the first), Gray Line Tours, Van from New Orleans, Dixie Tours, Airboat Adventures, Celebration Tours LCC, Big Easy Tours, Viator, Cajun Encounters, SightseeingWorld, City Tours, and, on screen, the Entergy IMAX Theatre.

My fieldwork has focused on Gray Line because it is the largest, has gained the most media coverage, and made two unique choices. First, Gray Line donated three US dollars of a 35 US dollar adult ticket to one of five nonprofits of the tourists' choice, all noted on

the tour: Habitat for Humanity, America's Wetlands, the Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Tipitina's Jazz Foundation, or the New Orleans City Park. Second, each passenger also was invited to sign a petition for federal assistance and legislation for rebuilding, which Gray Line committed to mail out weekly. Although these notable efforts prematurely ended after the first year, they do suggest ways a commercial tour operator can adjust after a disaster to directly implicate tourists in broader political critique and rebuilding efforts.¹⁵

Even without these measures, the act of traveling to the sites of greatest impact and listening to tour are significant. The tour initially ran twice a day and then, presumably due to its popularity, three times a day since 2008. Operating since 1924 in the city, the Gray Line Katrina tour brochure declares, 'NEW ORLEANS REBIRTH: Restoring the Soul of America' (Gray Line, 2006). Greg Hoffman, the Vice President of Gray Line New Orleans who lost his Lakeview home during the storm, said the governor's non-commercial advocacy efforts allayed his initial resistance to hosting commercial Katrina Tours because 'we kept hearing that congressmen from other states were not in support of our rebuilding effort unless they came and saw it with their own two eyes' (Guillory, 2006; Rioux, 2006; Weeks, 2006: C01). The tour's overall narrative makes three linkages between the city and the nation to advocate rebuilding: invoking a geographic imaginary that connects the city to the nation via the Mississippi River; noting the significance of New Orleans to the national economy; and making moral appeals for passengers to 'do the right thing' by a disaster-devastated city.

Each tour also promises the authenticity of local eyewitnesses, as the tour guides weave in their personal accounts of what they did during the storm with these broader points on the tour. Gray Line went from 65 to six employees in New Orleans after the storm; those remaining personalize the broader disaster with memories of what they experienced whether they evacuated or not. Within the limits of their scripted roles, Katrina tour guides perform public histories of the present.¹⁶ Although results are not guaranteed, tour guides explicitly call for tourists not to forget that the city needs their solidarity once the tour is over, including statements like: 'we want you to go home and let people know'; 'this is to teach the public so it will never happen again'; and 'what I want you to do –promise me you'll do this –is wherever you go home, whether it is in the United States or another country, go back and tell people what you saw. . . .And tell people we need them to come visit us'.¹⁷

Conclusion

In New Orleans, . . . the city has decided to mourn, and then to live. (Zakin 2006: 69)

Former US President George H. W. Bush responded in an interview in 2005 when asked about Katrina fatigue: 'well, first place, I don't believe there is such a thing. I think a lot of groups are still stepping up to the plate and helping in every way they can. But I think we can remind people from time to time by coming here'. In the same interview, former

US President William J. Clinton noted that it's not just witnessing the disaster firsthand that matters, but also what people are doing: 'I think that the fatigue will not be as great if people all over America and all over the world see these people rebuilding and doing exciting, interesting, innovative things' (Williams, 2005). Though they agree on little politically, both illustrate the point of this essay: the desire to give in to disaster fatigue is potentially diminished when one tours the site of a disaster and remembers not only what happened, but also what is being done and is left to do.

Disasters blur traditionally imagined lines between residents and tourists insofar as they often force residents to leave an area and to return only to discover the place they once called 'home' is radically changed. Of course, journalists, first responders, volunteers, and other non-residents who travel to New Orleans (myself included) do not know what it is like to be the residents who did not choose to cross their paths with disasters. Yet, traveling to the city, listening to memories of people who experienced it firsthand, and witnessing the devastation that is left behind does move one literally and emotionally closer to the stakes of one's response—or lack of.

As Ann Rigney (2008: 93) observes: 'collective memory is not a matter of collecting, but of continuously performing'. Tours provide a forum for performing memories again and again for those who have survived and for those who are visiting. Rather than necessarily following what Sturken (2007: 10) articulates as a typical tourist subjectivity by inviting guests to remain 'distant to the sites they visit, where they are often defined as innocent outsiders, mere observers whose actions are believed to have no effect on what they see', touring New Orleans post-8/29 can encourage participants to imagine themselves as implicated in the outcome of the disaster and to feel accountable to the struggle over what will happen next. The complexity of motives and acts of touring disasters warrants closer examination not only in US culture, but cross-culturally. In doing so, we need to account for more than the role tourists play economically, but also for the role of touring practices in fostering rebuilding, performing cultural memories, and providing political critique. By taking into consideration who tours disasters and why, it is apparent that the lines between commercial and non-commercial tour practices are blurred and not only in ways that depoliticize.

As an initial exploration into what a shift from the trope of memory warfare to the trope of memory sustainability might entail through acts of touring, I have shown how tour practices might offer a tactic of resistance to disaster fatigue by providing opportunities for more sustainable memories, that is, to: assess and publicize past and ongoing injustices; help us imagine our actions in longer timelines rather than in short-term gratification; and foster community relations that recognize the inextricably intertwined fates of humans with each other, as well as humans with our place on the Earth. As with any popular cultural practice, the possibilities of both resistance and containment exist (Hall, 1998). Despite the significant problematics Sturken (2007) identifies in certain practices associated with tourists specifically or broadly understood, however, the broader subjectivity of tourists and touring as a literal practice are not necessarily articulated to superficiality and a desire to escape critique, that is, to acting as offensive or laughable social failures. In its best moments, touring disasters offers us a ritual to remember not only to mourn, but also to live.

Notes

1. Naomi Klein (2007) coined 'disaster capitalism' to refer to the ways radical free market philosophy historically has been pushed into policy in times after a disaster because people have remained disoriented from the shock, unable to resist as we normally would; she also suggests how we might instead turn to more progressive, democratic politics.
2. Sturken (1997: 3) defines 'cultural memory' as 'memory that is shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning'.
3. Before 8/29, many predicted the levees were insufficient (Fischetti, 2001; McQuaid and Schleifstein, 2002; US Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2004).
4. Such scenes of presence and absence remind us that 'spatial simultaneity need not mean temporal homogeneity' (Crang and Travlou, 2001: 175).
5. 'Survivors . . . who have lived through traumatic public events, testify through the very presence of their bodies the materiality of memory' (Sturken, 1997: 12).
6. Commercial tourist souvenirs also serve as telling artifacts of memory (Halbwachs, 1980; Love and Kohn, 2001; Morgan and Pritchard, 2005).
7. I am grateful to the Department of Communication Studies at Louisiana State University for hosting me as a Visiting Scholar, as well as Indiana University's Office of the Vice Provost for Research for funding assistance. I did not visit New Orleans during 2005, because I did not wish to add to the extraordinary numbers of non-residents coming to the city for research during a time when so many were struggling to find shelter. Prior to the storm, my research in southern Louisiana focused on non-commercial advocacy tours (Pezzullo, 2007).
8. Committee Hearing: House Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina. 2005, December 14. FDCH Political Transcripts, Washington, D.C.
9. See previous reference.
10. Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2006 [S 10173]. Congressional Record-Senate, Vol. 151, No. 117. 2005, September 19. Washington, D.C.
11. United States Coast Guard [H8233]. Congressional Record—House, Vol. 151, No. 119. 2005, September 21. Washington, D.C.
12. Response to Hurricane Katrina [H7851]. Congressional Record—House, Vol. 151, No. 114. 2005, September 13. Washington, D.C.
13. Gulf Coast Hurricane Housing Recovery Act of 2007 [H2680]. Congressional Record—House, Vol. 153, No. 48. 2007, March 20. Washington, D.C.
14. For photographs, videos, and more volunteer tourist testimonies, see (viewed 13 August 2008), <<http://www.acorn.org/index.php?id=10187>>.
15. Commercial Katrina tours and re-branding are not without controversy or objectors (Gotham, 2007b, 2007c).
16. '[F]or urban landscape history, community-based public history is a natural ally. The great strength of this approach to public history is its desire for a "shared authority" (Michael Frisch's phrase) or a "dialogic" history (Jack Tchen's term) that gives power to communities to define their own collective pasts' (Hayden, 1997: 48).
17. For more on Gray Line's Katrina Tour scripts and stops and the related controversy, as well as how they can provide a forum to negotiate the social drama of nationhood, see Pezzullo, 2009.

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