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Yeah You Write: AuthentiCity and Authority in Katrina Literature

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INTRODUCTION:

AUTHENTICITY→AUTHENTICITY

“Authenticity” is a term that has become increasingly ubiquitous in the contemporary American discourse. It pops up in conversations about popular culture and entertainment, tourism, journalism, food, education, and politics. In each of these contexts, the concept of authenticity is approached and interpreted differently. It is “a relative concept, materialized within each context with the interaction of its participants” (Shomoossi and Ketabi 149). But authenticity’s current buzzword status is not something new. Authenticity has figured prominently in some disciplines and fields for decades. Often, even inside those fields where authenticity has a longer history, a singular definition of the term is lacking. Literary studies is one such field, where diverse, sometimes conflicting definitions of authenticity make it difficult to understand what writers, theorists, and lay people truly mean when they employ the term.

More problematically, the lack of a singular, clearly articulated definition for authenticity sometimes leads to a conflation of authenticity and authentication—that is, the practice of verifying or establishing the credentials of a given object. When authenticity and authentication are conflated in literature and literary scholarship, authenticity—or evaluations of authenticity—often works to tokenize marginalized groups in texts, erase them from texts altogether, or define texts by and about them as unworthy of scholarly engagement. Additionally, evaluations of authenticity can be used to deny marginalized writers their authorial status.

In a 2009 lecture, author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie shares an example of a time when her professor employed authenticity, conflated with authentication, to deny her authorial claims.

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1 See, for example, discussions of white Australian rapper Iggy Azalea’s hotly-contested “realness” (Marantz; Butler; Wen).

2 See Rares.

3 See Broersma and Holt.
by invalidating her work. Adichie, who is Nigerian, explains that her American professor thought that the African characters in her novel failed because they too closely resembled him. According to this professor, Adichie’s characters—and the book of which they were a part—failed because they were not “authentically African.” The professor denied Adichie’s authority because her story did not align with his knowledge. He could not verify or authenticate her novel’s content, and so he dismissed it. Adichie connects her professor’s critique of her characters to her discussion of the “single story,” a particular narrative that, through privilege-enabled repetition and normalization, comes to be viewed as universal; the single story becomes the authentic story against which all others are verified. According to Adichie, the single story is dangerous. It danger is rooted in how easily it is presented as monolithic truth. The single story creates stereotypes. These stereotypes, Adichie says, are not problematic because they are not truthful. The problem is that “they are incomplete.” The single story, by virtue of its singularity, cannot be the whole story.

Maddee Clark, a Bundjalong genderqueer person, engages with Adichie’s concept of the single story in her essay, “Against Authenticity.” Clark laments that conversations about artistic representations of or by queer Indigenous people in her native Australia “[fall] back on familiar narratives around authenticity”; the conversations revolve around a single story of what it real Indigenous people are like. Challenges to representations of and by Indigenous people are not based on content, but, instead, on the Indigenous speaker’s or image’s “legitimacy” (Clark). But, Clark points out, even support of Indigenous authority, when connected to authenticity, is problematic. This is because authenticity-based bolstering of Indigenous authority “very often fall[s] into racist tropes of savagery and intolerance” and, as a result, runs the risk of “[replicating] the internal logic of the argument [it seeks] to discredit” (Clark); even celebrations
of authenticity are problematic because they work to further normalize the single story that so
limits understandings of what Indigenous people can do or be.

Clark argues against authenticity as a concept; for her, the term authenticity is tainted
beyond reprieve. While it may be employed to bolster marginalized peoples’ claims to agency, it
nevertheless fuels epistemologies that counter those same groups. Clark’s critique parallels
feminist scholar Donna Haraway’s discussion of the concept of objectivity. Haraway writes that
she and other feminists “have both selectively and flexibly used and been trapped by two poles
of a tempting dichotomy on the question of objectivity” (576). But, by continuing to engage with
the concept of objectivity even as they worked to dismantle its marginalizing structures,
feminists sometimes became “perversely conjoined with the discourse of many practicing
scientists” (579)—the very group whose epistemologies they had set out to work against. Thus,
the problem Haraway seeks to solve in is

how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all
knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our
own “semiotic technologies” for making meanings, and a no-nonsense
commitment to faithful accounts of a ‘real’ world, one that can be partially shared
and that is friendly to earthwide projects of finite freedom, adequate material
abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness. (597, emphasis
in original)

Haraway’s quest is not to deny objectivity, but to view it through a lens that allows for
multiple, simultaneous understandings of truth—that allows for an escape from binary thinking.
To that end, she employs the metaphor of vision. More specifically, Haraway “[insists] on the
embodied nature of all vision and so [reclaims] the sensory system that has been used to signify a
Colman 4

leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere” (581). To combat this “conquering gaze,” whose very ability to conquer is rooted in its disembodied, unmarked, and “objective” status, Haraway proposes a principle of embodied objectivity: that of situated knowledges.

Haraway, who argues “for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is a condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (589), presents her concept of situated knowledges, in part, as a way to loosen the link between objectivity and objectification. I hope to employ it for a different, though parallel, task. I see Haraway’s insistence on situatedness and positioning as useful in loosening the link between authenticity and authentication. Thus, I propose a revised definition of authenticity, which seeks to rehabilitate authenticity by freeing it from the burdens of authentication. In addition to incorporating Haraway’s thinking on the importance of situated knowledges, my own definition of authenticity— and the definition that reflects my use of the term throughout this thesis— has three foundations.

First, my definition of authenticity begins with the word’s etymology. The word authentic’s roots can be traced to the Greek authentikos (“original, genuine, principle”), which itself comes from the Greek authentes (“one acting on one’s own authority”). Authentikos and authentes are, in turn, derived from the Greek autos, or “self,” and hentes, “doer” or “being.” Authenticity, as I use the term, relies on the interplay between these etymological roots. Authenticity can be attributed to knowledge that is rooted in what a self— be it that of the author’s or that of someone else— has done or been.

Second, my definition of authenticity is informed by Michel Foucault’s theorization of subjugated knowledges. For Foucault, subjugated knowledges means two things: “the historical
contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemization" (81) and “knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task” (82). A subjugated knowledge, Foucault explains, is “a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity” (82). Subjugated knowledges, which are often rooted in the self’s experience, are buried, ignored, or invalidated because of the marginalized status of the topic they cover or the individuals and/or groups from which they come. Authenticity, as I define it, prioritizes subjugated knowledges.

Third, my definition of authenticity draws on the work of Black feminist scholars. These scholars’ work addresses the experiences of Black women, whose knowledges have, like the two varieties of subjugated knowledges Foucault outlines, often been “present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematizing theory” (Foucault 82) and/or “disqualified as inadequate” (Foucault 82) because of Black women’s perceived inferiority. Patricia Hill Collins employs Foucault’s thinking and language in her 1990 essay, “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination.” In that essay, Collins explains that “domination operates by seducing, pressuring, or forcing African-American women and members of subordinated groups to replace individual and cultural ways of knowing with the dominant group’s specialized thought.” It pushes them to “[replicated] the internal logic” (Clark 33) of the matrix of domination. To resist, Black women must act as “agents of knowledge,” so that they might “[establish] the legitimacy of their knowledge claims” (Collins) without supporting the matrix of domination that subjugates their knowledges and experiences. In other words, Black women must abandon Eurocentric masculinist epistemologies, choosing instead to “[rearticulate] a Black women’s standpoint using an Afrocentric feminist epistemology” (Collins “Black Feminist Thought”). For Kimberlé Crenshaw, that Afrocentric feminist epistemology is centered on the experiences of Black
women at the intersections of axes of domination. Such a centering is necessary because “the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women’s lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately” (Crenshaw “Mapping,” 1244). Both Collins and Crenshaw note, however, that the experiences of Black women, shaped by their position at the intersection(s) of multiple axes of domination, are not universal. “A Black women’s standpoint is only one angle of vision” (Collins “Black Feminist Thought”); it presents a partial perspective. But, if multiple situated knowledges are allowed to coexist and to work in dialogue with one another, sharing their own partial perspectives and making connections and comparisons that allow them better see one another and themselves, a more complete vision might emerge. Accordingly, the goal of Crenshaw’s intersectional thinking—or, in Collins’s terms, thinking that embraces the partiality of situated knowledges—is not only to facilitate the inclusion of Black women, but more generally to “facilitate the inclusion of marginalized groups for whom it could be said ‘When they enter, we all enter’” (Crenshaw “Demarginalizing,” 73). While Collins and Crenshaw champion partiality and intersectionality, Jennifer Nash, writing over a decade after them, laments that in application intersectionality has begun to be employed as a single axis framework and, as a result, become part of a matrix of domination (“Rethinking Intersectionality,” “Hometruths on Intersectionality”). I agree with Nash that the institutionalization of intersectionality is problematic. For that reason, I wish to clarify that I am relying on Collins’s and Crenshaw’s theoretical foundations, which present partiality and intersectionality as broad, and not necessarily the narrower, institutionalized model of intersectionality that Nash identifies.

Authenticity as I define and use it throughout this thesis, then, is a particular positioning that prioritizes experience-based knowledges (especially what Foucault would term subjugated
knowledges) without the need to legitimate or verify them through external sources, and avoids presenting a master narrative by situating and contextualizes those knowledges. It is an approach that facilitates inclusion.

It is my hope that this understanding of authenticity as a type of positioning that prioritizes situated subjugated knowledges can escape the conflation of authenticity and authentication. Authenticity as positioning cannot be employed as a metric for evaluating the legitimacy or realness of an author or text; it cannot be used to silence or deny subjugated knowledges. Additionally, a definition of authenticity that highlights the positionality and situatedness of authors/texts also demands that readers position and situate themselves; none of us can be disembodied. Nor can we be unresponsive. This, I think, is the key to a new approach to authenticity: texts that embody authenticity cannot simply incorporate multiple standpoints or subjugated knowledges; they must circumvent the hierarchies of knowledge that present the disembodied, unmarked universal as Truth by facilitating exchange, response, and dialogue.

But in order for hierarchies of knowledge to be circumvented, that exchange, response, and dialogue must be taken up responsibly. For that reason, I return to Haraway’s insistence on situatedness to combat what she calls “the god trick” (581). As Haraway defines it, the god trick involves “seeing everything from nowhere” (581). The problem with this infinite vision is precisely that it is “from nowhere”; we cannot find it, and so we cannot hold it accountable. Disembodied, unsituated vision consumes without responding. It remains unchained; hierarchies of knowledge remain intact.

I argue that it is this constant, unchanging, irresponsible disembodiment that is the center of problematic conflations of authenticity and authentication. It is the centerpiece of logic that allowed Adichie’s professor to so casually declare her novel’s characters failures. It is the
foundation of the unchanging and narrow definitions of real Aboriginal experience that so vex Maddee Clark. Disembodiment-empowered refusal to respond not only reflects the internal logic of subjugation, but enables it; it is the logic. Accordingly, I propose one final modification to my new approach to authenticity. It is my hope that this modification serves as a visual reminder of both a move away from authenticity as authentication and of the importance of positioning and situatedness: I approach authenticity as authentiCity.

In addition to acting as a visual intervention, my move from authenticity to authentiCity works, I hope, to recall the embodied physical realm in which cities exist. Cities are not simply spaces—that is, locations which, because humans have not attached meaning to or modified them, are unmarked and abstract. Instead, cities are places; they are spaces that have been imbued with human meaning. But that meaning is not separate from the spaces in which it is established; places derive their placeness from the human connections built to and on the ground.4 Cities cannot exist outside of physical reality. Similarly, the cultures and systems they house, even though they might be to some degree mobile, are also tethered to the physical places that are cities. This connection is evident in the pride and affection many people ascribe to the places they feel attached to. Those sentiments are often especially visible when the places around which they are centered are threatened. The prominence of the I ♥ NY logo after September 11th, the #BostonStrong hashtag and slogan that were created in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombings, and the “Keep Austin Weird” slogan that grew out of a response to the perceived Disneyfication of the city are all evidence of the interconnected relationship between human identity and the places where those identities are centered.

4 For a more complete discussion of the interrelated concepts of space and place in humanist geography, see Yifu Tuan’s Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience.
Another lesser-known example is that of the “Be a New Orleanian, wherever you are.” stickers Blake Haney created in the months following Hurricane Katrina. “‘Be a New Orleanian, wherever you are’ is a shout out to all of us that were scattered across the country,” Haney explains. It’s a reminder to, “even if you’re stuck in Houston or Jersey, remember who you are” (quoted in Fogarty). Haney’s stickers were ubiquitous in New Orleans in the months and years directly after the storm—on cars, poles, backpacks. When I visited the site of my grandmother’s Lower 9th Ward home after her death nearly three years after Katrina, I saw that one of her neighbors had placed a sticker on the rotting shell of their flooded home.\(^5\) The stickers were a rallying call for the members of the Katrina Diaspora to retain their sense of place, even if they could not, in the moment, return. The “Be a New Orleanian, wherever you are” campaign reflects the importance of the place of New Orleans to the people who fight to call that place home. I see Haney’s stickers as representative of New Orleans in the years immediately after Katrina, years in which the importance of New Orleans as a city—as *our* city—was the center around which life in New Orleans revolved; the city became especially important. And so, I hope that my move from authenticity to authentiCity, with its visual emphasis on the buried city in the word, better enables me to employ the concept in the context of my area of interest: the context of post-Katrina literature.

I have chosen to investigate this particular body of literature for many reasons. First, there is simply so much and such diverse writing about Katrina available. Even before the flood waters that inundated some 80% of the New Orleans metropolitan area (Plyer) began to recede, a

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\(^5\) Throughout this thesis, I use “they” as a gender-neutral singular pronoun. My choice to do so is more than merely a way to escape a gender binary; it is also a small enactment of authentiCity as I theorize it. New Orleans has the second largest openly LGBTQ population in the south (Newport and Gates). It is home to Southern Decadence, a six-day annual festival that its organizers claim is one of the largest and longest-running gay events in the country, and the birthplace of Sissy Bounce, a gender-bending hip hop sub-genre. New Orleans is a place that is in many ways defined by its gender-fluidity, and so, by circumventing the gender binary through my use of gender-neutral pronouns, I hope to be better able to prioritize local knowledges and reflect local experience.
surge of storytelling had already begun; the history and narrative of the storm were being crafted in real time by journalists, scholars, activists, and creative writers. Much of the critical and casual response to this literary inundation has revolved around authenticity. Who is telling the real story of the storm? Often, those discussions of authenticity have addressed the degree to which the storyteller can establish their connection not only to the storm itself, or even to the people who experienced it, but to the city where the destruction to place. I have chosen to examine post-Katrina literature because it is a body of literature in which positionality and situatedness play an important role; in post-Katrina literature, the city matters.

I also chose to look at post-Katrina literature because even now, almost ten years after the storm, a body of literary criticism of Katrina-related narratives is noticeably absent. To some degree, this is likely a consequence of the limitations of time. Books take time to write and publish and, because Katrina happened less than a decade ago, it might be the case that the literature is only now entering the hands of readers and critics.

But, more than any rational or academic reasoning, my choice to engage with post-Katrina literature is also related to my own positioning and situatedness; it is related to my own connection to the city. Like my parents and grandparents and theirs before them, I am a New Orleanian and many of my experiences are typical of middle- and lower-middle- class Black New Orleanians around my age. I was born, raised, and educated in the city, where I lived in both predominately Black and racially mixed middle-class neighborhoods. I had just made

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6 This is not to say that post-Katrina literature has been wholly ignored. Many scholars outside of literary studies have, in the years since Katrina, begun to investigate the literature created since the storm and its connections to their multiple fields and disciplines. The 2009 Special Issue of American Quarterly, "In the Wake of Hurricane Katrina: New Paradigms and Social Visions," for example, includes the work of sociologists, geographers, activists, urban planners, and educators as well as scholars of Africana Studies, Women's Studies, and Ethnic Studies. Additionally, a handful of literary studies scholars (especially scholars based in New Orleans like Catherine Michna, whose scholarship greatly informs my own), have now started the work of investigating and engaging with post-Katrina literature.
nineteen in 2005, when Katrina hit, and I stayed with my family and a few close friends at my parents’ Gentilly home to ride out the storm. We were lucky. My parents’ house was relatively undamaged, needing a new roof and many other repairs but not a complete gutting. Many of my friends, family, and community members were not so lucky. My grandmother’s house was swept from its foundations; a cousin found it, months later, six blocks away from its original location on Charbonnet Street. The homes of two of my best friends were completely submerged; nothing was salvageable. Gone were the buildings that had shaped my childhood: the schools, the churches, the stores, the homes. Gone too were the faces that had peopled my childhood. Some of the people had moved away—to Atlanta and Texas and California and Chicago and Alaska—while others had perished, washed away with the water like everything else. For me and so many other New Orleanians, The Storm didn’t only result in a break in the levees; it broke our entire world. It took from us the location that defined our situatedness and positionality. Katrina disembodied us. It took us from (and, in some ways, took from us) the physical space that was New Orleans.

The world-breaking, disemboding, exile-inducing disaster of Katrina was a traumatic event for New Orleanians, both individually and collective, and we are still working to recover from that trauma. The act of bearing witness to our individual and collective traumas through remembering and re-telling is part of that work. Through this reparative work, we can process our experiences, gain access to (and, as we take up the role of listeners, offer to others) support and empathy. Thus, both the act of creating and the act of consuming Katrina narratives has the potential to be, for those who experienced the trauma of the storm, a form of healing. Witnessing our trauma is a way for us to regain some of the agency and control over our lives we lost the storm; it can facilitate a return to subjectionhood. As Susan J. Brison explains:

8 See Brison.
The act of bearing witness to the trauma facilitates this shift [from acted-upon object to acting subject], not only by transforming traumatic memory into a coherent narrative that can then be integrated into the survivor’s sense of self and view of the world, but also by reintegrating the survivor into a community, reestablishing connections essential to selfhood. (39-40)

But the burdens imposed on New Orleanians who wish to witness the trauma of Katrina in literary form—burdens that are rooted in the conflation of authenticity and authentication—impede the process. As children’s book author and former community-storyteller for New Orleans Public Libraries Sherry “Led” Milam explains, authenticity “slowly grinds away at the foundation of [lived] truth so it can be used against its teller and force them into silence” (Milam).

I think that the encumbrances to witnessing of authenticity-as-authentication contribute to an additional reason for the lack of a body of literary criticism focused on Katrina narratives: many of those narratives have not been written or published. While it is true that there many Katrina narratives are available to the public, many of those narratives are removed from the experience of the storm. The textual flood that occurred alongside Katrina’s actual flooding involved primarily journalistic accounts. Much of the written engagement with the storm that was published in the following years appeared as long-form investigative journalism or scholarly examinations of, for example, civil engineering or hurricane-related demographic shifts. Far less numerous are Katrina narratives written by people who lived through the storm, and many of those that do exist are informed by their author’s professional training as journalists or historians, or public intellectuals/cultural commentators. While I concede that this lack is

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9 Examples include Jed Horne, author of Breach of Faith, Chris Rose, author of I Dead in the Attic,
10 For example, Douglas Brinkley, author of The Great Deluge
likely related to numerous factors—writing publishable narratives of any kind takes time, training, and practice and the overrepresentation of narratives by professional writers is evidence of the role access to networks of editors and publishers plays—I think the lack is also deeply related to the burdens of authenticity. Journalists, historians, and public intellectuals are, generally speaking, not only better-trained or better-connected writers. They also work inside of genres that tend to value authentication and verification. People who write in these fields and genres are less likely to be silenced by demands for authentication. But for the rank and file of New Orleanians, the act of witnessing the trauma of Katrina in literary form necessitates just the kind of circumvention my rehabilitated definition of authenticity as authentiCity provides. AuthentiCity can protect our ability to bear witness.

And so, my conceptualization of authentiCity draws from Black Feminist Theory in another important way; its intent is liberatory. On a larger scale, the paradigmatic shift from authenticity to authentiCity can help to liberate subjugated knowledges, their holders, and the spaces from whence they came. But here and now, in this moment, I hope that a move toward authentiCity approach can help liberate my community’s subjugated knowledges, my people as the holders of those knowledges, and the city—my city—that functions as those knowledges’ home. AuthentiCity circumvents the impositions and expectations that accompany authenticity and authentication—impositions and expectations whose burdens are more often than not borne by holders of subjugated knowledges—by opening the floor for more: more speakers, more experiences, more and more stories. The existence of more stories (or, even authentiCity’s assumption there always exists a potential for more stories) combats the normalization of monolithic stories. This circumvention lessens the ability of dominant outsiders to impose their

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11 Dave Eggers, former Salon.com editor and McSweeney’s founder is an example.
single, authentic story on narratives of nondominant experience and, in so doing, warp the experience-based stories of nondominant people they speak about or for.
CHAPTER ONE:

(THE LACK OF) AUTHENTICITY IN JOURNALISTIC NARRATIVES

As discussed above, my definition of authenticity involves not only the incorporation of experience-based knowledges, but the prioritization of those knowledges. But texts that recognize and/or value experienced-based knowledges do not necessarily prioritize them. In fact, some genres incorporate voices with experiential knowledge, but then weave those voices together in ways that subordinate them, prioritizing externally validated knowledge instead. In these texts, experience-based knowledge is subordinated and relegated to the realm of subjugated knowledges.

One genre that can rarely claim authenticity is journalism. According to the Pew Research Center, journalism is shaped by nine core principles: its “first obligation is to the truth”; “its first loyalty is to citizens”; “its essence is a discipline of verification”; “its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover”; “it must serve as an independent monitor of power”; “it must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise”; “it must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant”; “it must keep the news comprehensive and proportional”; “its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.” The Pew Research Center explains that the field of journalism does not view truth “in an absolute or philosophical sense,” but a “practical” one. This practical journalistic truth is excavated through analysis and interpretation of sources; it “emerges from this forum” over time. It is the journalist’s task to collect and compile information, then to synthesize and contextualize it—to make sense of it all. In the journalistic model, the journalist-as-author draws their authority from their role as an analyst and compiler. On its surface, this understanding of the nature of truth as the result of dialogue between multiple particular and partial narratives seems to align
with Haraway’s concept of partial perspectives, but there is a key difference. In the Haraway model, positioning and situating ensure that all parties are embodied and none can exist as the disembodied universal: “the god trick is forbidden” (589). But in the journalistic model, the disembodied journalist is thrust regularly into the god position. The journalist is all-knowing and all-seeing, omnipresent and omnipotent, “seeing everything from nowhere” (Haraway 581). The single journalistic narrative—the truth that the journalist has excavated—becomes privileged, while the experience-based knowledges that establish journalistic authority are subjugated. Journalism’s ability to incorporate experiential knowledges in order to create a final product that cannot claim authenticity is evident in many of the news reports about Hurricane Katrina and its effects on New Orleans.

Journalistic accounts and investigations of Katrina were some of the first to be published. In fact, some journalistic engagements with what would become Katrina were published before the storm even made landfall because “the media are intimately involved with hurricane preparedness, funneling warnings from NHC and the National Weather Service to millions of people when a hurricane threatens” (Sylvester xiv). While New Orleans’s citizens and residents were busy with the work of evacuation, rescue, and relocation, it was largely journalists who were creating a textual record of those citizens’ and residents’ experiences. Journalistic accounts were not limited to traditional media like newspapers, magazines, and television broadcasts. Journalistic accounts of the storm also appeared on new media platforms. Sylvester argues that the disaster “boosted new media: online news products, text messaging, podcasts and satellite communication systems” because “traditional communication systems still have obstacles to overcome before they function efficiently in the face of disasters” (xv). One example of a new media journalistic account is Sheri Fink’s Pulitzer-winning 2009 article, “The Deadly Choices at
Memorial,” which was funded and published simultaneously by The New York Times and ProPublica, a web-based investigative journalism newsgroup which shares its work under the Creative Commons non-commercial license. In “The Deadly Choices at Memorial,” Fink began to investigate the storm and its aftermath at New Orleans’s Baptist Hospital,\textsuperscript{12} where medical staff allegedly euthanized patients who they thought could not be evacuated after the hurricane. After the article’s publication, Fink continued her work investigating what had happened at Baptist and, in 2013, published a full-length book on the subject, Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital. Five Days was met with praise from critics. The New York Times’s Jason Berry championed Fink’s work as “social reporting of the first rank” while Sherwin Nuland, another Times critic, called it an example of “masterly reporting and the glow of fine writing.” Even National Public Radio’s Susan Jane Gilman, who found that Fink’s narrative is sometimes “frustrating,” describes her writing as “nuanced” and “fair and balanced.” Five Days at Memorial won multiple awards, including the 2014 National Book Critics Circle Award and the Ridenhour Book Prize, and appeared on The New York Times bestseller list. National audiences—audiences who had little or no relevant experiential knowledge to apply in their reading—loved it.

But responses from audiences with local ties were not so positive or focused. Mike Scott’s coverage of the book, which appeared in The Times Picayune, New Orleans’s major newspaper, is less concerned with the book itself and more with issues connected to the book that still loom large for people in New Orleans: the still-ongoing legal cases the book describes and rumors about a locally-filmed big screen adaptation of the book. Local message boards and forums are full of angry responses to the book and its author: “Fink has effectively capitalized on

\textsuperscript{12} For reasons I elaborate on below, throughout this document, unless directly quoting others, I refer to the hospital as Baptist.
this tragedy. I can’t figure out why she hasn’t been exposed. She’s a vulture, picking at the bones of patients who died and swooping down to sully the reputations of the doctors and nurses who stayed in hell to help” (CinnamonGirl). I’ve yet to find a single New Orleanian who read Fink’s book by choice. And, when I’ve asked my diverse resident friends and family members for their opinions on sections of *Five Days*, their responses have been overwhelmingly negative, a mixture of anger, frustration, and exasperation. Many of them also framed their responses in the form of questions. Those questions might be summed up with a single inquiry: How can someone who did this much research get so much wrong? Or, to put it another way: How can something made of so many verified pieces not align with what the people who experienced the events discussed remember? The simple answer is that Fink’s book does not feel *real* for many residents of the city of New Orleans because it a piece of investigative journalism, a genre that does not come from a position of authenticity.

Fink begins her book with a “Note to the Reader.” This note, which is just over a page long, illustrates her devotion to the core principles of journalism outlined by the Pew Research Center. In the note, Fink describes the process of writing the book. That process, which began in 2007—two years after Katrina and six years before the book’s publication—involved interviews as well as investigations of other source materials such as photographs, articles, weather reports, and architectural floor plans (*Five Days* xvii). Fink’s choice to share her process with her audience aligns with the Pew Research Center’s mandate that journalists must be transparent about their investigative processes so that “audiences can make their own assessment of the information.” But there is another consequence of journalistic transparency: it allows journalists to establish their own authority. It is a way for journalists to present to their audiences the criteria which make them experts on their given topic. Accordingly, Fink’s transparency about her
investigative process is also a way for her to present her ethos. Thus, the “Note to the Reader” is a section in which Fink is able to subtly champion her role as a sense-maker and compiler of sources. “Many people held a piece of this story,” she writes, “and I conducted more than five hundred interviews with hundreds of them” (*Five Days* xvii). In describing her process of compiling information and writing her book, Fink also notes that that she “visited the hospital and other sites depicted in the book”; she *experienced* the places she investigated. But Fink’s own experiential knowledge is not prioritized or allowed to stand on its own; instead, she uses it to verify and bolster her investigative process. She presents her experiential knowledge as evidentiary support. Similarly, Fink does not prioritize the experiential and subjugated knowledges offered to her by her interviewees and informants. This is evident in the way that she turns to privileged knowledges like those presented in weather reports and architectural floor plans to verify or refute her interviewees’ stories, subtly undermining them. Fink’s undermining of experiential knowledges is reflective of the Pew Research Center core principle that journalism’s “essence is a discipline of verification;” journalism prioritizes information that can be externally corroborated or substantiated. Fink explains that “because memories often fade and change,” she worked to find other materials dating from the time of Katrina that could uphold or contradict information she gathered in interviews. These source materials, Fink writes, were “particularly valuable” to her. But, if Fink were writing from the position of authenticity, the fact that memory is fluid and changing would not disqualify them.

Fink’s note also seems to align with the Pew Research Center journalistic tenet that “its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover”—a tenet that connects a journalist’s authority with their distance from that which they write about. This claiming of authority on the basis of distance is also a claiming of authority by virtue of a lack of directly
relevant experiential knowledge. This core principle, which establishes journalists as observers instead of participants, creates a prerequisite outsider status for them. Thus, Fink’s statement that “[she] was not at the hospital to witness the events” is not actually a concession or an admission of a gap in her narrative, but instead an ethos-building assertion that she is independent and unbiased. Journalistic independence or distance might also be understood in terms of Haraway’s god trick. To ensure her independence and distance and, at the same time, continue to present a clear and total picture of her subject—that is, one that is not blocked by the journalist’s own particular personal standpoint—the journalist must be able to see everything from nowhere; they must take up the disembodied, unsituated position and unresponsive gaze of god. A practitioner who maintains a journalistic independence from their subjects cannot come from a position of authenticity.

In her note, Fink admits that, even though she has worked to be transparent and independent, her own identity might factor into the book she creates. Interestingly, it is only when she acknowledges her own subjectivity that Fink indirectly refers to herself as an author: “As any book reflects the interwoven interpretations and insights of its author, I have tried to make these distinct.” The implication is that Fink’s “I” here is an authorial one.

Fink’s “I” looms large in her reader’s note, appearing six times in a little over a page, before disappearing, morphing into a disembodied presence that shapes the book’s remaining five hundred pages. Fink readily admits that the story she tells is not owned by any one person because “many people held a piece” of it (Five Days xvii). She also admits that, because she was “not at the hospital to witness [them],” she has no direct access to the events about which she writes (Five Days xvii). Still, Fink centers herself in the reader’s note. But because Fink centers herself without situating herself—because she plays the god trick—she is able to claim authority
over her book’s content—the narratives it includes and incorporates as well as the narrative it is in and of itself. Fink also claims ownership of it. This ownership comes across in the note’s final sentence: “All errors are mine.” On the one hand, Fink seems to be making herself accountable for her work, but what resonates is the possession. Before jumping into telling the story of other people, Fink reminds the reader that this story is also—and, perhaps, primarily—her property, or, at least, the property of people like her; Fink’s book is for readers who, like her authorial voice, are disembodied and unsituated. Fink’s narrative is not only hers, but is also owned by her audiences. Her mainstream readers, the majority of whom, like her, lack experiential knowledge of her story, get to claim and shape the narrative. Outsiders’ positive reviews of Fink’s book, then, might also be viewed as evidence of Fink’s success at sharing her ownership of her narrative; outside audiences love the book because it is for them. Accordingly, insiders’ negative reviews might be viewed as evidence of their lack of ownership over the narrative: they dislike the book because they can see the myriad ways in which it is clearly not for them. Or, at least, it is not for them if they wish to maintained their embodiment and connection to (or situated distance from) the city; Five Days is not for readers who are concerned withauthenticity.

The impression that Fink’s book is not for people whose connection to Katrina or New Orleans is more direct—people whose knowledge of the storm and the city is experienced-based—is perhaps most deeply rooted in Fink’s alignment with another of journalism’s core principles, that “it must keep the news comprehensive and proportional” (Pew Research Center). As the Pew Research Center explains, journalists act as “cartographers.” In that role, journalists’ ability to sift through information, to decide what is important and what is not, is vital. “Inflating events for sensation, neglecting others, stereotyping or being disproportionately negative all make a less reliable map” (Pew Research Center). But, if journalists are outsiders—and, based
on the core principle that “practitioners [of journalism] must maintain an independence from those they cover” (Pew Research Center), they must be—their ability to evaluate information and decide what is central or superfluous is limited. The same lack of distance that underpins journalistic authority makes the task of keeping a narrative “comprehensive and proportional” without relegating some experiential knowledge to the realm of the subjugated, even unintentionally, problematically difficult. This problem is especially evident in the body of *Five Days’* text, where Fink’s attempts to keep her narrative “comprehensive and proportional” lead her to make choices about language and naming that, in addition to making her narrative challenging for local audiences, show that she does not write from the position of authenticity.

Language and, in particular, naming have been important instruments of global conquest, exploration, and colonization. As Zhenja La Rosa explains in her essay on the role of language policies in the establishment of the Spanish Colonial Empire, explorers like Columbus named new (to them) lands and people in a “ritual process of taking possession.” Later, “perceived authority through words” justified imposing “real authority through other military actions.” The Pew Research Center’s wording in their description of journalists as “cartographers” is especially interesting in that it connects, at least on the level of vocabulary, journalism with the same exploration and colonialism. While Fink’s book is not an attempt to justify the imposition of military authority in New Orleans, the way she uses names in her book aligns with the colonial naming practices La Rosa describes. Fink’s approach to naming is also one of the aspects of *Five*

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13 The issue of military force is not, however, wholly irrelevant in the context of Hurricane Katrina. The military is especially relevant in my own personal experience of the storm (as I witnessed military officers and officials acting as both rescuers and looters) and of the recovery (National Guard officers, in full uniform and with military-grade weapons drawn, patrolled the neighborhoods where I lived for well over a year after the storm). My personal experience is not unique or isolated. It is related to public policy. For a detailed overview of that policy and the involvement of the United States Military in the initial hurricane response, see the “Hurricane Katrina: DOD Disaster Response” report (United States) and Samaan & Verneuil’s “Civil-Military Relations in Hurricane Katrina: A Case Study on Crisis Management in Natural Disaster Response.” For a personal account of the storm’s aftermath rooted in the connection between the national military and the federal military disaster response, see Dave Eggers’ *Zeitoun.*
*Days at Memorial* that shows her consistent choice not to, as authentiCity requires, center or prioritize subjugated and experiential knowledges and, as a result, not to come from a position of authentiCity. This is most notable in Fink’s choice to refer to the hospital at the center of her book as Memorial Medical Center.

As Fink explains in the first chapter of *Five Days*, “For certain New Orleanians, Memorial Medical Center was the place you went to ride out each hurricane... But chances are you wouldn’t call it Memorial Medical Center. You’d call it ‘Baptist’” (11). Fink explains that this “nickname” is rooted in the hospital’s history, which Fink briefly relates. Baptist was founded in 1926 by the Southern Baptist Convention. It became a public, nonprofit hospital in 1969, when the SBC, unwilling to bend to federal and state legislation demanding an end to racial segregation, separated itself from the institution (12-15). But New Orleanians went right on calling Baptist “Baptist.” They went on calling Baptist “Baptist” when the hospital merged with Mercy and changed to Mercy-Baptist Medical Center in 1990, and didn’t feel any particular reason to speak any differently in 1996, when the hospital was acquired by Tenet Healthcare and renamed Memorial Medical Center (Fink, “Deadly Choices”). Even now, in 2015, nine years after the hospital was sold to Ochsner Health Center and officially renamed Ochsner Baptist Medical Center, many New Orleanians still refer to it as “Baptist.” When I asked my cousin, who’s due to deliver her first child in June, where she’s having her baby, her response was “Baptist.” Regardless of the factual name of the institution, most New Orleanians’ experience-based knowledge leads them to call the hospital “Baptist.” But Fink, who prioritizes official, verifiable information, employs the hospital name that aligns with outsider knowledge.

Fink’s prioritizing of official models of naming and titles comes up in other places as well. In many instances, Fink seems unaware of the ways in which local, experience-based
knowledge adds layers of meaning to what she interprets and presents as nicknames. Fink makes special note, for example, that Carrie Hall, one of the patients who died at Baptist in the days after the storm, was called “Ma’Dear” (4). Fink seems to view “Ma’Dear” as a pet name rooted in Carrie Hall’s personality; Hall’s family called her “Ma’Dear” because she was dear to them. In actuality, “Ma’Dear” is simply a term New Orleanians, and especially Black New Orleanians, use for a grandmother or other elderly matriarch. I have a Ma’Dear, as do many other Black and working-class New Orleanians. In fact, the term is so ubiquitous that it has found its way into mainstream American and African-American popular culture by way of the work of native New Orleanian Tyler Perry’s theater and film character Madea.14 Fink’s multiple implications that the name symbolizes Hall’s out-of-the-ordinary caring or devotion to her family are rooted in her lack of understanding—a lack that is in turn rooted in Fink’s own lack of familiarity with New Orleanians’ particular idiomatic expressions. Fink’s misuse of Ma’Dear is also rooted in her disembodied authorial positioning—a positioning that is not one of authenticity. Had Fink written from the positionality of authenticity, she would have prioritized the experiential voices and their knowledges. She would have listened and heard.

Fink’s misuse of Ma’Dear is also evidence that she is not writing from the positionality of authenticity in another important way. Texts that embody authenticity circumvent the hierarchies of knowledge that present the dominant or normalized as Truth. But Fink’s use of Ma’Dear does not circumvent hierarchies; it supports them. As Patricia Collins explains, Black women “have laid a vital analytical foundation for a distinctive standpoint on self, community, and society and, in doing so, created a multifaceted, African-American women’s intellectual

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14 I do not mean to imply that Tyler Perry’s treatment of Black matriarchs who answer to the title Ma’Dear/Madea is not problematic. Quite to the contrary, Perry’s Madea movies display an alarming amount of misogynoir; in fact, the Black blogosphere has repeatedly taken Perry to task for his depictions of Black femininity. My point is simply that Fink’s seeming ignorance of the larger context into which the moniker Ma’Dear/Madea fits, despite that the existence of such a high-profile popular culture use of the term, is, at best, troubling.
tradition” (“Chapter 18”). But this rich tradition has remained largely ignored and invisible; Black women and their ideas are “not known and not believed in” (Collins, “Chapter 18”). Black women’s knowledges are, more often than not, subjugated knowledges. The subjugation of Black women’s knowledges, Collins argues, is “neither accidental nor benign” and “has been critical in maintaining social inequalities” (“Chapter 18”). By presenting Ma’Dear, a term used overwhelming by and in Black communities to describe women who are revered for their roles as matriarchs, with a meaning shaped through a dominant lens, Fink decontextualizes the title. She obscures the social relationships from which the title of Ma’Dear gains meaning. Fink effectively erases Black women’s knowledges and self-definitions. Thus, Fink’s treatment of the term Ma’Dear follows a “recent pattern of suppression” which “involves incorporating, changing, and thereby depoliticizing Black feminist ideas” (Collins “Chapter 18”). Even if it was not Fink’s intent to erase or devalue the knowledge of the communities about which she writes, her sloppy use of regional language works to support a matrix of oppression that squashes those communities.

Fink’s treatment of other localisms, even those not directly connected specifically to the lives of Black women, are similarly problematic. Early on in her book, Fink explains that the area surrounding Baptist hospital is often hit by flash floods. Hospital employees and neighborhood residents, aware that parking on the street during heavy rain could leave their vehicles at risk of water damage, park on the raised medians that separate traffic on major thoroughfares. New Orleanians refer to these medians as neutral grounds, a term rooted in the city’s particular history. ¹⁵ For locals, “neutral ground” functions as a compound word, not a noun.

¹⁵ As Sally Asher explains, “Around the turn of the nineteenth century, Creoles [which here means francophone people of any race who were born in the Americas] primarily lived in the French Quarter, while the American newcomers largely settled on the other side of Canal Street in the area today known as the Central Business District (CBD). Tensions and conflicts between the two groups were strong, but Canal Street was considered the neutral
with an adjectival descriptor. But when Fink uses the term, she misses that detail: “In the first years of the twenty-first century,” she writes, “workers knew a moderate storm could fill the streets around Memorial Medical Center with enough water that they would have to park their cars a block or so away on ‘neutral ground’—the high berms between lanes” (23). Fink’s descriptions of neighborhoods are also problematic. In the years following Katrina, shifting demographic patterns—especially a large influx of white, middle- and upper-class transplants to formerly working class and/or Black neighborhoods—have drastically changed the city.¹⁶ Though this wave of gentrification is not purely the result of the storm, it is a prominent part of discussions of Katrina and recovery. One thing that comes up again and again in those discussions is the issue of names—do New Orleanians keep the street, school, and neighborhood names we’ve always used, or do we rebrand, ascribing new names to reflect the city’s new character? The neighborhood where Baptist hospital is located is generally referred to as Uptown by locals. Some describe it more specifically as Central City, and others—especially people who themselves live in Central City and its smaller neighborhoods—see it as part of Hollygrove, Broadmoor, or even Gert Town. But Fink does not use any of these terms. Instead, she describes the area around Baptist Hospital as being “in the Freret neighborhood” (Five Days 23). Fink’s choice to use this name aligns with her field’s prioritization of verifiable sources over anecdotal ones and, more generally, official knowledge over unofficial knowledge. “Freret” is the neighborhood’s official name, as designated by the City Planning Commission. What Fink and the CPC call the Freret neighborhood, like many other areas of the city, has seen a largely white, outsider-driven economic revitalization since the storm—a revitalization that has pushed pre-

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¹⁶ See Miller and Rivera.
storm residents out and reshaped what had been their world to better fit incoming transplants.\textsuperscript{17}

Catherine Michna sees official renaming as part of that process. For her, the official rebranding is not simply a label change:

\begin{quote}
It is no coincidence that charter schools are being renamed as their identities and systems of authority are being reconstituted/whitened. Public memories in New Orleans are shifting as the city grows whiter and wealthier. The renaming process serves to increase that by invisibilizing, or, in the case of schools, attempting to incorporate or neutralize black histories and histories of collective moments. This process functions to revise the cognitive maps of local residents as they walk through, drive through, consume, and create New Orleans so that we see, remember, and imagine the city differently. (Michna, "Renaming")
\end{quote}

Fink’s misuse of local terms like Ma’Dear and neutral ground reflects gaps in her understanding of the world about which she is writing—gaps that, for readers who can see them, undermine her authority even as they align with ethos-establishing methods in her genre and field. Her use of nonlocal terms for neighborhoods does the same thing, but, additionally, undermines the authority of locals over their own world by prioritizing the voices of outsiders who’ve pushed new neighborhood names. In these small ways, Fink empowers outside voices, giving them authority at the expense of self-defined nomenclatures. This pattern acts as a type of linguistic colonialism where outsiders reshape the linguistic patterns of a colonized space to reflect their own understanding of that space; they prioritize powerful knowledges and, in so doing, relegate local knowledges to the realm of subjugated ones. Institutions like the City Planning

\textsuperscript{17} To see some of the ways New Orleanian neighborhoods are currently broken down and how those neighborhoods have been referred to at different times and by different groups, see Dan Swenson’s collection of interactive maps. For a detailed examination of how locals name and perceive New Orleans neighborhoods and how those names and perceptions do and do not align with official designations, see “The 73 ‘Official’ New Orleans Neighborhoods: Why They Exist, and Why They Shouldn’t” and/or Richard Campanella’s “A Glorious Mess”
Commission exercise linguistic colonialism on the ground in New Orleans; Fink exercises it in her text.

Perhaps even more problematic than her misuse of local language is Fink’s alignment with the journalistic tenet of making the narrative “relevant.” As the Pew Research Center explains, journalism “must balance what readers know they want with what they cannot anticipate but need.” This puts journalists in a position where they need to “continually ask what information has most value to citizens and in what form” so that their work is not “overwhelmed by trivia and false significance” (Pew Research Center). But, in Fink’s case, her quest to ensure relevance, coupled with her lack of local or experiential knowledge and her subordination of her local and experientially knowledgeable sources, leads her to make problematic judgements about what is or is not trivial. As a result, parts of her narrative not only fail to align with authentic knowledges but also border on factual misrepresentation; at times, Fink fails to effectively “excavate” (Pew Research Center) a journalistic truth. Take, for example, Fink’s reliance on and depiction of former Orleans Parish coroner Dr. Frank Minyard.

Fink introduces Minyard about halfway through her book. Her introduction of him is simple, tucked into a small clause: “Orleans Parish coroner Frank Minyard told Special Agent Virginia Rider it would be useless to examine the bodies from Memorial” (261). Fink presents Minyard as a competent public official with a potentially problematic, but mostly endearing, tendency to let his personal opinions affect his work. Fink’s portrayal is largely sympathetic. Even his blurring of lines between personal opinions and work duties are, in Fink’s telling, evidence of Minyard’s loyalty to his community: “Minyard imagined the case going to trial, provoking a battle royal of these forensic experts. The parish would lose the case over reasonable doubt. This, in his estimation, would not be good for the city, for the recovery. This was the
bigger picture that he felt he had to consider beyond what pure basic science suggested about the deaths” (410).

What Fink fails to present—presumably because she has judged it to be “trivia” or of “false significance”—is well-known (and scandalous) information about Minyard’s four-decade career as Orleans Parish coroner. Over the course of that career, Minyard, whose background as an OBGYN provided him no training in forensic pathology, often had his initial autopsies proven to be inadequate or incorrect after family members hired their own medical examiners. He also developed a notoriously close relationship with the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) and the city prosecutor and agitated against technological and oversight upgrades that would have increased his office’s efficiency and accuracy (Post Mortem). Minyard’s questionable practices are especially interesting in the context of Katrina. Minyard’s office’s decision to classify as “undetermined” the cause of death of Henry Glover, a Black man whose charred remains were found in an incinerated car on a Westbank levee in the days after Katrina, even after an NOPD officer admitted to killing Glover, was seen by many locals as representative of Minyard’s time as coroner and his role in establishing and protecting NOPD’s toxic culture. For many New Orleanians, especially Black people, Minyard’s conduct on the Glover case seemed connected to his tendency to place blame for the city’s high crime rate on “social ills” like teen pregnancy absentee fathers in communities of color (Johnson). This worked to support the region’s myriad systems of white supremacy, especially by absolving the NOPD for its consistent record of misconduct (which often takes the form of brutality against Black civilians). As local activist W.C. Johnson explains in a 2014 Louisiana Weekly interview, “Minyard [who is white] has been a major reason why Blacks in New Orleans have had a terrible time getting resolution to police terror. Once the coroner refuses to do his or her job, everything else is an uphill battle” (Lewis).

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18 Orleans Parish’s new coroner, Jeffrey Rouse, has since reclassified Glover’s death as a homicide (McGill)
Perhaps Fink’s failure to present a more thorough picture of Minyard is related to her failure to race him. If a reader’s only knowledge of Minyard comes from Fink’s book, they cannot definitively say what his race is. Fink’s failure to adequately race major players in her book is not limited to her depiction of Minyard; race is central to any completely contextualized discussion of New Orleans in general and, perhaps even more so, to any discussion of Katrina and its aftermath, but an explicit discussion of race is notably absent from *Five Days at Memorial*. Fink discusses the geology of south Louisiana in detail. She devotes more than half a chapter to the history of New Orleans’s pumping and flood mitigation systems. But she never directly addresses the issue of race (or racism). On a purely informative level, this is problematic for the reader, who is not provided with enough (or consistent enough) information to categorize or characterize major players in the book. Readers are faced with the task of excavating race from Fink’s words: is it fair to conclude that Lifecare nursing director Gina Isbell is white based on Fink’s explanation that “When she exerted herself like this her round cheeks flushed a pretty pink” (26)? Is a description of Susan Mulderick, nursing director and head of Baptist’s emergency preparedness committee, as “fair” (57) enough to suss out her race? Other markers that might, on their surface, seem to be racial descriptors are similarly inconclusive. Take references to hair color (32, 53, 93, etc.), for example. Perhaps, in the cases of Isbell and Mulderick, race is not centrally important. But in other cases where Fink does not race individuals, like that of Frank Minyard, it is of vital significance.

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19 For in depth examinations of race in the context of Katrina, see any of the numerous articles included in the Social Science Research Council’s *Understanding Katrina: Perspectives from the Social Sciences* project, available online at understandingkatrina.ssrc.org. Or readers might prefer to turn to popular culture, as opposed to academia, for evidence of the centrality of race to experiences of and responses to Katrina. Case in point, hip-hop artist Kanye West’s statement, during the NBC-sponsored live broadcast of fundraising and relief concert on September 2, 2005, that “George Bush doesn’t care about Black people” (Shokroc).
Interestingly, Fink does often at least partially race her non-white subjects. We learn the non-white classification of a never-named newborn because “one of its tiny brown feet stretched down to balance atop [a man’s] beer gut as someone snapped a picture” (88). This racing of non-white subjects might be rooted in Fink’s own racial identity. Because of white privilege in American society, “Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as norm they seem not to be represented to themselves as whites but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualized and abled. At the level of racial representation, in other words, whites are not of a certain race, they’re just the human race” (Dyer 3). Accordingly, white people often do not think of themselves—or other white people—as raced individuals. Whiteness remains unmarked. Fink, as a white American woman, is likely not used to thinking of white people as raced.

At other times, Fink’s racing of characters seems like it might be rooted in her original sources’ words. It is unclear, for example, if the detail that the four patients described on page ten are “three elderly white women and a heavyset African American man” is included because Fink thought it relevant or because the person whose words she’s paraphrasing did. Fink’s shifting use of terminology—she uses terms like Black and African American, white and Caucasian interchangeably—is similarly hard to pin down. Which point of view is hers; which is that of her sources?

Additionally, there are moments when Fink chooses to include what might be seen as “trivial” racial or ethnic markers in what seem, in terms of the Pew Research Center journalistic tenets, like attempts not to “enlighten” her audience, but to “engage” it. Thus, even though Fink largely leaves Whiteness unmarked, she does take time to note when white characters, like Cheri Landry, are “of Cajun extraction” (9) or come, like Dr. Anna Pou, from non-Anglo European
backgrounds. References to regional dialect also appear often. Hospital chaplain Father John Marse, Fink notes, speaks “quickly in a Southern drawl” (76). Similarly, Fink’s choice to include quaint regionalisms, like investigator Virginia Rider’s description of nurse manager Karen Wynn’s worry that anxiety would spread throughout the hospital’s residents—that the “seed [of panic] at the back of their brain” could have “grown into an acorn and an oak tree” (177)—or, at times, to merge non-Anglo ethnic markers with regional language patterns—“the blunted vowels and head-spinning pace of their patois marked them as Louisiana Cajuns” (134)—come off as efforts to entertain her audience by othering or exoticizing her subjects.

Fink’s consistent othering of her informants is also additional evidence that her narrative is primarily for outsiders—people who are not closely linked to the city of New Orleans. Furthermore, this othering, like her depiction of Minyard, undermines Fink’s excavation of a journalistic truth. Fink’s above-quoted description of Father Marse, for example, becomes almost nonsensical when it is interpreted through the lens of regional knowledges. Fink writes that Marse speaks with a “southern drawl.” Outsider audiences might interpret that to mean that Marse speaks with an accent that is representative of his region. But insider audiences—that is, audiences who have experienced speech patterns in Southern Louisiana—are more likely to associate a southern drawl with nonlocal outsiders. Southern Louisianans in general, and New Orleanians in particular, do not sound like people in the rest of the Deep South. Fink’s choice to include the information to engage her outsider audience actually has the effect of confusing insider readers because it does not align with their experiential knowledge. If authentiCity is, as I argue above, an approach that facilitates inclusion, Fink’s othering of her local informants,

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20 To hear some of the diverse dialects of New Orleans, watch Louiz Alvarez and Andrew Kolker’s 1985 documentary, Yeah You Rite!, available in its entirety online.
which, in turn, pushes local readers out of her audience, is further evidence that _Five Days_ does
not reflect authentiCity.

While Fink’s bothersome othering of local language has the bothersome consequence of
pushing local readers out of her audience, a consequence of her uneven treatment of race and
failure to address it directly is more problematic; it leads her to, at times, echo the racialized
rhetoric of her sources. The result is a narrative that is, at times, offensive. This (I assume
unintentional) offensiveness is yet another piece of evidence that Fink’s book is for an outsider,
mainstream American—and largely white—audience. It is not inclusive and, as a result, cannot
claim authentiCity.

The character whose racialized rhetoric is most problematic—in part because it is most
prominent—is Dr. John Thiele. Thiele is introduced on page four of _Five Days_, but it is not until
page 288 that Fink tells the reader that he is white. There are, however, hints to Thiele’s racial
identity—namely, his racist descriptions of other people. Sometimes, as when he describes
people of color outside the hospital as “the enemy” (4), Thiele’s racism is subtle and reflective
of what Ian Haney Lopez calls “Dog Whistle Racism”—rhetoric that is not explicitly racial, but
that resonates on a racial register that is both deeply veiled but readily accessible. It operates
“like a dog whistle—a metaphor that pushes us to recognize that [it] always operates on two
levels: inaudible and easily denied in one range, yet stimulating strong reactions in another” (3).
Other times, Thiele’s racism is more blatant:

[Thiele] also wondered about the remaining pets, which he’d heard would be
released from their kennels to fend for themselves. They were hungry. And Thiele
was sure that another kind of ‘animal’ was poised to rampage through the hospital
looking for drugs. He later recalled wondering at the time: ‘What would they do,
these crazy black people who think they’ve been oppressed for all these years by white people... God knows what these crazy people outside are going to do to these poor patients who are dying. They can dismember them, they can rape them, they can torture them.’ (Fink, *Five Days 8*)

Fink does not contextualize Thiele’s statement or editorialize about it. For Fink, Thiele’s equating of Black New Orleanians who “think they’ve been oppressed for all these years” (emphasis added) with “animals” merits neither authorial intervention nor the inclusion of another viewpoint for the sake of comparison. This is in part so noticeable precisely because of Fink’s *ethos*-establishing claim in her reader’s note that she interviewed so many people. If she interviewed so many people to excavate the journalistic truth, why does she not incorporate their voices at this point to help paint a more complete picture of that truth for her readers? Fink’s failure to address or engage with Thiele’s comment is also noticeable because, throughout the book, she constantly steps in to contextualize or editorialize about other statements. In a scene where Fink discusses people who “headed to a darkened Winn-Dixie supermarket about eight blocks away and returned, arms laden with diapers, food, and drinks,” for example, she explains that some people saw such behavior as “soul surviving, surviving for soul,” while others “considered it looting” (65). There are other moments when Fink fails to contextualize or editorialize racially loaded statements made by Thiele. In fact, the moment when Fink explicitly races Thiele (some 284 pages after his introduction), is one such moment. Fink describes Thiele’s experiences immediately after being evacuated from Baptist. Thiele and his colleagues are dropped off at Louis Armstrong airport in Kenner, just outside of New Orleans.

The next day [Thiele] waited hours in the whirl of chaos with the small hospital group. They swayed in the pushing, pulling crowds. Teenage National Guardsmen
armed with semiautomatic weapons failed to impose a sense of order. People skirmished. A nurse companion fainted. He maintained his doctor’s mien, bucking up his colleagues, but inside himself grew sure they would not make it out, that they were on the cusp of death, that any moment gunfire would erupt. ‘This is crazy.’ He was white, his colleagues, too, and those around them were nearly all ‘Afro American.’ And, he feared, desperate. (288)

Perhaps Fink’s inclusion of quotation marks around “Afro American,” which places this particular awkward and borderline politically incorrect racial term squarely in Thiele’s mouth, is a sign of her recognition that his standpoint is racially problematic. But her choice not to explicitly editorialize here, as she does at other points, implies that, even if she disagrees with it, Thiele’s logic makes sense to her. For Fink, Thiele’s logic (We are white. They are Black. They are desperate. And, therefore, they are a danger to us.) is understandable if not sound. To borrow Fink’s own words from her reader’s note, Thiele’s logic aligns with and “reflects” the author’s “interwoven interpretations and insights” (xviii). Fink’s tendency to coopt Thiele’s images and language is also evidence that her viewpoint aligns with his. Fink’s statements that “The long-repressed masses outside the hospital, brandishing looted guns and rifles, would revolt and overtake them,” that “the enemy was near,” and that “a rowdy gang” was waiting to pounce from a building across the street from the hospital (290) all echo Thiele’s rhetoric.

Fink’s alignment with Thiele’s viewpoint—a viewpoint shaped by experiential knowledge—might be viewed as a prioritization or even empowerment of a local voice; Fink allows the “other” speak for himself. However, in the end, Fink only empowers subjugated voices that match her own experiential knowledge. In part because she does not position or center herself, Fink seems to take what Collins might term Thiele’s partial perspective’s
alignment with her own partial perspective as evidence of his sentiment’s universality. But in actuality, it is only further evidence of Fink’s own particularity and situatedness.

Fink’s at times problematic engagement with the subjugated voices that inform her text aligns with Catherine Michna’s analysis of the way another writer, Dan Baum, uses local informants in his 2009 creative non-fiction book, *Nine Lives: Mystery, Magic, Death, and Life in New Orleans*. Dan Baum’s treatment of his local informants *Nine Lives* is similar to Fink’s and provides an additional example of a journalism-based account of Katrina that does not exhibit authenticity. Like *Five Days, Nine Lives* began as a smaller journalistic project. Baum worked as a journalist covering Katrina for *The New Yorker* until 2006, when he was dismissed from *The New Yorker* staff over disagreements about how to write about the disaster. After his dismissal, Baum, along with his wife Margaret as editor and ghost-writer, decided to write “a contemporary cultural history of New Orleans through oral testimonies of a diverse range of local residents” (Michna, “Hearing” 251). To that end, Baum interviewed nine local residents, weaving their narratives into a final product that, according to a *Los Angeles Times* review that appears on the back of the 2010 paperback edition, “reads more like fiction that journalism” and “resembles a vast Victorian novel in its many-sided evocation of an entire world” (W. Smith).

On its surface, Baum’s book seems as if it can claim itself to authenticity. Like Fink’s, Baum’s book incorporates diverse local voices and their knowledges and is deeply concerned with a physical location. Most relevant to authenticity, though, is Baum’s explanation of why he wrote the book:

While covering Katrina and its aftermath for *The New Yorker*, I noticed that most of the coverage, my own included, was so focused on the disaster that it missed the essentially weird nature of the place where it happened. The nine intertwined
life stories offered here are offered here are an attempt to convey what is unique and worth saving in New Orleans. (x)

Baum undertook the task of writing with the explicit goal of presenting a narrative that he felt was buried or ignored in mainstream journalism; he wrote to circumvent existing hierarchies of knowledge by prioritizing subjugated local knowledges and liberating their home. But *Nine Lives* fails to achieve its goal of authenticity. This failure is, I believe, related to Baum’s failure both to position and situate himself and to push his readers to position and situate themselves. Baum authorial voice and his audience are able to create and consume the nine lives presented in the book as disembodied, nonresponsive, unchanging gazers: they play the god trick.

Like Fink, Baum opens his book with an introduction that relates the process of the book’s birth. In his “About This Book” section, Baum explains why he decided to write his book. Like Fink, Baum also shares information about his interview process, writing that “[his informants] all sat for many hours of interviews, unpacking their innermost moments for a stranger” (x). Additionally, in a fashion similar to Fink’s explanation of why certain types of external sources were “particularly valuable” to her (xvii), Baum relates his use of outside sources for verification, explaining that he “supplemented those interviews by talking to many of [his] characters’ friends, relatives, and associates” (xi). Also reminiscent of Fink’s rhetorical moves in her “Note to the Reader” is Baum’s subtle undermining of his sources: “It is certain that other people will remember the events described herein differently. And memory is a funny thing,” Baum writes, before providing a specific example of how he debunked a detail related to him in an interview. That example has to do with how one of his interviewees describes “in detail the epiphany that launched [his career].” The man Baum interviewed was sure that “it happened in 1967” and “equally sure the song that set it off was Peggy Lee’s ‘Is That All There
Is? which wasn’t recorded until 1969.” Baum goes on to explain that that “[t]his was how Frank’s own story explained Frank’s world to Frank. So [he] left it as he told it” (xi). Like Fink’s concession that she did not witness the events of the storms, which adds to her journalistic authority by highlighting her independence from the world about which she reports, Baum’s admission that parts of his book may be factually untrue actually builds his ethos by depicting him as aligned with local knowledges. His story is even more real, his admission implies, because it incorporates the real memories of insiders even when he knows those memories are factually wrong. But instead of championing local knowledges, Baum actually relegates them to the realm of the subjugated. Baum’s interviewee is depicted as naïve and incorrect while Baum himself is, in comparison, simultaneously knowledgeable and benevolent.

Baum’s discussion of how he decided to treat his interviewee’s funny memory seems to be related to his own identity. Nine Lives is similar to Five Days in that its “About This Book” section, like Fink’s “Note to the Reader,” centers the author. In this section, Baum explains that “these stories come to the reader through two filters.” The first is the “sensibilities, emotions, and memories” of the nine main characters (x), while “The second filter is [his] own” (xi). After explaining that the second filter is himself, Baum elaborates:

I have re-created scenes and dialogue out of remembered snippets, using what I know about the people, the time, the immediate setting, and the city. I put words to thoughts and feelings that, during the months I spent working on this, were laid bare by these remarkably candid people. I changed the names of three peripheral characters to avoid hurting their feelings. (xi)

As evidenced by the above-quoted paragraph, which contains the word “I” five times in just 62 words, Baum’s “I,” like Fink’s, looms large and visibly in the introduction and goes on, albeit
invisibly, to remain central in the rest of the text. And, just as Fink’s concession that “all errors are [hers]” actually works to explicitly establish her authorial status, Baum’s transparency about mistakes he made in the first paper-back edition of *Nine Lives* (“Most were small—names misspelled, clothing details bungled, and a reference to forsythia when any fool knows that forsythia doesn’t grow in New Orleans”) ends not with an assertion of the authority of the people he interviewed, but with words that imply the authority and bolster the authorial status of the outsider writer: “*My* goal all along was to tell them as accurately as possible” (xi, emphasis added). Baum’s *my*, like Fink’s *mine*, stakes his claim to not only the narrative that is the book, but the authentic narratives that informed it.

There is also more evidence of Baum’s similarity to Fink—and Baum’s misalignment with authenticity—in the way his “About This Book,” like Fink’s “Note to the Reader,” does not require that the reader position or situate himself to facilitate response and dialogue. Baum does give the impression that his intended audience is non-New Orleanians. He consistently refers to the people of New Orleans as “they,” not “we” or “you” (or, were he to speak in the language of most people of the region, “y’all”). But Baum does not push his readers to investigate the us/them dynamic he establishes; he does not push readers to remember who and what they are as they evaluate who and what the people they read about are. He does not mandate embodiment. In fact, Baum’s advice (command?) to his readers is to do the exact opposite. At the end of his “About This Book” section, Baum provides a final directive to his readers:

> Nine separate stories is a lot to keep straight. Don’t worry if, for the first fifty pages or so, you can’t remember who’s who. These chapters were written to be enjoyed as individual stories. Everybody will fall into place eventually. In other
words, be a little bit New Orleanian about reading this book. Don’t stress over achieving anything. Just have a good time. It will all work out in the end. (xi)

There is no need, Baum seems to say to his audience, to respond to the information presented in these narratives; there is no need for change. There is no call to even think about, much less circumvent, any hierarchies. There is no call to oppose matrixes of oppression. There is no quest for the liberation of subjugated knowledge. Baum invites his readers to consume stories of trauma as a leisure activity. At the same time, he invites his audience to “be a little bit New Orleanian”—to insert themselves into his book’s content and become owners of it themselves—by relaxing and enjoying the story. As a New Orleanian whose world was so shattered by the storm, I deeply resent Baum’s choice to offer such an invitation. He invites outsiders to reap the rewards of New Orleane’s *laissez les bon temps rouler* attitude without also shouldering the risks that come with that attitude. It is as if he is inviting outsiders to dance on our waterlogged graves even though he knows—as they surely know themselves—that those graves will never hold their remains. Baum’s “About This Book” section not only subjugates local and regional knowledges, but subjugates our very lives.

*Nine Lives* is also similar to *Five Days* in that it was met with overwhelming positive response from mainstream American audiences. The second paperback edition’s front and back covers are cluttered with critical praise from reviews in major publications. Many of the nearly 50 reviews of *Nine Lives* that appeared in national newspapers and magazines highlight Baum’s use of multiple voices to weave together a singular tale. But New Orleanian academic Catherine Michna argues that this potentially powerful multiplicity of viewpoints “[unravels]” when it “[confronts] the figure of the white male author himself” who “exerts a powerful absent presence on each of the novel’s [sic] narratives” (“Hearing” 253). Because Baum fails to position and
situate himself, his attempt to circumvent hierarchies of knowledge actually works to reinforce them. As Catherine Michna explains, Baum’s liberatory goals and aesthetics

Caught between his desire to let the meaning of the book emerge from the stories themselves and his desire to shape the narratives to make an argument rooted in his own situated knowledges and geographies, Baum invents a fragile, paradoxical form of created non-fiction that exerts a continues claim on the ‘real’ by employing the techniques of fiction to erase the role of the interlocutor (himself) on the production of the narratives. Doing so allows the text to maintain the illusion of authorial objectivity and transcendence, only to ultimately push forward a white patriarchal view of the city. (“Hearing” 253-4)

Baum’s advocacy for a white patriarchal view is evidenced in his treatment of one of his characters in particular. This character is the same one that Baum uses to exemplify the “funny” nature of memory is. The Frank that is one of Baum’s nine local informants is none other than beleaguered former Orleans Parish Coroner Dr. Frank Minyard. Baum’s treatment of Minyard, like Fink’s treatment of the bigoted Dr. Thiele, is overarchingly sympathetic. In Baum’s descriptive hands, Minyard is a charismatic Jazz doctor, beloved by New Orleans’s residents. He is a maverick and renegade, a white gynecologist who bucks against 1960s racial etiquette to treat “colored women” (25), works to establish a methadone clinic at the parish prison after seeing an addict who relapsed while in jail among a “line of sad-looking Negro women” at church21 (37). The scene sets the stage for Minyard to take up the archetypal role of the White

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21 The scene in which Minyard sees the relapsed addict does not take place in just any church. It is set in St. Augustine Catholic Church, the oldest Black parish in the nation, which is located in Tremé, the oldest Black neighborhood in the United States. St. Augustine was the home parish of many notable New Orleanians of color, including civil rights activists Homer Plessy and A.P. Toureaud. Baum does not relate this information to his audience, and so it is possible that most of his readers are oblivious to the nuance St. Augustine’s history adds to the story. But as a reader who is aware of St. Augustine’s reputation as a center of Black culture and resistance in New Orleans, I find Baum’s cavalier treatment of Minyard’s relationship with the parish is awkward and bothersome.
Savior, which he does a short while later, when he meets the addict’s partner at a country club event. The partner, an unnamed Black man working as a bartender at the event, thanks Minyard who, he says, “gof [his old lady22] straightened out more in two months than I’d been able to in two years,” by paying for his drink. Later in the book, Baum presents Minyard as a type of Robin Hood coroner who officially classifies deaths of young people two years after the storm from conditions like mild cirrhosis or pulmonary stress as hurricane related because he believes that such a classification will help the deceased people’s heirs collect more money from FEMA or life-insurance companies. “These are my people,” Baum’s Minyard says as he fills out the paperwork necessary to classify deaths as storm related. “It’s the least I can do” (304). Reference to Minyard’s fraught relationship with New Orleans and its Black communities is almost entirely absent from *Nine Lives*. Like Dr. Thiele’s racism in *Five Days*, it is whitewashed.

Baum sets out to present a more holistic truth about New Orleans—a majority-Black city that, thanks to then-Mayor Ray Nagin’s 2006 speech, is, for many Americans, the quintessential “Chocolate City” and whose French moniker, *La Nouvelle-Orléans*, is notable feminine—but falls short because of his failure to recognize his own white, male gaze.

In the cases of both *Nine Lives* and *Five Days*, meticulous investigations of events—investigations that rely heavily on local and experiential sources of information—do not prioritize experiential knowledge. Instead, they draw from these testimonies to present a “distorted image of the city” (Michna, “Hearing” 257) and storm. Furthermore, because they follow journalistic models, neither Fink nor Baum situates themselves. Instead, these outsiders write about their consistently embodied insider subjects from their own disembodied standpoints. For these reasons, Fink’s and Baum’s books fail to embody authentiCity. *Five Days* and *Nine

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22 A regional term for a female significant other, “old lady” can refer to a wife or girlfriend, but not simply a casual fling.
*Lives* uphold the same systems of domination that deny and silence the authority of nondominant voices, subjugating them while empowering the voices and epistemologies of the dominant, disembodied authorial “I” and dominant, outsider audiences.
CHAPTER TWO:

AUTHENTICITY IN POETRY

The lack of authenticity in texts, like Fink’s and Baum’s, that follow journalistic tenets is in large part because of their genre. It is also reflective of some of the foundational principles of the earliest waves of literary trauma studies.

At its core, trauma is “an event in the subject’s life, defined by its intensity, by the subject’s incapacity to respond adequately to it and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the psychical organization” (Laplanche and Pontalis 465). Psychiatrist Lenore Terr notes that it is actually the way trauma can disrupt an individual’s mind that is most damaging. “Psychic trauma occurs,” Terr writes, “when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or a series of blows assaults the person from outside” (8). The traumatic trigger is so large, so powerful, that it disrupts the traumatized person’s understanding of self. At the same time, trauma, whether in its individual form (as experienced by, for example, many victims of sexual assault) or its communal manifestation (as experienced by, for example, many victims of natural disasters), is an enduring part of human existence and has often been at the center of literary expression. What are the Epic of Gilgamesh, the story of the rape of Dinah in the Old Testament, or Thucydides’ account of the plague in Athens if not attempts to recount and understand particular traumas? But it was not until the 1990s that scholars began to investigate and theorize trauma in literature. The work of one such scholar, Cathy Caruth, is especially noteworthy. Caruth is a foundational figure in literary trauma studies and her 1997 book, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History, helped to shape and drive work in the field. Caruth “is concerned principally with questions of reference and representation: how trauma becomes text” (Berger 577). Caruth explores “the complex ways that knowing and not
knowing are entangled in the language of trauma”—how wound becomes voice (Unclaimed Experience 3). Caruth’s key insight is that the experience of trauma disrupts memory and, through that disruption, upsets sense-making. As a result, the traumatic experience is “unclaimed.” In “Trauma and Experience,” Caruth explains that trauma is “an event whose force is marked by its lack of registration” (3). Immediate trauma remains unspoken because it is unintelligible—and unspeakable. Like other experience-based knowledges, knowledge of trauma is subjugated. At the same time, Caruth argues that trauma is also marked by the traumatized’s urge to understand and, importantly, speak the traumatic experience. This urge leads to continuous attempts to revisit and remember the trauma, to make sense of the very thing that shatters sense-making. The result is the traumatic narrative, which constructs a history of the traumatic moment. That history, like the “objective” truth excavated by a journalist, unfolds over time, eventually “[arising] where immediate understanding may not” (“Trauma and Experience” 11).

Joshua Pederson argues that the “takeaway” for thinkers like Caruth is that “trauma victims may be unable to verbally explain their own traumas” (336). Their experience-based knowledge—the very knowledge that makes them authoritative sources—renders them mute. I would argue that Caruth’s understanding of trauma in literature implies another key idea: that the traumatic narrative, a history of the trauma, “is never simply one’s own” because “that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (Unclaimed Experience 24). Traumatic narratives, even individual ones, are communal property. Sociologist Ron Eyerman also understands the memories of trauma that inform trauma narratives as communal property. Eyerman argues that the American system of chattel slavery, “not as an institution or even experience, but as a collective memory” (1) constitutes not only a trauma—that is a disturbance
experienced by an individual in response or relation to an event—but a cultural trauma. To be affected by a cultural trauma, one need not have individually experienced or possess independent memories of trauma; instead, trauma as cultural process directly affects all members of the group whose collective character is rooted in the emergence of the collective memory of shared trauma (Eyerman 1); the experience of trauma is related to identity. Thus, the collective memory of cultural trauma follows some of the same trends as group identity. The collective memory is re-interpreted by each generation of the group that shares it as its members work to reconcile their past trauma with their current condition. This, Eyerman argues, accounts for both the continued centrality of slavery to African American communal identity and the different ways Black people in the United States have remembered and represented slavery through the course of the nation’s history. Each successive generation of people whose ancestors were slaves modified the symbolic representation of slavery to meet their particular contexts; each generation has different perspectives on the past” as a result of their particular “emotional and temporal distance” and “altered circumstance and need” (Eyerman 33).

Eyerman’s understanding of how collective memory is cyclically forgotten, remembered, and re-presented by each successive generation is especially interesting in dialogue with New Orleans’s history and status as an outlier American city—that is, one that does not share the same cultural, social, or historical roots as the rest of the nation—is not only related to its unique geography or its historical association with multiple European colonial regimes. What Ned Sublette describes as New Orleans’s “apartness” is also the legacy of the city’s unique slave system. As Sublette explains:

New Orleans is an alternative American history all in itself. Different in everything, Louisiana had what amounted to three colonial eras in rapid
succession: French, Spanish, Anglo-American. Moreover, each colonial power that rule colonial Louisiana was associated not only with a different European language, but with a different slave regime. Each change of flag brought new laws and customs, causing black New Orleans to develop differently according to the possibilities afforded it during each of the colonial periods. (4)

Sublette’s explanation of the development of New Orleans’s collective identity as a continual process of response and adjustment to colonial powers mirrors Eyerman’s discussion of Black American collective identity as successive generations’ negotiations of their current needs and circumstances with the “primal scene” of slavery (33).

Also reminiscent of Eyerman’s concepts of collective and generational memory, as well as with his understanding of communal trauma as a catalyst for the development of a group identity (2-3) and repetition of trauma as a force that further refines group identity, is the unique way New Orleanians experience and remember the shared trauma of hurricanes and flooding. For six months of every year, during the Atlantic Hurricane Season, New Orleanians live on the brink of a state of emergency. Each successive generation of New Orleanians grows up hearing the stories of past storms: the sixteenth century storm which smashed conquistador Parfilo de Narvaez’s fleet and effectively ended European exploration of the mouth of the Mississippi for the until LaSalle’s voyages more than a century and half later; the eighteenth century storm which nearly destroyed the glorified shantytown that was New Orleans at the time; Betsey and Camille in 1965 and ’69, respectively.23 Even storms that did not actually hit the city, near misses like Andrew, Georges, Ivan, and Rita, are incorporated into New Orleanians’ collective memory of hurricanes. New Orleanians’ understanding of their identity as a people is

23 For more on the history of hurricanes in Louisiana, including a chronological list of each recorded storm and detailed information about the aftereffects of some of the most important storms, see David Roth’s National Weather Service report “Louisiana Hurricane History.”
inextricably linked to both African-American consciousness and the cyclical repetition of disaster. New Orleanians of all races, like Black Americans in general, are simultaneously linked and defined by their sharing of a collective memory of communal trauma.

While Eyerman’s work seems relevant the identities that shaped Katrina narratives, Irene Kacandes’ discussion of the communal nature of trauma narratives is related to the crafting of those narratives. Kacandes discusses shared trauma in the context of Holocaust literature, which presents narratives of trauma that are “multiply mediated” as they are crafted into texts (Kacandes and Hirsch 12). Kacandes argues that trauma narratives are the result of the transformation of traumatic systems, which upset sense-making, into “narrative memory,” the ability to make sense out of experience (“Testimony” 91). The testimony or “Talk” of traumatic experience is crucial to this transformation. That “Talk” takes place in a communicative circuit the components of which—an enunciator (victim/witness/narrator), a story (the narrative of the traumatic event and its consequences), and an enabler for that story (analyst/cowitness/reader)—are completely enmeshed and interdependent. (95)

It is the “completely enmeshed and interdependent” nature of this communicative circuit that allows for the creation of narrative memory and the production of literary trauma narratives. The resulting narratives, even when their content is limited to the experience of “enunciator,” are birthed through a process that necessitates an “enabler.” The “enabler” is also a creator of the narrative, for “without a witness with whom to construct the story, the trauma will continue to surface as symptom-waiting-to-be-narrated” (Kacandes, “Testimony” 94, emphasis added). The enabler has not experienced the trauma and, as such, is not the trauma’s original witness. Instead, the enabler gains access to the experience through the act of witnessing/experiencing the
enunciator’s story; the enabler gains both access to experience and authority over the narrative of experience through the act of cowitnessing.

Like Eyerman, who links collective memory with group identity as well as both inter- and intra-generational exchange, Kacandes highlights the social nature of the production of narratives of trauma. This sociality necessitates responsiveness; for communicative circuits to successfully transform traumatic experience into narrative memory, all parties (witnesses, cowitnesses) must listen and react to one another. It is this responsiveness that ensures that all parties—even if they are, in terms of lived experience, outsiders—are situated as insiders. This responsiveness-based situatedness is also what makes Kacandes’s concept of (co)witnessing one that resonates with authentiCity. Similarly, Eyerman’s concept of collective memory resonates with authentiCity in that it is rooted in the particular experiences of a marginalized group whose members are holders of subjugated knowledges.

Kacandes’s concept of (co)witnessing trauma, which mandates responsiveness and situatedness and, as a result, aligns with authentiCity, does not align with Fink’s or Baum’s outsider narratives of Katrina. Nor does Eyerman’s concept of trauma as collective memory, which aligns with authentiCity in that its core is historical experience of a particular situated group. The (co)witnessing of trauma and the concept of collective memory do, however, align with a different model of outsider-written Katrina literature. This model of outsider-written Katrina literature, which I argue is much more successful than the journalism-based narratives examined above at achieving authentiCity, is exemplified by Patricia Smith’s 2008 book, Blood Dazzler. The collection of more than 50 poems tracks Hurricane Katrina from her roots as an area of low pressure over the Bahamas to a category 5 storm and beyond, to a communal
memory. The collection began with a story. As Smith explains in an interview that appeared in a 2009 issue of *Poets & Writers* magazine:

> During Katrina, the story that kept nudging at me, the one that grew increasingly insistent until I had no choice but to write, was the story about the 34 nursing home residents abandoned and left to die as the water rose to swallow them. In 34 small stanzas, I wanted to rewind the clock, give those elders a bit of their voices back so they’d have a chance to tell us who they were. I write quite often in persona, so I was able to get out of the way and let the drama unfold again, with the voices of those who were lost guiding the story. This poem, “34,” led to the rest of *Blood Dazzler*. (qtd in Kaczmarek 20)

Like Fink, Smith, a native Chicagoan who did not personally experience the storm, does not bring her own experiential knowledge to her narrative. Instead, like Fink, Smith’s writing accesses local and regional knowledges by her incorporation of the voices of the holders of those knowledges. Her collection of poems is shaped by its multivocality. Some of the voices included are similar to the “particularly valuable” verifiable sources Fink uses: words from official National Hurricane Center reports, e-mails between government officials, and mainstream news stories. Smith also incorporates and prioritizes the kinds of nonverifiable, experiential, local voices that Fink tends to ignore or question and that Baum subsumes: voices rooted in their insider points of view. Those voices include that of the city itself, Katrina and other major storms like Betsy and Camille, a dog named Luther B, and the voice of voodoo as well as the voices of people who survived the storm and the resulting flood and people who perished. But where Fink and Baum incorporate experiential voices into a narrative that, on the whole, does not align with locals’ perceptions of their experience of the storm (as evidenced by locals’ negative reactions to
her book), Smith’s collection of poems creates a narrative (or set of narratives) that more closely align with authenticity. That alignment is, I argue, largely the result of Smith’s particular use of multivocality. This use not only incorporates and prioritizes the partial perspectives of diverse subjugated knowledges but, through continually resituating and recontextualizing those multiple voices and standpoints as well as the standpoint of the reader, circumvents hierarchies of knowledge that present the disembodied and unmarked as a universal truth. Furthermore, the fact that the multiple voices in the poems are linked by their engagement with and inside of New Orleans pushes works to ensure that audience members consider their own connection to or distance from the city as they read; Smith’s poems insist on place-based embodiment.

Smith’s explanation that her expertise with writing persona poems allowed her to “get out of the way and let the drama unfold again” (emphasis added) is worthy of note as it helps to illustrate a central aspect of the model of Katrina literature Smith’s work exemplifies: the understanding of the experience of trauma as a breaking of temporality. Trauma initiates, in the lives of those that experience it, a continuous quest for reenactment and re-experiencing—attempting to revisit the site and the moment in order to understand it and reincorporate it into an understanding of the self. It is this quest for understanding the repeated experience and rediscovery that binds the ego of the traumatized with the source of trauma. Alain Badiou describes a similar type of connection between the ego and what the ego experiences in *Being and Event*. For Badiou, the “event” is a rupture in being; like trauma, it upsets systems of sense-making. At the same time, the event, as Badiou understands it, is the catalyst which drives a person to reflect back on themselves—in what he terms an “interpretative intervention” (181); the rupture set in motion by the event is what leads a person to transcend the position of the object and take up the position of the subject. Peter Dews puts it another way when he writes that “the
event emerges along with the subject who recognizes it, or who nominates it as an event” (emphasis in original). Furthermore, just as the subject emerges as a subject through the process of recognizing the event it experiences, the event emerges as an event through the process of being recognized; being and event are simultaneously separate and inseparable. Or, in other words, “the event has no objective existence; since it exhibits a distinctly reflexive structure, it only occurs through... an ‘interpretive intervention’” (Dews). Because Badiou sees being and event as in a dialogic relationship to one another, he emphasizes the importance of “fidelity.” As Badiou uses it, though, there is no general fidelity. Instead, “fidelity is the apparatus which separates out, within the set of presented multiples, those which depend upon an event” (232).

Badiou further explains that

a fidelity is always particular, insofar as it depends on an event. There is no general faithful disposition. Fidelity must not be understood in any way as a capacity, a subjective quality, or a virtue. Fidelity is a situated operation which depends on the examination of situations. Fidelity is a functional relation to the event. (233)

If we apply Badiou’s understanding of the connection between the being and the event—a connection facilitated by what he calls fidelity—to trauma narratives, we see that the trauma (event) is defined not by external forces, but by the traumatized subject’s re-presentation of it. Furthermore, that re-presentation is facilitated by (or, perhaps, even dependent on) fidelity, or a commitment to the experiential truth that is in the process of being disclosed.

Badiou’s fidelity is similar to authentiCity. Both fidelity, a situated operation that simultaneously emerges from and shapes interpretation of an event, and authentiCity, a positionality that prioritizes experiential knowledges, center the truth as presented by those who
experience it and empower experiential voices. Smith’s persona poems, in which her authorial persona merges with the traumatized subject, speaking from its standpoint, are an exercise in fidelity. The reader grows to understand the situatedness of each poem’s speaker(s) as the speakers’ voice emerges from the event the poem recounts. Smith’s use of multivocality is, in this sense, a linking of form and function. As a result, her narratives, even though they are written by an outsider author, not only incorporate particular knowledges (as Fink’s and Baum’s do), but also embody the standpoints of those particular knowledges (as Fink’s and Baum’s do not). This multivocality-driven embodiment is at the core of Blood Dazzler’s authenticity.

Smith’s use of multivocality also aligns with what Catherine Michna terms “second-line literary aesthetics” (“Hearing” 13-15). Michna’s term references a deeply-rooted New Orleanian cultural tradition, the second-line parade. Unlike the first or main line of a parade (the actual members of the band, social club, or other permit-holding group putting on the parade), the second line consists of audience members who follow and dance along with the organized parade. Second liners are both watchers and participants; they consume and shape the show in an intricate but unscripted system of vocal and physical call and response. Or, to describe a second line in Kacandes’s terms, the parade is a communicative circuit. The first line acts as the witness who shares the story (the music and dance) with the second liners who, as they play accompanying music and dance along, become cowitnesses, moving from the position of audience to that of performer and continuing the story. Importantly, in contemporary New Orleans, the second line can—and often does—exist without an official first line; community members build the parade together through organized though unscripted physical and musical

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24 For an in-depth investigation of second lining’s rich history, especially its connection to West African cultures and religious traditions, as well as a discussion of the importance of second lining in post-Katrina New Orleans, see Richard Brent Turner’s Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans. For a detailed discussion of the history of second-line culture and images and sounds from actual second-lines, see the 2005 documentary Make it Funky!.
response. Furthermore, even when the official first line is present—as is the case, for example, in wedding second lines and at conventions, where hired musicians and revelers lead paraders through the streets—the first line is obligated to respond to the second line; if the people don’t pull out their handkerchiefs, raise their voices, and pick up their feet, the parade is a failure. In the second-line literary model, just as in actual second-line parades, no individual acts as the leader or head of the narrative. Instead, multiple voices contribute and interact, in the end creating a multilayered narrative that creates space for multiple voices, even (and perhaps especially) when they conflict with one another or stand in opposition to systems of dominance (that is, the main line). No single partial perspective is presented as representative of a universal master-narrative; instead, it is the interplay between the individual particular narratives that begins to highlight points of connection and universality. The end result is not a master-narrative, but an interrelated set of narratives that are at once fragmented and whole. Additionally, because second-line literary aesthetics not only reflect a New Orleanian cultural tradition but also enact them, or, in Badiou’s terms, exhibit fidelity to them, second-line literary aesthetics work to ensure that New Orleans’s local, particular knowledges are not subjugated in the text.

“34,” the poem which was the catalyst for Blood Dazzler, is a prime example of how second-line literary aesthetics play themselves out in Patricia Smith’s collection of poems. The poem is preceded by an epigraph taken directly from a United Press International report:

*ST. BERNARD PARISH, LA., Sept. 7 (UPI)—Thirty-four bodies were found drowned in a nursing home where people did not evacuate. More than half of the residents of St. Rita’s Nursing Home, 20 miles southeast from downtown New Orleans, died August 29 when floodwaters from hurricane Katrina reached the home’s roof.* (50, italics in original)
The epigraph is similar to the “particularly valuable” sources Fink used (xvii)—sources that are rooted in privileged, factual knowledges—but Smith does not use the knowledge reflected in the epigraph to (in)validate any other knowledge. Instead, the journalistic information included in the epigraph acts as the main or first line of the parade. It is the official, sanctioned standpoint. But it is not the only standpoint; it is immediately followed by the second line: the poem’s body.

That body is composed of thirty-four short stanzas, each presented through the voice of a different person who died at St. Rita’s. The voices represented are not only multiple, but also diverse. There is speaker five, who resents her children’s inattention and laments that it “Gets harder to remember / how my womb folded because of them, / how all of me lumbered with their foolish weight” (30-32). Speaker twenty-nine, another woman, declares her sex and recalls maternity in a different tone: “I had the rumble hips, I tell ya. / I was sling-back and press curl / And big titties with necessary milk” (167-9). Speaker thirty, who relates having lost the sense of sight in a war (176), seems to be male. Most of the others are unsexed and, with the exception of speaker nineteen, Earline (108), unnamed. They speak in different dialects and with different vocabularies. Speaker 15, who says that “The walls are slithering with Bayou spit, / tears, / the badness that muddies rivers” (89-91), sounds educated while speaker 16, who “ain’t scared of no wet, no wave” (97) sounds less so. One, speaker eighteen, is silent. Smith also provides details of characterization and personal histories as she channels many of her speakers. Speaker twenty, for example, is addicted to pain killers and craves more of them: “I want the man with my needles. / I want that sting” (117-8).

The thirty-four stanzas that make up the poem’s second line do not oppose or debunk the information presented in the epigraph. Instead, they complicate it, filling in details that help the reader access not only what happened (thirty-four drowned bodies were found), but what the
experience might have been like for those who drowned. Together, the thirty-four individual stanzas present a single chronology of the events at St. Rita’s. Speakers 1-5 present information about what their lives were like “Before the rain stung like silver” (15) while speaker six’s statement that there are “Clumps of earth in the rising and me / too weathered to birth a howl” (36-7) moves the poem’s plot forward to the moment when the flooding begins. Speaker eight’s words help the reader to understand that some of the residents at St. Rita were anticipating what became reality; that when they left the home, it would be not as living people but as bodies:

When help comes,

It will be young men smelling like cigarettes and Chevys,

Muscled boys with autumn breath and steel baskets

Just the right size for our souls. (52-5)

Speaker eleven’s words relate the panic and yearning for family some residents must have felt while the water rose around them: “Daughter, son, I am bursting with this. / I am straining to celebrate the links of blood. / I am wide aloud craving something shaped like you” (76-8).

Speaker thirteen’s stanza alerts the reader to a fact, not mentioned in the journalistic report quoted in the epigraph; through speaker thirteen, Smith excavates an important truth previously left uncovered: that St. Rita’s employees only left their wards after the flooding began. As speaker thirteen explains, some of the doomed residents—those who were lucid, but physically limited—must have been aware when their guardians were abandoning them:

We are stunned on our scabbed backs.

There is the sound of whispered splashing,

And then this:
Through the chronological organization of multiple experiential voices, the event emerges as the poem’s speakers recognize it as one.

The stanzas of “34” do not merely add separate details to create the poem’s composite narrative or move it forward. Like the audience-members-cum-participants at an actual second line, they interact with one another. If the epigraph is the call, the body paragraphs are not only responses to it; they are also their own calls and responses to one another. Accordingly, words and images from one stanza are often echoed in another. At the same time, mirrored words or images carry, through the standpoints of different characters, different meanings. Speaker two seems to welcome “The Reaper” who “[blesses]” them “with gray fragrance and awkward new skin” (9-10), viewing the stereotypically threatening figure as a companion as death approaches. Speaker twenty, on the other hand, is not comforted by the Reaper’s company:

I wanna cheat the Reaper.

I want somebody’s hand. (122-3)

Religious references appear in numerous stanzas, but reflect different models of faith. One speaker sees the storm as the will of God:

I believe Jesus is hugely who He says He is:

The crook of an arm,

a shadow threatening my hair.

a hellish glare beneath the moonwash,

the slapping storm that wakes me,

the washing clean. (2-7)
Another has lost faith, having “forgotten how to pray” because, they explain, “I cannot find my knees” (114-6). Another pleads with their deity:

   God, we need your glitter, you know,
   those wacky miracles
   you do
   for no reason at all? (146-9)

Another religious reference, speaker twenty-one’s single-line stanza, “Hallowed be thy name” (125, italics in original), acts as a call in and of itself. That call is taken up by speaker twenty-two, whose stanza begins “Hollow be our names” (127, italics in original).

Through the interaction of her multiple voices, each presenting their own experience-based knowledges, Smith is able to present a key aspect of the events at St. Rita’s that is absent from the journalistic epigraph: blame. This key issue is one that both Fink’s and Baum’s narratives fail to address. Ironically, Fink’s silence on the issue of blame is related to her journalistic objectivity; as a journalist, her “first obligation is to the truth,” which she must present through verification of sources that are both “comprehensive and proportional” (Pew Research Center). Journalists can only place blame if they can provide evidence that such a placement is merited. But, in the case of the events at St. Rita’s—and, in fact, in the context of the complex disaster that was Katrina as a whole—verifiable evidence is sorely lacking. The only people who can truly know what happened at St. Rita’s are the victims, silenced by death, and the people accused of leaving them to die; there is no “objective” third party. And, even if there were another source for verifiable information about what happened at St. Rita’s, placing blame on the nursing home attendants who left patients to die would not be enough; they were

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25 For an interesting discussion of the issue of blame as it relates to what people chose to call the hurricane that hit New Orleans on August 29, 2005, see Thomas Beller’s essay “Don’t Call it Katrina,” which was published online by The New Yorker on May 29, 2015.
only the last to abandon the home’s thirty-four residents. As the poem’s speakers plainly state, they were abandoned by their families (27-34, 75-8), their communities (14-8), young people (42-8), their government (51-8, 74), their god (1-7, 68, 160), and the city (135-44). Smith, through the words of speaker seventeen, also implies that St. Rita’s residents were abandoned by the reader(s):

Wait with me.
Watch me sleep in this room
that looks so much like night.
I’m gon’ wake up, I swear it,
to some kind of sun. (100-5)

Speaker seventeen pleads with the audience, begging us to stay. But, as we read on, we abandon her. And Smith gives the audience time to pause, to let our culpability sink in; speaker eighteen, whose stanza is still marked with a number and takes up as much space on the page as the stanza that preceded it, is silent. Two stanzas on, the reader is again asked to join the poem’s speakers, to stay and offer solace, when speaker twenty explains that “I want somebody’s hand” (123), and again, to finish the poem, the reader must leave the imploring speaker behind.

Ginny Kaczmarek sees Smith’s engagement with the question of “Who is to blame... when the weakest among us are left to such a fate?” (20) as related to the words heard and re-told by speaker 13: “leave them.” With these words, “Smith conveys an extremely vulnerable human being’s stunned understanding that she—and her fellow residents—have been left to drown by those responsible for their care” (20). Kaczmarek goes on to explain that the words “leave them” are taken up by other speakers in the poem, becoming a kind of refrain on its own. Speaker 27’s
single-line stanza elevates those words to the level of prayer: “And this scripture: Leave them.” (158). As Kaczmarek elaborates,

Each time “leave them” appears, it is attributed slightly differently: as an actual human voice, as part of “scripture,” and as if the “underearth” itself whispers its desire. These shades of meaning suggest that the elders were abandoned not only by their caretakers at the nursing home but also by everything they had believed and trusted: their families, their communities, their religions, even the Earth itself. (20, italics in original)

By the end of the communal narrative that is the product of the interactions between the poem’s thirty-four speakers, the reader understands that there is no singular, objective answer to the question of who is to blame. Instead, through the lenses of particular, experiential knowledges, the reader learns that multiple parties are culpable. And, because the audience, as we move read through the poem, leave each speaker behind (much as we leave speakers seventeen and twenty even as they beg for companionship) the reader comes to understand that they, too, are responsible; we are all to blame.

The refrain of “leave them” and the engagement with the question of who is to blame in “34” has an additional consequence: it pushes the reader to situate and position themselves. As the repeated refrain works to construct a “them”—the people who perished at St. Rita’s—it also works to construct an implied “us.” Thus, Smith subtly pushes the reader into the narrative. But the reader is not empowered to enter the narrative in a disembodied position; the god trick is forbidden. Instead, the reader is aligned with the forces implicated in leaving them. To consume the narrative(s) presented in the poem, the reader must participate, and the only participatory position available is one that holds blame.
Smith does not force her readers to shoulder blame on their own. Just as the individual stanzas in “34” incorporate multiple situated standpoints that feed off of and build on one another, each of the poems in Blood Dazzler relates to the others, working together as “choruses of experience” and “allowing for greater understanding of those struggling to break free of silence” (Kaczmarek). And so, a person who reads the poems in Blood Dazzler in the order in which they are placed in the book will reach “34,” a poem in which the reader is pushed into a position that carries guilt, only after having read numerous other poems in which numerous other parties are indicted. In the first four poems of the collection, for example, Hurricane Katrina herself claims responsibility for the destruction she leaves in her wake. In these poems, which are narrated by the storm, Smith presents Katrina as an egotistical diva with a chip on her shoulder; she’s a bitch whose very birth is rooted in her feelings of inadequacy:

A muted thread of gray light, hovering ocean,
becomes throat, pulls in wriggle, anemone, kelp,
widens with the want of it. I become
a mouth, thrashing hair, an overdone eye. How dare
the water belittle my thirst, treat me as just
another
small
disturbance. (“5 p.m., Tuesday, August 23, 2005” 1-8)

But even Katrina’s taking up of responsibility for her destructive handiwork is complicated by the inclusion of other standpoints in the poems that she narrates. Each poem, like “34,” begins with an epigraph drawn from privileged knowledge sources (The National Hurricane Center, for example). Like their counterpart in “34,” these epigraphs act as the main
line of the parade, the call. The epigraphs are the catalysts for the poems’ bodies just as the poems’ bodies hold the content that the epigraphs rely on. Just as in Badiou’s theorization that “the event emerges along with the subject who recognizes it, or who nominates it as an event” (Dews), resulting in an inseparable linking between the being and event, the epigraph and the poems’ bodies are attached. In the opening poems, where Katrina speaks her own birth, the interplay between the epigraph and the poems’ bodies prevents the reader from completely vilifying the storm. She is not only personified; she is granted humanity. Smith’s humanizing of Katrina is also a way of granting her subjectivity; Katrina emerges as a being as she nominates herself as an event. In addition to reflecting second-line literary aesthetics where the call (epigraph) and response (body) merge to create the parade (poem), Katrina’s subjectivity ties into the question of blame. That question is taken up in the poem that follows “5p.m.,” “11a.m., Wednesday, August 24, 2005.”

The epigraph to “11a.m., Wednesday, August 24, 2005,” drawn from a National Hurricane Center report, describes the moment when what was tropical depression twelve became tropical storm Katrina. In the poem’s body, Katrina experiences her naming as an awakening of her destructive capabilities.

The difference in a given name. What the calling,
the hard K, does to the steel of me,
how suddenly and surely it grants me
pulse, petulance. Now I can do

my own choking… (1-5)
It is “that crisp, bladed noun” (9) of a name that holds malice and threat, not the bearer of the name. But Katrina does not decide her own name; it is “given” (1). It is “the calling” that awakens “the steel of [her]” and empowers her to “do/ [her] own choking” (1-5). And it is humans who have given Katrina her name and done the calling. Smith forces her readers to confront the hubris of naming hurricanes as a method of watching and attempting to control their destruction. But, because Smith, through Katrina’s voice, roots the storm’s destructive potential in her human-given name, she implicates humans in the destruction. She forces her reader to shoulder blame.

In “5 p.m., Thursday, August 25, 2005,” the storm’s threat is similarly attached not to Katrina as an entity, but to her eye, which “takes in so much— / what it craves, what I [Katrina] never hoped to see” (1-2). It is Katrina’s eye that seeks to “unravel the world for no reason at all, except that it // hungers” (6-7). Like the oppressive dominant gaze (or the imposition of a master narrative in *Five Days or Nine Lives*), Katrina’s eye controls the world through which it moves, subjugating Katrina. The poem ends on a note of defeat, with Katrina simply dragged along for the eye’s ride:

The eye

pushes my rumbling bulk forward,

urges me to see

what it sees. (13-16)

Katrina’s subjugation to the power of her own “solo swallowing eye” (22, “8a.m. Sunday, August 28, 2005,”) is, like the “leave them” of “34,” a recurrent theme in the collection. An entire poem, “She Sees What It Sees,” is centered on it.
As evidenced by the poem’s epigraph, “She Sees What It Sees” takes place in the moment when “The eye of Hurricane Katrina passes over New Orleans” (italics in original). The poem’s sixteen free-verse lines appear as a single stanza, which contributes to the poem’s fast pace. Like the quick-moving water narrator-Katrina describes as a “baptism that rushed through the ward” (2) after “the levees crackled” (1), the lines of “She Sees What it Sees” come as a surge of words and images in quick succession. We see, through Katrina’s witnessing of her own eye’s vision, the water “blasting the boasts from storefronts” (3) and “withering the strength of stoops” (5) as well as “Skirts shamelessly hefted, / pants legs ripped away, babies balanced in the air” (7-8). We also see the storm’s victims rage back at the storm with “flurries of ha ha I’ll be damned” (9) and their embrace of the water which “sears through them” (11) and “reveals a savior’s face” (12). Katrina brings with her the destruction from above, like a disembodied god, but, because she is embodied as a storm, does not offer a nonresponsive, universal gaze. Instead, Katrina’s gaze is situated and particular. The poem’s title is important in maintaining Katrina’s embodiment; the title alerts the reader that the gaze presented is that of the storm’s eye, but that it is mediated through the character of Katrina. Katrina acts as the witness, relaying what she sees to the reader, who becomes a cowitness. And so, it is Katrina’s embodiment—her particular standpoint—that allows the reader see the event presented in the poem. Katrina’s gaze shapes the reader’s.

The importance of vision and gazes—and, especially, how the gazes of others can shape our experiences—is also evidenced in other ways. With “Up on the Roof,” for example, Smith presents a poem that addresses media coverage of the storm’s devastation. The poem seems to have been inspired by one of the many images of storm victims who, in the days immediately following the deluge, were stranded on rooftops. The poem, made up of seven two-line stanzas,
has no epigraph for context. Instead, through her use of direct address, Smith pushes the reader to position themselves inside the poem: “Up on the roof, stumbling slickstep, you wave all your sheets and your blouses,” (1, emphasis added). But unlike Baum’s invitation to his outsider readers to “be a little bit New Orleanian” by “just [having] a good time” (xi) as they read about the trauma of others, Smith’s forced-positioning of her audience through direct address disallows disembodied reading. To consume the poem, Smith’s readers must situate themselves as insiders. They must experience the moment conjured on the page. Thus, readers cannot only observe someone else experience the worry and resignation and impatience that accompanied waiting for rescue; they is thrust into experiencing it themselves. The question of why rescue took so long is not asked from a distance, but from the self: “what you ask on the morning: / When are they coming to save us? Cause sinking is all that you’re feeling” (2-3, italics in original, boldface added for emphasis).

After pushing the reader into the position of the traumatized—into the inside—Smith prompts the reader to think about the experience of being viewed from the outside. The reader is confronted with thinking about, and, for an instant at least, feeling what it was like to be the object of the dominant gaze in the moment of trauma as “Cameras obsess with your chaos” (7). The reader is forced to bear the dominant gaze, to be assaulted by it:

... Now think how America sees you:

Gold in your molars and earlobes. Your naps knotted, craving a brushing.

You clutch your babies regardless, keep roaring your spite to where God is.

Breast pushes hard past your buttons. Then mud cracks its script on your forearm, each word a misspelled agenda... (7-11)
Smith’s poem recalls not only the event of the storm, but also the days, weeks, and months after, when images of suffering permeated mainstream media. Many of the descriptions Smith includes in “Up on the Roof” recall photographs and video footage Americans will remember having seen in major publications and news broadcasts; the archetypal depictions of the storm. Those images are integral parts of many Americans’ conceptualization of Katrina. As Diane Negra explains in Old and New Media after Katrina, the storm “remains a cultural event strikingly difficult to access independent of its media” (5). In fact, “if your primary source of information about Katrina was media, then your memories of Katrina… also were shaped by the media—television, news, documentary film, and fictional stories” (Cook xiii). But the media depictions are not neutral; they reflect the dominant standpoint:

Representations of Hurricane Katrina cannot be read outside of a neoliberal context marked by ‘New Economy’ market fundamentalism, state-supported assaults on the environment, intense anti-immigration rhetoric in a nation that still celebrates itself as a global beacon of hope for the downtrodden, the withering role of state care for the vulnerable, and various other perversions of democracy that have flourished in recent years. (Negra 1)

Negra goes on to explain that “Hurricane Katrina is positioned at the intersection of numerous early-twenty-first-century crisis narratives centralizing contemporary uncertainties about race, class, region, government, and public safety” (1). In other words, the event of Katrina both affects and is affected by power dynamics Collins might call “[matrices] of domination.”

An important aspect of those power dynamics is that, in the context of consumption of Katrina media, they play themselves out in terms of the privilege of distance and disconnection. Bernie Cook explains that “[t]elevision and new media provided a sort of connection to the
events in New Orleans, but both television news and new media technology also structured
distance and disconnection” (xiv). Outsider audiences were able to watch what was happening on
the Gulf Coast with interest and curiosity, but without taking up any personal risk; none of the
coverage was about them. They were not the gaze’s focus. “If you were far removed from New
Orleans, watching events on a 24-hour cable news channel, you likely remember Katrina as
disturbing, perhaps fascinating” (Cook xiii). But insider audiences—audiences whose
experiential knowledges were subjugated in mainstream media discourse—could not access the
privilege that enabled distance and disconnection. Even as they acted as gazers by consuming
media images, they remained aligned with the object of the gaze—the consumed. In such cases,
“lived connection to New Orleans worked against this structured distance, causing displeasure
and frustration” (xiv). For New Orleanian insiders who viewed and consumed mainstream media
about the city and the storm, the “experience of Katrina involved negotiation and struggle with
dominant media accounts.” Their “memories of Katrina are certainly shaped by television news
coverage, but also by a sense of the problems and absences in that coverage” (xiv-xv). It is the
problematic absence of information about the object of the gaze’s opinion (that is, the opinion of
the trauma victim whose rescue is filmed or photographed) that Smith, in “Up on the Roof,”
excavates and pushes into presence. The poem is an intervention in the erasure and subjugation
of local knowledges. Furthermore, because Smith simultaneously pushes the reader into the
position of object of the gaze with her use of the second person and allows the object of the gaze
to take up once again the position of the subject, she ensures that dominant audiences cannot
impose their own point of view; they cannot subjugate because they are placed in the position of
the subjugated. The poem’s penultimate line cements the imposed shift from outsider to insider,
from potential subjugator to subjugated: “Some people think that you’re crazy” (13). You (the
reader) are perceived insane by outside, dominant onlookers. Foucault directly references “crazy” people’s knowledges in his theorization of subjugated knowledges, presenting “the psychiatric patient” first in his list of archetypal “directly disqualified knowledges” (82).

Additionally, by positioning even outsider readers as the subjugated, Smith works to resist the dominant media gaze. The same type of people who both consumed and supported the dominant media gaze that subjugated local knowledges and people become, by the poem’s end, the proxy holders of subjugated local knowledges; they can no longer support the dominant gaze.

While poems like “Up on the Roof” resist the dominant media gaze, others in Blood Dazzler resist what Lloyd Pratt argues is a “tendency to ‘historicize’ the storm” in a way that “effectively [neutralizes] the collective outrage expressed worldwide immediately following the collapse of [a] major urban culture” (251). As Pratt explains, audiences “faced with the choice of reading the situation in New Orleans as either an exception or an example” fall victim to “compassion fatigue”—a “backlash of indifference and hostility” to Katrina narratives and their writers—that seems to be a logical outgrowth of the “structured distance” Cook discusses (xiv). Audiences, challenged by narratives that do not align with the exception/example model or who are completely distanced and disconnected from the narratives, bow out of the conversation, choosing instead to ignore the often-challenging, sometimes conflicting experiences shared by those who experienced Katrina. In so doing, such audiences deny writers of Katrina narratives their authority and/or authorial status; they silence those who experienced Katrina by refusing to listen.

One poem that resists this denial of experience-based knowledges is Smith’s “Prologue—And Then She Owns You.” This poem does not directly reference Katrina. Instead, it is a portrait of New Orleans. The New Orleans Smith describes in “Prologue” as a place of “stupid beauty”
(4) that is simultaneously revolting and enticing. “It’s shattered beads, stomped flowers, vomit” (3) with swerving “brick hips” (29). As Smith writes it, the city is a woman who “[woos] you” (32). By beginning her Katrina narrative not with the storm, but with the world affected by the storm, Smith allows—or, perhaps, forces—her readers to view the storm as more than an exemplary or exceptional event; she resists distance and compassion fatigue. That resistance is also possible because of Smith’s use of second person. As in “Up on the Roof,” in “Prologue,” it is the generic you that comes to the forefront. This generic you not only invites the reader into the poem, but demands that the reader participate. The “you” that could be anyone becomes “you, the reader”—it becomes each reader’s individualized “I.” From the first two lines (“This is not morning. There is a nastiness / slowing your shoes, something you shouldn’t step in” emphasis added) on, the reader is placed inside the poem’s setting and plot, becoming a character in the poem’s action.

But Smith’s constructed reader/character is positioned as an outsider—a visitor to the city. Smith makes this evident long before the poem’s ninth stanza, in which New Orleans’s particular “kind of romance” (33) “tells you Leave your life. Pack your little suitcase” (35, italics in original), by her allusions to famous aspects of the city’s tourist economy. “Shattered beads” (3) and “necklaces raining” (20) evoke images of Mardi Gras and Bourbon Street. There are also references to the darker side of the city’s service industry: “the brash, boozed warbling of bums with neon crowns” (19) and the city’s “whiskey / swelter” (7-8). Such references are similar to those found in Eve Ensler’s “Welcome to the Wetlands,” the centerpiece of the opening monologue of the 2008 V to the Tenth production of The Vagina Monologues. In “Welcome to the Wetlands,” Ensler connects America’s treatment of New Orleans to the treatment of women in patriarchal systems: “New Orleans,” Ensler explains, “is the vagina of America.” Ensler goes
on to address the tendency to celebrate New Orleans through hypersexualization, only to
denigrate the city for its hypersexuality. “We call her sultry and sexy when we crave her,” Ensler
writes, “but after when we want to demean and dismiss her, we call her swampy and soiled.”

But there is an important difference between Smith’s “Prologue,” which, like the rest of
*Blood Dazzler*, aligns with an authenticity positionality, and Ensler’s “Welcome to the
Wetlands,” which doesn’t. That difference has to do with situatedness. Smith’s poem presents an
*embodied* outsider standpoint. Because that standpoint is situated, it is not presented as a master
narrative. In Ensler’s piece, on the other hand, the writer’s constructed “we”—a group that seems
to be aligned not with people who call New Orleans home, but Americans at large—is never
embodied or situated. It is thrust into the position of the dominant, all-seeing gaze. Ensler plays
the god trick and makes her disembodied “we” God. Accordingly, the *we* is the only player in the
poem with agency; the *we* shapes the city’s identity. When *we* are “jealous of her power and
embarrassed by our awe, we *make* her a whore” (emphasis added). Ensler’s “we” literally
consumes the city; “we love her fishy taste, we love to eat her.” And, at the monologue’s closing,
Ensler’s “we” is granted total authority and authorship over the city: “we change her story.”

But in Smith’s “Prologue,” the city is not only acted upon; it is also an actor. At first,
Smith’s New Orleans is weak and seems to be victimized. “Each day she wavers, not knowing
how long she / can stomach the introduction of needles” (17-18). But the city finds a self-driven
strength. “She tries on her voice” (21). That voice is bolstered by the same seedy, negative forces
that appear in Ensler’s monologue. It “sounds like cigarettes / pubic sweat, brown spittle lining a
sax bell / the broken heel on a drag queen’s scarlet slings” (17-19). But, as Smith writes it, those
negative forces are part of the city’s growing power. They add to the city’s appeal and help to
lure the reader in. It’s “your kind of singing” (20).
This singing, and the sensual romance it breeds, is powerful. It “dims the worth of soldiers, / bends and breaks the back, sips manna from the muscle” (29-30). It is what lets the city “touch that raw space / between cock and calm” (33-34) and leads the reader to beg for more—to “let her pen letters addressed to your asking” (35). By the end of Smith’s “Prologue,” “You s-s-stutter” (26) and beg “New Orleans’s, p-please. Don’t” (36, italics in original). The reader is not invited to “change [the] story,” as he or she is at the end of Ensler’s monologue. Nor is the reader urged, as in the “About this Book” section of Baum’s Nine Lives, to relax and “have a good time” (xi). Instead, Smith’s prologue’s penultimate line marks the reader’s submission to the city: “Gently, she leads you out into the darkness” (47). This submission also denies the audience the authority to shape the narrative. It is followed by the poem’s final line, “and makes you drink rain” (48). Again, the city dominates the reader (it makes you). Additionally, the reference to rain introduces the storm. The city not only makes the reader drink rain; by forcing the reader into the role of a dominated participant, the New Orleans Smith writes is also forcing the reader to experience Katrina. In multiple ways, Smith’s “Prologue” puts—and keeps—the reader in their place.

It is, I think, Smith’s insistence on placement or situatedness, when coupled with her prioritization of experience-based and subjugated knowledges and her circumvention of hierarchies of knowledge through second-line literary aesthetic-driven multivocality and responsiveness, that allow her text to resonate authentiCity. Smith’s choice to, as she does in “Prologue—and then She Owns You,” center the place of New Orleans and give it agency is also an important aspect of Blood Dazzler’s authentiCity positioning; it is what allows Blood Dazzler to embody authentiCity’s liberatory character. But, while Blood Dazzler’s centering of place works to liberate the city, it does not liberate the city’s people. Instead, Blood Dazzler’s final
A similar centering of the city of New Orleans is an integral part of the authenticity of another post-Katrina literary text, *Where We Know: New Orleans as Home*. There is, however, an important difference between *Blood Dazzler* and *Where We Know: Where We Know* works to liberate not only the city of New Orleans, but also the people who call that city home.
CHAPTER THREE

AUTHENTICITY IN HYBRID ANTHOLOGIES

*Do You Know what it Means to Miss New Orleans?* a collection of essays and art first published in 2006, was compiled in the months immediately following Katrina while its New Orleanian writers were “living in exile and watching their city drown” (“Do You Know what it Means to Miss New Orleans?”). The love of the anthology’s creators for the city is evident in the volume’s design. Both the original paperback edition and the 2008 edition, reissued as a hardback, are beautiful objects in and of themselves—thoughtfully designed and printed tomes that might be described as twenty-first century illuminated manuscripts. The anxiety felt by those writers as they tried to cope with post-storm limbo is also readily noticeable. It is on display in co-editor David Rutledge’s preface to the collection. “Of course New Orleans will be rebuilt,” he writes, only to follow up with his own doubts and questions: “I say ‘of course’ the city will return, but as I write, the fate of the Ninth Ward is still being debated. How much of this city will be lost? How much of the culture will fall to the force of this hurricane? How much of the culture will fall to the rebuilding process?” (Rutledge, “Preface” 9-10). Rutledge goes on to explain that “the voices of this book come with a sense of urgency, a necessity to get the story out” (“Preface” 10). Accordingly, “many of the stories are about survival. Literal survival” and are spoken by “voices [that] demand to be heard” (Rutledge, “Preface” 11). As is the case with Smith’s *Blood Dazzler*, *Do You Know what it Means to Miss New Orleans?*’s authentiCity is largely thanks to its multivocality. The book includes diverse voices and the knowledges they speak. Each selection in the anthology offers a situated, partial standpoint. When viewed in relation to the one another, these partial standpoints do not coalesce into a universal Katrina narrative. Instead, particularity perseveres; each narrative remains its own at its core. In this way,
*Do You Know* exemplifies how authentiCity allows place-based connections and place-based embodiment to enrich narratives. Just as the a generic space emerges as a particular place through its connections to particular situated humans who imbue it with meaning, the essays in the collection gain authority as representatives of particular standpoints as they become increasingly in dialogue with other particular standpoints that discuss the place they share. In turn, both the essays themselves and the reader’s understanding of the place the essays move through, around, and across gain additional layers of meaning. As Rutledge explains, “together, these disparate works complete a portrait of New Orleans, not a complete portrait, but a true and unique one” (“Preface” 11-12).

The influence of local cultural traditions on *Do You Know what it Means* is direct and palpable, from the book’s title (which it owes to the oft-performed song made famous by New Orleans native son Louis Armstrong), to its organization—the anthology’s structure is a direct reflection of a jazz funeral: it begins with a section entitled “The Dirge,” which is followed by another entitled “The Return.” In jazz funerals, the dirge is the journey from the church to the cemetery; the return is the journey back. The book concludes with a final section that includes only a single essay, Rex Noone’s “Professor Stevens Goes to Mardi Gras.” This section’s title, “Lagniappe,” is also reflective of local culture.27 *Do You Know what it Means*’s roots in the jazz funeral make it simple to connect the collection with second-line literary aesthetics that reflect second line traditions that are themselves rooted in jazz funeral customs. And the anthology does in some ways draw the contributors and audience in to participate in the texts. Editors David and Bruce Rutledge even offer an “Alternative Reading Order” so that audience members can, with

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26 See Badiou
27 Lagniappe comes to contemporary New Orleans as a legacy of Spanish and French colonial control. It originally referred to a small free gift a merchant gave to a customer after a sale and has now come to mean, basically, *a little something extra*. 
guidance, choose how they experience the text. David Rutledge explains the logic behind the alternative order:

It’s not easy reliving the horrors of Katrina, especially if your home is in the Gulf Coast region. With that in mind, we have created an alternative table of contents that pays tribute to the many different renditions of “Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?” We played the different versions, thought about which stories related best, and reshuffled the book in a way that spreads the pain and the laughs. (“Preface” 7)

*Do You Know*’s editors’ reshuffling of the collections’ contents is not limited to their offering of an alternative reading order; the entire anthology is a mixing and reshuffling of voices. This mixing and reshuffling is part of what makes *Do You Know* unique; whereas most anthologies clearly separate the work of their editors from that of the contributors (and the work of each contributor from that of their counterparts), the selections in this collection bleed, blend, and blur into one another. Some of the selections in the anthology are themselves reshuffled and blurry. Those selections, titled simply “Voices” I-IV, weave excerpts from emails and transcripts from radio interviews together with portions of news reports as well as essays and travelogues. Many of the voices that are presented in these four selections are contextualized by brief biographical and/or background information. “Voices I,” for example, consists of three emails between high-ranking FEMA employees, a transcript of some of local radio interview of Mayor Nagin, excerpts from a September 2005 *Rolling Stone* interview with local musician Aaron Neville, New Orleans native Steven Rohback’s discussion of his evacuation and exile, and a short excerpt—only a sentence long—from a *The New York Times* interview with a New Orleans man who called himself Strangebone. Editorial paragraphs provide information about the voices
included: biographical information about the speakers, explanations of when and where the words were spoken or written, and information about any previous publication of the words. Even with this additional context, however, some things about “Voice I” remains unclear. Are the emails complete or edited? Is Rohback’s story one he wrote or was it transcribed from a conversation?

The unique shuffling and blending of voices in *Do You Know what it Means* heightens the reader’s awareness of the volume’s multivocality; it is difficult to read more than two or three pages of the book, even pages in the same selection, without stumbling upon one that displays the words of more than one person. Like *Blood Dazzler*, whose multivocality reflects second-line literary aesthetics, *Do You Know what it Means* offers a chorus of local voices. But *Do You Know what it Means to Miss New Orleans* is primarily a first-line or main-line book. Like the main line of a New Orleanian jazz funeral, the anthology, even with its brief humorous moments, is overwhelmingly “mournful”; “the sense of loss is an inevitable theme of [the] book” (Rutledge, “Preface” 9). The alternative reading order might also be viewed as evidence of the anthology’s main-line character. As Patrick Mackey, a New Orleanian musician who plays with brass, jazz, and trad jazz bands (including local favorite Panorama Jazz Band) explained in an interview, “The main line is for the family. It’s about healing them and making them whole.” The mission of the main line of a jazz funeral is to temper the pain felt by those close to the deceased person through ritualized acts. The Rutledges’s offering of an alternate reading order that “spreads the pain and the laughs” (Rutledge, “Preface” 7) is an attempt to comfort those traumatized by Katrina; it is an embrace of the family that is New Orleans.

*Do You Know what it Means*, like the main line of a New Orleanian parade, invites the audience to participate, but only in the form of predetermined types of responses that both align
with and mirror the main line’s own character. Participation in the main line is necessarily on the terms of the institution that sanctions the parade—the Mardi Gras krewe, the brass or jazz band, the recently deceased’s family, the Social Aid and Pleasure Club. The main line of a jazz funeral demands response that is somber and gloomy. The mournfulness of Do You Know elicits just such an externally determined response.

The main line’s insistence on only limited types of response is also evident in the muddiness that comes with the shuffling and blending of voices. The original nature of one selection in the anthology, “We’re Getting out of Here,” is exemplarily imprecise. It is unclear if the piece, whose caption reads “Bill Lavender talks to John Gravois” (D. Rutledge and B. Rutledge 42, italics in original), is a jointly-authored essay or a transcription of an actual verbal exchange. This muddiness seems to be intentional. The Rutledges, as co-editors, made the final choice to describe “We’re Getting out of Here” as a conversation between two parties even though a note on the copyright page gives a different impression: “‘We’re Getting Out of Here’ by John Gravois was reprinted with permission from The Chronicle of Higher Education, copyright 2005” (D. Rutledge and B. Rutledge, iv). The co-editors modified the presentation of the essay to reflect and mirror the entire anthology’s main-line character.

The parade-sanctioning institution that defines the nature of the main line is, by virtue of its institutionality, disembodied. As a result, it cannot participate in the physical parade. Its role is taken up, in turn, by the embodied bandleader, who represents the institution in the parade. The bandleader directs the participation of both their bandmates and audience members; they decide and declare what song will be played, count off at the song’s beginning, and take up the control the call and response. Often, the bandleader is also the public face of the band; they represent the group. Accordingly, the bandleader is frequently awarded credit or recognition for
the group’s collective work. The blurring of voices in *Do You Know what it Means* is reminiscent of the blending of trumpet, tuba, trombone, and percussion in a main line-leading brass band ensemble. And, just as the bandleader is often, by default, given credit for the blend of sounds that is the band’s product, the unclear boundaries between voices in *Do You Know what it Means* lead the reader to credit the anthology’s editors, David and Bruce Rutledge, for parts of the collection that are difficult to attribute to a particular voice.

The ways that *Do You Know’s* editors function as bandleaders is, in large part, what makes the book align more with first-line aesthetics (as opposed to second-line ones); it is what sets up the volume as a main-line call. But the compilation’s alignment with the first line is not only implicit. David Rutledge explicitly establishes the main-line, calling characteristics of *Do You Know* in the opening of his “Preface”:

> This book should begin with a certain musical phrase—best expressed on the trumpet—that every New Orleanian knowns. It is that four-note announcement, with powerful emphasis on the third note—da-da-DAAAA-da. The Mardi Gras call to arms, call to attention, call to parade. (9)

David Rutledge establishes the anthology he co-edits as a call, urging his New Orleanian readers to “let that trumpet sound” (“Preface” 12) and to “use that musical phrase to *lead* the people who are bringing this city back to life” (10, emphasis added). Rutledge’s choice to use the word *lead* is also representative of this anthology’s main-line character.

Of course, leadership is only effective if it facilitates following. Similarly, a first-line call is only effective in as much as it facilitates a second-line response, one that welcomes improvisation and encourages audience members to become participants through synchronicity, through playing around or inside the music. The response to the main-line call of *Do You Know*
what it Means is not left unanswered. The response comes in the form of a follow-up anthology that embodies second-line literary aesthetics. That anthology, published five years after the storm in 2010 is Where We Know: New Orleans as Home, a collection of literary and photographic essays, short stories, letters, and journal entries written in, from, by, and about New Orleans.

Where We Know appears at first glance to be a typical paperback book, but a closer inspection shows that it is, like its precursor, not. Thanks in large part to the work of its designer, Joshua Powell, the physical object that is Where We Know is something different, something more. Where We Know is “designed as though Chin Music Press/Broken Levee Books intends to singlehandedly resurrect the art of bookmaking,” writes Lucia Silva. It is “a book you want at your bedside and on your coffee table.” Reviewer Buzz Poole, who links the book’s success with its design, puts it another way. “As a printed object from which unfolds a narrative much larger and more complex than any single writer’s words,” Poole writes, “this book demands you spend time with it.” The power of the book’s design comes, I think, from its alignment with authenticity.

The book is small, with matte white front and back covers. Its title appears in small, dark grey words on its front cover while an aerial map of the city’s streets and the curve of the Mississippi begins on the front cover and bleeds onto the spine. The anthology’s title does not appear on its spine; instead, in the same small grey print as the title, are the words “Cradled by the river, on a pillow of mud.” The book’s dust jacket is similarly minimalist. Part of “New Orleans” appears in thick, cursive black letters across the front and spine of the dust jacket; the words are so large that they extend beyond the limits of the book. The full title, much smaller, appears in reflective silver on the center of the jacket’s front. While most of the title is written in a simple, sans-serif font, the words “New Orleans” are rendered in the same thick, flowing
cursive used in the larger background text. Both the front and back jacket covers are debossed with names of many of New Orleans’s neighborhoods. Powell’s design prioritizes the names locals use for their neighborhoods: Sixth Ward, Desire, Holy Cross. This is a contrast to Fink’s deference to official nomenclature. Many of the neighborhoods are named multiple times, reflecting names used during different periods and, in so doing, extending the prioritization of local knowledges and nomenclatures across time. The area of Gentilly that stretches from Leon C. Simon up to Filmore Avenue and from Elysian Fields Avenue to Franklin, for example, is referenced more than once on the cover. This area was once part of the independent township of Milneburg until it was incorporated into the city of New Orleans. The area retained the name of Milneburg (pronounced “Mill-en-burg” or “Mil-lan-burg”) until major land reclamation projects drained the surrounding swamp and allowed for increased residential and business development. As it became increasingly more inhabitable and inhabited, locals began to refer to the larger area as the Lakefront (which was broken up into Lake Terrace, Lake Oaks, Lakeview, and Lakewood).28 Both “Milneburg” and the Lake-names appear on Where We Know’s back jacket, reflecting a respect for and deference to local knowledges and nomenclatures that is not limited to the present but that transcends the boundaries of time.

Like Fink, Baum, and Smith, Powell, an Atlanta-based designer, is an outsider to New Orleans and did not experience Katrina. To imbue his design for Where We Know with a New Orleanian feel, Powell, like the above-mentioned authors, researched. A note on the book’s copyright page explains:

to infuse this book with a New Orleanian soul, Josh Powell traveled to the Crescent City, drank in Harry’s Bar, ate pickled okra, threw up that okra about a

28 For more information on the history of New Orleans’s street and neighborhood names, see John Churchill Chase’s Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children and other Streets of New Orleans.
block from Brangelina’s house, slept on an old and musty mattress in [the anthology’s editor] Professor Rutledge’s apartment, attended a *Treme* party, dined at Bayona, rifled through hundreds of maps and prints at bookstores and libraries and stayed up till dawn at least once.

It is important to note that the sources highlighted in this explanation are predominantly *experiential* ones: drinking in a well-known local bar; eating regional foods (both working-class home-style favorite pickled okra and Susan Spicer’s fine-dining cuisine); sleeping on a damp mattress at a local’s home; not only watching HBO’s *Treme*, but watching it with locals at a viewing party; staying up until morning. The note focuses on establishing Powell’s authority through his knowledge of subjugated local and regional knowledges. Furthermore, unlike Fink’s and Baum’s “Note to the Reader” and “Reader’s Note,” which both seem addressed to outsider audiences and, accordingly, highlight traits likely to establish authority to outsider eyes, the focus on locally relevant details in the description of Powell’s research process seems to be an offering to insiders. By the same token, the humorous tone seems to be a gift to us New Orleanians, who often use wit to negotiate our tense relationships with the tourist service industry, which simultaneously enriches and burdens us; what better balm is there for the waiter or bartender’s soul than the image of the tourist who drunkenly hassled them at work spewing up their (probably overpriced) dinner? Powell’s willingness to self-deprecate (or, at the very least, to allow *Where We Know*’s editors to poke good-natured fun at him) endears him to locals. Powell’s *ethos* is also bolstered by references to details that outsiders can appreciate: official, verifiable sources. These privileged knowledges—“hundreds of maps and prints at bookstores and libraries”—are mentioned, but not prioritized. In fact, they are actively depreciated. The note states that Powell merely “rifled through” them, giving the impression that his investigation
of these sources was merely a casual, surface level romp, though it is clear from the quality of the end product that this is not the case. Even though they are somewhat nonchalantly referenced, the privileged knowledges—what Fink refers to in her note as “particularly valuable” (xvii) as tools for verification of experiential knowledges—do factor into Powell’s design choices. Historic maps, presumably some of the ones Powell “rifled through” at local libraries and bookstores, serve as the book’s front and back endpapers. They also underlie the title page of each thematic section (see Figure 1), where the section title and epigraph are printed on top of the same faded, washed out historical map of the city that appears on the book’s front cover and spine, giving the impression of a palimpsest. Additionally, a smattering of small grey circles, reminiscent of a highly-stylized version of the water damage and mold that appeared on books and documents in hot, damp homes after Katrina, are printed under the text on the copyright and dedication pages. The words on these pages seems to rise up out of the maps and spots, to emerge from the fog and decay of the past, but also to bring some of that same haze clinging along into the present.
As he explains, Powell worked to ensure that the book’s design “[gave] visual organization” to the book’s content and reflected its theme. As Powell understands it, this theme is, in turn, driven by the local, regional, subjugated voices included in the collection: “that lovers of New Orleans have always battled with its darker side, and how the people’s knack for celebrating an impromptu second line goes hand in hand with their acknowledgement of the ghosts in their midst” (Powell). Powell, in contrast to Fink and Baum, uses privileged sources to support subjugated knowledges and local standpoints, not to authenticate subjugated knowledges and establish his own authority; the privileged sources support the insider narratives that make
up the anthology by providing context for them. Because it allows for the prioritization of local, experiential, and subjugated knowledges, Powell’s incorporation of privileged knowledges aligns with authentiCity.

Much of the contextual role of the privileged knowledges Powell incorporates is related to the nonnarrative parts of the book. These supporting materials might also be described as extranarrative, that is, outside of the narrative(s), but they are not irrelevant to the narrative(s) presented. They work to situate the narratives in relation to time, space, and each other. A timeline page (see Figure 2) with a caption describing it as “A Chronological Reference to Quotations Featured in this Volume” (D. Rutledge, Where We Know ix), for example, appears directly after the Table of Contents. The two-page spread offers a timeline of some of the anthology’s contents, positioning each quote in relation to the others. The timeline appears just below an artistic rendering of an engineering diagram of the river and the Crescent City Connection Bridge that crosses it, linking New Orleans’s East and West Banks.

The timeline is followed by another two-page spread (see Figure 4) designed to assist readers with “Locating the Essays and Stories in this Volume” (D. Rutledge, Where We Know xx). On the left page of the spread, a three-column list offers the author and title of each essay, a corresponding number, and the place where the essay was written. Mark Folse’s essay, “In the Brown Zone with Mother Cabrini,” for example, is assigned the number eight; readers learn it was written in “Gentilly (St. Francis Cabrini Catholic Church, in the Vista Park section of Gentilly along Paris Avenue).” Eve Troeh’s “Dear New Orleans: I’m Leaving You,” the reader learns, was written in Los Angeles. On the right hand page of the spread are minimalist line-drawing maps of the United States, Louisiana, and the city.
Small black circles with the numbers 1-16, each corresponding with an essay listed on the facing page, allow the reader to place the essays and visualize geographic relationships between the texts. These informative diagrams contribute to the compilation’s overall authenticity by facilitating positioning in both time and space. An illustration on the book’s final page works similarly, offering a visual tool to push readers to think about the anthology and the city of New Orleans in relationship to other places. This illustration, a minimalist line drawing in keeping with the rest of the anthology’s visual character, is a simplified aerial map of the city. From its center, eight lines emerge. Each is an arrow whose label tells where it is pointing and how far...
that place is from New Orleans: San Francisco (1952 miles); St. Louis (615 miles); Chicago (875 miles); Cincinnati (729 miles); New York City (1193 miles); Havana (660 miles); Panama (1570 miles).

Powell’s design techniques expresses authentiCity as I have theorized it: his design choices emerge from a research process that centers experiential knowledge; his techniques prioritize subjugated, local knowledges (as evidenced by his deferral to local nomenclatures in the dust jacket debossing); the final product serves to contextualize and situate the knowledges presented in both time and space; the book’s design facilitates and demands relational, responsive thinking. But more than anything, Powell’s design techniques align with authentiCity in that they center the City. New Orleans is the core not only of each illustration, but of the research process from which each illustration emerged—from conceptualization to application, the city matters. Furthermore, Powell’s design techniques reinforce the city’s status as not simply a space—that is, an unmarked, abstract location—but as a place; Powell’s design focuses on the human meanings imbued on the space New Orleans occupies.

The centrality of the city in Where We Know is not limited to the book’s design; it is also evident in the book’s thematic organization. Though Katrina is the catalyst for the collection, the selections inside it cover a vast span of time; the oldest, Pierre-François Xavier de Charlevoix’s journal entry account of his first visit to the city, is from 1721 while many of included essays were written in the same year that the anthology was published. David Rutledge explains, the reasoning for the collection’s temporal diversity in the introduction:

History continues in New Orleans. Even after the cameras—the news cameras, the tourist cameras—New Orleanians find themselves living through history each day. The decision to rebuild or to demolish a house; the choice to leave one’s
home or to gut and try again; the culture and the traditions that make living here so rewarding, even as we face unprecedented challenges; the constant promise of this city: these are historical circumstances, these are current circumstances.

These are among the topics one will find in this book. (xxiii)

The book is not organized in chronological order. Older and contemporary selections are interwoven. Lyrics from Mahalia Jackson’s 1947 song “In My Home Over There” (Rutledge Where We Know, 215), for example are bookended by two contemporary essays, as is an excerpt from Tennessee Williams’s 1972 Memoirs in which the writer shares his hope that he will die in his sleep “in the beautiful big brass bed in [his] New Orleans apartment” (qtd. in Rutledge Where We Know, 219). Where We Know is broken into four sections based on theme: “Home,” “Culture & History,” “Loss,” and “Home II.” By linking the narratives in the collection across time instead of presenting them in chronological order, Rutledge weakens the potential strength of time in as a unifying factor. As a result, the city becomes the overriding organizational force; it is the city that is the volume’s connective thread. Furthermore, the maneuver away from chronological organization works similarly to Smith’s “Prologue—And Then She Owns You.” Smith’s “Prologue” alludes to Katrina in its final line, “and makes you drink rain” (48), but does not directly reference the hurricane. As I argued in the previous chapter, by beginning her Katrina narrative with the city instead of the storm, Smith makes it more difficult for readers to distance themselves from her poems and their content. The “Prologue” acts simultaneously as an intervention and an imposition—like the city that “tells you Leave your life” (Smith “Prologue—And then She Owns You,” 35, italics in original) and “makes you drink rain,” (Smith “Prologue—And then She Owns You,” 48) the poem draws readers into the city of New Orleans and the trauma of the storm, making them cowitnesses. Similarly, Rutledge’s choice to organize
Where We Know by theme instead of by time makes it more difficult for readers to limit their understanding of the experience of Katrina to the hurricane itself. This is important because the way locals experienced (and continue to experience) Katrina is not limited to the days, weeks, months, or even years directly preceding and following the storm. Instead, the direct experience of the storm sometimes seeps into earlier memories, reconfiguring them to align with what has happened since; the traumatized brain works to integrate memories of trauma with the post-trauma self.29 At other times, memories of the storm become fixed; they flash back into the traumatized person’s mind in near photographic detail. Still other memories of the experience of the storm shape the way locals understand and move through the present as time moves forward. This post-trauma transgression of temporal boundaries is not limited to people who experienced Katrina (one of the most noted consequences of trauma is a disordering of time30), but it heightened for New Orleanians because our collective memories of cultural trauma (in the form of slavery, natural disasters, war, and other social and political conflicts) lead us to view and experience both trauma and time cyclically. By organizing his anthology by theme instead of by time, Rutledge ensures that the anthology he edits aligns with authenticity by centering the city; New Orleans, not time, becomes the collection’s connective tissue. At the same time, the thematic organization of Where We Know, because it reenacts the trauma-induced temporal break experienced by New Orleanians as a result of Katrina, puts both insider and outsider audiences in the position of cowitnesses to the traumatic event. This cowitnessing is related to the labor of chronological ordering; just as those who directly experienced the trauma of Katrina are tasked with the work of revisiting their memories of the past and trying to align them with a

29 See essays in Caruth’s Trauma: Explorations in Memory, William Friedman’s “Development of Children’s Memory for the Time of Past Events,” and “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma” by Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart.
30 For in depth discussions of how experiences of trauma affect understandings of time, see “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma” by Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart in Trauma: Explorations in Memory, edited by Caruth.
profoundly changed vision of the future, readers are forced to revisit the information presented in each essay as their understandings of both the pre-Katrina world and the storm itself are enriched.

Rutledge’s choice to organize Where We Know by theme also exhibits authenticity in that it reflects the experiences and memories of the holders of the subjugated knowledges that inform the collection and, by doing so, works to circumvent hierarchies of knowledge that deny traumatic memory—or, as Caruth describes them, “memories that would, under traditional criteria, be considered false” (“Preface,” viii). The character of the place that is New Orleans is in many ways shaped by the unique way in which its residents experience and understand time and Rutledge’s Introduction to Where We Know seems to be a detailed explanation of that unique approach to temporality. People of and in New Orleans live simultaneously in the present and in the past, participating in a culture shaped by collective memories of political, social, and environmental upheaval and trauma.31 As he explains, in New Orleans “there is more of a tendency not only to preserve the past, but to live alongside of it, to live in the midst of it... We still have a culture that comes from the city, from the neighborhoods; we still have a culture that connects to the past and parades in the streets” (Where We Know xxv). Rutledge goes on to argue that “Here we listen to our ghosts” (Where We Know xxvi).32 This separates New Orleans from the rest of the United States, which, Rutledge argues, is home to another kind of culture. “That other kind of culture,” Rutledge writes, is a “corporate culture” that “renders the ghosts of the

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31 See discussion of Eyerman and Sublette in Chapter 1.
32 A brief explanatory note at the end of the Introduction is further evidence of Rutledge’s resolution to listen to New Orleans’s ghosts. This note explains that the inconsistent spelling that appears throughout Where We Know is not the result of careless editing. Instead, it is connected to the goal of “staying true to the original texts.” Accordingly, “‘Mississipp’y’ is not a mistake; ‘Toulan’e’ is not a mistake.” Rutledge goes on to further explain the editorial reasoning: the purpose of the volume is not to “push each voice into conforming to some standard” but to “respect each voice, along with each quirky spelling, non-standard grammar and any other method of expression” (xxxii). Rutledge has chosen to listen to and respect the voices of New Orleans’s ghosts; he has chosen not to subjugate their knowledges.
past nearly inaudible” (*Where We Know* xxvi). It is “the kind that [New Orleanians and the people who advocate for them] must constantly resist”; it is a culture that “comes from `above, but it does not trickle down—it stomps down—with a large footprint—erasing whatever remnants of local culture may get in its way” (*Where We Know* xxv). Thus, the city-centering, nonchronological organization of *Where We Know* contributes to the book’s authenticity not only in that it is one of the ways in which the collection prioritizes and reflects experiential, subjugated knowledges, but also in that it speaks to Rutledge’s liberatory intent.

Rutledge defines New Orleans’s culture as a “culture-under-siege” (*Where We Know* xxvii) and seems to present *Where We Know* as a weapon in the fight against the blockading force (the “corporate culture” of the rest of America that New Orleanians must constantly resist) that pursues the siege. The nonchronological organization of the collection and its inclusion of voices that span four centuries speak directly to this liberatory goal. They work to situate the history of New Orleans and Katrina in a larger context, a “continual rhythm of raised spirits and recovery” (Rutledge, *Where We Know* xxxi). It works to present New Orleans’s contemporary moment as “a time of transition” that is related to and reminiscent of “many times of transition in its past, and many times when the culture felt threatened” (Rutledge, *Where We Know* xxvi) even as it is separate from them. Rutledge alludes to a few of the historical times of transition and threat: the tension caused by the influx of Anglo-Americans that came to the area after the Louisiana Purchase; the anxiety that came with northern and federal troops at the end of the Civil War. He contextualizes current struggle by incorporating it into cyclical New Orleans time.

Rutledge is not alone in his relating historical anxieties, threats, and events with Katrina. Anna Brickhouse connects Katrina, or, more specifically, national discourse about the storm, to discourse about the great Haitian fire of 1866. Aligning with *Where We Know*’s renunciation of
chronological organization, Brickhouse’s analysis of both the Haitian fire and Katrina as “Transamerican catastrophes” focuses on the “dissjunctive temporal reality” of both Haiti and New Orleans—the “pastness of their present” (1098). In “Lele’s Long Song,” Ruth Salvaggio begins her work of using Katrina’s devastation as an entry point into a tradition of women’s poetry that harkens back from enslaved women in the city’s Congo Square all the way to ancient Greece. Geographer Richard Campanella connects the city’s current residential patterns to historical population shifts in order to put post-Katrina gentrification in its larger historical context (“Gentrification and its Discontents”). The connections historian Lawrence N. Powell’s draws between Katrina and related historical contexts and patterns was arguably more personal. He was inspired to write *The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans* after “the calamitous storm of 2005 forced him ‘to think differently about the city,’ offended as he was by ‘all those promiscuous statements about how [his] adopted hometown should be allowed to slide back into the primordial ooze’” (Yardley).

Rutledge’s interweaving of historical and contemporary narratives of New Orleans through the thematic organization of *Where We Know* is also another example of second-line literary aesthetics. The anthology as a whole functions as a second line. At the same time, inside that second line, the voices of the collection’s authors call and respond to one another across time, space, and topic. Rutledge explains that the book “shows some of the parallels between historical and current accounts of [New Orleans],” it also “[swerves] through the past, back to the present, commenting on and contemplating” the city (*Where We Know* xxxi-xxxii). It is

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33 Interestingly, Salvaggio’s work is not only connected to *Where We Know* in that it speaks to the same themes; they share their roots in *Do You Know what it Means to Miss New Orleans?* As Salvaggio explains, the “long song” she follows through history—the song of a creole woman named Zizi and her broken heart—was at times elusive. She would find historical references to the song and its roots only to lose them again. As she explains, “Zizi’s song delivers us a sorrow that arcs back through memory. It appears suddenly and just as suddenly disappears.” Salvaggio herself found it “tucked inside” the “odd, montage-like copyright page” of the first edition of *Do You Know*; a single line of the song was incorporated into the book’s design.
through this meandering, connected, call-and-response that Rutledge hopes “to convey some of the poetry of home” (*Where We Know* xxxii).

Like many of Smith’s poems, three of the four thematic sections of *Where We Know* begin with an epigraphic quote that functions as a call to which the section’s body responds. But *Where We Know*’s section-starting calls are not like Smith’s epigraphs, which are drawn from privileged, verifiable sources like NHS reports. Nor are they like Fink’s epigraph to *Five Days*’s first chapter, which is pulled from a source that is wholly unconnected to New Orleans or Katrina: Portuguese writer Jose Saramago’s 1995 novel, *Blindness*. The epigraphs-cum-calls that begin *Where We Know*’s sections relay the words of regional sources and their subjugated knowledges. In the epigraphic quote that introduces the “Home” section, Gustav evacuee Brenda Duplessis explains that “It’s really not worth staying in New Orleans, but that’s where we from. That’s where we know” (Rutledge, *Where We Know* 1). Duplessis’s last name, a common one in New Orleans, is evidence that her familial roots in New Orleans reach back to the French colonial past while her non-standard dialect gives the impression that she is likely poor and/or Black; the standpoints her voice represents (female, local, underprivileged, and perhaps nonwhite) inform archetypal examples of subjugated knowledges. Local musician Wynton Marsalis’s warning that “when [your culture] is for sale and when everything is for sale, you lose your mooring” (Rutledge, *Where We Know* 47) appears on the title page of the section on culture and history. Lyrics, written by local musician Joe Braun, to The New Orleans Jazz Vipers’s “I Hope You’re Comin’ Back to New Orleans” (Rutledge, *Where We Know* 211) introduce section four, “Home II.” Even the notable absence of an epigraph for the third section of the anthology, “Loss” (161), seems to be a default to local knowledges: immediate trauma is unspeakable (Caruth “Trauma and Experience,” 3) and so at the moment of trauma, the moment of loss,
victims cannot speak. To include an epigraph for this section would necessarily entail the prioritization of outsider, privileged, and—most importantly—non-experiential knowledge. Rutledge continually prioritizes to local, subjugated knowledges; he maintains a position of authentiCity.

Rutledge does, however, still include outsider voices, especially those of travelers, explorers, colonizers, and other temporary transplants, in the anthology. Diron D’Artaguiette, for example, is a quintessential outsider. D’Artaguiette, who served as Inspector General of Louisiana from 1722-1723, was not from New Orleans and, as was typical for colonial officials, likely had no intention to remain in the city after his post expired; France, not New Orleans, was his home. His voices appears in Where We Know in the form of excerpts from his journals. Those excerpts are from 1722, the year La Nouvelle-Orléans replaced Biloxi as the capital of French Louisiana. D’Artaguiette’s included journal entries engage with the motifs of destruction and recovery that permeate the entire anthology. The first entry, dated September 5, 1722, relates the story of Traverse, a man who was jailed for building a home that “was not set in accord with the alignment of the streets, as he had built it before the plan had been proposed” (Rutledge, Where We Know xiii). D’Artaguiette explains that the man was imprisoned not for failing to adhere to the street-building plan, but for daring to ask for compensation so that he might afford to build another. Traverse’s story is reminiscent of the hardships faced by New Orleanians in the years after Katrina as they struggled to fund their rebuilding; FEMA, Road Home, and private insurance companies often denied rightful claims or withheld payouts for months.  

D’Artaguiette’s second journal entry, dated September 12, 1722, recounts what he calls “the

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34 To read more of D’Artaguiette’s journals, see Travels in the American Colonies, edited by Newton D. Mereness. The book, published by The Macmillan Company in 1916 is no longer in print, but its full text is available through online the non-profit library and archive archivel.org.

35 For a detailed exploration of the poorly-conceived and -enacted systems Katrina’s victims attempted to navigate as part of the recovery, See Davida Finger’s “Stranded and Squandered: Lost on the Road Home,” which was published in the Seattle Journal for Social Justice in 2008.
most terrible hurricane which has been seen in these quarters” (Rutledge, *Where We Know* xiii). That “Great Louisiana Hurricane of 1722” was the first to be recorded in the region and levelled the fragile young city.36 The final entry, dated September 14, 1722, D’Artaguiette explains that residents “are working hard here to repair the damage which the hurricane has caused” (Rutledge, *Where We Know* ivx), just as contemporary New Orleanians work to repair the damage caused by Katrina. Rutledge’s choice to cross temporal boundaries and include historic narratives helps outside readers to understand New Orleanians’ cyclical understanding of time and disaster; the cowitnessing of D’Artaguiette’s narrative of trauma allows outsiders to access information that helps them contextualize and better understand the volume’s contemporary selections. Because they become cowitnesses to the same type of historical knowledge that informs New Orleanians’ collective memory, outsiders are, after reading D’Artaguiette’s words, better prepared to view contemporary local narratives as authoritative; D’Artaguiette’s journal entries combat any single story they bring with them to the reading.

The inclusion of historical selections alongside contemporary ones is also evidence of *Where We Know*’s second-line character. The essays call and respond to one another across time. The fact that many of the historical selections were written by outsiders adds further nuance to the book’s time-crossing second-line interplay.

A prime example of the call and response function and interplay between historical outsider narratives and contemporary insider ones—and how that interplay helps to ensure that *Where We Know* maintains its authenticity—can be seen in the way those second-line relationships add layers of meaning to Charles Dudley Warner’s essay, “New Orleans,” which originally appeared in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in January of 1887. Warner, a white

36 For a detailed discussion of how the effects of the 1722 hurricane shaped the development of New Orleans, see “Utopian by Design” in Lawrence N. Powell’s *The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans*. 
man from a well-off Protestant New England family, was a celebrated essayist, travel writer, and novelist of his time. He was also a close associate of Mark Twain, with whom he coauthored *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*. His race, geographic origin, upper-class status, Anglophone heritage, and religion all separate him from the majority of the people who called New Orleans home during his lifetime; his temporal situatedness—living in the nineteenth as opposed to the twenty-first century—further distances him from contemporary New Orleanians. “New Orleans” recounts Warner’s first (and only documented) trip to New Orleans. Written for an educated, white, upper-class national audience, the essay presents the people of New Orleans as exotic subalterns who live in a primitive environment that is simultaneously repulsive and alluring. Its buildings, he writes, support “mouldering window-ledges [on which] flowers bloomed” and line “shabby… ill-paved” streets with “undulating sidewalks, and open gutters green with slime, and both stealing and giving odors” (75). The sounds of New Orleans, as Warner describes them, are lush and rich: “caged birds sang and screamed the songs of South America and the tropics” (75). Warner’s description of the sound of New Orleanian speech reflects attitudes that come with his upper-class Anglo-American roots: “the language heard on all sides was French, or the degraded jargon which the easy-going African has manufactured out of the tongue of Bienville” (75). After describing the city’s landscape, architecture, and cultures (especially that of “the Creole Civilization” [81] and of the city’s general “foreignness” [83]), Warner goes on to discuss in detail the city’s racial climate. The Anglo-American Warner (and, I think it is fair to assume, the Anglo-American audience for which he writes) seems fascinated by the “stories pathetic and tragic, many of which cannot yet be published, growing out of the mingling of the races” in New Orleans “and especially out of the relations between the whites and the fair women who had in their thin veins drops of African blood” (84). Warner’s exotification of non-Anglo and African-
descended locals seems similar to Fink’s treatment of “ethnic” whites and Black people—like Fink, Warner does not mark or other people like him; they retain, as he does, the privilege of inclusion without qualification or note.

Warner’s othering of local subjects is also gendered. Warner uses the masculine pronoun to describe the imagined generic traveler: “[This traveler] needs a person of vast local erudition to tell in what part of the city, or in what section of the home of the frog and crawfish, he will land” (77, emphasis added). Similarly, Warner uses the masculine pronoun to describe the universal New Orleanian/Creole condition—to speak of the people in a disembodied sense: “In business the Creole is accused of being slow, conservative, in regard to improvements obstinate and reactionary, preferring to nurse a prejudice rather than run the risk of removing it my improving himself, and of having a conceit that his way of looking at life is better than the Boston way” (82, emphasis added); “His literary culture is derived from France... and his ideas a good deal affect the attitude of New Orleans toward English and contemporary literature” (82, emphasis added). But all of the particular descriptions Warner presents are of women: “ladies tripped along from early mass or to early market” (75); the particular person he uses as an example to support his claim that “the African strain is so attenuated that the possessor of it would pass to the ordinary observer for Spanish or French” (85) is a woman; his description of street life mentions only the female bodies of “pretty girls sewing and chatting” who “[stab] the passer-by with a charmed glance,” “a slender yellow girl sweeping” a market stall, and “a colored gleaner recalling Ruth” (88-9). For Warner, the female and the racially or ethnically nonnormative are embodied and situated; the male and the white/Anglo (including the author himself) seem to remain disembodied and unsituated. Like Baum’s Nine Lives, Warner’s text,
through his uneven treatment of raced and gendered subjects, “ultimately [pushes] forward a white patriarchal view of the city” (Michna, “Hearing” 254).

But where Fink’s and Baum’s disembodied authorial presences, which contribute to the problematic ways each author engages (and fails to engage with) race and ethnicity, are barriers to their books’ authentiCity, the inclusion of Warner’s essay and its problematic treatment of those same characteristics actually adds to Where We Know’s authentiCity. This is because Warner remains situated. This contrasts both Fink and Baum, neither of whom are situated in their texts. In fact, Warner is not only situated; he is, albeit indirectly, embodied. Following the conventions of 19th century travel writing37, Warner’s generic traveler is actuality a stand-in for himself. He is the “stranger who is accustomed to closed sewers” and, as a result, “is aghast at this spectacle of slime and filth” that is 1887 New Orleans’s open sewer (Warner 91). He is the “passer-by” who is “stab[bed]” by glances of pretty, chatting girls (Warner 88). Warner’s authorial persona is not disembodied, but universalized. His privileged standpoint is allowed to stand in for others, but does not erase them. Furthermore, because Rutledge’s inclusion of Warner’s essay is not accompanied by any claim of its “objectivity,” there is no implication that his narrative is a singularly authorities one; it is never presented as a single story. Instead, Rutledge offers Warner’s narrative as one of many stories. Warner’s white patriarchal standpoint cannot as easily become oppressive or obscure other standpoints. It cannot, because of the limits imposed on it by its inclusion in the collection, transcend its particularity and become a universal master narrative; it cannot subjugate other knowledges.

Standpoints that are different from Warner’s complicate his narrative even before that narrative begins. The first complications come in the form of the local knowledges that precede Warner’s essay in the anthology. These include Rutledge’s “Introduction” and Powell’s

37 See Tim Youngs’s introduction to Travel Writing in the 19th Century: Filling in the Blank Spaces.
thoughtful design. There is the also the entire first chapter of the anthology, “Home,” which offers four essays, a short story, and three short quotes, all of which were written or spoken by New Orleanian residents. These local knowledges do not present their own master narrative, or even a unified standpoint. Native New Orleanian Anne Gisleson’s “Reconstruction Baby” focuses on how “living in the city of your childhood, surrounded by family and places from your past, it’s easy to slip into former states of yourself,” which allows her to view the work of “rebuilding the city [as] inextricable from rebuilding ourselves, an attempt to lace the best of our lost childhoods to the better ones we want so badly for our children” (6-7). Gisleson, writing during the first years after Katrina, is optimistic and determined to stay in her native city. New Orleanian musician Terence Blanchard, whose voice is included in the chapter in the form of a short quote he spoke during the 2006 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, is similarly resolute about remaining and rebuilding in the city. “I don’t know about y’all,” Blanchard says, “but I’m sure damn tired of people asking me is New Orleans coming back. I’m so sick of that question. I tell ‘em, I tell ‘em all the time, Goddamn right we’re coming back, ‘cause we don’t like y’all food and we hate y’all music” (Rutledge Where We Know, 45). But New Orleanian jazz great Louis Armstrong, whose opinion appears on the page opposite Blanchard’s, does not present the city in such a positive light. Armstrong’s quote, which a contextual note explains was spoken in 1949, after he returned to New Orleans from touring to lead the Zulu carnival parade and was thrust into a Jim Crow south he found more oppressive than he remembered. “I don’t care if I never see this city again,” says Armstrong. “Honestly, they treat me better all over the world than they do in my home town” (Rutledge Where We Know, 44). Racial tensions appear in Ray Shea’s short story, “Gather the Fragments that Remain,” contributing to a depiction of the city that is, like Armstrong’s, not especially positive. Shea’s story, which takes place directly
after Katrina, also presents a negative representation of the city’s buildings and spaces. As Shea writes it, New Orleans is a city overtaken by “the poison sadness of mold” that “burned the nose, sharp prickly toxicity, like cocaine cut with something foul” (35). It is littered with “debris, rotting refrigerators. Buzzing of the crypt flies” (Shea 35). Shea’s protagonist spent her adult life “running from this city” only to be called back by Katrina, which “gave her a purpose. A house to restore, a city to rebuild, a childhood to reclaim” (39). At the story’s end, however, she is still unsure of whether or not she will return to New Orleans, a city she simultaneously loves, fears, and despises.

Kris Lackey, a professor at the University of New Orleans whose essay, “Ghostland Sublime,” appears directly before Shea’s story, tells of his experience of post-storm exile and of coming back to work at UNO’s devastated Lakefront Campus. Lackey’s essay focuses on how, even though he loved the city of New Orleans and was determined to remain there, living in it in the years immediately after the flooding was painful. It is a “landscape of futility” (29) full of ghosts that make New Orleanians “weep in our automobiles and arrive at school spent and shaky” (28-9). These ghosts, Lackey explains,

haunt the Gentilly ghostland, like the three elderly people within a block of my Legion Oaks house who refused to evacuate and who drowned, and the two middle-aged men in the same neighborhood whose hearts failed in distant cities. Strangely, unless we lost loved ones the living ghosts trouble us more deeply. Their silent ruined homes speak to us as we drive past, each blurring half a frantic sentence before the next begins, a Babel of voices mounting and swirling into mad chatter, subsiding as we leave them behind. (29)
Sarah Inman, another UNO faculty member, discusses the same flooded neighborhoods as Lackey in her essay, “The Gutting.” Like Lackey, Inman is struck by the ghostly remnants of life that surfaced after the waters receded. These remainders are also reminders of the devastation; they help to understand the nature of the disaster as it was experienced in a given location. Inman describes the bathroom in a house she and some others are gutting:

The toilet is a muddy shade of light brown, the white porcelain having absorbed the muck from the flood. The bathtub is similarly muddy in color. Two broken blackened cubes of soap are stuck to the tiled-in soap dish just above the tub. They sit as if undisturbed, but their position gives an indication of how the water rose in Gentilly. It came up inch by inch, foot by foot, no sudden gush or tidal wave as in areas close to the failed levees. This house was dry until Tuesday after the storm. (11)

Detailed descriptions of the devastated landscape in Inman’s essay help the reader gain a more nuanced understanding of the disastrous event of Katrina. They act as what Badiou terms an “interpretive intervention,” (181)—the beginning of a process that, once it is underway, facilitates the emergence of both the being and the event as subjects. “The event emerges along with the subject who recognizes it, or who nominates it as an event” (Dews) through the interpretive intervention.

But in the context of the second-line chorus of voices that make up Where We Know, the interpretive intervention also works as a narrative intervention. As Badiou theorizes it, the being is singular, individual. A being recognizes an event and, through that recognition, both emerge as subjects. But in the multivocal authentiCity-positioned second-line narrative, multiple beings recognize the event and emerge along with it as subjects. Furthermore, the reader—who is,
thanks to the second-line style of the literature, pushed into to position of responder to the main-
line call—also recognizes both the event and the beings who have nominated it as such. The
reader is pushed not only to consume the second-line narratives, but to internalize them—to
become a cowitness. Thus the reader’s subjecthood in relation to the event is directly connected
to the subjecthood of the other emerging beings in the narrative. This makes it impossible for the
reader to become disembodied. To transcend situatedness, the reader must disconnect from the
beings and events that her subjecthood emerged alongside. It also makes it impossible for the
reader to consume a master-narrative about her co-subjects or their shared event without
resisting; the master-narrative, with its flattening disembodied authority, erases the reader’s
newly emergent subject self.

By the time a reader of Where We Know reaches the second part of the book—the section
in which Warner’s “New Orleans” is located, they are already resistant to the white patriarchal
(and necessarily disembodied) standpoint he offers because that standpoint, which exotifies the
subjugated knowledges that are intertwined with the reader’s cowitnessing self, is oppositional to
their subjecthood.

The narrative intervention begun in the first chapter of Where We Know is continued and
refined in the selections of chapter two that precede Warner’s essay. The intervening nature of
these selections, like that of their corresponding sections in chapter one, are related to the
multiple particular standpoints they reflect. More specifically, their interventionary character is
rooted in the way they present particular situated understandings of New Orleans’s history and
the relationship between that history and the city’s culture(s).

Chapter two, “Culture and History” begins with an epigraph/call, first spoken by
musician Wynton Marsalis in 2009, which links the preservation of culture with personal and
communal integrity. Marsalis’s call also links the commodification of culture to the dissolution of culture and, as a result, a loss of positioning and situatedness—a disconnection from home:

If you think that your culture is a leisure activity, it belies a level of deep and profound ignorance. That’s why you will have trouble with your business practices, like we have trouble with our business practices in the United States, because we lack integrity. What informs your integrity is your culture, and your culture is your stories, your songs. That is your integrity, and when that is for sale and when everything is for sale, you lose your mooring. Where is home? You don’t know where home is, and once you don’t know where home is, you could be anywhere. (qtd. in Rutledge Where We Know, 48)

This call works to reinforce the chapter’s theme, but also to reinforce the importance of authenticity by highlighting the importance of situatedness. The danger of the commodification or erasure of culture is that it leads to homelessness—it removes us from our place.

The first response to Marsalis’s call comes from Lafcadio Hearn, a nineteenth-century renaissance man; he was a journalist, essayist, ethnography, and, despite his visual impairment, an accomplished woodcut artist. Though his skillset was diverse, Hearn, born in the Ionian Islands and raised in the British Isles before immigrating to the United States, is best known for his travel writing. Many of his travelogues focus on New Orleans, where he lived and wrote for nearly a decade (Heitmann). Hearn’s first contribution to “Culture & History” is a brief excerpt from his 1877 essay “At the Gate of the Tropics,” which appeared in the Cincinnati Commercial. Hearn keys in on the multicultural heritage that makes New Orleans seem both foreign and familiar to many visitors; “while it actually resembles no other city up on the face of the earth,” he writes, “yet it recalls vague memories of a hundred cities” including “towns in Italy, and in
Spain, of cities in England and in Germany, of seaports in the Mediterranean, and of seaports in the tropics” (qtd. in Rutledge, Where We Know, 48). Hearn’s narrative takes up Marsalis’s call near its end, when Hearn shares what he believes to be an effect of the legacies of New Orleans’s diverse cultural borrowings on visitors to the city. That effect, Hearn supposes, is that “whencesoever the traveler may have come, he may find in the Crescent City some memory of his home—some recollection of his Fatherland—some remembrance of something he loves” (qtd. in Rutledge Where We Know, 48).

Though Hearn lists many European influences on New Orleans, he only briefly alludes to non-European influences. In fact, even that brief reference is obscured by European colonial influence—“seaports in the tropics” seems far more likely a reference to European-established cities like Havana than to precolonial port cities in the Americas, Africa, or Asia. It is the following selection in “Culture & History,” Lolis Eric Elie’s “Still Live, with Voices,” that takes up the calls of both Marsalis and Hearn and, in doing so, fills some of the gaps in Hearn’s presentation of New Orleans’s cultural roots.

Elie, like Marsalis, for whom he worked as a road manager, is a native New Orleanian and, like Hearn, he is multiply skilled; he is a writer, food historian, and documentary film makers. Much of Elie’s artistic output examines the history and culture of the city in which he was raised and, especially, the history of New Orleans’s Black communities, of which he is a member; he is a story editor on HBO’s Treme, named for New Orleans’s (and the United States’s) oldest Black neighborhood and wrote and co-directed an award-winning documentary film about the neighborhood, Faubourg Treme: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans. In “Still Live, with Voices,” Elie presents an account of the city’s heritage that reads more like a folk tale
than a traditional history. The reader is alerted to the untraditional nature of the historic essay in its first five lines, in which Elie writes

I would like to tell the story of my city.

I would like to do so in simple, declarative sentences. I would like my narrative to be neat and linear, like I learned in school and on television. Do not think me unequal to the task. In fact, I have already started a draft. (49)

That “draft” of his city’s story connects the often buried history of people of African and indigenous descent to the more openly celebrated and venerated European traditions that have also informed New Orleans’s development. “We were founded by the Europeans,” Elie writes, “We were built by the Africans” (49). Elie also references another group that is absent in Hearn’s historicization: “non-Native [to New Orleans] Americans”, who, he explains, “taught us to work hard and to honor the dollar and to cherish the word freedom even more than the condition itself” (49). Elie adds to these “three parents” of New Orleans “the Gods and winds who have shaped us as surely as any DNA” and his own “sweet mother” (an educator) and “unruly father” (a prominent local civil rights activist and attorney) (49), rooting both his personal cultural history and the cultural history of his city in five hereditary lines.

In his introduction, Elie describes these lines as five “voices.” The voices that wreak havoc on his story by imposing multivocality: “The neatness of every draft I compose is ruined by these five voices, voices that suddenly pop out like wild hairs that have escaped the barber’s scissors unclipped” (48-9). The remainder of his essay is an enactment of neatness-ruining he describes. Elie’s narrator—who seems to align closely with his extradiegetic self—is interrupted at every turn by the voices who add their viewpoint to the master narrative he attempts to create. The end result is a text that reads less like a singular story and more like a chaotic
conversation—a drunken debate in which impassioned parties shout over and around one another, determined to be heard. When some of the voices resent Elie’s description of them and immediately disrupt his draft’s neatness to counter him: “So we Africans, the Africans in you, are nothing more than dancing beasts with wild hair?” (50, italics in original). Elie responds: “No one is anything yet, father. It is a draft and we are all in a state of becoming.” (50). The African voices respond again that that state of becoming is really a “state of becoming sold down the river again” (50, italics in original). At this point, an additional voice, that of the region’s precolonial indigenous inhabitants—who, like the Africans, are notably absent from Hearn’s narrative—steps in: “Excuse me, Kemo Sabe, but when the Europeans were doing their founding, they founded us already here. Put that in your story.” The native voices urge Elie on, but insist on a further erosion of the draft’s neatness: “More voices, you must have more voices” (50, italics in original).

And, indeed, “Still Live, with Voices” has more voices. French voices step in to correct Elie’s narrator when he claims that “in the manner of Food, we were instructed by the French” (Elie 50). These voices balk, detailing the ways in which New Orleans cuisine is far removed from its Gallic forbearers:

> Do not blame us for your food, monsieur. Your poisson meuniere is deep fried; your remoulade is red and has no anchovies; your ‘French’ bread has a crust like phyllo dough, not like a proper baguette, and you put that slimy okra in your bouillabaisse. Your food is good, peut-etre. Peut-etre. But Francais? Jamais! (50, italics in original).

When Elie concedes that he should have called the cuisine “Creole,” a version of “France in America plus 300 years plus black cooks” (50-1), the African voices step in again. “Why do you
insist on crediting the French with everything?” they ask before explaining that what Elie refers to as French bouillabaisse is neither; it is West African soupa konja. Furthermore, these voices resist the erasure of their particular geographic and cultural roots, asserting that, “these vague ‘Africans’ you refer to had countries—Senegal, Benin, Cameroun, etc.” (Elie 51). When Elie defends himself by explaining that the information he offered is simply what he’s found in books, the indigenous voices step in again: “I hate to darken your narrative again, Kemo Sabe, but the filé in your gumbo is the sassafras leaf powder we introduced to your people” (51).

The neat narrative Elie’s narratorial persona sought to create is hijacked by rowdy, cantankerous voices who resist being buried, ignored, or erased. Each of the voices fights against subjugation of their knowledges. Interestingly, even groups that are often presented as dominant are included in the chorus of subjugated voices; their particular history in New Orleans has at times denied them the privilege people like them carry in contemporary American society: white voices demand that the influence of European instruments, American marching bands, and Caucasian musicians like B.A. Rolfe on jazz be recognized (51-2); Spaniards who remind Elie’s narrator that both the French Quarter and the city’s large population of free people of color, freed during the years of Spanish domination, are Iberian accomplishments (52-3); French voices chafe at the tendency to blame Louisiana’s corruption on their colonial government, pointing instead to corrupt Scotsman John Law, a “schemer who duped [the French] into investing in this mosquito-infested back water [that is, South Louisiana]” (54, italics in original). There are also the voices of Fundamentalist Christians—so often associated with positions of privilege in contemporary American society—who interrupt Elie’s already un-neatened draft to assert that Katrina was divine retribution for New Orleans’s sexually permissive character: “I said it then and I’ll say it now: my God will not sit idly by as heathen Sodomites mock His Holy Name” (54,
italics in original) while nonreligious leftist voices invoke the deity to argue that “sometimes, God works through levees” (56, italics in original). Right-wing conservative voices interject their opinion into narrator-Elie’s hopeful claim “that New Orleans is going to rise up again as a great city” with their rebuttal that “a lot of that aim came from the damn communists like Cuba and Venezuela” (55, italics in original). There are also voices that are more commonly thought of as marginalized: the voices of dark skinned Black people recoil at Elie’s claim that light-skinned Black New Orleanians were “radical egalitarians” (53), asking “If these light skinned Creoles were so egalitarian why did they look down on dark skinned people?” before offering a relevant historical example of passe blancs exercising their color privilege (53, italics in original).

“Still Live, with Voices” is not only multivocal. It is almost literally an “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (Foucault 81). But this insurrection, which narrator-Elie fears will ruin his neat story, is actually what makes it a richer, more complete history of the city. These insurrectionary voices, these holders of subjugated knowledges, have defined the city of New Orleans through and across time. The narrator concedes as much in the essays conclusion, in which he begins to compare New Orleans to other cities:

I am told that there are cities where the citizens speak with one voice and are able to achieve progress in an ordered, mature fashion. In these places, the streets are clean, the people are well-mannered and the humors of the blood are kept in passionless balance. (56)

But those places are not like New Orleans. New Orleans is home to “unruly voices” (Elie 56). And, though Elie admits that if New Orleans could “tame” those voices, the city could, perhaps, “achieve the bland efficiency” of other cities and the outsiders who inhabit them, the rich culture that is those voices’ legacy is, he asserts, worth the “high tax” New Orleanians pay for “non-
conformity” (Elie 56-7). With his final sentence, narrator-Elie defers to the authority of the crazy chorus of unruly voices that disrupt his neat history: “If you live long enough with these voices, they start making sense” (57). Elie’s essay is a response to Marsalis’s call, but it is also a call to others—especially the reader—to listen to what New Orleans’s many voices have to say.

Marsalis’s call to protect the integrity of home cultures rallies the reader to defend homeplaces. Hearn’s brief description of the way New Orleans, for all its foreignness, is familiar enough to spur “some memory of [the traveler’s] home—some recollection of his Fatherland—some remembrance of something he loves” (Rutledge 48) establishes New Orleans as a homeland worthy of defense, even for outsiders. Elie’s multivocal, insurrectionary history presents and contextualizes the diverse conflicts and relationships that have shaped the city and calls on readers to follow suit. So, by the time the reader is presented with Warner’s essay—an essay which, because it presents only the disembodied, uncontextualized standpoint of its writer,—she can fill in the some of the blanks Warner leaves for herself. Warner’s description of the “easy-going African” (76) is juxtaposed against and related to the insurrectionary subjugated African voices in Elie’s essay. Warner’s defeated claim that he is “utterly unable to say... wherein [New Orleans’s] charm lies” (76) connects to Hearn’s argument that New Orleans “recalls vague memories” of all travelers’ homeplaces (Rutledge Where We Know, 48). The interplay between Warner’s essays and the others, as opposed to Warner’s essay alone, shapes the reader’s interpretation.

It is in the final paragraph of Warner’s essay that the power of second-line literary call and response to act as an intervention in hierarchies of knowledge is most evident. In that paragraph, Warner praises New Orleans’s environment and infrastructure, foreseeing great economic success in the city’s near future:
The metropolis of the Southwest [that is, New Orleans] has geographical reasons for a great future. Louisiana is rich in alluvial soil, the capability of which has not yet been tested, except in some localities by skilful agriculture. But the prosperity of the city depends much on local conditions. Science and energy can solve the problem of drainage, can convert all the territory between the city and Lake Ponchartrain into a veritable garden, surpassing in fertility the flat environs of the city of Mexico. And the steady development of common-school education, together with technical and industrial schools, will create a skill which will make New Orleans the industrial and manufacturing centre of that region. (95)

This paragraph reflects Warner’s own cultural standards; he is a well-off, white, Protestant northeasterner. His culture is one that champions capitalism and industry and pushes people to “work hard and to honor the dollar and to cherish the word freedom even more than the condition itself” (Elie 49). It is the culture of “cities where the citizens speak with one voice and are able to achieve progress in an ordered, mature fashion” (Elie 56). It is the culture of mainstream Anglo-America, which, as the reader learns in Marsalis’s call, is one that breeds “bad business practices” because of a “lack of integrity” (Marsalis, qtd. in Rutledge, Where We Know 47). Many New Orleanians are likely well aware of the consequences of those bad business practices and lacking integrity before reading Where We Know, but Rutledge reminds them (and alerts outsiders to the consequences) in the volume’s introduction when he urges his audience to purchase his books at one of New Orleans’s many small, locally owned bookstores:

One needs only to look at New Orleans to learn that this kind of culture flees town and does little or nothing to help rebuild after a disaster. Don’t count on
McDonald’s to anchor your neighborhood when it is in need. Don’t count on Starbucks. Corporate culture has no connection to home. ("Introduction" xxv)

It is a culture of commodification; a culture that has lost its mooring and, as a result, has lost its situatedness. It is a culture that is placeless because it has lost its relationship to its home—"and once you don’t know where home is, you could be anywhere" (Marsalis, qtd. in Rutledge, Where We Know 47).

People whose standpoint is like Warner’s would commodify New Orleans’s culture, disconnecting it from its history, silencing its myriad subjugated voices, and render it a place that could be anywhere. But Where We Know’s second-line literary style allows those subjugated voices to call and respond to one another across time as they relate to and in the place that is the city of New Orleans. In so doing, Where We Know liberates New Orleans’s historical and contemporary voices, uniting, prioritizing, and empowering them through an alignment with authentiCity.

Of all the texts I examine in this thesis, it is Where We Know that best illustrates authentiCity’s liberatory nature. Where We Know’s liberatory intent is on display even before the collection truly begins; it is evident in Rutledge’s dedication of the anthology to “those who wish to come home—and those who we wish could come home” (x, italics in original). Rutledge’s dedication works to ensure that the profits of local knowledge and labor are reaped by the knowers and the laborers. This is quite different from Fink’s dedication of Five Days at Memorial to Mary Fink (v), which offers the book—that is, the end product made up of local, experiential knowledge—not to the people whose knowledges were the raw materials from which the book was formed, but to a member of the (outsider) author’s own (outsider) community. Like a colonial power that extracts raw materials from its colony but funnels the
profits from goods manufactured out of those materials back to the colonial homeland, Fink takes the product manufactured from New Orleans’s resources (that is, the city’s history and residents) and, through her dedication, symbolically offers the profits to her own non-New Orleanian relative. Smith’s gifting of *Blood Dazzler* to her non-New Orleanian husband and granddaughter is similar to Fink’s, though Smith does, at least, include local people at the end of her dedication, when she writes that the collection is “*for the people of the Gulf Coast, / who redefined faith*” (v, italics in original). Baum’s dedication of *Nine Lives*, which reads “*for the people of New Orleans*” (v), similarly compensates locals for their experiential knowledge. But neither Smith’s dedication, with its past tense, nor Baum’s, with its lack of time marker, speak to the liberation of New Orleanians in the present or future. Smith’s dedication, like her persona poems, which liberate subjugated knowledges by providing a venue for them to engage with the past events of hurricanes, is backward-looking; Baum’s dedication, like his authorial persona, is not situated or positioned. Rutledge’s dedication, with its nod to the potential of future homecoming, works like the volume’s nonchronological organization to connect the present moment of exile with both the past event that was the catalyst for the current exile and the future, be it one of continued exile, homecoming, or both. Rutledge’s dedication links the volume to a current struggle, a hurricane-induced diaspora, whose goal is liberation through a return to the city that is home.

Liberation through homecoming, a recurrent theme of *Where We Know*, is most visible through the motif which is attached to it throughout the volume: threat. Again and again, Rutledge and the writers whose work appears in the anthology reference the forces that have made it difficult (or even impossible) for New Orleanians to come home, both in the past and the present. The ubiquitous referencing of both historical and contemporary barriers to New
Orleanians’ connection to their homeplace works to reinforce the particular cyclical way, explained above, that the people and place of New Orleans experience trauma. The motif of threat also allows Rutledge to connect the Katrina diaspora to other contemporary threats that face New Orleans and, he argues, will soon threaten others:

[Citizens of New Orleans] face situations that the rest of the country will face soon, if they have not faced them already: the decay of American infrastructure, the ruin of the American environment; the breakdown of American cities; the blunt fact of American poverty and the attempts by some business-minded leaders to sweep that poverty out of view, off to another city if the opportunity (i.e., a national disaster) presents itself. (“Introduction” xxiv)

Rutledge ends his enumeration of hazards with a more positive aspect of Contemporary New Orleans: “Big parties that are still a whole lot of fun” (“Introduction” xxiv). He makes this shift to illustrate another aspect of New Orleans’s culture: “Oops,” he writes, “in good New Orleanian tradition, my list switched. This city is never wholly negative. We face these issues with some hope or, when that hope seems naïve, we throw one hell of a party” (“Introduction” xxiv). Rutledge goes on to celebrate the city, but the list of threats he begins is extended as the volume progresses; if Rutledge’s list in the anthology’s introduction is a call, the book’s contributors take it up and, as the collection progresses, respond to it.

Sarah Inman responds to Rutledge’s call in her essay, “The Gutting,” by adding the threat of economic competition to the list of threats to New Orleans and its residents. Inman explains that that she and her husband are apprehensive about their colleagues—who will be vying for limited positions at the university where they work—coming home after the storm. “When we talk about those who will come back to the city, it’s not the ghetto’s return I worry about” (20).
More threatening than the reappearance of the urban poor and the poverty-associated social ills connected with them is the prospect of competing against an influx of middle class, educated, professional people who, like Inman and her husband, seek to earn or maintain white-collar jobs or are interested in buying or renting the relatively few properties left habitable after Katrina.

“A Dull Life,” an 1867 essay by Barbara Bodichon, a leading English feminist and educational activist who was also the granddaughter of a famous radical abolitionist, responds to Rutledge’s call by presenting New Orleans’s embrace of the slave system as the biggest threat to those that call the city home. Bodichon argues that New Orleans is unique for its “dreary and oppressive” landscape (59), rampant criminality (59-60), and immorality (60). Bodichon links each of these issues to slavery, which, she explains, seeped into every moment of her 1858 visit to New Orleans and left her feeling that “everywhere, at every time, the presence of slavery was heavy upon [her]” (60). Bodichon’s essay, written two years after the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the United States, seems to imply that slavery’s legacy is still a threat to New Orleans and its people because of the degree to which the white supremacist patriarchy it both depended on and protected ensured that New Orleanian women and People of Color remained uneducated. Just as Bodichon’s essay asked her 1867 audience to consider the lasting effects of past social and educational injustices on New Orleans’s future at a time of crisis and rebuilding (in this case, post-Civil War Reconstruction), Rutledge’s inclusion of the essay in Where We Know pushes contemporary readers to consider the ways in which modern New Orleans’s inequitable educational system, both pre- and post-Katrina, poses a threat to recovery and how that danger might not be limited to New Orleans but, instead, might also threaten the

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38 For an overview of some of the successes, failures, and continuing challenges facing the New Orleans public school system, see “The End of Neighborhood Schools,” a multimedia project by NPR’s Anya Kamenetz and Edmund Fountain which incorporates photographs and interviews as well as statistical and policy information, both current and historical, as part of a detailed examination of public education in the city.
American public education system in general. In this respect, Bodichon’s essay serves a similar purpose in *Where We Know* to the one it likely served when it first appeared not in a local newspaper, but in a British literary magazine; “A Dull Life” presented New Orleans as a cautionary example to Bodichon’s mainstream British audiences and implicitly argued that protection of access to education, especially for women, was necessary to ensure that Britain did not fall to the same fate as New Orleans. Rutledge’s inclusion of a short selection from novelist and temporary New Orleans resident Sherwood Anderson’s 1922 essay, “New Orleans, the Double Dealer, and the Modern Movement in America” serves a similar purpose as the incorporation of Bodichon’s essay. The selection from Anderson’s essay depicts the industry-courting “new New Orleans,” which “begs factories to come here from other cities” as New Orleans’s biggest menace, though its threat is tempered by the city’s own character, which includes “too many elements here pulling in another direction” (Rutledge *Where We Know* 121).

Just as Bodichon’s essay brings to the fore contemporary concerns about equitable education in New Orleans, Rutledge’s inclusion of Anderson’s thoughts on the threat posed to the city by industrialization and Americanization in 1922 align with current debates about the potential benefits and costs of contemporary New Orleanian flirtation with national industries and corporations.39

Contemporary writer Mark Folse responds to Rutledge’s call by sharing his own anxiety, which is related to the erasure of New Orleans’s communal history: “So much of the city is still in danger of being reduced to memory” (177). Sam Jasper, another contemporary writer,

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39 Almost ten years after Katrina, New Orleans is a hotbed of private-sector experimentation, development, and innovation. Not only has the city (re)gained its reputation as an incubator for innovations in service sector industries like tourism and dining, but it has also welcomed a multi-million dollar film and television industry, helping to earn Louisiana the nickname of Hollywood South. New Orleans has also become a mecca for millennial entrepreneurs, small business start-ups, and, along with the rest of south Louisiana, a home base for multi-national oil and natural gas corporations. For an examination of the complicated pros and cons of the film industry—which is, in many ways, representative of other private-sector industries in New Orleans at this time, listen to Kate Richardson’s radio-short, “Louisiana’s Film Industry Thrives, but at what Cost?”
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similarly bemoans the “possible loss of our culture, our favorite places, our way of life” (199). But Jasper’s essay, “Breach of Contract,” implies that Katrina resulted in a greater, and more dangerous, loss than that of history, memory, or culture. Jasper recounts a panel discussion he attended two months after Katrina. Though the panel focused on the mental health issues anticipated after the storm, it was a psychiatrist’s statement about a particular type of grief that Jasper remembers most clearly. The psychiatrist explained that what New Orleanians will “grieve most is the loss of our belief in a social contract between our government and our populace.” This “breach of trust” which came after “years of belief in something as fundamental to our civic sense of ourselves, a sense that we were part of something greater than just our little block or neighborhood, to suddenly find that we were naïve in our expectations” is the largest “shock and... trauma” (Jasper 199). Part of the threat of this particular loss is its long lasting nature. Jasper quotes the psychiatrist, who said, just two months after the storm, that “it will be years before that grief abates, if ever” before ending his essay with his own experience-based response: “So far it hasn’t” (199).

Eve Troeh, an Alaska-born, Missouri-raised reporter based in New Orleans both before and after Katrina, takes up Rutledge’s call to engage with the motif of threat by offering her personal experiences in two contributions to *Where We Know* in the form of two essays, “New Orleans Loss” and “Dear New Orleans: I’m Leaving You.” In these essays, Troeh presents the city’s horrific crime rate as the biggest threat to homecoming (or, in Troeh’s case, homestaying). In “New Orleans Loss,” Troeh tells the story of her friend Helen Hill, one of six people murdered in New Orleans on January 4, 2007. Hill’s murder—and the ever-present, all-consuming violence that was its context—was an important symbol for Troeh and many others who held New Orleans dear. As Troeh explains:
All of us who’ve come back to New Orleans know there’s risk involved, on every level. The levees aren’t rebuilt. The public systems are still broken. But for many of us, it’s exciting that our collective human potential could change something destroyed into something beautiful. Helen’s death has turned that light bulb off for a lot of people. (“New Orleans Loss” 207)

Hill’s death leaves Troeh, like many others, wondering “when peace is going to come. Or how” (“New Orleans Loss” 207).

In the end, Troeh writes, peace does not come, and the violence is too much of a risk. In “Dear New Orleans: I’m Leaving You,” Troeh explains that she left New Orleans after she was attacked by a stranger less than a block from her home. Still, Troeh is conflicted about leaving. She is “angry and confused” and has questions about “which is the real New Orleans? The one that’s violent and desperate? Or the one that coos softly, and caresses [her]?” Though she concedes that “the answer, of course, is both,” Troeh still decides to leave, explaining that she “just hauled her things out of New Orleans in a big truck” (“Dear New Orleans” 222).

The risks, threats, and anxieties presented in Where We Know resonate with me as a New Orleanian. Like Inman, I worry that an influx of skilled, educated workers will make jobs in my field more competitive. Additionally, like Sarah DeBacher, aware that many of her neighbors view her as “this crazy white lady who’d moved in with her tall, funny-talking husband. This outsider. This bitch” (193), I have a fraught relationship with gentrification; I worry about the degree to which I, even as a native New Orleanian and person of color, because of my middle-class aspirations and marriage to a non-local white man, am a threat to some of the city’s longstanding cultural patterns. Like Bodichon, I worry that it is our own cultural foundations and dark history that cement our position as a poor, struggling community. Like Anderson and Folse,

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40 Troeh has since returned to New Orleans, where she now lives and works as News Director for WWNO-FM.
I worry that economic progress and the memory erasure that so often comes with it will erode both our coastline and our culture. Like Jasper, I worry that our loss of faith in social contracts leaves us ill-suited for the responsibilities of citizenship. And, like Troeh, I dread the violence that is endemic to my hometown.

I knew Helen Hill; at the time of her murder we lived in the same neighborhood and belonged to overlapping social circles. I remember when my friends Andrea and Clint had their home broken into and ransacked, though it is, perhaps, further evidence of the normalcy of violence and crime in New Orleans that I had forgotten about this particular incident until I read Inman’s reference to it (10). I remember Dinerral Shavers, another person I knew personally, who fell victim to our city’s violence. Dinerral, a teacher and member of popular local brass band the Hot 8, died after a bullet meant for his teenage son lodged itself in the back of his skull. Recently, while I was visiting home, my father’s work colleague and his son were gunned down on their porch a few blocks away from our own home. Those murders, which took place on New Year’s Day, were the city’s first for 2015. I remember Addie, a coworker of mine, and her boyfriend Zack, who strangled her, then dismembered and ate parts of her body before jumping to his death from the roof of a French Quarter hotel the year before Helen Hill was killed. Zack and Addie’s story\footnote{Because I knew both Addie and Zack intimately, I am, perhaps, unfair in my critiques of media portrayals of them and the sensationalization of both their refusal to leave the French Quarter during and after the storm and their deaths. I have yet to find an account of their lives or deaths that does not, in my opinion, distort their lives to make their story more interesting and/or easily understandable—and more sellable. That said, for more information about their deaths, see Ethan Brown’s 2010 book, \textit{Shake the Devil Off: A True Story of the Murder that Rocked New Orleans}, \textit{Zack and Addie} (a 2015 documentary directed by Rob Florence), or the “Graveyard Love” episode of ABC’s true crime series \textit{Final Witness}.} is seen by many as an example of the potential consequences of a risk Sam Jasper mentions in “Breach of Contract”: “the mental health issues that were expected to show themselves in the aftermath [of the storm]” (198), but I also see their deaths as related to the depressing grind of life in New Orleans. Zack and Addie’s story is exceptional in its
gruesomeness, but they are not unique for having died violent deaths in New Orleans. I have lost count of how many of the people I went to school with, worked with, celebrated with, ate, drank, or fought with have, in the years since Katrina, been the victims of violence, the perpetrators of violence, or both.

New Orleans is, in so many ways, a dangerous place. And living in and under such constant threat can wear a person down. It can make you sad and hopeless. It can, as it did to Troeh, make you want to leave. If you decide to stay, it can change the way you interpret the world. “It make us disgusted, depressed, and everything else” (Duplessis, qtd. in Rutledge, Where We Know 1). It can also make you angry. So many of the voices included in Where We Know are tinged with anger. There is a rage just under the surface. That rage, a consequence of experiencing not only Katrina, but life in New Orleans both before and after the storm, is not easily traced to a single cause or easily verifiable through documented, privileged sources.

Similarly, because it is informed in historical and communal knowledge that is, in turn, connected to the city of New Orleans, this rage cannot easily be separated from the place in which it is rooted. Perhaps for these reasons, it is largely absent from Five Days, in which Fink, who does not write from a position of authentiCity, prioritizes privileged knowledges and relegates local, experiential, place-based knowledges—and their anger—to the realm of the subjugated.

The rage is not as absent from Nine Lives, but it is obscured by Baum’s alignment with prioritized knowledges. Baum, a white, Anglo American male who does not prioritize subjugated knowledges of the Black New Orleanian communities he writes about, often displaces local rage, crafting his story so that rage is not directed at his white male characters. In a scene in which Coroner Frank Minyard waits with half a dozen people for rescue at the Orleans Parish Criminal
Courts Building the day after Katrina is a prime example. Minyard and the others hear bullets whiz past them.

‘Not again,’ the deputy said tiredly as everybody on the steps rose and shuffled up the steps into the courthouse. A lot of people had been sent to Angola [Louisiana’s infamous plantation-style state penitentiary] from this building, and every now and then since the crisis had started, somebody in the city had taken the opportunity to take a shot at it. (238-9)

Baum’s use of the passive voice (“people had been sent”) and generic, unspecific actors (“a lot of people;” “somebody in the city”) downplays the context in which the violence he writes about took place. That context involves a system of institutionalized oppression in which Louisiana citizens, overwhelmingly the descendants of African slaves, are imprisoned inside an institution, which bears the name of the African nation from which many of their ancestors were stolen. At that penal institution, they are required to perform the same time of back-breaking agricultural labor as their enslaved ancestors. But in Baum’s book, the “Ptuiiii!” (238) of bullets are robbed of background knowledge that could imbue them with resistant or revolutionary nuance.

Baum’s depiction of the death of Mardi Gras Indian chief-of-chiefs Tootie Montana is similarly decontextualized and sanitized. Baum presents Montana’s death as a personal tragedy, focusing on how Montana’s wife, Joyce, witnesses and reacts to his death at a June 2005 New Orleans city council meeting (203-4). As Baum writes them, Montana’s last words are “Say what?” which he speaks in response to New Orleans city councilman Oliver Thomas’s gentle urging to Montana to take his time as he addresses the council (204). Gone from Baum’s “nonfictional” narrative—a narrative Baum takes so many pains to remind the reader is built on interviews with nine real New Orleanians (ix-xi)—are Big Chief Montana’s real last words.
They were spoken at a June 27, 2005 special session of the New Orleans city council, a session called to address complaints of police misconduct during second lines and brutality aimed at Mardi Gras Indians and their communities. Interestingly, these final words are well documented and easily verifiable; like all New Orleans city council meetings, the one at which Big Chief Montana died was filmed. Those words, “This has got to stop!” were, like the fictional final words Baum writes, directed at a city council official (or, more accurately, all of them). But, unlike the words Baum places in Montana’s mouth, Montana’s true final words were spoken in the context of resistance and rage; they were revolutionary and liberatory in intent. As local activist Kalamu ya Salaam explains, Montana “died on the battlefield. He died fighting.” By removing these words from his book, Baum is able to obscure and deny the lived experience of a particular subset of Black New Orleanians, making *Nine Lives* more palatable for nonlocal white audiences (and, perhaps, for his nonlocal white self) by removing rage from the narrative. The removal of rage is necessary for Baum and his audience because that rage is directed at power. In the context of Montana’s story, that power is whiteness, nonlocal interests, and the economically and politically privileged classes those entities represent; Montana’s rage is directed at those entities that have the privilege of maintaining their disembodied status. That disembodied status is shared by Baum’s audience, whom he allows to remain unsituated, unpositioned, and disembodied, and by Baum’s authorial persona, which is similarly nonspecific. By virtue of their lack of particularity or specificity, both Baum’s authorial persona and his audience become consumed by the “solo swallowing eye” (Smith, “8a.m., Sunday, August 28, 2005” 22) of the dominant gaze; they become one with the dominant.

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42 For a much more accurate and in depth examination of Montana’s life, work, and death than that presented by Baum, see *Tootie’s Last Suit*, directed by Lisa Katzman.
But Rutledge, himself a white, Anglo American man, brings New Orleanian rage—albeit of a different kind—to the fore in the “Acknowledgements & Anger” section of *Where We Know*. “Acknowledgements & Anger” begins like a typical acknowledgment section in any book, thanking people and institutions whose support contributed to the publication’s existence. Rutledge thanks his research assistant and UNO’s English Department, which provided the assistant to him (“Acknowledgements” 263). But from there, Rutledge shifts. He thanks Louisiana’s governor, Piyush “Bobby” Jindal, “for not having budgeted [UNO] out of existence, yet. Thanks for squeezing us to point [sic] of passing out” (*Where We Know* 263). In the remaining page of acknowledgements, Rutledge moves beyond sarcastically thanking Jindal to critiquing him outright, warning the reader not to “be fooled by Jindal’s oil cleanup speeches” because “deep down he is as bad as those oil execs who are willing to ruin the Gulf” (*Where We Know* 264). Rutledge ends “Acknowledgements & Anger” (and *Where We Know* as a whole) with a call for action to support and protect UNO and, by doing so, to protect the city of New Orleans:

> We need more brains in this state.

> [UNO’s] student body represents the people of New Orleans, from Versailles to West End, from the Lower Ninth to Black Pearl, from Algiers to Lakeshore. Let us save our neighborhood; let us educate our neighbors.

> A great city needs an excellent and well-funded city university. That should not even be a question. (264)

Rutledge translates the rage into a call for liberatory action. This call comes only at the end of *Where We Know*, after the reader has been exposed to a second-line chorus of voices that contribute their own multifaceted experiential knowledges. These knowledges help to create, in
the reader, an understanding of Katrina and New Orleans that is rooted in different partial perspectives and situated standpoints which, taken together, do not present a universal narrative. Much of the information these partial perspectives offer is, indeed, nonverifiable—it may not be possible to authenticate the information presented. But, from a position of authentiCity, this is precisely what makes these narratives authoritative; partiality is a prerequisite for making “rational knowledge claims” (Haraway 589). Rutledge’s call to protect UNO and the city in which it is located would not, were it not for the volume’s authentiCity, make sense; the audience would be unable to hear—or take up—the call.
CONCLUSION

With this thesis, I argue that a paradigmatic shift from authenticity-as-verification to authentiCity is potentially valuable to literary scholars as they pursue their work. AuthentiCity-informed literary criticism assumes the authority of particular, experiential, subjugated knowledges, thereby enabling scholars to engage with narratives informed by voices that they do not typically hear because they do not know how to listen. AuthentiCity can allow literary scholars to engage with and investigate literatures that, because of their roots in particular perspectives, cannot be effectively interpreted without striking down the assumption that universality is a central to making rational knowledge claims. AuthentiCity can also be useful for scholars who wish to engage with texts rooted in they variety of subjugated knowledges with “historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemization” (Foucault 81) in ways that are not possible when authentication or verification are prerequisites to interpretation. It can help literary scholars and historians engage with nonfictional accounts of events that are denied or downplayed in official narratives as well as narratives of trauma. Additionally, a shift to authentiCity can, for example, help scholars navigate historical autobiographies that more often than not reflect and echo the racial biases of their time, biases which contributed to a censoring of the contents or otherwise limited the autobiographical narratives they set out to study. AuthentiCity is also useful to literary scholars in that it can help them engage with texts written in marginalized dialects and allow them to

43 Take, for example, autobiographies like Gabi Köpp’s Warum war ich bloss ein Mädchen? (Why Did I Have to be a Girl?), which recounts her experiences of post-war rape in 1945 Pomerania, or the narratives in Peipei Qiu’s Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan’s Sex Slaves.

44 In this potential use, authentiCity aligns with the work of contemporary scholars who examine the discursive modes employed by formerly-enslaved Black people whose accounts of their own lives were often curated or framed by their white publishers and tailored to meet the expectations of their white audiences. See, for example, Jacqueline Goldsby’s “I Disguised my Hand: Writing Versions of the Truth in Harriet Jacobs’ Incidences in the Life of a Slave Girl and John Jacobs’s ‘A True Tale of Slavery’.”
promote work examining increasingly popular but under-theorized genres like hip-hop, Creative Nonfiction, and memoir. This value is related to the way authentiCity circumvents some of the hierarchies of scholarly work that define those dialects and genres as inherently unworthy of serious engagement because they are “low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (Foucault 82).

Because it circumvents the hierarchies that privileges some literatures and denigrates others, a shift to authentiCity is potential liberatory for scholars whose interest lies in marginalized literatures. AuthentiCity assumes the inherent validity and worth of both popular young adult novels and classical poetry and leaves space for scholars to pursue criticism of both genres with equal amounts of scholarly rigor.

But the liberatory potential of authentiCity-informed scholarship, be it literary or another variety, are, I think, more important for those whom scholars study than for the scholars themselves. This is because authentiCity, which calls for the situatedness and positioning of all parties, limits the ability of scholars to act in a disembodied fashion. A shift to AuthentiCity can facilitate scholarship, but it also ensures that scholars, whose alignment with the privileged world of academia often makes them more powerful than the people of the worlds they study, cannot disempower or subjugate already-marginalized voices—it can simultaneously liberate scholars in and liberate others from scholarly work.

Had Sherri Fink, whose work as an investigatory journalist is similar to the work pursued by researchers in the social sciences, for example, undertaken her research from a position of authentiCity, it have necessitated a more thoughtfully consideration of her own identity a well-educated white woman from the East Coast. This consideration might have led her to ask for clarification about why Carrie Hall’s family called her “Ma’Dear,” how New Orleanians use the
term neutral ground, or how Louisianans define and understand Cajun identity and Southern accents. Instead, Fink, who approached her research as authentication, gives the impression that “Ma’Dear” is a nickname (not title) (*Five Days* 4), misrepresents local language use (23), and makes statements about regional dialects and accents that are almost nonsensical (76, 134). These types of errors, while disrespectful, are small, and are likely to add up to little more than annoyance for most New Orleanians of Louisianans who read her book. More bothersome are some of Fink’s other authorial choices, like her complacency in Theile’s racism and her editorialization about the criminality of taking food, water, and diapers from a flooded grocery store (*Five Days* 65), which are also rooted in her failure to recognize the particularity of her own standpoint—a failure enabled by her failure to practice authentiCity through and doing her work. Baum’s erasure of local rage—an erasure that is similarly rooted in the author’s failure to recognize his own particularity and situatedness—work similarly. These failures do not merely risk disrespecting or aggravating the local people about with Fink and Baum write. Fink’s treatment of the commandeering of goods from businesses after the storm reinforces a monolithic narrative that re-presents post-hurricane transgression of property laws by New Orleanians of all races as chaotic “looting” by Black thugs. Baum’s deletion of the revolutionary context of Tootie Montana’s death absolves NOPD of its systematic abuse of the city’s citizens.

These authorial acts do damage. A shift from authenticity-as-authentication to authentiCity as a positionality can help to mitigate and prevent that damage.

AuthentiCity can also help to prevent another type of damage: the damage of the single story—the damage of authenticity-enabled silencing. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explains, her American professor, a man whose position as Adichie’s instructor imbued him with greater power in their academic relationship, told her that her novel failed because her characters were
not “authentically African.” In the same lecture during which she shares the story of her professor’s critique, Adichie explains that, as a child, she read British and American children’s books. When she began writing her own story and picture books, she mimicked those books’ contents. As a result, the young Adichie, who had never been outside of Nigeria, wrote about Caucasian characters who played in snow and talked about how lovely (and noticeable) the sunny weather was. Her exposure to only books with foreign characters had convinced her “books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify” (Adichie). Being exposed to a single story limited Adichie’s ability to speak about her own world before she had even begun to find her own voice.

Adichie was able to rise above the limits imposed on her speech by the single story presented in the books she read. Nor was she effectively silenced by her professor’s critique; she went on to publish novels and short stories and is widely celebrated for her lectures and speeches. Adichie explains that her success is the result of her access to multiple stories. It was her discovery of African books that liberated her from the single story and empowered her to preserve through her professor authenticity-based critique. Because of those books, Adichie realized that people like her “could exist in literature.”

In her lecture, Adichie does not dwell on the concept of authenticity. She mentions it only in the brief anecdote about her professor and then moves on. Maddee Clark, on the other hand, dwells on authenticity. Like Adichie, who discusses the problematic real-world effects of the single story, Clark does not limit her discussion of authenticity to the theoretical realm of literary or media representations. Instead, after explaining why authenticity is theoretically dangerous, Clark discusses the very real effects of evaluations of authenticity on Aboriginal peoples, especially those who are queer and trans, in her native Australia. Authenticity empowers people
who are not members of these marginalized groups to present “a narrative that offers an incomplete representation of [them]” (Clark). Further, authenticity ensures that marginalized people cannot liberate themselves from the limited authentic narrative by enriching their own knowledge banks because, as it privileges an incomplete narrative, authenticity also emboldens nonmarginalized people to proclaim as false or irrelevant marginalized people’s own understandings of their culture, history, community, and selves. Clark also disallows increased representation, which facilitated Adichie’s realization that people like her could appear in books, as a potential solution. Because those representations are so often critiqued in terms of their authenticity, cannot repair Clark’s problem. But neither can the continuation of the near-invisibility which is the status quo. After presenting an argument against the very concept of authenticity, Clark arrives, at the conclusion of her essay, in an isolated and rudderless state:

I feel this lack of representation in many ways. Even as a teen, the films I watched about lesbian and transgender people always inevitably eroticise the same people, and I always pictured myself in their bodies or with their bodies. Now I know different, but I don’t know where to go next. (36)

If a total abandonment of authenticity leaves us, like Clark, simultaneously aware of the problematic baggage the term brings with it and unsure of how to proceed, what are we to do? How are we, as readers, writers, scholars, and critics to escape the limitations of authenticity? Perhaps a return to Adichie’s discussion of the single story could provide direction. Adichie offers her own personal strategy for circumventing the hazards of the single story: “I’ve always felt,” she says, “that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person.” But Adichie’s solution of knowing all of the stories of a person and place is not realistic; it is impossible to be all-knowing.
I argue that AuthentiCity’s potential to undo and combat the damage of authenticity-enabled silencing. AuthentiCity is not simply a statement, like Clark’s, against authenticity. Nor is authentiCity, like Adichie’s professed personal solution of engaging with all of a particular person or place’s stories, an impossible quest to attain infinite knowledge. It is, instead, a rehabilitation, reclamation, and expansion of the term. Just as those with power can employ authenticity as authentication to silence the voices of marginalized people whose experiential knowledges refute their claims (as Adichie’s professor did), marginalized communities can employ authentiCity as protection against knowledge claims rooted in normalized, privileged, disembodied knowledges. This is because authentiCity, with its insistence on the situatedness of all involved parties, demands that the powerful remain embodied and accountable; they cannot play the god trick. AuthentiCity stands in the face of, for example, the scientific racism that provided both the ideological framework and justification for medical abuses of People of Color again and again in American history\textsuperscript{45} holding “objective” scientists accountable for their racism.

A paradigm shift from authenticity to authentiCity to empower members of marginalized communities—who are so often the objects of scholarly or literary work—to pursue scholarly and literary work themselves. As I stated early on in this thesis, I hope that authentiCity can help liberate my community’s subjugated knowledges, my people as the holders of those knowledges, and my city, which functions as those knowledges’ home. In this form, my interest in authentiCity is less concerned with how it can enrich and enable scholarly work—that is, work that examines and engages with literature by, about, and of New Orleans and/or Katrina—and more concerned with how it can work to empower the creation of that literature. Again, I turn to personal experience as a clarifying example. During the fall of 2014, I was enrolled in an upper-

\textsuperscript{45} See, for example, Todd L. Savitt’s “Blacks as Medical Specimens” in his book, Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia, Allan Brandt’s “Racism and Research: The Case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study,” or Rebecca Skloot’s The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks.
level Creative Nonfiction workshop at Eastern Illinois University. Many of my stories were about Katrina and the years directly after it; those that weren’t directly about the storm were still informed by my experiences living in New Orleans and featured New Orleanians. I was an outlier in the class of about twenty students: one of only three non-white writers, the only Southerner, one of only three who workshoped pieces whose settings were explicitly not the rural Midwest, one of only three whose stories incorporated any non-standard American dialect. Each time we workshoped my pieces, I received mostly positive feedback. My peers thought my characters and dialogue were “gritty” and “real” and they described my settings as “exotic” and “foreign” (this particular comment was especially frustrating because it was in response to an essay in which I shared my frustration and hurt at how, after Katrina, many Americans referred to New Orleanians, their fellow citizens, as “refugees”46). But there were also negative critiques, mostly in the form of requests for clarification. Parts of my essays did not work, my peers said, because they couldn’t have been true. In an early draft of “The Deluge,” I wrote a scene with dialogue between my mother and father. In the original version, my father’s words appear in dialect while my mother’s are more standard. This is true to my memory and to reality. Both my parents can function in Standard American English, but my father tends to speak in his home dialect (a Seventh Ward New Orleans variety of Black English) at home while my mother does less code-switching. My peers thought that the difference in the way the characters spoke felt “fake”; for them, an authentic Black New Orleans experience was one in which everybody sounded the same kind of different. In another scene in the same essay, I describe going through a flooded grocery store after the storm. In the earlier draft, I wrote that the water in the store was up to my knees even though, a few paragraphs above, I wrote that the water in the street was up to my neck. Again, this is true to my memory and to reality. Flooding in New Orleans was not

46 See Masquelier.
uniform, even in individual neighborhoods. This is, in part, related to the way the city was built on ancient alluvial deposits as well as to the intricacies of modern pumping systems, drainage canals, and patterns of sinkage. In my neighborhood, whose main thoroughfare of Gentilly Boulevard follows the path of an ancient mound of silt deposits, a narrow strip of high land was only minimally flooded, while buildings a block further into the neighborhood had eight feet of water. But my peers thought that an essay in which flooding was inconsistent did not seem real, even after I explained to them where the shifting water level come from. One of my classmates went so far as to demand that I bring pictures to prove that it could be true; he wanted outside verification. In the end, I buckled to my peers’ feedback. In the final draft of “The Deluge,” I wrote my father’s dialect as closer to Standard American English and my mother’s closer to a New Orleanian Black dialect (Coleman 53) and added sentences that give the impression of increased distance between the areas where water was higher and where it was lower (55). Though the changes I made were small, I feel like I’ve fictionalized my true story so that it more closely aligns with an externally imposed, restrictive standard of the authentic. After a semester trying to reconcile my experiential knowledge with the expectations (and demands) of readers who, I felt, did not view that knowledge as authoritative, I lost interest in writing my story. Because I am not passionate about creative writing and I do not feel compelled to bear witness to my trauma through creative writing as an act of healing, this is no great loss, either to me or to my potential readers. But my experience is, I think, exemplary of the experiences of many New Orleanians who really are passionate about putting their experiences of Katrina on the page. For these writers, the single story in their readers’ heads—the preconceived notion of what an authentic Katrina narrative looks like—is a barrier to their claiming of authorial status and the

47 The narrow strip of high land on which my parents’ home (and the grocery store in my essay) sits is clearly visible in a map of estimated flood depths (United States, “Overview of Hurricane Katrina in the New Orleans Area” 3).
privileges (authority, or, in the case of therapeutic witnessing, healing) that come with it.

AuthentiCity, with its circumvention of the singular, universal, disembodied narrative and championing of particular, embodied ones, is a potential solution; it is a liberatory tool.

I am also interested in the potential value of authentiCity as a liberatory tool for the communities and people of New Orleans outside of the context of literary studies. The community and people I reference are New Orleanians, children of a city that is one of the poorest in the country, with more than 75% of native-born residents living their entire lives below the poverty line (“New Orleans, Louisiana (LA) Poverty Rate Data”). New Orleans is also one of the unhealthiest\(^\text{48}\) and least educated\(^\text{49}\) metropolitan areas in the United States. In some areas of New Orleans, residents’ life expectancies are comparable to those of their contemporaries in Cameroon and Angola (Somosot). This is in no small part due to the city’s murder rate which, at more than triple the average for American cities of comparable size, is one of the highest in the nation (Martin). More specifically, I am interested in liberation for New Orleans’s Black communities—the communities that birthed my parents’ parents and grandparents and that are half of my own children’s heritage—which feel the negative effects of New Orleans’s poverty, violence, and disease even more acutely; from 2008-2010, a Black person in New Orleans was 1.37 times more likely to die than a white New Orleanian, 1.23 times more likely to die than a white American, and 1.21 times more likely to die than a white Louisianan (New Orleans Health Department). My communities are communities under constant and extreme threat.

\(^{48}\) For a detailed analysis of health inequities in Orleans Parish, see the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies’s June 2012 *Place Matters for Health in Orleans Parish* report.

\(^{49}\) In 2003, 44% of adult New Orleanians were functionally illiterate (compared to 25% nationally) (“Hurricane Recovery Confronts Low Literacy Rate”).
But my communities—New Orleans in general and Black New Orleans in particular—are not unique in their precariousness. New Orleans is like so many other American urban centers: Detroit, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Washington D.C., and Chicago. Neither New Orleans nor any of these other cities have escaped poverty, violence, failing educational systems, aggressive policing, and a just-below-the-surface rage that threatens to erupt at any moment. New Orleans is not unlike Baltimore, where protests and civil disorder in response to the death of 25-year-old Black man Freddie Gray turned violent in April of 2015. Nor is New Orleans especially different from Ferguson, Missouri, a St. Louis suburb where the August 2014 killing of 18-year-old African-American Michael Brown by a white police officer (who was later not indicted for Brown’s death) led to large-scale protests and civil unrest. American cities are exploding; our nation is on the cusp of chaos. But that current chaos has roots that reach far back into our country’s collective history. Why, then, has our nation been caught so off guard by the recent events—call them protests, uprisings, or riots—in our cities? I think the reason has to do with the way we fail to prioritize subjugated knowledges. We have, as a nation, systematically denied subjugated knowledges and their holders. We have deferred their dreams. We have invited an explosion.

AuthentiCity, which requires that each of us position and situate ourselves, demands that we, as a nation, abolish the god trick. We must return to our bodies and recognize the partiality—not universality—of our perspectives; we must begin to see ourselves as an enactment of the words we include on the Seal of the United States, *e pluribus unum*. With its prioritization of subjugated knowledges, authentiCity works toward ensuring that all members of democracy are

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50 For a detailed history of New Orleans’s police corruption and brutality and an analysis of how local Black communities have responded to and organized against the police, see Leonard N. Moore’s *Black Rage in New Orleans: Police Brutality and African American Activism from World War II to Hurricane Katrina.*

51 See Ta-Nehisi Coates’s “The Case for Reparations” and “The Clock Didn’t Start with the Riots”
recognized and heard and that our government is truly one where liberty and justice are for all. With its focus on the placeness of cities—on the ways humans interact with and imbue meaning upon the spaces in which they live, not only in the present but across time—authentiCity facilitates the consideration of historical context in contemporary governance. It allows us to cowitness our fellow citizens’ contemporary and historical traumas so that we might collectively help one another shoulder, and eventually put down, our individual burdens. Through the rehabilitation of authenticity, redefining it as authentiCity, we stand not only to enrich our scholarship and empower marginalized authors. We can also work to rehabilitate our cities and the communities that form and are formed by them, so that each of us are empowered in our particularity to contribute to a more just and inclusive universal whole.
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