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Upcoming Events

With JSRI:

Holiday Toy Drive for Loyola at Rayburn.

JSRI is collecting toys for children & teens visiting their parents at Rayburn Correctional Center this Christmas! In collaboration with Loyola-Rayburn Student Government Association and Loyola SGA, we are hosting a toy drive so that hundreds of children & teens can unwrap presents and celebrate the holidays with their parents. You can also [donate online to the Loyola Rayburn Fund](#), and we can buy a gift for you! Toys will be collected until Wednesday, December 10th. Bins are located in the Danna Center, Monroe Library, Law School lobby, and Chapel of Saint Ignatius. See [the flyer for guidelines and more information here](#).

On Campus:

Earth Week Clothing

Drive. Join the Environment Program in making a difference by giving your old wardrobe a new life to support the future of Earth Week! Clean out your closet of gently used clothing and drop them off in the bins

Trailers of Tears: The Impact of Settler Colonialism on Post-Katrina Displacement

By Dr. Cassandra Shepard

I write from a place originally named Bulbancha, "land of many tongues," the ancestral grounds of the Choctaw, Chitimacha, Houma, Biloxi, Atakapa-Ishak, Tunica, and Tchefuncta. I recognize their connection and acknowledge that they were violently removed for the formation of New Orleans. I encourage readers to contribute to justice, reconciliation, and decolonization – with an emphasis on land return – as land acknowledgment is not as important as giving back land.

The post-Katrina displacement of New Orleanians is indicative of settler colonialism operating under a facade of progress. Although Hurricane Katrina caused one of the largest mass migrations in the United States, the new New Orleans purged the city of unwanted inhabitants through a difficult and discriminatory 20 year rebuild. This essay defines settler colonialism, how it historically operated in the city, and how it continues in this post-Katrina period¹.

Settler colonialism is a system where the typical geography of a mother country and its colony is collapsed; resource extraction and management occur in one place with internal, external, and frontier operations. Settlers – who are alien to that place – claim sovereignty over it while pretending to be native. Settlers are not born: they are made in the act of land dispossession². They violently transform non-capitalist life forms into capitalist ones³, thereby turning Indigenous land into "public land" for the country and into private land for settlers.



around campus. Clothing Collection will run through Thursday, December 11th. Bins are in Buddig, Uptown, Cabra, and Francis Halls, and in the Commuter Lounge in Satchmos. See the [flyer here](#); read [more information here](#).

In the Community:

Unión Migrante Immigration Court Watch. Unión Migrante is a democratic organization of immigrants, for immigrants. They are dedicated to fighting for immigration reform, providing training and offering advocacy to support immigrants in emergencies. **As the threat of racist state violence against immigrant communities continues, Unión Migrante's resolve rises to meet it—and they want you to join!** See the [flyer & post here](#).

'The Trail They Blazed' is currently on display at the Historic New Orleans Collection. Leaders of the local Civil Rights Movement tell their stories of resistance in their own words. The exhibit features quotes from JSRI's Twomey Scholar, Dr. Ronnie Moore. The multimedia exhibition immerses visitors in the movement with ambient musical recordings of songs sung by activists, audio excerpts from oral history interviews, archival news footage, stirring photography, an interactive voter registration test, and more. The voices of those who experienced it firsthand narrate the tremendous and often dangerous effort to transform Louisiana from a Jim Crow holdout into an equitable place for all residents. **Admission is free. On view until June 7, 2026. Located on the 3rd floor of the Historic New Orleans Collection, 520 Royal Street.**

Cassandra Shepard a.k.a. MetaArtHeart, "Sailing Settlers & A Chasmic Levee," NOLA GIRL Urban Art and NFT Collection, Open Sea, 2022, <https://opensea.io/collection/nola-street-art>.

In the United States, foundational to this kind of settler colonialism is a triad including: the seizure of Indigenous land and labor and the exploitation of Black life and labor for the purpose of settler property and profit⁴. In my book, *Settler Colonialism is the Disaster*⁵, I argue that this ongoing relation creates a perpetual disaster characterized by dispossession, dispersal, extraction, pollution, environmental racism, surveillance, policing, incarceration, and death.

The settlement of New Orleans is a testament to this. The French claimed Nouvelle-Orléans in 1682. Jean-Baptiste Bienville later founded it while kidnapping and selling Indigenous people as slaves. The city was shuffled back-and-forth between France and Spain, until Napoleon sold Louisiana's 530,000,000-acre territory for \$15 million, which doubled the size of the United States.

President Thomas Jefferson enmeshed Indigenous people into debt, forcing them to use their lands as collateral⁶. Later, President Andrew Jackson implemented the Indian Removal Act of 1830 resulting in the Trail of Tears – displacing 100,000 Indigenous and enslaved Black people, killing 10,000, and opening 25 million acres for plantation expansion⁷. Seminoles and Black Seminoles from Florida were trafficked through New Orleans and held at Fort Pike en route to Indian Country⁸. Choctaw were either forcibly relocated west of the Mississippi, blended into Maroon communities, or hid in lower-lying parishes⁹. The Choctaw coastal bands now face settler-induced devastation: rising tides, land erosion, pollution, and saltwater intrusion caused by the oil, gas, and shipping industries. The Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw have been forced to relocate again because their (forced) resettlement location, Isle de Jean Charles, is now sinking¹⁰.

These tactics of dispossession and removal have continued in post-Katrina New Orleans. Over 400,000 evacuees struggled to return as racial disparities emerged with recovery funds. Black hurricane victims were more likely to reside near failing levees and suffer greater devastation, but private insurance companies consistently underpaid Black homeowners. The Road Home Program¹¹, responsible for distributing \$11 billion in recovery funds, provided Black homeowners with the "pre-storm market value" of their homes, while providing white homeowners a higher "estimated cost to repair damage."¹²

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) depreciated home values based on race¹³ and denied rebuilding assistance to 20,000 heir property owners, a majority of whom were Black, held unclear housing titles, and needed legal assistance¹⁴. With Black homeowners unable to receive support, they were less likely to receive FEMA trailers, unable to afford to repair their homes, subjected to aggressive city blight initiatives, and approached by *disaster capitalists*¹⁵ offering small cash buyouts. Because white homeowners received better customer service, timely FEMA trailers, and greater recovery funds, they were able to more efficiently rebuild and keep their properties.

Class disparities escalated as renters, who made up over half of the New Orleans populace, were dispersed. 80,000 rental units were damaged and renters fell victim to disaster-related price gouging and gentrification

masqueraded as “no fault evictions.” The City Council demolished 5,300 public housing units and replaced them with only 706 units. In 2023, city housing received a grade D for having 150,000 rental units and needing 50,000 more. Instead, the New Orleans Planning Commission is seeking to end affordable housing mandates downtown.¹⁶

A manufactured crisis has emerged. Inflation, the cost of living, insurance premiums, and poverty have soared, while wages remain stagnant and wealth is divided by race¹⁷. The elite now demand greater security. The New Orleans Police Department (under consent decree for unconstitutional policing) responded by investing \$70 million into cameras, secretly using facial recognition technology, and cooperating with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to target immigrants, who were vital in rebuilding the city after Hurricane Katrina. Governor Jeff Landry has deployed State Police and seeks to redeploy the National Guard, despite crime decreasing. The mass incarcerator, Orleans Parish Prison (also under consent decree), is building a \$110+ million “mental health jail.” This landscape, in addition to Katrina inducing mass casualties and untreated trauma, explains why 20 years later, there are still 100,000 displaced people, who are unable – or unwilling – to move back, living in mostly Texas and the southeast.



Cassandra Shepard a.k.a. MetaArtHeart, “Ruins & a Rodeo II,” NOLA GIRL Urban Art and NFT Collection, Open Sea, 2022, <https://opensea.io/collection/nola-street-art>.

The Lower Ninth Ward is a microcosm of this struggle. The working-class Black community of 14,000 people once boasted the nation’s highest percentage of Black homeownership, despite being in a redlined area at the “back of town.” After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, it would become the city’s most devastated neighborhood. Yet, in 1965, during Hurricane Betsy, the neighborhood flooded and was rebuilt. Because of this history, in all instances, residents claimed the State intentionally flooded them to save the French Quarter. Furthermore, for months after the storm, the city placed the community under “look and leave” status, where they could only briefly view their property but then had to vacate the neighborhood. They then released a planning map, called a “green dot map,” which showed that the ward would be made into a green space, essentially banning residents from rebuilding. Industries speculated about the neighborhood; Donald Trump considered building a hotel-casino there. Residents fought for the

right to return against this forced migration – resonating with Palestinians seeking their pre-Nakba land. The Lower 9 is back, but it emanates disinvestment; only 5,000 residents have returned.

Post-Katrina New Orleans exhibits the dispersal, dispossession, and violent removal seen in settler colonialism, where Black and Indigenous peoples are removed for the profit of settlers. Human rights violations abound us; therefore, activists have called for Katrina reparations¹⁸. True justice should account for histories of enslavement and removal, counter the privatization and commodification that have devalued our lives, provide reconciliation to Indigenous folk and land, and atone for the dead¹⁹. We must decolonize the city of New Orleans and advocate for repair, abolition, and land return.

[Works Cited](#)

- ¹ I discuss Black and Indigenous struggles, not to eradicate cultural difference, but to critique the colonial system that removes, displaces, and deadens, illustrating Tiffany King's theorization that, "We die the same." Tiffany King, "Into the Clearing: Black Female Bodies, Space, and Settler Colonial Landscapes" (dissertation, University of Maryland, 2013), 234.
- ² Patrick Wolfe, "The Settler Complex: An Introduction," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37, no. 2 (2013), 1.
- ³ Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition (Indigenous Americas)*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 9. Primitive accumulation.
- ⁴ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), 1-40.
- ⁵ Cassandra Shepard, *Settler Colonialism is the Disaster: An Analysis of Post-Katrina New Orleans and During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2026).
- ⁶ Donna Martinez and Jennifer L. Williams Bordeaux, *50 Events That Shaped American Indian History: An Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2017), 209.
- ⁷ This act dispersed 17,000 Choctaw to open 10 million acres of land.
- ⁸ The Great Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, "Seminole Trail of Tears (Removal to the West)," Seminole Nation, I. T.
- ⁹ Kirstin L. Squint, "Indigenous Removal and (Un)Recognition in the Plantationocene: Documenting Louisiana's Rising Waters," *The Global South* 16, no. 2 (March 2023): 69.
- ¹⁰ Following the British Petroleum oil spill in 2010, formaldehyde-laden FEMA trailers used post-Katrina were redeployed on Isle de Jean Charles.
- ¹¹ A program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Louisiana Recovery Authority.
- ¹² Richard A. Webster et al., "How a Katrina Rebuilding Program Shortchanged Poor Residents," *ProPublica*, December 11, 2022.
- ¹³ Matt Plaus, "Racial Disparity in Disaster Response in the United States: A Case Study of Aid under FEMA," Harvard Kennedy School: Student Policy Review, February 9, 2024.
- ¹⁴ Sue Sturgis, "Recent Disasters Reveal Racial Discrimination in FEMA Aid Process," *Facing South: A Voice for a Changing South*, September 24, 2018.
- ¹⁵ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007), 6.
- ¹⁶ Sophie Kasakove, "New Orleans Planning Commission Says City Should End Affordable Housing Mandate Downtown," *NOLA.com*, November 12, 2025.
- ¹⁷ Allison Plyer et al., "The New Orleans Index at Twenty: Measuring Greater New Orleans' Progress toward Resilience," The Data Center, August 5, 2025.
- ¹⁸ Shepard, *Settler Colonialism is the Disaster*, 235.
- ¹⁹ There were 10,000 deaths during the Trail of Tears, 1,500 deaths due to Katrina, and 2,300 due to COVID.

Cassandra Shepard is an Assistant Professor in the Africa American Diaspora Studies Department at Xavier University. She holds a B.S. from Xavier, an M.A. in social sciences from the University of Chicago, and a Ph.D. in African American studies from Northwestern University where she wrote her dissertation, "The Colonial Continuum: A Critique of Disaster in Post-Katrina New Orleans." Through archival and oral history research, Cassandra analyzes and theorizes on the intersecting relationships among race, ethnicity, gender, class, and place as they pertain to the histories, lives, and futures of African-descended people in the U.S. and beyond. In particular, her research examines the impact of colonialism on the

rebuilding process of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Her approach is grounded in the Lower Ninth Ward and Isle de Jean Charles, and it is motivated by a desire for social justice and change. Her study has culminated in her book, *Settler Colonialism is a Disaster: an Analysis of Post-Katrina and Post-Covid-19 New Orleans*.

Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans. Please send feedback to jsri@loyno.edu.



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