

# Fact Sheet

IWPR #D491

August 2010

## Mounting Losses: Women and Public Housing After Hurricane Katrina



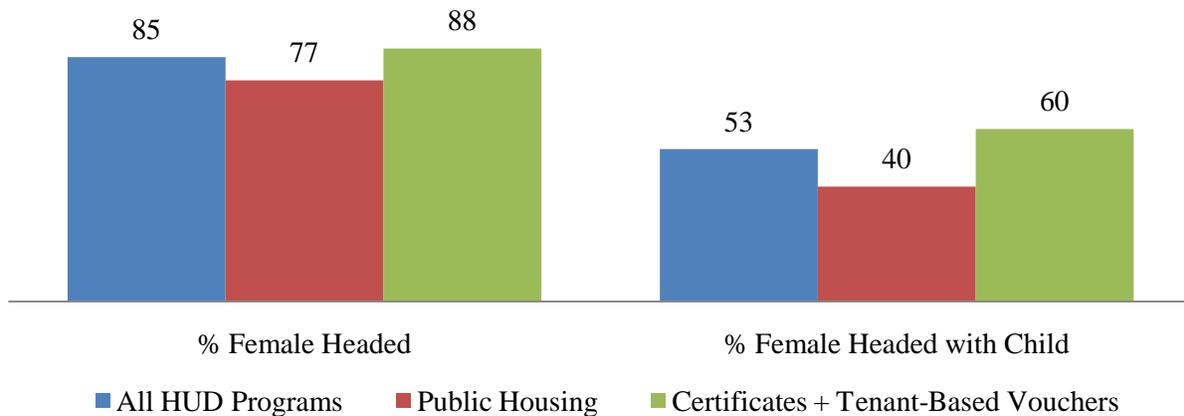
Photo: IWPR. April 2008. Lafitte Housing Development

New Orleans public housing apartments five years ago were home to thousands of families. The residents held jobs, attended schools, and participated in New Orleans culture and its communities over the decades the developments stood. When the city's levees ruptured and the brick apartments flooded, residents fled and found shelter in other towns and cities. The disaster emptied New Orleans and destroyed much of its housing. Five years later, market rates for renting private apartments have risen, nearly all of the old public apartments have been removed while the new remain under construction, and former residents of public housing are still displaced. For public housing tenants, most of whom were low-income African American women and their families,<sup>1</sup> housing support in New Orleans has been transformed.

Much of the traditional public housing in New Orleans when Katrina hit was comprised of multi-storied apartment complexes known locally as "The Big Four." These developments covered multiple blocks in the central "bowl" of New Orleans and had been constructed and expanded throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Even before Katrina, apartments in those developments were in need of repair but their structures were solidly built of brick and pronounced sound after the storm and flood.<sup>2</sup> The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) sought for over a decade to demolish two of the Big Four in order to make way for mixed-income housing, in some cases with the partnership of residents, and in other cases without their participation.<sup>3</sup> In 2007, HANO and the city won a lawsuit enabling demolition of the Big Four to take place. This action contributed to the context in which poor families needing affordable housing in New Orleans find themselves today.<sup>4</sup>

The most recent data available from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) show that a majority of households (77 percent) in public housing of the area<sup>5</sup> are headed by women, which includes homes with women living alone or with others. As Figure 1 shows, 88 percent of voucher subsidized housing units are headed by women.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1. Households in New Orleans Public Housing by Family Structure**



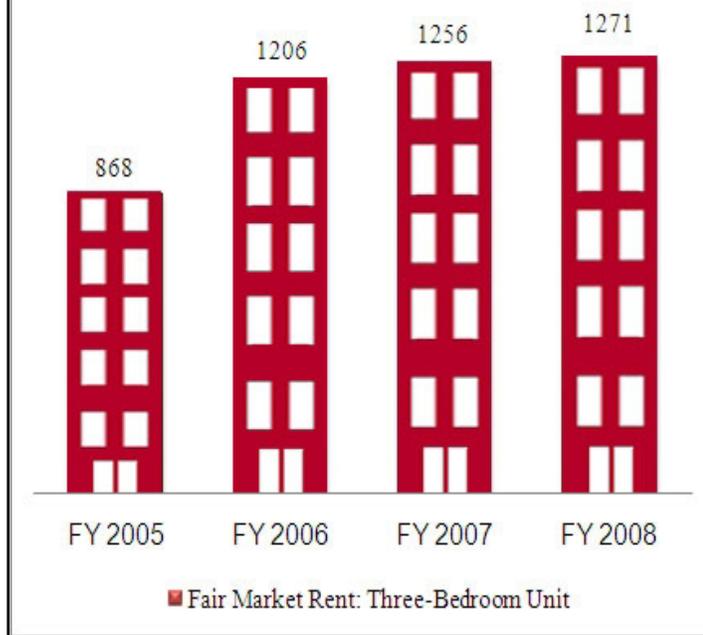
Source: IWPR figure from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Office of Policy Development and Research. “A Picture of Subsidized Households 2008.”

While scattered in their places of refuge from 2005-2007, former residents of the Big Four learned that most of their apartments would be demolished to make way for mixed-income units. Families were informed of this at a time that rents in the city had risen and little other housing was habitable; data released by HUD demonstrates a 39 percent increase in rent from 2005 - 2008 (Figure 2).<sup>7</sup>

## Public Housing and the Big Four in New Orleans

Public housing in New Orleans is undergoing dramatic shifts with little housing available during the transition. HANO managed 7,379 rental public housing units in New Orleans with 5,146 of these occupied at the time the city flooded.<sup>8</sup> Across the developments that constituted the Big Four of B.W. Cooper, St. Bernard, C.J. Peete, and Lafitte, 3,077 occupied apartment units existed pre-Katrina.<sup>9</sup> Since 2007, all but a few of the buildings within the former Big Four housing developments have been torn down and are in the process of redesign and new construction as mixed-income multi-family units.

**Figure 2. Housing Rental Prices in New Orleans Pre- and Post-Katrina**



Note: Fair market rents for each fiscal year are effective as of Oct. 1 of the previous year, 2008 projected.

Source: IWPR figure from Greater New Orleans Community Data Center data. 2007. “Metro New Orleans Fair Market Rent History.”

## **B.W. Cooper**

The B.W. Cooper housing development originally consisted of 1,550 public housing units. In October 2008, 1200 units were demolished with plans to build 740 units of mixed-income housing, including both affordable rental homes and market-rate rentals. The new development will be constructed in phases, with 410 projected units to be completed in the first phase. Of the original public housing stock, a total of 303 occupied units remain.<sup>10</sup>



Photo: IWPR. April 2008. B.W. Cooper Housing Development

## **Columbia Parc on the Bayou (formerly St. Bernard)**

Prior to Katrina, St. Bernard had 1,464 rental units, of which 963 were habitable and/or occupied. The new site's developer, Columbia Residential, states that nearly 1,300 housing units will form Columbia Parc, including off-site mixed-income rental housing and for-sale homes in the surrounding neighborhood. 684 rental units are planned, of which 120 are reserved for low-income seniors and 564 are mixed-income units. Currently, 130 rental units are occupied.<sup>11</sup>

## **Harmony Oaks (formerly C.J. Peete)**

C.J. Peete's original 1,403 public housing units had been reduced to 723 units, with only 144 occupied, at the time of the 2005 flooding of New Orleans. Harmony Oaks is planned as a new mixed-income development involving both rental and homeownership.<sup>12</sup> Urban Strategies, subcontracted to work with tenants, reports that Harmony Oaks will include 510 units of which 460 will be mixed-income townhouses and garden units for rent on the original site, as well as 50 single family homes for sale in the surrounding neighborhoods.<sup>13</sup>

## **Lafitte Redevelopment (Tremé)**

Lafitte contained 896 rental units occupied in August 2005. Providence Community Housing, a partner in the redevelopment of the Lafitte site reports thirteen completed "homeownership units" in the former development site, of which eight have been sold to date.<sup>14</sup> In Phase I of the redevelopment, a 100-unit senior apartment building, as well as 276 affordable rental apartments and 141 for-sale homes will be built. According to HANO, many of the homes for sale will be affordable to families earning 80 percent or less of the area median income.<sup>15</sup> The finished development of 1,500 affordable and market-rate housing units will represent a one-for-one replacement of all subsidized rentals available prior to Katrina.<sup>16</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Most of the "Big Four" public housing developments have not been re-occupied by residents. How many apartments will be available to former residents of the Big Four in the future is unclear at this time. Currently, most of the buildings remain under construction with completion delayed.

## **Public Housing Assistance:**

The federal government provides three principle forms of housing assistance to eligible households. These are administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and include: public housing; tenant-based; and privately owned, project based.<sup>17</sup>

### **Public Housing**

Public housing is a project-based subsidized program, whereby housing is owned by local agencies and residents agree to live in a particular development. Local housing authorities manage the housing for low-income residents at affordable rents utilizing Federal aid administered by HUD.<sup>18</sup>

### **Tenant-Based Assistance**

Under tenant-based assistance, HUD subsidizes the cost a tenant would have to pay for a rental unit in the private market. Local Public Housing Agencies administer these programs by entering into contracts with private landlords. The Housing Choice Voucher Program—formerly, Section 8—is a tenant-based program.<sup>19</sup>

### **Privately Owned, Project-Based**

Privately owned, project-based vouchers, also referred to as multi-family assisted housing, are a type of rental assistance in which private landlords receive housing subsidies based on HUD contracts. These subsidies compensate for the difference between tenant rents and actual costs. Unlike tenant-based vouchers, project-based vouchers cannot be used at any other site in the private market.<sup>20</sup>

## **Additional Housing Help, Post-Katrina:**

Certain programs were put in place post-Katrina to accommodate those who were displaced by the storm. These include the Disaster Housing Assistance Program, the Disaster Voucher Program and the Tenant Protection Voucher.

### **Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP)**

DHAP is an interagency program developed by the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and HUD to assist households affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Under DHAP, HUD administered "temporary long-term housing rental assistance and case management" through local Public Housing Agencies (PHA) for households who received rental assistance from FEMA.<sup>21</sup>

### **Disaster Voucher Program (DVP)**

The Disaster Voucher Program was established to replace DHAP, which expired as of January 31, 2006. Families who were receiving assistance from HUD prior to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were eligible for DVP.<sup>22</sup>

### **Tenant Protection Voucher (TPV)**

Tenant Protection Vouchers are distributed to former residents of public housing that will be demolished or redeveloped.<sup>23</sup> In September 2007, the Housing Authority of New Orleans received approval for TPV. When DVP vouchers ended June 30, 2008, Lafitte, B.W. Cooper, C.J. Peete and St. Bernard former tenants were eligible for Tenant Protection Vouchers.

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*IWPR began research along the Gulf Coast almost immediately after Hurricane Katrina to learn how women in particular were affected, and how post-disaster conditions for women and their families might be improved: please see IWPR publications #D464, #D465, and #D481. A new IWPR study based on interviews conducted in Baton Rouge, Houston, and New Orleans with women who were residents of New Orleans public housing before Hurricane Katrina will be released in 2011.*

**For more information on IWPR reports or membership, please call (202) 785-5100, email [iwpr@iwpr.org](mailto:iwpr@iwpr.org), or visit [www.iwpr.org](http://www.iwpr.org).**

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women and their families, promote public dialogue, and strengthen communities and societies. The Institute works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and their families, and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations and corporations. IWPR is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women's studies and public policy programs at The George Washington University.

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<sup>1</sup>Greater New Orleans Community Data Center (GNOCDC). 2006. B.W. Copper Apartments Neighborhood: People and Household Characteristics. <<http://gnocdc.org/orleans/4/60/people.html>> (August 24, 2010); GNOCDC. 2006. Central City Neighborhood: People and Household Characteristics. <<http://gnocdc.org/orleans/2/61/people.html>> (August 24, 2010); GNOCDC. 2006. St. Bernard Area Neighborhood: People and Household Characteristics. <<http://gnocdc.org/orleans/4/26/people.html>> (August 24, 2010); GNOCDC. 2006. Tremé/Lafitte Neighborhood: People and Household Characteristics. <<http://gnocdc.org/orleans/4/42/people.html>> (August 24, 2010).

<sup>2</sup>Ouroussoff, Nicolai. 2006. "All Fall Down," *New York Times*, November 19. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/19/weekinreview/19ouroussoff.html>> (August 25, 2010).

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2004. HOPE VI Demolition Grants: FY 1996-2003. <<http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/ph/hope6/grants/demolition/>> (August 24, 2010).

<sup>4</sup>Ouroussoff, Nicolai. 2007. "High Noon in New Orleans: The Bulldozers are Ready," *New York Times*, December 17. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/19/arts/design/19hous.html>> (August 25, 2010); U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2008. HOPE VI Revitalization Grants. <<http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/ph/hope6/grants/revitalization/>> (August 24, 2010).

<sup>5</sup>New Orleans Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Office of Policy Development and Research. 2008. "A Picture of Subsidized Households." <<http://www.huduser.org/portal/picture2008/index.html>> (June 28, 2010).

<sup>7</sup>Greater New Orleans Community Data Center. 2007. "Metro New Orleans Fair Market Rent History." <[http://gnocdc.s3.amazonaws.com/reports/fair\\_market\\_rents.html](http://gnocdc.s3.amazonaws.com/reports/fair_market_rents.html)> (July 19, 2010).

<sup>8</sup>Common Ground. "New Orleans in Numbers: A Pre- and Post-Hurricane Katrina Snapshot." <<http://www.infocollective.org/NOIN>> (August 25, 2010).

<sup>9</sup>Reckdahl, Katy. 2008. "HUD Expected to Break Ground on New Development to Replace 'Big 4'." *Times-Picayune*, December 2, <[http://www.nola.com/news/index.ssf/2008/12/hud\\_expected\\_to\\_break\\_ground\\_o.html](http://www.nola.com/news/index.ssf/2008/12/hud_expected_to_break_ground_o.html)> (August 25, 2010).

<sup>10</sup>Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO). 2010. "Communities at a Glance: B.W. Cooper." <<http://www.hano.org/index.php?q=node/92>> (July 7, 2010).

<sup>11</sup>2010 (July). Columbia Residential. Personal communication.

<sup>12</sup>Housing Authority of New Orleans. 2007. "Communities: Harmony Oaks." <<http://hano.org/Harmony%20Oaks.htm>> (July 7, 2010).

<sup>13</sup>2010 (July). Urban Strategies. Personal communication.

<sup>14</sup>2010 (July). Providence Community Housing. Personal communication.

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- <sup>15</sup> Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO). 2010. "Communities At A Glance: Lafitte." <<http://www.hano.org/index.php?q=node/65>> (August 4, 2010).
- <sup>16</sup> 2010 (July). Providence Community Housing. Personal communication
- <sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Office of Policy Development and Research. 2008. "A Picture of Subsidized Households." <<http://www.huduser.org/portal/picture2008/Introduction%20to%20web%20application.pdf>> (June 28, 2010).
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Federal Emergency Management Agency. Disaster Housing Assistance Program. *FEMA-HUD Disaster Housing Program Pilot to Launch*. 2007. Federal Register 72.162. Washington, DC: Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- <sup>22</sup> Housing Program of Jefferson Parish. 2006. "Summary of HUD Disaster Voucher Program Guidelines." <<http://www.jeffparishsection8.org/index.php/2006/02/20/hud/disaster-voucher-program-dvp/summary-of-hud-disaster-voucher-program-dvp-guidelines/>> (July 7, 2010).
- <sup>23</sup> Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. 2009. "Policy Basics: The Housing Choice Voucher Program." <<http://www.cbpp.org/files/5-15-03hous.pdf>> (July 7, 2010).