

Reshaping Louisiana's coastal frontier: managed retreat as colonial decontextualization

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Abstract

This article describes social encounters produced by climate adaptation policy experimentation focused on managed retreat—a concept increasingly used by academics and planning professionals to describe various kinds of relocation from areas exposed to environmental hazards. Building on scholarship that examines the political ecology of resettlement and adaptation, I draw on five years of ethnographic work conducted alongside Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribal leaders as their longstanding Tribal resettlement was transformed by government investment. I describe how Louisiana's Office of Community Development relied on Tribal planning to garner federal funds, used those funds to reduce the scope of the resettlement, and systematically erased the initial resettlement rationales and aims of Indigenous leaders. I liken the state's approach to Dina Gilio-Whitaker's notion of decontextualization as a colonial strategy, and argue that state efforts to transform the resettlement from what Tribal leaders viewed as "an act of cultural survival" to a scalable model for managed retreat policy threatens to reproduce a frontier dynamic whereby colonial and capitalist futures are once again rested upon the erasure of Indigenous peoples. State tools for decontextualization included published constructions of risk, community, and timelines; liberal planning conventions; and evocations of legal barriers. Ethnographic accounts of such processes can inform future resistance to eco-colonial schemes within climate adaptation.

Keywords: Community resettlement, managed retreat, racial capitalism, environmental change, native American and Indigenous Studies

Résumé

Cet article présente les interactions sociales engendrées par l'expérimentation d'une politique d'adaptation au climat axée sur recul du bâti, un concept de plus en plus utilisé par les universitaires et les spécialistes de la planification pour désigner divers types de relocalisation hors des zones exposées aux risques environnementaux. Inspiré des travaux académiques portant sur l'écologie politique de la relocalisation et de l'adaptation, je m'appuie sur cinq années de recherches ethnographiques menées aux côtés de conseil tribaux Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw de l'Isle de Jean Charles dans le cadre de la transformation de leur réimplantation tribale de longue date par des investissements gouvernementaux. Je décris comment l'Office of Community Development de Louisiane a exploité la planification du développement tribal pour obtenir des fonds fédéraux, comment il a utilisé ces fonds pour restreindre l'envergure de la relocalisation et comment il a occulté les expériences et les motifs et objectifs initiaux de relocalisation des chefs autochtones. Je compare l'approche de l'État à la notion de décontextualisation en tant que stratégie coloniale de Dina Gilio-Whitaker, en soutenant que les tentatives de l'État pour convertir la relocalisation de ce que les chefs tribaux considéraient comme « un acte de survie culturelle » en un modèle évolutif de politique de recul du bâti menacent tout simplement de perpétuer une logique historique de « frontière », où les lendemains coloniaux et capitalistes se résument encore

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et toujours à l'effacement des peuples indigènes. Au nombre des outils de décontextualisation de l'État figurent les interprétations publiées du risque, de la communauté et des échéances; conventions d'urbanisme libérales; et évocations de barrières juridiques. Les rapports ethnographiques de ces processus peuvent éclairer la résistance future aux schémas écoloniaux dans le cadre de l'adaptation au changement climatique.

Mots-clés: relocalisation des communautés, recul du bâti, capitalisme racial, changement environnemental, études amérindiennes et autochtones.

Resumen

Este artículo describe los encuentros producidos por la experimentación de políticas de adaptación climática, enfocados en la "retirada gestionada" – un concepto utilizado por académicos y profesionales de planeación para describir los varios tipos de reubicación de áreas expuestas a peligros medioambientales. Aprovechando los trabajos académicos que examinan la ecología política de reubicación y adaptación, me baso en cinco años de investigación etnográfica con los líderes tribales de Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw mientras su reasentamiento tribal fue transformado por la inversión del gobierno. Describo como La Oficina de Desarrollo Comunitario de Louisiana contó con la planeación Tribal para conseguir fondos federales, usó esos fondos para reducir el alcance del reasentamiento, y borró las experiencias, los razonamientos iniciales, y los objetivos de los dirigentes indígenas. Comparo el abordaje del estado con la noción de "descontextualización" de Dina Gilio-Whitaker como estrategia colonial y planteando que los esfuerzos estatales, de transformar el reasentamiento de lo que vieron los dirigentes como "un acto de supervivencia cultural" a un modelo escalable por una política de la retirada gestionada, amenazan a reproducir una dinámica de frontera en que los futuros coloniales y capitalistas se basan una vez más en la eliminación de los pueblos indígenas. Las herramientas estatales de la descontextualización incluyeron publicaciones de construcciones de riesgo, comunidad, y cronologías; convenciones de planeación liberal; y evocaciones de barreras legales. Relatos etnográficos de estos procesos pueden informar las futuras resistencias a los esquemas eco-coloniales dentro de la adaptación climática.

Palabras clave: reasentamiento comunitaria, retirada gestionada, capitalismo racial, cambio climático, estudios indígenas y nativos americanos

1. Introduction

"Vanishing?" asked Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribal Secretary Chantel Comardelle with an exasperated chuckle. We sat at her parent's supper table in Houma, Louisiana, working on a presentation for an upcoming conference and stumbled upon the title and abstract of another conference article about Chantel's community. "The *Vaanishiing* Isle de Jean Charles!" She read the title aloud dramatically. It was not unusual in early 2018 to see presentations about Isle de Jean Charles at academic conferences. The biggest media outlets on the planet had recently christened her Tribe the "First American Climate Refugees" (Davenport & Robertson, 2016). However, this presentation stood out. It was authored by one of the state employees tasked with administering a US\$48 million federal grant to support the Tribe's resettlement inland as part of the National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC). The NDRC was a planning and design competition sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) with the intent of "help[ing] communities plan and implement disaster recovery that makes them more resilient to future threats or hazards" (HUD, 2014). The presentation's abstract highlighted the Island's precariousness, "biophysically and culturally", in relation to climate change. "No", Secretary Comardelle said with her eyes fixed on the screen. "We ain't vanishing."

Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribal leaders have been planning their Tribe's inland resettlement since 2002 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) excluded their homeland from regional hurricane protection. Over the last seventy years, erosion and subsidence have washed away approximately 98% of the Island's landmass and the surrounding marsh. Without the protective wetlands, storms inundate Isle de Jean Charles each year. Traditional Chief Albert Naquin compares the loss to a dying relative: "It's like watching a family member with cancer [...] eaten away little bit by little bit." The loss of subsistence lands and encroaching development have led Tribal citizens to work in regional industries, like shipbuilding, oil and gas, and the service industry. Displacement and outward migration, often after storms, has encumbered Tribal efforts to gather, educate youth, and share traditional knowledge (Maldonado *et al.*, 2015). Tribal leaders

saw resettlement as a way to reunite as many of the approximately 600 Tribal citizens as possible, create a space to embrace their heritage, address future risks associated with climate change, and serve as a teaching and learning community for others facing similar socio-environmental pressures (Figure 1). According to Secretary Comardelle:

We are preserving our place, the Island, our place in history, and our future for the next generations. This is not the first time we have had to resettle. Our ancestors were displaced by treaties and Indian Removal. My papa's generation was displaced from the Island. We are a displaced Tribe [...] With the resettlement, we are creating a living and active bridge from our ancestral land to the new Isle de Jean Charles Tribal Community.

She scoffed at the notion that the Island community was "vanishing", a term reminiscent of colonial tropes used to rationalize land grabs and other atrocities against Indigenous peoples throughout U.S. history. Comardelle explained, "For us, community resettlement is an act of cultural survival."



Figure 1: Resettlement meeting planned by Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe and Citizens Institute for Rural Design, 2017. Photo by Author

2. Intellectual background and research questions

Frustrations expressed by Tribal leaders as their resettlement garnered government support demands an analysis of the relationship between their struggle for cultural survival and *managed retreat*—a term increasingly applied to various kinds of planned relocations from areas exposed to environmental hazards. The meaning of managed retreat is a matter of ongoing debate (Ajibade *et al.*, 2020). Adopted from coastal ecology, the concept has stoked controversy when applied to human settlements. For policymakers, managed retreat elicits fear of upsetting constituents, losing tax revenue, and adding administrative burdens (Koslov, 2016; Manning-Broome *et al.*, 2015). In Louisiana, state coastal restoration and adaptation frameworks avoid the term but are understood as such by those who create them (Acevedo 2020). State plans have proposed "resettlement" from areas where flooding is expected to exceed 14 feet [4.27 meters] and "reshaping" at the inland areas primed for population growth (Louisiana Department of Administration [LDOA], 2017a). Louisiana's 2017 Coastal Master Plan embraces the voluntary acquisition, or "buyout", of as many as 2,400 structures—including

houses—in high flood risk areas (Marshall 2017). Additionally, the state's 2017 adaptation framework describes community resettlement as a prospective "small-scale, targeted strategy for culturally-sensitive at-risk communities and special needs groups, including the disabled, the elderly, disaffected minority groups and very low-income populations" (LDOA 2017a, p. 14).

Restoration and resilience planning throughout the Mississippi River Delta has become a charged site of social conflict related to the *longue durée* of racialized inequality and violence (Barra, 2021). Scholars and community advocates are increasingly concerned about social justice and human rights implications raised by government funding for buyouts and community resettlement. Recent studies on relocation have considered uneven exposure to environmental risks, differential access to resources, place-based relations and attachment to place, environmental injustice, community organizing, local knowledge, and healing from historical and ongoing injustice, and human rights (Ajibade & Siders, 2021; Bronen, 2011; Colten *et al.*, 2018; De Vries & Fraser, 2012; Dundon & Camp, 2021; Elliott, Brown & Loughran, 2020; Koslov, 2016; Maldonado *et al.*, 2013; Maldonado *et al.*, 2021; Marino, 2015; Shearer, 2012; Siders, 2019). Additionally, Indigenous leaders have criticized "managed retreat" as an inherently top-down continuation of the colonial dynamics that ravaged ecosystems in the first place. According to Chief Parfait-Dardar of the Grand Caillou/Dulac Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe, for example, "The only people who should be managing a retreat, if that is what they so choose, is the community and they should be in charge of the terminology and ways of thinking about their resettlement" (Jessee *et al.*, 2020).

Such critiques indicate a need to consider state efforts to manage risk, mobility, and land-use alongside *racial capitalism*—entangled processes of racialization, nationalism, and capitalism rooted in medieval European conquests and imposed elsewhere through colonization (Kelley, 2017; Robinson, 2000). The term racial capitalism was first used by South African anti-apartheid activists in the 1970s, debated as either a liberal foil or potent power analysis (Hudson, 2018). Political scientist Charisse Burden-Stelly (2020) emphasizes that as a heuristic rooted within the Black Consciousness movement and anti-apartheid left, critiques of racial capitalism reveal "how both capitalism and racism are historical formations that are underwritten by settler colonialism, apartheid state formation, and imperialism." According to Jenkins and Leroy (2021), such work interrogates "the process by which the key dynamics of capitalism—accumulation/dispossession, credit/debt, production/surplus, capitalist/worker, developed/underdeveloped, contract/coercion, and others—become articulated through race" (p. 3). Analyses of racial capitalism are thus premised upon the historical contingency between race and capitalism and the widespread production of variable racialized differences throughout capitalist exploitation of land and labor.

British, Spanish, French, and U.S. societies have imposed racial capitalist social structures on the lands and peoples they have occupied (Estes, 2019; Robinson, 2000; Woods, 1998). Anthropologist Patrick Wolfe (2006) theorized settler colonization as a form of "structural genocide" driven by a "logic of elimination" directed at Indigenous societies. Colonial efforts to eliminate Indigenous peoples have been administered in part through invasion and massacre (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014); dispossession of land, removal, and the confinement of Indigenous peoples (Denetdale, 2008; Whyte, 2016); gendered violence and the imposition of heteropatriarchal social relations (Arvin, Tuck, & Morill, 2013), institutionalized abuse and forced assimilation of Indigenous children (Lajimodiere, 2019); and environmental destruction and the fracturing of Indigenous ecological relations and knowledges (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019)—premiered upon dehumanizing ideologies of white supremacy and greed. Several contemporary institutions remain complicit in maintaining U.S. colonialism and racial capitalism. These include, but are not limited to, private property and the real estate industry (Harris, 1993; Taylor, 2019), petrochemical industries (Luke & Heynen, 2020), the prison industrial complex (Gilmore, 2007; Pelot-Hobbs, 2019); and the U.S. legal system (Barker, 2011; Deloria, 1988; Park, 2021).

In *As Long as Grass Grows*, Dina Gilio-Whitaker (2019) describes Indigenous struggles for environmental justice and the U.S. refusal to legally recognize or address colonial violence. Observing a "lack of research that critically positions contemporary environmental inequalities within historical process", Gilio-Whitaker (2019) argues that "framing law absent of history" is a form of *decontextualization* that encumbers current Indigenous-led movements (p. 37). According to Gilio-Whitaker (2019), "Inquiries that ignore histories characterized by domination and oppression also ignore factors that shape perceptions of justice" (p. 37). If decontextualization is understood as a codification of what Vimalessery *et al.* (2016) refer to as "colonial

unknowing" or what Anne McClintock (2014) has called "imperial ghosting" within law and policy, it unfolds within encounters produced by policy formation and program administration.

Climate adaptation programs have tended to avoid the root causes of the climate emergency and historically produced racialized vulnerability (Grove *et al.*, 2020; Hardy *et al.*, 2017). The use of managed retreat, for example, has at times collapsed diverse frameworks of migration and constructions of risk. Hino *et al.* (2017) reduced an array of buyouts, national programs, and Tribal and community-led initiatives to "deliberate intervention[s] intended to manage natural hazard risk" and "the abandonment of land or relocation of assets" (p. 364). These "defining features" distort the Isle de Jean Charles resettlement as locals do not see the conditions forcing resettlement as natural, or the idea of resettling as equivalent to abandonment. Maldonado *et al.* (2020) worry that managed retreat discourse may also confine support to the spatio-temporal act of physically moving, thereby reproducing abandonment over the long term. Moreover, Whyte *et al.* (2019) demonstrate that narrow frames of climate resettlement threaten to erase the continuation of what they refer to as Indigenous mobility traditions. This research reveals the high stakes as constructions of ecological risk and mobility clash throughout the globalization of environmental knowledges, particularly in colonial contexts (Callison, 2017). In this article, I supplement scholarship of how Indigenous lifeways, knowledges, relations, and initiatives are disrupted by—and sustained despite—colonial adaptation by describing how the state of Louisiana's decontextualization of the Isle de Jean Charles resettlement—from "an act of cultural survival" to an experimentation in managed retreat—has reproduced a frontier dynamic whereby colonial and capitalist futures and imagined white settler publics are premised upon the continued erasure of Indigenous peoples.

3. Methodology

My work with Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribal leaders began in 2014, when I met Tribal leaders through mutual collaborators and contributed to the Tribe's outreach efforts (Jessee, 2015). After federal funding for the resettlement was announced in early 2016, I began to monitor state administration of the funds. This included documenting thirty-one conference calls and fifteen in-person meetings between Tribal leaders and state officials. I interviewed five state and federal program administrators and three contractors working on the resettlement. I also conducted participant observation at gatherings, meetings, and planning workshops co-organized by Tribal leaders and their collaborators. In 2017, I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews with Tribal leaders and participated in several focused conversations about the resettlement with Tribal citizens living on and off the Island. Finally, I compared planning-related documents produced by the Tribe and those created by the state to understand how the resettlement was imagined differently by multiple actors.

Cognizant of the imperial legacies of anthropology and environmental studies, I have striven to apply decolonizing principles throughout my efforts to understand social and environmental change. I try to reject extractive research conventions by building long-term, accountable relationships with Indigenous leaders (Smith, 2012); recognizing Indigenous social and ecological knowledge as expertise (Wildcat, 2009); materially supporting Tribal-driven efforts to regenerate a land base and ecological relations (Tuck and Yang, 2012); and reconsidering ethnographic ideals, mindful of material risks associated with colonial knowledge production (Simpson, 2014). I have also drawn upon participatory research values of knowledge sharing, maintaining transparency, engaging in material reflexivity, and using valid research to enhance community-driven endeavors (Kindon *et al.*, 2007; Park *et al.*, 1993; Sultana, 2007).

In practice, this has meant following Tribal protocols, honing research questions to investigate topics important to Tribal collaborators (like, for example, barriers to Tribal self-determination throughout resettlement planning), documenting meetings, sharing notes, contributing to Tribal-led grant applications, and co-authoring and co-presenting with collaborators from the Tribe. An analytic limitation is that I focused on the perspectives of Tribal leadership, people who participated in resettlement planning activities, the Tribe's collaborators, and state planners and subcontractors. I therefore do not claim to represent the experiences or perspectives of the entire Indigenous nation, other Indigenous nations in the region, or the entire scope of perspectives and priorities that exist regarding this resettlement. Nonetheless, this work enabled greater

understanding of how Tribal-driven resettlement efforts were influenced by complex social dynamics and prevailing planning norms.

4. Ecocide on the Island

Resettlement to and from Isle de Jean Charles is linked to European and U.S. colonization and regional development-induced disaster. Before European invasion, Chitimacha, Biloxi, Choctaw, Attakapa, Bayougoula, Houma, and many other nations inhabited the region. Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribal elders recall that ancestors came to the Island after removal elsewhere. Many Choctaw citizens resettled with land scripts in southern Louisiana after the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek expropriated millions of hectares from the Choctaw Nation. According to the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (2008), Isle de Jean Charles was an "exclusive Indian settlement" by 1880—a time when colonial property regimes began to have profound socio-environmental consequences. The 1849, 1850, and 1860 Swamp Land Acts allowed Louisiana to sell wetlands that could be drained for agriculture (Colten, 2017; Maldonado, 2018). Since then, two forms of regional development have devastated the Island: levees and oil and gas extraction.

Artificial levees are a flood control infrastructure introduced by the French in the early 18th century. Colonial law mandated that property owners create earthen mounds to protect agriculture in the floodplain (Morris, 2012). After the Civil War, Congress used levee and flood control funding on the Lower Mississippi River to console disgruntled white southern property owners and reconsolidate U.S. territory (O'Neill, 2006). During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the U.S. government relied on the forced labor of African and African American peoples, immigrants, and convicts to build levees throughout the Mississippi River Delta (Spencer, 1994). In 1904, the federal government severed Bayou Lafourche from the Mississippi River to prevent flooding in nearby Lockport (Reuss, 2004), and twenty-five years later, the 1928 Flood Control Act funded thousands of kilometers of additional levee construction along the Mississippi River after catastrophic flooding (Barry, 1998). To accommodate mid-century growth and increased shipping, the USACE also built massive control structures to prevent the Mississippi River from rerouting west of Baton Rouge (McPhee, 1989). This history of river development has exacerbated flooding on Isle de Jean Charles by preventing new sediment from replenishing the naturally sinking deltaic land near the Island. Since 1932, 20% of the surrounding Terrebonne Basin's wetlands have washed away, and a third of the remaining wetlands will likely erode and sink by 2040 (United States Geological Survey, n.d.). Additionally, a new regional levee system that excluded the Island and led to the Tribe's initial consideration of resettlement further exacerbates flooding during storms as predicted by the levee's environmental impact statement (USACE, 2013).

The exploitation of oil and gas fields has also contributed to land loss around Isle de Jean Charles. Oil was first discovered in Louisiana 275 kilometers northwest of Isle de Jean Charles in 1901. By 1908, the Lirette gas field was established nearby. Companies like Texaco, Louisiana Land and Exploration, and La Terre began carving up the marsh to install wells (Silvernail, 1967). Oil and gas extraction saved the land companies who were losing money on wetland holdings (Sell & McGuire, 2008). The Houston-based oil and gas company, Apache Corporation, now has title to extensive holdings on and around the Island. Companies acquired land on the Island by exploiting colonial property regimes, coordinating with regional sheriffs and lawyers, and pressuring Island residents (Jessee, 2021). Tribal elders recall that oil and gas representatives coercively acquired land by getting signatures on title transfers from Island residents who could not read English, in part due to the legal racial segregation of schools until 1965.

Over 220,000 oil and gas wells have been drilled in Louisiana and well over 20,000 kilometers of shipping and pipeline canals cut through the wetlands. The canals exacerbate erosion and subsidence by enabling salt-water intrusion, killing flora, and stifling drainage (Turner & McClenachan, 2018). Additionally, oil spills, and the subsequent use of toxic dispersants, have also killed wildlife and devastated local food systems (Maldonado *et al.*, 2015). Global climate change will compound the effects of regional causes: Louisiana's 2017 Coastal Master Plan includes Isle de Jean Charles on a list of eleven locations that will experience flooding "high enough to make daily life next to impossible, even without future hurricane damage" (Clipp *et al.*, 2017).

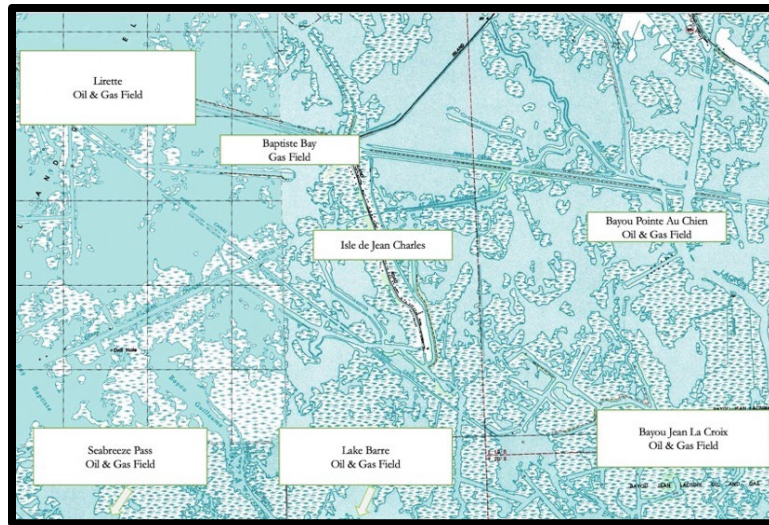


Figure 2: Isle de Jean Charles surrounded by oil and gas fields. Image adapted by author from <https://www.mytopo.com/maps/?lat=29.3707&lon=-90.45235&z=15>

5. When 'resettlement' meets 'retreat'

Environmentalists, community and tribal leaders, and religious leaders have long advocated sound environmental stewardship on Louisiana's Gulf Coast. Government failures after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the increasing awareness of threats to the region's position as an international port and seafood and oil exporter have led to massive recent investments in disaster recovery and environmental planning. In 2006, Louisiana established the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority to conduct master planning along the coast, particularly in the Mississippi River Delta. Over the following years, the state invested more in disaster resilience (LDOA, 2009), and scholars began to deliberate community resettlement as a regional form of environmental adaptation (Dalbom *et al.*, 2014; Colten, 2015; Darlington and Woodell, 2006). At the same time, philanthropic-public partnerships have played a growing role in regional deltaic governance and resilience planning throughout the U.S. In 2013, Louisiana hosted the 'Changing Course' competition sponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Rockefeller Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, Environmental Defense Fund, and other nonprofits to develop projects for the state's Coastal Master Plan. The same year, President Obama's Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force partnered with the Rockefeller Foundation to launch 'Rebuild by Design'—a competition intended to generate projects for resilient recovery following Hurricane Sandy.

In 2014, congress allocated US\$1 billion of surplus Hurricane Sandy funds to create the NDRC, which drew submissions for resilience projects from across the country, including Louisiana's application for money to advance the Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe's resettlement. As described in the following sections, after Louisiana's NDRC award was announced in early 2016, state officials began to decontextualize the resettlement from the Tribe's broader struggle for cultural survival. This involved five substantial programmatic shifts:

- 1) From honoring a partnership with the Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe to constructing a non-Tribal version of the community,
- 2) from prioritizing Tribal reunification to Island 'relocation',
- 3) from centering heritage, to houses,
- 4) from investing in renewable energy to 'energy efficiency' and
- 5) from supporting a teaching and learning community to creating a replicable model of resettlement.

Tracking these programmatic changes reveals how the state used existing Tribal resettlement plans to acquire federal resources, then used those resources to re-envision the resettlement, and then tried to render invisible the Indigenous struggle for cultural survival that originally motivated the proposed and funded resettlement.

From a Tribal Partnership to constructing a non-Tribal community

For nearly fifteen years prior to the NDRC, Isle de Jean Charles resettlement planning was a Tribal-driven process coordinated by Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribal leaders. After initially resisting the idea of resettlement in 2002, Tribal leaders began to see it as an opportunity to reduce environmental risk while planning socio-cultural regeneration. They began to imagine a process by which planning a future elsewhere would not involve severing their ties to each other and the Island. At the time, Chief Naquin explained:

The Island community is dying [...] We talk on how we want to keep our heritage and culture, but unless we can do something to keep our community together, it's a 'gone pecan.' [...] We have to look at an alternate plan to keep the community alive. I hate to say this but maybe relocation is that alternative, with the right offer. (Stuart, 2002)

After the Tribe were unable to get resettlement support from USACE in 2002 and Terrebonne Parish in 2008, the Tribal Council continued to search for resources, working with long-time collaborators, Dr. Kristina Peterson and Dr. Shirley Laska, who founded The Lowlander Center in 2010 and incorporated as a nonprofit in 2013. Their collaboration and search for resettlement support prioritized honoring the Tribe's sovereignty and rights to self-determination (Maldonado *et al.*, 2013). In 2014, the Tribe and Lowlander Center initiated a partnership with Louisiana's Office of Community Development (OCD) as the agency began to prepare the state's NDRC application. While crafting the application, the Lowlander Center and OCD co-authored a prospectus highlighting the importance of "Tribal community input, vision and leadership" (LDOA, 2015a, p. 16). The prospectus and subsequent NDRC application assured, "All factors of design and process will help to support and enhance tribal identity, sovereignty, and dignity" (LDOA 2015b, p. 107). After receiving the award, the OCD sent a partnership letter to Chief Naquin thanking him, acknowledging the Tribe's contribution to the application, and indicating continued partnership (See Figure 3).

Soon after, however, state officials began to treat the Tribe less as a partner and more as one stakeholder among many. Tensions around communication between the Tribe and OCD offer a vivid example of this shift. In May of 2016, during a presentation at the U.S. Capitol, Tribal leaders criticized state officials' lack of communication since the award announcement (Reilly, 2016). During a meeting between OCD officials and Tribal leaders on June 16, 2016, OCD director Pat Forbes suggested weekly conference calls to establish regular direct communication between the Tribal leadership and state planners. Tribal leaders agreed, eager to implement their plans. In the following months, however, state officials opened these phone calls to the public, handing out flyers at public meetings and inviting additional "stakeholders", including non-Tribal citizens and regional residents who were openly hostile to Tribal leaders' longstanding advocacy. Secretary Comardelle explained:

The calls were designed for the Chief and the Council to have an open line of communication. The only purpose was that [...] It was not for every Tom and Harry to get on and have their concerns heard. It was for a specific purpose, because at the time there was no communication between OCD and the Tribe.



Figure 3: Office of Community Development Partnership letter, February 15, 2016.

Uncertainty as to who was listening on the calls and the sense that they were not intended for earnest cooperative decision-making frequently silenced Tribal leaders, displacing both critique and collaboration from the first post-award forum for direct communication between Tribal leaders and the state.

Then, from June to November 2016, the OCD imposed a divisive "Data Gathering and Engagement" process on the Island. State planners and subcontractors assessed land use and physical infrastructure on the Island and conducted surveys with some of the remaining Island residents. The funds were initially meant to benefit the entire Tribe, which includes most Island residents and those who have already moved to other nearby locations. This is reflected in HUD's grantee profiles and the state's initial post-award press release (HUD, 2016). State action plans have also identified the Tribe as beneficiaries, stating, "A new settlement will provide tribal members an opportunity to relocate to disaster resilient and energy efficient housing, while offering the tribe a space to build cultural resilience" (LDOA, 2017b). However, the survey process focused on remaining Island residents. The resulting report's methodology was opaque, and possibly intentionally confusing. For example, while surveys with individuals from 10 of 26 households lasted 60-90 minutes during organized meetings, other interviews were much shorter and some Island residents declined to participate at all, potentially introducing a sampling bias (LDOA, 2017c, p. 6). Additionally, the data from respondents was conveyed in brief summarizing sentence fragments, not direct quotes.

Surveyors prioritized asking about Island residents' knowledge of pre-NDRC Tribal planning (LDOA, 2017c, p. 6). Though the report briefly acknowledges Tribal leaders' contributions to the NDRC application and

confirms that all those surveyed approved of the Tribe's plans, it also diminishes the Tribe's planning as "rumors" (LDOA, 2017c, p. 4). According to the report, 16 of 20 people who responded knew about the Tribe's planning, but 12 of these respondents reportedly "did not participate" in the planning (LDOA, 2017c, p. 21). However, it is unclear how surveyors probed residents' knowledge and participation in Tribal planning. The survey report contains the term "previous visioning efforts", a phrase that foreshadowed the state's unwillingness to call Tribal activities "planning" and which one Tribal leader thinks may have confused respondents. They wondered if Island residents who were involved in the overall planning would not have distinguished the NDRC from other grants that the Tribe pursued to advance the resettlement. At Tribal meetings I attended, many more than the four Island residents implied by the report consistently showed up to participate. Additionally, in contrast to the "supporter" and "resistor" binary implied by the report and overstated in widespread media coverage, even those most vocally opposed to moving themselves contributed to conversations and generated ideas for the resettlement.

The report also presents unsubstantiated claims about communal relations and social organization on the Island, diminishing the saliency of "Tribal affiliation":

In our conversations, few residents mentioned tribal affiliation. [...] It is possible that residents did not want to talk about tribal issues with outsiders, and it is also likely that references to tribe, family, and community all identify the same group of people, making references to any of them interchangeable. In our presence, though, residents spoke first and foremost about each other as family and neighbors. (LDOA, 2017c, p. 22)

As expressed in this quote, the authors invented a tension between "Tribal affiliation" and "family and neighbors" despite acknowledging their epistemological limitations. Additionally, the report constructs a community-Tribe dichotomy by citing internal frustrations within the Tribe without context (LDOA, 2017c, p. 22). However, Tribal leaders openly acknowledged the array of perspectives on resettling within the Tribe and understood that the decision to move was personal, voluntary, and might take time. Tribal leaders did not think the diversity of perspectives or existing disagreements within the Tribe invalidated their community, Tribal sovereignty, or identity, as implied by the report. After its publication, state officials repeatedly cited the report to rationalize not honoring their partnership with the Tribe (LDOA, 2019a, p. 44).

State officials and subcontractors began referring to the Tribe as the "Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw" or "BCC" rather than the widely used "Isle de Jean Charles band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw", "Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw", or commonly used informal names, "The Island" or "IDJC." State planners omitted "Isle de Jean Charles" from the Tribe's name in the state's Regional Adaptation Strategy, referring to the Tribe simply as "the Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe" (LDOA, 2019b, 147). Dropping "Isle de Jean Charles" from the name discursively severed the Tribe from their home—a sanctuary for two centuries, where Tribal citizens were born and raised, where some of their ancestors are buried, and a place that Tribal leaders have long devoted time and resources to saving, even as some have moved a few kilometers away.

Tribal leaders recognized the entire data gathering and engagement process as a "divide and conquer" strategy. They compared the survey activities to the ways that oil and gas companies would, as Chief Naquin put it, "make friends with our people and get them to sign their land away." Political ecological scholarship has linked community representations and technical land survey tools to broader political economic processes and colonization (Li, 1996; Palmer, 2020). Similarly, this process rendered an 'Isle de Jean Charles community' discrete from the Tribe. After a public meeting where state planners presented the report findings, Secretary Comardelle asked officials how they planned to support the Tribe's collective rights: "What about our sovereignty, our self-determination? This is going against all of that. This is against the UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples." A state employee replied, "Those do not apply to you."

Public constructions of the resettlement timeline reflected the shifting relationship between the state and the Tribe. Soon after the 2016 award announcement, the state created a website for the resettlement without consulting Tribal leaders or existing collaborators. For years, the website displayed a project timeline that began

with the June 16, 2016, meeting—five months after the award announcement (See Figure 4). The timeline contained no references to the Tribe or Lowlander Center's direct contributions to the successful NDRC application, nor to the fifteen years of pre-NDRC Tribal resettlement planning. The 2015 resettlement prospectus, funded NDRC application, and action plans identifying the Tribe as beneficiaries were also omitted—buried instead on the state's Department of Administration (DOA) website. At the time of writing, the prospectus and original NDRC application are no longer accessible even on the DOA website, and a recent article coauthored by an OCD employee and state contractors characterizes pre-NDRC Tribal-led planning as "previous resettlement efforts" (Simms *et al.*, 2021).

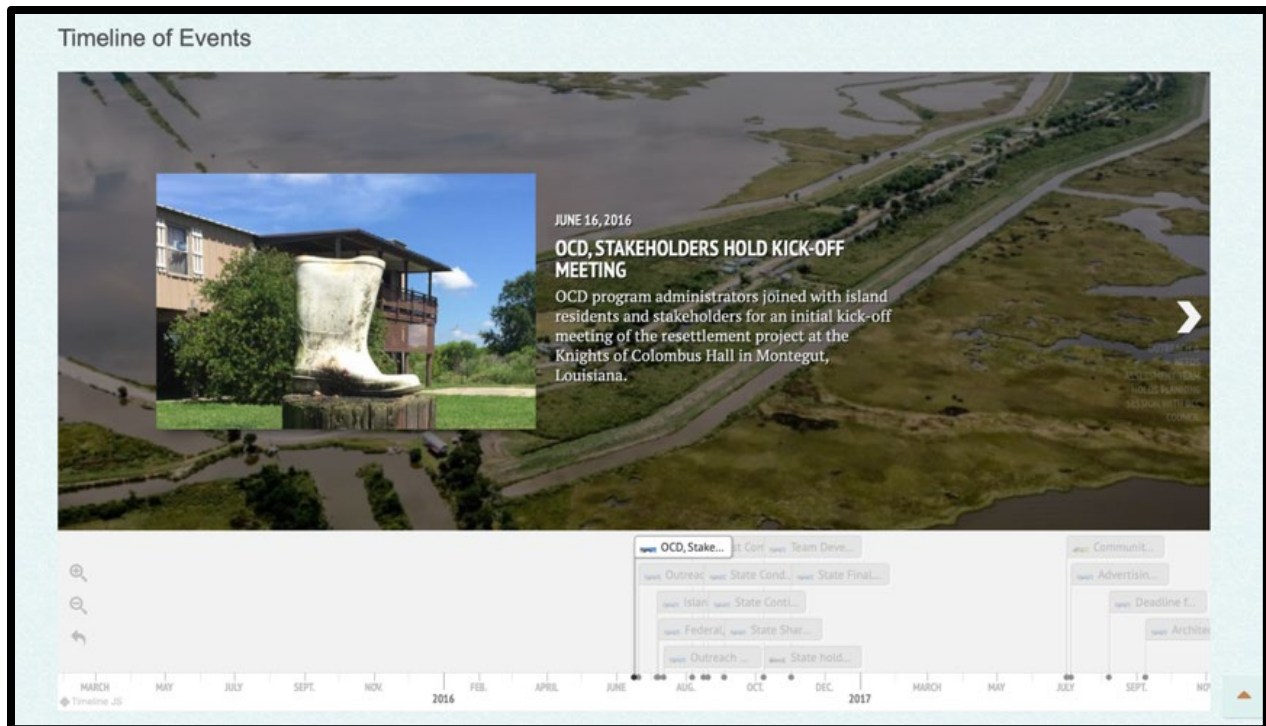


Figure 4: Timeline of events with no planning activities represented prior to summer 2016, Isledejeancharles.la.gov. Accessed January 2019

From Tribal Community reunification to island relocation

Reuniting already-displaced Tribal citizens was central to the Tribe's pre-NDRC community resettlement planning. Throughout the last thirty years, the Island population has decreased, primarily due to recurrent storm damage and due to flooding of the road, which has prevented Tribal citizens to off-Island jobs. Between 2002 and 2014, the Island population decreased by over 200 people and 50 homes (Maldonado, 2014). In 2009, Tribal leaders highlighted tribal reunification when they petitioned Terrebonne Parish for funds to support the resettlement as a "Unified Community" in their "Tribal Protection Plan" (IDJC, 2009). Tribal leaders framed reunification as a matter of safety. For example, The Tribal Council—itself composed of both on and off-Island Tribal citizens—provides aid after storms, and Island residents often ride out storms in off-Island family members' homes. Such relationships have been seen as essential for community resilience (Colten *et al.*, 2018). One Tribal Council member described reunification as a matter of safety in the context of racism. He explained:

You got to bring the whole community together. Then you are either working in the community or you come back to the community to see your family members. [...] The thing about it is, no matter what the world is throwing at you out there, all the discriminating and racism against us Indians, when you come back to the community you are at home. You have peace, and you have time to soak it up and go back into the world. That's how you keep your strength up.

As a resettlement goal, reuniting the Tribal community was, therefore, an act of survival in the face of both extreme weather and inland racism.

State planners acknowledged the aim of reuniting the Tribal community but considered it a low priority, delaying concrete plans for including former Island residents and eventually implementing exclusionary eligibility requirements. In early 2019—three years after the NDRC announcement—state planners publicized eligibility requirements for former Island residents to move into the resettlement site. While the Tribe extended eligibility to anyone who had lived on the Island since 1960, state officials were only committed to those who have lived on the Island since 2012. Supposedly, the 2012 cutoff was due to the tie-back date of the congressional appropriation of NDRC funds. However, one HUD official who oversaw the NDRC explained during a 2017 interview that the date of inclusion was at the discretion of the state and should be decided in consultation with Tribal leaders. Additionally, the state required former Island residents to "demonstrate financial ability to build a new home" on a lot provided at the new site (LDOA, 2019a). Many Tribal citizens, especially renters, who were active in the planning process but lived in off-Island locations (also exposed to storm risks) remained unclear about their eligibility through 2019 or were discouraged by the added expense of building a house.

From heritage to houses

Tribal leaders wanted the resettlement to collectively embrace the Island's heritage and help heal the legacies of extraction, racism, and displacement. For years, the Lowlander Center and other partners had funded Tribal leaders' participation at conferences and meetings to support the Tribe's interest in lessons from development-forced displacement and resettlement, Indigenous planning, resilience, and community development. Tribal leaders and the Lowlander Center valued collective well-being, social re-articulation, and cultural heritage by integrating the continuation of relationships with traditional lands and establishing new communal facilities early in resettlement processes. Lowlander Center facilitator, Dr. Kristina Peterson, often evoked Mindy Fullilove who describes the importance of creating "healing places" in her book *Root Shock* about the social effects of displacement associated with urban renewal. Fullilove (2005) writes, "For an environment to lift the spirit, attention must be focused on opportunities of relatedness" (p. 6).

Towards this end, Tribal leaders envisioned Tribal citizens would retain full ownership of on-Island property, and prioritized communal land-use at the new site. The Tribe and Lowlander Center held multiple workshops to plan a Tribal community center at the new site. They acquired support from the National Endowment for the Arts' Citizen's Institute for Rural Design (CIRD) to "apply the principles of rural design and placemaking to a process of climate-induced resettlement, while synchronously applying the Tribal principles of land settlement to a contemporary planning process" (CIRD, 2017, p. 2). Ideas included childcare, a senior center, health clinic, museum, Tribal offices, recreational facilities, *pow wow* grounds, traditional food and medicinal gardens, and a market. Tribal citizens also envisioned programs to sustain fishing, shrimping, and oystering traditions near the Island, and plans for the Tribal center included "temporary residential space that will double as refuge in the event of storms that threaten the existing homes of the tribal community" (CIRD, 2017, p. 2). The 2015 resettlement prospectus described the Tribal center as so central to the overall resettlement that they thought it should be developed early to "serve as an anchor" throughout the upheaval of resettling individual households and in case of devastating hurricanes during the resettlement process (LDOA 2015a, p. 16).

State planners delayed and wavered in commitments to these pillars of the Tribe's plans, instead prioritizing the transfer of individual property ownership and framing the resettlement as one planner characterized it, as "a very complicated real estate transaction." In 2019, state planners announced that they

would develop a community center only if funds remained after building homes for current Island residents. After extensive advocacy by Tribal leaders, the state agreed to fund a *parish* community center to serve the entire region, not a Tribal community center with cultural and administration space. In early 2020, the state procured contracts to design and develop individual family housing even as tensions about the community center remained unresolved (Louisiana Land Trust, 2020).

In September 2018, state officials proposed attaching mortgages to Island properties that would transfer ownership to the state over a 40-year period (LDOA, 2018, pp. 13). This infuriated Tribal leaders, who worried that it would further fragment the Tribe from their ancestral lands. After advocacy from Tribal leaders, the state decided to utilize homeowners' agreements instead. In 2021, state planners touted this concession as a decision to protect Island residents' senses of place (Simms *et al.*, 2021), decontextualizing the "policy innovation" from the Indigenous activism that led to it. The agreements are also restrictive as they prohibit the use of public or personal money to make substantial repairs and prevent Island property from being rented out.

Also in late 2018, Louisiana's Trustee Implementation Group (LTIG) allocated US\$3 million in 2010 BP Oil Disaster settlement funds to build fishing piers along Island Road, the central artery of the Island (LTIG, 2018). The announcement came a decade after FEMA and local officials rejected requests for road improvements (King, 2010). The post-resettlement Island Road enhancements may reflect a lack of coordination and consistency among agencies when it comes to flood protection and resilience planning, but the announcement raised questions regarding the state's original motivations for embracing the Tribe's resettlement, as Louisiana's NDRC application cited the road's impending impassability as a rationale for the funding (DOA, 2015b, p. 107). When asked, one state contractor dismissed the funding for road enhancement as a rumor. Yet, the construction of parking lots, fishing piers, and a rock levee was underway by early 2020 (See Figure 5). In response, Secretary Comardelle observed, "Because a small ridge of land is only good and profitable for the oil or as a 'sportsman paradise', let's invest in that, now that the Indians are gone."



Figure 5: Construction of fishing piers on Island Road, 2020. Photo by Author

From Tribal-led renewable energy to water retention and energy efficiency

Leading up to the NDRC award, Tribal leaders and their collaborators embraced energy independence and renewable energy as "a strong expression of cultural integrity and tribal sovereignty" (LDOA, 2015a, p. 17). According to the 2015 prospectus, "Renewables will be emphasized such as solar, earth-coupled (or water-coupled) heat pump systems, with wells shared by clustered homes, and locally-sourced building materials and equipment" (LDOA, 2015a, p. 16). Tribal leaders and their partners also hoped that renewable energy and other tax credits could help offset some of the financial burdens incurred at the new site (LDOA, 2015a, p. 32).

Energy independence was seen as integral for disaster resilience and Tribal economic development (LDOA, 2015a). Tribal leaders and the Lowlander Center hoped to use the resettlement to ensure that Indigenous peoples were well-positioned to become leaders in regional energy transitions. However, Louisiana's OCD removed the renewable energy component from their resettlement vision. One state-produced design included a solar farm to serve the community, but according to a state employee, investing in solar was not financially feasible. Instead, state designs include detention ponds (for flood control), wetlands, and energy efficient houses.

From a teaching and learning community to a scalable model

Tribal leaders had long hoped to support other communities facing similar socio-environmental pressures. According to the 2015 resettlement prospectus:

As the community is being planned and implemented, Tribal citizens are contributing their knowledge of traditional and present best practices and learning from the team members. Once complete the settlement and the Tribe will serve as 'leaders' in teaching these best practices to interested members of other communities in the region and to the organizations and non-profits that specialize in resilience including inculcating it into disaster recovery. By virtue of using and improving the best-applied practices, and by recording their application, the community will be able to robustly contribute to other communities that are already struggling with or anticipating weather displacement. (LDOA, 2015a, p.13)

Tribal leaders and their partners envisioned a process whereby Tribal citizens, having lived through the process, would lead efforts to evaluate the resettlement. They further honed the "teaching/learning community" concept in work funded by the National Academy of Sciences, which led to the publication of *Preserving our place: A community field guide to engagement, resilience, and resettlement: Community regeneration in the face of environmental and developmental pressures* (Naquin et al., 2019). This is a "resource for community efficacy and informed decision-making in community-led adaptation and regenerative planning processes in response to environmental stressors and injustice" (p. 7).

To justify the tepid support for the Tribe's specific plans, state planners, however, regularly described their goal of creating a "scalable" and "replicable" model resettlement. During a 2017 meeting with OCD planners, one Tribal leader explained, "I'm not doing this for me, you have to understand. [...] I'm doing this for my children. I have nothing to gain, but I do feel like I'm helping our people. We do this for the future of the Tribe." Louisiana's Resilience Program and Policy Administrator responded, "You know, I understand. I have a lot of respect for what you are doing. I really do. I respect the work that you have put into your community, but I need to sell it." Initially unsure what he meant by "sell it", I reviewed a previous interview with the same planner. When asked what would make the resettlement a success, he responded:

If we have JP Morgan Chase coming down and saying 'We want to do the next one' because they can see where they can make money off of it, that is where we have hit the tipping point. That is when this is a thing that could happen, and it makes sense for everybody. It is a triple bottom line at that point. That would be truly awesome.

During the meeting, the planner outlined his goal of creating a "scalable" and "replicable model" for future coastal resettlements: "I need to make this work for people in Venice [Louisiana] just as much as for the people on the Island."

The NDRC call for proposals asked about replicability and scalability explicitly, "Is your proposal scalable? Replicable? If yes, describe the mechanism. Does your proposal integrate existing required plans or strategies into a holistic vision?" (HUD, 2014). As one planner explained:

The project is about picking up people at scale and moving them somewhere safer. I think that gets lost in the clutter. [...] At the beginning of a reporting process, at some point the reporter seems to get sucked into the narrative that this is a tribal resettlement, and we should just talk about all the cultural aspects of the tribe or the tribes or whatever. I'm not suggesting that those things are not important, I'm really not. But again, the real trick here is to figure out how to pick up a community at scale. I really wish that would be a more primary focus of the discussion and less, 'Oh these guys like to fish, and they like to trap. They like to go do whatever, and they can do *pow wows* again.' That is fine. That is all great, but that is not the project.

Thus, in the administration of resettlement funds OCD established a tension between the "community scale" and Tribal aims. As Neil Smith (1992) observed, "There is nothing ontologically given about the traditional division between home and locality, urban and regional, national and global scales. The differentiation of geographical scales established and is established through the geographical structure of social interactions" (p. 73). Scaling community resettlement in this case served as an eco-colonial abstraction to create a baseline that accommodated existing development and capitalist institutions (i.e., "JP Morgan Chase") instead of the Tribe's struggle for cultural survival.

Narrative clarification and altering Action Plans

The changes described above were incremental and uneven. Though state officials conducted more "community engagement" than is typical for administering federal funds, Tribal leaders faced ever-reduced commitments and pervasive uncertainty. Three years after the award announcement and long after the state began to shift the scope of NDRC beneficiaries through their community engagement activities, the state submitted an official request to HUD to substantially amend the terms of the initial grant (LDOA, 2019b). Drawing on the contentious data gathering and engagement process described above, the request officially proposed eliminating commitments to the Tribe, including commitments to enhance Tribal identity, sovereignty, and dignity and to fund the Tribal community center. What the state euphemistically called a "narrative clarification" was understood by Tribal leaders as a "bait and switch", a "curse", a "road-side robbery", a "hijacking", and "another treaty made, another treaty broken" (Dermansky, 2019; Jessee, 2020). Despite Tribal-led mobilization and public comments in opposition, HUD approved the amendment.

State officials offered multiple rationales to explain their shifting commitments. One was the fear of losing political support. Shortly after the award, the Principal Chief of the United Houma Nation (UHN)—another Indigenous nation with ties to the Island—sent a letter to the Governor expressing concern over their Tribe's exclusion from Louisiana's application for NDRC funds. The United Houma Nation had also previously developed disaster resilience plans to sustain community, maintain connections to place, reduce coastal risk, and support their Tribal citizens as they resettled inland (Carbonell and Meffert, 2009)—an effort that was distinct from the Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe's resettlement plans that led to the successful application for NDRC funds. After receiving the post-award announcement letter from the UHN, state officials panicked about upsetting the large Tribe. As one state official noted during a resettlement meeting, "The United Houma Nation has what? 17,000 people? That's not just a Tribe. That's a political constituency."

State administrators also repeatedly referenced legal barriers to honoring their partnership with the Tribal leadership. They repeatedly pointed out that the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs has not yet formally recognized the Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe and argued that state recognition was irrelevant (Jessee, 2020). Additionally, planning materials evoked the Fair Housing Act—federal policy that prevents housing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, or national origin—a reflection of both the racialization of Indigeneity in the U.S. and a tension between the individualistic civil rights discourses and collectivist struggles for Indigenous sovereignty within the liberal settler state (Hall, 2008). Tribal leaders and their allies challenged these explanations, asking why HUD would have funded the Tribal community resettlement if it was illegal to begin with. They pointed to precedence of fair housing waivers in multiple other contexts and wondered if the turnover in HUD personnel during the transition from the Obama to the Trump administration prevented the agency from pursuing such possibilities.

6. New Isle

State officials also decontextualized the resettlement from racial capitalist development at the inland resettlement site—a sugarcane field fifty-five kilometers north of the Island (Figure 6). A brief genealogy of the site reveals enduring entanglements of genocide, enslavement, and racialized property regimes. The area was inhabited by Chitimacha, Washa, and other Indigenous peoples prior to European colonization. Spanish, French, and Acadian settlements grew throughout the 18th century. For most of the 19th century, the resettlement site was part of the Evergreen sugarcane forced labor camp owned by the father-in-law of Confederate General Braxton Bragg (Via & Smith, 2005). In 1887, after a three-week strike of 10,000 cane workers from multiple plantations, white militiamen massacred as many as 300 evicted Black families just eight kilometers north of the site (DeSantis, 2016). In 1911, Evergreen was sold to the Platers, an influential family with multiple plantations who also leased expansive holdings and mineral rights elsewhere to companies like Humble Oil, Exxon, and others responsible for destroying wetlands surrounding the Island (Via & Smith, 2005). In 2003, 3,000 acres [1,214 hectares] were sold for US\$9.5 million to a real estate firm that leased the site to sugarcane planters (James, 2003). In 2019, OCD allocated US\$11.7 million of the NDRC funds to Louisiana Land Trust—the nonprofit created for the state's Road Home Program after Hurricane Katrina—to purchase a small 515-acre [208-hectare] portion of the land for the resettlement.

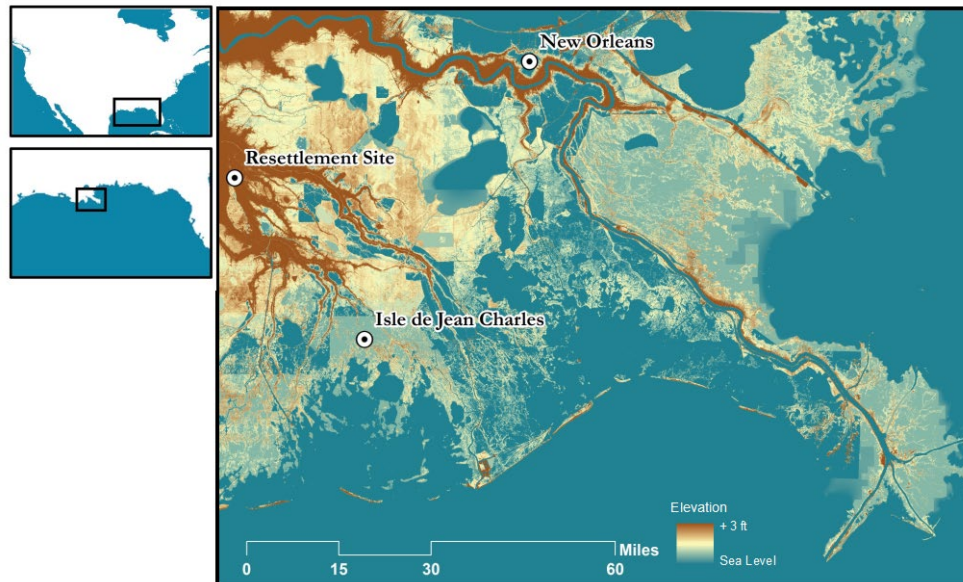


Figure 6: Isle de Jean Charles and resettlement site with elevation. Map by Alahna Moore

State officials established the groundwork for liberal governing institutions and corporate redevelopment at the new site. They determined that it would be maintained by a homeowner's association and Terrebonne Parish, instead of the Tribe. According to OCD Director Pat Forbes, the Tribe would not own any land collectively, as was envisioned by Tribal leaders, despite the Tribe owning land on the Island. The Tribe would instead be offered "non-exclusive, use rights" to common areas of the new site like every other resident or organization in the region (LDOA, 2019c). The state also contracted a market analysis driven by technical and quantifiable notions of "highest and best use" without consulting the Tribe to ensure their values were prioritized in economic development at the new site (Isacoff, 2021). The prospectus proposed integrating cultural heritage, green energy and resilience, and Tribal economic development, though this integration has been lost in the state's approach. Moreover, while Tribal leaders had envisioned including businesses owned by Tribal citizens in the new site, the state has not pursued this.

An online article written by the state resilience administrator at the time also epitomizes the erasure. The piece contains no reference to the Indigenous history of the Island or the Tribal resettlement planning. The piece tellingly begins, "In Louisiana, real estate is a commodity" (Sanders, 2018). In a news article, the same planner is quoted:

'Like founding any new town over the course of Western history [...] it's all wrapped around the idea of, how do we generate revenue? [...] In Louisiana, that could mean fitness companies, pharmacies, and supermarkets chip in with funding in exchange for footholds in the new community, much like a city would on a new real estate development.' 'Unlocking that financial [support] (sic) is something that will determine the success of [relocation] (sic) projects,' adds Mr. Sanders. 'Ultimately we want to show that there would be the same amount of incentives the private sector has every time in any real estate development.' (Gass, 2017)

State planners defined the resettlement with terms like "real estate", "a new town", and "Western history", erasing the Island's Indigenous heritage and the Tribe's struggle for cultural survival. Following a 2019 OCD presentation to mainly white residents near the new site, Secretary Comardelle explained:

This is just another blatant erasing of our culture. [...] They are trying to conform our culture. It's like when they describe a community center. It went from a full Tribal culture center with a museum and space for our government to function to a parish recreation center we can use occasionally. It's like, 'Don't worry, white people. We aren't bringing a Native American community. We are making ball parks, festival grounds, and we will have a public community.'

The state's vision has perpetuated a long history of pitting public investment against Indigenous futures, laying bare what Libby Porter (2016) refers to as the "colonial culture of planning." At the time of this publication, houses and infrastructure remain under construction at the resettlement site, which is referred to by state officials as "New Isle." Officials have repeatedly pushed back an anticipated move-in date for individuals who have decided to move, and there remains immense uncertainty as to when the new development will be completed.

7. Reshaping the racial capitalist coast

Louisiana's government faces increasing pressure to advance climate adaptation and mitigation policy. The state is a top carbon emitter due to the industrial sector and has increasingly relied on large federal disaster expenditures. To build political will for such activities, state agencies have relied on a stakeholder approach that accommodates environmental risk producers within efforts to institutionalize risk reduction. While mustering support for wetland restoration planning, for example, the state reframed oil and gas companies from culpable to victims (Colten, 2017) and even partners for developing a "working coast" (Randolph, 2018). Even as oil and gas become a smaller part of the state's economy and state leaders consider prospects for regional renewable energy development, the state continues to approve new pipelines, organizes drilling lease sales, and the governor boosts the expansion of liquid natural gas infrastructure throughout the coastal zone (Office of Governor John Bel Edwards, 2019). The state also continues their accommodation of petrochemical development with the longstanding industrial tax exemption program and severance tax credits (Luke & Heynen, 2020) and the recent passage of a 2018 "critical infrastructure" law that criminalizes water protectors (Hardy, 2019). Additionally, major corporate philanthropies—like the Walton Family and Rockefeller Foundations—have invested heavily in the state coastal restoration projects and environmental coverage in the region. Finally, the state's new Climate Change Initiatives Task Force includes representatives from Louisiana Mid-Continent Oil and Gas Association, Louisiana Chemical Association, the largest utility company, and state economic development officials. By contrast, only one Indigenous leader is included.

Like elsewhere, gentrification extends settler colonial territoriality (Safransky, 2014; Toews, 2018). Since the 1970s, wealthy non-Native people from Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and elsewhere have built fishing

camps—lavish vacation homes with docks and modern amenities—throughout the coast (Solet, 2006). By 2016, the thirty-five camps on the Island outnumbered the twenty-six houses (LDOA, 2017c). Recreational investments in the area—like the fishing piers on Island Road—have coincided with the resettlement and the shuttering of an elementary school that served the Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw and neighboring Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe (Jessee, 2021). As the real estate industry responds to environmental risk, property values have increased on higher ground (Keenan *et al.*, 2018). In this case, new forms of "resilient" land use in flood-prone areas also enable possibilities for some at the expense of others (Jessee, 2021). Additionally, the sluggish hurricane response and inability of non-federally recognized Tribes to obtain resources directly from FEMA has led to regular displacements inland following storms. Questions of just coastal adaptation and disaster recovery are thus a matter of supporting people as they diminish exposure to coastal hazards, but also a set of questions about rights to the coast. While recreational campers and petrochemical companies are thus afforded a future on Louisiana's coast, the displacement of Indigenous peoples is treated as a foregone conclusion, or worse, adaptation.

State efforts to scale community resettlement must be understood within this broader political context. The Office of Community Development undermined the resettlement's interruptive potential by extracting ideas developed by Tribal leaders and their collaborators, producing timelines that rendered Tribal planning invisible, diminishing Tribal reunification, dismissing renewable energy development and energy independence plans, and replacing the role of an Island institution—the Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe—with liberal settler forms. Candis Callison (2017) highlights the threats posed by "mundane adaptation and planning research and policies where baselines established determine community management and state responses." Decontextualization in this case enabled the state to create a baseline that displaced continued consultation with Tribal leaders and has avoided ongoing investments into the Tribe—moving Indigenous people while divesting from Indigenous organizations, advocacy, and collective futures. Struggles over defining the community served as moments outside of formal recognition processes, when the state imposed administratively cumbersome and divisive forms of identity policing.

The state's approach also enabled officials to promote growing expertise in community resettlement as a resilience strategy at a time when the federal government is seeking new ways to coordinate community resettlement in response to the climate crisis (GAO, 2020). Furthermore, such a baseline engendered individualized property regimes and will open new coastal and inland real estate markets—a dynamic that resembles historical land dispossession through policies like the Dawes Act of 1887, which created individual parcels out of collectively held Tribal land while expropriating millions of hectares for white settlers. Anna Tsing's (2015) examination of scalability—notably rooted in an analysis of sugarcane plantations and industrialization, two producers of environmental risk and pillars of racial capitalism in coastal Louisiana—is salient: "Scalability banishes meaningful diversity, that is, diversity that might change things" (p. 38).

Maintaining the colonial status quo throughout the resettlement threatens Indigenous organizing capacity to address an array of chronic inland socio-ecological risks associated with racial capitalism. Louisiana is among the most inequitable and impoverished states in the U.S. with nearly 20% of the population living in poverty (Louisiana Budget Project, 2018). The unemployment rate is regularly above the national average (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018), and Louisiana was recently ranked the fifth most rent-stressed state in the country (Louisiana Housing Corporation, 2019). As Tribal leaders withdrew support for the state's process, they encouraged individuals to participate in the state process if they felt like it would benefit them. However, they remain uncertain and deeply concerned as to the extent of new costs that will be incurred by Tribal citizens at the new site and the impacts of real estate dynamics there. Additionally, while Isle de Jean Charles Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribal leaders remain committed to their struggle for cultural survival, many expressed feeling profound planning fatigue even before the COVID-19 pandemic and Hurricane Ida, which made landfall near the Island as a Category 4 storm on August 29, 2021. The Hurricane caused overwhelming devastation, destroying many of the twenty-six houses that had remained on the Island and thousands more throughout the region (Laughland, 2021). According to one Island resident, 10-12 households have been cleaning out and fixing their houses on the Island. At the time of this publication—three weeks prior to the start of the next hurricane season—many Tribal citizens both on and off the Island are still sleeping in trailers adjacent to their damaged homes as they wait for sluggish insurance companies or government assistance to fund repairs.

8. Conclusion

Decontextualizing resettlement as a form of environmental risk reduction, removed from the regional political economy and development, engenders new experiences of old risks. At a time when advocates are working to ensure that Tribal and community demands are honored through transformative public policy, future research must critically examine barriers to justice within climate adaptation. The Isle de Jean Charles resettlement demonstrates that despite the allocation of federal funds for innovative programs, interruptive or transformative principles can be sidelined in the administration of those programs, raising the question as to whether states or municipalities are always appropriate parties to implement Tribal or community-led resettlements. Can resources and power be redistributed more directly to those Tribal or community-based organizations advancing decolonization or collective liberation as forms of hazard mitigation? The state's unwillingness to pursue Tribal-led renewable energy also demands further work on harmonizing climate adaptation and mitigation, especially in this moment when green energy transitions threaten to further exclude and exploit Indigenous and other historically oppressed communities. This experiences of those on Louisiana's coast additionally demands more critical scholarship that untangles philanthropy-oil-public collaboration in climate governance in Louisiana and elsewhere. Why are corporate philanthropic organizations so invested in coastal restoration and resilience? Finally, the role of property regimes within the political economy of resettlement must be closely examined, attending to experiences of renters, and predatory real estate dynamics and practices in supposedly less risky locations.

In the introduction to *Violence over the land*, Ned Blackhawk wrote about the colonial expectation that Indigenous peoples lose their identities or sovereignty while adjusting to changing political economic conditions: "Once adaptation becomes synonymous with assimilation, change over time—the commonplace definition of history—becomes a death knell" (2006, p. 4). Ongoing racial capitalism continues to ravage the Indigenous peoples of the Gulf Coast. A 2020 complaint to the United Nations, submitted on behalf of five Tribes in Alaska and Louisiana, cites petrochemical development around the Island and the state's administration of the resettlement funds as violations of the Tribe's rights (Alaska Institute for Justice, 2020). At the same time, local Tribes have long been working to protect ecosystems, traditional lifeways, and social relations (Comardelle, 2020; Jessee *et al.*, 2020). The tensions described in this article nonetheless raise an increasingly urgent question: How will local, state, and federal policymakers and agencies ensure Indigenous cultural survival, land stewardship, and rights to self-determination on Louisiana's sinking coast? At stake is a death knell, whereby strategies like managed retreat may serve as extraction, assimilation, and removal by another name.

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