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Reconstructing the Big Easy: racial heritage tourism in New Orleans

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This paper identifies the dominant narratives, themes, and marketing strategies that local tourism organizations and groups have used to promote racial heritage tourism in New Orleans. Drawing on ethnographic methods and qualitative data, I argue racial heritage tourism is a form of cultural production in which people construct and draw on past memories and current perceptions of racial discrimination and segregation to contest marginalization and fashion a racial identity. African Americans use racial heritage tourism as a set of discourses and practices to position themselves as stewards of New Orleans culture and therefore central to the process of 'reconstructing the Big Easy' as a distinctive place of African American identity and racial consciousness. The analysis focuses on the linkages between identity construction processes and the growth of heritage tourism and examines the ways in which tourism discourses can mobilize people to create new collective identities. Examining racial heritage tourism contributes to our general understanding of how racial identity is socially constructed and how collective representations of the past and present can promote the growth of heritage tourism.

Resumen

Este trabajo identifica las narrativas dominantes, los temas y las estrategias de marketing que los grupos y organizaciones turísticas locales han utilizado para promocionar el turismo histórico racial en Nueva Orleáns. Recurriendo a métodos etnográficos y a datos cualitativos, argumento que el turismo histórico racial es una forma de producción cultural en la que los individuos construyen y se acercan al pasado y a las percepciones actuales de la discriminación racial y la segregación para enfrentarse a la marginalización y moda de una identidad racial. Los afroamericanos utilizan el turismo histórico racial como un conjunto de discursos y prácticas para situarse como encargados dè la cultura de Nueva Orleáns y por tanto piezas claves en el proceso de 'reconstruir the Big Easy' (entiéndase como Nueva Orleáns) como un lugar distintivo en la identidad y conciencia racial de los afroamericanos. El análisis se centra en las relaciones entre los procesos de construcción de identidad y el crecimiento del turismo histórico y examina las formas en que los discursos turísticos pueden movilizar a las personas a crear nuevas identidades colectivas. Examinar el turismo histórico racial contribuye a nuestra compresión general de cómo la identidad racial se construye socialmente y cómo las representaciones colectivas del pasado y del presente pueden promover el crecimiento del turismo histórico.

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Palabras claves: turismo histórico racial; identidad racial; Big Easy; organizaciones turísticas

Résumé

Cet article identifie les narrations, thèmes et stratégies commerciales dominants que les organismes et groupes de tourisme locaux ont utilisés pour promouvoir le tourisme du patrimoine racial à La Nouvelle Orléans. Partant de méthodes ethnographiques et de données qualitatives, je considère le fait que le tourisme du patrimoine racial est une forme de production culturelle dans laquelle les gens construisent et extraient de leur mémoire passée et de leurs perceptions actuelles des discriminations raciales et de la ségrégation afin de contester la marginalisation et la mode d'une identité raciale. Les Afro-Américains utilisent le tourisme du patrimoine racial comme un ensemble de discours et de pratiques pour se présenter comme des représentants de la culture de la Nouvelle Orléans et donc au centre du processus de « reconstruction » de *the big easy* (le surnom populaire de la Nouvelle Orléans) en tant que lieu caractéristique de l'identité afroaméricaine et de la conscience raciale. L'analyse se concentre sur les liens entre processus de construction de l'identité et croissance du tourisme du patrimoine et étudie les façons dont les discours sur le tourisme peuvent mobiliser les gens afin de créer de nouvelles identités collectives. Examiner le tourisme du patrimoine racial contribue à notre compréhension générale de la façon dont l'identité raciale est construite socialement et de la façon dont les représentations collectives du passé et du présent peuvent promouvoir la croissance du tourisme de l'héritage.

Mots-clés: tourisme de l'héritage racial; identité raciale; Big Easy; organisations touristiques

摘要

本文识别了新奥尔良当地旅游组织在促销种族遗产旅游时主要使用的叙述手法、主题及营销战略。通过民族志的方法及定性资料分析，本文认为种族遗产旅游是一种文化产品，在这种文化产品里人们凭借对种族歧视隔离的记忆及现今的感知来质疑种族的边缘化,并建构新的种族认同。非裔美国人将种族遗产旅游视作理论与实践的集合，并将自己定位为新奥尔良文化的中间力量，他们因此在重建代表非裔美国人的认同和种族意识的'快活之都'的过程中处于核心位置。本文着重分析了认同构建过程与遗产旅游发展之间的联系，探讨了旅游理论如何促使人们建立新的集体认同。通过探讨种族遗产旅游有助于我们理解种族认同是如何建立的，过去及现在的集体表征如何促进遗产旅游的发展。

关键词: 种族遗产旅游；种族认同；'快活之都'；旅游组织

Introduction

Recent years have witnessed much scholarly debate concerning the conceptualization and socio-cultural impacts of heritage tourism. Scholars disagree whether heritage is a cultural expression of national imagination (Park, 2009), a sign and symbol of collective memory (Macdonald, 2006), or a mechanism for promoting group conflict (Poria & Ashworth, 2009). As a set of discourses and cultural practices, heritage tourism is concerned with preserving the continuity and substance of a group's putative collective

identity grounded in material and tangible remnants of the past (Macdonald, 2006). In this definition, heritage involves the use and production of particular sites, symbolic codes, and cultural artifacts as 'authentic' representations of a past community, and establishes an identity among members of a group. Bessiere (1998, p. 26) notes that heritage, 'whether it be an object, monument, inherited skill or symbolic representation, must be considered an identity marker and distinguishing feature of a social group.' As a goal and strategy, heritage functions as a resource to establish 'solidarity among members of a group (national, social, etc.), by highlighting the differences between them and others so that this differentiation will legitimize a certain social order' (Poria & Ashworth, 2009, p. 523). Different conceptualizations of heritage tourism suggest that heritage attractions can facilitate the creation of an identity, distinguish this identity from rival identities, and justify a certain social order and ideological interpretation of the past. In this sense, heritage tourism is a sign and symbol of collective memory, a political strategy for legitimizing or challenging the status quo, and a cultural mechanism to reinterpret and reconstruct history.

This paper draws on ethnographic field observations, interviews, and other data sources to examine the development of racial heritage tourism in New Orleans. As a form of niche tourism, racial heritage tourism aims to highlight the differences between particular racial groups to educate the public, achieve group distinctiveness, and reconstruct the past. Heritage tourism reflects what Poria and Ashworth (2009) call the heritagization process in which different groups and organizations construct and use heritage as a resource to achieve certain social goals, including preserving, restoring, or reconstructing racial heritage (Poria & Ashworth, 2009; Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003). The heritagization process defines history 'as completed, something that belongs to the inhabitants of the present who can choose how to interpret and use it to their advantage' (Poria & Ashworth, 2009, p. 523). Yet heritage tourism reflects a partial and purposely chosen view of the past that groups construct and use for particular instrument and expressive goals, including creating identity and inculcating people. Through the heritagization process, tourist displays of racial heritage have the potential to redefine the content and parameters of a racial group and its relationship to other groups. Therefore, the different representations and interpretations of racial heritage tourism are important in understanding processes of collective memory construction and their interrelationships with contemporary race relations.

My goal in this paper is to identify and explain how different tourism practices affect racial identities, and how racial meanings and differences shape the production and development of tourism in a particular locale. I explain how the development of racial heritage tourism offers the potential to nurture new racial and cultural identities by presenting and marketing African American culture as an object of visual consumption. Two basic assumptions guide my investigation and analysis. First, heritage tourism sites and practices derive from the formulation and implementation and social policies, socio-legal regulations, and land-use practices. That is, heritage tourism is a product of planning and policy implementation at multiple levels of political organization. Policies pertaining to the arts, heritage, culture, land-use, urban and suburban development, and so on are crucial to determining socio-spatial variation in the form and content of heritage tourism. State policies create social structures, specify rules and statutes, and supply a legal framework to define 'heritage' and 'culture' and to regulate tourism financing and cultural exchange. Second, the production of heritage tourism in a particular locale or region requires a thorough understanding of past and current socio-economic trends, political conflicts, and group

struggles. Thus,the development of racial heritage tourism takes place in the context of past and present civil rights struggles and racial conflicts. By examining the production of racial heritage tourism in New Orleans, this paper provides insight into the relationships between social policies, racial conflicts, and racial identity.

Collective identity and heritage tourism

Recent studies of tourism have focused on the ways in which ethnic and racial identities and local cultures are negotiated, defined, and socially constructed through tourism practices (Gotham, 2007; Meethan, 2001; Rath, 2007). Central to this constructionist view is the idea that ostensibly primordial categories such as race and ethnicity are neither fixed nor immutable but changing in different contexts and varying situations, including individual and group encounters and engagements with tourism sites and discourses. Park's (2009, p. 116) analysis of tourist visits to Changdeok Palace, South Korea, suggests that 'heritage tourism experience acts as a symbolic mechanism through which national belonging can be reconstructed and communicated.'

Boyd's (2000) analysis of racial nostalgia and neighborhood redevelopment intimates racial heritage tourism as a major element of the cultural 'tool kit' that African American residents and activists use to revitalize their neighborhoods. Others have argued that tourism practices and modes of staging and visualization can purvey a 'reconstructed' ethnic or racial identity, and thereby a rhetorical and symbolic expression of cultural difference that is packaged and sold to tourists (MacCannell, 1973, 1992, p. 168; Picard, 1996; Picard & Wood, 1997). Robert E. Wood's (1998) analysis of ethnic groups in Asia and the Pacific Rim, Jane Desmond's (1999) examination of tourism in Hawaii, and Diane Barthel-Bouchier's (2001) study of the Amana Colonies in southeastern Iowa suggest that ethnicity and other social categories can be constructed and strategically deployed by different groups for instrumental and strategic purposes. Different groups can use tourism practices, imagery and symbols to confront the values, categories, and practices of the dominant culture, challenge the dominant culture's perception of a minority group, and contest public policy within the political arena. These diverse studies draw attention to the ways in which different groups' interaction with tourism is an integral part of the construction and reproduction of racial and ethnic identity. Local meanings of race and ethnicity shape and are shaped by tourism advertising and promotional strategies. In this way, the tourism creates new bases of struggles and conflict over meanings of race and ethnicity.

Racial heritage tourism involves the reconstruction of local African American history and the inclusion of new symbols, themes, and representations that highlight and celebrate African American history and culture (Boyd, 2000; Rath, 2007). As a form of tourism oriented toward the cultural heritage of the location where tourism is occurring, racial heritage tourism constructs and defines African Americans as authentic spokespersons of local culture. Examining representations of slavery and 'plantation heritage,' Buzinde and Santos (2008) assert that heritage plays help create a site for people to come together to reflect on shared pasts while disavowing victimization. Themes of omission and/or erasure are thus present in the process of constructing and modifying destination images for targeted consumers. Revealing the ideological nature of tourism marketing, representations of African Americans in heritage tourism brochures and advertisements downplay exploitation, discrimination, and inequality and accentuate positive role models, emphasize racial harmony, and suggest residents are affluent and wealthy (Buzinde, Santos, & Smith, 2006). As an

amalgam of tourism practices, racial heritage tourism involves the production of nostalgia, the mobilization of collective memories and heroic imagery, the asetheticization and theming of space, and the circulation of people to particular places to consume African American culture, history, nature, and otherness (Gotham, 2007). By commodifying race, racial heritage tourism is a process by which tourist modes of staging, visualization, and experience increasingly frame meanings and assertions of African American culture, identity, and collective memory.

Rather than embracing either/or explanations of heritage tourism, I develop a both/and conceptualization that views heritage tourism discourses and sites as arenas of contestation that embody contradictory tendencies, and articulate conflictual and opposing meanings of urban space and reality. In this conceptualization, heritage tourism contains discursive techniques that divert attention away from inequalities and oppressive features of past race relations as well as qualities that highlight the achievements and successes of particular racial and ethnic groups. Thus, racial heritage tourism is a contested terrain to the extent that the dominant narratives, themes, and destination images reflect racialized struggles over meanings of culture and identity. This multifaceted view recognizes that the planning, impact, and effects of heritage tourism are plural, heterogeneous, conflictual, and contested. Rather than obscuring and camouflaging urban problems, heritage tourism practices and attractions express the politics of inclusion and exclusion to the extent that they put on display social differences, divisions, inequalities, and antagonisms. Rath (2007) and Goulding and Domic (2009) note that tourist attractions often present new opportunities to reconstruct local identities through the mechanisms of group conflict and struggles over access to political and economic resources. As a cultural battlefield, tourist attractions constitute sites of political struggle where a variety of contending groups and organizations strive to legitimate their conceptions of a city as valid and authoritative, and, in turn, delegitimate rival interpretations and meanings. In this sense, tourist attractions are contested cultural terrains that express a variety of disparate representations and effects. A conception that probes for the conflictual, contested, and contradictory nature of racial heritage tourism avoids celebratory, one-sided, and reductive views and offers a sophisticated and empirically promising theory of tourism attractions and practices as essential elements in the politics of racial identity construction.

Methods and data sources

My analysis uses a multi-method approach and a combination of primary and secondary data sources. The secondary data come from archival collections, government documents, planning reports, and newspaper articles. The primary data come from more than a decade of ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, and interviews. Ethnographic work includes involvement in guided tours of the city, evaluation of written narratives, and regular encounters and interactions with employees in the local and regional tourism sector. I conducted semi-structured interviews during two major periods from 2003 to 2006 and 2009 to 2010. The first wave of data collection included interviews with 46 people gathered through a snowball sample that included 15 white males, 16 white females, nine black males, five black females, and one Asian female. These interviewers were with a variety of long-term residents, including current or former tourism professionals, civil rights activists, leaders of historic preservation societies, neighborhood coalition leaders, city planners, and others who have had first-hand knowledge and experience with the development of racial heritage tourism

in New Orleans and the surrounding region. All my interviews lasted between one and three hours and all interviews were transcribed. The second period includes a dozen interviews and focuses on issues related to post-Katrina tourism rebuilding. I have changed the names of interviewees to protect their confidentiality and do not reveal the organizations they are affiliated with.

Interviewing is an optimum data collection tool to conceptualize and embody the various articulations, individual experiences, and personal interpretations associated with racial heritage tourism. I used interviews to compare and contrast experiences, understandings, and framing strategies that tourism professionals and local residents have employed to interpret the development of tourism in New Orleans and recent efforts to rebuild the city in the years since Hurricane Katrina. In my interviews, I asked questions about the history and organization of the tourism industry, the role of local culture and historical preservation in the development of tourism venues, and the impact of race and racial discrimination on tourism development in New Orleans. I focused my research on asking 'process' questions to illuminate meaning construction processes, and how race shapes the formation and reproduction of collective memory. Process questions lend themselves to the use of interpretive inquiry to seek out information about how social identity and heritage are shaped and shaped by extra-local context, socio-economic transformations, and the constraints and opportunities of tourism.

Since I am primarily concerned with examining the conceptual and symbolic interrelationships between race and heritage tourism, I used a semi-structured interview protocol with both general and specific questions. These questions dealt with issues pertaining to definitions, impacts, and positive and negative views of tourism; the vestiges of past racial discrimination and segregation on contemporary culture; perceived elements of collective memory and heritage; and relationships between identity, culture, and tourism. Semi-structured interviews gave participants room to articulate their experiences, speak about past events and happenings, and elaborate at length on different points. This loosely organized interviewing format allowed me to ask theoretically generated and derived questions while providing an opportunity to probe for clarification when I needed more information from interviewees. Broadly, the interview data not only helped uncover rich data but provided for triangulating data sources – archival data, government documents, newspaper articles, and other data sources – to enhance validity and reliability and contribute to scholarship on racial heritage tourism.

Heritage tourism development in New Orleans

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a massive expansion of the New Orleans tourism sector that included the formation of new tourism organizations, new place marketing strategies, and the growth of cultural and heritage tourism. The seeds of this tourism expansion were planted during the 1970s when city elites and state officials began discussions and planning to promote new forms of investment to compensate for the decline of the port industry and the chemical and petroleum industry. To revive the struggling state and local economy, political and economic elites joined forces to build a series of big-ticket, image conscious capital projects such as the Louisiana Superdome, the Rivergate Convention Center, and international hotels bordering the historic French Quarter. These major developments dovetailed with the planning and staging of the 1984 Louisiana Exposition, the multi-million dollar renovation of the Audubon Zoo,

and the development of the Aquarium of the Americas (Gotham, 2007). Within the central city, the formation of the Downtown Development District (DDD) and the Historic District Landmarks Commission (HDLC) spearheaded the upgrade of the Central Business District and the creation of new zoning ordinances to guide future tourism-oriented growth. The objective of these and other initiatives was to make the Central Business District more hospitable to visitors, enhance the growth of entertainment facilities, and help to preserve the historical architecture of the adjacent Vieux Carre.

A major push in the tourism development of New Orleans came from national level developments and policies to promote new investment in urban entertainment, cultural attractions, and tourism heritage sites. The passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966 declared that cultural heritage is in the 'public interest' and that the Federal Government 'assist State and local governments and the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States to expand and accelerate their historic preservation programs and activities.'[1] Over the next two decades, local grassroots organizations, social movements, and cultural groups established coalitions and networks with national heritage organizations and tourism bureaus to promote the United States as a cultural destination with a rich and unique heritage. By the 1990s, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the Institute for Museum Services, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) sponsored workshops, conferences, and consortia to encourage cultural and tourism industry leaders to work together to create innovative strategies for community involvement, partnership building, financial support, and planning and promotion for heritage tourism.

In 1995, the White House Conference on Travel and Tourism outlined a series of best practices in cultural and heritage tourism and created a national network for information sharing and exchange. Executive Order 13287, *Preserve America*, issued on 3 March 2003, required federal agencies to recognize that federal historic properties are valuable assets that can support agency missions and also stimulate local economic development. This Order established an accountability system to gauge agency implementation of the mandates of the NHPA and created an evaluation process to assess whether accurate information on the state of federally owned historic properties could promote community economic development through local partnerships. Over the past decade, the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program has emerged as an important federal program to allow states and municipalities to leverage federal block grant funds for historic preservation and heritage tourism projects as part of a broader strategy of community development and economic revitalization. As a result, many cities in the United States have established partnerships with federal agencies and private firms to leverage federal resources, tax codes, and policies to promote the preservation and enhancement of local culture and heritage attractions.[2]

These national level developments dovetailed with a growing informal network of tourism professionals, cultural organizations, and cultural heritage movements in New Orleans and Louisiana. In late 1984, African American leaders in New Orleans were successful in lobbying state legislators to create the Louisiana Black Culture Commission and the Division of Black Culture. Six years later, in 1990, 13 African American business owners established the Black Tourism Network (BTN) to increase opportunities for African Americans in the tourism industry. In 1990, the State of Louisiana and the City of New Orleans established the New Orleans Tourism Marketing

Corporation (NOTMC) as a private, non-profit, economic development corporation to market New Orleans as a leisure destination. During the 1990s, the City of New Orleans established the Mayor's Office of Tourism and Arts to serve as a liaison to the tourism industry and arts organizations. In 1995, the State of Louisiana and the City of New Orleans passed statutes earmarking a portion of the local hotel–motel tax to the New Orleans Sports Foundation to attract professional sports events to the city. This tax was also appropriated to the New Orleans Metropolitan and Convention and Visitors Bureau (NOMCVB) to expand foreign travel to the city and promote the city as a leisure and convention destination internationally. In 1996, the State of Louisiana created the multicultural branch of the Louisiana Office of Tourism to work with the BTN in identifying historical African American sites and hosting a major multicultural tourism summit. Later in the year, the Louisiana Office of Tourism established a Heritage Tourism Development Program to identify and document the diversity of cultures in the state. These developments represented the formation of new organizations to raise awareness of African American heritage and create an inclusive conception of urban culture (Gotham, 2007).

Reconstructing the Big Easy

One consistent theme that appears in advertisements and other images from major tourism organizations in New Orleans and the State of Louisiana is that African Americans are a community of achievers and cultural inventors that have invigorated and enlivened New Orleans culture and history over the decades. This celebratory discourse situates African American accomplishments in a long history of institutionalized discrimination that has constrained their lives and made it difficult to succeed. Hard work, motivation, and determination have been the ingredients for success, advancement, and upward mobility. At the same time, these qualities have served as bulwarks against discrimination and segregation. As one African American leader within the tourism industry told me:

> There has been a renaissance, an appreciation of the value of African American culture in New Orleans. I have seen this since the 1990s. My office has undertaken the organization of several efforts to promote and elevate the scholarship and research of the indigenous African American community. Just last year we organized an exhibit of Africa American master craftsmen and their impact on the architecture of the city. Many of the historic homes in New Orleans were designed and built by African Americans who had special skills in building homes. Many of these families built whole sections of the city, the neighborhoods that we celebrate today, the areas that make up the unique architecture of the city today. These people were important to the development of the architecture of New Orleans and played an instrumental role, we can say, in helping to anticipate and provide the cultural support to the development of cultural tourism in the city. Some of these families still apply these skilled trades today, work to rebuild, restore, and maintain these structures. It is important that they receive their recognition and their due, especially since their ancestors worked and created our neighborhoods during segregation.

The above quote expresses a rhetoric of success and achievement that serves as both valorization and critique. Privileging the accomplishments of African Americans through a discourse of racial heritage tourism celebrates the practices of racial group members while simultaneously critiquing the system of institutionalized discrimination that pervades American society and culture. This finding reflects recent research by Vasquez and Wetzel (2009) who find that claims of racial identity and authenticity

are a 'tactic of resistance against contemporary institutional racism' (p. 1). Different racial and ethnic groups evaluate themselves and establish their social worth by 'making discursive comparisons with, and drawing distinctions from, the American mainstream. They evaluate themselves using a metric that highlights their traditions, specifically their roots, values, and cultural toolkits' (p. 1). In the case of racial heritage tourism in New Orleans, the discourse of accomplishment, success, and achievement is significant in contesting diffuse institutional discrimination and situating African American triumphs over marginality in historical context. Using themes of success and accomplishment marks symbolic boundaries between whites and blacks and provides a language that African Americans can use to re-invest their minority status with a pride and dignity that whites will not accord them in mainstream society and culture.

Another theme, one that interviews reveal, is that racial heritage tourism helps preserve African American culture and functions as a venue for expressing the history and development of African American community. In the quote below, one leader of an African American historic preservation organization remarks on the ways in which she tries to promote cultural awareness through music education and neighborhood preservation. As this person told me:

> Take, for instance, jazz. [African Americans] live with jazz, we live with it every day and we breath it so we don't appreciate it as much as other people who come to visit New Orleans. So, I feel that being in this office I am exposing young people to who built the foundation for jazz. I am exposing young people to the history and culture of African Americans and how we migrated and came into the United States ... through lectures, through tours, through written material. And especially what we do is to embrace the houses, and the places where jazz musicians lived ... We are educating people to the culture, to the music, to the neighborhoods. By working with preservationist organizations to preserve the sites where the jazz musicians lived, we are, in fact, preserving their spirits in that particular place. And it would not be the same if we picked that house up and moved it to some other particular place. It would still be a house but not a place where he actually lived and his spirit is there. So, that way I feel that I have been educated and I am helping educating others.

Another person, a leader of a museum, echoes the above points and notes how he tries to create new conceptions of culture and identity through local organizations and institutions:

> It is said that music, food, and architecture are the three main draws to New Orleans, then it is very important that people understand the contributions of people of color to that culture. What we have tried to do to show the contribution of African American builders, architects, and designers in the development of New Orleans historic neighborhoods, whose ancestors still survive and still apply their trade in the city. Now, this material is finally being incorporated in the narratives of tours and I think it opens up our tourism product and exposes us, our city, to reinterpretation that broadens our market and brings greater public awareness and exposure. Because now you are giving people a much richer overview of what the city is all about than what they got in the past.

The above points emphasize racial heritage tourism as both a tactic of resistance against marginalization and proactive strategy to affirm African American culture. African Americans use the language and discourse of racial heritage tourism in three ways: first, to acknowledge the reality of racial discrimination and segregation; second, to criticize the racial status quo; and third, to position themselves as authoritative and

authentic spokespeople and experts of New Orleans culture and history. While heritage tourism sites tend to emphasize nostalgia for the past downplay past atrocities connected to slavery and racial oppression, local residents are not passive receivers of dominant images or themes. They are actively involved in interpreting reality and use different symbols and discursive strategies to construct identities and collective memories that stress racial progress and liberation.

In describing their experiences with heritage tourism organizations and practices, residents comment on the ways in which the interaction of tourism and heritage can be a mechanism for breaking down racial barriers and remedying longstanding racial inequalities by bringing whites and blacks together. Closely related to this theme is the idea that racial heritage tourism can be a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization and cultural invention and innovation. In the quotes below, three interviewees reflect on role of racial heritage tourism in promoting racial harmony, neighborhood revitalization, and cultural renewal:

> The [heritage preservation] program we have formed has been the link between the African s and the whites, the link between the Hispanics and the Asians. Everybody has a history. There may not have been any Chinese jazz musicians but the Chinese are interested in hearing about jazz history and music. So, this organization is all about tourism and promoting culture.

> I think that developing African American heritage tourism should be a primary focus, for both the public and the private sector. Because I know for a fact, because of my past involvement in tourism industry, that many of our international visitors, the ones that spend the most money here, are very interested in African American culture. The people who come here who are interested in the food, the music would spend more money if they had more authentic African American cultural attractions, as opposed to the kind of superficial ones run by the white community. And, it would stem the destructive decline of neighborhoods in the city that are not often the beaten path, the ones that are accessible to the tourists.

> We have a number of very prominent black musicians who are investing their time and efforts in the institutions of the city. They could go elsewhere, New York City or Los Angeles, and probably have excellent careers as famous musicians. Several musicians have the music programs and the local universities and other schools around the city. Those are the types of institutional-building developments that are going to have a major impact in the city. And so, you know, how can that have an impact? Well, if they are training people to be musicians then they will make music that will increase the exposure for the city. Sooner or later, they'll be more music venues in the city because there will be more musicians. If you can get the same thing to happen with culinary arts and visual arts, then, all the better.

These points suggest that tourism provides a set of symbols, imagery, and discourses that local people can (re)interpret and integrate into their tactics of invention to produce new expressions of local culture and delegitimize rival interpretations and other strategies of marginalization. As a set of social relations to facilitate the creation of identity, racial heritage tourism motivates people to invoke cherished values and beliefs to forge solidarity and create new cultures and traditions to fit the constraints and opportunities of the present, the 'invention of tradition' in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's (1983) classic formulation. What is important is that present constructions of local culture are not simply a historical residual, a set of meanings and traditions inherited from the past. Nor are meanings and assertions of culture and heritage arbitrary fabricated and deployed at will. Rather, people construct culture, race, and

heritage by appropriating images and symbols from the past, discarding others, and adding new ones to fit the opportunities and constraints of the present. The implication is that culture, heritage, and race are neither stable and durable nor malleable and fabricated. As contingent and fluid categories, culture, race, and heritage are contested terms that reflect the politics of urban representation and tourist modes of staging, visualization, and discourse.

Conclusion

The process of racial heritage tourism is intertwined with local power relations, structures, and inequalities that demarcate the content, form, and trajectory of cultural construction processes and conflicts. It is important to note that the terms 'race,' 'heritage,' 'culture,' or 'identity' are not created by abstract collectives but are fashioned in struggles of factions and groups to create and control material resources and the contents of collective representation. The social construction of culture, heritage, and related urban representations is always a conflictual and contested process. In the case of tourism practices, racial heritage serves to valorize African American accomplishments and identity and critique the existing system of institutionalized discrimination. Privileging African American culture and traditions through racial heritage tourism is a mechanism of celebration and criticism. Whether by conscious decision to exploit images as a means to profit-seeking or other objectives, racial heritage tourism provides cultural scripts, interconnected symbols, and narratives that people use in telling their histories and life stories as an expedient to forging group identity and achieving self-worth and dignity.

Today, tourism discourses, practices, and framings can act as mechanisms through which people construct notions of racial identity and cultural authenticity. Tourism advertisements and imagery crafted and disseminated by the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation, the New Orleans Multicultural Tourism Network, and the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau all promote African American art, music, cuisine, and history as constitutive of New Orleans culture and history. As a set of idealized images from the past and present, racial heritage tourism functions as a model of what African American communities should strive to become. Rather than marginalized by decades of segregation and discrimination, African Americans are presented as a class of achievers and inventors that were and continue to be active agents in the development of the city and region. At the same time, tourism brochures and advertisements downplay the history of segregation and racism and celebrate the present and future as part of a new era of racial harmony and collaboration between all ethnic and racial groups.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, different heritage organizations and historic preservation societies are deploying a variety of nostalgia and idealized symbols to unite disparate groups of residents and galvanize support for tourism rebuilding. Websites proclaim that the 'soul of New Orleans is inseparable from its people. You can hear the love in their expressions. You can see their skill in the architecture, with carriageways and courtyards' (New Orleans Multicultural Tourism Network, http://www.soulofneworleans.com/thesoul/ [accessed July 20, 2009]). As a political strategy, the symbol of 'soul' or 'heritage' contains a multiplicity of meanings that provide social actors with a strategic vocabulary but one that leaves the specifics of content purposely ambiguous. In this sense, we can view these and other terms like 'community' and 'identity' as a form of cultural capital that different groups wield more or less self-consciously in their social and political struggles to influence local meanings of race and shape urban

culture. In short, social structural forces shape and frame assertions of racial heritage in the production of culture and tourism. The example of racial heritage tourism illustrates the ways in which culture and tourism increasingly share similar themes, symbols, discourses, and interpretive systems. To what extent and in what ways tourism practices and cultural discourses will interconnect to shape the pace and trajectory of post-Katrina rebuilding remains an interesting topic for further exploration.

Notes

1. National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 – as amended through 2006 (http://www.achp. gov/docs/nhpa%202008-final.pdf).
2. Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. 'HUD and Preserve America,' http://www.achp. gov/docs/PAHUDFactSheet.pdf

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