

LSU RESEARCH

Office of Research & Economic Development The Constant Pursuit of Discovery | 2021-22



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THE HUMAN CONDITION: Building Connections Across Neighborhoods

By Alison Lee Satake

While Louisiana may be no stranger to disaster, it's also intimately familiar with community resilience. To capture the qualitative stories of humanity and community resilience, sociology professor and disaster research scholar Frederick Weil and his research team of LSU undergraduate and graduate students have conducted and collected hundreds of hours of taped interviews with people and community leaders throughout the pandemic.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Weil collected 7,000 quantitative survey responses and numerous ethnographic interviews to capture how communities were responding amidst that disaster. He has since maintained contact with many community members through his neighborhood portraits project in which he gathers interviews and takes environmental portraits of people and places in New Orleans. His connections and ties to community leaders have been integral to his new research during the pandemic.

"Because we know everybody still, there's continuity. I don't think you could do [this research] if you didn't have that," he said.

One interviewee noted the way people came together after Hurricane Katrina in their neighborhoods to share food and help each other isn't safe or possible during the pandemic. So, people have had to rely on already established relationships, use technology in new ways, and become innovative.

With support from the National Science Foundation, Weil is conducting hour-long, in-depth qualitative interviews with community members and leaders. He has adapted a sampling process that stems from older European polling methods. His modified quota sampling approach begins with a random sample of interviewees, who are then allowed to pick interviewees based on a quota system so diversity in age, gender, and ethnicity are represented in the data.

"At LSU, we have a very diverse student body. When this diverse student body interviews people they know, we get diverse samples of data which reflect the population of Louisiana. So, we're doing it this way, and it's totally working."

Frederick Weil

LSU Sociology Professor and disaster research scholar

Although the research team has conducted more than 350 interviews so far, they are just beginning to scratch the surface on understanding the effects of the pandemic and community resilience. The early findings are already illuminating. The researchers have identified recurring themes of safety, stress, family life, vulnerability, interpersonal conflict, community assistance, partisanship, and social justice that have run through the interviews.

As part of their analysis, Weil's graduate student Samantha Ramey is leading a linked research team that is going through the interviews and identifying emerging themes from Black and minority perspectives. They are finding within the community a strong sense of mutual support, shared responsibility, caring for others, and support for social justice, but also feelings of vulnerability and distrust based on a long history of injustice.

From his interviews with community members, Weil has also found that many of the leaders who are actively responding to community needs during the pandemic in New Orleans learned disaster response in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Some of the grassroots community response groups that emerged after the hurricane have since developed into mid-level nonprofit organizations or have even been absorbed by the city through the establishment of the Neighborhood Engagement Office.

"Some of these mid-level nonprofits have developed innovative connections to block-level neighborhood leaders like Sue Press, who is the president of the Ole and Nu Style Fellas Social Aid and Pleasure Club (see About the Covers on [pg. 64](#)). These connections form a kind of 'from the firehose to the capillaries' structure, where the mid-level organizations bring massive amounts of food or other supplies into the city, and the neighborhood leaders help distribute it to needy people who might otherwise be missed," write Weil and the research team. "In all cases, leaders are highly cognizant of infection risks and take extensive precautions to keep everyone safe." ■

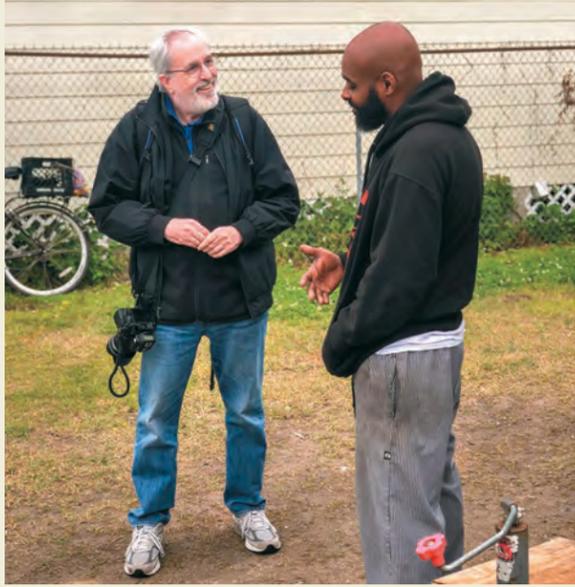
The following pages feature some of the photos from Weil's Photographic Portraits of New Orleans Neighborhoods project.

Visit rickweil.com/NolaNBHs to read the interviews and see more of Weil's photography.





MEET THE RESEARCHERS



Weil interviews Ralph Sullivan (right), a resident of the Black Pearl neighborhood in New Orleans. Sullivan runs a home remodeling company but is mostly known in his own community for cooking barbequed oysters at second-line parades.



LSU sociology graduate student Samantha Ramey is pictured here in her hometown of New Orleans. According to Weil, her graduate advisor, Ramey is an outstanding statistician, a great ethnographer, and an amazing artist. Her interests include grassroots mentoring of children and adolescents as well as addressing mental health. She is working with Weil on COVID-19 and disaster research; working with Sue Press on creating a mentoring program; and she is writing and illustrating a graphic novel set in New Orleans. Before returning to LSU to study sociology, she studied mass communication and graphic design at LSU, worked as a digital artist in Los Angeles, and was a graphic designer for Microsoft.









PORTRAIT CAPTIONS

Pg. 10-11 Louisiana Creole family members Ellen, Elizabeth, Kaitlyn, and Alexi at their family's home in the 7th Ward. People with mixed heritage and ancestry who were born in the New World with ancestry in Africa, France, or Spain identify as Creole in Louisiana.

Pg. 13 Community arts leader Nurhan Gokturk (2nd from left) and friends at The Front, his art gallery, in the Bywater neighborhood.

Pg. 14 Deacon Isiah Riley in front of the Second Baptist Church of Cut Off that was founded in 1868.

Pg. 15 Artist and sign painter Simon Harveldt in the Irish Channel holds a portrait of Vera Briones Smith, a woman who died in Hurricane Katrina and was temporarily buried in a garden until her family could come for her remains.

Pg. 16 World War II veteran and carpenter Mr. Edward Lee built many of the houses in the Cut Off neighborhood on the West Bank.

Pg. 18 Musician Clarence "Frogman" Henry and his great-granddaughter Jaci Green on the West Bank.

Pg. 19 Musician and manager of Euclid Records in the Bywater neighborhood Lefty Parker.

Pg. 20 Ernest Johnson, president of the Broadmoor Improvement Association.

Pg. 21 Pepa Lopez is a costume designer from Spain, who lives in the Irish Channel.

Pg. 22 Pat McDonald, who works at the Candlelight Lounge, one of the last remaining old-style barrooms in Tremé, where local jazz musicians play.

Pg. 23 LSU alumna and retired University of New Orleans Sociology Professor Pam Jenkins with her neighbor Griffin Winn in Mid-City.

ABOUT THE COVERS

Three different covers are featured in this year's issue of the LSU Research magazine. All three photos featured on the cover were taken by LSU Department of Sociology Professor Rick Weil as part of his on going Photographic Portraits of New Orleans Neighborhoods project. He has taken hundreds of photos in 14 distinct New Orleans neighborhoods: 7th Ward, Black Pearl, Broadmoor, Bywater, Carrollton, Cut Off on the West Bank, Hollygrove, Holy Cross in the Lower 9th Ward, Irish Channel, Lakeview, Marigny, Mid-City, Pontchartrain Park, and Tremé.

"People tell us about their neighborhoods. We want to see how neighborhoods are changing a dozen years or more after Hurricane Katrina," Weil writes. "We find a wide variety of patterns across many neighborhoods. We interview residents and take photographs to give a feel for what neighborhoods are like today and how they are changing."

The following are descriptions of the three portraits chosen for the cover of the magazine.



COVER #1:

Sue Press (right) pictured with her mother, Emelda Lewis-Frank, in her home in Tremé. Press is the president of the Ole and Nu Style Fellas Social Aid and Pleasure Club of which Lewis-Frank, who recently passed, was the "mother". Social aid and pleasure clubs, like mutual aid societies, are grassroots organizations that help community members pool their money and resources. They began around the 19th century and helped families cover the cost of burials and hiring a brass band. In Tremé, one of the oldest and most culturally vibrant neighborhoods in New Orleans, social aid and pleasure clubs invented the jazz funeral.



COVER #2:

Lynward L. Adams, or "Bud," (right) pictured with his friend in front of his Family Barber Shop located in Uptown New Orleans in the Carrollton neighborhood. Adams is a World War II U.S. Navy and Army veteran. After the war, he attended barber school and has been cutting hair on Oak Street for more than 70 years. The Family Barber Shop opened in the 1920s and is one of the oldest operating businesses on Oak Street. In 1967, Adams purchased the shop and continues to run it today. The barber shop offers "Bud's Special," which is a buzz cut for \$15.



COVER #3:

Crista Rock pictured out on her front stoop in the Irish Channel neighborhood, where she is a leader in neighborhood affairs. Rock is a filmmaker, photographer, photojournalist, and muralist. She wrote, shot, and edited a documentary series following a family of four as they struggled to rebuild after Hurricane Katrina, which aired on New Orleans local TV news channel, WDSU/NBC. She moved from Cleveland, Ohio to New Orleans in 2003 and now runs her own film production company, Crista Rock Productions "to tell the stories and struggles of New Orleans and its surrounding parishes." Her double-shotgun house pictured here has painted murals inside and out.

