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"Strictly an act of street violence": intimate publicity and affective divestment in the New Orleans Mother's Day shooting

Ashley Noel Mack and Bryan J. McCann

Department of Communication Studies, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, USA

ABSTRACT

On May 12, 2013, two men opened fire on a Mother's Day second line parade in New Orleans's Seventh Ward. This essay attends to discourses from public officials and news media following the shooting that reified what we describe as affective divestment from the suffering of historically marginalized bodies and communities. Specifically, public discourse characterized the shooting as an episode of "street violence" that did not warrant sustained national attention. Affective divestment is the consequence of rhetorical maneuvers that signal a pushing away from certain bodies by intimate publics—an estrangement at the symbolic level that has naturalized or rationalized the neglect of certain forms of suffering. Such estrangement, we argue, is a function of neoliberal logics that devalue and, at times, necessitate the suffering of disposable populations.

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By the time two teenage brothers, Akein and Shawn Scott, opened fire on a Mother's Day parade in the predominantly black, working class Seventh Ward of New Orleans, the United States had experienced an unusually high number of "national tragedies."[1] For example, less than one month before the May 12, 2013 shooting in New Orleans, two bombs exploded at the finish line of the beloved Boston Marathon, taking three lives and injuring nearly 300 people.[2] It was in this context that Mary Beth Romig, a New Orleans-based spokesperson for the FBI, immediately told news outlets that the Mother's Day shooting was not an act of terrorism. Rather, she explained, "It's strictly an act of street violence in New Orleans."[3] This brief statement is rich with semantic entailments. Claiming that this was *strictly* an act of "street violence" imposes clear parameters on what the shooting was not: it was not an act of terrorism, that amorphous transnational threat on which our nation has waged righteous warfare since 2001. Furthermore, it was strictly an act of violence that occurred in *New Orleans*. This was not, in other words, a "national tragedy." This was no doubt a somber occasion, but one whose consequences were symbolically confined to a predominantly black, poor and working class, and statistically high crime urban area.[4]

CONTACT Ashley Noel Mack ashleymack@lsu.edu

However, some voices of dissent challenged the public erasure implicit in the FBI statement following the Mother's Day shooting. For example, journalist and New Orleans native David Dennis wrote in the *Guardian*:

> Now take a moment and imagine a Mother's Day Parade in the suburbs of Denver, a neighborhood in Edina [Minnesota], or a plaza in Austin where bullets rain down on civilians and even hit children. I can't help but imagine the around-the-clock news coverage. And I can't help but think it's because most of America can identify with the fear of being bombarded with gunfire while just enjoying a parade in the middle of town. But America can't identify with being at a parade in the "inner city" where "gang violence" erupts. The "oh my God, that could happen to me" factor isn't present with a story about New Orleans or the Chicago southside.[5]

For writers like Dennis, the FBI's immediate declaration that the May 12 shooting was not a cause for national concern raised myriad questions about how we choose to value victims of public violence in civil society. Dennis suggests that the relative national indifference to the New Orleans shooting expressed white supremacist sentiments about and learned detachment from racialized spaces like the "inner city." For those invested in the fate of the Crescent City, the failure to sufficiently recognize the tragedy that unfolded on Mother's Day in the Seventh Ward eschewed a fundamental reverence for the maimed bodies that languished on the streets of one of America's oldest cities. Rather, the racialized and criminalized, poor and working-class communities of the Seventh Ward and other parts of New Orleans were told to reckon with their own demons. This was not a "national tragedy."

For the purposes of this essay, we attempt to account for why these wounded bodies did not beckon a national, or more publicly salient, outcry. To this end, we put forth a hermeneutic for critical scholars to trace and unpack the ways that cultural discourses symbolically negotiate public intimacy by demobilizing affective investments in the fates of specific kinds of bodies and communities. We argue that the detachment implicit in Mary Beth Romig's brief comments betrayed a broader regime of affective investments associated with violence, race, class, and locality. Specifically, when the FBI described the shooting as "Strictly an act of street violence in New Orleans," it reified an affective *divestment* from the suffering of New Orleans's poor, working class, and primarily black residents on the part of the broader intimate public sphere in America. Affective divestment does not describe the absence of affect, for affect is always and already present. Rather, it is the consequence of affective mobilization away from specific bodies and communities. It describes an absence of felt linkages with and responsibility for Others. Affective divestment is both cause and consequence of exclusion; large-scale affective divestment excludes Others from the intimate public sphere and guarantees continued indifference. While affective divestment occurs in a variety of contexts, this essay describes its manifestations in the wake of public violence. Whereas national audiences experience deep degrees of intimacy with the victims of national tragedies where affective investments have been mobilized in ways that presume collective responsibility toward the suffering of Others, the mostly black bodies that bled and writhed in the Seventh Ward on Mother's Day were placed outside the affective registers of our intimate public sphere—they were not our responsibility.

To clarify our argument, this essay proceeds in three parts. First, we describe the affective contours of intimacy and violence, noting the central role of affective divestment in

the constitution of exclusionary intimate publics. Next, we return to Mary Beth Romig's public statement and map it onto mainstream print and television news coverage following the Mother's Day shooting.[6] In so doing, we note the ways in which the profoundly limited journalistic interest in that day's macabre events rationalized and reified the affective limits of intimacy to public violence in the United States. Lastly, we conclude with a meditation on other violent episodes in the Crescent City and what they stand to teach us about intimacy and public violence.

Making public intimacy

> No "we" should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain.—Susan Sontag[7]

Publics do not intrinsically view displays of violence—an image of a dead body; a viral video of an explosion—as tragic or with moral indignation. Rather, the context or discourses surrounding violence frame our felt experiences thereof. One's sense of obligation to victims of violence is never guaranteed, but is shaped by a broad constellation of commitments associated with nationality, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and so on.[8] As we argue, how violence resonates is predicated on the discursive construction and maintenance of intimacy through the mobilization of affective investments.

In past rhetorical and cultural studies scholarship, identification has been the predominant language for critically unpacking how discourses function to produce a sense of connection or disconnection with particular bodies in pain.[9] As Sontag claims above, no "we" should be taken for granted when bullets fly or bombs drop. While not the only method of approaching identification, Burke offered critics a rich foundational vocabulary of enemies and scapegoats to unpack how we come to invest in particular positions through the symbolic process of identification.[10] However, we would like to posit the production of intimacy through the circulation of affective investments as an alternative to the concept of identification.

Examining how intimacy is rhetorically produced enables us to look at moments not only when identification is central to rhetorical maneuvers but also when it is not. Discourses can resonate based on the presence of intimacy—the *felt* experience of closeness, empathy, or perhaps even responsibility, to the Other—and not necessarily identification.[11] Identification describes a degree of consubstantiality with the Other—I am you and you are me, or I am absolutely not you and you are absolutely not me. Identification is not a precondition for intimacy: Intimacy does not require such firm linkages or boundaries with identity. The production of intimacy in public relies on the circulation, capture, and escape of affective investments in public life. We understand affect as a domain of felt intensity that exists prior to its expression as emotion. In other words, as Lundberg argues, affect and emotion are not synonymous, but the former is the precondition for the latter.[12] Affect is, then, inarticulable and felt and must therefore be understood as a social and corporeal phenomenon, emerging from encounters between bodies in social life. As Gould notes, "affect is a body's processing of social conditions."[13]

Affect is subject to a vast array of symbolic deployments and, therefore, is a key resource for the production of cultural discourses and the constitution of what Berlant calls intimate publics. Berlant claims that publicity has grown further removed from the state as

a key site of deliberation and political action. Because neoliberalism rejects the very notion of deploying state resources in the service of social welfare, seeking instead to rationalize privatization and growing economic inequality with appeals to individual autonomy, political and cultural leaders urge citizens to turn away from it as a source of relief in times of need. Rather, she claims, citizens now look to the nation as a privatized domain of feeling.[14] This perspective on publicity offers an alternative to those that privilege normative models of rationality and identification in the assembling of publics and, therefore, offers a broader repertoire for understanding how subjects come together as a public. To argue that publics are constituted through affective registers is to claim that people find common cause through shared affective investments. Affective investments are our inarticulable affective commitments that are mobilized through discourse and social conditions. Because bodies occupy social structures and are conditioned by those social structures, social forces such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism always shape the ways that bodily affect finds expression and how affective investments are mobilized. The production of intimate publicity, Berlant explains, functions as a proprietary politics in which those who belong feel compelled to protect their intimate sphere from outsiders (e.g., ethnic and national minorities, poor people, LGBTQ+ people) who may wish them harm. Berlant argues that intimacy is "formed around threats to the image of the world it seeks to sustain."[15]

The shared affective investments of an intimate public demarcate the terms of belonging, and also notions of whose violence is justified and whose victimhood is legitimate. In her writing amid the American War on Terror, Butler explains, "Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as 'grievable.'"[16] Compassion, empathy, and worry for the Other in pain, in other words, is fundamentally unstable. Butler writes, "To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of *identification with suffering itself*."[17] One must, in other words, acquire a sense of investment with witnessed suffering. We need not necessarily *identify with the Other in pain*, but instead *feel* a notable empathetic response to their suffering. Furthermore, to simply acknowledge an Other's suffering is not a sufficient condition for intimacy. We must also engage in the sometimes "slow process" of feeling linked to their suffering and, ultimately, their fate.

The rhetorical circulation of affects can demobilize intimate publics just as surely as they mobilize. Affective divestment, we argue, is the consequence of rhetorical maneuvers that signal a pushing away from certain bodies—an estrangement at the symbolic level that has naturalized or rationalized a pulling away from identification with the suffering of the Other. What we are describing here is not the opposite of affective investment, but a direct consequence of the emergence of particular kinds of affective investments that mobilize compassion and responsibility toward some forms of suffering at the expense of others. To be clear, affective divestment does not necessarily entail antipathy, glee, or cold indifference toward such suffering. Quietly shaking one's head at the horror of violence in an American city or a far-off land, and then proceeding to go about one's business without mobilizing such an affective response in the service of sustained attention and action, represents the affective divestment from the suffering of Others. Such fleeting expressions of compassion or bewilderment wither absent more concrete action or sustained

identification with the suffering. A felt sense of powerlessness in the face of distant horrors, just as surely as apathy or hatred, is a manifestation of affective divestment. The key element of affective divestment is the orienting of one's affect away from the Other, even if witnessed suffering inspires an initial affective response. Recognition, in other words, is a necessary but insufficient precondition for mobilizing affect in ways that reflect identification with and respond substantively to suffering.[18]

Therefore, we should not read the national affective divestment from the Mother's Day shooting as an act of blind indifference toward the primarily black communities that occupy the Seventh Ward and other, largely impoverished communities in New Orleans. The news media sources we consult for this project do not ignore the violence of May 12, 2013, and we argue that the acknowledgment of suffering can occur in a state of affective divestment.[19] It is the substance of the ways we respond to public acts of violence and other forms of suffering that delineate sincere and efficacious felt connections from fleeting moments of recognition. The former phenomenon is the stuff of affective investments that give rise to mobilization and action, whereas the latter is a manifestation of affective divestment. Furthermore, affective divestment can occur in a context of felt powerlessness just as surely as relative indifference. When the problems plaguing communities with which we do not experience intimacy present themselves to us, they often manifest as overwhelming and hopeless consequences of history and pathology. Affective divestment, then, can function as a mode of self-preservation when the task of responding to the Other appears too daunting.

But while the paths that lead us to states of affective divestment vary from indifference to hopelessness, the structures of intimacy that govern such responses are firmly rooted in distinct material interests. It is for this reason that Berlant argues that the contemporary politics of intimacy are inseparable from their contextualization in neoliberalism. Since at least the catastrophic consequences of the levee breaches following Hurricane Katrina, myriad state and corporate interests have successfully dismantled the Crescent City's social safety net in favor of aggressive and profoundly lucrative privatization.[20] The national affective divestment from the Crescent City, therefore, does not begin or end with the horrors of the Mother's Day shooting. Rather, it is part and parcel of a broader neoliberal logic of withdrawal from what Davis calls a surplus humanity.[21] Neoliberalism orients us toward certain choices when engaging in intimacy. Prevailing discourses associated with public violence, as well as other, more quotidian forms of suffering, mobilize connection in ways that advance neoliberal logics. To call for militarized responses to acts of terrorism or enhanced law enforcement in the wake of mass shootings in highly recognizable spaces reifies many neoliberal logics.

To demand intimacy with the suffering of racialized bodies and communities in New Orleans and other parts of the country—and here we are referring to a broad tapestry of suffering associated with interpersonal crime, police brutality, disproportionately high incarceration rates, segregation, failing schools, and gentrification—might invite questions regarding shared responsibility in the face of structural inequality, as well as demands that the state respond to such suffering in ways that contradict the key tenets of neoliberalism.[22] Thus, affective divestment from the suffering of the Seventh Ward is a precondition for sustaining the various transformations occurring in New Orleans that benefit some at the expense of others. As Duggan notes, neoliberalism's capacity to naturalize dramatic redistributions of wealth across all identity categories largely hinges

on the role of white supremacy and other modalities of inequality in rationalizing the most intense forms of suffering in the contemporary economy.[23] To experience affective investment in one's whiteness or relative affluence necessitates divestment from those who look and live differently from oneself. One can more easily justify policies and practices that sustain the impoverishment of poor communities of color (i.e., deregulation, dismantling of entitlement programs, increased reliance on precarious low-wage labor, and the disproportionate mass incarceration of poor racialized bodies) if the bodies residing in those communities languish outside the intimate public sphere. In other words, the exclusionary politics of intimacy not only, as Berlant notes, protects felt investments of social membership but also guards against intrusions that threaten the structural contours of neoliberal hegemony in civil society.

Affective divestment from the Seventh Ward

One of the most striking characteristics of the Mother's Day shooting coverage was what amounted to brief mentions relative to other acts of mass public violence. More often than not, telecasts placed their descriptions of the New Orleans shooting amid other major news stories. The Mother's Day shooting, in other words, did not warrant the full dedication of national journalistic resources, but was one of many noteworthy stories during the middle of May. ABC's earliest mention of the attack came during the opening hour of *Good Morning America*. Journalist Josh Elliot reported:

> At least two gunmen opened fire and sparked panic as people ran for their lives, ducking around corners, jumping into backyards and all about a mile and half from the famous French Quarter. 19 people, including two children, were injured. Police are now searching for a group of men spotted running away from the scene. A $10,000 reward is being offered in the case. And the FBI describes the shooting as a flare up of street violence and not terrorism.[24]

Much of this description is straightforward and unexceptional. However, as we demonstrate below, such unassuming coverage partakes in the constitution of a national intimate public that excludes the victims of New Orleans. Specifically, we turn to three topoi that characterize this affective divestment.

It happened there, not here; or the affective politics of distance and cultural malaise

When, one day after the fact, Josh Elliot informed his national news audience that 19 people had sustained gunshot wounds in New Orleans, he paraphrased the FBI's insistence that the event was "a flare up of street violence and not terrorism."[25] There are useful distinctions between the politically and/or religiously motivated acts we call "terrorism" and the malicious deeds of two young men with alleged gang connections. But such a firm and repeated distinction between "street violence" and "terrorism" entrenches deep affective stratifications between the people of the Seventh Ward and the several million people who watch *Good Morning America* each day. Such an implied audience's affective investments in "terrorism" are longstanding and abiding. We feel strong affective commitments toward bodies falling from smoldering iconic skyscrapers or fleeing in panic after a bomb explodes. Such acts read as unpredictable and entirely unjustified.[26] We are less likely to

feel compelled to respond substantively to violent acts we have come to regard as routine and which occur in communities with which we lack familiarity or strong affinity. A neighborhood such as New Orleans's Seventh Ward is only familiar to the extent that it resembles so many other urban enclaves whose racialized residents appear dangerous and hopelessly impoverished.[27] News coverage reified the affective divestments associated with the shooting by coding it as an act of predictable "street violence," as opposed to an unpredictable act of "terrorism."

To the extent that the Mother's Day shooting was a tragedy of national proportions, it was only because the event appeared to confirm so much of what the American intimate public sphere assumed about urban areas in general and the poor communities of color in New Orleans in particular. Writing about the shooting for *The New York Times*, Robertson and Reckdahl explain, "The police have released no motive, but people here by and large figured that it was the same old story: a young man with gun and a complaint spotted a rival and attacked."[28] Whereas "national tragedies" are characterized as anathema to the spaces where they occurred, this coverage reifies the belief that such open disregard for human life is the norm in economically impoverished and predominantly black areas like the Seventh Ward. To be sure, this section of New Orleans, as well as other predominantly black neighborhoods in the Crescent City, experiences a disproportionate share of the city's violent crimes. However, the fidelity of this framing to crime statistics does not negate the role of broader affective investments associated with violence that enabled a national audience to divest from the shooting. Whereas news outlets speculate on the mental health or ideological commitments of other perpetrators of mass violence, such grand themes were absent in the wake of the New Orleans shooting.[29] Before police identified a suspect, conventional wisdom provided us with the motive. This was another violent day in the ghetto. The myriad questions we ask about "national tragedies" denote attempts to understand, and therefore experience intimacy with, the pain of people we never met. Few such attempts were made on Mother's Day. Rather, to the extent that this was a tragedy, it was one that impacted "people here," or, from the vantage point of the implied intimate public consuming this news coverage, the people over there. The Seventh Ward figured as a violent enclave far removed from the affective investments of the intimate public sphere.

Public representations of the New Orleans culprits were also suggestive of a politics of race, class, and masculinity that has long underwritten conventional logics of violence and criminality. While few reporters, political leaders, or citizens convey genuine sympathy for perpetrators of mass shootings or bombings, they rigorously interrogate their biographies. These men are deeply individualized, if also vilified.[30] Brothers Akein and Shawn Scott, however, possessed no extensive story. Of the two national news sources we examined for this essay, only *The New York Times* announced their arrest on May 16. The brief article recalls the grim events of Mother's Day, identifies the two brothers, notes that police arrested and charged four other individuals "for providing 'comfort and aid' to Akein Scott after investigators identified him as the likely gunman," and noted that Akein Scott was an alleged gang member. The journalist adds, "Akein Scott was already out on bail for gun and drug possession charges."[31] Tropes such as gang membership and "gun and drug possession" render Scott indistinguishable from other young black men in New Orleans or other cities with reputations for "street violence."

Because such tropes function as entrenched signifiers for an intrinsically criminal black masculinity, they imbued Scott and his deeds with a generic character that diminished their specificity and, therefore, potential for affective investment from a broader intimate public. White civil society has long produced and circulated myriad discourses that treat black masculinity as pathology: black men, especially those at the economic margins of neoliberalism, are framed as potential killers and sexual sadists who lack the wherewithal to participate in democratic culture or the mainstream economy. Figuring black masculine bodies in such ways renders black communities in general suspect and dangerous; the kinds of bodies and places one avoids.[32] Even before the public knew his name, Scott lingered anonymously in these kinds of discourses. While fear of black masculine bodies and their communities is itself a function of affective investments, it results in divestment from their interests and suffering.

For example, virtually all news coverage of the Mother's Day shooting featured security camera footage of the incident. Released by the New Orleans Police Department, the recording overlooks the parade crowd from the upper corner of a building at the intersection of Frenchmen and North Villere. The grainy, delayed video simply shows a group of indistinguishable, mostly black bodies. The young man authorities would eventually conclude was Scott stands in the lower left-hand corner of the shot. Forty-eight seconds into the 1 minute and 25 second video, the assailant approaches the crowd and opens fire. Chaos ensues as individuals flee for their lives. Many fall to the ground, either to avoid the bullets or because one had struck them. The assailant then flees toward the lower-right corner of the frame. At this point, the video freezes and zooms in on this solitary individual. The police presumably released this video in hopes that it, along with the promise of a $10,000 reward, would aid their search for the culprits. However, we struggle to understand how this closing image would be of any practical help. The low-quality recording only grows more pixilated as we zoom toward the male figure. He functions more as an anonymous silhouette of a black male: white T-shirt, blue jeans, and black skin. Facial characteristics are nowhere to be seen here. Instead, the final seconds of this troubling video leave us with an anonymous signifier of black youth. This could be any young black man from New Orleans. Indeed, even following their arrests, the Scott brothers could have been any young black men from New Orleans. Their history and their macabre deeds became enfolded into the violence of their home city, as well as other struggling urban sectors across the country. The capacity for viewers or readers to experience intimacy with such an incident is, therefore, limited, for the specificity afforded the horrors of "national tragedies" is absent. This is "street violence" perpetrated by generic black masculine bodies. The suffering caused by this shooting figures as both alien and ordinary, and not a cause for affective investment from a national news consuming intimate public.

Justifying vernacular intimacy

A second element of the affective divestment from the New Orleans Mother's Day shooting found expression in the judgment of vernacular cultural practices. The shooting occurred at what New Orleans residents call a second-line parade. Second lines are traditional Crescent City parades that feature a brass jazz band marching through a neighborhood. The band's members typically belong to a neighborhood social aid and

pleasure club. In addition to holding events like the Mother's Day parade, these organizations provide monetary and other forms of assistance to fellow residents.[33] Second-line spectators often follow the band on their path while dancing to the exuberant music. As the parade proceeds, the group grows larger.

Second lines hold varied meanings for participants. Turner explains,

> For some participants, a second line was "nothin' but a party goin' on" … for others, however, it was a profound expression of New Orleans' African diaspora past, an experience of communal meditation or even trance that re-created the historic performances in Congo Square, where black New Orleanians had reinterpreted the sacred music and dances of Vodou in weekly African festivals every Sunday until the Civil War.[34]

Whether one experiences the second line as an opportunity to imbibe and gyrate, or to encounter the sacred, they are unmistakably intimate affairs. Furthermore, they operate in a broader tradition of black vernacular practices that enact what Kelley calls "freedom dreams." Because black Americans have never been fully welcome in white civil society, they produce alternative modes of cultural activity that give expression to utopian yearnings and communal solidarity. They provide outlets for affect when one must suppress it elsewhere.[35]

When a second line became the site of a shooting that wounded 19 individuals in a city with an already high violent crime rate, questions resurfaced about the very efficacy of second line parades and similar street parties in black neighborhoods. In their lengthy *New York Times* article about second lines in the context of the Mother's Day shooting, Robertson and Reckdahl write,

> When shootings like this happened in the past—and they have, sometimes deadly but almost never as brazenly—they often prompted a debate about street culture and violence, about the rolling crowds that form on such occasions and how much they may be to blame for what goes on in their orbit.[36]

They note that, following the devastation and spiking violence after Hurricane Katrina, the city government dramatically increased fees for holding second line parades. The insinuation was that these outdoor festivities, consisting primarily of assembled black bodies, were the cause of violence. Robertson and Reckdahl write, "For many New Orleanians—black and white—the parades were, and still are, surrounded by an air of menace." They also note that these parade organizers are acutely aware of the violence associated with their cherished events, admonishing attendees to "Leave your guns and foolishness at home."[37] However, as the history that these journalists chronicle suggests, this is one tradition that must justify its very existence with every shot fired and body felled.

Tethering "street culture" to "violence" frames second lines in ways that invite affective divestment, for these linked terms place such events outside the parameters of a broader intimate public sphere. As Dennis suggested in the *Guardian* article cited above, the assembling of black bodies in spaces that read as impoverished and dangerous do not invite the same kinds of affective investment as similar celebratory events that resonate with the cultural and spatial commitments of the broader intimate public sphere. To the extent that audiences recognize the "street culture" of places like the Seventh Ward, they regard it as strange and dangerous. Accordingly, they orient their affect away from such events and toward more recognizable alternatives.[38] Such characterizations resonate strongly with the broader historical arc of white encounters with black cultural expression.

Attending second lines, as well as, for example, listening to rap music, represents an opportunity for white observers to engage in the revelry of a tradition that is not their own. When the band packs up, well-to-do, primarily white fans return to their intimate publics untarnished by the existential threats of poverty and gang violence. Those for whom the second line is the lifeblood of communal affective bonds, on the other hand, remain within the histories of violence and divestment that make social aid and pleasure clubs a necessity for collective survival. Berlant writes that intimacy is marked by minimal use of "signs and gestures."[39] Its practices are enthymematic among individuals with shared affective investments. The requirement that the Seventh Ward's black residents, once again, claim their warrants and account for their "street culture" reveals the degree of national affective divestment from their traumas.

Filtering violence through familiar affective lenses

Our discussion so far is not meant to suggest that national news sources did not convey sympathy for the victims of the Mother's Day shooting. Rather, one can experience sympathy while remaining affectively divested from the suffering of Others. During the 8:00 a.m. headlines segment, *Good Morning America's* Josh Elliot warned viewers that they were about to see "dramatic images" of the shooting and its aftermath.[40] *The New York Times* explained that the gunfire "shattered the festive mood surrounding the parade."[41] There was something fundamentally troubling about viewing or reading about a handgun assault against a crowd of celebrants on Mother's Day. Even if it did not rise to the level of intimacy, there was room for affective investment in the troubling images that circulated briefly in major national news outlets. This should not, however, be mistaken for an affective investment in the suffering of the victims themselves, for such framings did not beckon a "fast and furious response" from members of the intimate public sphere.[42] These images disappeared from the national public screen in less than a month (national coverage of the shooting virtually ceased by the end of May), whereas the victims and families traumatized by other "national tragedies" remain broadly visible in the context of gun control debates and victim compensation issues. While the localized suffering associated with "national tragedies" mobilizes affect toward matters of public policy and justice, the suffering that occurred on Mother's Day in the Seventh Ward vanished from the public screen before such discussions could occur in earnest.[43]

News sources filtered the Mother's Day shooting through frames of reference that were more accessible to the mainstream American intimate public sphere. For example, coverage of the shooting frequently noted that it occurred approximately one mile from the beloved French Quarter in New Orleans.[44] The historic Quarter is the Crescent City's tourist epicenter, consisting of historic buildings, famous restaurants, art galleries, and myriad opportunities for out-of-towners to consume copious amounts of alcohol and explore their prurient curiosities. A distinct familiarity marks the neighborhood, making audiences more likely to experience felt connections to its gorgeous architecture and festive atmosphere. The predominantly black and working class neighborhood where the shooting occurred was not recognizable in its own right. Many members of a national television audience were unlikely to recognize New Orleans outside of the Quarter, for tourists rarely venture outside the famous perimeter. Any spatial orientation

to the macabre events of Mother's Day relied on reference to a more familiar, and decidedly white, upper-middle class center of culture and commerce.

This was not the first or last time the Quarter served as a site of affective investment for national audiences witnessing trauma unfold in the Crescent City. In an attempt to publicly atone for his administration's disastrous response to Hurricane Katrina, President George W. Bush addressed the nation during a televised speech from historic Jackson Square in the French Quarter. Speaking behind a podium positioned in the shadow of the ornate St. Louis Cathedral, Bush spoke of the need to ensure that "this great city will rise again."[45] While the iconicity of the cathedral and the rest of the French Quarter was unmistakable, the areas most directly impacted by the storm and subsequent levee breaches were predominantly black poor and working-class neighborhoods like the Seventh and Lower Ninth Wards. Still, Bush delivered his call to national solidarity with New Orleans from a site that would resonate with the broader intimate public sphere's affective investments in the city. While a perspective strictly committed to the rhetorical efficacy of presidential public address might praise the selection of such a locale (to say nothing of the fact that many alternatives were still underwater), it nonetheless partakes in the affective distancing of less familiar and, both before and after the storm, neglected parts of the Crescent City. More recently, the French Quarter's most popular thoroughfare, Bourbon Street, was the site of a shooting that killed one person and injured nine others. The incident attracted national attention and remained a subject of intense local news coverage relative to far more frequent shootings in areas with less allure for tourists and high-end commerce.[46]

In addition to subordinating the Seventh Ward to more familiar New Orleans spaces, national media also displayed affective divestment from the Mother's Day shooting through its contextualization of the incident in broader national controversies. It would seem that an incident like the mass shooting of 19 bystanders at a Mother's Day parade would, like other public shootings, factor into public deliberation regarding the efficacy of enhanced gun control measures. While some journalists, including New Orleans resident and then-MSNBC host Melissa Harris-Perry, attempted to frame the shooting as further evidence of the need for more robust gun laws, it experienced far less attention than its predecessors, which victimized largely white and middle-class communities.[47] One finds an exception to this trend in Nocera's "Weekend Gun Report" on *The New York Times*'s website, but he crucially makes the affective case for the Mother's Day shooting and other incidents of gun violence through reference to trauma more firmly situated in the nation's intimate public sphere. Even as Nocera's list identifies violence impacting primarily members of deeply disadvantaged communities, he closes his blog entries with a tally of American gun deaths following the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut, in which Adam Lanza murdered 26 young children and adults. Furthermore, Nocera opens his May 13, 2013 entry by lamenting that "the Mother's Day weekend offered no reprieve from gun violence."[48] Invoking maternal ethos to add cultural heft to his journalistic crusade against gun violence, Nocera provides a link to an article penned by Rebecca Bond, the white founder of the antigun group Evolve. She writes,

> What drove me to start Evolve is knowing that we have to do better. That as mothers we must do better to make saving a life our priority. We know that human life is fragile because we

> know first-hand the miracle of creating one. We also know once that life is created, we must do everything within our power—within our society's power—to ensure that life does not go to waste.[49]

Bond, and, by proxy, Nocera, speaks in universal terms by invoking culturally entrenched and affectively charged discourses of motherhood. *We* must do better. *We* know that human life is fragile. All mothers, she claims, should feel a calling to intervene and prevent gun violence.

However, Bond is unlike many of the grieving mothers profiled in Nocera's weekly blog or those honored by New Orleans's social aid and pleasure clubs. She cofounded Evolve with her husband, Jon, and, by all accounts, lives a comfortable middle-class life. Her experience and public profile are starkly different from those of the mothers in areas most directly impacted by violent gun crime. Poor women, including poor women of color, are significantly more likely to raise children with meager financial resources, failing school systems, and the threats of drugs and gang violence.[50] To the extent that the victims of this tragedy or any incident of urban violence warrant affective investment, it is insofar that they might be juxtaposed with more recognizable victims. The New Orleans shooting was only intelligible alongside a litany of other near-anonymous acts of gun violence buttressed by more recognizable victims and maternal discourses.

"Another one bites the dust"

> "Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans / And miss it each night and day?"[51]

The beloved song "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?" expresses a longing for one's home, as well as the lover one left behind. It speaks of interpersonal affection expressed through shared investments in a specific, and symbolically rich urban space. The traditions of New Orleans jazz, its second lines, Mardi Gras parades, and many other vernacular practices speak to intense local affective investments in the city. However, the national journalistic response to the Mother's Day shooting we have documented suggests the foreclosure of intimacy with this beautiful and troubled city for those who do not experience its most joyous highs and heartbreaking lows. New Orleans is far from anonymous, but we have argued that public discourse surrounding the 2013 Mother's Day Shooting in the Seventh Ward reflects and enacts an affective divestment from suffering in New Orleans by the national intimate public sphere. Because the nation's affective investments in the Crescent City tend to be, at best, filtered through familiar sites and discourses of cultural novelty, those who experienced the pain and horrors that occurred at Frenchmen and North Villere lingered outside the limits of national intimacy. Not unlike the days New Orleans residents waited in vain for federal support following Hurricane Katrina, the people of the Seventh Ward faced their traumas alone.

By conceptualizing affective divestment as an affective orientation away from the suffering of Others, we have advanced a theoretical vocabulary for why mainstream audiences neglected the casualties of the Mother's Day shooting. More broadly, we have offered rhetorical and cultural studies scholars a conceptual resource for understanding the intersections of affect, intimacy, and suffering under neoliberalism. Because it delegitimizes shared affective investments that might threaten its economic and social orthodoxies,

neoliberalism relies on affective divestment to limit modes of intimacy that might cultivate common cause across experiential boundaries.

The trouble with writing about the "real world" is that it does not stay still for the sake of academic inquiry. While we drafted this essay, we took stock in two acts of Crescent City violence that occurred hours apart. As we note above, a shooting occurred in the French Quarter on July 29, 2014. One person died, and nine were injured. We awoke that Sunday to emails and text messages from family and friends inquiring about our welfare. While our Seventh Ward house was relatively close to the Quarter, we first learned of the shooting by way of social media. As moved as we were by the goodwill of our family and friends, this project lingered freshly in our minds. *Of course a shooting in the French Quarter would elicit this kind of affective energy.*

Later that afternoon, our intersection was a spectacle of squad cars, police tape, and news crews. Several residents, mostly black, stood behind the tape to observe and learn what they could. Some were in tears. We joined our neighbors and learned that a 55-year-old black man with terminal cancer was dead by a bullet to the head. As privileged white residents in a predominantly black, but gentrifying, neighborhood, we stood uneasily among the crowd. We did our best to engage, learn, and offer whatever support we could. We watched the deceased man's children collapse on the concrete as the police confirmed what they already knew. We spoke to one man who said the scene reminded him of the time his son was shot to death in a gang dispute. We spent a few minutes talking to the mother of one of the victim's children. She was calm and collected, possibly due to a complex relationship with the father of her daughter, possibly from the familiarity of these kinds of scenes in the Seventh Ward. Her daughter was anything but collected. We were, in other words, witnessing an intimate public reckoning with the all-too-familiar sight of gun violence and police presence. The intensity of their responses varied, but the shared affective investment in that day's tragedy, as well as its consequences for their (our?) neighborhood, was unmistakable.

We also spoke to a politically connected neighbor who dismissively said, "Another one bites the dust." One white man, towing his large boat down the narrow and crowded street, hollered out the window to us, "Having fun?!" We opted for a firm "No" over "Go fuck yourself!" Like us, these were individuals of privilege who, even if they lived in the Seventh Ward, did not share the kind of affective investments displayed by the deceased man's family and neighbors. They were not part of this intimate public and, from what we could gather, had no desire to be. The posture of "Another one bites the dust" resonates strongly with the claims about New Orleans black life we document above. Tragic as this event may have been, it was other people's tragedy. It was another occasion of affective divestment. Indeed, local media could not muster more than a day's worth of brief coverage.[52]

We have dedicated the majority of this essay to engaging the ways that national publics divest from intimacy with poor communities of color through the circulation of affective investments that constitute intimate publics that often support neoliberal logics. We hope this closing meditation clarifies that the negotiation of affective investments occurs even within the borders of the Crescent City itself. There are those who fall to the concrete weeping as they learn of another handgun death in a neighborhood wrestling with the myriad violent forces of gun violence, police surveillance, gentrification, and poverty. On the other hand, there are those who quietly shake their heads at the tragedies of

others or find room for laughter in the midst of squad cars and police tape in a predominantly black neighborhood. Thus, challenging the exclusionary intimacies of the nation's intimate public sphere means also exploring avenues for expanding the Crescent City's own; for addressing our investments not only with bodies and communities located across the country or the world but also with those that live right next door.

Notes

1. "Police: 19 Hurt, Including Two Children, in NOLA Mother's Day Shooting," *CBS News*, 12 May 2013, http://cbsn.ws/29oVr0Z (accessed August 10, 2017).
2. Colleen Curry, "Three Dead, Including Child, in Boston Explosions," *ABC News*, 15 April 2013, http://abcn.ws/29vCgPB (accessed August 10, 2017); Deborah Kotz, "Injury Toll from Marathon Bombings Rises," *The Boston Globe*, 23 April 2013, http://bit.ly/29ntgKo (accessed August 10, 2017). Also see James Barron, "Children Were All Shot Multiple Times With a Semiautomatic, Officials Say," *The New York Times*, 15 December 2012, http://nyti.ms/29nsvBj (accessed August 10, 2017); Dan Frosch and Kirk Johnson, "Gunman Kills 12 in Colorado, Reviving Gun Debate," *The New York Times*, 20 July 2012, http://nyti.ms/29RO7qE (accessed August 10, 2017).
3. "Police: 19 Hurt, Including Two Children, in NOLA Mother's Day Shooting."
4. See Debbie Elliott, "New Orleans Struggles with Murder Rate, and Trust," *NPR*, 5 July 2012, http://n.pr/29zlDWm (accessed August 10, 2017).
5. David Dennis, "Why Isn't New Orleans Mother's Day Parade Shooting a 'National Tragedy'?" *The Guardian*, 15 May 2013, http://bit.ly/29nsSLX (accessed August 10, 2017), para. 12. Also see Chris Hayes, "*All in with Chris Hayes* for May 13, 2013," *MSNBC*, 13 May 2013, Lexis/Nexis Academic (accessed August 10, 2017); Hamilton Nolan, "Terrorism and the Public Imagination," *Gawker*, 13 May 2013, http://bit.ly/29knNrP (accessed August 10, 2017); Melissa Harris-Perry, Raul Reyes, Ari Melber, Joe Watkins, and Trymaine Lee, "*Melissa Harris-Perry* for May 18, 2013," *MSNBC*, 18 May 2013, Lexis/Nexis Academic (accessed August 10, 2017).
6. For this project, we performed Lexis/Nexis Academic searches of one major national newspaper (*The New York Times*) and one major national news network (ABC). We limited our search to one month following the Mother's Day shooting and used the sole keyword "New Orleans." We selected two prominent national news sources in order to ascertain national, as opposed to local, coverage of the shooting. Our one-month timeframe was largely the consequence of the fact that mentions of the Mother's Day shooting vanished after this period.
7. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 7.
8. Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997). Also see Gerard A. Hauser, *Prisoners of Conscience: Moral Vernaculars of Political Agency* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012).
9. See Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).
10. See, for example, Shane Borrowman and Marcia Kmetz, "Divided We Stand: Beyond Burkean Identification," *Rhetoric Review* 30 (2011): 275–92; Jaclyn Howell, "Not Just Crazy: An Explanation for the Resonance of the Birther Narrative," *Communication Monographs* 79 (2012): 428–47; Robert L. Ivie, "Fighting Terror by Rite of Redemption and Reconciliation," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10 (2007): 221–48.
11. Nicole Magee, "Saving Sex Slaves: The A21 Campaign and the Mobilization of Christian Affect," (master's thesis, University of Southern Mississippi, 2014), 9–12.
12. Christian Lundberg, "Enjoying God's Death: *The Passion of the Christ* and the Practices of an Evangelical Public," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95 (2009): 387–411.
13. Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 31. Also see Erin J. Rand, *Reclaiming Queer: Activist and Academic Rhetorics of Resistance* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014);

Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Seigworth and Gregg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–25.

14. Lauren Berlant, "Intimacy: A Special Issue," *Critical Inquiry* 24 (1998): 281–88. Also see Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 7–8. On neoliberalism in general, see Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); Stuart Hall, "The Neo-Liberal Revolution," *Cultural Studies* 25 (2011): 705–28; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005).
15. Berlant, "Intimacy," 288.
16. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 32.
17. Ibid., 30. Emphasis added.
18. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 99–100.
19. While this essay relies on journalistic texts to mobilize our analysis, we do not attribute affective divestment to the intentions of media workers. Rather, we understand news coverage following the Mother's Day shooting as symptomatic of a broader cultural politics of intimacy and violence, as well as the political economy thereof. On the role of news media in the politics of race and class, see Deepa Kumar, "Media, Class, and Power: Debunking the Myth of a Classless Society," in *Class and News*, ed. Don Heider (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 6–21; Jimmie L. Reeves and Richard Campbell, *Cracked Coverage: Television News, the Anti-Cocaine Crusade, and the Reagan Legacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).
20. Richard Campanella, "Gentrification and its Discontents: Notes from New Orleans," *New Geography*, 1 March 2013, http://bit.ly/29oZVVe (accessed August 10, 2017); Roberta Brandes Gratz, "Why Was New Orleans's Charity Hospital Allowed to Die?," *The Nation*, 27 April 2011, http://bit.ly/29vIz5w (accessed August 10, 2017); Lyndsey Layton, "In New Orleans, Major School District Closes Traditional Public Schools for Good," *The Washington Post*, 28 May 2014, http://wapo.st/1tTBvCI (accessed August 10, 2017); Brittany Libson, "River Garden: New Orleans' Model for Mixed Income Housing?," *Social Policy* 37 (2007): 98–105; Adriane Quinlan, "Hurricane Katrina Leaves a Quiet Hush over New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward," *The Times-Picayune*, 28 August 2013, http://bit.ly/29p0dvi (accessed August 10, 2017); John Simerman, "NOPD Chief Ronal Serpas Faces Cynical Crowd on Racial Profiling Questions," *The Times-Picayune*, 27 March 2013, http://bit.ly/29BaYrx (accessed August 10, 2017).
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22. On the range of structural challenges facing New Orleans's most vulnerable citizens, and some of the efforts to address them, see Jordan Flaherty, *Floodlines: Community and Resistance from Katrina to the Jena Six* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010). On conceptualizing structural determinants as violent, see Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008).
23. Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*
24. Josh Elliott, "News Headlines," *Good Morning America*, 13 May 2013, Lexis/Nexis Academic (accessed August 10, 2017).
25. Ibid.
26. Butler, *Precarious Life*.
27. On such characterizations of racialized urban spaces, see Reeves and Campbell, *Cracked Coverage*.
28. Campbell Robertson and Katy Reckdahl, "Celebrating, in Spite of the Risk," *The New York Times*, 14 May 2013, http://nyti.ms/29nuu8O (accessed August 10, 2017), para. 4.
29. See Mark Greenblatt and Carol McKinley, "James Holmes' Psychiatrist Contacted University Police Weeks before Movie-Theater Shooting: ABC Exclusive," *ABC News*, 6 August 2012, http://abcn.ws/29llfGg (accessed August 10, 2017); Liza Long, "'I Am Adam Lanza's Mother': A Mom's Perspective on the Mental Illness Conversation in America," *The Huffington Post*, 16 December 2012, http://huff.to/29tnV7j (accessed August 10, 2017); Jordan

Smith, "How to Unpack the Tsarnaevs' Real Motives," *Salon*, 16 May 2013, http://bit.ly/29B8bi1 (accessed August 10, 2017).

30. For example, *Rolling Stone* was widely criticized for featuring Dzhokhar Tsarnaev on their cover following the marathon bombing. See Erik Wemple, "*Rolling Stone* Stands by Controversial Cover," *The Washington Post*, 17 July 2013, http://wapo.st/29nu2Hk (accessed August 10, 2017).
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33. Robertson and Reckdahl, "Celebrating, in Spite of the Risk."
34. Richard Brent Turner, *Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 3.
35. Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).
36. Robertson and Reckdahl, "Celebrating, in Spite of the Risk."
37. Ibid. On the policing of black vernacular expression, also see Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005).
38. Dennis, "Why Isn't New Orleans Mother's Day Parade Shooting a 'National Tragedy'?"
39. Berlant, "Intimacy," 281.
40. Josh Elliott, "Headline News," *Good Morning America*, 13 May 2013, Lexis/Nexis Academic (accessed August 10, 2017).
41. "19 Wounded in New Orleans Shooting," *The New York Times*, 13 May 2013, http://nyti.ms/29llYYg (accessed August 10, 2017)
42. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 32.
43. See Emily Bazelon, "'You Allow Your Heart to be Broken Everyday,'" *Slate*, 12 June 2014, http://slate.me/29oYMgy (accessed August 10, 2017); Lenny Bernstein, "Boston Marathon Bombing Victims to Get $20 Million More," *The Washington Post*, 27 June 2014, http://wapo.st/29RQFVA (accessed August 10, 2017).
44. See "19 Wounded;" Josh Elliott, "News Headlines," *Good Morning America*, 13 May 2013, Lexis/Nexis Academic (accessed August 10, 2017); George Stephanopoulos and Robin Roberts, "Good Morning America," *Good Morning America*, 13 May 2013, Lexis/Nexis Academic (accessed August 10, 2017).
45. "Bush: 'We Will Do What It Takes,'" *CNN*, 15 September 2005, http://cnn.it/29RR76m (accessed August 10, 2017). On the federal response to Katrina, see Flaherty, *Floodlines*; Jed Horne, *Breach of Faith: Katrina and the Near Death of a Great American City* (New York: Random House, 2008).
46. See Ken Daley, "Bourbon Street Shooting Suspect Fights Extradition from Mississippi," *The Times-Picayune*, 7 July 2014, http://bit.ly/29toXAk (accessed August 10, 2017); Ken Daley, "Bourbon Street Shootings Become Homicide Case as 21-Year-Old Nursing Student Dies," *The Times-Picayune*, 2 July 2014, http://bit.ly/29nv32j (accessed August 10, 2017); Robert McClendon, "After Bourbon Street Shooting, Tourism Industry Puts on a Brave Face," *The Times-Picayune*, 29 June 2014, http://bit.ly/29B9X2y (accessed August 10, 2017); Richard Rainey, "Bourbon Street Shootings Prompt Jindal to Send 50 State Troopers to New Orleans through Labor Day," *The Times-Picayune*, 3 July 2014, http://bit.ly/29kBToU (accessed August 10, 2017); Amy Robach, David Muir, and Ryan Smith, "Headline News," *Good Morning America*, 30 June 2014, Lexis/Nexis Academic (accessed August 10, 2017), para. 7–10.
47. Chris Hayes, *All in with Chris Hayes*.

48. Joe Nocera, "Weekend Gun Report: May 10–12, 2013," *The New York Times Blogs*, 13 May 2013, http://nyti.ms/29BaeTg (accessed August 10, 2017).
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50. See Michael K. Brown, Martin Carnoy, Elliott Currie, Troy Duster, David B. Oppenheimer, Marjorie M. Shultz, and David Wellman, *White-Washing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
51. Louis Armstrong and Billie Holliday, "Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans?," *Definitive Vocal Duets*, mp3, Ideal Music, 2012.
52. For a typical story, see Clint Durrett, "NOPD Investigates 'Unclassified Death' in Seventh Ward," *WDSU.com*, 29 June 2014, http://bit.ly/29xmo0D (accessed August 10, 2017).

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