

REVISIONS

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ReVisions: Best Student Essays is a publication designed to celebrate the finest nonfiction work composed by students at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke. This issue was designed and produced by the students in PRE 3450: Publication Design:

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The cover photograph was taken by Jay Locklear, a Mass Communication major who will graduate in May 2023 with a B.S. in Broadcasting. It depicts the entrance to the Curt and Catherine Locklear American Indian Heritage Center on the second floor of Old Main. The newly designed space, which had its grand opening in November 2022, was named after Curt and Catherine Locklear, a Pembroke couple well-respected in the business community with strong ties to the University dating back to the 1930s. It provides the center with additional resources and a permanent state-of-the-art location featuring offices, a meeting room/study space for students, and a conference room.

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APHRA BEHN'S *OROONOKO*: A STORY OF EUROCENTRISM, CLASSISM, AND CONTRADICTIONS

By Peace Ajirotutu



O*roonoko: or, The Royal Slave* by Aphra Behn (1640-1689) is a novel published in 1688; *Oroonoko* is a work of many firsts. It is considered the first British novel written; it is one of the first texts to sympathize with black individuals; and its author was the first British female writer to make a living off of her writing. Janet Todd, English professor, professional editor, and writer for *The British Library*, describes the eighteenth-century remake of *Oroonoko* into a romantic play, which downplayed the grotesque elements that its earliest readers disliked (Todd 1). However, Todd says, “In the twentieth century, it became Behn’s most famous work, seen as a powerful, original story of slavery, a ‘True

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History’ with shifting points of views and startling episodes from both real life and heroic romance” (1). This paper discusses Todd’s assertion about twentieth-century writers’ views of *Oroonoko* and states why, in contrast to Todd’s opinion, Behn’s work is certainly not an original, compelling story of slavery. Instead, *Oroonoko* leaves the reader with a Eurocentric and royalist view of slavery, taking away its significance as a potential anti-slavery text.

Literature Review

Oroonoko is a work of literature that has split the literary community into different camps about the true nature of the story. According to twentieth-century writer Moira Ferguson, Behn “generated a paradigm for British colonialist discourse” (339). *Oroonoko*, indeed, created a diverging wave of ideas from literary scholars and can be praised for starting a conversation around the plight of black individuals in the colonies. Many scholars writing in the early twentieth century leaned on the side of praising Behn for her revolutionary work, as Janet Todd has said previously. In an essay titled “Aphra Behn’s ‘Oroonoko,’” author Edwin Johnson believes Behn to have been genuinely writing a biographical story for *Oroonoko* and credits her for having “the courage... to write a novel whose characters were real and whose setting was not in an imaginative country, but a real one” (335). Johnson is convinced that Behn was writing a true historical work: This is why he praises her, but it is believed today that Behn’s work was not based on historical fact.

Similarly, Moira Ferguson credits Behn for starting the literary discussion around anti-slavery but also faults her for ironically reinforcing the institution of slavery and colonialism (365). Ferguson is not entirely critical of Behn, as she describes her faults as more accidental or inherent of the time rather than intentional, ultimately, giving Behn a pass for her shortcomings. In “Oral and Literate Discourse in Aphra Behn’s ‘Oroonoko,’” David Paxman discusses the conflicting ideas scholars have about *Oroonoko*’s “representations of gender,

race, and epistemology” (88). Paxman tackles another critical aspect of the Behn-Oroonoko discourse: whether Oroonoko was a real person or not. He concludes that it does not matter if Oroonoko was real or not because British society needed such a character to give “invention...fancy” and other exotic elements a place in the seventeenth-century British literary world (94). In this way, he argues, historical fact is not important because Behn’s work adds enough to the literary world that the reality of Oroonoko does not need to be contended.

As the twentieth century rounded out and the twenty-first century began, scholars became more critical of Behn’s work. Twenty-first century scholars have had less praise for Behn and more condemnation of the paradoxical elements within *Oroonoko*. In 2002, Joseph Ortiz, author of “Arms and the Woman: Narrative, Imperialism, and Virgilian ‘Memoria’ in Aphra Behn’s ‘Oroonoko’” praised Behn’s *Oroonoko* as an epic with the intent to memorialize a character such as Oroonoko; however, he is less forgiving of the novella’s colonialist sense. Ortiz says an “imperialist narrative, even when it is employed... apologetically by a female narrator (as in *Oroonoko*)... [it] uphold[s] rather than undermine[s] the empire’s predominance” (119). Behn’s narrative can in no way be a text that fully denounces the institution of slavery and holds up an imperialistic perspective at the same time. In “Behn’s *Oroonoko*, the Gold Coast, and Slavery in the Early-Modern Atlantic World,” Adam Beach fixates on the description of West-African culture with a lack of focus on the fact that Behn “celebrates Oroonoko as a slave-owner, downplays his role as a slave trader, and mitigates the harsh realities of slavery in West Africa” (217). Downplaying certain aspects of Oroonoko’s life proves that Behn wrote more fantasy than realism when describing West Africa. She inevitably injects Oroonoko’s life with European elements to make him and Imoinda more appealing to her European readers.

In “Spectacle, Spectatorship, and Sympathy in Aphra Behn’s ‘Oroonoko,’” Ramesh Mallipeddi focuses on the aspect of the “black body” of Oroonoko, a metaphorical manifestation of Oroonoko’s physical body and the bodies of slaves during Behn’s time. Mallipeddi believes that “Behn’s novella grasps—as does no other literary work of her time—the transformation of the black body into a commodity at the point of its insertion into the circuits of commercial exchange” (476). However, because Mallipeddi sees Behn as the first author to present the black body as something that can be bought, sold, and desired—Behn’s decision to fetishize Oroonoko’s black body as a beautiful character for his European-like features is juxtaposed with the descriptions of other black bodies during the Atlantic slave trade (484); therefore, the “black body” concept can only be placed on Oroonoko and cannot be a generalizable concept for other slaves at the time. The discussion of black individuals in literature in the seventeenth century was a powerful thing because it brought awareness to their plights at a time when they were treated the worst; however, Behn does not have a proper representation of black individuals in an African setting or in a colonialist setting within *Oroonoko* to be praised for her part in the discussion.

There is a deep controversy about what Behn did right and what she did wrong with her novel; however, underneath all the claims previously mentioned, the central discourse within the literary community has been whether Behn’s *Oroonoko* is an anti-slavery/abolitionist text or not. Banani Biswas’ article “Oroonoko: A ‘Royal Slave’ and/or a Master of Dignity” seeks to understand why the character of Oroonoko forces the text into such a slavery-focused crux. Biswas concludes that Oroonoko, the character, should not “be cat-

This essay examines a contested question in the scholarship surrounding Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*, one of the earliest novels written in English. Published relatively early in the history of the Atlantic slave trade, it can be read as an indictment of English slave-trading practices or as complicit with the ideology underpinning those practices. Peace introduces this debate very clearly, using representative quotes from the authors to illustrate various positions providing her own argument for why one view is somewhat more persuasive than the other. Her thesis is not a simple agree/disagree statement but examines a range of responses. It is an excellent example of the correct use of MLA style documentation as well.
—Melissa Schaub

egorized into any absolute category....Oroonoko informs the postmodernist/plural concept of 'being,' embracing a variety of identities from the 'royal slave' to the 'master of dignity'" (Biswas 208). If Oroonoko is a character representing a variety of conflicting identities, the novella itself carries the same essence. *Oroonoko*, the tale, must be commended for its attempts at sympathy and compassion for the plight of slavery; yet, it has many shortcomings in its portrayal of slavery itself. *Oroonoko: or, The Royal Slave* by Aphra Behn is a novella with anti-slavery sentiments that become buried under Eurocentric, imperialistic, and classist elements, creating a novel with an excess of contradicting themes. Moreover, the end of Behn's novel leaves readers unclear about whether to sympathize with Oroonoko because he is a tragic slave with a grotesque death or a royal slave with a dishonorable death.

West Africa from a Eurocentric View

The story of *Oroonoko* begins with Aphra Behn's narrator, a younger adjunct version of herself, who will be addressed as Behn throughout this paper, attempting to humbly reassure readers that her story is a text of true history. It states:

I do not pretend, in giving you the history of this Royal Slave, to entertain my reader with adventures of a feigned hero, whose life and fortunes fancy may manage at the poet's pleasure; nor in relating the truth, design to adorn it with any accidents but such as arrived in earnest to him: and it shall come simply into the world, recommended by its own proper merits and natural intrigues; there being enough of reality to support it, and to render it diverting, without the addition of invention. (Behn 186)

Here Behn attempts to validate her story by having the narrator speak in the first person to make this a historical account and not historical fiction. Nevertheless, many scholars agree that although the narrator interjects herself throughout the story to portray her reality, many things she describes throughout the novel prove to be more farce than fact. After Behn establishes the method of storytelling, she dives right into the story describing the colony of Surinam. Behn focuses on the fact that the Europeans cannot enslave the Native Americans they encounter in the colony because "their numbers [are] so far passing ours on that continent," which is why they use African slaves to work the plantations (Behn 188). Behn describes Coramantien as "one of those places in which they found the most advantageous trading for these slaves," and this West African country is where the readers meet Oroonoko and Imoinda (Behn 188).

Behn introduces Oroonoko to readers as the grandson of the King of Coramantien. She describes him as courageous and honorable. Even though he spent a large portion of his life at war, Behn praises him for learning humility and grace. Behn attributes the best qualities of Oroonoko to a Frenchman who was his tutor. She praises Oroonoko highly for his lack of barbarity and that "in all points [he] addressed himself as if his education had been in some European court" (190). She asserts that all but his skin color was that of European standard saying, "His face was not of that brown rusty black which most of that nation are, but of perfect ebony, or polished jet... His nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat" (190). Behn sets up Oroonoko as a character deserving praise for being an African man who appeals to the European eye in appearance and class. This European and royalist appeal separates Oroonoko from other black individuals he lives in Coramantien with. This theme of class difference carries on into Surinam, where Oroonoko separates himself from the other slaves.

Similarly, readers find that Oroonoko's lover Imoinda is described as desirable from a European point of view. She describes Imoinda as "a beauty... of delicate virtues" and says, "I have seen a hundred white men sighing after her, and making a thousand vows at her feet, all in vain, and unsuccessful. And she was indeed too great for any but a prince of her own nation to adore" (190-191). The fact that white men fawn after her implies that Behn sees Imoinda as a rare type of black beauty and different from other black girls of her time. It places Imoinda in a similar space as Oroonoko; she is not like those within the rest of the kingdom, nor is she like the slaves they encounter later in the novel.

Behn reinforces the idea that if a black person is to the standards of Europeans, that makes him or her beauti-

ful. Furthermore, she asserts that Imoinda and Oroonoko were meant for each other because their class statuses were similar. If Oroonoko were not a prince, he would not have been worthy of Imoinda. European and royal, it is what makes these black characters palatable enough for Behn to write about and sympathize with. Later in the plot, Oroonoko and Imoinda fall in love and plan to marry; however, Oroonoko's grandfather, the King, likes Imoinda and steals her away from Oroonoko. In an attempt to get back together, Oroonoko angers the King, who sells Imoinda to Surinam. Shortly after this ordeal, Oroonoko is tricked by a white colonialist and sold to Surinam as a slave (192-205).

Surinam: Where the 'Royal Slaves' are Born

The storyline in Surinam is the bulk of the story and is also the section of the story where scholars grab the most evidence of Behn's anti-slavery sentiment. It is important to note that Behn's writing of Oroonoko and Imoinda in Surinam is highly unrealistic. The story that unfolds does not condemn the institution of slavery as a whole but condemns colonialist slavery for forcing Oroonoko to kill Imoinda and ruin his royal body. Besides being given new European names because the two characters' native ones are seen as "barbarous and hard to pronounce," the treatment of the two in Surinam is not how colonists would have treated slaves on a plantation in the seventeenth century (208). When Oroonoko arrives at the plantation, he is named Caesar. He is said to be "received more like a governor than a slave... he endured no more of the slave but the name" (209). The colonialists treat him better than other slaves because of his social status, and Behn does not assert that this was odd but instead praises the differential treatment.

Imoinda, who is renamed Clemene, is described by one of the colonists, Mr. Trefrey, as "adorned with the most graceful modesty that ever beautified youth..." (210). Because the European men in Surinam adore her, she does not do hard labor; instead, Trefrey insinuates that her work is to reject the various lovers who come each day to try and persuade her to sleep with them (210). Oroonoko and Imoinda, while separated, both benefit from having a European standard of beauty in Surinam and having the colonists consider them of a higher-class. However, other slaves of this time were not subjected to such luxurious treatment. The contradiction of Oroonoko and Imoinda as royal slaves comes to its climax in two significant passages that many scholars consider the text's main anti-slavery sections. These passages are discussed in the next section.

Oroonoko: The Royal Slave and His Slaves

Oroonoko and Imoinda eventually meet again in Surinam, and Imoinda becomes pregnant. Even with the decent conditions as slaves with higher status, Oroonoko and Imoinda do not become complacent. Imoinda's pregnancy forces them to try and hasten their freedom, and when it seems unlikely the two will gain freedom, Oroonoko starts a slave rebellion. Many scholars note the speech Oroonoko gives during the slave rebellion as the first primary anti-slavery section Behn writes within *Oroonoko*. Yet, both sides of the anti/pro-slavery literary crux are able to use this speech to argue their points. The fact that this one passage garners such different reactions shows the complexity of Behn's writing. However, if one profoundly analyzes the text, one will find the classist ideas of narrator Behn seeping into Oroonoko's language. He says,

"And why ... my dear friends and fellow-sufferers, should we be slaves to an unknown people? Have they vanquished us nobly in fight? Have they won us in honorable battle? And are we by the chance of war become their slaves? ... we are bought and sold like apes or monkeys... Do you not hear every day how they upbraid each other with infamy of life, below the wildest savages? And shall we render obedience to such a degenerate race, who have no one human virtue left, to distinguish them from the vilest creatures? Will you, I say, suffer the lash from such hands?" They all replied with one accord, "No, no, no; Caesar has spoke like a great captain, like a great king" (221).

Oroonoko's speech is powerful because it empowers his fellow slaves to rebel against the colonialists; however, there are two critical issues with the language Oroonoko, and his fellow slaves use within this section. Adam Beach

points out the first issue: The speech “draws distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable forms of enslavement,” creating a contrasting section in which Oroonoko seemingly dismantles the European colonialist form of slavery while upholding the West-African form of conquest slavery (215). When Oroonoko says, “Will you, I say, suffer the lash from such hands?” he suggests the idea that it is only unworthy for the slaves to receive the lash from “a degenerate race,” white Europeans, but not from their own race (221). This text cannot be seen as anti-slavery while upholding one form of slavery, even if the West-African form is different from European race-based colonial slavery. Second, while this speech empowers the slaves, it reinforces the classist idea that Oroonoko is their king instead of a fellow slave. By allowing the slaves to respond to Oroonoko’s speech by saying, “Caesar has spoke like a great captain, like a great king” it creates the idea that Oroonoko would approve of them being proper slaves of his own through war and class oppression rather than slaves of the Europeans through racial oppression (221). Oroonoko allows himself to have a higher status than the other slaves, which is similar to the way that the colonists differentiated themselves from Africans. In what was supposed to be a compelling anti-slavery text, the underlying idea of the difference in slave status shone in the language of Oroonoko and the other slaves, and Behn may have unconsciously placed Oroonoko in the same category as colonialist slavers. This passage is a prime example of Aphra Behn’s potential anti-slavery points imploding.

The Dismemberment of a Slave or a King?

Besides the failed slave rebellion, Oroonoko’s death is another section within *Oroonoko* that has caused dissent among scholars as to whether or not it promotes the dismantling of the institution of slavery. Many scholars like to paint Aphra Behn’s sympathy for Oroonoko at the end as an anti-slavery sentiment because Behn is the first white author to write of a white narrator feeling sympathy for the plight of a black individual. However, Mallipeddi argues that while other works have focused on *Oroonoko* as an anti-slavery text, many have missed the crucial connection between the female narrator and the primary point of sympathy in the novel: the dismemberment of Oroonoko’s body (483-484). At the end of the novel, Oroonoko fails to act out his revenge after killing Imoinda and their child. Colonialist slavers capture him and grotesquely kill him. Behn, the narrator, says that the action of dismembering Oroonoko is “inhumane,” which is seen as a general sympathy for slaves who encounter such a death (231); however, in the same breath, she calls Oroonoko a “mangled king,” a statement that cannot be applied to other slaves of the time (221). Behn’s fetishization of Oroonoko at the beginning of the text is an idea that crashes against his dismemberment by the end. Author Aphra Behn could have stripped Oroonoko of his royal status by having him dismembered to categorize Oroonoko’s death as a generalizable situation for slaves at the time. Instead, she does it to condemn colonialists for the treatment of Oroonoko, the royal slave, and not Oroonoko, the common slave. Due to the “mangled king” language, it is impossible to separate her sympathy for Oroonoko as a slave from her sympathy for Oroonoko as royalty (231). The dismemberment of Oroonoko is the final and most crucial juxtaposition in Behn’s plot, which is why Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* is a text with anti-slavery intentions, but pro-slavery and royalist plots.

Behn Deserves Praise and Condemnation

The arguments of whether or not *Oroonoko* can genuinely be considered an anti-slavery text hold weight in the literary world. It is entirely possible when looking at specific aspects of the novel that Aphra Behn’s text can be interpreted as one or the other. However, each section that pertains to anti-slavery has language or actions within the novel that inevitably dismantle the idea. The readers’ perspectives of slaves within the novel are depicted from the royal Eurocentric Oroonoko and Imoinda. Nevertheless, the slaves of Surinam in the seventeenth century would not have been like Oroonoko and Imoinda. The difference between the fictional slaves of Behn’s story and the real slaves of Surinam in the seventeenth century is too significant to project what happened to Oroonoko and Imoinda

as generalizable for slaves of their time. If the slaves in the story are not generalizable, they cannot be catalysts for the text to represent a sentiment such as anti-slavery. To be a fully anti-slavery text, Behn's *Oroonoko* needs at least one more main character to depict a non-royalist slave perspective. The text needs a character of lower status with features that do not appeal to the European standard. Having a generalizable character would elevate the story from a royalist sympathizer novel to an acceptable tale about the horrors of slavery in the seventeenth century.

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THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE CHOCTAW INDIANS

By Jacob A. Álvarez



Jacob A. Álvarez grew up in South Carolina and received his bachelor's degree in political science from UNCP in May 2022. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in international affairs from American University. He is a citizen of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

It should come as no surprise that, after centuries of sustained and intense contact with Europeans and their descendants, the Native peoples of the Americas encountered and absorbed many aspects of Euro-American life, including the exchange of religious ideas. In fact, evangelization was practiced by all settler societies in the Americas to convert the Natives from their pre-Contact beliefs to forms of Christianity.¹ Among the Native groups of the future United States, the Choctaws were uniquely situated where the frontiers of English, French, and Spanish control blended into one another from the seventeenth century until the end of the colonial period.² This opened them up to cultural and religious influences from the Catholic Spanish and French and the Protestant English and their American successors. After analyzing religious and historical trends among the Choctaw Indians, I assert that the Euro-American effort to Christianize the Native American Choctaw people was a gradual process that ended in the Christianization of its members and society. Importantly, though Choctaws are residents of many states, foreign nations, and tribes, this paper focuses on those Choctaws who are affiliated with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, which is by far the largest of the Choctaw tribes.

Pre-Colonial Choctaw Beliefs

To understand how the Choctaws became Christianized, it is first important to understand their pre-Christian religious beliefs as a point of comparison. Pre-Columbian North America was home to an unknown number of religious traditions practiced by various tribes and civilizations, of which the Choctaw belief system was one of many. There are two prevailing origin myths for the Choctaw people. The first origin myth is that the predecessors of the Choctaws used to live in a western land in ancient times but were forced to migrate because of the threat of violence from neighbors.³ After wandering for many years, they were given a sign to settle in a particular location, which became the Choctaw homelands.⁴ The second origin story is that the Choctaws emerged from the ground at a large mound called *Nanib Waiya* (“leaning mound”) and that they settled the surrounding area.⁵

As part of their religion the Choctaws believed in regular communication between the physical and spiritual worlds with balance and harmony being the two most important values.⁶ Choctaws believed in a Superior Being known as *Hvshwhli*, among other names, who created order and was closely associated with the Sun.⁷ Human beings had two “souls” known as *shilup* and *shilombish*.⁸ The *shilup* was like the Western concept of the soul, and it went to a land of spirits after death.⁹ The *shilombish* was like a ghost, and it remained among

the living to haunt and frighten others.¹⁰ Many other supernatural beings inhabited the Choctaw spiritual world, including *Ohooyo Osh Chishba* (“Unknown Woman”) who introduced the Choctaws to corn.¹¹ Corn continued to hold spiritual significance as highlighted by its centrality in the Green Corn Ceremony, the most important Choctaw religious occasion of the year.¹² There were also many other lesser beings, including forest dwarves, who kept knowledge of healing; ordinary Choctaws who learned to use magic for healing or harm; and evil beings with demonic characteristics.¹³

Initial Interactions with Christianity

French fur trappers from New France had maintained interactions with the Choctaw since the mid-seventeenth century.¹⁴ Some Frenchmen who had been particularly successful in the Choctaw region “had become virtual members of the Choctaw nation,” marrying Choctaw women and introducing market capitalism into Choctaw society.¹⁵ As the decades passed, mixed Choctaw-French and mixed Choctaw-British/American people began to accumulate power in the tribe, using that power to support efforts by Protestant missionaries to convert other Choctaws to their white fathers’ religion.¹⁶ This culminated in a mixed-race aristocracy that became locked in a power struggle with the full-blood traditionalists, introducing religion into the political crisis and souring Christianity for many potential Choctaw converts.¹⁷ Also, the Choctaw tribe was one of the “Five Civilized Tribes” recognized by the American government as having been acculturated to a high degree compared to other Indian groups, even by early American standards. Of all of the Indian tribes of the future United States, it is likely that the Choctaw had the longest and most sustained process of assimilation in culture and religion.¹⁸

Initial efforts to convert the Choctaws to Christianity were contentious. Missionaries from the United States, because they were officially supported by the federal government,¹⁹ inevitably served a political purpose as well as a religious one.²⁰ Because of their meddling in Choctaw religious and political life, missionaries were met with “a wave of anti-missionary and anti-Christian activities” in the 1820s, which were partial revenge against the missionaries’ complicity in the recently-signed Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, which authorized Choctaw Removal.²¹ Before Removal, reports by the missionaries themselves asserted that between 360-2000 underwent a Christian religious conversion, primarily to Methodism,²² though because these are self-reported numbers by missionaries interested in inflating the number of converted Choctaws, they should be taken lightly. Regardless, “the vast majority of Choctaw people, however, did not belong to Christian churches.”²³

The original missionaries, however, did sow the seeds for future success with their other activities. Possibly the most famous missionary ever sent to the Choctaws was a Calvinist New Englander named Cyrus Byington. He was concerned with learning the Choctaw language, and soon after being sent to Choctaw lands by the American Band of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, was able to preach and write in Choctaw.²⁴ Choctaw was given its first writing system and dictionary by Byington, and his dictionary reveals Christian values creeping into Choctaw definitions. For example, the term *haksi* means “to be out of control” in a way akin to cosmological chaos, but the Byington dictionary translates it as being in a state of sin or ignorance.²⁵ Christian ideas of patriarchy also entered the Choctaw language. Though Choctaw society was traditionally matriarchal and showed reverence toward

This essay traces the development of Christian missionary efforts to evangelize the Choctaw Native Americans. Jacob's thesis states that this was a gradual process and ended in what can be considered successful evangelization by the missionaries. He also offers convincing evidence that the Christianity that was offered was not accepted as a complete faith but augmented and redacted towards a distinct Choctaw culture. The argument is clear, concise, and well supported with impeccable academic sources.

—Susan Ulrich

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women,²⁶ the definition of “male elder” recorded by Byington, *hatak asahnonchi*, is more respectful than the female one, *ohoyo kasheba*.²⁷ These subtle changes to the language primed Choctaw speakers to be more receptive toward Christian messages in the future and to internalize Christian values.

Religious Life in Indian Territory

The missionaries followed the Choctaws to Indian Territory after their forced removal from Mississippi.²⁸ A common feature of Indian Territory was the existence and government support of boarding schools, which Native children would be sent to for education.²⁹ Throughout Indian Territory, in schools run by the federal government and religious organizations, Indian children were forcibly Christianized as captive audiences.³⁰ A combination of cultural and familial isolation, strict time regimentation, constant exposure to religious anxiety, the emotional nature of Protestant conversions, and the impressionability of the young students were conducive to successful conversion.³¹ This was likely the first upper hand that Christianizing forces gained over Indian institutions and provided a stream of Christian Choctaws entering Choctaw society after their (re-)education. Even when the Choctaw Nation gained control over some schools, the mixed-race elite ensured that they imparted to students the same religious ideals and Anglo-Saxon customs as the white-run schools.³² This is evidence of the self—perpetuation of Christianity among the Choctaws, which is an important factor in a Christian society such as the type that the Choctaws were becoming.

For those who were too old to be sent to boarding schools, the missionaries tried to stamp out practices with apparent non-Christian purposes. For example, the missionaries put pressure on the Choctaw Nation to end official support for and religious dimensions of *tolih* (stickball games), which were spiritually significant for Choctaws.³³ Elements of *tolih* with spiritual significance included ritual purification, magic use, and prayer through dance.³⁴ Other gatherings of social and spiritual importance, such as those for war dances and eagle dances, were similarly targeted for co-optation and termination.³⁵

The Late 1800s to the Termination Crisis

Because the missionaries had been the ones to first write the Choctaw language, they had wide latitude as to how the language was formally used. Notably, the Choctaw language was used, and still is used among Choctaws regardless of language ability, to sing Christian hymns.³⁶ The co-optation of the Choctaw language was a vehicle of conversion.³⁷ As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, Choctaw culture was preserved by women within Protestant churches.³⁸ However, though a cultural identity was preserved, the Choctaw religion died in favor of Christianity. To save Choctaw culture through the churches, Choctaw women submitted to Christianity and melded Choctaw culture with the American religion. Choctaw women derived their cultural authority to accomplish this because of the matriarchal nature of pre-colonial Choctaw society, elements of which had survived to this point.³⁹

That is not to say that Choctaw Christianity was a carbon copy of Euro-American Christianity. A sustained period of syncretism existed among Choctaws from the late 1800s into the mid-1900s, especially among Choctaws with a high degree of Indian blood. For example, alongside Christian beliefs, herb doctors and witches were believed to exist and to interact with Choctaw society well into the 1900s.⁴⁰ Other Choctaw practices with pre-Christian religious dimensions were modified for a Christian context, such as the *yaiya* (funerary cry), which was incorporated into Christian burial practices.⁴¹ For a time, Christianity existed with many Choctaw characteristics, though the Christian aspects were more pronounced, especially under the continued watch of Christian Americans and the mixed-race elite. By the 1930s, all explicitly non-Christian religious activity ceased in the Choctaw Nation due to pressure from the elite.⁴²

The Termination Crisis of 1970 exemplified the extent of Choctaw cultural and religious assimilation by the

late 1900s. From 1948 to 1975, the Choctaw Nation was ruled by a man named Chief Belvin, who was hyper-assimilationist to the point of advocating for the dissolution of the Choctaw Nation (otherwise known as “Termination”).⁴³ Part of the reason that Chief Belvin was able to advocate for this position was that he counted on the apathy towards tribal traditions that many Choctaws exhibited.⁴⁴ Many Choctaws were assimilated to the point that they did not care to be differentiated from whites by a tribal affiliation, a degree of psychological assimilation that extended to religion. It is telling that, in the first democratic election for Chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma in 1971, Belvin won, despite the Termination controversy.⁴⁵ (Chiefs before this were appointed by the federal government.⁴⁶) Even into the early 2000s, those Choctaws who were known to have opposed Chief Belvin’s attempts to achieve complete acculturation of the Choctaws into Euro-American society, language, and religion felt compelled to conduct interviews under pseudonyms for fear of backlash from other Choctaws.⁴⁷ This was symptomatic of a tribal society in which to be anti-assimilationist was to be anti-Choctaw. By the late 1900s, the two had become intertwined.

After the Termination Crisis

After the Termination Crisis, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma operated a tribal-run newspaper called *Biskinik* that was sent to all tribal members free of charge.⁴⁸ This made it a state-owned media publication with a policy to not print content that “it [found] inaccurate, profane, offensive or morally unacceptable.”⁴⁹ Notwithstanding the censorious implications of this policy, it provided a tacit official endorsement of all printed media. Also, in every issue of the *Biskinik* was a printed miniature sermon from the Chaplain to the employees of the Tribe.⁵⁰ The fact that the Tribe felt compelled to include a government-salaried pastor’s Christian editorial in their government-run newspaper was evidence of a tribal government and newspaper readership that was Christianized.

The Tribal Council of the Choctaw Nation unanimously passed a resolution in 2018 with a number of references to the Choctaw Nation’s Christian character. Though a government in the United States declaring an official religion seemed out of character with the country’s secular nature, tribes could legally establish religions.⁵¹ This was because the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 (ICRA) did not explicitly include an equivalent to the Establishment Clause found in the United States Constitution.⁵² Though this clause was omitted to allow historically theocratic tribes to govern themselves in congruence with their traditions,⁵³ the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma considered Christianity traditional and integral enough to Choctaw character that it could be the tribe’s official religion under the ICRA. This resolution is of such extreme importance to a discussion of Choctaw religion that some clauses warrant repetition:

...whereas, we are a Christian Nation; and whereas, the Tribe’s core values of Faith, Family, and Culture, come from the Choctaw people’s strong faith in Chihowa (God). Therefore be it resolved by the Council that this Resolution be cited as approval for to hereby honors (Chihowa) God in protecting the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and commits to making all reasonable efforts to honor (Chihowa) God in the development and improvement of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Therefore be it resolved by the Council that the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is recognized as a Nation of the Christian faith.⁵⁴

This was the work of a nation that is thoroughly Christianized. That this resolution passed by all twelve members of the Tribal Council and was signed into law by current Chief Batton was evidence that any religion other than Christianity held no sway over the Choctaws. Christianization was complete.

Conclusion

It has been roughly 200 years since the first Choctaws were removed to Indian Territory under the watchful eye of the Euro-Americans. Presently, there is a consensus among Choctaw academics that the long process of Christianization is complete. Choctaw children on tribal lands grow up “strongly imbued with the values and precepts

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of fundamentalist Christianity,”⁵⁵ involved in “a thoroughly Christian nation in Oklahoma”⁵⁶ that “is recognized by Choctaws and non-Choctaws as a Christian nation.”⁵⁷

However, though the pre-Christian Choctaw religion is beyond the reach of virtually every Choctaw Nation member, the loss of that religion was part of a Faustian bargain made by Choctaws with Euro-American society. By internalizing Protestantism and working within Protestant institutions, Choctaw women were able to perpetuate a distinct Choctaw culture, albeit one with Protestant characteristics.⁵⁸ The changes that Choctaws made religiously, socially, linguistically, and politically “enabled the larger group structure to survive.”⁵⁹ Various aspects of Oklahoma Choctaw life offer support for the assertion that there still exists “a cultural identity that Christianity has not obliterated.”⁶⁰ The caveat here is that that cultural identity exists alongside Christianity, not in opposition to it. Christianity is now a Choctaw institution.

Despite the success of cultural preservation among Oklahoma Choctaws, that is not the scope of this paper. The aspect of culture known as religion did not survive colonization. As evidenced by the previous pages, the Christianization of the Choctaws was a gradual and contentious process with political and social dimensions. Over the generations, more and more Choctaws have accepted their place in Christendom to create the contemporary Christian nation of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Choctaw religious life in the 1600s and 1700s has virtually nothing in common with Choctaw religious life in the 2000s. Though the Christianization of the Choctaws took over two centuries and a lot of effort on the Euro-Americans’ part, it is now complete.

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² Donna L Akers, *Living in the Land of Death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 4-6.

³ Akers, *Land of Death*, 1.

⁴ Akers, *Land of Death*, 1-2.

⁵ Akers, *Land of Death*, 46.

⁶ Akers, *Land of Death*, 41.

⁷ Akers, *Land of Death*, 54; “Iti Fabŭssa: Spiritual beliefs and rituals, a collection of early written references,” *Bishinik* (Durant, OK), December 2009.

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⁹ “Iti Fabŭssa,” *Bishinik*.

¹⁰ “Iti Fabŭssa,” *Bishinik*.

¹¹ “Iti Fabŭssa,” *Bishinik*; Michelene E. Pesantubbee, “Beyond Domesticity: Choctaw Women Negotiating the Tension between Choctaw Culture and Protestantism,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67, no. 2 (June 1999): 391.

¹² “Iti Fabŭssa,” *Bishinik*.

¹³ “Iti Fabŭssa,” *Bishinik*.

¹⁴ George E. Lankford, “Trouble at Dancing Rabbit Creek: Missionaries and Choctaw Removal,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 62, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 56.

¹⁵ Lankford, “Dancing Rabbit Creek,” 56.

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¹⁸ Steven M. Karr, “Now We Have Forgotten the Old Indian Law: Choctaw Culture and the Evolution of Corporal Punishment,” *American Indian Law Review* 23, no. 2 (1998/1999): 412.

¹⁹ Clara Sue Kidwell, “The Language of Christian Conversion among the Choctaws,” *The Journal of Presbyterian History* (1997-) 77, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 144.

²⁰ Lankford, “Dancing Rabbit Creek,” 62.

²¹ Lankford, “Dancing Rabbit Creek,” 63.

²² Kidwell, “The Language of Christian Conversion,” 149.

²³ Akers, *Land of Death*, 98.

²⁴ Lankford, “Dancing Rabbit Creek,” 55.

²⁵ Kidwell, “The Language of Christian Conversion,” 146.

²⁶ Akers, *Land of Death*, 98.

²⁷ Pesantubbee, “Beyond Domesticity,” 392.

- ²⁸ Kidwell, "The Language of Christian Conversion," 150.
- ²⁹ Kidwell, "The Language of Christian Conversion," 150.
- ³⁰ Donald A. Grinde Jr., "Taking the Indian out of the Indian: U.S. Policies of Ethnocide Through Education," *Wicazo Ša Review* 19, no. 2 (Autumn, 2004): 27.
- ³¹ Kidwell, "The Language of Christian Conversion," 150.
- ³² Joel Spring, *The Cultural Transformation of a Native American Family and Its Tribe 1763-1995: A Basket of Apples* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates), 154.
- ³³ Pesantubbee, "Beyond Domesticity," 398.
- ³⁴ Pesantubbee, "Beyond Domesticity," 398.
- ³⁵ Pesantubbee, "Beyond Domesticity," 399.
- ³⁶ Pesantubbee, "Beyond Domesticity," 402.
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- ⁴² Valerie Lambert, "Political Protest, Conflict, and Tribal Nationalism: The Oklahoma Choctaws and the Termination Crisis of 1959-197," *American Indian Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (Spring, 2007): 284.
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- ⁴⁴ Lambert, "Political Protest," 290.
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- ⁴⁷ Lambert, "Political Protest," 286.
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FROM HURICAN TO WHIRLWIND WOMAN: INDIGENOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF SEVERE WEATHER IN THE AMERICAS AND CARIBBEAN

By Jacqueline P. Harlow

Indigenous peoples of the Americas and Caribbean developed spiritual and logical understandings of their natural environment, including severe weather such as tornadoes and hurricanes. As members of agrarian societies, Native Americans and Taíno had particular interest in closely observing natural phenomenon and explaining relationships between earth, sky, wind, water, animals, and humans. The geography in which each tribe lived greatly affected their agricultural practices and spiritual beliefs, which were intrinsically related. This paper explores that relationship as well as the ways in which Indigenous peoples viewed the most powerful weather events, which occurred in different landscapes, from the great plains of the United States to the tropical islands of the Caribbean, and the ways they culturally internalized those views. This connection is important in furthering our understanding of pre-colonial Native beliefs and the potential for rediscovering natural wisdom. Agrarian Indigenous peoples of the Americas and Caribbean observed and interpreted severe weather phenomena in ways which were significant to their cultural practices, and from which we can gain a more well-rounded perspective of hurricanes, tornadoes, and other examples of nature's power.

Whirlwind Woman

Indigenous peoples of the Americas knew the power of tornadoes well and respected it deeply as both a source of destruction and creation. Tornadoes, linked to rain, women, and agriculture, appear in creation mythology of nearly all tribes inhabiting the Central, Southern, and Eastern regions of North America. Pybus (2009) notes, "Tornado beliefs were especially well-attested among the horticultural tribes of the Southwest and the Eastern United States. These often-elaborate myths reveal that the tornado was once conceptualized as a significant female deity, intimately linked to rain and agriculture, sexuality, medicine, and magic," (Pybus, 2009, p. 2).

Stories were often told of great arguments between cyclone, an anthropomorphic serpent being, and wind, thunder, and/or lightning. Cyclone was also depicted as a flying headless person, mythical Red Horse, the Panther of the West, or Whirlwind Woman, who was at the core of Arapaho myth as the First Woman who created earth. Several plains tribes held



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Figure 1: Whirlwind Symbol
Source: Garrick Mallery, "Picture Writing of the American Indians," Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, 1888-1889, Washington, DC: GPO, 1893, 604-05. Retrieved from www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/54653.

traditional myths of Whirlwind Woman as a tornado goddess with strong feminine characteristics of sexuality, mystical rites, agricultural rituals, and medicine, who had the power to bring the sacred tobacco pipe to human male leaders as well as disease and destruction if she was made angry (Pybus, 2009). It is interesting to note that many Indigenous societies prior to colonial contact were matrilineal and matrilocal, with women in charge of farming practices. The life-giving, healing, and destructive powers of femininity were associated with the mighty power of tornadic winds in Native mythology, indicating the respect and status women held in these more egalitarian cultures.

According to the original, ancient Iroquoian tradition, Whirlwind was a Crooked Face masked being, and the Seneca linked the twisted face being to their deity known as “Great One.” This spirit was part of a quatrain of wind gods, each with characteristics of the cardinal directions from which they originated. Whirlwind was associated with the West, the one who could climb mountains and tear down forests, according to the Indigenous peoples in the North and Southeastern United States regions. They were well aware of which direction the most destructive weather patterns came, which we now confirm as the predominant eastward moving weather pattern across the United States. To Native peoples, the spring weather phenomenon of tornadoes appearing from the western skylines signified the power of nature to provide rain, essential for agricultural societies such as theirs.

As Pybus (2009) suggests, “A common context for these tornado tales is that of rain and agriculture. The wind phenomenon known as a dust-devil is viewed consistently as a different type of entity – a ghost, a messenger, or a witch. Native American myths thus reflect comprehension of the meteorological distinction between tornadoes and dust-devils” (p.110). The separation of dust-devils and tornadoes is particularly noteworthy as these phenomena are often mistakenly thought to be the same, even in modern times. Native peoples viewed dust-devils as harmless trickster archetypes, which were vastly different from the deified spirits which were often associated with tornadoes and other more powerful weather phenomena such as wind, lightning, and rain.

Cocoon of the Great Butterfly

Northern tribes, such as the Cheyenne, and Arapaho, associated flying insects, specifically butterflies and dragonflies, with strong tornadic winds — a somewhat surprising connection. Natives in this region noticed that the cocoons of butterflies hatched with the approach of strong storms, such as tornadoes. They interpreted this phenomenon as a meaningful sign that delicate winged creatures were imbued with great power. They believed that dragonflies even created tiny whirlwinds when they flapped their wings. The Dakotas wore a cocoon-like twig on their heads (See Figure 2) and tribal warriors in the region proudly decorated their bodies and war bonnets to harness their speed and agility, as representations of

Jackie did good work researching imagery relating to the mythology of wind deities in North America and Caribbean. Her paper is a good example of how scholars should strive to bridge the gap that often exists between the humanities and the natural sciences. She used vivid and evocative imagery to breathe life into this essay on meteorology.
—Dennis Edgell

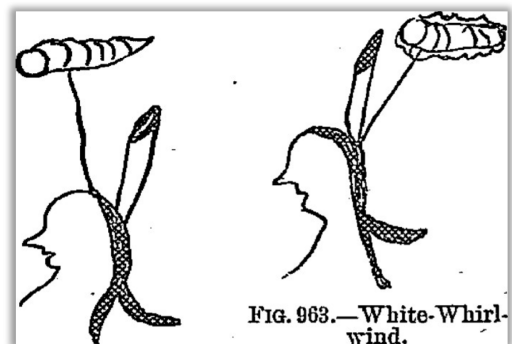


Figure 2: Cocoon Stick Signifiers, Oglala individuals from Red Cloud's Census

Source: Garrick Mallery, “Picture Writing of the American Indians,” Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1888-1889, Washington, DC: GPO, 1893, 604. Retrieved from www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/54653.

whirlwinds (Pybus, 2009). Proving their keen ability to connect natural phenomena, cocoons actually do hatch when the barometric pressure drops before a large weather event, such as a tornado.

Huracan and the Trio of Gaubanacex

As indigenous people of the Caribbean, the Taino were particularly focused on hurricanes, which had the power to decimate their vulnerable island societies. Originally found in the Mayan *Popol Vuh* text as a one-legged member of creation mythology, Huracan (Juracán) is the Arawak Taino word for major cyclonic weather events (Yucatan Times, 2019; Zimmer, 2020), which they described as a trio of powerful forces, led by the rage of the great female wind goddess Gaubanacex. They say that she called upon her assistant Gautauba, God of Thunder to announce her arrival. Gaubanacex then rotated her arms in a spiral to pick up the ocean and gave it to Coatrisque, Goddess of the Flood, to wash over the villages of the Taino people as rain (Lasche, 2016; Velez, 2008). It seems that the indigenous peoples recognized the counterclockwise swirling of hurricane winds, and the eye of the storm, which they represented as an angry woman's face. This ancient name and symbol are both remarkably similar to what we use to denote hurricanes today, and the artwork we see of Huracan is an exact depiction of the swirling depressions we see via satellite images (Figure 3) from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and via other sophisticated technologies in modern times.



Figure 3: Hurricane Humberto Satellite Image
 nesdis.noaa.gov/news/noaa-sees-the-fifth-hurricane-humberto-through-high-powered-lens

Conclusion

While much of the detailed descriptions of Indigenous mythology pertaining to hurricanes and tornadoes have been lost to broken oral histories and many of the powerful female weather goddess representations have been converted to masculine archetypes as colonial patriarchies infiltrated Native societies, it is clear that the Aboriginal peoples in the Americas and Caribbean were astute observers of their environment and revered the power of nature. They depicted tornadoes and hurricanes as both strong, life-giving and destructive, natural forces that bring forth rains and medicine, but also cause disaster and disease. They knew that cocoons hatched as pressure dropped, cyclone winds swirled counterclockwise, and great winds were always related to lightning, thunder, and rain. Perhaps most importantly, Indigenous peoples knew that in order for crops to grow, the rains must come to give life to the land and its people, and there was no greater provider of rains in the region than powerful storms, such as tornadoes and hurricanes. As Pybus (2009) suggests, “Appreciating that link and its cultural significance is key to gaining a clear understanding of how peoples in both the New World and the Old experienced their environments” (p. 24). There is still much to be explored and rediscovered in this area of Native cultural studies, and perhaps much more to be learned from ancient wisdom.

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HOW YOUTH TRAVEL BASEBALL TEAMS ARE CHANGING AMERICA'S FAVORITE GAME

By James Taylor, III

Baseball has often been coined as “America’s pastime”; however, with the privatization of youth baseball programs, are all American children given the same opportunities to play the game so many love? The privatization of youth baseball has been taking shape for nearly 40 years as private companies, groups, and individuals have invested money in recreational sports ventures for young athletes, evolving into the capitalization and exploitation of parents’ desires to provide the best opportunities for their children. Privatization of youth baseball programs has escalated costs for children to play, and a recent shift to an overly competitive environment has turned many children away from learning the sport at all. As a result, many children are being forced out of the sport due to economic disadvantages; families are looking to more affordable activities for their children because the cost to play is no longer just that of a bat and glove.

The current trend in youth baseball to be more competitive, along with attempts to replicate professional-style play, has created barriers for American children who cannot afford to participate and has introduced greater possibility for injuries among those with the financial means to play. With this shift in game dynamics, the possibility exists that children from lower income families are being excluded and left behind, while those playing at this highly competitive level could experience burnout and could be at higher risks of injury from more intense gameplay, leaving the future of America’s beloved game victim to socioeconomic disparities and those over eager to professionalize youth sports.

Privatization of Youth Baseball and the Rise of Travel Baseball

Although the executive order to privatize youth sports was signed over 40 years ago (Exec. Order No. 12345, 1982), the last two decades have been the most pivotal for entrepreneurs and investors within the youth sporting industry, creating the opportunity to capitalize on the growing youth sports market, and catapulting it to over \$19 billion annually (McGuire, 2022). With over 4 million children participating in the sport, baseball ranks as the third most popular organized team sport (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2019, p. 6) and a major contributor to the astonishing and steadily increasing sports economy. Youth travel baseball is a modern-day movement in the sports world, beginning with the sole purpose of generating revenue from tournament fees, overnight lodging, and entertainment costs from families traveling for tournament play with their young athletes (Gregory et al., 2017, p. 50).

A travel baseball team (also called club, elite, or showcase) generally refers to a team



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composed of children more committed to the sport, more advanced, or more elite than most. The team is designed to showcase an individual's talents and place young athletes in a situation where they can grow from the more intense competition and unique, personalized coaching they receive. However, as Gregory et al. (2017) point out, many of these teams are elite in name only and shamelessly take money from parents of children whose future in baseball is limited (p. 44). Travel team expenses for an individual player can easily cost the thousands of dollars a year (McGuire, 2022). According to a survey of high school baseball parents in which over 70% of the children participated in club baseball, the average amount spent was \$3,000 a year (Post et al., 2019, p. 5). That amount can be easily surpassed when one factors in the costs of year-round play and private lessons all in the hopes of a coveted, yet rare, college scholarship. As Gregory et al. (2017) suggest,

There may be no single factor driving the professionalization of youth sports more than the dream of free college. With the cost of higher education skyrocketing—and athletic-department budgets swelling—NCAA schools now hand out \$3 billion in scholarships a year (Gregory et al., 2017, p. 46).

However a Division I college will award only 11.7 baseball scholarships (Post et al., 2019, p. 2), and approximately 1 in 47 of the almost half a million boys playing highschool baseball will advance to Division I baseball (Gregory et al., 2017, p. 46), making the possibility of a return on the investment for parents highly unlikely.

Even with an awareness of the short supply of college scholarships, parents continue to embrace the travel baseball programs for their children by encouraging early single sports participation and year round play for their young baseball player, hopeful their child will be one of the few to receive a scholarship while evading the commonality of sports-related injuries (Post et al., 2019, p. 10). Research indicates children who specialize in a sport early on are not only more likely to experience a physical injury but are also at a higher risk of mental exhaustion leading to “burnout, anxiety, depression and attrition” (Gregory et al., 2017, p 51).

However, many parents believe the travel ball experience is entertaining and fun for everyone involved (McGuire, 2022). They are often the driving force behind pursuing more intense sports training for their children in an effort to keep up (Gregory et al., 2017), whereas others succumb to the trend out of fear of being left behind (McGuire, 2022). According to *State of Play* (2019), The Aspen Institute's annual report on youth sports compiled by experts and leaders in the industry, some parents fear that leaving pay-for-play sports will negatively impact their child's chances of playing higher level sports; therefore, they continue to participate in and increase the already booming sports industry, leaving behind those who can't afford to play (p.2).

Economic Disparities Create Unequal Access

Children of lower income families, those with an annual household income of less than \$25,000, are at a disadvantage in this new, costly youth baseball scene (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2019). As expectations shift towards more professional style game play, complete with state-of-the-art training facilities, top of the line equipment, and destination tournaments, the recreational baseball leagues dwindle away. Local leagues striving to maintain the historical just-for-fun atmosphere at the ballpark are being edged out by the hyper-competi-

James's essay on the cultural consequences of elite competition in youth baseball is informed by well-chosen secondary and primary research, news sources, and his own observations and experience. Written during a six-week summer session, the essay demonstrates a strong voice—well informed and insightful—and a style of expression and presentation that is well controlled, highly coherent, and sophisticated.
—Cynthia Miecznikowski

tiveness of elite youth baseball programs and eliminating an option for affordable play for all. The cost to participate in youth baseball has increased so dramatically that participation rates among children from lower income families has decreased despite increasing participation in the sport as a whole (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2019, p. 4).

While children from lower income families already face social and economic challenges, they are now forced to sit on the sidelines while their wealthier peers continue to indulge in the benefits of sports like baseball and the possibilities that come with specialized training and team play. Money provides the opportunities to hone talent and skills, create social connections with peers and coaches, and reap the multitude of physical and mental health benefits that come with regular physical activity.

State of Play (2019) reported a significant gap between children who participated in sports from low income families and those of higher income families (p.14). The most impacted communities are urban areas where expensive sports like organized youth baseball are no longer seen as affordable (Pennington, 2015). Outpricing the children in these urban areas is one of the reasons why the MLB says only 4% of college baseball players identify as African American, a number which eventually will transcend to the highest level of baseball (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2019, p. 15). Rob Manfred, the commissioner of the MLB said, “Economics is why black kids don’t play baseball,” adding, “To claim that they simply no longer like the sport is just another way of avoiding the truth. The good news is that the decline in participation in baseball by underserved kids is reversible” (Pennington, 2015).

Taking Action for the Future of All Baseball

Seeing the potential for a future of a diversity-lacking sport, many Major League Baseball clubs are seeking to reverse the trend by creating and offering low-cost baseball programs in low income areas (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2019, p. 14). The Washington Nationals Youth Baseball Academy is one example of an MLB team funded facility created to promote accessibility to affordable baseball programs for America’s youth despite economic status with the intent to encourage diversity among players and the fanbase as well as to provide a safe environment where children can learn valuable lessons from baseball that can be applied to real-life situations (Pennington, 2015). According to Pennington (2015), “The academy, one of several recently established or taking root in major league cities, is an important step for baseball as it confronts its most serious decline in youth participation in decades, particularly among AfricanAmericans” (para. 6). The MLB has seen an increase in enrollment in its RBI program, which gives children in underserved communities opportunities to participate in baseball and softball (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2019, p. 15).

To solve the disparities in access to youth sports, experts believe it is critical to provide public officials with the necessary data to understand how valuable sports are and how they relate to future health and sports economic trends so they can properly fund programs on local levels (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2019). Many local volunteer leagues have been aware of the impact of travel teams on their recreation leagues, watching once thriving programs wither away, and have taken steps in their own municipalities to conduct training clinics for players and coaches with hopes of developing young players who might not want to play in the ultra-competitive environment or might face cost barriers preventing them from doing so (McGuire, 2022). The plea to “provide community-based, low-cost leagues and programs that are accessible to all kids — not just youth with the resources and ambition to participate on travel teams” is one which can no longer be ignored (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2019, p. 14).

The increased costs and levels of competitiveness continue to prevent children from lower income families from participating in a sport that potentially can help develop life skills, encourage team building, and most importantly, provide a source of physical activity for young people. The trend in higher expenses to play youth baseball only increases the divide between socioeconomic classes and is turning baseball into a sport for only the select who can afford it. The higher levels of competitiveness and the upward swing in early sports specialization are resulting in sports-related injuries at early ages and mental and physical burnout from young athletes. Although programs

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are being implemented nationwide to create accessible youth baseball for all children and to establish responsible injury prevention guidelines, continued monitoring and action should be taken by those directly involved in these programs as well as by those who have a love for the sport of baseball.

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ASSESSING DISASTER RISK THROUGH THE PRESSURE AND RELEASE MODEL: THE CASE OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA

By Madeline Yeung

Disaster risk at the county level can be assessed with a variety of models and indexes, including the Social Vulnerability Index provided by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ASTDR), as well as the National Risk Index provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). These disaster risk assessment tools consider social vulnerability, which can be defined as the characteristics of an individual or group that provide them with the ability to resist, cope with, and recover from the impacts of a natural disaster (Wisner et al., 2003). This paper will utilize the Pressure and Release (PAR) model to assess indicators of vulnerability within Miami-Dade County, Florida to determine the disaster risk present within the county.



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Case: Miami-Dade County, Florida

Located in the southeastern most portion of Florida, Miami-Dade County is no stranger to natural hazards, with hurricanes and flooding being risks with which the state is most intimate. According to Florida State University's Climate Center, all of Florida's coastal counties have been impacted by hurricanes at least once since 1850 (Florida State University). Among all the counties in Florida, Miami-Dade County has the highest risk rating according to the National Risk Index (FEMA, 2022). Miami-Dade County has a rating of 63.93, much higher than Florida's average of 19.65, and even higher than the national average of 10.60. The only county in the United States with a higher risk rating is Los Angeles County, California.

Looking at hurricane risk, Miami-Dade County has a score of 58.93, placing it fourth in risk rating among Florida's southern coastal counties. Counties that have a higher risk rating include Palm Beach County, Lee County, and St. Lucie County (FEMA, 2022). Despite having a lower risk rating than these coastal counties, Miami-Dade County has seen its fair share of hurricanes in the past decades. In a 2011 report, the costliest hurricane to date was a Category 4 hurricane that struck Miami in 1926, causing \$164,839 million in damages by 2010 standards (Blake, et al, 2011; Weather Forecast Office Miami, Florida). Although Hurricane Katrina is best known for the devastation it caused in New Orleans, it initially made landfall on the Florida coast, around Miami-Dade County (National Weather Service, 2005). Hurricane Wilma in 2005 made landfall as a Category 3 storm, sweeping over Miami-Dade County, Palm Beach County, Broward County, and Hendry County, causing swaths of destruction in all four counties (National Weather Service, 2005). While

numerous tropical storms and hurricanes have impacted Florida since Hurricane Wilma, the last major hurricane that Miami-Dade County experienced was Hurricane Irma in 2017. Downtown Miami saw severe flooding damage, a combination of rainfall from Hurricane Irma and trapped waters from the city's seawalls and its drainage systems (Cangialosi, et al. 2021). Since Hurricane Irma, Miami-Dade County has not experienced another hurricane of this severity, although it remains prepared during each hurricane season. The county publishes a hurricane guide each year, along with tips on actions to take before, during, and after a hurricane (Miami-Dade County, 2022). These previous intense occurrences of hurricanes in Miami-Dade County demonstrate that this is an important hazard for the county.

Theoretical Framework: Pressure and Release (PAR) Model

The Pressure and Release (PAR) Model is a method of measuring vulnerability in a way that allows emergency managers to analyze and directly address the root causes, dynamic pressures, and unsafe conditions that create vulnerability within a community (Wisner et al., 2003). These root causes, dynamic pressures, and unsafe conditions represent the pressure portion of the model. Root causes that contribute to vulnerability most often come from demographic, economic, or political processes that cause widespread effects in the community. These processes are not limited to local effects and can also include global pressures that impact political or economic effects into the community. These processes then generate dynamic pressures. Dynamic pressures are systems or activities seen within the community that can turn root causes into unsafe conditions. Such pressures could include rapid growth and urbanization of a community, lack of green space and environments that can help mitigate weather effects, or lack of local institutions that provide necessary community services and support. Since dynamic pressures can result in unsafe conditions, these conditions are more visible and explicit when compared to root causes and dynamic pressures. These conditions can include living in hazard-prone territory, having a low-socioeconomic status, or having a lack of disaster preparedness knowledge. When combined with the effects of natural disasters, deadly consequences can occur for those living in unsafe conditions.

The release portion of the model comes when emergency managers address the factors that are contributing to the pressure and vulnerability in a community. If these pressures are not released, when a natural hazard impacts the community, there is an increased risk of the consequences of the natural hazard negatively impacting the community. Risk is calculated by multiplying the vulnerability with the effects of the natural hazard. This is an appropriate model to conduct the vulnerability assessment for Miami-Dade County as it will directly indicate to local emergency managers what conditions must be addressed to decrease vulnerability within their county.

Vulnerability Assessment using the PAR Model

Root Causes

The first root cause indicator is the percentage of citizens in Miami-Dade County who live in poverty. Disaster scholarship has found that living in poverty or having a low socioeconomic status increases an individual's vulnerability to the consequences of natural hazards (SAMHSA, 2017). Prior to Hurricane Katrina, impoverished residents heard the calls from government officials to evacuate New Orleans but could not heed those warn-

This paper contributes to the existing literature of disaster vulnerability by assessing a wide array of vulnerabilities in Miami-Dade County, Florida. Existing vulnerability studies tend to solely focus on the vulnerability directly relevant to disaster management. However, this paper takes into consideration the broad political, economic, and social contexts that exacerbate or mitigate disaster vulnerabilities in addition to the vulnerability factors directly affecting individuals and communities. Madeline did a great job introducing and utilizing creative, sophisticated, and well-justified measurements for the vulnerability indicators suggested by the Pressure and Release (PAR) Model.

—Sojin Jang

ings. Residents that lived in poverty in New Orleans were majority African American, with roughly 35% of the African-American community lacking private transportation to evacuate from Hurricane Katrina (UN-Habitat, 2007). These individuals were reliant upon public transportation provided by the city, which did not materialize in the capacity needed to evacuate all those who needed it (Tierney, 2006). Not only does living in poverty make escaping from the natural hazard difficult, but these individuals may also have had homes within a flood zone or had homes that were not sufficiently resilient against the natural hazard. This means that post-natural hazard, residents previously living in poverty may find themselves homeless, making their situation even more difficult as they do not have an abundance of financial resources to fall back upon (SAMHSA, 2017). Fifteen percent of residents living in Miami-Dade County live in poverty, compared to 13.1% of Floridians living in poverty within the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The margin of error for these two measures does not cause the percentages to overlap (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). This higher percentage in Miami-Dade County indicates that this measure has a high impact on disaster vulnerability within Miami-Dade County.

The second root cause indicator is the percentage of residents in Miami-Dade County living in rental units. Individuals living in rented units lack secure housing and deal with the possibility that they may be evicted from their home. This possibility rises post-disaster, with researchers finding that evictions increased after the impacts of natural hazards, leading to housing disruptions for renters, particularly those who were low-income (Brennan, et al, 2022). This finding is significant as the number of people who rent rather than own has grown within the United States. Compared to homeowners, renters are twice as likely to have an annual household income of less than \$30,000 and be a person of color (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2022). The prevalence of lower-income, minority Americans living in unstable rental housing compared to secure owner-occupied homes indicates limited access to stable housing for renters in America. Forty-seven and a half percent of occupied housing units in Miami-Dade County are renter-occupied, compared to just 32.6% of renter-occupied housing units in Florida (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Although this measure may include vacation rentals, this finding indicates that Miami-Dade County has a much lower percentage of housing units that are owner occupied, compared to the state of Florida. Additionally, both measures were found by applying the same definition of housing tenure in the 2020 American Community Survey. Because Miami-Dade County has such a high percentage of renter-occupied units, this measure represents a high level of vulnerability for the county.

The third indicator of root causes is the political affiliation of Miami-Dade County. According to statistics from the Florida Division of Elections (2022), there are 1,522,460 registered voters within the county. About 29% of voters are affiliated with the Republican Party, while 37.80% of voters are registered with the Democratic party. About 32% of registered voters have no party affiliation, making this voter population larger than Republican voters in Miami-Dade County. Only 1.52% of voters are affiliated with a minor party. Looking at County Commissioners, all commissioners run on a non-partisan platform and have no party affiliation. However, of the 12 currently active commissioners, eight have supported policies like climate change mitigation, investments in environmental protection, support for providing emergency preparedness materials to persons with a disability, and other policies that align with the Democratic Party's platform (Miami-Dade County). While the mayor also ran on a non-partisan platform, Mayor Cava has also supported policies that align with the Democratic policy, including investing in housing affordability, general infrastructure, and addressing climate change and supporting sustainability policies. Support for these policies indicate that in general, Miami-Dade County Commissioners are supportive of policies that reduce disaster vulnerability. In contrast, Governor DeSantis belongs to the Republican Party and does not focus on disaster risk reduction policies or on supporting minority populations during disaster. Thus, the vulnerability level for this indicator is low.

The fourth indicator of root causes is the gross domestic product (GDP) of the county. GDP provides an overview of the value of the goods and services created by the county and is an indicator of the county's overall economic

strength (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022). If the GDP of a county grows, that indicates that the value of the goods and services created by residents has risen, ideally leading to higher worker wages and greater wealth. The GDP of Miami-Dade County in thousands of dollars is 164,519,091, which is the highest county GDP in Florida (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022). However, Miami-Dade County is also the most populous county, meaning that it should have a higher GDP compared to other counties. Taking this GDP and dividing it by the population of the county results in GDP per capita, providing a better indicator. The GDP per capita of Miami-Dade County is 61.78. Compared to the four other most populous counties in Florida, Miami-Dade County has the third strongest GDP per capita out of these five counties. Orange County has the highest GDP per capita at 68.51, with Broward County having the lowest GDP per capita at 57.18. From this measure, the vulnerability of Miami-Dade County is rated at medium, because it has neither the highest GDP per capita nor the lowest.

Dynamic Pressures

The first indicator of dynamic pressure is housing affordability in Miami-Dade County. When it comes to disaster recovery post-natural hazard impact, one obstacle to survivors looking to bounce forward is housing. Disaster survivors lacking previous home ownership will need to rent to secure housing, but rental prices may cause their households to become cost burdened. Cost burdens occur when households or individuals spend more than 30% of their income on paying rent (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2022; Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2022). If households or individuals are spending 30% or more of their income on securing shelter, they may be underspending on healthcare or food costs. They may not have the necessary financial resources to prepare for a disaster (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2022). The median gross rent per month for Miami-Dade County is \$1,373 compared to \$1,218 for the state of Florida (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The median monthly income for individuals in Miami-Dade County is \$4,952, meaning that on average, renters are spending 27.72% of their income on rent. A similar percentage of 27.18% is found for the state of Florida, with the median monthly income for individuals being \$4,480 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Because the county indicator is roughly equivalent to the state average, this is a medium level of vulnerability for the county.

The second indicator of dynamic pressure is sea-level rise. Carbon emissions from human activity are contributing to global warming, the gradual warming of the Earth's temperature, which has led to warmer oceans and increased ice-sheet melt (Raimi et al., 2020; Sweet et al., 2022). Sea-level rise is considered a dynamic pressure because it contributes to unsafe conditions by causing flooding of low-lying areas, destroying human structures that may be there, as well as disrupting industries that are reliant upon coastal territory (Wisner et al., 2003). Miami-Dade County government states by 2040, the sea-level is expected to rise 10-17 inches, with 10 inches being a moderate estimate and 17 inches being a high estimate (Miami-Dade County, 2021). The median sea-level rise expectation by 2040 is roughly equivalent to the sea-level rise the state of Florida is expected to experience by 2040. Raimi, et al. (2020) find that the median sea-level rise estimate for Florida is 8-9 inches. The NOAA finds that a median sea-level rise projection for the contiguous United States is 0.30 meters, or around 12 inches. Considering these average findings, the level of vulnerability for Miami-Dade County on this indicator is medium.

The third indicator of dynamic pressure is the unemployment rate in Miami-Dade County. This measure shows how many individuals are actively seeking employment but are unable to find it as a percentage of the labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). When individuals become unemployed, not only do they cease to contribute to the productivity of their county, but also individuals must provide for their own benefits they may have once received from their employer, or receive benefits from a spouse or family member. Unemployed adults in non-metro areas have the highest rate of having no health insurance, with unemployed adults in metro areas having a similar lack of health insurance rate compared to self-employed adults in metro areas. Individuals without health insurance experience poorer health outcomes compared to those with health insurance, which could lead to an in-

creased decline in productivity if they become too ill or injured to rejoin the workforce (McWilliams, 2009). The unemployment rate for Miami-Dade County is 2.0, while the unemployment rate for Florida is 2.5 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Given that these rates are similar, the vulnerability rating for this indicator is low.

The fourth indicator of dynamic pressure is the tourism industry present within Miami-Dade County. Florida is a well-known vacation destination for both domestic and international tourists, with 131.07 million visitors in 2019 and 79.18 million visitors in 2020 (Visit Florida Research Department, 2022). The decrease in tourists from 2019 to 2020 was due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so figures from 2019 will be utilized as indicators. According to Visit Florida (2022), April through October are the best months for warm beach waters, with Miami beach among the destinations with the warmest waters. Hurricane season runs from June through November, meaning that there are many months of overlap when tourists are visiting the county and when hurricanes could occur. More than half of all tourists stay for more than one day in the Greater Miami area (Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, 2019). These tourists may not be aware of the risks that hurricanes and flooding can cause and may be unaware of local evacuation routes or what resources may be available to them if a natural disaster occurs during their stay. The tourism industry in the Greater Miami area generated \$17.9 billion in economic impact from 24.2 million total visitors in 2019, indicating that this is a strong industry within Miami-Dade County. Because of the volume of visitors that come to the county, particularly during hurricane season, the level of vulnerability for this indicator is high.

Unsafe Conditions

The first indicator of an unsafe condition is the percentage of Miami-Dade County that is a floodplain. FEMA (2011) defines a floodplain as any area that may be covered by floodwaters. Floodwaters could originate from rivers, streams, oceans, or any body of water that could overrun its natural area. Living in a floodplain is an unsafe condition because while an area may normally be dry, during a natural disaster or high precipitation conditions, homes and businesses can experience flooding. This can ruin living spaces, disrupt livelihoods, and cause death if extreme flooding occurs, and people are not prepared for it. Miami-Dade County states that 44.62% of the county is a floodplain (Miami-Dade County, 2020). While the State of Florida does not provide an exact percentage on the floodplain status of Florida, a vast majority of Florida is a floodplain. Miami-Dade County is one of few counties that is not entirely covered by a floodplain. Thus, Miami-Dade County can be considered to have a medium vulnerability to this hazard.

The second indicator of an unsafe condition is the percentage of the population with a disability. During a natural disaster, people with disabilities, whether they are physical or mental in nature, experience greater difficulties than people without disabilities. This makes this population a special group at risk. People with mobility impairments may find it more difficult to evacuate pre-disaster, or they may struggle to navigate through their homes post-disaster, particularly if the disaster has caused damage (Baker & Cormier, 2015). People with cognitive or developmental impairments may have trouble understanding disaster educational material or may not have their needs adequately met if they evacuate to a disaster shelter. The United States Census Bureau defines disability status as the interaction between individuals' bodies and their environment. Individuals are noted as having disabilities if they have difficulty with certain functions (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). In Miami-Dade County, 10.8% of the population has a disability. For the state of Florida, this percentage is 13.5% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Because Miami-Dade County has a lower percentage, the vulnerability for the county is low.

The third indicator of an unsafe condition is the percentage of the population over 65 years of age. In the United States, individuals who are 65 years or older are considered "elderly" (Lohr, 1990, p. 69). Although age does not equate to disability or inability to care for oneself, research has shown that the likelihood of having a disability rises with age, with individuals greater than 90 years old being particularly susceptible to having a disability (Berlau, et al. 2012; Okoro, et al. 2018). Some elderly may also live in nursing homes and part- or full-time care facilities,

meaning that they rely on healthcare workers for day-to-day assistance. This population of institutionalized elderly are particularly susceptible during disasters, as their facilities may not have a proper evacuation plan and they may be abandoned by their healthcare workers (Baker & Cormier, 2015). This was particularly notable during the COVID-19 pandemic, as long-term care facilities across the nation experienced worker and PPE shortages, leading to numerous deaths in the institutionalized elderly population (Abbasi, 2020). In Miami-Dade County, only 16.9% of the population are aged 65 and older, compared to 21.1% of the population in Florida. Thus, the vulnerability for the county is low for this indicator.

The fourth indicator of an unsafe condition is the percentage of occupied housing units that were built from the year 2000 to 2022. Prior to the 1990s, the State of Florida required all local governments to adopt the state minimum building code that ensured the health and safety of all residents. However, local governments were free to modify this building code, meaning that building safety could vary dramatically depending on the priorities of local government. In 1992, Hurricane Andrew impacted south Florida and caused \$26 billion in damages, destroying around 157,000 homes in what would become Miami-Dade County (National Weather Service, 2022). After this disaster, the State of Florida created and adopted the Florida Building Code in 1998, ensuring that local governments adhered to the same building standards across the state. This code superseded all local building codes in 2002 and is updated every three years to ensure that buildings are resilient enough to withstand hurricanes, flooding, and wind damage (Florida Housing Finance Corporation, 2017). In Miami-Dade County, only 22.5% of occupied housing units were built in 2000 and years following, compared to 31.2% of occupied housing units in Florida (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Because this indicator is lower in Miami-Dade County compared to the state of Florida, this indicates a high level of vulnerability.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The overall vulnerability rating for Miami-Dade County is a medium rating, with a summary of the contributing vulnerability indicators seen in Table 1. Although Miami-Dade County has features that make it highly vulnerable to natural disasters, such as having a large portion of the county being floodplain territory, and being located on the coast, county commissioners are supportive of vulnerability reduction policies and climate change mitigation policies that lower the county's vulnerability level. The factors that contributed the most to Miami-Dade County's vulnerability rating included the size of its tourism industry, the percentage of the population that rent or live in poverty, and the percentage of homes that were built prior to the year 2000.

Miami-Dade County could address home infrastructure issues by requiring a mandatory retrofit of all occupied housing units built prior to the year 2000. Los Angeles has a similar mandatory retrofit policy, which requires existing wood-frame, multistory buildings that have soft, weak, or open front walls be modified to existing minimum earthquake standards (Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, 2016). A similar ordinance could be written for Miami-Dade County to ensure residential buildings are capable of withstanding hurricane forces. This would also ensure that residents, no matter their status as homeowners or renters, would be living in spaces that are capable of withstanding the hazards frequently faced by Miami-Dade County.

Although housing affordability is currently a focus of the Miami-Dade County government, additional actions to ensure these resources reach citizens throughout the county would be to host education and outreach programs. This would be particularly beneficial for low-income and minority populations within the county, as those individuals and households may not be aware of the resources available to them to assist with affordable homeownership. Education and outreach can also be a feasible action for addressing population fluctuations from the tourism industry. The Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs could form a partnership with the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau to ensure tourism websites, brochures, and pamphlets include information about hurricane preparedness and where to find disaster preparedness information while an individual is

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Appendix

Table 1 – Vulnerability Assessment Summary Table

Progression of Vulnerability	Indicators	Measurement	County Measurement	State-Level Measurement	Rating (Impact on Vulnerability)
Root Causes	Limited Access to Resources	% population in poverty	15%	13.1%	High
Root Causes	Limited Access to Structures	% population renting	47.5%	32.6%	High
Root Causes	Political Systems	Support for Vulnerability Reduction Policies	Supportive of Democratic Party Platform Values	Supportive of Republican Party Platform Values	Low
Root Causes	Economic Systems	County GDP	61.78	Equivalent County GDP ranged from 68.51 to 57.18	Medium
Dynamic Pressures	Housing Affordability	% of income spent on rent	27.72%	27.18%	Medium
Dynamic Pressures	Changing climate	Sea-level rise	10in (median) 17in (high)	8-9in (median)	Medium
Dynamic Pressures	Decline in Productivity	Unemployment Rate	2.0	2.5	Low
Dynamic Pressures	Rapid Population Change	Tourism	24.2 million visitors, \$17.9 billion economic impact	N/A	High
Unsafe Conditions	Dangerous locations	% of area in flood plain	44.62%	Vast Majority, see Figure 1	Medium
Unsafe Conditions	Special groups at risk	% population with a disability	10.8%	13.5%	Low
Unsafe Conditions	Special groups at risk	% persons aged 65+	16.9%	21.1%	Low
Unsafe Conditions	Physical Environment	% of houses built after 2000	22.5%	31.2%	High



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