

# Social Effects of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill on Coastal Communities Along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico

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# Presentation Outline

- Deepwater Horizon Disaster
- Research Phase I – 2010-2012
  - Methods
  - Study communities
  - Key Findings
- Research Phase II – 2013-2015
  - Key Changes between phases
  - Key Findings
- Looking Ahead...

# Deepwater Horizon Disaster

- Explosion on April 20, 2010 – 11 killed, 17 seriously injured; Survivors face testimony, stress-related effects
- Spill capped August 4, 2010– est. 4.9 million barrels



Photo:  
<http://static.businessinsider.com/image/4bdae57c7f8b9a1c32140300-590-/.jpg>

# Deepwater Horizon Disaster – An Ongoing Series of Events

- Explosion
- Spill Capped
- Investigation
- Regulatory Changes
- Reparations



Source: Austin et al 2014

# *Offshore Oil and the Deepwater Horizon: Social Effects on Gulf Coast Communities*

Purpose of study: Document the range of immediate effects of the Macondo Well blowout and aftermath

Data collection: 2010-2012

# Research Approach

**Ethnography: Scientific research approach that embeds researchers in communities under study**

## **Methods include:**

- Observation
- Participant observation
- Semi-structured interviews

## **Used to:**

- Identify patterns
- Describe relationships and social networks
- Reveal understandings and meanings people ascribe to places and events

**Places phenomena in historical, social, economic, and political context**

# Study Communities

Louisiana

Dulac

Larose

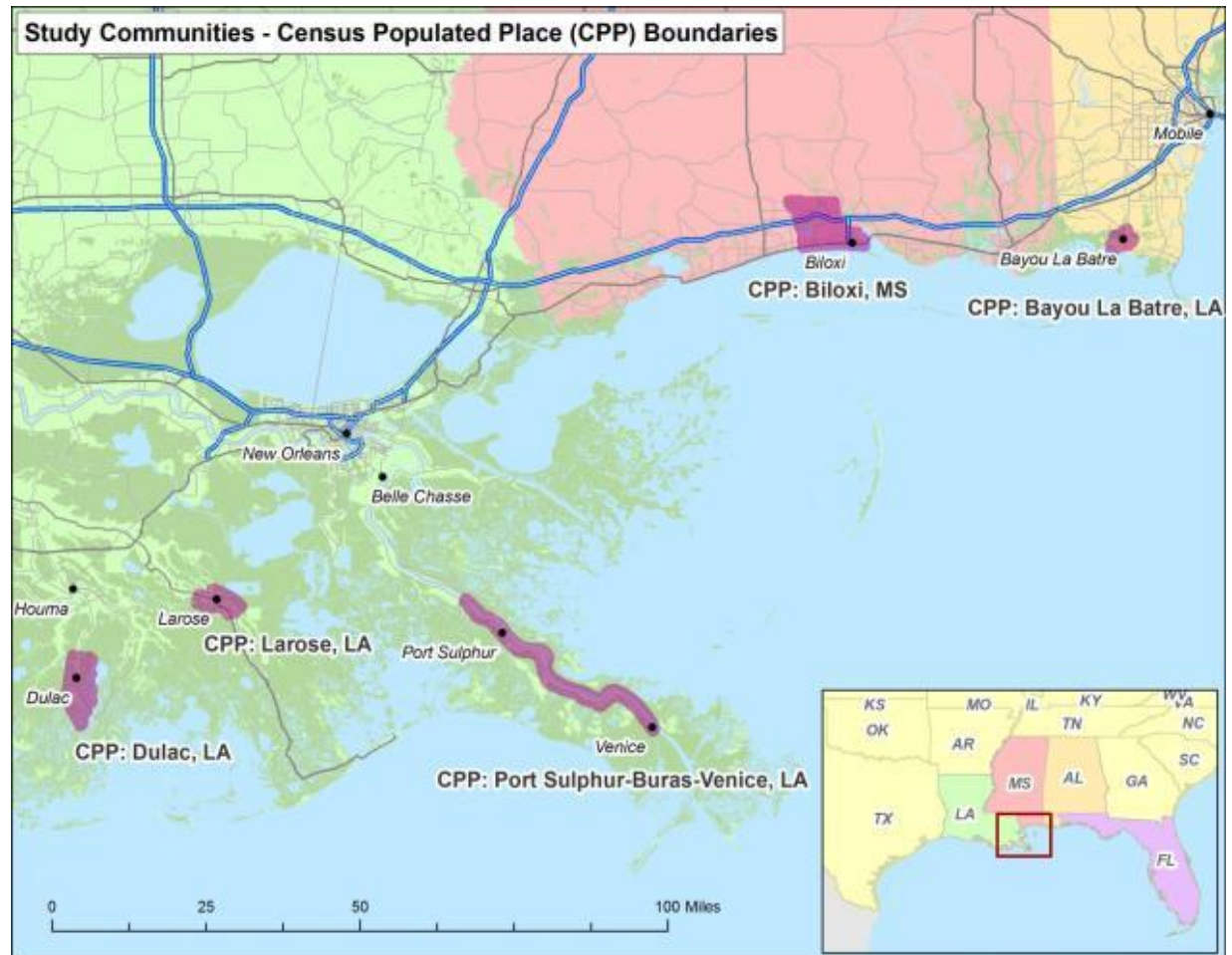
Port Sulphur/  
Buras/Venice

Mississippi

Biloxi

Alabama

Bayou La Batre



Source: Ben McMahan (Rogers, Marks, and Austin 2014)

# Key Findings

## **The Disaster Caused Serious and Widespread Sociocultural Harm**

- Livelihoods
- Social and economic inequities
- Identity
- Divisiveness
- Local governments and NGOs



*Social Impacts of the Deepwater  
Horizon Oil Spill on Coastal  
Communities along the U.S. Gulf of  
Mexico*

Purpose of study: Document the array of mid-range effects of the Macondo Well blowout and aftermath

Data Collection: 2013-2015

# Key Challenges

- Complex and uneven BP legal processes
- Struggling commercial fishing industry
- Uneven recovery from the economic recession
- Oil price crash beginning in 2014
- Northward migration of residents  
(Primarily in Louisiana)
- Hurricane Isaac (2012)
- Subsidence and coastal land loss

# Key Findings

## **Social Effects of the Disaster Persist**

- Layered uncertainties
  - Ongoing physical, environmental, and health effects
  - Ongoing release of research findings
  - Funding from legal action and how it will be used
  - Economic outlook
- Multifaceted, community-specific effects
  - State, community, and position in that community mattered
  - Precludes simple conclusions, complicating groups' attempts to be heard

# Looking Ahead

## **Social effects of the disaster extend beyond 2015**

- Legal proceedings ongoing
- Restoration not defined or complete
- Uncertainties and anxieties remain

# Study Reports

- Austin, D., B. Marks, K. McClain T. McGuire, B. McMahan, V. Phaneuf, P. Prakash, B. Rogers, C. Ware, and J. Whalen. 2014. *Offshore Oil and the Deepwater Horizon: Social Effects on Gulf Coast Communities. Volume I: Methodology, Timeline, Context, and Communities*. OCS Study. BOEM 2014-617. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region.
- Austin, D., S. Dosemagen, B. Marks, T. McGuire, P. Prakash, and B. Rogers. 2014. *Offshore Oil and the Deepwater Horizon: Social Effects on Gulf Coast Communities. Volume II: Key Economic Sectors, NGOs, and Ethnic Groups*. OCS Study. BOEM 2014-618. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region.
- Forthcoming: Austin, D., V. Phaneuf, J. Simms, J. Luchetta. *Social Impacts of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill on Coastal Communities along the U.S. Gulf of Mexico*. OCS Study. BOEM U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Gulf of Mexico OCS Region.

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