



A few thoughts about Dave Anderson's *One Block* by Susan Burnstine

As we near the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, Dave Anderson's second book, *One Block: A New Orleans Neighborhood Rebuilds*, offers a truly distinctive perspective; one that intimately documents a community and the people that make up a single block in the Holy Cross section of the lower ninth ward.



In the immediate aftermath of Katrina, Anderson traveled to New Orleans with the intention to photograph residents in hopes of earning a magazine assignment that may help the cause. But after experiencing the overwhelming psychological devastation and witnessing the obvious physical destruction of the city, he couldn't bring himself to photograph the residents in such pain. Instead, he photographed the destruction solely, as he felt it would be abusive if couldn't offer anything in return to the citizens of New Orleans.

For months, Anderson struggled to find a worthy angle to the story. Despite living elsewhere for years, he "fiercely" identified with his hometown of East Lansing, Michigan, and always had been "drawn to locales that inspire devotion." The enigmatic attributes involved in people's identification with their hometown preoccupied Anderson as he reflected on the upheaval visited upon New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Realizing that New Orleans was a city whose citizens and identity were uniquely devoted towards its origin and culture, and simultaneously wondering if what had been lost — both psychologically and physically -- Anderson set out to see if this place could "fix what had been broken" and whether its people might be able to comfortably call this distinct city "home" once again.

Anderson researched several neighborhoods in the city in what he describes as a "sociological, nonscientific way" and ultimately decided upon the 500 block of Flood Street in the Lower Ninth Ward along with two bordering streets, Caffin and Chartres. Due to the cultural, social and financial dynamics on the block, he knew there was a chance it could recover, but success was uncertain, thus, paralleling the city's plight as a whole.

Beginning in May of 2007, Anderson traveled to New Orleans numerous times during an eighteen-month period and documented the rebuilding of this single block. While Anderson's images elucidate this community will never be the same, the future is uncertain and change will remain constant, the quiet evolution of what's to become and what will remain is what continues to resonate long after this chapter has been closed.

In recent years, Anderson has exhibited a remarkable talent for dissecting communities and imparting a strong sense of home by means of what he visualizes as the good that unites us all, despite perceived assumptions or apparent odds. He realized this approach brilliantly in the first body of work and subsequent book that gained him notice, *Rough Beauty*. And once again in *One Block*, Anderson steadily peels back the layers and exposes the physical and psychological landscape amongst the average and mundane, thus finding the remarkable within.

