

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

kind of repudiation and neglect that undermine the well-being of black people and all victims of racism and poverty.

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Common Ground Relief's charge is to provide temporary aid for victims of hurricane disasters in the Gulf Coast region and long-term support for reconstructing communities affected by Katrina in the Greater New Orleans area. Common Ground Relief is a grassroots organization that offers various kinds of assistance and mutual aid. It does not administer to communities; rather, it gives hope to communities by working with them in sustainable ways to meet their most basic and pressing needs. We thank you, Common Ground Relief, for standing at the forefront of the rebuilding process and for showing us the way forward.

INTRODUCTION

"Truth Crushed to Earth Will Rise Again"

Katrina and Its Aftermath

JEREMY I. LEVITT AND MATTHEW C. WHITAKER

What we saw unfold in the days after the hurricane was the most naked manifestation of social policy towards the poor, where the message for decades has been: "You are on your own." Well, they really were on their own for five days in that Superdome, and it was Darwinism in action—the survival of the fittest. People said: "It looks like something out of the Third World." Well, New Orleans was Third World long before the hurricane.—CORNEL WEST, "Exiles from a City and from a Nation," *Observer*, September 11, 2005

Hurricane Katrina was one of the deadliest and most costly hurricanes in U.S. history. It was the sixth strongest Atlantic hurricane ever recorded and the third strongest on record that reached the continental United States. Katrina formed on August 23, 2005, during the Atlantic hurricane season. It devastated much of the north-central Gulf Coast of the United States. The most severe loss of life and property damage occurred in New Orleans, Louisiana, which was largely devoured by floodwaters after the levee system suffered a calamitous failure. Katrina's floodwater exposed as much

as it covered, however. The storm caused destruction not only in New Orleans, but across the entire Mississippi coast and into Alabama (as far as a hundred miles from the storm's center), uncovering weaknesses, prejudices, and inequalities throughout the Gulf Coast and within the whole of American society.¹

Katrina was the eleventh tropical storm, fifth hurricane, third major hurricane, and second Category 5 hurricane of the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season. It formed over the Bahamas on August 23, 2005, and made its way past southern Florida as a moderate Category 1 hurricane, where it caused some deaths and flooding, before growing rapidly in size and strength in the Gulf of Mexico, where it became one of the more powerful hurricanes recorded at sea. The storm weakened somewhat before hitting land for a second and third time, on the morning of August 29, in southern Louisiana and at the Louisiana/Mississippi state line, respectively, as a Category 3 storm. The storm surge caused catastrophic destruction along the Gulf Coast. In Louisiana, the flood protection system in New Orleans failed in fifty-three different places. Nearly every levee in metro New Orleans breached as Hurricane Katrina's 140-mile-an-hour gale force winds, torrential rain, and thunderous floodwaters rolled eastward through the city, flooding 80 percent of the city and many areas of neighboring parishes for weeks. Along the Mississippi coast, Katrina overwhelmed the cities of Bay St. Louis, Biloxi, Gulfport, Long Beach, Ocean Springs, Pascagoula, Pass Christian, and Waveland.²

More than a million Gulf Coast residents were displaced by Katrina, relocating in cities in all fifty states. Many of Katrina's so-called refugees were living well below the poverty line before the storm struck, which made them extremely vulnerable to the storm's wrath and the many human failures that followed. At least 1,836 people were killed by Hurricane Katrina and in the subsequent human floods that ravaged the Gulf Coast, making it the deadliest in

the United States since the Okeechobee Hurricane in 1928 and the hurricane that hit the island city of Galveston, Texas, in 1900. Katrina caused an estimated \$81.2 billion in damage, making it the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history.

Criticism of the federal, state, and local governments' reaction to the storm was widespread and resulted in an investigation by the U.S. Congress and the resignation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) director Michael Brown. The storm also prompted Congressional review of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the failure of the levee protection system. Hurricane Katrina revealed as much about American society and the inextricable link between race, class, gender, and age in our nation as it did about nature's fury. Indeed, Katrina uncovered not only the devastating penalty for structural racism and classism but also their loathsome underbelly. As the world watched the coverage of Hurricane Katrina and its desolation in horror, America's racial inequality and shocking levels of poverty, vulnerability, and displacement, particularly among African Americans, were laid bare before the world.³

The purpose of this book is to offer a critical assessment of the local, national, and international impact of Hurricane Katrina on the lives of African Americans in the social, cultural, political, economic, environmental, religious, and legal spheres. The chapters in this collection are multidisciplinary and comparative, and draw principally from the following disciplines: law, political science, history, economics, sociology, and religion. The chapters introduce polemic and critical ideas and question the efficacy of the national and global responses to Katrina's central victims, African Americans. The essays, which reveal the multifarious impacts of Hurricane Katrina on black people, combine research and advocacy by some of the most experienced scholars and activists working on cutting-edge Katrina-related issues of race, ethnicity, and class of

real-world significance. This book underscores the extent to which black people and others were and are being impacted by the natural and human-engineered forces that have engendered and maintained intense suffering associated with Katrina and its aftermath.

Although this introduction places Katrina in its proper historical context, the current socioeconomic condition of Katrina's victims will be the primary focus of this book. Since Katrina, in fact, its survivors continue to be confronted by the racial, economic, and political injustices that marginalized their existence before the storm; discrimination placed them squarely in harm's way during the hurricane and continues to undermine their ability to rebuild their often shattered and scattered lives after the storm. This reality requires political leaders, scholars, and activists to address these problems assertively and in intelligent and practical ways. Failure to engage these issues has created and enabled political obfuscation, cutthroat capitalism, unchecked market forces, avarice, racism, classism, sexism, and basic apathy to undermine relief and rebuilding efforts in housing, education, employment, contracting, and infrastructure.⁴

Such neglect has also adversely affected many people, particularly immigrants who have come to the United States seeking work in the Gulf Coast redevelopment industry. They are also facing manipulation, xenophobia, and racism and are arguably allowing themselves to be used in perpetuation. Following Hurricane Katrina, the Gulf Coast region played host to the arrival of larger numbers of immigrant and non-immigrant workers who were lured to the area by contractors with promises of well-paying jobs and housing. Yet, in New Orleans and throughout the Gulf Coast region, many found themselves mired in poverty without shelter, advocates, or representation. The Advancement Project, the National Immigration Law Center, and the New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition demonstrated how complicated and divisive these issues were when

"TRUTH CRUSHED TO EARTH WILL RISE AGAIN"

they revealed that African American survivors were often denied employment opportunities, even as migrant and especially immigrant workers secured jobs (positions that were often quite exploitive and unsafe).⁵

The most enduring and jarring stories associated with Hurricane Katrina, however, are the abject poverty and racism that has marked the region for generations. Television cameras from around the world captured indelible images of people walking, floating, and sometimes drowning in contaminated water. Once the water receded, the same cameras captured frightening images of dead bodies on deserted streets, crowds of people dying slowly of hunger and dehydration, and people fainting and thrashing about in pain for want of desperately needed medication for chronic illness. As Michael Eric Dyson recently observed:

Photo snaps and film shots captured legions of men and women huddling in groups or hugging corners, crying in wild-eyed desperation for help, for any help, from somebody, anybody, who would listen to their unanswered pleas. The filth and squalor of their confinement—defecating where they stood or sat, or, more likely, dropped, bathed in a brutal wash of dredge and sickening pollutants that choked the air with ungodly stench—grieved the camera lenses that recorded their plight.

Scores of people took to the streets dotted by deserted shops and restaurants, scavenging for food, water, and clothing. The hordes were multiracial in orientation, but the overwhelming majority of the displaced and disinherited were black. At first glance, many people would have assumed that the sight they were seeing was taking place in some other corner of the so-called Third World, such as Liberia, Rwanda, or Sierra Leone. Many people asked, could this be happening in the United States of America? Could the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world abandon some of its

poorest citizens at a time when they needed their government the most?⁶

It is precisely these questions, and others, that this anthology answers. What formed the pre- and post-Katrina Gulf Coast? What were the public and private sectors' responses to the disaster? How should a post-Katrina America be constructed? How do we get there? Since Hurricane Katrina has become synonymous with socioeconomic circumstances that mark many communities throughout the country, what lessons can be learned from pre- and post-Katrina failures that will help ameliorate many of the problems associated with pre- and post-Katrina America? The pre-Katrina Gulf Coast, especially New Orleans, like many other American regions and cities, was characterized by racism, racial segregation, and acute poverty levels well before the storm. The antebellum and post-Civil War South, particularly New Orleans, was populated by indigenous peoples, enslaved people of African descent, free blacks, Creoles of various hues and status, and whites, including Cajuns and European ethnics, who embodied the area's native, African, Spanish, French, and English roots.⁷

Despite the multiracial nature of the New Orleans heritage, the metropolis has been characterized by acute racial segregation. People of African descent were marketed, sold, purchased, exchanged, and treated as chattel. Black people were raped, mutilated, ridiculed as aberrant and inferior, and denied the freedoms set forth in the Declaration of Independence that America claimed to embrace. Even after legal slavery ended in the United States in 1865, black people, by virtue of their race and class, were relegated to sharecropping and other wage-earning forms of work and forced to live in the poorest areas of New Orleans. At the time of Katrina, according to the Brookings Institution, New Orleans was one of the most racially segregated among the largest U.S. metropolitan cities. Moreover, post-World War II suburbanization and white flight

from the city's core led to the African Americanization of New Orleans. As the city became blacker, it also became poorer as blacks were systematically denied work and a living wage. In 1960 New Orleans was 37 percent black; in 1970 it was 43 percent black; in 1980 it was 55 percent black; in 1990 it was 62 percent black, and in 2000 it was over 67 percent black.⁸

The poverty rate was 28 percent in New Orleans in 2000, compared to 12 percent for the nation. By the time Katrina hit New Orleans, the city claimed the second highest percentage of its residents (38 percent) living in high-poverty census tracts, in which more than 40 percent of its residents were living at or below the poverty line. In addition, the city's black poverty rate was 35 percent, three times the rate of 11 percent for whites. White people who remained in New Orleans fled to areas such as Jefferson Parish, which is 70 percent white; St. Bernard Parish, which is 88 percent white; and St. Tammany Parish, which is 87 percent white. "By 2000," the Brookings Institution argues, "the city of New Orleans had become highly segregated by race and developed high concentrations of poverty. . . . [B]lacks and whites were living in quite literally different worlds before the storm hit."

Such racial disparities and poverty are the result of individual choices and actions. They are also the result of a long history of institutional structures and arrangements that have helped create our contemporary sociopolitical and economic order. Slavery and its racialized effects on wealth accumulation, family life, and white attitudes toward and treatment of people of African descent are the historical root causes of black poverty in New Orleans. Another century of legalized segregation, informal barriers to racial equality, and so-called progressive policies such as the New Deal actually sustained and exacerbated racial inequality. Social Security excluded agricultural workers and domestics, occupations that were dominated by African Americans. Federal housing programs

severely restricted their aid to people of color, which reinforced racial segregation. The celebrated G.I. Bill that was passed following World War II offered extremely restricted housing and education assistance to black people, even as it subsidized upward mobility for millions of whites. It must be noted that when African Americans did receive these benefits, schools, housing authorities, and employers, more often than not, did not allow blacks to freely exercise them.¹⁰

History does not repeat itself, but it certainly rhymes, and the socioeconomic pulse of race and class discrimination continues to reverberate. For example, poor people, regardless of color, are often ignored, marginalized, and exploited. People of color, especially women of color, however, often find themselves disproportionately represented among the poor and dispossessed. Even as racial discrimination was eliminated officially between 1954 and 1970, the government and the private sector circumvented anti-discrimination laws. "Redlining" by loan-granting institutions, for example, is still widespread, and de facto school segregation since *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* has led to gross inequities in educational opportunities. Employment and housing discrimination remains, prejudicial zoning regulations endure, racialized bank lending and real estate practices flourish, while federally financed highways that privilege predominantly white suburbs and tax breaks for wealthier home owners facilitate this inequitable system. Disparities in lending and health care along race lines thrive, and the criminal justice system practices ardent favoritism in terms of sentencing patterns and incarceration rates. These matters are of utmost importance because extreme poverty and racial segregation undercuts opportunity, and as sociologist Douglas Massey maintains, "any process that concentrates poverty with racially isolated neighborhoods will simultaneously increase the odds of socio-economic failure."¹¹

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Regrettably, there are "haves" and "have-nots," and race, which is inextricably linked to class, still plays a significant role in determining the social status (and corresponding opportunities) into which all of us are born. The haves in New Orleans and the Greater Gulf Coast, therefore, had the resources to escape or withstand Katrina's wrath, while the have-nots were fully exposed to destruction, displacement, injury, and death. As Hartman and Squires argue:

[T]he wealthy have access to personal transportation or plane and train fare, money for temporary housing, and in some cases second homes. Guests trapped in one luxury New Orleans hotel were saved when that chain hired a fleet of buses to get them out. Patients in one hospital were saved when a doctor who knew Al Gore contacted the former Vice President, who was able to cut through government red tape and charter two planes that took them to safety. This is what is meant by the catch phrase "social capital," a resource most unevenly distributed by class and race.

Racial segregation has engineered a situation in which wealthier whites have secured homes in suburban areas, while black people have few if any options to live anywhere other than the inner city, where, in the case of New Orleans, the worst flooding occurred.¹²

Insofar as poor people and people of color are disproportionately dependent upon public services, including public transportation, the consequences of the failure of public services prior to and following Katrina were not "color blind" or impartial with regard to color and class. These groups had extremely inadequate private resources to draw from in times of chaos. This is not only true during catastrophic events like Katrina, but during times of personal trauma associated with sickness, physical impairment, and familial tragedy. Indeed, as James Carr, senior vice president of research for the Fannie Mae Foundation argued, if New Orleans had been a more inclusive community with regard to race and class, the city's

population would have had the social and economic capital to improve its levee system well in advance.¹³

The point here is that although individual racist and classist acts endure with devastating effects, institutional malfeasance and dishonesty often born of racial and class-based stereotypes enabled the incompetence of FEMA and various public and private entities in Katrina's wake. These entities have proven themselves to be the most powerful forces in creating and maintaining racial disparities among the communities they are charged with serving. This "institutionalized racism," as it has been called, is all too familiar to people of color, yet generations of privilege have rendered it almost incomprehensible to many white people. It should come as no surprise then that Katrina's devastation fell hardest upon the city's poor people and persons of color. New Orleans, like most urban areas in America, has suffered and will continue to be marred by gross racial inequality as long as the effects of individual prejudice, institutional racism, concentrated poverty, and inequitable progress remain permanent features of the city's social psychology and sociopolitical order. If these forces are allowed to prosper unimpeded by progressive and concerted action, they will continue to encumber the repopulation and redevelopment of New Orleans and other American communities in which security and prosperity are desired by all their residents.¹⁴

Hurricane Katrina was not the first storm that unmasked blatant inequalities in America. The "Great Mississippi Flood of 1927," long before Hurricane Katrina, revealed the vulnerable and unequal status of African Americans in the United States. During the fall, winter, and spring of 1926–27, seasonal rains were so heavy that the tributaries of the Mississippi overflowed, causing devastating floods. On New Year's Day, 1927, the Cumberland River at Nashville topped levees at 56.2 feet. The Mississippi River levee system broke in 145 places and flooded 27,000 square miles or

about 16,570,627 acres of land, an area equal to the combined size of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. In some areas the floodwater depth reached 30 feet. The flood caused over \$400,000,000 in damages and killed upward of 246 people in seven states. The flood overran parts of Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Arkansas sustained the most damage as 14 percent of its territory was enveloped by floodwaters. On April 16, the main levee in southeastern Missouri broke, followed by breaches in 144 additional areas. The floodwaters engulfed millions of acres of land, impacting some 930,000 people in seven states. The waters smashed into 160,000 homes and decimated 41,487. By May of 1927, the Mississippi River south of Memphis, Tennessee, reached a width of 70 miles. By July 1, even as the flood began to recede, 1.5 million acres were under water.¹⁵

To help preserve and protect the people and the land affected by the flood, President Calvin Coolidge appointed Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover to organize and direct what became the Red Cross and the Army Corps of Engineers' turbulent and exploitive plan to raise the levee by stacking sand bags on top of it. Camps were erected throughout deluged areas. Many, such as the camps near Greeneville, Tennessee, housed the men who labored to protect the levees. The stations near Greeneville, atop an 8-foot-wide levee, trapped between the river and the flood, were stocked with field kitchens and tents for thousands of plantation workers—all African Americans—to live as black men filled sand bags and white men stacked them on the levee. Although most white authorities viewed African Americans as inferior people, they still viewed them as an indispensable cheap labor source at best, and as virtual property at worst. Despite the eminent flood threat, most whites conspired to undermine black people's ability to evacuate. Black men were forced to work on the levee, and those who attempted to escape were driven back at gunpoint by the National Guard. Indeed,

preoccupied with losing "their" labor force, argues historian Robyn Spencer, white plantation owners and local relief officials fashioned relief camps "as holding pens designed to ensure the retention and preservation of the southern labor force." Such measures demonstrate that the individuals leading the recovery effort undertook to reestablish the racially unequal and unjust sharecropping system that welcomed them. Hoover addressed this issue specifically when he stated that "national agencies have no responsibility for the economic system which exists in the South." Hoover was slow to respond to the disaster, and when he did, he failed to involve the government in the rebuilding process in a substantive way. Furthermore, his deference to white supremacy curtailed his ability to orchestrate relief on an equal basis, thereby reinforcing white supremacy and racial inequality throughout the region for generations to come.¹⁶

The river near Greenville broke on April 21, creating a massive 100-foot channel upriver from Greenville, one half mile in width. In ten days it covered one million acres with water ten feet deep—and the crevasse continued to pour water for months. Water, more than twice the volume of Niagara Falls, roared out of the breach, ushering in one of the ugliest episodes in American history. Panic ensued, and hundreds of levee workers crawled onto a nearby barge to escape. The Red Cross, influenced by the economic and political power of local planters, however, abandoned and detained African Americans on the levee. Cotton, and the white planter barons who made a fortune on it, were kings in the Delta region. Cotton cultivation was labor intensive; cotton was planted, grown, and picked by hand by black laborers who earned \$1.00 a day for twelve hours of work. White planters understood that if they helped black laborers evacuate, they might lose their cheap labor source. African American workers now had nothing to return to, and given the malevolent racial etiquette in the south, many believed that anyplace would be better than the Delta.¹⁷

The Great Mississippi Flood, like Hurricane Katrina, did not simply ravage the landscape; it revealed the brutal and longstanding problems associated with systemic racism, political cowardice and corruption, and governmental malfeasance. Blacks were displaced from their homes, denied proper food and shelter, trapped in a dangerous disaster zone; accosted, abused, and detained unfairly by the authorities; and forced to work under dangerous circumstances for little or no pay. Like the recovery effort after Katrina, the Mississippi flood rescue, according to Spencer, "lacked any reforms that addressed the structural inequalities abundant in a land where the tenant farming and sharecropping systems kept blacks perpetually in a cycle of debt and dependence."¹⁸ Not only did this concentration camp atmosphere smack of virtual slavery, but it undermined the future generational earning potential and asset acquisition of blacks in the area, who scattered about eventually as a part of the Great Migration of African Americans from rural to urban areas, and from the south to the north.¹⁹

Moreover, the Great Mississippi Flood serves as a powerful historical precedent; evidence that when racial and economic inequality and government malfeasance meet nature's wrath, the worst of human nature is exposed. Black people, poor people (who are disproportionately women of color), the sick, and the elderly across the Gulf Coast were in harm's way long before Katrina. No student of history can claim that the aftermath of Katrina was a surprise, given the socioeconomic status of the majority of Katrina's victims before the storm formed. The history of American chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation, economic inequality, patriarchy, political apathy, gross disparities in educational opportunities, police brutality, and legal injustices loomed large before Katrina, and they continue to ensnare our hearts and challenge America's promise of freedom and democracy to its people.

This book examines the history and lives of African Americans

in the Gulf Coast, their socioeconomic status prior to Hurricane Katrina, the impact of the storm on black people in the region, the response of the government and the private sector, the disaster's bearing on the health of African Americans, the various legal ramifications of the storm and its aftermath, and the nature and implications of massive dislocations associated with the hurricane. Although this book speaks of victims, it is about agency and resilience at its core. It emphasizes the inspiring deployment of African Americans' unique culture of struggle, resistance, and hope in the face of tragedy, squalor, and rejection. Key issues will include the legacy of chattel slavery and Jim Crow segregation in the Gulf Coast, economic inequality, the gendered nature of Katrina's impact and the various responses to it, the government and legal community's response (or lack thereof) to Katrina and its victims, the various ways in which those who were most affected by Katrina can rebuild their lives and communities, and the ways in which our society can ameliorate the kind of racialized poverty that was painfully exposed in Katrina's wake.

In chapter 1 Mitchell F. Crusto offers his personal account as a native of New Orleans as he and his family evacuated the city prior to Hurricane Katrina, and his reaction to the news of the devastation and the government's mishandling of the situation in the months, albeit now years, following the hurricane. He tells his story through letters written to his fictitious mother, the City of New Orleans herself. Crusto is a multigenerational descendant of enslaved blacks, free people of color, and white French and Spanish enslavers. He has written on the legal history of black women's struggles for property and wealth in the antebellum South with particular emphasis on Louisiana law, and he believes this history helps to explain the government's reaction to the Katrina situation in treating black people as discarded property.

In chapter 2 Bryan K. Fair explores the deep chasms in American

life that rendered so many of New Orleans' black citizens trapped and under siege during and after Hurricane Katrina. He argues that America's longstanding discriminatory practices and caste-like socioeconomic structure have relegated millions of Americans to a permanent subordinate status by virtue of their birth, from which very few escape. He maintains that this heritage is powerful and repressive, and that pre- and post-Katrina New Orleans offers a window from which we can appraise and understand the impoverished lives of America's most vulnerable citizens. He contends that poverty is an international problem that begs for solutions, one that America and the world must face before the storm.

In chapter 3 Charles R. P. Pouncy challenges conventional economic analyses of the disaster. He examines the economic and financial policies that enabled the post-Katrina disaster. Pouncy critiques the poorly conceived and executed interventions that exacerbated the tragedy, and he evaluates the policies that have the potential to transform the legacy of the calamity into opportunities for more equitable distribution of resources for the wealthy and the truly disadvantaged. Pouncy makes a case for the adoption of alternative economic initiatives that minimize the influence of natural disasters and limit their impact to temporary socioeconomic disruptions rather than permanent dislocations.

In chapter 4 Andre L. Smith offers Katrina victims various strategies for empowering themselves and ameliorating the economic pain and suffering that they have endured. He proposes that a "good offense is the best defense" against future tragedies in the mold of Hurricane Katrina. Framing the potential empowerment of Katrina victims within the larger context of economic justice for disadvantaged groups, Smith argues that the reconstruction of New Orleans will offer opportunities for employment and investment in new businesses and real property if redevelopment is implemented efficiently and fairly.

In chapter 5 Phyllis W. Kotey examines the effects of Hurricane Katrina on the court system in New Orleans and other areas affected by the storm. She evaluates how the judicial system operated before and immediately after Katrina, and how its operation—and hence justice—was severely constrained by the hurricane. Kotey also explores Katrina's impact on the judiciary through the prism of three distinct perspectives: defendants, victims, and the court system. She considers how local and state government can better respond to the needs of defendants, victims, and the judiciary and justice system as a whole when faced with public emergencies.

In chapter 6 Alyssa G. Robillard investigates the relationship between race, socioeconomics, and health, particularly for African Americans who have had a long and problematic history with health care providers and the health care industry. Robillard contends that racism and the history of prejudice and discrimination toward Americans of African descent have contributed significantly to the health disparities experienced by black people in America. Additionally, and not surprisingly, she maintains, those with lower incomes do not fare nearly as well on health indexes as those with higher incomes. For people whose socioeconomic conditions and physical health were already compromised, Katrina made a bad situation worse. In the face of the trauma and tragedy Katrina wrought, the storm has afforded us an opportunity for lessons learned and improvement on many levels related to health. Robillard discusses the health of African Americans in the regions affected by Katrina, the public health response during and after the storm, the health care infrastructure as it exists now, and the notion of preparedness as it relates to inequalities and inequities in health.

In chapter 7 Carleton Waterhouse explores the findings of the Independent Levee Investigation Team. This group scrutinized the New Orleans levee system failures and described them as a typical example of the effects of environmental injustice that primarily

affects people of color and the poor. Waterhouse's research matches several of the team's findings with existing complaints and studies. This is particularly true for the inferior quality of environmental protection provided to minority and poor white communities ranging from the design and implementation of Superfund cleanups to the issuance and enforcement of permits under the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. Based on the correlation between the planning failures associated with the New Orleans levee system and those associated with federal, state, and local environmental protection for people of color and poor people, Waterhouse shows how the environmental injustices associated with Hurricane Katrina reflect the environmental injustices devastating other communities around the country.

In chapter 8 Kenneth B. Nunn argues that the loss of lives and property in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast was not the result of inadequate warnings but was, in part, the result of a failure to act on the part of local, state, and national authorities. Moreover, he considers whether the failure of authorities to prepare, warn, and rescue could be characterized as a crime. Nunn examines the appropriate legal standards for both civil and criminal liability in these cases and explores the events leading up to and in the aftermath of Katrina in light of these standards. He also analyzes Katrina-related events with an eye on the characteristics of the victims of this catastrophe, arguing that the failure to properly assist Katrina victims in the manner that U.S. citizens rightfully expect from their government was colored by race and class.

In chapter 9 Linda S. Greene reveals government knowledge of the possibility of Katrina-like floods in the Gulf Coast region and government failure to act on this knowledge in the face of eminent death and destruction. She examines the government's control and misuse of all measures necessary to protect the citizens of New Orleans against Katrina-like disasters and explores the legal,

moral, and ethical claims of citizens to protection by the government from catastrophic disasters like Katrina. Greene's chapter assesses post-Katrina analyses of political and legal findings to determine whether any court or governmental body has acknowledged its duty to protect its citizens. She suggests that the scope of redress available to the citizens of New Orleans, as well as future efforts to prepare for catastrophic disasters, should be measured against this standard.

In chapter 10 Ruth Gordon argues not only that Hurricane Katrina wrought horrendous physical damage, but that the response of the U.S. government made a grave situation truly catastrophic. Images of mostly poor and mostly black people stranded on rooftops surrounded by water and in a "hellhole" that had been a football stadium were endlessly played on television screens, evoking true outrage from all quarters of the political spectrum. There was genuine disbelief that our government could be so hapless and incompetent. In the face of this ineptitude and the human suffering it wrought, reporters and commentators referred to Katrina victims as refugees and generated images reminiscent of the Third World to a world audience. Whether or not these unfortunate people came within the legal definition of refugees is a separate matter. What is striking, Gordon argues, is the notion that such terms as "Third World" and "refugees" were viewed as pejorative terms that describe the poor, the disenfranchised, the oppressed, and people of color. Indeed, Gordon maintains that some people from the Third World noted that it meant that perhaps they were not so incompetent and America was not all-powerful. It also demonstrated, as Gordon posits, that Americans of whatever class or status stand apart from these depths, and that Katrina presents an opportunity to pause and examine our assumptions and biases, even as we try to go beyond those limitations.

The book's final chapter, prepared by D. Marvin Jones, reminds

us that civil rights laws presuppose that the majority guarantees equal justice to minority citizens. But what does that guarantee mean in this context? According to the debates during the era of Reconstruction (1868–77), it was not only a legal guarantee but a financial one as well. Yet because of the traditional imposition of a set of common law baselines, the "reparational" nature of civil rights laws is evident only from a reading of legislative history of these civil rights laws. This cannot, however, obscure the original definition and purpose of these laws, Jones maintains. His chapter argues that while common law legalisms are relevant to federal litigation, and perhaps foreclose litigation, they in no way limit the power or moral duty of the legislature to respond to government-imposed racial inequality. He argues, therefore, that civil rights laws presuppose that victims such as Hurricane Katrina evacuees would be made whole by the government for their losses, at least from the standpoint of the original understanding of civil rights laws. Thus, the question becomes not "why" to provide reparations based upon the aforementioned issues but, in light of the nation's original commitments during reconstruction, "why not."

All of the chapters in this book were prepared to offer a critical examination of the social, political, economic, and legal tempest before the storm, during it, and in its aftermath. Specifically, this text argues that the inequalities linked to race, class, gender, and other socially constructed indicators are not preordained and absolute. Rather, they manifest deliberate choices rendered by political and economic resolutions and executed by public and private institutions. In this sense, the book is ultimately about choices, and as we come to the end of the first decade of the new millennium, we pause to assess our history and the extent to which we can learn from our mistakes. Indeed, this book explores one of the biggest mistakes in the history of the United States, Katrina, America's unnatural disaster.

Notes

1. Brian Handwerk, "Eye on the Storm: Hurricane Katrina Fast Facts," *National Geographic News*, September 6, 2005, 1; Douglas Brinkley, *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (New York: William Morrow, 2006), 1-10; John McQuaid and Mark Schleifstein, *Path of Destruction: The Devastation of New Orleans and the Coming Age of Superstorms* (New York: Little, Brown, 2006), 151-307. Also, the term "Katrina" is often used as a quick reference to Hurricane Katrina and the physical, social, and economic chaos that arose as a result of the storm. Likewise, even though this book is concerned with the effects of Katrina on the Gulf Coast, "New Orleans" will be used as an inclusive term that will cover the greater Gulf Coast, including Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas.
2. Handwerk, "Eye on the Storm," 1; Brinkley, *Great Deluge*, 1-10; McQuaid and Schleifstein, *Path of Destruction*, 151-307.
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Hurricane Katrina

AMERICA'S UNNATURAL DISASTER

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