Katrina: Race, Class, and Poverty: Reflections and Analysis
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KATRINA: RACE, CLASS, AND POVERTY
Reflections and Analysis

This special edition of the Journal of Black Studies focuses on the impact of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. The devastation left by Hurricane Katrina, the failure of the levee system, along with the incompetent response by local, state, and federal officials, have brought to the center of our national consciousness issues that have long been on the periphery—namely, the enduring legacy of systematic and structural racism that has resulted in a disproportionate number of African Americans mired in poverty for generations. Katrina the “natural disaster” revealed to the nation the “man-made disaster” that existed in plain sight of Mardi Gras, Bayou Classic, and numerous other conventions and parades. According to Douglass Brinkley (2006), “Tourists didn’t come to see the unemployed of whom there were many, or the ill, the toothless, and the old and the elderly” (p. 24).

The nexus between race, class, and poverty illustrates how many in the New Orleans areas most vulnerable were African American and elderly or both. The Center for Social Inclusion reports:

- Almost one third (28%) of New Orleanians were poor before Katrina hit the Gulf Coast.
- More than 105,000 city dwellers did not have a car during Katrina’s evacuation; nearly two thirds of those were African American.
- Almost half (44%) of those harmed by the broken levees were African American.
- More than 11% of New Orleans residents were elderly.
- Nearly 70% of the poor people affected by the storm were African American.
- In the city of New Orleans, communities of color made up nearly 80% of the population in the flooded neighborhoods.
These statistics reveal only a small snapshot of life in pre-Katrina New Orleans. The scholars featured here have taken up the task of analyzing the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the residents of the City of New Orleans and the nation. Katrina has reified the reason why the discipline of Black studies was founded on both an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to examining “Black” phenomena. These scholars have approached this topic from a variety of different disciplines and perspectives and have made an outstanding contribution to scholarship surrounding the effects of hurricane Katrina.

Scholars Clyde C. Robertson and Joyce E. King examine the impact of Katrina through the eyes of the children who were affected—using a concept from the culture of the people of Mali in West Africa called *Boŋ Feerey*, which means the process of opening ones mind and accepting new ideas and approaches to integrate these new perspectives into your daily life. Their article gives an essential overview to a more comprehensive program involving a multifaceted approach to examining the impact of Katrina called the “saddest days.” Patrick Sharkey’s article pushes us past the common rhetoric of loss of life as it relates to Katrina in “Survival and Death in New Orleans: An Empirical Look at the Human Impact of Katrina.” Sharkey uses the most comprehensive data on the city of New Orleans to illustrate exactly who, what, and where people were affected.

In their article “Continually Neglected: Situating Natural Disasters in the African American Experience,” Jason David Rivera and DeMond Shondell Miller bring to the fore a neglected backdrop of African American history that plays out in and during natural disasters. In “Feeling the Pain of My People: Hurricane Katrina, Racial Inequality, and the Psyche of Black America,” Ismail K. White, Tasha S. Philpot, Kristin Wylie, and Ernest McGowen demonstrate that African Americans were much more likely than White Americans to experience feelings of anger and depression in response to the events surrounding the hurricane. In addition, most of these feelings stem from the perception that Hurricane Katrina from its impact through its media coverage, and governmental response was viewed as a racial event. Patric R. Spence, Kenneth A. Lachlan, and Donyale
R. Griffin compare differences in crisis preparation, information-seeking patterns, and media uses on the basis of race in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Pamela Denise Reed in her article “From the Freedmen’s Bureau to FEMA: A Post-Katrina Historical, Journalistic, and Literary Analysis” draws on historical and literary documents to analyze the failed legacy of federal governmental agencies in the lives of African Americans.

— Troy D. Allen
Guest Editor