

Institutional Discrimination, Individual Racism, and Hurricane Katrina

Kristin E. Henkel*

University of Connecticut

John F. Dovidio

University of Connecticut

Samuel L. Gaertner

University of Delaware

Since Hurricane Katrina made landfall, there have been accusations of blatant racism in the government's response, on the one hand, and adamant denials that race played any role at all, on the other. We propose that both perspectives reflect oversimplifications of the processes involved, and the resulting debate may obscure a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the situation. Specifically, we discuss the potential roles of institutional discrimination, subtle contemporary biases, and racial mistrust. The operation of these processes is illustrated with events associated with Hurricane Katrina. In addition, drawing on these principles, we offer suggestions for present and future recovery efforts.

You'd have to go back to slavery, or the burning of Black towns, to find a comparable event that has affected Black people this way.

—Darnell M. Hunt, a sociologist and head of the African American Studies Department at UCLA

I think all of those remarks were disgusting, to be perfectly frank because, of course, President Bush cares about everyone in our country, and I know that.

—Laura Bush, First Lady

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Kristin E. Henkel, Department of Psychology, 406 Babbidge Road, Unit 1020, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT 06269-1020 [e-mail: Kristin.Henkel@gmail.com].

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which devastated New Orleans and had particular impact on its Black community in August of 2005, accusations pertaining to the lack of preparation for the storm and for the plight of its victims were heatedly exchanged. Racism was one focus of the debate. On one side, it was asserted that the inadequate response to the storm and the flooding was due to obvious racism. This sentiment is evident in a statement by Kanye West, a prominent rap artist, who said, “George Bush doesn’t care about Black people” (Broder, Wilgoren, & Alford, 2005). In response and in contrast, others such as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice adamantly denied that race had anything to do with Hurricane Katrina or the government’s response to it. She claimed that “nobody, especially the President, would have left people unattended on the basis of race” (Broder et al., 2005).

From a social psychological perspective, both sides appeared to oversimplify the situation, and polemics obscured the potential roles of historical factors, institutional discrimination, and contemporary subtle forms of individual racism, all of which likely played parts in the impact of Hurricane Katrina and the government’s response to it. This article examines some events and decisions related to Hurricane Katrina, and explores how historical and contemporary orientations toward Blacks in the United States likely shaped responses in a way that produced particularly tragic consequences for Black residents of New Orleans without overt antipathy or intention of decision makers. We emphasize the importance of how the past shapes contemporary race relations. In the next section, we provide a brief overview of the forces that contribute to racism in the United States. We then apply these psychological insights into the dynamics of racism to understand the events and decisions that produced uniquely devastating outcomes for Blacks in New Orleans. We conclude by exploring the implications of this analysis for specific interventions in New Orleans and for policy more generally.

It is impossible to know whether the processes we propose were operating among the protagonists; we can only point out that the immenseness of the devastation created tremendous confusion and communication problems and, further, show that these are precisely the conditions most conducive to the activation of these processes. We have prepared this article in the interests of helping people sort through the different perspectives on these tragic events and to sensitize policy makers, officials, and future rescuers to how racial factors can play a role during such catastrophes.

Understanding Racism

Although discussions and accusations of racism in the popular media typically portray racism in its most obvious and blatant form, within psychology it is considered to be much more complex and multifaceted. Individual bias is just one aspect, but one that involves several components: prejudice, stereotypes, and

discrimination (Dovidio, Brigham, Johnson, & Gaertner, 1996). *Prejudice* is commonly defined as an unfair negative *attitude* toward a social group or a person perceived to be a member of that group. A *stereotype* is a generalization of *beliefs* about a group or its members that is unjustified because it reflects faulty thought processes or overgeneralization, factual incorrectness, inordinate rigidity, an inappropriate pattern of attribution, or a rationalization for a prejudiced attitude or discriminatory behavior. *Discrimination* is defined as a selectively unjustified negative *behavior* toward members of the target group that involves denying “individuals or groups of people equality of treatment which they may wish” (Allport, 1954, p. 51).

Even though racism relates directly to the coordinated interaction of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, it involves more than individual biases. Racism reflects institutional, social, and cultural influences, as well. According to Jones (1997), at its very essence racism involves not only negative attitudes and beliefs, but also the social power that translates them into disparate outcomes that disadvantage other races or offer unique advantages to one’s own race at the expense of others. As Feagin and Vera (1995) explain, “Racism is more than a matter of individual scattered episodes of discrimination,” it represents a widely accepted racist ideology and the power to deny other racial groups the “dignity, opportunities, freedoms, and rewards that are available to one’s group through a socially organized set of ideas, attitudes, and practices” (p. 7). Thus, while the study of prejudice and discrimination focuses on the roles of individuals and interpersonal processes, racism encompasses institutional, social, and cultural processes that serve as an influential backdrop to individual-level perspectives. *Institutional racism*, for example, refers to the intentional or unintentional manipulation or toleration of institutional policies (e.g., poll taxes, admissions criteria) that unfairly restrict the opportunities of particular groups of people, and *cultural racism* involves beliefs about the superiority of one’s racial cultural heritage over that of other races and the expression of this belief in individual actions or institutional policies (Jones, 1997).

Moreover, both contemporary personal and institutional racism often operate without Whites’ intention to harm members of minority groups or even awareness by Whites of their personal role in disadvantaging Blacks. For instance, applying policies that seem just and egalitarian based on immediate principles of fairness in a narrow sense may systematically disadvantage groups that for historical reasons have fewer contemporary resources (e.g., wealth or education) that would allow them to benefit fully from these policies and procedures (Dovidio, Mann, & Gaertner, 1989). Thus, Whites’ historical discrimination against Blacks produces a legacy of disparity that may be perpetuated even by well-intentioned people who endorse and exercise current policies that have disparate consequences for Whites and Blacks. Furthermore, cultural racism gives priority to the values of the majority group, which are embedded in widely accepted cultural ideologies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Policies, laws, and procedures that reflect these values

may be subtly distorted in ways that enhance the disadvantage of minority groups and the advantage of the majority group. Thus, when a racial group and its members have been historically disadvantaged, the consequences are broad and severe, reproducing themselves across time (Jones, 1997).

Consistent with this perspective, statistics show that racial disparities in several key quality-of-life areas have stubbornly persisted over the years. For example, the median family income for Blacks is less than two-thirds that of Whites, a differential that has widened over the past two decades (Blank, 2001). Also, on several basic measures of health and well-being, the racial gap either has been maintained or in some cases (e.g., infant mortality) has widened substantially over the past 50 years (Jenkins, 2001). Furthermore, recent studies suggest that over their lifespans, Black and White patients receive unequal treatment from medical practitioners, resulting in less favorable health-related outcomes for Blacks (see Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2003). Steady trends toward residential integration that were observed from 1950 to 1970 have slowed in the South and stagnated in the North (Massey, 2001). Massey (2001) observed, "Either in absolute terms or in comparison to other groups, Blacks remain a very residentially segregated and spatially isolated people" (p. 403). Both cultural racism and institutional racism are subtle, difficult-to-detect processes that are at least partially responsible for these outcomes.

Like institutional and cultural racism, individual prejudice is also commonly manifested subtly, often without conscious awareness or intention. Many contemporary approaches to individual racism acknowledge the persistence of overt, intentional forms of racism but also consider the role of automatic or unconscious processes and indirect expressions of bias (McConahay, 1986; Sears, Henry, & Kosterman, 2000). We have explored the nature of Whites' racial attitudes to understand the duality between the generally expressed nonprejudicial views of Whites in contemporary U.S. society and the persistence of significant racial disparity and discrimination. Our work built upon the conceptual framework of Kovel (1970), who distinguished between dominative and aversive racism. Dominative racism is the "old-fashioned," blatant form. According to Kovel, the dominative racist is the "type who acts out bigoted beliefs—he represents the open flame of racial hatred" (p. 54). Aversive racists, in comparison, sympathize with victims of past injustice, support the principle of racial equality, and regard themselves as nonprejudiced, but, at the same time, possess negative feelings and beliefs about Blacks, which may be unconscious. Aversive racism is hypothesized to be qualitatively different than blatant, "old-fashioned," racism, is more indirect and subtle, and is presumed to characterize the racial attitudes of most well-educated and liberal Whites in the United States. Nevertheless, the consequences of aversive racism (e.g., the restriction of economic opportunity) are as significant and pernicious as those of the traditional, overt form (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986).

A critical aspect of the aversive racism framework is the conflict between Whites' denial of personal prejudice and underlying unconscious negative feelings toward, and beliefs about, Blacks. Because of current cultural values, most Whites have strong convictions concerning fairness, justice, and racial equality. However, because of a range of normal cognitive, motivational, and sociocultural processes that promote intergroup biases, most Whites also develop some negative feelings toward or beliefs about Blacks, of which they are unaware or from which they try to dissociate their nonprejudiced self-images. These negative feelings that aversive racists have toward Blacks do not reflect open hostility or hatred. Instead, aversive racists' reactions may involve discomfort, uneasiness, disgust, and sometimes fear. That is, they find Blacks "aversive," while at the same time finding any suggestion that they might be prejudiced "aversive" as well. Thus, aversive racism may involve *more positive reactions* to Whites than to Blacks, reflecting a pro-ingroup rather than an anti-outgroup orientation, thereby avoiding the stigma of overt bigotry while protecting a nonprejudiced self-image.

The negative feelings and beliefs that underlie aversive racism are hypothesized to be rooted in *normal*, often adaptive, psychological processes. These processes fundamentally involve the consequences of social categorization. People inherently categorize others into groups, typically in ways that delineate the "we's" from the "they's" (Hamilton & Trolie, 1986). The mere categorization of people into groups, even on the basis of arbitrary assignment, is sufficient to initiate (often spontaneously, according to Otten & Moskowitz, 2000) an overall evaluative bias, in which people categorized as members of one's own group are evaluated more favorably than are those perceived as members of another group (Brewer, 1979; Tajfel, 1970).

The aversive racism framework also helps to identify when discrimination against Blacks and other minority groups will or will not occur. Whereas old-fashioned racists exhibit a direct and overt pattern of discrimination, aversive racists' actions may appear more variable and inconsistent. Sometimes they discriminate (manifesting their negative feelings), and sometimes they do not (reflecting their egalitarian beliefs). Our research has provided a framework for understanding this pattern of discrimination.

Because aversive racists consciously recognize and endorse egalitarian values and because they truly aspire to be nonprejudiced, they will *not* discriminate in situations with strong social norms when discrimination would be obvious to others and to themselves. Specifically, when people are presented with a situation in which the normatively appropriate response is clear, in which right and wrong are clearly defined, aversive racists will not discriminate against Blacks. In these contexts, aversive racists will be especially motivated to avoid feelings, beliefs, and behaviors that could be associated with racist intent. Wrongdoing, which would directly threaten their nonprejudiced self-image, would be too costly. However, because aversive racists still possess feelings of uneasiness, these feelings will eventually

be expressed, but they will be expressed in subtle, indirect, and rationalizable ways. For instance, discrimination will occur in situations in which normative structure is weak, when the guidelines for appropriate behavior are vague, or when the basis for judgment is ambiguous or confusing. In addition, discrimination will occur when an aversive racist can justify or rationalize a negative response or a failure to respond favorably on the basis of some factor other than race. Under these circumstances, Whites unintentionally may engage in behaviors that ultimately harm Blacks but that allow Whites to maintain their self-image as nonprejudiced and that insulate them from recognizing that their behavior is not color blind. Frequently, this discrimination does not manifest itself in purposeful harm or injury, but rather in Whites' failure to help Blacks either in situations in which the failure to help can be attributed to factors other than race (e.g., the belief that someone else will intervene; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977; Saucier, Miller, & Doucet, 2005), or in the expression of particular positive responses to Whites without overtly negative actions toward Blacks (Gaertner et al., 1996). Indeed, one of the fundamental conclusions of the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (1968) over 35 years ago was that the disadvantaged status of Blacks was due, in part, to insufficient efforts of Whites to help Blacks, not to their efforts to harm them. This principle could likely be relevant to the inadequacy of the official responses to Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The subtlety of the contemporary expressions of institutional racism and individual biases may contribute in significant ways to the racial mistrust, particularly the distrust of Blacks for Whites that characterizes race relations within the United States (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002; Feagin & Sikes, 1994). Blacks have a pervasive distrust for Whites that is reflected in high levels of perceived discrimination and orientations toward basic social institutions (Dovidio et al., 2002). Blacks report distrust of government leaders (Earl & Penney, 2001; Shavers-Hornaday, Lynch, Burmeister, & Torner, 1997) and medical practitioners and researchers (Armstrong, Crum, Reiger, Bennett, & Edwards, 1999; Davis & Reid, 1999), as well as for authorities and policies in the areas of business and education (Phelps, Taylor, & Gerard, 2001). They also tend to perceive conspiracies by the government and Whites generally to harm Blacks (Crocker, Luhtanen, Broadnax, & Blaine, 1999), reflected for example in the belief that AIDS was purposefully created to infect Blacks.

At the same time, because of the absence of intention and awareness involved in much of contemporary institutional and individual racism, Whites may be not be sensitive to the extent of racial bias in the United States and particularly to their own expressions of bias (Dovidio et al., 2002). As a consequence, Whites and Blacks often express divergent views about their race relations. For instance, in a Gallup Poll (Gallup, 2002) over three-quarters (79%) of Whites reported that Blacks "have as good a chance as Whites" to "get any kind of job," but less than half (46%) of Blacks shared that view. Whereas the vast majority (69%) of Whites

perceived that Blacks were treated “the same as Whites,” the majority of Blacks (59%) reported that Blacks were treated worse than Whites.

In the next section we illustrate the role of three of the basic processes in contemporary racism—institutional racism, aversive racism, and racial mistrust—in the context of Hurricane Katrina. We acknowledge that old-fashioned, blatant racism still exists among Whites and that it continues to affect the lives and well-being of Black Americans. It may even have played a role in the consequences of Hurricane Katrina on Blacks in New Orleans. Nevertheless, we emphasize that understanding the subtle dynamics of race relations, rather than being preoccupied with assigning blame for intentional harm, may not only provide valuable insight into the events and responses associated with Hurricane Katrina but also help guide the development of new policies that can assist the residents of New Orleans and prevent disparate harm to Blacks more generally in the future.

Understanding Responses to Hurricane Katrina

What happened during and after Hurricane Katrina was determined not only by the present circumstances on the Gulf Coast but also by a history of discriminatory policies and practices, particularly in the New Orleans area, that created socioeconomic and consequent housing disparities along racial lines. In addition, although the actions of decision makers during Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath may have appeared “colorblind,” without particular sensitivity to the unique vulnerabilities of the Black population these actions were subtly biased and produced racially disparate consequences. Also, historical discrimination and contemporary institutional racism eroded the trust of Blacks in New Orleans for the government, which adversely influenced the effectiveness of interventions in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. In this section we therefore examine the influences of (a) historical discrimination and contemporary institutional racism, (b) subtle bias at the individual level, and (c) interracial distrust.

Historical Discrimination, Contemporary Institutional Racism, and Hurricane Katrina

The impact by Hurricane Katrina was catastrophic by all measures. Besides billions of dollars of damage and a premier city in the United States left largely in ruins, between 1,100 and 1,700 people died and thousands more are still unaccounted for (Burchfiel, 2006). In addition, Hurricane Katrina was particularly devastating for Blacks. The flooding caused by the hurricane was particularly damaging to Black neighborhoods, communities that were relatively uninsured against floods. Thus, many of the Blacks in New Orleans who survived but were displaced by Hurricane Katrina will not be able to afford to return to the city and to the areas where they once lived.

To understand what happened during Katrina and why it had such a disproportionate negative impact on Blacks, it is important to appreciate the local and national historical context that surrounded the disaster. One of the most significant legacies of slavery and historical discrimination in the United States is the pervasive racial disparity in wealth (Blank, 2001). The median family income for Whites in 1994 was \$33,600 but was only \$20,508 for Blacks. Blacks' incomes were only 62% of Whites' incomes. Moreover, when net worth is considered, weighing family financial assets and debts, the gap is even greater. In 1994, the median net worth for Whites was \$52,944 as compared to \$6,723 for Blacks. That is, Blacks' net worth was only 12% of Whites' net worth (Oliver & Shapiro, 2001).

Contemporary biases further contribute to racial disparities in income. Minority groups have disproportionate difficulty finding jobs as compared to majority groups: based on job audits across several countries, minority-group members have a 23.7 percent chance of being discriminated against when applying for any given job (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Even when Blacks find jobs, they are overrepresented in jobs with poor working conditions, such as shift work, long hours, repetitive tasks, physical dangers, and accident rates. They also have disproportionately low mobility out of such low-end jobs (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Institutional discrimination in the labor market only serves to increase discrepancies between minority group and majority group members. Discrepancies in the labor market lead to a disproportionate number of Blacks in positions of lower socioeconomic status.

Race and racial disparities are particularly relevant for understanding the impact of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. For example, in the context of Hurricane Katrina, fewer available resources meant that it may not have been as easy for Blacks, who were less likely to own cars, to leave the city. In addition, socioeconomic differences influenced the vulnerability of Blacks, relative to Whites, to the devastating consequences of Hurricane Katrina. Approximately one-third of the population in the New Orleans metropolitan area is Black, ranking it 11th in terms of percentage of Black population among over 300 major metropolitan areas in the United States (CensusScope, 2006). The largest proportion of Blacks is concentrated within the city limits, representing 68% of the population, many of whom lived in the most low-lying areas—those most vulnerable to Hurricane Katrina. In addition, New Orleans historically has been one of the cities with the largest racial disparities in income and wealth. It showed the fourth largest increase in racial disparity in income in recent years (Madden, 2000). The poverty rate in New Orleans has been almost twice the national rate, and a third of Blacks and half of the Black children in the city live below the poverty level (Hancock, 2005). This racial gap in income and wealth contributed significantly to the particular vulnerability of Blacks in New Orleans to Hurricane Katrina.

One consequence of racial disparities in wealth and income, which is exacerbated by contemporary housing discrimination, is the residential segregation of

Blacks. In general, more affluent residential areas in the United States are predominantly, if not virtually exclusively, White. Thus, access to housing in these areas requires either pre-existing wealth or access to substantial housing loans. As we noted earlier, the racial gap in wealth is even greater than the sizable income disparity (Blank, 2001; Madden, 2000). Moreover, in part due to their lower wealth and available assets, Blacks have more difficulty obtaining housing loans than do Whites. In 2001, 36% of Black applicants, compared to 16% of White applicants, were denied conventional home mortgage loans. However, even when controlling for financial status, Blacks are denied home loans at rates much greater than Whites. Among applicants who had incomes less than 50% of the income for the local area, Blacks were denied loans 42.7% of the time, whereas Whites were denied 29.6% of the time. Among the applicants who made more than 120% of the median income, Blacks were denied 19.6% of the time, whereas Whites were denied only 6.8% of the time (Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council, 2002).

Institutional policies, past and present, have further contributed to residential segregation of Blacks and Whites. According to Seitles (1996), federal and state governments have had large roles in creating and maintaining residential racial segregation. For example, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) employed practices that disadvantaged Blacks since it began in 1937. It used a practice called “red-lining” to determine risks associated with loans made to borrowers in specific neighborhoods. “Red-lining” involved rating neighborhoods such that the neighborhoods in the top two categories were White, stable, and in demand. The “high risk” categories involved Blacks. The third category was made up of working class neighborhoods near Black residences, and the fourth category was Black neighborhoods. As a result of this policy, most mortgages and home loans went to middle class White families, promoting the racial segregation of neighborhoods, particularly in urban areas. Further, the federal government used interstate highway and urban renewal programs to increase segregation (Seitles, 1996).

In addition to institutional discrimination rooted in historical practices, contemporary biases conspire to contribute further to residential segregation. Fischer and Massey (2004) found that callers identifiable as Black were systematically discriminated against relative to those identifiable as White in housing inquiries, controlling for the socioeconomic status of the caller. The primary exception to this effect was for Black neighborhoods. Blacks were more likely than Whites to gain access to areas that already had high concentrations of Blacks. Thus, institutional discrimination, along with individual discrimination, tends to deny Blacks access to the more affluent neighborhoods, which are much more readily available to Whites. Due to past and present institutional discrimination in housing and mortgage processes, neighborhoods are segregated and mortgages go to largely White neighborhoods, which only perpetuates the problem.

The history of racial disparities in income and wealth and the influence of institutional discrimination have had a significant influence on housing patterns in New Orleans. New Orleans currently ranks 29th out of 318 metropolitan areas examined in terms of the extent of neighborhood racial segregation (CensusScope, 2006), and the highest concentrations of Blacks have been in poorer areas. In addition, as Laura Bush observed, in New Orleans poor Black neighborhoods were on lower, undesirable, cheaper land that was particularly vulnerable to flooding. As a function of where they lived, when Hurricane Katrina hit, many Black people in New Orleans were already in a position to be disproportionately affected by the disaster. For example, HUD-funded public housing units above Feret Street West, which were occupied largely by Blacks, and New Orleans East were also on lower ground more vulnerable to flooding than higher, more desirable neighborhoods. Even areas that Blacks considered attractive locations within the city, such as New Orleans East and the Lower Ninth Ward, were at environmental risk. New Orleans East is home to middle income Blacks who left the urban center of New Orleans in the 1960s and 1970s to build affordable homes in this area. The homes were affordable because they were built on slabs and were located 2.5 to 4.0 feet below sea level. The Lower Ninth Ward is a neighborhood of primarily modest houses, often the location of choice of musicians and multi-generational Black families of the metropolitan area. It is situated in close proximity to an industrial canal, which posed particular health risks during the flood. This neighborhood was devastated by Hurricanes Betsy and Rita, as well as by Hurricane Katrina.

In summary, the result of the institutional discrimination in New Orleans as outlined here is multifaceted. Because of discriminatory housing and mortgage policies and practices, Blacks tended to live in more environmentally vulnerable areas of the city. The discrepancies in socioeconomic status were exacerbated by discrimination in the labor market, which on the whole prevented Blacks from gaining jobs, specifically ones of higher status, and prevented acquisition of material resources, such as personal cars, that would have enabled them to evacuate New Orleans for safer areas as Hurricane Katrina approached. When evacuation orders were announced, a disproportionate number of Blacks in the areas most at-risk lacked the resources to leave the city. "Many of them were people without automobiles," explained Marc Morial, former mayor of New Orleans and now the president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League. They were "people who couldn't afford a hotel room, who may have had no choice but to remain. And that means that the people who remain in New Orleans are disproportionately poor people, disproportionately African-American" (Ross, 2005). Past and recent institutional discrimination on the basis of race thus contributed to the particular vulnerability of the Black population of New Orleans to a disaster like Hurricane Katrina.

Subtle Bias and Response to Hurricane Katrina

The pattern of decision making, or lack of immediate responsiveness that characterized the official response in the aftermath of Katrina, also reflects the kinds of subtle biases associated with aversive racism. Given that Blacks were disproportionately affected by the storm and flooding, any sluggishness and disorganization on the part of government officials also disproportionately affected Black victims of the disaster. Michael Brown, then the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), learned about the starving crowds at the New Orleans Convention Center from news media, rather than through official means (CNN, 2005). In addition, no large-scale deliveries of supplies arrived at the Convention Center until midday on September 2nd, four days after Katrina hit (Callebs, Gupta, Lavendera, Lawrence, & Starr, 2005). In another example of poor government response, housing for evacuees was held up because of a notably slow bureaucratic process. Two weeks after Katrina, the Department of Veteran Affairs offered up 7,000 single-family homes owned by the government for the use of evacuees. The houses then went unused for three months because of paperwork problems in FEMA (ABC News, 2006). Such unhurried relief work on the part of the government disproportionately affected Blacks, because the victims of Katrina were disproportionately Black in the first place. This is an instance of institutional discrimination, since it disadvantaged a racial group, even if there was no race conscious intentionality on the part of the government.

In addition to the slow government response to the immediate needs of evacuees, the recovery process continues to be remarkably slow. Whole areas of New Orleans (particularly the poorer areas) have still not been made habitable. Demolition in the Lower Ninth Ward to remove houses that were uninhabitable since the hurricane did not begin until four months after the hurricane hit New Orleans (Nossiter, 2006). At the time, there was still no power or running water in these areas, which were primarily Black neighborhoods.

It was the responsibility of the individuals who made up the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA to respond and to make decisions in times of crisis such as that of Hurricane Katrina. As previously noted, one of the most common forms that individual discrimination takes is a failure to help or intervene rather than committing an intentional act of harm. In Hurricane Katrina, a swift, well-organized, large response was critically important but did not occur. Michael Chertoff, head of the Department of Homeland Security, acknowledged that FEMA was overwhelmed by Hurricane Katrina and responded poorly (Hau, 2005). Ultimately, the responsibility for such a response falls on the shoulders of individuals rather than institutions. Knowing this, Chertoff oversaw the resignation of Michael Brown due to FEMA's response.

It cannot be stressed enough that it would be unfair, given the evidence, to say that race was a conscious motivator in the government response. It is unreasonable to assert that individuals knowingly made decisions based on race, but research has shown that lack of empathy and perspective-taking may be the unintentional factors operating behind a failure to help, especially across group membership.

One of our early experiments (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977) demonstrated how subtle racism could have operated unintentionally amidst the initial confusion, both regarding the magnitude of the storm's impact and who had primary responsibility to respond among local, state, and national government agencies. As we indicated earlier, this confusion and ambiguity are precisely the circumstances that are most conducive to the influence of subtle biases. The scenario for the experiment was inspired by an incident in the mid-1960s in which 38 people witnessed the stabbing of a woman, Kitty Genovese, without a single bystander intervening to help. What accounted for this behavior? Feelings of responsibility play a key role (see Darley & Latané, 1968). If a person witnesses an emergency knowing that he or she is the only bystander, that person bears all of the responsibility for helping and, consequently, the likelihood of helping is high. In contrast, if a person witnesses an emergency but believes that there are several other potential helpers, then the responsibility for helping is shared. Moreover, if the person believes that someone else either will help or has already helped, the likelihood of that bystander taking action is significantly reduced.

We created a situation in the laboratory in which White participants witnessed a staged emergency involving a Black or White victim. We led some of our participants to believe that they would be the only witness to this emergency, while we led others to believe that there would be two other White people who also witnessed the emergency. These potential bystanders were isolated from one another in their own cubicles and thus they could not easily communicate with each other. We predicted that, because aversive racists do not act in overtly bigoted ways, Whites would not discriminate when they were the only witness and the responsibility for helping was clearly focused on them. However, we anticipated that Whites would be much less helpful and would respond slower to Black than to White victims when they had a justifiable excuse not to get involved, such as the belief that one of the *other* witnesses would take responsibility for helping.

The results supported these predictions. When White participants believed that they were the only witness, they helped both White and Black victims very frequently (over 85% of the time) and equally quickly. There was no evidence of blatant racism. In contrast, when they thought there were other witnesses and they could rationalize not helping rapidly on the basis of some factor other than race (e.g., the presence of other bystanders), they helped Black victims more slowly and only half as often as White victims (37.5% vs. 75%).

Another feature of this study that is also revealing of what may have happened during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina involved the monitoring of our

participants' heart rates just prior to and following the emergency. Within the first 10 seconds after the emergency, participants who witnessed the emergency alone showed equivalent patterns of heart-rate escalation for both the Black and the White victims. Those who witnessed the emergency believing other bystanders were present showed heart-rate escalation in response to the emergency involving the White victim. In contrast, when the victim was Black and participants believed other bystanders were present, participants' heart rates decelerated within the initial 10-second period following the emergency.

However, the differing pattern of heart-rate responsiveness following the emergency does not necessarily reflect differential concern for the well-being of the Black and White victims in the presence of other bystanders. Rather, heart-rate escalation has been linked to a preparation for action, whereas deceleration is associated with the intake of information from the environment (Lacey & Lacey, 1974). Thus, amidst the confusion during the aftermath of the emergency, the initial orientation of our participants was to take action when the victim was White. For Black victims, however, the initial orientation was take in and process information about what needs to be done—rather than rapidly doing something to alleviate the problem.

Recently, Saucier et al. (2005) performed a meta-analysis of 31 experiments conducted over the past 40 years that examined race and Whites' helping behavior, specifically testing implications of the aversive racism framework. Across these studies, they found "that less help was offered to Blacks relative to Whites when helpers had more attributional cues available for rationalizing the failure to help with reasons having nothing to do with race" (p. 10). Moreover, the pattern of discrimination against Blacks remained stable over time; the effect for year of study was nonsignificant. Saucier et al. summarized, "The results of this meta-analysis generally supported the predictions for aversive racism theory" (p. 13), and concluded, "Is racism still a problem in our society? . . . Racism and expression of discrimination against Blacks can and will exist as long as individuals harbor negativity toward Blacks at the implicit level" (p. 14).

During an emergency such as that presented by Hurricane Katrina, this differential pattern of initial, visceral responsiveness as well as the observed pattern of actual intervention for Black and White victims in our experiment suggest some unintentional processes by which local, state, and national authorities may well have responded quite differently than they did in the aftermath of the storm—had New Orleans been inhabited by White rather than by Black citizens.

The Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina (2006) identified several junctures where a lack of decisiveness to intervene had tragic consequences, particularly for Blacks, in New Orleans. The reports states, "The failure of local, state, and federal governments to respond more effectively to Katrina—which had been predicted for many years, and forecast with startling accuracy for 5 days—demonstrates that

whatever improvements have been made to our capacity to respond to natural or man-made disasters, four and half years after 9/11, we are still not fully prepared” (p. 1). Despite adequate warning 56 hours before landfall, orders for mandatory evacuation of the most vulnerable areas—those inhabited disproportionately by Blacks—were delayed until 19 hours before landfall. The report concluded, “The failure to order timely mandatory evacuation led to deaths, thousands of dangerous rescues, and horrible conditions for those who remained” (p. 2). In addition, investigation found that subsequent decisions at the highest levels of government, which showed a lack of responsiveness to the events as they transpired, had substantial consequences: “The White House failed to de-conflict varying damage assessments and discounted information that ultimately proved accurate” (p. 3). It is under conditions such as conflicting information and ambiguity (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000; Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2002) that aversive racism influences decision making in ways that ultimately disadvantage Blacks. Further, consistent with the aversive racism framework, the report of the Bipartisan Committee contrasted the response of decision makers at more remote sites with those in positions of immediate responsibility. The report observed, “The Select Committee identified failures at all levels of government that significantly undermined and detracted from the heroic efforts of first-responders . . . those who didn’t flinch, who took matters into their own hands when bureaucratic inertia was causing death, injury, and suffering” (p. 1).

Racial Distrust and Consequences for Hurricane Katrina

We have discussed the mistrust that Blacks generally feel for Whites and the government (Crocker et al., 1999; Dovidio et al., 2002) and the inconsistencies in how Blacks and Whites see race relations in the United States (Gallup, 2002). Racial tensions in New Orleans were particularly high before Hurricane Katrina hit and continue to be high in the aftermath. New Orleans’ history of racial tension was reflected in Blacks’ more negative attitudes than Whites’ toward the police, particularly among those for whom their race was a more important part of their identity (Howell, Perry, & Vile, 2004). Hancock (2005) reported, “The tensions of race have always defined the best and worst of this city . . . many residents say that their future hinges on bridging race and class divisions that many say had gotten deeper, uglier, and angrier in the months before the storm.” At the beginning of 2005, three White bouncers of a nightclub suffocated a young Black man to death during a New Year’s celebration. This event escalated Black anger, distrust, and guardedness. Glanton (2005) described the racial tensions in New Orleans in the months before Katrina hit. In an interview with Glanton, Rev. Norwood Thompson, president of the New Orleans chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, remarked, “New Orleans is still part of the deep South, and what happened that night was pure racism. Even though we have a Black mayor and a Black

police chief, racism has been very flagrant. African-Americans have been asleep, but now we are in an uproar.” A month later a Black teenager was killed “in a hail of more than 100 bullets” fired by Jefferson County police officers (Treadway, 2005).

One possible consequence of this racial divide in New Orleans is the lack of coordination and responsiveness that characterized evacuation efforts for Hurricane Katrina. The Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina (2006) noted, “Two of Louisiana’s most populous localities, New Orleans and Jefferson Parish, declared mandatory evacuations late or not at all” (p. 103). These areas have particularly large Black populations. Although over a million Louisiana residents evacuated their homes in private vehicles, the Select Bipartisan Committee also found “that thousands of residents, particularly in New Orleans, did not evacuate or seek shelter, but remained in their homes” (p. 64). It is likely that Blacks’ distrust of government contributed to their decisions not to heed the warnings to evacuate. Moreover, the government’s decision not to make evacuation mandatory in some of the most vulnerable areas, which had substantial Black populations, permitted this hesitancy to have disastrous consequences. By the time the severity of the crisis became clear to many of the Black residents of New Orleans, they were unable to evacuate the areas successfully because they did not own cars and public transportation and volunteer transportation were too limited at the time.

The history of racial discrimination and disparity in New Orleans went hand and hand with deep racial distrust. Indeed, in New Orleans there has been a strong history of a connection between racism and flooding. One of the most common oversights in the dispute over Katrina is this history of racism in New Orleans. It is crucial to understand how history led New Orleans to its precedent of racial mistrust that existed long before the hurricane and the flooding. In 1927, with floodwaters all along the Mississippi River rising, the government dynamited a levee south of New Orleans to relieve pressure on the city proper, flooding land owned by rural and poor farmers. Most of those affected were never compensated, despite government promises (Leopold, 2005). In 1965, when Hurricane Betsy hit New Orleans, Black communities were once again flooded and there were rumors that again, the levee had been breached intentionally (Ross, 2005). These historical factors are too important to be overlooked or underestimated. With a precedent of the government intentionally breaching levees followed by rumors that it had happened again in 1965, there were strong and deeply rooted feelings of mistrust among the Black community in New Orleans. When mass destruction and flooding occurred in New Orleans again in 2005, many in the Black community questioned the government’s willingness to respond. Racial mistrust is only compounded by the other historical factors and discrimination that have led to racial discrepancies in housing, labor, socioeconomic status, and education.

In addition, actions during the crisis caused by Hurricane Katrina have fueled racial suspicions and exacerbated racial mistrust. For instance, on September 1, 2005, 3 days after Hurricane Katrina struck, thousands of evacuees who were fleeing the wretched conditions of the city and the Convention Center marched toward a bridge that would take them to safety. They were met at the bridge by the Gretna Police, who brandished rifles. The evacuees recount hearing gunshots (Hamilton, 2006) as the police prevented them from crossing the bridge and turned them back to the city. Two visitors trying to escape New Orleans wrote about their experiences: "We questioned why we couldn't cross the bridge anyway, especially as there was little traffic on the 6-lane highway. They responded that the West Bank was not going to become New Orleans and there would be no Superdome in their city" (Bradshaw & Slonsky, 2005). The police chief explained that "his town . . . feared for its safety from a tide of evacuees" (Sharokman, 2005). As Sharokman (2005) observed, "And because most of the evacuees were Black and most of Gretna is White, the episode has stirred charges of racism" (p. 1A). This incident remains a symbol of racism and the fundamental racial divide in New Orleans. Six months after the incident, Rev. Jesse Jackson, who organized the protest, led a demonstration by "a celebrity-studded, almost exclusively African-American crowd of thousands who marched across the bridge, which they consider a symbol of injustice in post-Katrina New Orleans" (Donze & Filosa, 2006, Metro, p. 1).

Given a national context in which Blacks distrust Whites and the government (e.g., Earl & Penny, 2001), in combination with clearly differential outcomes for majority and minority group members (e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), and a history of racism and flooding specifically in New Orleans, it is not surprising that racial distrust played a role in response to Hurricane Katrina and the recovery process. Hancock (2005) described the deepened distrust of Blacks in the aftermath of Katrina. He found that many Blacks felt the events were "too coincidental," and wrote, "There are other, more sinister conspiracy theories. Many Black residents believe that the Ninth Ward and other Black neighborhoods were deliberately flooded in order to save the tourist areas and White business areas."

This distrust has been fueled by questions about the recovery and rebuilding efforts. Efforts to return Blacks to their communities have appeared to be particularly slow. Three months after Hurricane Katrina hit landfall, only 16% of the trailers and other forms of temporary housing requested, which would have primarily benefited those originally from low-income housing areas, had been delivered (Hancock, 2005). Despite similar damage, residents of Lakeview, a predominantly White community, were allowed to "look and leave," a key step in the recovery process, in which residents are allowed to return temporarily to their homes during the day, long before residents in the primarily Black area of the Lower Ninth Ward were given this opportunity, ostensibly because the neighborhood was still flooded

(Scott, 2005). In fact, bulldozing of the Lower Ninth Ward was commissioned prior to informing residents, and it took the action of local activists to stop the bulldozing plan.

Government actions in the rebuilding process have further fueled Blacks' perceptions of conspiracies against them. Hancock (2005) observed, "In Katrina's aftermath, rumors circulated that the area [the Ninth Ward] would be bulldozed and returned to swampland or handed to rich, White developers." The Mayor's Bring New Orleans Back Commission explicitly proposed "greenspaces" in New Orleans East, which would displace residents in this traditionally Black neighborhood, and recommended turning over historically Black neighborhoods and public housing areas not substantially damaged by Hurricane Katrina to White urban developers. Professor John Logan, a sociologist who studied the impact of Hurricane Katrina, concluded that New Orleans could lose up to 80% of its Black population if people displaced by the storm are not allowed to return to live in their neighborhoods (Smith, 2006). It is not surprising that three-quarters of Blacks reported feeling anger in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Saad, 2005).

Policy Implications

Although much of the public debate about the devastating consequences of Hurricane Katrina, particularly for Blacks in New Orleans, has focused on whether racism was involved, we have attempted to show that a focus on old-fashioned, overt racism likely misrepresents the dynamics in the situation. Overt racism might have played a role, but subtle and unintentional biases seemed to be a much more significant influence. Moreover, the actions of Whites and Blacks both contributed to varying degrees and in various ways to the lack of responsiveness that characterized the preparation for the hurricane and the response in its aftermath. Specifically, three key processes that we identified are institutional racism, subtle contemporary prejudice, and racial distrust. We further propose that understanding how these forces shaped the way both Whites and Blacks responded to the threat and damage of Hurricane Katrina can help to guide policies that can facilitate effective recovery and enhance emergency efforts in the future.

One of the most basic implications of our analysis is that the circumstances of Blacks in New Orleans at the time Hurricane Katrina made landfall, which made them especially vulnerable to flooding and which contributed to racial distrust, were the result of historical discrimination and institutional racism. Because race was central to these circumstances, interventions to address the consequences of Hurricane Katrina and policies for future emergency situations cannot be colorblind. Effective interventions and policies should consider the importance of historical and contemporary racial disparities to the susceptibility of different communities to harm, how racial biases may unintentionally influence the actions of decision makers, and how race relations might influence the responses

of vulnerable groups to efforts to help. That is, the processes related to how New Orleans got to this point need to be considered in a plan to reverse the devastating consequences of these processes. We illustrate the application of these principles with a recovery strategy that could meet these requirements.

It is important to establish trust for the recovery effort. Given Blacks' mistrust for the government (Dovidio et al., 2002), some other more-trusted agency should be chosen to work directly with citizens of New Orleans, with government sponsorship. That is, while the government may provide financial and logistical support, other organizations may be employed to deliver the assistance. For example, neighborhood coalitions could be formed to meet this need and other organizations that are already trusted in the community can provide additional assistance. To facilitate the development of interracial trust and improve race relations, as outlined in the Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998), these coalitions should include members of both Black and White communities. The efforts of Blacks and Whites should involve personal interactions in which they are equal-status partners in cooperative ventures with the support of both communities and the government (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003).

In addition, the community coalitions with government support would then be responsible for meeting the needs of storm victims not simply by giving money, which could foster the dependency of residents on outside assistance, but by encouraging the autonomy and agency of the storm victims themselves. For instance, rebuilding programs might recruit members of the community as apprentices who could acquire skills that would enable them to help others in the community in the future. By addressing specific problems that are common among storm victims, it would be possible to get the community members back on their feet more quickly and effectively.

These skills that are acquired can provide either material assistance, such as carpentry, or psychological help, such as social support, and information for appropriate referrals. Besides the extensive damage to property, Hurricane Katrina will have long-term adverse effects on victims' mental and physical health. A recent report (Dewan, 2006) found that among storm victims, more than 50% of female caregivers scored "very low" on mental health screening exams, showing signs of anxiety and depression in particular. Children are exhibiting symptoms of behavioral and anxiety problems as well. Among children, 34% have asthma as compared to 25% of the rest of the population and many of these children have gone without prescription medication at some point since Katrina. Among adult victims, 50% have some kind of chronic condition like diabetes, high blood pressure, or cancer. Given these statistics, it is critical to provide access to medical and mental health clinics. However, a 2001 Surgeon General's report has shown that mistrust of such clinics is prevalent among Black communities. We suggest establishing a community council to help run the clinics and educate the communities about services being offered to bolster trust.

Other problems that need to be addressed are those of jobs and housing. Many Katrina evacuees are currently fighting eviction from landlords who want to renovate and raise prices (Kunzelman, 2006). In addition, evacuees may not have the skills that they need to get jobs. Therefore, we propose that the recovery effort involve job training, job placement, and housing placement programs. To counteract the past segregation and discrimination that Blacks experienced, it would be important for such programs to work to integrate job environments and facilitate voluntary integration of neighborhoods. Because of the community organizations, such intentional integration would be possible, since members of both Black and White communities would both be responsible for training and placement.

Another problem that many evacuees have faced is that their children have missed significant amounts of school (Dewan, 2006). Missing school only exacerbates the effects of educational discrimination that many children of color face, so it is critical for the children to catch up in school. This can be accomplished through individual support, such as tutoring, or more general efforts, such as extending the school year and expanding day care programs. Children can go to day care while their parents are at work and receive tutoring if they have missed significant school time. Members of the community can volunteer to provide day care and to tutor. Since the program would be run through the community, parents would not have the added stress of worrying about their children while they are at work, and children would have the opportunity to continue with their schoolwork. Although it will involve added community expense, extending the school year will help students compensate for time and opportunities lost while schools were closed, emphasize the priority of education, and reduce the cost of supervision of school-age children in the summer for parents directly.

Programs addressing needs such as health care, job training and placement, housing, and childcare are critical in the recovery process, but the process may be overwhelming for many individuals who are trying to reestablish themselves. To address this, we propose a mentorship or a sponsorship program where people who are in the early stages of recovery are paired up with members of the community who have been through the process already and can provide support and advice. As people move through the process, they can then be in a position to mentor others. Thus, efforts for recovery need to consider explicitly the particular needs of victims, recognizing the historical legacy of racial biases and the potential for contemporary subtle racial bias, and addressing these needs with race-sensitive policies.

To some extent, neighborhood associations and charitable community organizations are already carrying out many of the same strategies that we suggest. For example, Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) is helping residents recover financially from Hurricane Katrina and return to their neighborhoods by cleaning out and gutting homes in low income neighborhoods to reduce costs for homeowners. ACORN also holds regular housing workshops

to provide assistance with buying or building a home, getting rehabilitation loans, applying for state aid, carrying out FEMA appeals, removing lead contamination, and dealing with displacement from public housing (ACORN, 2006). Another nonprofit group, Cityworks, is cataloguing the efforts of individual neighborhood associations in an attempt to assess what has been done and what resources these neighborhood associations still need. Cityworks, along with New Orleans neighborhood associations and other nonprofit and governmental groups, recently organized a "Festival of Neighborhoods," which was aimed at helping people rebuilding from Katrina. Many of these organizations set up booths with information, resources, and helpful items like fly and mice strips (Bazile, 2006).

In summary, the events in New Orleans related to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath illustrate the importance of understanding how historical race relations and subtle and institutional racial bias can significantly influence what types of efforts and policies can be effective for providing people the assistance they need. Without a foundation of trust, formal government assistance programs may be met with suspicion and resistance, compromising their effectiveness. As Nadler (2002; see also Nadler & Halabi, 2006) noted, low power groups may resist offers of help, even if it provides valuable material benefit, if it is perceived as reinforcing the control of the high power group. Thus, volunteer groups and other nongovernmental agencies are particularly important in the rebuilding of New Orleans.

Conclusions

Even if overt discrimination may not have played a role in the government's response to Hurricane Katrina, the fact that Blacks in New Orleans were disproportionately affected by the disaster suggests that other, more subtle processes were at work. These processes included contemporary personal prejudice, past and present institutional discrimination, and cultural racism. In addition, these processes combined to create a climate of racial distrust that served as a backdrop for Katrina's landfall. Although it is impossible to go back and change the way Hurricane Katrina was handled initially, it is crucial that researchers, government agencies, and people in positions of power learn from what happened there and improve the recovery still in process as well as future disaster and recovery efforts.

It is also critical to recognize that institutional and subtle forms of racism, and even blatant racism, are not simply historical events but are also contemporary influences. Racial biases are a formidable challenge in the rebuilding of New Orleans. Institutional racism can take new forms, with apparently egalitarian policies having adverse impact on race relations and opportunities for Blacks in the city. For example, the government has further damaged its relationship with the Black community in New Orleans by planning to tear down 5,000 apartments in public housing and to replace them with mixed-income housing (Quigley, 2006). Although support

for this likely more integrated housing seems to be a well-meaning and positive step toward racial harmony, it would drastically reduce the amount of low-income housing in New Orleans and displace a large number of Black residents from their homes and, ultimately, from the city. Many of these apartments are part of buildings that are repairable, like the Lafitte complex near the Faubourg Tremé (Elie, 2006). Displaced residents have filed a lawsuit against local and federal housing agencies, saying that the agencies are keeping low-income Black families from returning to their homes, which violates their civil rights (Filosa, 2006b). In this case, what government officials may have thought was a positive step toward integration may actually push or keep Blacks out of New Orleans.

The recovery of public education in New Orleans has also been controversial. All but four of the city's 128 public schools have been converted to charter schools or taken over by state agencies. Although some residents find the charter school system progressive, others are unhappy. For example, Louella Givens, New Orleans' representative to the state's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, has expressed concern about the amount of input communities will be able to have on how their schools are run. Other residents believe that the charter school system will result in more inequality (Filosa, 2006a). Thus, the reconstruction of New Orleans illustrates the ways that apparently well-intentioned efforts and government policies can alienate Blacks, limit their opportunities for housing, and mute their voice in key institutions such as their schools. Without full consideration of the long-term consequences of these actions, these efforts can enable others with blatant racial motivations to exclude Blacks physically, politically, and psychologically from the future of New Orleans.

Hurricane Katrina could have been and still can be a means for positive change in New Orleans. It has created a turning point, where either racism can be eradicated or an unfair history can be repeated. To this point, there have been mixed results in New Orleans. Since Katrina, there has been a wave of activism in the city, indicating that there is hope for a positive change (Bazile, 2006). Nevertheless, problems in housing and education have further damaged the government's image (e.g., Elie, 2006).

More generally, after almost 250 years of racial inequality in the United States, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which disproportionately affected the lives of Black citizens, could serve as a catalyst for leaders and policy makers in the United States to commit themselves fully to addressing institutional and individual forms of racism that continue to harm and restrict opportunities for millions of citizens. If the United States is serious about eradicating racism and its consequences, it is important to learn more about the dynamics of racial attitudes and their underlying cognitive, emotional, and developmental processes. Moreover, it is important that policy makers be made aware of these advances and incorporate them directly into policy formulations. Thus, in addition to providing the financial support that is necessary to address the immediate needs of victims of Hurricane Katrina, it is

also important to invest substantially, in terms of enhanced research funding, to make the elimination of racism a national priority. Long-term national investments to understand the basic processes of racism and discrimination and to facilitate partnerships between scholars and policy makers can be critical in combating racism, which can bring racial groups in the United States closer together rather than pushing them further apart.

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KRISTIN E. HENKEL is pursuing her Ph.D. in social psychology at the University of Connecticut. Her current research interests are in stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. She is a National Institute of Mental Health Fellow in the Social Processes of AIDS Training Program supported by grant T32 MH074387.

JOHN F. DOVIDIO is professor of Psychology at the University of Connecticut. His research interests in social psychology are in stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination; social power and nonverbal communication; and altruism and helping. He is the editor of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology–Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes*.

SAMUEL L. GAERTNER is professor of Psychology at the University of Delaware. His research interests involve intergroup relations, with a primary focus on reducing prejudice, discrimination and racism. He has served on the Council of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) and on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, and *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*. He and John Dovidio shared SPSSI's Gordon Allport Intergroup Relations Prize in 1985 and in 1998 and the Kurt Lewin Award in 2004.