

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

After Katrina: A Second Generation of Books

(1) *The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe*, by David L. Brunnsma, David Overfelt, and J. Steven Picou, eds. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2007. 288 pp. \$29.95

(2) *Through the Eye of Katrina: Social Justice in the United States*, by Kristin A. Bates and Richelle S. Swan, eds. Carolina Academic Press, Durham, NC, 2007. 440 pp. \$40.00

(3) *Racing the Storm: Racial Implications and Lessons Learned from Hurricane Katrina*, by Hillary Potter, ed. Lexington Books, Lanham, MD, 2007. 320 pp. \$25.46

For 2 years after Hurricane Katrina left a city and a region in tatters, most writing on the storm consisted of journalistic description and critical essays. The most sociologically relevant of the few book-length works included three collected volumes, published between late 2005 and early fall 2006: *Katrina: Rights and Responsibilities*, edited by John Brown Childs; *After the Storm: Black Intellectuals Explore the Meaning of Hurricane Katrina*, edited by David Dante Troutt; and *There Is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina*, edited by Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires. These anthologies pulled together the small amounts of available information and their primary contribution was to frame elements of the disaster with historical background and political interpretation. These volumes from the first generation helped to contextualize the events and carry us over to the current period.

Now, in the third year since Katrina made landfall, we are witnessing the emergence of a body of social scientific scholarship that is based on data and draws more systematically from theory and literature. This second generation of sense making is the beginning of in-depth analysis of a wider range of topics related to the storm, with greater disciplinary accountability.

I review three of these most recent works from 2007 here. Like their predecessors, all are collected volumes. *The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe*, edited by David Brunnsma, David Overfelt, and J. Steven Picou is framed as a sociology of disaster text, although not all of the pieces are written by disaster scholars. *Through the Eye of Katrina: Social*

Justice in the United States, edited by Kristin A. Bates and Richelle S. Swan, is organized around inequality, specifically racial and economic (in)justice. And *Racing the Storm: Racial Implications and Lessons Learned from Hurricane Katrina*, edited by Hillary Potter, focuses on the racialized dimensions of the causes and effects of the disaster. Chapters in *The Sociology of Katrina* and *Racing the Storm* are primarily authored by sociologists, whereas *Through the Eye of Katrina* is more interdisciplinary, with just over half of the authors coming from the field of Sociology (many from Criminology and Justice Studies).

The current volumes benefit, to varying degrees, from the data collection and research the additional year has brought, as well as the ability to address outcomes and implications beyond the immediate aftermath. These similarities notwithstanding, the texts are different, and in some ways complement each other: *The Sociology of Katrina* is a data- and theory-driven collection, exhibiting the best of what sociology has to offer; *Through the Eye of Katrina* contributes an important, explicit focus on justice, equity, and resistance that is missing from the former; and *Racing the Storm* examines a variety of different issues from the premise that race is at their center. I will describe each volume in turn.

In the “Introduction” to *The Sociology of Katrina*, J. Steven Picou and Brent K. Marshall propose that Katrina requires nothing less than a “paradigm shift in disaster research and a reorientation and redirection of important themes throughout the broader discipline of sociology” (p. 1). Claiming that as an exceptional disaster, the “Katrina difference” (p. 4) demands an exceptional sociology, Picou and Marshall, supported by Kai Erikson’s “Forward,” John Barnshaw and Joseph Trainor’s chapter “Race, Class, and Capital amidst the Hurricane Katrina Diaspora,” and Lee Clarke’s “Postscript,” make a compelling case for the need for new disaster typologies. They move beyond applying disaster sociology to Katrina and use Katrina to begin to reimagine disaster sociology. Together this cluster constitutes one of the most innovative contributions of the book.

The rest of the chapters unfold as a more traditional examination of various issues related to the storm, in abbreviated journal article format. Taken together, their strength lies in their methodological and theoretical diversity, and, in about half of the selections, in their sociological rigor. While containing more qualitative than quantitative studies, both approaches are represented. More interesting, however, is the range of area studies (militarism, criminology, immigration, political sociology, medical sociology, organizations, media studies, culture, urban planning, and education) and theoretical frameworks (network analysis, comparative-historical analysis, social capital, and ecological-symbolic, to name just a few). Some of the chapters offer sociological substance to the most controversial and now iconic public issues related to the storm, and their juxtaposition provides complexity when authors come to different conclusions.

For example, two articles address the question why so many New Orleanians did not evacuate: Timothy J. Haney, James R. Elliot, and Elizabeth Fussell's "Families and Hurricane Response: Evacuation, Separation, and the Emotional Toll of Hurricane Katrina" and John Barnshaw and Joseph Trainor's "Race, Class, and Capital amidst the Hurricane Katrina Diaspora." Two others explore the question of looting: Russell R. Dynes and Havidan Rodriguez's "Finding and Framing Katrina: The Social Construction of Disaster" and Kelly Frailing and Dee Wood Harper's "Crime and Hurricanes in New Orleans."

Other articles establish newer, important conceptual terrain by identifying and framing emergent problems, such as the militarization of disaster management in Kathleen Tierney and Christine Bevc's "Disaster as War: Militarism and the Social Construction of Disaster in New Orleans," and the structural origins of New Orleans' unique culture and the subsequent implications for planning and reconstruction in George E. Capowich and Marcus M. Kondkar's "Rebuilding New Orleans Neighborhoods after Hurricane Katrina: Toward a Theory of Social Structure and Cultural Creativity." This work is quite important, and I imagine these chapters will have lasting significance.

Another source of diversity in the volume is the degree to which the chapters are developed. Some have sophisticated theoretical frameworks but little data, and others are primarily descriptive, with little analytic dimension. While this makes the volume uneven and many of the chapters feel like proposals for longer works, I also found the variation refreshing; there will be something here for readers with strong preferences in either direction.

Despite the range of subjects and approaches, none are steeped in contemporary racial theory, whether racial formation theory, critical race theory, critical legal studies, or critical whiteness studies. While several of the pieces center race—in particular, Barnshaw and Trainor's chapter, and Katharine M. Donato, Nicole Trujillo-Pagán, Carl L. Bankston, III, and Audrey Singer's "Reconstructing New Orleans after Katrina: The Emergence of an Immigrant Labor Market"—and many more necessarily include race as a variable because of the demographics of New Orleans, none benefit from these theoretical traditions. Because of the crucial importance of race in the construction and impact of this disaster, the lack of this perspective is regretful.

The other two volumes, *Through the Eye of Katrina* and *Racing the Storm*, take a step in this direction. Both focus on racial and economic inequality, and both have as their premise that structural racism and poverty are the context of the disaster. Each collection contains chapters which identify some of the current racial theories listed above. At the same time, neither is as theoretically developed as I would have hoped, and neither uses the opportunity of the Katrina events to advance race theory. Instead, in more standard form, the authors analyze elements of the disaster through the lens of the sociology of race.

Through the Eye of Katrina's inequality theme links chapters written on topics from the prison industrial complex, to voter disenfranchisement, to human rights. Together these selections contextualize Katrina in the larger terrain of power contestation and social struggle. The editors describe a primary motive for the volume to be the development of a text that will help students and others who have the "strong tendency to see social problems as individual-level dilemmas" (p. 4) reframe the events preceding and following the storm in structural terms. It is designed with this goal in mind, and reads as an introduction and overview to social problems, with Katrina as a case study.

Some sociologists may find the interdisciplinary approach of *Through the Eye of Katrina* unsatisfying, and some of the chapters do read like essays from the earlier anthologies, which is in part the cost of the undergraduate orientation. In addition to the importance of its justice studies focus, however, I found at least a third of the chapters substantively strong and useful. When taken together, the cluster written by Communications scholars offers an introduction to some of their disciplinary tools, such as discreditation and rhetorical strategies of unity and difference. Interesting claims from these pieces include Kenneth Lachlan, Patric R. Spence, and Christine Eith's assertion, in "Access to Mediated Emergency Messages: Differences in Crisis Knowledge across Age, Race, and Socioeconomic Status," that a class-based knowledge gap (in terms of information access such as evacuation warnings) is reinforced by the historical fact that marginalized people tend to mistrust information once they get it. This insight is a useful addition to the two chapters on evacuation in *The Sociology of Katrina*. Similarly, Lisa Foster compares what she calls "rhetorics of displacement" (p. 300) between Katrina and the arguably more damaging cutbacks in public housing policy in the last 15 years, in order to build an hypothesis about why the former precipitated more social movement activity.

Despite my own interdisciplinary tendencies and biases, I did find the strongest selections in *Through the Eye of Katrina* to be the most sociological: "Katrina's Latinos: Vulnerability and Disasters in Relief and Recovery" by Nicole Trujillo-Pagán, and "From Invisibility to Hypervisibility: The Complexity of Race, Survival, and Resiliency for Vietnamese-American Community in Eastern New Orleans" by Karen J. Leong, Christopher Airriess, Angela Chia-Chen Chen, Verna Keith, Wei Li, Ying Wang, and Karen Adams. They are companion pieces, presenting some of the most substantial documentation of New Orleans communities that exist outside of a black-white paradigm to have been published since the hurricane. Another virtue is that Leong and colleagues' chapter, together with David Leonard's "George Bush Does Not Care about Black People: Hip-Hop and the Struggle for Katrina Justice," avoid reducing the experience of Katrina to oppression, by documenting resistance and showing that "marginalized communities often possess distinct forms of capital . . . and

demand[ing] historical specificity when seeking to understand community resiliency” (Leong et al. 2007:171). Leonard’s overview of the Hip-Hop response to the disaster, as well as Terence Check’s analysis of New Orleanian Congressional testimony from 2005 provide data I have not found in other scholarly sources.

Racing the Storm can be located between *The Sociology of Katrina* and *Through the Eye of Katrina* on a sociological spectrum, both by the disciplinary affiliation of most of its authors and by the classical theories they employ; for example, social identity theory versus attribution theory in “Making Sense of a Hurricane: Social Identity and Attribution Explanations of Race-Related Differences in Katrina Disaster Response,” and ecological theory versus political economy theory in “Protect or Neglect? Social Structure, Decision Making, and the Risk of Living in African American Places in New Orleans.” In chapter style, *Racing the Storm* more resembles *Through the Eye of Katrina*, whereas *The Sociology of Katrina* reads more like a collection of mini journal articles. *Racing the Storm* also shares with *Through the Eye of Katrina* the more explicit privileging of race and justice concerns.

While most Katrina volumes are organized chronologically—roughly before, during, and after the storm—*Racing the Storm* is divided thematically. It has three sections: Perception and Typecasting; Culture and Community; and Citizenship, Politics, and Government Priorities. Part I is largely social psychological, and the articles demonstrate that race colors worldview and experience. Part II is less unified, though it features a particularly strong chapter on the relationship between culture and structure, in which Susan C. Pearce argues for the historic relationship between “the musician and the physical built environment” (p. 128) in “Saxophones, Trumpets, and Hurricanes: The Cultural Restructuring of New Orleans.” This piece complements Capowich and Kondkar’s related culture/structure analysis in *The Sociology of Katrina*. Part III contributes to the growing body of criticism of what Naomi Klein calls “disaster capitalism,” in offering three overlapping chapters on militarism and privatization. This section is the strongest contribution of the volume, especially Ganesh K. Trichur’s “Spectacular Privatizations: Perceptions and Lessons from Privatization of Warfare and the Privatization of Disaster.”

Taken together, the three new volumes provide a map of social scientific research on Hurricane Katrina to date. Issue identification and framing is similar across the anthologies, with key subjects and arguments appearing in all three works. As a canon emerges, the omissions become apparent too, and are as patterned and consistent as the defining themes. The first striking absence is gender and/or women. Not a single chapter in all three volumes mentions either, except in a list of variables. The second is documentation of grassroots response in general and of local social movement activity in particular. While a few

chapters characterize volunteer efforts, and a few others describe forms of organized resistance (such as local and national Hip-Hop), none explore local grassroots movement activity aside from passing references to the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), a national organization with a strong New Orleans chapter. Finally, all three volumes almost exclusively focus on New Orleans. While New Orleans' exceptionalism before and after the storm demands comprehensive investigation, there are other stories to tell throughout the Gulf Coast. My hope is that future research which builds on this rich New Orleans analysis to compare and contrast the political, cultural and economic drivers of reconstruction will find room for the inescapable presence of gendered actions and social movements.

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