

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

DAVID DANTE TROUTT (Ed.), *After the Storm: Black Intellectuals Explore the Meaning of Hurricane Katrina*. New York: The New Press, 2006, xxvii + 164 p.

This collection, edited by David Dante Troutt, brings together ten insightful and thought-provoking essays from thirteen prominent Black academic and professional authors on the issues affecting New Orleans and the Gulf South prior to Hurricane Katrina in August of 2005, and disaster relief efforts in the days and months following the storm. This fresh look at the recovery and rebuilding efforts in Louisiana will require that readers view these efforts as still continuing today.

Following a preface by Derrick Bell and an introduction by Charles J. Ogletree Jr., the volume is divided into five parts. Part one, "Race, Poverty, and Place," deals with issues of gentrification, "Americanization," decentralization and the current state of racialized politics in the United States in general, and in the aftermath of the storm. "Class, Politics, and the Politics of Race" forms the second section of the book, in which the authors discuss intersectionality as a view of how events unfolded for the predominantly Black and poor populations at the center of the storm. In the third section, "Disasters and Diaspora," the authors present the forces of nature and social motivations behind migrations of Black populations. Part four, "Perceiving the Image, Framing Identity, and Critiquing Crime," is perhaps the most theory-driven section of the collection. The essays here pay close attention to media coverage during the storm, for instance referencing rapper Kanye West's accusation that "George Bush doesn't like Black people" and the double-standard experienced by persons of colour in news coverage. The final part five, "Rights and Shared Humanities," offers an international and historical perspective that probes additional questions regarding what took place in Louisiana.

The editor's contribution, "Many Thousands Gone, Again," proposes that rebuilding efforts should focus on remaking the "American social contract" (6), recognizing that past discrimination still reverberates today with new effects. This is an excellent chapter that brings attention to the racialized realities revealed by the catastrophe. Troutt includes a section on the theorizing of William Julius Wilson, and provides a descriptive look at the city during his time there after the storm.

Sheryll Cashin's "Katrina: The American Dilemma Redux" compares and contrasts perceptions of race relations, noting the contradiction between the stark number of African-American citizens living in poverty with the no-inequality-here impression presented by the appeal of the Black, powerful and famous Oprah Winfrey or Will Smith amongst others. Cashin seems to evoke sentiments of bell hooks' 1984 commentary (Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center) on journalist Barbara Walters making millions as a symbol of success for (middle-class) women, yet simultaneously a symbol for working-class and poor women that signifies further "exploitation." In addition, Cashin's analysis of ghettoized stereotypes provides an explanation for why policies and programs are not working for the Black working-class population, and addresses important topics such as incarceration rates for men of colour.

In his chapter titled "The Persistence of Race Politics and the Restraint of Recovery in Katrina's Wake," John Valery White discusses the illogical nature of the class conflict involved with rebuilding efforts. Adding to the discussion of gentrification in the previous section, he comments on the view that officials might "[take] advantage of the storm to rid the city of its poor" (46). An offensive commentary on its own, this also denies the nature of New Orleans' dependence on minimum wage, part-time and temporary workers, and creates a complex situation for the future of the city should they rebuild in such a way. For instance, gentrification in the centre of the city will result in working-class households being less able to afford housing in the area, and incurring more costs such as those for transportation from outside the urban centre. Models of urban zones like those of Burgess and Hoyt would see an influx of middle-class residents forcing out those working-class citizens in the area. White discusses why the storm sets off debate about race relations in America, but may not result in the changes some wish to see.

Adolph L. Reed Jr. writes in "The Real Divide" that we should not be analysing the unequal effects of Hurricane Katrina on racial groups but rather on class, going as far as generalizing that "[as a] political strategy, exposing racism is wrongheaded and at best an utter waste of time" (64). Reed extrapolates from the situation in New Orleans to compare their circumstances with the shrinking resources and liberties offered to Americans on the whole in a neoliberal environment. This piece endorses the value of using intersectionality theory to look at what Katrina has revealed in New Orleans, but also at race relations in America as a bigger picture. Reed advocates that there be more action taken than just the exposure of racist practices and policies.

Offering a slightly different point of view than Reed, "Historicizing Katrina" by Clement Alexander Price, suggests that the storm "[provides] a complicated context in which race and racism can be discussed anew" (72), noting that it is often people of colour in the United States who over time are most adversely affected by disasters due to their physical location. The history of race relations in America can provide insight into the distribution of the population across various areas. In his brief commentary he is able to

draw connections between similar displacements caused by examples of forces of nature, citing the 1900 Galveston, Texas, flood. He takes note of storm survivors being called “refugees” (71), bringing us full circle from the striking quotation from a woman on National Public Radio in the first few pages of the book. In the next chapter, Michael Eric Dyson presents and discusses three types of migration that have affected Black residents of New Orleans accounting for internal shifts, moving across borders and pursuing higher pay and better working or living conditions.

The other essays throughout this collection touch on different views of rebuilding efforts, with Dyson noting in “Great Migrations?” that this disaster should instead be seen as “an opportunity to really address what the needs of the people are as they have articulated them” (79), noting that public and social services were lacking support and resources well before the storm. Dyson urges us to consider the various conditions of diasporic areas as well as gentrified areas. Adrien Katherine Wing, in her essay “From Wrongs to Rights: Hurricane Katrina from a Global Perspective,” adds to Dyson’s thought by expressing the need for “the displaced themselves [to participate] in the planning and management of their return” (141), something that seems to have been disregarded as those surviving residents have been shuttled across multiple state lines. An example of this exclusion noted by Wing is the difficulty displaced residents might face in voting in a city election. Her contribution to the anthology is one of the lengthier pieces, and is more law-focused. It is a well-prepared analysis of the treatment of those displaced by Katrina in the context of international treaties and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

Similar pictures of storm survivors posted online through the Yahoo! News website captioned as “finding food” (for Whites) or “looting” (for Blacks) are examined at length by Cheryl I. Harris and Devon W. Carbado in their chapter, “Loot or Find: Fact or Frame?.” Taking an approach reminiscent of Gregory Bateson’s theorizing on framing, Harris and Carbado examine how our frames of reference or how our stereotypes and assumptions disable us from seeing Black survivors as victims or as heroes, especially the example of “guys who looked like thugs” (102). While few theories on race and class politics are directly mentioned, it is not difficult to extract examples that bring to mind theories on deviance, such as how labelling theory works in a similar fashion. Harris and Carbado also raise the issue of colour blindness as a frame, describing it as “the belief that race is not a factor in how we make sense of the world” (91). Katheryn Russell-Brown perhaps unknowingly elaborates on their point in the next essay in this section, “While Visions of Deviance Danced in Their Heads,” stating that although most Black residents attribute the slow response following the storm to the racialized makeup of the area, “most [Whites] believed that race had no effect on the government’s recovery efforts” (118). Looking again at the big picture, this example might be extrapolated to use in an analysis of the existence of racism in general. Russell-Brown’s chapter works to expose the hidden crimes which took place and to deconstruct who gets framed as criminal.

None of the authors explicitly discuss the role of Black residents and community efforts in rebuilding the city. The only mention of the role of Black residents in aid work is immediately following the storm, in “The Station,” which includes Anthony Paul Farley’s observation of survivors who “took direct action by expropriating and redistributing needed water and food” (158). Most of the commentary on rebuilding focuses on the decisions, activities and aims of those in government and in power. While the decisions made by these various levels of authority have a great ability to affect the lives of those still in New Orleans and dispersed across the United States, it would be unwise to think that residents are passive in seeing their futures determined for them. Foreshadowing Dyson and Wing, Troutt’s introduction to the book states that “the reconstruction should begin with the [survivors]” (6). This intent is here, but perhaps it is better left discussed in another volume. As the closing essay of the book, Farley’s chapter offers a statement we should consider, when he writes: “There are no accidents. Every accident is an accumulation that has already taken place” (155). This sums up an underlying theme of the essays, which encourages us to see beyond Katrina as an unfortunate act of nature and learn from the social and political histories leading up to this point, and what we must do for the future.

Although the bulk of this anthology is written by lawyers and professors of law, these essays remain accessible and relevant to those with backgrounds or interest in sociology and the social sciences in general. Academics with interest in media studies will enjoy discussions of framing and racialized perceptions, and the commentary on the issue of how race and class intersect as the determining factors in who had the most to lose in the path of the hurricane. Those interested in the sociology of disaster, or in works such as Kai Erickson’s *Everything in its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* might also find this compilation noteworthy.

Readers from the disciplines of law, political science and African-American studies may also find this anthology informative and insightful. Varying in length, most of the essays are concise and brief. Much of the language used by the authors would be manageable for undergraduates in many disciplines. A collection featuring all Black academics and professionals, both male and female, would be a welcome addition in classrooms and syllabi with few readings by minority authors.

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