Displaced: Life in the Katrina Diaspora
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elder paradigm—wherein the city is imagined as a collection of neighborhoods or villages best governed by local residents and elders—ignores the whole of the city in favor of plans that seek to recoup small-scale living under the guise that such projects will have a spillover effect within the larger metropolitan region. This spillover effect, Valverde argues, is emblematic of the possibilities and problems of current urban (re)development agendas that have been heavily influenced by Jacobs’ perspective.

This dialogic relationship between Everyday Law On The Street and Jacobs’ The Death and Life of Great American Cities is perhaps best distilled in Chapter Five, where we learn that the village-model Jacobs advocated has helped produce what Valverde calls “ghost jurisdictions”—“entities that have been politically abolished but some of whose legal rules continue to be in force” (p. 111). Such jurisdictions often encompass residential properties, such as rooming houses, that have fallen out of fashion in the contemporary cosmopolitan city but still retain legal resonance in municipal codes throughout urban America. As cities and the residential patterns of urbanites have changed, such laws play an invisible hand in the sociolegal infrastructure and settling/emergence of civic disputes in cities like Toronto. Often frustrating new development, residential maintenance and construction, Valverde demonstrates that, despite the virtual extinction of urban establishments such as rooming houses, new municipal codes and legislation are predicated (knowingly and unknowingly) on a sociolegal framework born of an earlier period and different sociolegal contexts.

Taken together, this book is perhaps best understood as the foundation for a new path at the intersection of urban and political sociology. As Valverde successfully demonstrates, “our urban spaces contain many injustices” and to analyze and understand such we must begin to look at cities as comprised of a layered sociolegal apparatus (p. 140). Such insights conjure the image of cities as matryoshka dolls (wooden Russian nesting dolls), a composition of antiquated and dysfunctional sociolegal frameworks layered upon another often under the noses of urbanites and civic authorities.

As with most works that open new pathways for sociological inquiry, there will be those who read this work and crave for elaboration or perhaps a longer tome. This possible contention is well anticipated by the author and seems to be the sentiment that Valverde means to leave with her readers, seeking to inspire and empower follow-up and further attention (much like what Valverde does with Jacobs’ research). Scholars and students alike will find much to learn in this book, as it is the first (and hopefully not the last) to shine a light on the layered sociolegal infrastructure of urban America—which plays a significant and too often invisible role in frustrating and facilitating urban living and change. Indeed, as intended from the outset, Valverde successfully provides a lens to view the city differently from its “big brother,” the state. While “seeing like a state” has proven a useful window into the entanglement of citizenship, power, and space, Mariana Valverde develops and provides a provocative and innovative sociological and legal framework to view this nexus by “seeing like a city.”

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Network on Persons Displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Half of the book’s contributors were themselves displaced by Katrina and others were actively involved in Katrina recovery efforts. The result of their dedication to engaged community research is a strong, cohesive, feminist collection with a refreshing focus on women’s first-hand accounts, deft analysis of the importance of social context, and a careful and consistent exploration of the hierarchies of race, class, gender, age, and citizenship and the role they played in making this storm a social disaster. In a beautiful foreword, Bonnie Thornton Dill explains that this book is about the “truths that arise as people recount and share their lived experiences of having their home and family moorings blown away, flooded out, and scattered across the country; truths that are revealed as people are trying to resettle in new communities or return to the old ones” (p. ix).

This volume is the most comprehensive overview of displaced persons’ experiences of Katrina to date. It contains an impressive number of interviews—“562 with displaced persons; 104 with first responders, service providers, and community organizers; and 101 with other residents in the receiving communities” (p. 4). Most of the studies began immediately after the storm in 2005. The majority of the respondents are African American women and as a result the book is an important corrective to the stereotypical media portrayal of African American women as helpless victims.

The book is organized into three main sections with a helpful introduction by editors Lynn Weber and Lori Peek that provides an overview of common themes and maps and charts identifying the location and selected characteristics of New Orleans and the receiving communities in Colorado, Louisiana, Missouri, South Carolina, Texas, Mississippi, and Georgia. The first section of the book exposes us to the organization of relief efforts in twelve cities with very different social contexts. The combination of in-depth interview material and demographic comparisons between the receiving cities and New Orleans in each chapter forces us to consider how rates of poverty, racial composition, availability of affordable housing and public transportation, education levels, and other factors affected the experiences of the evacuees. The authors highlight that many survivors had never left New Orleans previous to that storm, and a forced evacuation to an unknown place heightened their sense of displacement. Despite the early, warm community welcomes for Katrina evacuees and some perceived advantages in their new communities including quality schools and offers of free housing, displaced individuals also experienced common problems related to inaccessible or unaffordable public transportation, health care, housing, jobs, and social services. Because “place matters” (p. 30) and clearly affects the experiences of internally displaced people, it needs to be addressed in future disaster planning. This section also introduces some particularly useful concepts including “the basement of extreme poverty,” “Katrina fatigue,” and the feeling of “permanent temporariness” expressed by children in the Louisiana diaspora.

Section II of the book delves into the social networks that interviewees relied on and mobilized to survive the hurricane and to negotiate its aftermath. We meet, among many others, Miss Joanne who opens up her duplex to fifty-four friends and family during and after the storm, Garifuna immigrant groups who negotiate a long history of displacement and barriers associated with citizenship status and language, and older women who re-make their lives in a FEMA trailer park. We also witness the role of religion and “church homes” in navigating displacement. This section does an excellent job of highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses of close network ties. On the one hand, we see that when everyone you know is impacted by the storm, resources are tight or non-existent and it is difficult to give or receive sustained support. On the other hand, close networks provide emotional support that strangers and non-profit or government agencies cannot replace. A focus on “community” as resource helps us to see not only how networks provide access to food, shelter, jobs, health care, but also to (often gendered) emotional and spiritual care as well.

Overall, the organization of the book follows a clear path from “receiving communities” to “social networks,” with each chapter...
making unique contributions, building on common themes. While the concluding chapter, which comprises the third section of the book, provides a case study of a social movement organization that raises important questions about how to achieve social change during and after disasters, there lacks an additional chapter on policy implications. While there are many lessons to be learned from this book about creating “enhanced social justice for Katrina survivors and survivors of future social disasters” (p. xii), a more direct compilation of these suggestions would have been useful. One of the most important policy implications of this book is the light it sheds on the “less visible women-centered networks of care” that were “essential survival resources for the most vulnerable” and “key connections through which survivors identified themselves and measured the success or failure of their recovery” (p. 167). Weber and Peek’s volume promises a reflective discussion of the methodological challenges of white, middle-class women interviewing African American poor and working-class women, but there is more to be learned from these authors’ experiences and it is obvious that the brief early chapter on the experiences of “the research network” could have been expanded to address these issues more explicitly.

*Displaced* will be an invaluable resource in undergraduate and graduate classrooms and required reading for scholars interested in intersectional inequalities, community development, social networks, and disaster. Its intentional privileging of black, working-class and poor women’s experiences is unique and productive. A teacher in Peggy Orenstein’s book *Schoolgirls*, explains why she starts with a project on sexual harassment in her middle school classroom as a way to address women’s history more broadly by quoting Peggy McIntosh. She says, “...if you start your Civil War class with *Diary of a Slave Girl* you’ll get to Abraham Lincoln. ... But if you start with Lincoln, you’ll never get to *Slave Girl*” (p. 265). I think this is a lesson for sociologists studying Katrina. By keeping African American, poor and working-class women’s experiences central in this book, we are able to see Katrina as a “social disaster” based on our society’s hierarchical relations of gender, race, and class. If we do not start with these women’s experiences, then their race, gender, and class privilege slip out of the analysis and we are much more likely to find ourselves talking about a “natural” disaster and planning recovery efforts that do not take into account these fundamental social inequalities and the real people affected by them.

**Reference**


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In his multi-country ethnographic study, Ronald Weitzer, professor of sociology at George Washington University, makes the case for legalizing one form of the sale of sex in the United States. Noting that the United States is somewhat out of step with other countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Australia, Weitzer examines why legalization of prostitution—but not decriminalization—actually fits with U.S. neoliberal politics. Weitzer has combined and finessed years of research into this monograph to argue that legal indoor prostitution is the best workable alternative to criminalization.

*Legalizing Prostitution* is a well-researched policy alternative. The book explains why regulating the sale of sex is the best method of social control for all parties: the workers, law enforcement, and the local community. Weitzer draws on political trends and criminal justice models to discuss forms of social control that are less draconian than criminalization. He explores the legal contexts of prostitution in Amsterdam in the Netherlands; Frankfurt, Germany; and Antwerp, Belgium. His argument for a legalization