DOCUMENTING DISPLACEMENT
AN INTRODUCTION

I don’t know where my family is... I done lost everything. The place where I grew up at, that’s gone. My high school—gone. My elementary school—gone. I can’t never bring my kids and show them where I come from.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN, TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS OLD

I was kind of a little shaken up because this was all new to me. We were on a bus and tears just began to run out of my eyes because I was going to an unfamiliar place that I have never been. I’ve been in New Orleans all my life. All my children were born and raised in New Orleans. My entire family, that is where we are from. New Orleans... Then we had to go into a shelter with tons of people that I didn’t even know. We are all sharing a bathroom and we are sleeping together. You had to get accustomed to living like this.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN, TWENTY-THREE YEARS OLD

On Monday, August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated more than 90,000 square miles of the US Gulf Coast and, when the levee system gave way, drowned the city of New Orleans. Katrina:

- Forced the evacuation of about 1.5 million people from across the Gulf Coast.
- Destroyed or made unlivable approximately 300,000 homes.
- Severely damaged 150,000 businesses.
- Caused between $80 and $200 billion in economic losses—the costliest disaster in US history.
- Killed 1,720 initially and hundreds more in the months following from suicide, drug overdoses, and other “indirect” causes.¹

LYNN WEBER AND LORI PEEK
According to one study, nearly half of the estimated 110,000 people who remained in New Orleans did so because they did not believe the storm would be as bad as forecast. And, although some media outlets disparaged them for their decision, they were right: The full force of Katrina bypassed the city. But the miles of weak levees could not withstand the storm surge.

The vast majority of those who either chose or were forced to stay behind were African American, poor, elderly, and/or living with a disability. As the levees collapsed and the city began to fill with water, children and adults sought refuge in attics, on rooftops, and on highway overpasses and other patches of dry ground. As many as 60,000 eventually made their way to the Superdome and the New Orleans Convention Center, often with the help of other stranded survivors.

After awaiting relief and rescue, people were forced, sometimes at gunpoint, to evacuate. They were loaded into buses and airplanes and taken away, almost always with no idea of where they would end up. Although at first most of Katrina’s evacuees sought and received shelter close to home, in the weeks following the hurricane, evacuees were scattered across all fifty states (see Figure 1.1). More than five years after the storm, tens of thousands of former Gulf Coast residents remain displaced. Some are desperate to return to the region but do not have the means. Others have chosen to make their homes elsewhere. Still others found a way to return home but could not find a way to remain.

This volume describes the experiences of people who were displaced as a consequence of Katrina. They have been variously labeled as refugees, victims, survivors, evacuees, exiles, and environmental migrants—and the authors in this collection use many of these terms. The most appropriate term, however, might be “internally displaced persons,” which refers to people forcibly dispersed from their homes within a country by a disaster.

The chapters in this volume feature the work of a group of scholars who conducted research with displaced persons in thirteen different communities in seven states across the nation. Each chapter draws on ethnographic accounts to examine the full range of evacuee experiences—from the substantial obstacles the evacuees faced to their often remarkable resourcefulness in overcoming them. This resourcefulness is especially apparent among the women who led households and were responsible for the health and well-being of the very old and the very young. The chapters also consider the short- and long-term impact that evacuees have had on receiving communities and how this impact has revealed many opportunities for social change that would improve the lives of our most vulnerable populations and blunt the impact of future disasters.
Katrina's Diaspora

The victims of Hurricane Katrina have filed for assistance from FEMA from every state. The map shows the distribution and number of the 1.36 million individual assistance applications as of Sept. 23.

FIGURE 1.1. Katrina's Diaspora
THE STUDIES

When taken together, the studies in this volume represent the most extensive research on the experiences of Katrina’s displaced to date. Interviews with evacuees, first responders, service providers, and receiving community residents took place in: Colorado (Denver), Georgia (Atlanta), Louisiana (Baker, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, New Orleans), Mississippi (Jackson), Missouri (Columbia), South Carolina (Columbia/West Columbia), and Texas (Austin, Dallas, Houston, Huntsville). Figure 1.2 shows the locations of the researchers’ study sites.

All but two of the studies began in the fall of 2005, and data gathering continued in some instances through 2011. Taken together, these studies included 767 in-depth interviews—562 with displaced persons; 104 with first responders, service providers, and community organizers; and 101 with other residents in the receiving communities. Many of the studies employed multiple methods, including open- and close-ended interviews, document analysis, participant observation, and focus groups. To capture the flow of respondents’ unfolding lives, seven of the studies followed respondents over time.

Almost all of the evacuees you will meet on these pages lived in the city of New Orleans before the storm. And in their extended quest for stability and home after Katrina, displacement from their former neighborhoods was just the beginning. While some evacuees moved only once or twice, most moved three or four times, and others had to move more than twelve times.

The people we interviewed were mostly African American: Five studies included only African Americans; five others were over one-half African American. This representation reflects both the composition of New Orleans, which was about two-thirds Black before the storm, and the high concentration of African Americans among the poor and most vulnerable, the focus of many of these studies. Fothersgill and Peek’s research draws on interviews with children and youth. Fussell’s, Mason’s, and Pardee’s studies included only women, and the remainder included both men and women or boys and girls.

Studies also covered a wide range of household living arrangements—single individuals, single parents, partners with and without children, and multigenerational families. Similarly, respondents’ employment statuses before Katrina were quite diverse—employed in blue- and white-collar work, unemployed, disabled, retired—some receiving public assistance and many others not.
NEW ORLEANS AND THE RECEIVING COMMUNITIES

Table 1.1 presents selected characteristics of the pre-Katrina city of New Orleans and the receiving communities and their surrounding population areas where we conducted research.9

Compared to the receiving communities, New Orleans was midsized, with relatively large Black and small Latino, foreign-born, and White populations. Compared to the Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) represented here, New Orleans had higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and female-headed households; had lower median family incomes; and ranked in the mid range on educational attainment. A high percentage (42.4 percent) of renters were paying rents that were 35 percent or more of their household incomes, and New Orleans had a comparatively high rental vacancy rate—9.1 percent of all available rental units. The descriptive statistics that follow illustrate how different New Orleans was from the destinations of many evacuees represented here and suggest how they may have felt out of place in their new communities.
### Table 1.1. Selected Characteristics of the City of New Orleans, LA, and the Metropolitan Statistical Areas of Twelve Receiving Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>New Orleans, LA</th>
<th>Denver, CO</th>
<th>Atlanta, GA</th>
<th><strong>Baker, Rouge, LA</strong></th>
<th>Baton Rouge, LA</th>
<th>Lafayette, LA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>437,186</td>
<td>2,413,844</td>
<td>5,122,275</td>
<td>13,793</td>
<td>753,299</td>
<td>252,877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>66.90%</td>
<td>5.30%</td>
<td>30.50%</td>
<td>52.90%</td>
<td>35.00%</td>
<td>26.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Latino</td>
<td>3.10%</td>
<td>21.70%</td>
<td>8.90%</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>2.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>26.20%</td>
<td>67.30%</td>
<td>54.90%</td>
<td>45.60%</td>
<td>59.80%</td>
<td>68.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Asian</td>
<td>2.40%</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>1.60%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Other</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>2.40%</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Foreign-Born</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>12.60%</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
<td>3.10%</td>
<td>2.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Families Below Poverty Level in Past Year</td>
<td>21.80%</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>13.40%</td>
<td>13.10%</td>
<td>12.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed****</td>
<td>13.20%</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
<td>7.20%</td>
<td>3.10%</td>
<td>7.20%</td>
<td>5.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Householder w/Children</td>
<td>12.60%</td>
<td>6.40%</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>13.40%</td>
<td>9.40%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Family Income ($)</td>
<td>39,428</td>
<td>71,531</td>
<td>67,568</td>
<td>38,621</td>
<td>56,360</td>
<td>54,882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-High School Education</td>
<td>55.40%</td>
<td>64.30%</td>
<td>59.10%</td>
<td>42.10%</td>
<td>49.60%</td>
<td>48.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent 35% or more of Household Income</td>
<td>42.40%</td>
<td>38.50%</td>
<td>38.10%</td>
<td>30.40%</td>
<td>38.40%</td>
<td>33.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Vacant Housing Units</td>
<td>23.40%</td>
<td>8.30%</td>
<td>11.10%</td>
<td>10.30%</td>
<td>8.20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental Vacancy Rate Estimate (%)****</td>
<td>9.10%</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>7.10%</td>
<td>5.20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% No Vehicles Available</td>
<td>26.00%</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
<td>7.00%</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jackson, MS</th>
<th>Columbia, MO</th>
<th>Columbia, SC</th>
<th>Austin, TX</th>
<th>Dallas, TX</th>
<th>Houston, TX</th>
<th>Huntsville, TX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>529,030</td>
<td>159,467</td>
<td>703,807</td>
<td>1,533,263</td>
<td>5,979,240</td>
<td>5,485,720</td>
<td>64,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.40%</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
<td>32.90%</td>
<td>7.30%</td>
<td>13.80%</td>
<td>16.70%</td>
<td>22.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>2.40%</td>
<td>3.50%</td>
<td>29.40%</td>
<td>26.30%</td>
<td>32.80%</td>
<td>15.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.40%</td>
<td>83.80%</td>
<td>60.30%</td>
<td>57.10%</td>
<td>53.50%</td>
<td>43.60%</td>
<td>59.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
<td>5.50%</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>1.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.50%</td>
<td>5.20%</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td>17.70%</td>
<td>21.30%</td>
<td>10.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.40%</td>
<td>9.80%</td>
<td>9.90%</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>12.10%</td>
<td>16.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 7.00%      | 5.60%       | 6.10%       | 6.10%     | 6.60%     | 7.10%       | 11.10%        |
| 11.10%     | 7.20%       | 9.20%       | 6.70%     | 8.00%     | 8.30%       | 7.60%         |
| 53,852     | 59,239      | 58,734      | 69,012    | 63,719    | 60,188      | 38,584        |
| 58.60%     | 67.90%      | 56.60%      | 64.50%    | 57.00%    | 53.10%      | 40.80%        |
| 38.00%     | 40.20%      | 32.90%      | 37.10%    | 36.00%    | 37.50%      | 44.80%        |
| 10.60%     | 7.50%       | 10.70%      | 8.70%     | 10.00%    | 11.60%      | 14.90%        |
| 9.80%      | 6.70%       | 9.40%       | 8.50%     | 11.50%    | 12.60%      | 7.20%         |
| 6.30%      | 5.90%       | 6.70%       | 5.10%     | 5.10%     | 6.40%       | 7.90%         |

***Population over 16 in labor force unemployed.

****Rental Vacancy Rate—The rental vacancy rate is the proportion of the rental inventory that is vacant “for rent.” It is computed by dividing the number of vacant units “for rent” by the sum of the renter-occupied units, vacant units that are “for rent,” and vacant units that have been rented but not yet occupied, and then multiplying by 100. This measure is rounded to the nearest tenth. [source: U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder, Glossary, available from http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/epss/glossary_r.html, accessed June 13, 2011].
The communities we studied are quite diverse. Some were relatively close to the disaster zone (Baker, Baton Rouge, Houston); others, considerably farther away (Denver; Columbia, South Carolina). Some were large cities (Atlanta, Denver, Dallas, Houston); some, midsized cities (Baton Rouge; Jackson; Columbia, South Carolina); some, smaller towns and rural areas (Huntsville; Columbia, Missouri).

The racial and ethnic composition, as well as the prevalence of female-headed families, varied among these locales and between them and New Orleans. New Orleans was 66.8 percent Black and only 3.1 percent Latino, making it more like the Deep South destinations (Atlanta; Baker; Baton Rouge; Jackson; and Columbia, South Carolina), each of which had an MSA over 30 percent African American and less than 10 percent Latino. In contrast, all of the Texas destinations, as well as Denver and Columbia, Missouri, were less than 20 percent African American. Denver and the Texas communities ranged from 15 percent to 32.8 percent Latino and, with Atlanta, had more than double New Orleans's foreign-born population. Strikingly, while New Orleans was only 26.1 percent White, all of the other cities, with the exception of Baker (45.6 percent) and Houston (43.6 percent), had majority White populations.

EDUCATION, INCOME, UNEMPLOYMENT, POVERTY, AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

The proportion of New Orleans's population with some education beyond high school (55.4 percent) was smaller than that of most receiving communities, which had more high school graduates and larger college-educated populations. The largest cities (Denver, Atlanta, Austin, Dallas, and Houston) had significantly higher median incomes than New Orleans, reflecting the heavier concentrations of highly paid professional and managerial occupations, more lucrative industries (e.g., high tech, transportation), and higher government employment than New Orleans, whose economy is heavily reliant on low-wage service and tourism industries.

New Orleans had higher unemployment (13.2 percent) and poverty rates (21.8 percent) than any of the receiving MSAs. Compared to New Orleans, the relatively low unemployment rate of some of the cities in Louisiana (Baker, Baton Rouge, Lafayette) may reflect the unevenness of the recovery across Louisiana, the mismatch between the kinds of jobs available in New Orleans after the storm (e.g., construction) and the work people performed
before the storm (e.g., service work), and the hiring preference of outside private contractors for low-wage migrant workers over local workers. In terms of household composition, only Baker had a higher concentration of female-headed families than New Orleans, while Denver, Austin, Huntsville, and Columbia, Missouri, had significantly lower ones.

HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION

We had one client one night who was staying in a hotel out by the airport. He was a computer programmer. He got a job with Blue Cross/Blue Shield. . . . Of course, that’s twenty-five miles or twenty miles or whatever, which required two different bus transfers . . . . So evidently, he got off on Two Notch Road at the wrong bus stop and had no idea where he was—had nobody he knew he could even call . . . . It was like in October or November and it was cold and a policeman finally stopped and said, “Where are you?” He had that nervous breakdown kind of . . . all of a sudden it just came crashing in on him.

WHITE WOMAN SERVICE PROVIDER,
COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

To give some idea of the housing markets the displaced entered, we also include in Table 1.1 housing unit availability, rental vacancy rates, and the proportion of renters paying 35 percent or more of their household incomes for rent, an amount generally considered to burden families. Some of the cities with the lowest number of available housing units were those least like New Orleans on other indicators (poverty levels, household composition, and educational attainment—Austin; Denver; Columbia, Missouri), suggesting the additional difficulties that landing in those communities posed for long-term resettlement. Further, although Dallas, Atlanta, and Houston had relatively high rental vacancy rates (11.5 to 12.6 percent), Baton Rouge, Lafayette, and Columbia, Missouri, had lower rates (7.1 percent or less). The statistics confirm reports from New Orleans’s evacuees that finding affordable housing was challenging and, given the high poverty rate in New Orleans, that many would be paying more than 35 percent of their household incomes on rent.

New Orleans had an unusually high number of households (26 percent) with no access to an automobile—a rate three to four times as high as any of the receiving MSAs. For evacuees adjusting to a new city, acquiring a car or learning the public transportation routes introduced additional challenges.
We recognize that these data in no way capture the full landscape of the hundreds of places across the nation where more than one million evacuees landed. Although most receiving communities shared some characteristics with New Orleans, none came close to resembling its major socioeconomic and demographic contours. The estimates we offer here represent only an abstract picture, somewhat like an aerial view, of the exact nature of what evacuees experienced in their individual receiving communities. But the statistics reveal the sizable gap between New Orleans and these places where evacuees made their new homes. As the subsequent chapters reveal, numerous other complex and meaningful social divisions, relationships, and cultural characteristics shaped what the evacuees actually saw and experienced.

COMMON THEMES

This volume is organized into three sections, each beginning with a brief overview. The first section looks at the communities that received Katrina’s displaced. The second section describes the role of informal and formal social networks in the evacuation, relocation, and resettlement of individuals and families displaced by Katrina. The third section offers a case study of the People’s Hurricane Relief Fund and illustrates the challenges grassroots groups face in providing relief and advocating for social change in the aftermath of disaster.

Each of the twelve research projects described in this volume reflects a different perspective on people displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Although the settings and samples are distinct, the methods varied, and the conclusions unique, as we see below, common themes appearing throughout the volume offer important lessons for the future.

THE FORCED RELOCATION OF EVACUEES AMPLIFIED TRAUMA AND IMPEDED RECOVERY

I thought we was really going to die because me and my girls slept on the streets for five days. I didn’t know where I was going. I just got on a plane. I was scared because I had never been on a plane before. Everybody thought they were going to San Antonio, but then they wind up here.

AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN AND KATRINA SURVIVOR LIVING IN DENVER, FORTY-ONE YEARS OLD

10 WEBER AND PEEK
Many of the people who evacuated before Katrina struck New Orleans exercised some choice in where they ultimately sought shelter. They shared rides or drove out of the city in the days and hours before the hurricane made landfall. Once out of harm's way, many had few resources—financial or otherwise—to help them survive.

Tens of thousands of other evacuees had little or no choice in where they ended up after the storm. After seeking refuge at the Superdome or the Convention Center or being plucked from rooftops or dry highway overpasses, mostly low-income African American men, women, and children were transported out of New Orleans and taken, according to the prerogatives of federal government agencies, to unfamiliar destinations.

The ad hoc evacuation, combined with the lack of a central database for identifying and tracking evacuees' whereabouts, resulted in government-induced separation of family members. These separations not only were emotionally traumatic, but also caused severe material and financial stress among families already living at the margins of poverty. Indeed, more often than not, the families separated by government relocation efforts had previously survived by pooling resources generated through extensive kin networks. Breaking up these networks left these evacuees with few alternatives for reuniting with their families or returning to the Gulf Coast.

_A lot of people were on the loose. A lot of people asking about their families. A lot of people were running loose... babies, fathers... I have friends and family in Atlanta, too. They weren't with us in the house. They couldn't get out at the same time. They didn't have nowhere to go and they were shipped to a different place. So many people shipped so far. It's hard, because sometimes you were shipped to places and you didn't want to be that far. You didn't know anybody. You don't know where you are. It's hard._

_AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN AND KATRINA SURVIVOR LIVING IN BATON ROUGE, THIRTY YEARS OLD_

_EVACUEES EXPERIENCED CUMULATIVE BARRIERS IN THE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS_

_Because they didn't have lights. And they didn't have food. So... a lot of people was not mentally capable, and I'm [not] saying they had a mental illness, but after a natural disaster, they just had to shut_
down. You know I was to that point. But that is a lot of it because they didn’t have their basic needs, so they couldn’t focus on nothing else.

AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY ORGANIZER  
AND KATRINA EVACUEE

As the resettlement and recovery process began in communities across the United States, evacuees had to find shelter, employment, transportation, schools, childcare, and healthcare (see Figure 1.3). But conditions pre-dating Katrina and issues caused by the disaster and displacement hindered the ability of many people to meet these basic needs.

Hurricane Katrina revealed America’s long-standing structural inequalities based on race, class, and gender and laid bare the consequences of ignoring these underlying inequalities. Indeed, even before Katrina devastated the region, people of the Gulf Coast—especially women and people
of color—were far more likely to be poor and to lack health insurance and were far less likely to earn good wages than people living elsewhere in the United States.\textsuperscript{13} The long-standing and complex disadvantages that these residents faced before the storm posed formidable barriers to achieving recovery afterward. Katrina’s effects pushed those with limited education, no professional work experience, no savings, and no healthcare into what Lein and colleagues refer to in this volume as the “basement of poverty.”

The disaster itself also generated a number of new, interconnected challenges that evacuees struggled fiercely to overcome. Many displaced persons, for example, were left without documentation—birth certificates; Social Security cards; driver’s licenses; proof of vehicle registration; and educational, medical, and other vital records—making it difficult if not impossible to apply for jobs, to drive legally, and to enroll their children in school. Social service providers often saw emergency aid as different from regular public assistance. Consequently, evacuees who had relied on public assistance for housing, food stamps, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families in New Orleans often faced obstacles to obtaining regular welfare payments in receiving communities. In addition, several studies report that when evacuees did qualify for welfare in receiving communities, payments were either less than people had received in New Orleans or were similar in amount but worth less in the receiving community because the cost of housing or food was higher or transportation less available.

\textit{The government support, the local government and city support, they say they have it, but really it is little or none. Whereas back home, if you fell behind, you had agencies that would help you. I do not find that here. I find it really hard to get back on your feet here.}

\textbf{AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN EVACUEE IN DENVER, COLORADO}

Emotional trauma and unavailable or unattainable mental health care further impeded the evacuees’ achieving a sense of normalcy and stability, both of which are defining characteristics of recovery.\textsuperscript{14} Untreated mental and physical health problems, in conjunction with the lack of reliable transportation, insufficient childcare, and unstable housing situations, made employment, a critical element in recovery, impossible for many. While these issues could easily be seen as “private troubles” for each individual or evacuee family, the research in this volume reveals how bureaucratic barriers and structural conditions gave rise to so much personal and collective suffering and made them into “public issues.”\textsuperscript{15}
The word “evacuation” suggests the movement of persons from a threatened location to a temporary safe haven. That was the experience of many residents who had to leave New Orleans but were able to return relatively quickly. But for many others, it was a continuing journey. They made several moves before even leaving the city—to and from the Superdome or Convention Center or other places of temporary shelter—and then they endured repeated moves from place to place. Some, for example, moved in with family and friends. But as days extended to weeks, months, and even years, people were forced to move because friends’ and families’ personal and material resources were often strained beyond their capacity to continue to support evacuees. Further, as federal government and local community programs and housing support changed over time, evacuees had to shift back and forth from shelters to hotels, to apartments, to public housing.

For displaced children, most of those moves meant new schools, new classrooms, new neighborhoods, and struggles to develop new friendships. For adults, the challenges associated with finding employment, housing, and transportation were often overwhelming. And these challenges were further aggravated by an unwieldy, baffling, and all too often unfriendly bureaucratic aid structure. Repeated displacement and adjustment to new locations meant prolonged uncertainty, precluding a return to “normalcy.”

RECEPTION OF THE DISPLACED SHIFTED OVER TIME

Here is how I’ve seen people reacting more recently. “You aren’t my neighbor. You aren’t family. You weren’t even in my state, and you’re coming in here.” Okay? At first it was “Oh, poor you!” But then after a while it became “You’re not going away, and I’ve got to pick up the cost.”

WHITE WOMAN SOCIAL WORKER IN DENVER

Immediately after Katrina, aid flowed to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. The federal government contributed billions of dollars to the provision of emergency aid to evacuees. As they attempted to meet the immediate needs of evacuees, communities across the United States drew on federal, state, local, and private resources. Individual volunteers gave generously of their time. Nonprofit and faith-based organizations gathered unprece-
dented amounts of money and material goods meant to support those displaced by Katrina.

But while evacuees received a warm and compassionate reception in most local contexts, tensions also marked the early stages of the post-disaster relocation. Media depictions of African American New Orleanians as marauding gangs of violent, out-of-control thugs and looters cast a cloud of suspicion over the entire population of Katrina survivors. As the displacement extended over time, community leaders, politicians, and others expressed concern that evacuees were “moving ahead” of local needy individuals on wait lists to receive public assistance. Services and resources were quickly exhausted, even though many evacuees had substantial and enduring needs that were still unmet. Frustration and resentment arose in host communities when displaced people were still present and in need long after local residents and resource providers had expected them to return home or to become entirely self-sufficient.

KATRINA REVEALED STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS
OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

I would hate to leave anyone back that I could have saved... I said, “Tell anybody, whoever it is, get whoever you can get. Tell them I got money. I’ll pay them on this side.” And tell the people, whoever’s bringing you, that whoever they got and whoever they got behind them, bring everybody over. I’ll take as much people as I can... if I even got to put y’all outside on my patio... I said, “Well, bring them because it’s real bad.”

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN RESIDENT
OF BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

New Orleanians and other Gulf Coast residents were in many ways more rooted in place than the average American. In fact, before Hurricane Katrina, over 75 percent of New Orleans residents were born in Louisiana and had lived most of their lives there. This attachment to place translated into strong and spatially concentrated social networks among many of the displaced. And as much of the research in this volume illustrates, women more often than not were at the center of these social networks.

During the evacuation and in the aftermath of the storm, women mobilized their preexisting networks to provide various forms of support for people in the network. They also organized “non-network support,” sup-
port that came from either strangers or more formal aid organizations. Both informal networks (family and friends) and formal networks (church and grassroots organizations) helped provide financial assistance, housing, and, perhaps most important, a frame of reference for making meaning out of such a traumatic event.

Just as Katrina revealed the strength and flexibility of these social networks, it also revealed their weaknesses. Because the social networks of so many New Orleanians were exceptionally localized, evacuees often had little experience outside the city or on the road. Many evacuees reported that they did not leave before the storm because they did not know anyone outside of New Orleans or because they had nowhere to go. And because of the concentration of the networks, in some cases every member of the network had experienced some form of loss in the storm. When so many had lost so much, networks became increasingly fragile as people—overwhelmed and stressed to the limit by the storm—attempted to provide material and emotional support for one another.

I just think that everybody was going through it in a different manner. Because all of our family lived in New Orleans, so everybody lost everything. . . . And most of my family lived in the Ninth Ward, where the worst damage was. So they were still traumatized deeply about the loss of everything.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN AND KATRINA SURVIVOR, THIRTY YEARS OLD

EVACUEES FACED MANY CHALLENGES IN RETURNING TO THE “NEW” NEW ORLEANS

At this point I still don’t believe home is anywhere. . . . I consider wherever I am with my kids as home. . . . It’s like Katrina just stripped me of roots. I don’t have any roots [in New Orleans] anymore because it’s not the same. And I don’t have any roots [in Houston].

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN AND KATRINA SURVIVOR, TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS OLD

Five years after Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans had returned to about 71 percent of its pre-Katrina size. Both returning residents and new migrants to New Orleans after Katrina were more likely to be White and homeowners and have higher incomes and were less likely to be parents of chil-
dren under the age of eighteen. Blacks, poor or lower-income residents, parents with young children, and renters were clearly less able—or less willing—to return to the new New Orleans. The chapters in this volume attest to the many challenges that individuals and families faced in deciding whether to return to New Orleans and, later, in actually making their way back to the city.

First, those whose homes suffered the most catastrophic structural damage were those living in predominantly Black neighborhoods. And this population was most likely to have been forcibly relocated, making the possibility of return more costly and difficult.

Second, within days of the levee failures, several public housing projects, which had been almost entirely occupied by African American residents, were closed and barred from reopening. In 2008, the four largest projects in the city were demolished, leaving thousands of Black New Orleanians with significantly diminished prospects for affordable housing. As a group, African Americans also encountered widespread covert and overt discrimination in the post-Katrina rental and housing market.

Third, with the demographic and cultural shifts in the city, many residents felt out of place in their former neighborhoods. And the contentious and highly politicized rebuilding process further amplified the sense of being unwanted—particularly among Black and poor New Orleanians, who were conspicuously absent from key post-disaster planning events. As one African American former resident explained, “I felt I was being encouraged to not return . . . They didn’t want us to come back so they could do what they want to do.”

Fourth, many former residents were deterred from returning to the city because of the destroyed infrastructure and limited availability of social services, educational opportunities, healthcare options, and public transportation. The rebuilding process in New Orleans has been so slow and so uneven that many former residents described themselves as incapable of “making a life” in their old city. A dilapidated levee system, potential toxic environmental risks, distrust of the government, and the fear of future hurricanes made residents more hesitant to return.

There are many individual success stories in the lives of Katrina’s displaced people, stories of people who have built healthier, more productive lives—stories we clearly heard and report here. Yet we cannot ignore the devastating reality of the lived experiences of most of the evacuees. Years after the disaster, tens of thousands of Katrina’s displaced are still strewn about the

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country, struggling to meet their basic needs. Most will never return home. Hearing their voices and critically examining their experiences highlight what remains to be done to address the ongoing legacy of Katrina and to mitigate the next disaster.

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NOTES


5. Contrary to widespread belief, martial law was not imposed following Hurricane Katrina. However, the Katrina relief effort—the largest in US history—did include military assistance. Because a state of emergency was declared in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, armed National Guard units were deployed to the affected region. See Keelin McDonell, “What Is Martial Law? And Is New Orleans Under It?” Slate, September 2, 2005.


9. The focus of this research is on the experiences of evacuees in these thirteen locations in the years after the storm. Therefore, we present data from the American Community Survey on the receiving communities that are three-year averages for the years 2005–2007. And since the evacuees were widely dispersed throughout the receiving cities and towns, the data we use are for the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) of each community. Because almost all of the evacuees studied here lived in the city of New Orleans before Katrina, however, New Orleans data are for the city, not the MSA. These data are for 2005, to represent the character of New Orleans at the time of the storm, when people evacuated. The data we present in this table may vary from data presented in some of the chapters because individual researchers made different decisions about which data were most relevant for their specific case.


11. Also see Haney et al., "Families and Hurricane Response."


17. Kathleen Tierney, Christine Bevc, and Erica Kuligowski, "Metaphors Matter:


21. Census data revealed that in 2010, the city had roughly 24,000 fewer White residents and 118,000 fewer Black residents. See Robertson, "A Much Smaller New Orleans."


27. For example, according to Mafruz Khan, 75 percent of the participants at an October 2006 Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) meeting were White, and 40 percent had an annual household income of more than $75,000. Before Hurricane Katrina, 67 percent of the city was African American and only 2 percent of households had incomes over $75,000. See Mafruz Khan, "The Color of Opportunity and the Future of New Orleans: Planning, Rebuilding, and Social Inclusion after Hurricane Katrina," in *Race, Place, and Environmental Justice after Hurricane Katrina: Struggles to Reclaim, Rebuild, and Revitalize New Orleans and the Gulf Coast*, ed. R. D. Bullard and B. Wright (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), pp. 205–228; cited data from p. 216.