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Article Author: Lori Peek

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In the months following Hurricane Katrina, more than 4,500 Gulf Coast families (approximately 14,000 individuals) relocated to Colorado. Although evacuees could be found in all sixty-four counties in Colorado, most landed in the two largest cities—Denver (6,500 evacuees) and Colorado Springs (4,000 evacuees)—with hundreds of others settling in mid-size cities like Boulder, Fort Collins, Grand Junction, and Pueblo. In this research, I focused on evacuees in the Denver metropolitan area, home to approximately 2.4 million people.

Denver is about 1,500 miles from New Orleans, and for former residents of the Gulf Coast, the distance only magnified the many differences between the two cities. Denver is nicknamed “the Mile High City” because its official elevation is 5,280 feet above sea level, while much of New Orleans sits well below sea level. Denver is located at the base of the Rocky Mountains, has four distinct seasons, has a semiarid climate, and receives over 55 inches of snow a year. New Orleans, a place where snow never falls, is known for its hot and humid weather and is surrounded by water, marshlands, and bayous. Colorado is not subject to many of the extreme weather events that are commonplace in Louisiana: according to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) records, Louisiana is near the top (sixth) and Colorado is close to the bottom (forty-fourth) of the fifty states in numbers of federally declared disasters. Denver is one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the United States, with a poverty rate of about 8 percent and a population made up predominantly of Whites (67 percent) and Latinos (22 percent), with much smaller proportions of African Americans (5 percent) and Asians (3 percent). New Orleans has been steadily losing residents for the past several decades and had a pre-storm poverty rate of 22 percent—twice the national average. Before Katrina, New Orleans residents were 67 percent African American, 26 percent White, 3 percent Latino, and about 2 percent Asian.

LORI PEEK
This chapter draws on field observations and in-depth interviews with Katrina evacuees and disaster relief professionals in Colorado. Between October 2005 and August 2008, I collected eighty-five recorded audio interviews with members of twenty-three different families who relocated to Colorado from the most storm-ravaged regions of the Gulf Coast. I interviewed twenty-two mothers, eight fathers, and fifty-five younger people between the ages of five and eighteen years. Most of the people I interviewed were African American, although the sample also includes members of six White and two Latino families. I conducted sixteen interviews with people working closely with evacuees, including church pastors, disaster relief providers, mental health counselors, and community volunteers. I followed up on the formal interviews with dozens of informal interviews and conversations. In addition, I spent over a hundred hours observing in the new homes of evacuees and at community gatherings, informational meetings, memorial events, and a large evacuee aid distribution center.

In this chapter, I use these data to chronicle the experiences of families who arrived in Colorado in the aftermath of Katrina. I draw on the accounts of displaced adults and youth, as well as on the narratives of people who helped with the resettlement process, for two primary purposes: (1) to examine the changing context of reception, which quickly shifted from a welcoming to a hostile environment; (2) to critique the concept of "Katrina fatigue," a term often used by professionals to describe the later phases of displacement, but a term that I will suggest ultimately served to obscure preexisting patterns of discrimination and racism.

**WELCOME AND ONSET OF “KATRINA FATIGUE”**

A number of factors pushed and pulled thousands of evacuees to Colorado in the aftermath of Katrina. At the most basic level, of course, it was the storm and the subsequent failure of the levee system in New Orleans that prompted the mass evacuation, but many other social and economic factors determined how and why people ended up in Colorado. Some of the poorest and most marginalized survivors were forcibly relocated by the federal government in the aftermath of Katrina. Others came to Colorado because they had lived in the state at some point before the disaster, had friends or family in the area, had received offers of free housing or jobs or other benefits, or simply wanted to start a new life in a different place.

Upon their arrival in Denver, people displaced by Katrina experienced an outpouring of support. Thousands of volunteers offered their services at the temporary shelter established at the former Lowry Air Force Base:
local residents cleaned the buildings, did laundry, and served meals; musicians played jazz tunes on the front lawn; professional chefs prepared New Orleans-style cuisine; and childcare providers set up recreation areas for children. Mental health experts and religious leaders offered counseling and spiritual guidance. A faith-based group ran a twenty-four-hour van service to take evacuees shopping, to appointments, or to look for housing. Donations of food, household items, clothing, shoes, and other goods arrived by the truckload. In fact, so many donations were received that relief workers opened a 10,000-square-foot warehouse, dubbed "Operation Safe Haven," so evacuees could select furniture and get supplies. Students at a local high school made personalized blankets for displaced children as part of their newly established "Warmth of Colorado" program. Various employers advertised jobs designated only for evacuees. Churches and disaster relief agencies organized a picnic in September 2005 and sponsored a Christmas party for evacuees in December 2005, complete with homemade food and gifts for adults and children. A number of Katrina families were "adopted" during the 2005 holiday season by Colorado families, schools, and businesses. Evacuees received presents, cash donations, gift cards, and airline tickets.

For the first three to four months following Katrina, the generous support directed toward evacuees in Colorado continued. However, as several disaster response professionals asserted, somewhere around the beginning of 2006, "Katrina fatigue" started to set in. To sociologists, that ominous-sounding phrase might seem to echo the concept of "compassion fatigue," which refers to a person's diminished capacity for, or reduced interest in, being empathic or "bearing the suffering" of a loved one or a client. "Katrina fatigue," in turn, has been used by the media as a sort of catchall term to describe waning political attention to the disaster, growing national apathy toward the recovery process, declining federal funding allocations, declining private donations from individuals and charities, diminished media coverage of the affected region and its people, and burnout among volunteers and community members who had previously helped evacuees. When professionals in Colorado used the term "Katrina fatigue," however, they were referring much more specifically to the local context in Denver. Although mental health providers, African American churches, and the three major disaster relief organizations working with evacuees in Denver—Catholic Charities, Lutheran Family Services, and Volunteers of America—continued to provide support for evacuees for more than two years after the storm, many Colorado residents, the local media, and employers seemed to lose interest much sooner.

The church pastor who coordinated the donations at Operation Safe Haven...
Haven reported that after January 2006, he consistently struggled to find volunteers to help sort clothes or to prepare food boxes for Katrina families. Another pastor was irritated that some of the major aid organizations in the area seemed interested only in helping with events that would be covered by the media. He observed that certain groups “only showed up when the television cameras were around. Once those cameras were gone, they were gone.” Newspaper and television stories about Katrina all but disappeared from local media (and only resumed in earnest at the one- and two-year anniversaries of the storm and when cases of disaster aid fraud were discovered), and employers discontinued special programs aimed at hiring evacuees.

A social worker who served as the director of the Katrina long-term recovery program at Catholic Charities in Denver asserted that “Katrina fatigue was a significant issue” that affected the prospects for successful resettlement among evacuees. She attributed the phenomenon, at least in part, to the fact that people in Colorado had not lived through the hurricane and thus could not possibly maintain the same level of empathy as could fellow survivors from the Gulf Coast. She astutely observed:

In Katrina, what is especially challenging is the disaster started in one place and it’s ending in another place. This is a complete anomaly in disasters, because most disasters start and end in one place. In the normal case, the entire community will be affected. Thus their empathy doesn’t end, because you were my neighbor beforehand, and my God, this horrible thing happened, so I’m going to help you out until you’re back on your feet, because I knew you before and now I’m watching you struggle and I want to help you get back to where you were previously. But with Katrina ending in a new place, it’s bizarre, because people aren’t connected in that same way. It’s not Coloradoans that were affected, it was people from Louisiana and Mississippi. So I think on a community level what we’ve seen a lot of is: “Isn’t that over yet?” “Haven’t you moved on?” “Do you have a job?”

A FEMA employee in Denver also believed that Katrina fatigue was a serious issue. He reported having received several phone calls and unsolicited comments from Colorado residents who thought that Katrina evacuees should have long been “over it” and should have already returned to the Gulf Coast. He suggested that Katrina fatigue developed largely as a result of perceptions that evacuees were costing Colorado taxpayers too much money. He described the situation as follows:
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.” “No wonder Texas wanted to send them over here, but we can’t send them back.” Things like that.

Other relief workers had encounters with Coloradoans who thought that Katrina evacuees were simply “abusing the system.”

I think I’ve talked to probably four or five people who just randomly called Catholic Charities and said, “Do you have evacuees?” And I’m like, “Yeah, we do.” And I describe a little bit about what we do. And they’re just like, “You know, I have an issue with that.” I’m like, “All right, what exactly is the issue? What’s going on?” They’re like, “I’m afraid they’re just abusing the system.” I’m like, “Okay, that happens. It happens everywhere. I don’t think because one person abuses the system, it means everyone abuses the system.” And they’re like, “Oh, well, I think the evacuees that live next door to me are using drugs.” And I would say, “Okay, can you tell me a little bit more about that? Why do you think they’re using drugs?” “Well, I just think they are.” I say, “Is it because they’re engaging in bad activities? Do you see bad people?” And they say, “No, I just think they are. I don’t think they’re very good people.” I’m like, “Okay.”

Disaster relief providers in Colorado tended to view the hostile remarks, lack of long-term commitment to the well-being of the evacuees, and inability of some Coloradoans to empathize with the evacuees as manifestations of “Katrina fatigue.” These people commonly used the term and were able to offer numerous examples of the ways that Katrina fatigue had played out in the period following the storm.

**EVACUEE EXPERIENCES IN COLORADO**

Interestingly, evacuees rarely if ever used the term “Katrina fatigue.” To them, what others referred to as Katrina fatigue was beginning to take on distinct racial overtones. They knew what discrimination looks and feels like, and they began to sense it in public settings, in their search for housing and jobs, and in the schools of Colorado.
TREATMENT IN PUBLIC SETTINGS

Almost all of the African American adults and youth in this study reported encounters with individuals who assumed they were violent, illiterate, poor, engaged in criminal activities, or abusing drugs. These are stereotypes that African Americans regularly face during nondisaster times, of course, but the evacuees believed that their status as victims of Katrina and former residents of New Orleans led to additional resentment and mistrust. A married man and father of three young girls was involved in a physical altercation in December 2005 with a man who wrongly assumed that he was a member of a gang because he was from New Orleans. He and his wife described what happened:

**Husband:** There’s a lot of people, when they find out [you’re from New Orleans], they want to fight. Last Saturday, I wound up getting in a fight.

**Wife:** We were at a bar, it’s like a bar for older people, a nice place. We was out on the dance floor, me and my husband and my cousin were out on the dance floor, and the DJ gave a shout out, “We got New Orleans in the house!” and we screaming and having fun. And one of the guys, he went to say something about “Killer Colorado,” or something—

**Husband:** He walked up to me like, “Who are you? I’m Killerado.”

**Wife:** They thought he was part of a gang.

**Husband:** There’s a lot of stuff that’s going on that they’re watching on the news. So I’m like, “Come on, brother. We ain’t come out here for no trouble. We ain’t trying to start nothing.” I told [my wife], “Come on, let’s go.”

**Wife:** We was about to leave. So when we were pulling off and the guy wanted to come to the truck and was beating on the truck, saying, “Is that on your mind?” That’s when they stopped the car and they started fighting. I’m screaming, “You don’t know if they have guns. Let’s go, let’s go.”

Those displaced by Katrina also reported that they experienced street harassment and verbal abuse as they traversed their new, overwhelmingly White neighborhoods. A sixteen-year-old African American boy described what happened to him: “I am a young Black male, so I stand out around here. I have had people yell ‘nigger’ at me as I am walking home [to our apartment] after school. It makes me want to get in a fight, but I know I
can't." Later during the interview, I asked him if he wanted to stay in Colorado. He responded emphatically: "Here? No way."

African Americans described various additional encounters with racist individuals in other public places. When a White man refused to move over for an African American Katrina survivor on a bus, she likened the treatment she received to the pre-Civil Rights era in the 1950s and 1960s. She elaborated on the incident:

You know racism happens everywhere, but to experience it firsthand, is, you know . . . We were on the bus, and the bus was kind of crowded. There was a man, he had a seat towards the window, and I said, "Excuse me," and he didn't move. I had my baby, she was in my arms, and everybody was looking because I said, "Excuse me, can I get by?" So this lady that was sitting two rows over on my opposite side, she got up and she gave me a seat. She said, "You can sit here," and she gave me the seat. So she says something to that man, and they start fussing with each other, and she says, "Did you hear her? She said excuse me. Why didn't you get up and move?" He moved over to let [the woman] sit down and she said, "No, I don't want to sit here. I don't want to sit near you." And so for five minutes, the people on the bus were [messing] with this man because he wouldn't let us sit down. You know, sometimes people don't hear you, but he refused to sit next to us. And see, not that you should excuse it, but you should try and give people the benefit of the doubt. He was an older man and maybe he hasn't caught up with society. He's still back in the sixties, the fifties, where Blacks were not equal. He maybe thought we shouldn't even be on this bus with him.

THE SEARCH FOR HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT

The stereotyping and consequent negative reactions that Katrina evacuees had to endure jeopardized their physical health and emotional well-being. And, in some cases, this mistreatment led to serious problems with maintaining stable housing and securing employment.

One African American single mother and her two daughters moved to Colorado after their home in New Orleans was destroyed. The family did not accept any aid from FEMA or the American Red Cross because the mother believed that "they treat you like criminals." Proud that she had never been on government assistance, she depleted her minimal savings when she paid for the first and last month's rent on a townhouse in Den-
ver. Soon after she and her daughters moved into their new home, they began having problems with the other residents, who were mostly older and White:

At first me and the girls moved into some townhouses. And I think we were the youngest family back there, because it was like senior living. They gave me hell. The older people gave me hell. I think we were the youngest family, and we were the only Blacks back there, and they didn’t know what we were because of our light complexion. They asked my landlord, “Where is she from?” He was like, “She’s a Katrina evacuee.” That was a slap right there . . . because of what they’ve seen on TV and what they’ve heard. So immediately they didn’t want us living there. I was having these old people literally toss trash on my lawn. The lease, you have to maintain the lawn, no trash, or you’ll get fined. And after so many violations you would get evicted. And I guess they wanted this to happen to me. There was just a lot of sabotage going on. They sent the police to my house and said I have a lot of traffic in and out. They accused us of selling drugs and prostituting. My seventeen-year-old daughter was home with her best friend when the police came. I called the police station, and I told them, “Don’t ever come to my home and disrespect my home, disrespect my daughter, embarrass my daughter in front of her friend.” Because her friend was like, “Prostitution and drug trafficking?” Thank God the kid knows us. That was the final straw. I had to get out of there. I was livid. I was livid.

This woman recognized that she and her girls were doubly stigmatized: Not only were they the only Black family in the entire housing complex, they were also labeled as Katrina evacuees, which she knew to be a “bad mark.”

A small but vocal minority of the disaster response professionals who worked closely with Katrina evacuees in Colorado perpetuated some of the negative stereotypes. The case manager who helped coordinate post-Katrina housing placements in Colorado frequently alluded to the damage that evacuees had caused in their rental units. He indicated that if a disaster like Katrina happened again, he would try to better prepare landlords for the “culture” of the people that they would encounter:

I think that’s where there could have been some explanation of culture. Tell the landlords, “Don’t be surprised if you go into your unit and you find garbage all over the place, because that’s how these people live.” Tell them, “You should accept whatever is not permanently damaging to your

38 PEEK
property, not write them off as worthless folks, and the stuff that's compromising your asset, work with them on stopping that." There could have been some of that. "Here's what you're gonna see. Here's how they're gonna act. You might need to help them figure out how to operate a thermostat." We had stories of people who ran their thermostats at 90 degrees, twenty-four hours a day.

That case manager helped secure rentals for over 950 evacuee households in Colorado. When asked how many he would label as "problem households," he replied: "You know, there were probably less than 50 really ugly events. So for the most part, it worked." "How these people live," then, seems to have been an issue in only about 5 percent of all of the housing cases ending in disputes between evacuees and their landlords. Regardless of the actual number or percentage of housing cases that ended badly, the case manager admitted that he had begun encouraging evacuees to secure housing in low-income areas of Denver.

When they searched for employment in Colorado, former residents of New Orleans also encountered problems related to their place of origin, evacuee status, and race. An African American mental health counselor who ran Katrina support groups said that many of the evacuees were "having a hard time finding jobs because of the stigma that all people from New Orleans are bad." She noted that evacuees felt that they "could not tell people that they were from New Orleans" and that they were removing pre-hurricane employment information from their résumés. An African American evacuee I interviewed also found that employers had various inaccurate and harmful perceptions about people from New Orleans. For example, she was upset by an employer who would not stop calling her a "refugee," which she felt was insensitive and demeaning:

First, if someone wakes you up at two, three in the morning, you have water up to your neck, you're gonna come out looking like a lot of the people did on the news. I mean, Black women, we wrap our hair at night, so yes, we're gonna have a scarf on our hair. Your skin is gonna be ashy. You're in murky water, and you're in 110-degree weather, nothing to eat, nothing to drink. So you're gonna look like that. And so I guess that was my problem here with jobs. . . . They had this image of us. They thought you would be from the projects, ghetto. And I didn't come off like that or as ignorant. In one interview, the woman was like, "Oh, so you came here with the Katrina refugees?" I was flabbergasted. I said, "We're not
refugees, we’re considered evacuees or Katrina survivors.” So she’s walking me around the office, saying to the staff, “Oh, she’s one of the Katrina refugees.” I walked out. I didn’t apologize. I just left.

Both White and African American evacuees had problems finding employment in Colorado. A White evacuee, for example, said employers treated her like she was “stupid” and “uneducated” because of her Southern accent. African American evacuees faced the added layer of racial discrimination as they attempted to secure employment. An African American woman and mother of three who had worked for over a decade at a five-star hotel in New Orleans recounted her experiences:

It might be just me, but I’m having a hard time finding a job. I’ve been almost promised a job, but when it comes down to you actually getting a job, something would come up or they find somebody more qualified for the job. It’s like last night we were in the store, and there was a “for hire” sign in there and I asked the lady, “Are you hiring?” and she says “No. We’re giving out applications, we’re passing out applications.” I said, “Well, may I please have one?” She said, “Oh, okay.” She looks in the drawer, just rattles some papers, and I’m watching her, and she’s not looking for the application, she rattles some papers and she says, “Oh, we’re out of applications.” But when you leave out the door, you see the big sign saying, “We’re Hiring.” There is racism everywhere, but I’m running across more and more of it here. It’s more of a hidden, subtle thing. And this is not the first time this actually happened. It’s been happening on several occasions.

After Katrina, that same woman suffered a severely broken arm and leg when she fell through the floor of her mother’s storm-damaged home in New Orleans. As a result of her injuries, she spent her first several months in Colorado in rehabilitation as she attempted to regain her strength and mobility. After recovering, she was desperate to find work. She was the sole caregiver for her three children and her disabled mother, and her FEMA housing assistance was soon going to end. Thus, the discrimination she faced in the job search process not only left her feeling depressed and demoralized, it threatened the livelihoods of her entire family.

An African American woman from Slidell also faced employment discrimination in Colorado. While she acknowledged that discrimination and racism were more overt in Louisiana, she argued that navigating the social
landscape in Colorado was exceedingly difficult because racism tended to be more subtle and hidden:

One of the things I miss about Louisiana, even though you knew they had prejudice there . . . You knew what you were up against. They was going to let you know their prejudice. But here it is more like a subtle way. It is like—now this is just my experience applying to certain jobs—to have one person shake your hand and then have the person rub their hand on their clothes. To have one man tell you, “Let me show you your way out of here,” after being interviewed and passing the test. It really took a toll on me because I experienced that. It was like a subtle way and you had to learn to read between the lines in a different way. In Louisiana you just knew if a person was prejudiced right up front. Here it is more of a subtle way to me.

NEGATIVE ENCOUNTERS IN SCHOOLS

School officials and teachers in Denver were generally supportive of Katrina-evacuated youth, and they worked quickly and efficiently to enroll students who were missing birth certificates, immunization records, grade reports, and other vital documents. Yet both parents and children had negative encounters with school personnel and students that came to overshadow many of their positive experiences. An African American single mother of five children, all of whom were enrolled in the Denver public school system, attempted to register a complaint after her youngest daughter was bullied. When the mother went to the school, she felt mistreated, as if her concerns were dismissed:

I cannot tell you how many times I have been treated like I can’t read, can’t write, can’t speak because a lot of people try to speak for me and I am just sitting there. So many of us are portrayed as if we don’t have an education. We are these poor people that are living hand to mouth. When I am talking to people about my kids, especially in the school system, it is really insulting. My youngest was sworn at by a student, and then I am being told that “No, that doesn’t happen here.” And I am like, “No, she said it happened and it happens here. I am not saying that it is a part of your policy that students can come in and they have the right to do this and do that, but it happened. And you are telling me that it doesn’t happen here?” And it did happen. My daughter was cussed out by a student
and she was spat on. And I had to speak out about it, and then they just treat me like I am a difficult parent.

Youth also faced difficulties as a result of their teachers’ assumptions about their literacy and potential for achievement. A thirteen-year-old girl said she had a “real tough time” at her new middle school. She had always earned good grades back in Louisiana, and her mother had high expectations for her. One of the teachers at the school, however, seemed to assume that the teen was incapable of doing well in school. The mother reported:

When I met with her teacher, what I got was this feeling that “she’s from Louisiana. Everybody’s illiterate in Louisiana.” The children are not high achievers. There’s no need to waste your time. So when my daughter gets there, she’s a different type of student, and she gets there and she's going to class and trying, and one of the teachers made some comments that they weren’t looking for her to do well, they didn’t think she would excel.

A Denver resident who took in her niece and nephew after Katrina was distressed when she found out that the high school where she enrolled her nephew had placed him in a special class for students with learning disabilities and behavioral problems. She was convinced that they had made this decision because the youth was African American, male, and from New Orleans:

So I went to the school and talked to his teacher and in conversing with them, realized that they had put [him] in a slow learner class. I said, “So tell me something. Why would you put a child in the ninth grade, who’s doing eleventh grade work back in Louisiana, in a tenth grade moderately handicapped class?” “Well, because that’s the only class that we had available for him.” I said, “Really? Is that so?”

Because he was an honor roll student in New Orleans, the woman asked school officials to transfer him from the special education class, but they refused. Much to her dismay, over the course of the 2005–2006 academic year, her nephew began engaging in delinquent behavior, started drinking and smoking cigarettes and marijuana, missed over eighty days of school, and was finally expelled for stealing a cell phone and an iPod. She understood that some of the “acting out” was the result of his separation from his parents and the trauma of the storm. However, she asserted that the most
significant contributing factor was that he was now surrounded by negative peer influences. This, she believed, was the direct result of the school's assigning him to a class that was filled with "slow learners" and "delinquent youth."

As with the White adults, some of the White children who were displaced by Katrina were subjected to harassment because of their Southern accents and style of speaking. Holly, a thirteen-year-old middle school student, reported, "I've been made fun of in school. A girl—mom calls her 'the little bully'—created the 'I Hate Holly Club.' She was makin' fun of me because of the way I talk. I guess I have an accent and also maybe that her boyfriend might like me." Similarly, when I arrived at another White family's house for an interview, their son offered only a "Hi" as a greeting, despite his mother's prompting to "say hello to Miss Lori." She later informed me that her son had begun refusing to use "Miss" or "Mr." before saying people's names, which is a common practice throughout the South, because "the kids at school had been making fun of the way he talks."

African American youth were also teased and subjected to racially hostile remarks from students in the predominantly White schools in Colorado that the evacuee children attended after the storm. A displaced African American grandmother from New Orleans who had been caring for her granddaughter since Katrina noted that her granddaughter was the only African American in her third grade class and that her "grandbaby had been being bullied" since starting school in Denver. She said, "They treat her okay in the classroom, but when she goes out on the playground, then those kids really bully her. They are calling her racial slurs, throwing rocks, just doing that kind of stuff." Another African American youth, who was one of only eight Black students in her middle school of several hundred students, initially received a warm welcome. This changed, though, after she was voted by her peers to be a cheerleader. She said that some of the girls started being "really mean" to her. Her mother elaborated:

They had a club, basically, for "I hate niggers." It was four White students who made this club and they were writing her name [and] "nigger bitch" on the wall, and it said different things were going on. The school she went to back in New Orleans, the school was mixed, but you didn't have the stereotyping as much. You really have stereotyping in schools here, they call each other names. She's doing okay, with all the things she's been through. But I was ready to leave and just pack up the bags and just leave and just go somewhere South where it wasn't so racist.
These African American children had some of the most threatening and damaging encounters with overt racism. Their parents expressed sadness and anger over the mistreatment their children were subjected to in the schools. They were also left feeling uncertain about how to handle the situation: on the one hand, many of the children were now attending academically comprehensive, highly resourced schools that offered their children new opportunities; on the other hand, the bullying and the racism caused much distress among both the children and their parents. Some parents questioned whether they should just “pack up the bags” and leave. Other parents thought it might be better if they tried to find a more racially diverse school in the area. As one mother told me, after recounting a story of the discrimination her daughter faced, “It might be better if she was in a school where there were other children who were the same color as her.”

CONCLUSION

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, thousands of persons moved to Colorado. These evacuees initially received a warm welcome from local residents and community leaders. Within a matter of months, however, the welcome had faded, and much of the outreach from the community at large had come to an abrupt end. Disaster response professionals attributed the waning concern from Colorado residents for evacuees to “Katrina fatigue.” They reasoned that those living in Colorado could not fully comprehend the magnitude of damage and loss caused by the storm, and consequently were not able to sustain empathy for evacuees for any extended period of time.

Disaster relief providers in Colorado, and the media more generally, used Katrina fatigue as a frame for understanding diminished public support for evacuees as individuals and for the Gulf Coast recovery process as a whole. While professionals and religious leaders clearly witnessed a significant decline in volunteerism and other helping activities among Colorado residents in the months following the storm, the use of the phrase “Katrina fatigue” served to obscure other important social realities and to render evacuees’ experiences with discrimination invisible. If the notion of “Katrina fatigue” is turned on its head, it is possible to consider that some of the generosity and goodwill that followed the disaster simply represented a temporary interruption to endemic and pervasive forms of inequality that mark American institutions and culture. Katrina peeled away the thin veneer that serves to suppress public consideration of issues of racism, classism, gender inequality, and ageism. Forgetting those inequalities
in the warmth of the moment, however, is wholly different from changing the structures that perpetuate them. From this perspective, Katrina fatigue was not simply an indication of exhaustion among political leaders, the press, or the public. It was a return to the familiar.

This lack of long-term commitment to the health and well-being of evacuees had tangible consequences for those who relocated to Colorado after Katrina. Both adults and children, African American and White, encountered many problems as a result of their status as evacuees and as former residents of New Orleans. However, African Americans were the more frequent targets of stereotypical comments and negative assumptions, ranging from perceived illiteracy to criminality. African Americans also experienced additional exclusion as a result of the racial discrimination that they encountered in public settings, in the workplace, in housing situations, and in schools in Colorado. African Americans are regularly confronted with both subtle and overt forms of discrimination during nondonisaster times. However, the harmful effects of discrimination were amplified by the displacement, loss of familiar surroundings, separation from usual systems of support, and intense financial insecurity that followed Katrina.

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NOTES


