The Invisible Toll of Katrina: How Social and Economic Resources are Altering the Recovery Experience among Katrina Evacuees in Colorado

MEGAN UNDERHILL

AmeriCans will never forget the hot summer day in 2005 when the strength of Hurricane Katrina's winds and floodwaters wreaked havoc on over 90,000 square miles of Gulf Coast homes, businesses, and communities (Cutter et al. 2006). In the days following the storm, area residents sat in their hotel rooms or the homes of family and friends, glued to the television in horror, as images of a region drowned and destroyed flitted across their screens. The reality of Hurricane Katrina was experienced in a much more intimate and terrifying way for those individuals who could not or did not evacuate to safety before disaster struck on August 29, 2005. Those left behind worried about the safety of their person, kin, and community and wondered if and how they would be rescued from the besieged region. From the moment of the storm's inception, issues of economic inequality came to the fore, determining who would be able to evacuate and where. Immediately following Katrina, news stories detailed the unequal ways in which issues of class and race influenced the evacuation and recovery experiences of Gulf Coast residents. Unfortunately, media attention and public debate waned when it became apparent that Gulf Coast recovery would not be swift or decisive. After the media turned their attention to other events in the nation and abroad, what happened to Gulf Coast residents in the months and years following Katrina? How were people's recovery experiences impacted by issues of class and the pervasive but little discussed reality that not all Gulf Coast residents had equal access to resources? In what ways was people's ability to financially
recover from the disaster enabled or constrained by their access to different economic and social resources?

Stories and reports abound regarding the U.S. government's handling of the disaster relief effort and its struggle to adequately evacuate or assist the region's most vulnerable residents. However, what has garnered far less attention or public scrutiny is the issue of the wide-scale displacement and resettlement of hundreds of thousands of Gulf Coast residents following Hurricane Katrina. Few historical precedents exist with which to compare or understand the magnitude of the Katrina displacement; however, some have likened the event to mass migrations that followed the Dust Bowl or the Civil War (e.g., Egan, 2005; Grier, 2005).

In the case of Hurricane Katrina, many Gulf Coast communities suffered economic hardships from the sudden loss of large sectors of their tax base. A dramatic decrease in the local tax base made it difficult for Gulf Coast communities to finance recovery efforts or afford basic public services. Similarly, cities that welcomed tens of thousands of disaster-affected individuals grew worried when it became apparent that many evacuees could not or would not return home. A number of social and economic factors prevented the return migration of Katrina's poorest evacuees, resulting in what was described as the "permanent transfer of a large number of poor people from one city to the next" (Peterson et al., 2006:652). Poor residents were more likely to become permanently displaced than middle-class residents. Many were the recipients of institutional evacuations and were resettled in communities farther from home. For countless people the cost to return home was prohibitive. The few who could afford the return journey discovered that their homes were destroyed and that rental prices had doubled (Peterson et al., 2006). A year after the disaster, many host cities, such as Houston, Baton Rouge, and Atlanta, complained of feeling burdened by the significant increase in the number of financially and emotionally vulnerable residents, and city managers expressed concern about how their local tax base could continue to afford the increased costs of public services and assistance (Axelman, 2006; Campo-Flores, 2006; Sullivan, 2006).

Although the approximate number of those displaced by the hurricane remains unclear, recent FEMA (2007) statistics indicate that more than 650,000 households participated in their housing assistance program. Displaced people found refuge in cities and states throughout the South; however, a significant number of people were flung farther afield to regions of the country that bore little resemblance culturally or geographically to the places they called home. Fourteen thousand Katrina evacuees moved to Colorado after the disaster. The manner in which Gulf Coast residents evacuated to the Rocky Mountain state depended a great deal upon the economic and social resources evacuees had at their disposal. Evacuees with economic and/or social resources came to Colorado of their own initiative while resource-poor individuals exerted less control in regard to their relocation and were often evacuated by the U.S. government. Initially evacuees assumed that their residence in Colorado would be temporary; however, as the days turned into months, evacuees were faced with the startling realization that their residence might be indefinite or permanent.

As discussed in detail below, individuals who had the least degree of difficulty recovering after the disaster were typically white, middle-class non-natives who had relatively small family and friend networks in Louisiana upon whom they relied for little if any economic assistance. The possession of economic savings, nationally recognized educational and occupational credentials, and ties to national businesses helped these economically self-sufficient individuals reconstitute their lives in Colorado and recover from the disaster. In contrast, Hurricane Katrina proved most devastating for native New Orleanians who possessed few economic resources in Louisiana, but who were able to transcend the realities of low-wage work through membership in dense and highly cooperative kin and friend networks. Many were deeply embedded within the local economy of New Orleans and depended upon extensive network ties to help them negotiate an assortment of income earning opportunities in both the formal and informal economy. The rupture of important social networks made resettlement in Colorado difficult, especially for those individuals who lacked economic capital and did not have family members in Colorado to help them negotiate their resettlement experience. Predominantly African American, these individuals arrived in Colorado without a job or the promise of one and few possessed much in the way of savings. Quickly, they learned they would have to start their lives anew in a state where the cost of living was almost twice as high as the one they hailed from.

All of the evacuees in Colorado experienced economic loss; however, the severity of their loss depended in great part upon both the economic and social resources people possessed before and after the disaster.

**Economic Impact Vulnerability**

In the book *Unequal Childhoods*, sociologist Annette Lareau (2003:236) examines how a person's class position in society influences the type of
skills, behaviors, and attitudes that American parents transmit to their children. According to Lareau, a person’s class status informs “critical aspects of family life” including but not limited to “time use, language skills, and kin ties.” Lareau posits that middle-class children learn a distinctively different set of skills and behaviors than their working-class or poor peers. She argues middle-class parents stress the importance of “concerted cultivation” and make strategic investments of both time and money in the education of their children. As a result, middle-class children develop excellent language and reasoning skills that enable them to effectively communicate with a variety of people in different institutional and interpersonal settings. Interestingly, middle-class parents do not teach their children to make similar investments in the extended family and most grow up geographically and emotionally estranged from their relatives.

In contrast, working-class and poor parents adhere to a childrearing philosophy that stresses the “accomplishments of natural growth.” With the help of extended family members (most of who live in close proximity to one another), working-class and poor parents are able to ensure their children are well cared for, fed, clothed, and housed in a safe home in a secure environment. Among the working class and poor, family is the organizing principle of people’s lives, and kin members regularly provide one another with instrumental services (Lareau 2003:87). Significant economic constraints make it impossible for working-class or poor parents to make similar monetary or temporal investments in the cultivation of their children’s individual talents. Nor are working-class or poor parents able to endow their children with the vocabulary or language skills that will help to effectively communicate with institutional authorities. Lack of financial resources and educational skills causes many working-class and poor individuals to feel powerless and constrained when interacting with institutions or people of different class backgrounds.

In the disaster literature, research has shown that disasters negatively impact the economic situation of the affected population, causing many to experience economic loss (Bolin 1986; Elliot and Pais 2006; Erikson 1976; Fothergill 2004; Fothergill and Peck 2004; Morrow 1997; Peterson et al. 2006). Following a disaster, it is common for people to incur significant debt in an effort to fix salvageable items or replace those that have been destroyed (Fothergill 2004; Morrow 1997). Mounting disaster expenses may exacerbate people’s already vulnerable economic situation, making it difficult for some to keep up with pre-existing bills and newly emergent expenses. In a research study conducted after the 1997 Grand Forks Flood, Fothergill (2004:54) notes that disaster-associated expenses increased people’s financial burden and caused many area residents to experience “severe and sudden” downward mobility.

The relationship between a person’s class and their ability to economically reconstitute their lives after a disaster or resettlement has been well documented (Elliot and Pais 2006; Fothergill 2004; Fothergill and Peck 2004; Morrow 1997; Scudder and Colson 1982). Not surprisingly, disaster researchers note that people of higher socioeconomic status fare better after a disaster than lower income people (Bolin 1986; Fothergill 2004; Morrow 1997; Peterson et al. 2006). Individuals of higher socioeconomic status are less likely to encounter job loss and experience fewer fluctuations in their income following a disaster (Fothergill 2004; Peterson et al. 2006). Indeed, many have salaried positions that provide them with regular and steady paychecks in the harried days and weeks following the event (Fothergill 2004). In addition, individuals of higher socioeconomic status are more likely to possess savings, investments, or lines of credit they can draw on to finance a variety of disaster-associated expenses (Fothergill 2004; Fothergill and Peck 2004; Peterson et al. 2006). In the case of Hurricane Katrina, middle-class residents evacuated closer to their homes and were among the first residents to return to their communities and begin rebuilding their residences (Peterson et al. 2006:650).

Individuals of lower socioeconomic status have a much more difficult time recovering their pre-impact economic status than similarly affected middle-class residents (Fothergill and Peck 2004). Many individuals experience job loss while others lose weeks of critical wages when they are unable to attend their hourly paid jobs for days or weeks after the event (Elliot and Pais 2006; Fothergill 2004). People of lower socioeconomic status are also more reliant upon disaster assistance programs to help them regain their pre-impact economic status. Unfortunately, many lower income people have a difficult time qualifying for, accessing, or negotiating disaster assistance programs. After Hurricane Andrew many individuals were prohibited from seeking government assistance due to the fact that aid offices were located in distant areas of the city that were inaccessible via public transportation (Morrow 1997:153; Oliver-Smith 1991). In addition, researchers have documented instances in which need-based individuals were denied recovery assistance by institutions whose eligibility requirements were based on a nuclear family model such as the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency’s head-of-household rule (Fothergill 2004; Morrow 1997; Phillips 1993; Scudder and Colson 1982). Inability to provide officials with proof of residency effectively prohibited people from accessing disaster assistance in the Katrina case and others.
Finally, scholars like Granovetter (1973) argue it is important to cultivate relationships with people who lie outside one’s immediate circle of family and close friends. In contrast to the stability imparted by dense and interdependent kin networks, weak ties broaden both the number and diversity of a person’s social network, thus enabling an individual to access information, resources, and even jobs.

**Methodology**

In this study I used a variety of ethnographic methods including informal interviews, in-depth formal interviews, structured interviews, and participant observation. My research began in September 2005 and concluded 15 months later in December 2006. Over the course of the research project, I interviewed 30 Katrina evacuees who resettled in Colorado following the disaster, of whom all but one were from the city of New Orleans or surrounding towns such as Slidell or Mandeville. My sample consisted of 18 black and 12 white participants, of which 17 were female and 13 were male. In addition, I coded 9 of the individuals as “self-sufficient” and 21 as “interdependent” individuals in my sample. The two groups of people had little in common with one another demographically, economically, or socially, as will be demonstrated in the findings sections of this paper. Stated briefly, self-sufficient individuals were usually middle-to-upper middle class non-natives who had small social networks they relied upon for affective services only. In contrast, interdependent individuals were usually working-class or poor Louisiana natives who possessed large social networks they relied upon for affective and instrumental services.

During the first five weeks of the research project I volunteered at a U.S. Air Force base in Colorado where many of the poorest evacuees were initially housed. As a volunteer, I was able to gather a wealth of observational data about people’s immediate experiences with resettlement in Colorado. I began to interview evacuees in October of 2005. In each interview, I asked people 53 questions about their life before and after their resettlement in Colorado. I was particularly interested in learning how disaster resettlement impacted people’s financial situations and I wanted to learn if people were able to draw upon pre-existing economic and social resources to aid them with their resettlement in Colorado. I asked evacuees the following kinds of questions: What did you do for a living in New Orleans? How do you support yourself in Colorado? Did you have any side jobs in New Orleans and do you have any in Colorado, why or why not? Have you received any assistance in Colorado, if so what kind and from
who? What, if anything, was difficult about your life in New Orleans? What kind of difficulties have you experienced in Colorado?

I also designed and administered a survey wherein I asked people specific questions about the size, composition, and function of their kin networks before and after disaster resettlement. During the 15-month period I attempted to maintain contact with all of the evacuees in my sample, and I spoke to most evacuees two to four times during the course of the project. These conversations made it possible for me to observe how their lives had or had not changed since our first interview.

The Economic Situation
Before and After Katrina
Everyone experienced economic loss after Katrina; however, the magnitude of a person’s loss depended upon the economic and social resources they possessed before and after the disaster. In order to illustrate how the economic context of people’s lives changed following Katrina, I have organized my findings into two separate sections entitled: life before the disaster, and disaster resettlement in Colorado.

In addition, I present my findings in terms of two populations of people; those who I identified as self-sufficient versus those who I saw as interdependent. Both groups can be distinguished from one another in terms of marked economic differences; however, they also differed from one another in regard to their region of origin, values, and norms and the size, composition, and function of their social networks.

Self-sufficient Individuals before the Disaster
Self-sufficient residents were usually middle-to-upper middle class individuals who either worked in, or were retired from, white-collar industries where they received an annual salary and health benefits. Of those who were employed, many worked for national businesses that had offices throughout the country while others worked in well-paying industries such as the healthcare sector where jobs were easy to come by if one possessed the requisite training, skills, and experience. Self-sufficient individuals rarely possessed more than one job in the formal economy and I heard of no instances in which a person tried to increase their income through informal side businesses. Higher annual incomes afforded many of these individuals the opportunity to save money, purchase a home, or invest in other financial ventures.

In addition, the majority of self-sufficient individuals were white non-natives who moved to New Orleans with their nuclear family when they were adolescents or adults. As a result of their relatively recent migration to the area, few of these individuals possessed kin networks that exceeded more than five family members (table 4.1). Over half of all self-sufficient individuals in the sample had no children and of those individuals who were parents, the average family size was limited to one or two children. Similarly, their non-kin networks were also small, consisting of a few close friends and a larger number of associates who were of a similar class background and whom they encountered at work or social events throughout the year. These individuals used their social networks in Louisiana for affective services only. None of these participants relied upon their network members for instrumental services. Indeed, all of these participants assured me that they were “self-sufficient,” “economically secure” individuals who need not rely upon network members for services that they were well positioned to purchase. One evacuee, Donald, elaborates upon this sentiment:

Well, I did not really need help in New Orleans. I was pretty self-sufficient. When I was young and in school my parents helped me out financially and let me borrow some money—but honestly I really do not need that much help. My wife and I do just fine as nurses. Self-sufficient people were proud to be able to take care of themselves and they viewed assistance from family or friends as unnecessary. They were quick to distinguish themselves from Louisiana natives who they said operated within a network system in which interests were advanced or opportunities accessed based upon one’s social connections rather than one’s merit, experience, or educational qualifications. One of my informants described the importance of social connections among locals in the following way:

I don’t know what the deal is—what is going on with people but it is just a slower pace of life. There is no hurry down there. There are a lot of
kickbacks and good old boys down there—you know brother, uncle type deal. In a lot of ways it was all about who you knew there.

Non-native, predominantly white self-sufficient individuals felt as if they had little in common with many of the values or norms that were espoused by native residents. Self-sufficient individuals lived and worked in Louisiana but they did not really see themselves as being part of the area. Armed with economic resources and nationally recognized credentials, these individuals had greater ties and connections to national businesses and interests. They were not embedded within the local cultural economy of New Orleans and few felt it necessary to rely upon local connections to access opportunities or services.

Interdependent Individuals Before the Disaster

In contrast, the financial situation of interdependent individuals was often more precarious and less secure. Most interdependent individuals were working-class or poor African Americans who had small annual incomes derived from hourly positions in the service sector of the economy. The majority of interdependent individuals in my sample were African American; however, a much smaller number of white residents also engaged in interdependent behavior, albeit to a much lesser scale. Indeed, lower income white residents engaged in everyday forms of reciprocity with their nuclear families only—for things like household assistance, childcare, and financial assistance. Like self-sufficient individuals, none of the interdependent whites were natives to the area and they had small family networks composed entirely of nuclear family members. In addition, whites possessed small friend networks that they relied upon mainly for affective services.

Almost no one in my interdependent sample was a homeowner and very few individuals possessed savings. As a result, the majority of people found it necessary to work two or three jobs in order to make ends meet. Close to one half of all lower income people in my sample had more than one job and I heard of many instances in which a person worked 15 or 16 hours a day, six days a week. A small number of individuals also tried to earn extra money working under the table. Only a few people in my sample openly discussed their side business with me. However, one of my informants who worked exclusively in the informal economy noted that many people in New Orleans had side jobs. He states:

That is kind of what New Orleans teaches you how to do—things that are under the table. People would pay cash for whatever they got and they would let the government worry about themselves.

Informal employment was an attractive option for many because it provided people with an opportunity to exert greater control over their schedule and earnings. The most common side businesses people discussed with me included: babysitting, cooking, repairing cars, cleaning, or helping people with various household repairs. Most of their business clientele consisted of people they knew fairly well; however, many also attracted new and unfamiliar customers through word-of-mouth advertising.

Few lower income people would have been able to survive financially had it not been for the assistance that their social networks provided. The majority of people I have labeled as interdependent were New Orleans natives who were deeply embedded in kin networks that consisted of 40 or more individuals with whom they engaged in frequent acts of reciprocity. Ronald, a 38-year-old African American man who was born and raised in the Ninth Ward, describes the value of reciprocity that existed among network members and New Orleans natives:

People in New Orleans are giving people. They share and help one another out. I may not know someone real well but they will still let you into their house and fix you something to eat. In New Orleans, many people act as if they be knowing you their whole lives. They help you out and when you can you help them out too. People just treat you like family there.

Interdependent people had an abundance of family, both biological and fictive, whom they could rely upon for assistance, help, or information. Many people lived in extended family households that were composed of three or four generations of relatives, sharing the cost of rent, food, or transportation. In addition, many parents—most often single women—received reliable and affordable childcare assistance from their female kin members. Violet discusses the problems her daughter encountered with many non-kin childcare providers:

My daughter had a hard time finding babysitters. She would have to take what she could get like night hours—late hours. She didn’t have dependable resources so we helped her. I sent my son Ted down there to help her. Then I moved down there to help her. I got part-time work at the Shell station because I needed money. I worked the 3–11 shift and my daughter worked 11–7 and when we were gone my son would be there with the kids so we was just rotating. We just all rotated.

Family members also served as important conduits of information, however; they were by no means the only people whom individuals turned
to in order to gather or disseminate information. People relied upon all of their network members to learn about employment opportunities or to advertise their own businesses.

Network members adhered to norms and values that stressed the importance of sharing and reciprocity. People understood that they could not financially survive on their own. As a result, many people gave with the knowledge that they would receive and they understood that sharing was a productive action that all network members benefited from.

Although interdependent social networks helped people to stay financially afloat, they could not help them to get ahead. Evacuees commonly complained about the lack of opportunities in New Orleans and noted how the majority of their family and friends were stuck in low-wage jobs that offered few opportunities for advancement. Many individuals thought it difficult if not impossible to improve their lives in Louisiana. In conversations people stressed the importance of investing in family; however, few interdependent evacuees made similar comments about the benefits that could arise from an investment in education. Evacuees like Jaime, a 19-year-old high school graduate understood the situation as follows:

In New Orleans education wasn’t a big deal. They didn’t push it on anyone. The attitude was if you are not doing good in school—well okay—whatever. In New Orleans I was still in contact with my family almost every single day. There was not much else other than that.

For Jaime and other low-income interdependent residents education may not have been considered a big deal because their families could ill afford to extend their education beyond high school. Most interdependent families were living paycheck to paycheck and could not make additional investments of their time or energy in the institutional education of themselves or their relatives. Few individuals I spoke with appeared to be worried about their lack of advanced educational qualifications. People did not perceive that their ability to attain employment in New Orleans hinged upon their possession of an advanced degree. More often, becoming gainfully employed depended upon the resourcefulness of the individual or a word-of-mouth referral from a network member.

**Self-sufficient Individuals and Resettlement**

Everyone experienced economic loss after the disaster including higher income, self-sufficient residents whose homes, properties, and possessions were badly damaged by Katrina. The financial loss sustained by self-sufficient individuals was significant; however, it never spelled their financial ruin. At most, people experienced a financial setback, a setback they could recover from because they possessed savings, owned insurance homes, and were able to resume employment at new or old jobs weeks after the storm.

Savings helped self-sufficient individuals to financially stay afloat in the weeks or months after the storm when many contemplated where they would go and what they would do. Individuals with savings claimed that they "did not really need any help" from the government or nonprofit organizations after the disaster. The institutional assistance that was received by higher income evacuees was usually limited to the procurement of clothes or furniture. Daniel describes his experience with assistance after the disaster:

After Katrina, there was a great outpouring of generosity and goodwill. People and organizations gave us clothes to wear. I had never worn used clothes before Katrina but we had lost everything so I had to. We also got a lot of free furniture and we were able to furnish our two-bedroom apartment. We were aware that there was a rental assistance program but we did not want to go through all of the paperwork. We didn’t need that kind of help. We had enough money saved to live off of for a while.

In addition to savings, many people were able to live off the insurance monies they received from their damaged homes. Insurance payments were an important source of capital that helped self-sufficient individuals to finance their new lives in Colorado and many used their insurance money to make a down payment on a home or to pay for additional start-up costs. The possession of savings and insurance money made people feel comfortable and confident about beginning their lives anew in Colorado, as one of my informants stated:

We were not scared to move here. We both felt very confident about getting a job and we had savings so we never once felt desperate after the hurricane.

We never feared that we were going to become homeless or anything.

Self-sufficient individuals were able to further stretch the largesse of their savings and insurance monies because very few had dependent children for whom they were financially responsible. With but a few exceptions, self-sufficient individuals did not have the added worry or financial stress of having to support a family after their resettlement in Colorado.

Of those individuals who were employed before the disaster, all but one was able to find comparable employment in Colorado shortly after
they moved. With relatively little difficulty, salaried employees at national companies were able to transfer their jobs to a local office in Colorado. Employment at a national company yielded other financial benefits as well. Many national companies provided their employees with generous relocation packages that paid for a portion, if not the entirety, of their moving expenses. Joanne describes the ease with which she was able to transfer her job to Colorado:

So I came up here and I was lucky to be able to transfer with my company because they had an office in Denver. I am just lucky to have fallen into a company with the resources to let me do that. It was pretty easy to get my job transferred. It was a phone call.

Self-sufficient individuals who were not affiliated with a national company also found it relatively easy to attain employment in Colorado. These individuals knew where to look for jobs and felt comfortable submitting applications and résumés as well as being interviewed by potential employers. Local businesses were especially likely to hire individuals who possessed specialized training or skills. Individuals with less specialized skills found jobs through temporary employment agencies that placed them with companies that had "temp to hire" policies whereby a person was permanently hired by an employer after a few months.

The need for kin assistance was a consideration for few self-sufficient evacuees who moved to Colorado. Indeed, only two self-sufficient individuals evacuated to Colorado because they had relatives who lived in the state pre-Katrina (table 4.2).

Both of these individuals’ Colorado relatives were financially secure homeowners who possessed the physical space and financial resources to enable them to house their relatives for weeks or months on end. These two evacuees felt extremely fortunate they had relatives who were willing and able to offer them long-term shelter. Living with their family spared them the hardship and frustration of having to find temporary housing elsewhere. In addition, family provisioned shelter provided them with several weeks of free accommodation. Despite their gratitude, neither person felt comfortable relying upon their relatives for instrumental services. The following quote from Janet typifies the discomfort they felt about accessing kin assistance:

I didn’t want to have to depend on my relatives here. I didn’t want to mooch off anyone and basically I didn’t feel like I had to. I am paying them rent and I think that benefits everyone.

### Interdependent Individuals and Resettlement

Lower income, interdependent people were more profoundly affected by the hurricane and their resettlement than were higher income self-sufficient individuals. Whereas most self-sufficient individuals described their disaster resettlement experience as an “inconvenience” or a “hardship,” lower income, interdependent individuals spoke of their experience in much more dramatic and weighty terms. Like most residents who lived in disaster-affected areas, interdependent individuals experienced huge material loss after the disaster. Katrina’s violent winds and swelling waters drowned people’s neighborhoods and communities and destroyed their homes and material possessions. However, in many ways resettlement in Colorado proved to be more detrimental for interdependent people than the wreckage wrought by Hurricane Katrina.

Unlike self-sufficient individuals, interdependent evacuees did not have the luxury of savings or insurance payments to help them rebuild their lives in Colorado. A dearth of financial capital made it necessary for them to rely upon governmental or nongovernmental assistance programs to help them get back on their feet. Ninety-five percent of all interdependent evacuees participated in the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s housing assistance program, which promised to provide people with 12 to 18 months of rental assistance in Colorado. The housing program made it possible for people to live in Colorado despite rent prices that were prohibitively higher than they were used to paying in Louisiana. Housing assistance was one of the most beneficial sources of aid people received, although it was by no means perfectly instituted in Colorado. Many people were placed in homes or apartments that they would not be able to afford once the Federal Emergency Management Agency program ended. In addition, residences were often distant from town centers, social services providers, or places of employment, which proved particularly problematic for those individuals who did not own cars or live within walking distance of a bus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.2. Median and Mean Sizes of Family Networks in Colorado</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family who left with them (median size)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependent African Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependent Whites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
stop. Geographic isolation and a lack of transportation impeded people's ability to find jobs or access alternative sources of assistance.

Job loss and long-term unemployment were two additional factors that contributed to people's increased economic insecurity. Rates of job loss were particularly high among interdependent evacuees. The majority of evacuees lost multiple jobs per person and less than 10 percent of all interdependent evacuees worked for national companies that would have enabled them to transfer their jobs to Colorado. The two individuals who had the least degree of difficulty attaining employment in Colorado were those who were employed at Wal-Mart in Louisiana. Employment ties to a national company like Wal-Mart helped both people to obtain comparable employment in Colorado rapidly. In contrast, it took the other five individuals in my sample four to six months to find a job in Colorado; however, none of them were able to find comparable employment. Indeed, all of the non-Wal-Mart employees complained they were making less money in Colorado than they had in Louisiana. Jennifer, a massage therapist, describes her feelings of frustration in regard to her reduced wages:

The new place I work pays about half of what I had made in New Orleans and I have to do more massages in order to make less than I did there. I can’t work many more days then I already do. I would go into the salon in New Orleans and do three massages but I made over a hundred dollars. Here I have to do 6 massages to make a hundred dollars.

Despite people's frustrations, employed evacuees were well aware they were better off than those evacuees who remained chronically unemployed. Working-class and poor evacuees understood they needed to find employment in Colorado. Most received weekly or monthly reminders from aid agencies regarding the status of their rental assistance, unemployment benefits, or other types of aid. Unfortunately, messages from aid agencies were often contradictory and misleading. Few people had a clear understanding of how long they would be able to access disaster assistance and many feared their benefits would end abruptly. Fears of homelessness were never far from the forefronts of people's minds. Evacuees like Diane, a former nurse's assistant in her mid-fifties, understood assistance would not last forever:

I need to be on some person's job—where I can be making me some money because when the pay from FEMA runs out I need to be able to pay for my rent, my utilities, and some transportation. If I can’t start working and banking up on that now—I am going to be in a pickle. Who will come to my aid then?

Regardless of people's awareness that they needed to begin earning money, a number of factors prevented people from immediately seeking work. Most were unsure how long they would stay in Colorado and they were hesitant to become employed if they planned to return home. Others argued that trying to negotiate disaster assistance programs and social service providers was a full-time job that left few hours in the day to look for work. A smaller number of individuals cited family problems or concerns as yet another reason why they had to postpone their job search. Evacuees like Cheryl, who relocated with her ailing mother, her two dependent children, and her sister's family, postponed her job search in Colorado when her mother became deathly ill and was hospitalized. Cheryl did not feel it was appropriate to begin looking for work until after her mother was released from the hospital and began to show signs of physical recovery.

By mid-November, the majority of interdependent evacuees felt as if they had their lives well enough in order to begin looking for work. In general, people perceived there to be a greater number of employment opportunities in Colorado than Louisiana and felt relatively confident about finding a job. Despite people's optimism, two-thirds of all working-class and poor evacuees were unable to find work a year after their resettlement. A small number of evacuees attributed their inability to find employment in Colorado to issues of racial and gender discrimination while others cited a lack of formal work qualifications as their greatest impediment to finding work. More commonly, I heard people mention that they did not know how to go about getting a job in an unfamiliar place where they knew few people. For many evacuees, this was the first time in ten or twenty years they had to look for a new job. Most were used to relying upon friends or family for employment help and were unaccustomed to the formal hiring process in Colorado whereby one filled out an application (often online), submitted a résumé, and attended one or more job interviews. Individuals like Elton were well aware that social connections could help him to acquire a job or learn about alternative ways to earn an income:

Maybe by the first of the year I will have met enough people to decide and think about if I can financially make it here. I don't know enough people here yet so that means that the job that I decide to pick is not only going to be for money but also for contacts. So I can use those people to help me with my business plan.

Bereft of either financial or social resources, such individuals had few alternatives but to rely upon disaster assistance programs, social service
providers, or the charity of local residents, all of which offered evacuees short-term remedies for complex and potentially long-term problems.

Many evacuees tried to circumvent their dependence on aid by engaging in relationships of reciprocity with local volunteers or other evacuees. Frequently unemployed or underemployed evacuees were hired by local volunteers or other evacuees for help with short-term side projects such as house painting, furniture assembly, or yard work. Evacuees were able to earn extra money through side work; however, side projects were too infrequent to serve as a viable source of income. More commonly, evacuees swapped goods and services with other evacuees who they were friends with or who lived in close proximity to them. Unfortunately, geographic isolation and a lack of transportation prevented many people from initiating or maintaining reciprocal relationships with other Katrina evacuees in Colorado.

Individuals who were able to re-institute relationships of interdependency and reciprocity with their kin in Colorado fared better than individuals who arrived in the state by themselves. Many interdependent individuals evacuated and resettled in Colorado because they had family that lived in the state pre-Katrina. During evacuation, people strove to keep their family members together and many evacuated to Colorado with 15 or 20 family members from home. Diana, one of seven siblings and a mother of two daughters, explained why many of her family members moved to Colorado following the hurricane:

We all stay close together because we all want to make sure that the other is taken care of. My daughters are grown and I did not even ask them if they wanted to come up—they just followed me. Many of my sisters and their kids followed me here too. We all just tried to stick together so that we can help one another out.

The presence of kin in Colorado made it possible for people to reestablish many of the forms of everyday reciprocity that characterized their lives in Louisiana. Unfortunately, disaster resettlement in Colorado severely impaired the size, strength, and capacity of many family networks. Single parents, most often women, were especially disadvantaged to be separated from network members who had offered them free and reliable childcare assistance in Louisiana. Parents without family in Colorado found it difficult if not impossible to pay for childcare assistance. The following quote from Annika helps to demonstrate her anger and frustration over the high cost of care in Colorado:

In New Orleans I didn’t have to do everything by myself. If I needed to go to work or go out I knew I could call their father or one of my family members for help. Here I can’t do that and I have to do everything by myself. I have tried to put my daughter into kindergarten here but they told me that a full day kindergarten is $285 and I told them that I didn’t have that kind of money. I applied for child care assistance but I have yet to hear from the lady who worked for that program. I have been living from paycheck to paycheck and I am over in two separate accounts. I don’t know what I am going to do.

Evacuees derived many benefits from their Gulf Coast relatives; however, as a whole their kin networks were in a state of crisis. Few family members were doing well emotionally or financially, making it difficult for people to rely upon their kin members for the same variety of services they had regularly accessed at home. In addition, many evacuees associated exclusively with other disaster affected relatives or evacuees who were privy to similar sorts of information and services as they.

Evacuees with Colorado relatives were lucky to have a native family member to assist them. Evacuees like Troy, a 39-year-old New Orleans native, relied upon his sister and cousin to introduce him to their friends and acquaintances, provide him with useful information in regard to the workings of the city, and help him find a centrally located and affordable place to live. In addition, Troy was able to secure a job through one of his sister’s social acquaintances who informed Troy of an employment opening at her work and encouraged her boss to hire him. However, evacuees with Coloradoan kin were quick to remind me that there were limits to the types of services their relatives could provide or that they felt comfortable requesting. Evacuees did not want their “native” relatives to become overwhelmed by the frequency of their requests, and several individuals admitted they refrained from asking for assistance until their need for help was pressing.

Conclusion
The disaster resettlement experience of Katrina evacuees in Colorado clearly illustrates that the consequences of disasters are not the same for all groups of people, nor is recovery equally likely or equally possible for all groups of people. Therefore, we must investigate why such investments are not equally likely or possible for all people to attain. Echoing the words of Annette Lareau (2003:84), this chapter seeks to demonstrate how “fami-
lies' social structural location gives them a different pool of resources to address similar life problems." Self-sufficient and interdependent residents both experienced material loss after Katrina and both were resettled in new communities they had little familiarity with; however, in few other ways were their experiences comparable.

The financial resources and educational skills possessed by self-sufficient evacuees made it easier for them to recover from Katrina. Their higher annual incomes afforded them the ability to develop and protect their financial assets before Katrina and their national connections and advanced academic qualifications made them feel confident they could attain a secure and well-paid employment position anywhere in the world they should choose to reside, including Colorado. Their financial survival did not depend upon their being rooted in a particular environment, nor was their ability to economically reconstitute their lives dependent upon their ability to exchange goods and services with family or friends. Although not relying upon families for day-to-day survival, they did benefit from long-term financial, educational, and social investments their families made in them. For self-sufficient evacuees, disaster resettlement in Colorado was an inconvenience. It was not an event that spelled their financial ruin or one that led to downward mobility.

Economic factors alone cannot account for what made some evacuees more or less vulnerable in Colorado. For interdependent evacuees, their economic situation was exacerbated by the loss of their social world, or more specifically, the loss of the social institutions or networks that provided them with instrumental services and assisted them in their day-to-day survival. In Louisiana, network assistance, especially among kin members, functioned as an adaptation to poverty and provided working-class and poor residents with a built-in safety net. In contrast to self-sufficient evacuees, interdependent evacuees arrived in Colorado with limited or no financial resources in tow. For those individuals who were lucky enough to resettle in Colorado with family or friends, many were able to reintroduce some of the forms of everyday reciprocity that characterized their lives pre-Katrina. Such assistance helped evacuees; however, a significant decrease in network size and a lack of weak ties to local community members made it difficult for evacuees to access the same number or diversity of services they received at home. A year after their resettlement, few interdependent evacuees were employed and most were still in a state of financial and emotional crisis.

The two groups of individuals experience recovery via the broader political economy in different ways: the poorer interdependent individuals with government assistance programs, and the more economically self-sufficient individuals with insurance companies. After years of having their wealth appropriated by government taxes or insurance policy plans, disaster-affected residents assumed they would be able to rely upon the government and other private institutions to help them finance their recovery. For example, housing insurance companies tried to avoid claims despite being able to pay them. Thus, middle-class Americans were tied to the larger political economy not only through their transferable professional skills/jobs but also through the insurance industry that protects their major form of investment. But disasters alter political economies, and the insurance industry has reacted by putting in stronger clauses about flooding, thus altering a major political economic link between the middle class and private capital.

Similarly for the lower class, the government began to absolve itself—months after Katrina—of its responsibility to assist the disaster-affected population. Thus, the poor are not only tied to the larger political economy through replaceable service and unskilled labor, but also via a variety of public housing programs in disaster and/or normal situations. These housing programs are costly to governments, especially if they involve financing, and thus governments tend to use them to the extent necessary to decrease outcures from either those in need of housing, or from people of higher socioeconomic status that find the neediness of others annoying. The definition of necessary, then, is what is politically economically expedient. As government assistance began to wane after Katrina, Gulf Coast residents were encouraged to assume complete responsibility for their recovery regardless of whether they were necessarily ready or able to take on such an endeavor.

Disasters help to make visible pervasive and often ignored social issues (Fritz 1968:658). Hurricane Katrina is no exception to this rule. In the aftermath of Katrina, the American public once again became aware of the fundamental ways in which issues of class and race influence people's life chances in routine and nonroutine circumstances. Although Katrina did not foment broad-scale social change in the United States, it did provide Americans with a lens with which to critically evaluate the political economy of a finance-driven economy.

Notes
1. It is important to note that only one self-sufficient individual had dependent children in Louisiana for whom they were financially responsible. All of the other parents had children who had reached adulthood and were financially responsible for themselves.
2. The one instance of job loss among self-sufficient occurred with a male home inspector in Louisiana. He could not attain equivalent employment in Colorado because he was unfamiliar with Colorado’s building codes and architectural styles and would have to obtain new training.

3. The other five people who found employment in Colorado possessed a technical skill, worked in the restaurant industry, or found a job through a family member or a family friend.

4. Seven interdependent individuals were forcibly evacuated to Colorado by the U.S. government. They arrived in Colorado by themselves and did not have family or friends who lived in the state pre-Katrina.

References

Axtman, Kris

Barnshaw, John

Bolin, Robert

Campo-Flores, Arian

Cutter, Susan L., Christopher T. Enrich, Jerry T. Mitchell, Bryan J. Bonnuff, Melanie Gall, Mathew C. Schmidleyn, Christopher G. Burton, and Ginni Melton

Egan, Timothy

Elliot, James R., and Jeremy Pais
2006 Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina: Social Differences in Human Responses to Disaster. Social Science Research 35(2):295-321.

Erikson, Kai T.

Federal Emergency Management Agency

Fothergill, Alice

Fothergill, Alice, and Lori Peak

Fritz, Charles

Granovetter, Mark

Grier, Peter

Halperin, Rhoda
1994 Cultural Economies Past and Present. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Hulbert, Jeanne S., Valerie A. Haines, and John J. Beggs

Lareau, Annette

Moore, Spencer, Mark Daniel, Laura Linnan, Marci Campbell, Salli Benedict, and Andrea Meier

Morrow, Betty Hearn
Recovering Inequality: Democracy, the Market Economy, and the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire

SHELLY BROWN-JEFFY AND STEVE KROLL-SMITH

In every city the people are divided into three sorts: the very rich, the very poor, and those who are between them

(ARISTOTLE 350 BC <BR> BOOK IV, CH XI)

Nature directs its fury seemingly at random. A small town in Kansas is leveled by a tornado; an earthquake swallows a highway; floodwaters ravage a town in Iowa. The scale of disaster is measured not only in the strength or invasive power of an averse agent but also in the amount of human and environmental damage it causes. The shock of disaster is routinely followed by the more prosaic, organizational, and inevitably political economic process of recovery.

Recovery is a term used by government agencies, corporations, non-governmental organizations, neighborhoods, and scholars. More importantly, for our purposes, it is used almost always the same way by all parties. In other words, researchers who write about recovery are apt to draw from the same vocabularies and perspectives as those who work in government and other arenas of the real politic. Brawny words like “renewal,” “rebirth,” and “revitalization”—the vocabulary of disaster recovery—are found in both the civic booster response to calamity and in scholarly papers and books (see for example, ACORN 2006; Daniels et al. 2006). Indeed, anthropologists and sociologists have added to this lexicon, coining terms like “amplified rebound” and the “Phoenix Effect” (see for example, Dyer