

HURRICANE KATRINA AND THE RACIAL GULF

A Du Boisian Analysis of Victims' Experiences¹

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Abstract

Americans like to believe that “we are all in the same boat” when disaster strikes. Using a Du Boisian framework, this article provides a multivariate analysis of survey data from victims of Hurricane Katrina to determine whether there were racial differences in their perceptions about rescue and relief efforts. The data collected from survivors show that Blacks and Whites drew very different lessons from the tragedy. There was widespread agreement among Black survivors that the government’s response to the crisis would have been faster if most of the storm’s victims had been White. Whites, in contrast, were more likely to feel that the race of the victims did not make a difference in the government’s response. Less than half of White victims, but more than three-quarters of Black victims, held that Hurricane Katrina pointed out persisting problems of racial inequality. There were, however, few racial differences in perceptions about the role of income in the aftermath of Katrina. Most Blacks and Whites agreed with the idea that low-income and middle-income victims of the hurricane received similar treatment. But when asked a similar question about the role of race, racial differences reemerged. Also, rather than this being a difference of opinion only between poor Blacks and middle-class Whites, these results suggest that there were also differences between the lowest-income Blacks and middle-income Blacks and perhaps an even larger difference between middle-income Blacks and middle-income Whites in terms of how they viewed the government’s response. Income and other sociodemographic differences did not explain racial differences in perceptions about the role of race in the aftermath of the hurricane. The article concludes that the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina exposed the wide gulf between the nation’s haves and have-nots as well as the nation’s persistent racial divide.

Keywords: Du Boisian Analysis, Survey of Hurricane Victims, Hurricane Aftermath, Racial Inequality, Race and FEMA Response, Racial Gulf

INTRODUCTION

When disaster strikes, Americans like to believe that, no matter the race, color, creed, or socioeconomic level of the victims, “we are all in the same boat.” Unfortu-

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nately, however, this is seldom the case. Hurricane Katrina did not affect all people of the Gulf Coast equally. The aftermath of the storm had racial and class dimensions. Any analysis of the Hurricane Katrina tragedy that fails to acknowledge this basic truth misses the opportunity to understand the underlying power structures and patterns of inequality that will make recovery from the storm much more difficult for some than for others.

Questions of race and class came into focus as news coverage of the disaster showed primarily Black residents stranded in New Orleans. In 2005, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the New Orleans population to be 20% White and 68% Black. According to a Population Reference Bureau Report (Saenz 2005), of the fifteen U.S. metropolitan areas with the most African Americans, New Orleans had the highest Black poverty rate, at 33%. Within the city itself, the poorest tended to live in the low-lying areas most vulnerable to flooding. Moreover, only half of African American males living in New Orleans were employed. African Americans were also much more likely than Whites to lack basic amenities such as an automobile or a telephone. Given their limited social and economic resources, along with their geographic isolation, poor urban African Americans are disproportionately vulnerable to being left behind during crisis situations.

Surveys of the U.S. general public indicated that African Americans and Whites held very different perceptions about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (*CBS News/New York Times* 2005; Pew Research Center 2005). But it is not as clear what effects the storm and its aftermath had on Black and White victims. Did Black and White victims of Hurricane Katrina differ in how they viewed the disaster? And, if so, do socioeconomic differences account for apparent racial disparities in perceptions about the aftermath of the hurricane? Using a Du Boisian analysis, this article uses survey data from survivors of the hurricane to examine the racial gulf in their experiences during the hurricane and their perceptions about the aftermath of the hurricane.

RACE AND DU BOISIAN ANALYSIS

What is a Du Boisian analysis? W. E. B. Du Bois, a noted African American scholar, activist, and cofounder of the NAACP, self-consciously incorporated race in his work, being “committed to empirical research as a source of knowledge to replace ignorance about race, and firmly believing that such knowledge was the basis for movement toward social equality” (McKee 1993, p. 31). As Morris puts it, for Du Bois, “the goal of science was the search for truth using the best scientific methods available.” In particular, Du Bois argued that sociological generalizations and interpretations needed to be based on carefully collected empirical data and measurement. Moreover, Du Bois’s “conceptual framework was driven in a novel direction because of its insistence from the beginning that sociological interpretations should rest on empirical data rather than grand theorizing” (Morris 2006, p. 15).

Throughout his illustrious career, Du Bois addressed the burning questions of his day: the relationship between race and class (Smith and Green, 1983; Hattery and Smith, 2005). Du Bois agreed with Marx that poverty and oppression are caused by an unjust economic system (Zuckerman 2004). Both Du Bois and Marx argued that, in a capitalistic structure, the wealth created by labor out of natural resources is surplus. Like Marx, Du Bois (1933, p. 102) argued that “a true just society could be realized only if democracy is extended to the realm of industry.” The most important factor for Du Bois, however, was race. He knew the shortcomings of the Marxian

theory of economic determinism that did not include race as a major consideration. Indeed, Du Bois was the first social theorist who attempted to link class to race. One of his most distinctive theoretical convictions was that race never stands apart from economic realities.

As Zuckerman (2004) suggests, Du Bois recognized that racial distinctions and racial constructs are central to how people experience the world, from health to wealth, from literacy to religion, from crime to politics, and from city governance to international relations. Du Bois also linked racial analysis to class analysis.

Given Du Bois's theoretical innovation of linking race and class, it is apparent that, although he appreciated the heart of Marxian analysis, he saw its shortcomings in ignoring the color line. Du Bois corrected this omission by adding racial dynamics to class dynamics (Du Bois 1933). As DeMarco (1983, p. 192) notes, "Du Bois' . . . objections to [Marxian] theory and practice involved racial considerations: Blacks formed a special group without a significant class opposition, essentially a proletariat group. Yet, Blacks were separated from the proletariat movement by racism; the proletariat as an economic class was split along racial lines." This was a fact that Du Bois viewed Marxism as incapable of explaining (Zuckerman 2004).

The insights of Du Bois can take one a long way toward understanding differences in perceptions of African American and White victims of Hurricane Katrina. They may also be useful in accounting for income-based differences. Before examining the role of race and income, this article provides a brief overview of the events that constituted Hurricane Katrina and her aftermath.

A BRIEF TIME LINE OF HURRICANE KATRINA

A central issue surrounding the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is whether rescue and relief efforts were slow in coming, and, if so, whether they were slower than they would have been if the race and/or class of the victims had been different. Because the issue of timing is central to understanding perceptions of the disaster (especially in New Orleans), this section provides a brief time line of the central events surrounding Hurricane Katrina.

On Thursday, August 25, 2005, the National Hurricane Center upgraded tropical storm Katrina to "Hurricane Katrina." That evening, Katrina made landfall in Florida as a category one. The next morning, the Hurricane Center upgraded Katrina to a category two hurricane and issued an advisory forecasting that she would soon become a category three hurricane. Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco declared a state of emergency for Louisiana, and Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour declared a state of emergency for Mississippi (Roig-Franzia and Hsu, 2005).

President George W. Bush—still on vacation at his ranch in Crawford, Texas—gave his weekly radio address on Saturday, August 27. His radio appearance made no mention of the events unfolding around Hurricane Katrina. Nevertheless, later on that day, he officially acknowledged that a state of emergency existed in Louisiana. He ordered federal aid to the affected areas to complement state and local relief efforts. On the same day, New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin declared a state of emergency for New Orleans and issued evacuation orders. That night, the Hurricane Center issued a warning suggesting that Katrina was moving in a westerly direction to an area that included New Orleans. By early Sunday morning, Katrina was declared a category four, and before noon she had reached the status of a category five hurricane, the highest possible rating (*Wikipedia* 2005).

On Sunday afternoon, National Hurricane Center Director Max Mayfield, as a part of his regular Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) briefing, personally updated President Bush. That same day, Louisiana Governor Blanco sent a letter to President Bush requesting federal aid. President Bush declared a state of emergency in both Mississippi and Alabama, and declared Florida a federal disaster area in light of the damage done by Hurricane Katrina. He did not, however, offer federal government assistance to Louisiana at that time (Phillips 2005).

Although the federal government did not offer assistance to Louisiana, New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson offered Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco help from his state's National Guard. Blanco accepted the offer, but the paperwork needed to get the troops en route did not come from Washington until late Thursday, September 2 (Theimer 2005).

Katrina made landfall in Louisiana as a category four hurricane with 145 mph winds on Monday, August 29. Storm surges sent water over the Industrial Canal near New Orleans, and a barge crashed through the floodwall and opened a breach that accelerated flooding into the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish. At approximately 9:00 a.m., the eye of Hurricane Katrina passed over the city of New Orleans. By that time, six to eight feet of water covered New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward. By 10:00 a.m., Hurricane Katrina was ripping holes in the Superdome's roof. More than 10,000 storm evacuees were inside. More than 3000 other evacuees were also stranded at the convention center (where officials had encouraged them to go for aid and comfort). By 10:30 a.m., President Bush had made emergency disaster declarations for Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, thus freeing up federal funds for the situation. Nevertheless, FEMA Director Michael Brown urged emergency service personnel not to respond to hurricane-impacted areas unless dispatched by state or local authorities. He waited until five hours after Katrina had hit to ask his boss, Director of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, for 1000 Homeland Security employees to be sent to the region. It took more than two additional days for them to arrive (*CNN.com* 2005).

On Tuesday morning, August 30, President Bush delivered a speech in San Diego on the sixtieth anniversary of Victory in Japan (V-J) Day. He began the speech with brief remarks on hurricane relief efforts, and he told the audience that "The federal, state and local governments are working side-by-side to do all we can to help people get back on their feet." The remainder of the speech was dedicated to the need to "stay the course" in Iraq (Phillips 2005). The next day, Governor Blanco ordered that all of New Orleans, including the Superdome, be evacuated. An exodus from the Superdome began, with the first buses leaving for Houston's Astrodome more than 350 miles away. The New Orleans police force was ordered to abandon search and rescue missions and to turn their attention toward controlling looting. A curfew was placed in effect, and Mayor Nagin called for increased federal assistance.

On Thursday, September 1, evacuees from the New Orleans area and the Louisiana Superdome began arriving at the Astrodome in Houston. In Washington, FEMA announced guidelines to contractors interested in "doing business with FEMA during the Hurricane Katrina recovery" (U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 2005). In New Orleans, Mayor Nagin called the situation critical and issued a desperate SOS. Reportedly, looting, carjacking, and other violence spread, and the military decided to increase National Guard deployment to 30,000.

As the city descended into chaos and squalor in the days following the hurricane, about 200 people from New Orleans—mostly African Americans—were told by police to cross the Greater New Orleans Bridge over the Mississippi River on foot. There, police told them, buses would meet them to take them to shelter and aid.

Instead, policemen from the neighboring suburb of Gretna met them. The police formed a line across the foot of the bridge. Before the evacuees were close enough to speak, the police began firing gun shots over their heads. This sent the crowd fleeing in various directions. After the evacuees retreated down the bridge and set up camp, the Gretna authorities pursued them. The police forced the evacuees off the freeway at gunpoint. The police said that their city was in lock-down and that their job was to protect property and lives in Gretna (Charnas 2005).

Members of the Congressional Black Caucus, the Black Leadership Forum, the National Conference of State Legislators, the National Urban League, and the NAACP held a news conference expressing anger and charging that the government's response was slow because those most affected were poor. Critics have said that city, state, and federal officials didn't bother to consider citizens who cannot afford private transportation when planning for a natural disaster in New Orleans (*Associated Press* 2005). Mayor Nagin was criticized for failing to formulate an evacuation plan providing transportation out of the city for those without private means. However, the greatest amount of criticism was directed at the slow reaction of the Bush administration to the crisis. No meaningful help for thousands of people stranded at the city's convention center occurred until the fifth day of the flood. They went without food, water, electricity, and toilet facilities. The people stranded in the Superdome and on highway overpasses fared only slightly better (Phillips 2005).

On the fifth day of the state of emergency, Chertoff claimed: "I have not heard a report of thousands of people in the convention center who don't have food and water." That night on ABC's *Nightline*, Michael Brown told Ted Koppel: "We just learned of the convention center—we being the federal government—today" (*ABC News* 2005).

On Friday, September 2, President Bush toured Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana to survey Katrina's damage. He described the result of relief efforts up to that point as "not acceptable." Afterward, however, while visiting Mobile, President Bush said about the efforts of FEMA and its director, Michael Brown: "Again, I want to thank you all for—and, Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job. The FEMA Director is working 24—(applause)—they're working 24 hours a day." FEMA released a statement asking for "patience in the wake of Hurricane Katrina" (Phillips 2005).

After having met with Federal Reserve Chairman Greenspan to discuss the economic impact of Hurricane Katrina, President Bush requested and Congress approved an initial \$10.5 billion aid package for immediate rescue and relief efforts. President Bush returned for a second visit to the Gulf Coast region on Monday, September 5. The *Associated Press* reported that Kellogg Brown & Root—a subsidiary of Halliburton that has been criticized for its reconstruction work in Iraq—had begun work on a \$500 million U.S. Navy contract for emergency repairs at Gulf Coast naval and marine facilities damaged by Hurricane Katrina. On Wednesday, September 7, the White House announced that it would send a \$51.8 billion supplemental budget request to Congress, for expenses in excess of the \$10.5 billion that Congress had approved earlier that week (Carson 2005).

On Monday, September 19, Mayor Nagin urged residents to return to New Orleans. As residents began coming back into the city, Hurricane Rita gathered strength off the coast of Florida, and Mayor Nagin called off his plan to allow residents to return to their homes in New Orleans, urging those who had come back to evacuate.

As of December 2005, the confirmed death toll from Hurricane Katrina stood at 1383 mainly from Louisiana (1075) and Mississippi (230). Moreover, most experts

anticipate that Katrina will be recorded as the most expensive natural disaster in U.S. history. Some estimates put the damages in excess of \$100 billion (Carson 2005). In the months after the tragedy, the debate continued over why the federal government made so few resources available to victims of Hurricane Katrina for so long, especially in New Orleans. Moreover, there have been questions about why, when help finally arrived, select groups of people were evacuated sooner than were poor African Americans. It has now been fairly well documented that the Black and White public saw these issues differently (*CBS News/New York Times* 2005; Pew Research Center 2005). But did Black and White victims of Hurricane Katrina differ in how they viewed the disaster? And, if so, do socioeconomic differences account for apparent racial disparities in perceptions about the aftermath of the hurricane? The remainder of this article examines these questions from the vantage point of survivors of Hurricane Katrina themselves.

DATA AND METHODS

Data Sources

The data used in the analysis come from a web-based survey, conducted from September 21 through October 5, 2005, of victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This survey collected information about the experiences and long-term needs of a sample of Gulf Coast residents (and others affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita) who registered with the *International/American Red Cross Family Links*. The *American Red Cross Family Links* website (2005) included more than 250,000 records with contact information of victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and their family members. *International/American Red Cross Family Links* is the largest consolidated website with the most current contact database and accurate information available about those who survived Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. From the contact database, 66,342 records contained e-mail addresses. It should be noted that the American Red Cross and Microsoft Corporation provided e-mail access to tens of thousands of people who may not have had e-mail access otherwise. From the list, more than 6000 e-mail addresses were randomly selected, and messages were sent to potential study participants. The data collection was anonymous and voluntary. Because it was not possible to verify which messages reached their destinations (nor who responded), it is not possible to calculate a final response rate. Nevertheless, this strategy did yield 1642 valid surveys. Thus, approximately 25% of those contacted participated in the study. For the purposes of this article, the 465 survivors of Hurricane Rita were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the base sample size (of Hurricane Katrina survivors) for this analysis is 1177.

The survey asked about evacuees' lives before, during, and shortly after the disasters. It also sought their opinions about the efforts of public officials and private agencies to meet their needs.

Operationalizations

The analysis included four dependent variables, the independent variables race and income, and several control variables to gauge net differences in perceptions about responsiveness to the hurricane situation.

Dependent Variables

Faster If White. Respondents were asked: “Most of the people stranded in New Orleans following the hurricane were African American. Do you think the government’s response to the situation would have been faster if most of the victims had been White, or don’t you think this would have made any difference?” Responses were coded (1) “Yes, would have been faster,” and (0) “No, wouldn’t have made any difference.”

Racial Inequality a Problem. Respondents were asked: “In your view, did this disaster show that racial inequality remains a major problem in this country, or don’t you think this was a particularly important lesson of the disaster? Responses were coded (1) “Showed that racial inequality remains a major problem,” and (0) “Not a particularly important lesson of the disaster.”

Income Treated Same. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement: “Low-income and middle-income victims of the hurricane have received similar treatment.” Responses were coded (1) “Agree,” and (0) “Disagree.”

Races Treated Same. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement: “Black and White victims of the hurricane have received similar treatment.” Responses were coded (1) “Agree,” and (0) “Disagree.”

Independent Variables

The central independent variables for the analysis are race and income. Respondents were asked “What is your race or ethnicity?” Responses were dummy-variable coded to indicate whether the respondent was “White,” “Black/African American,” or from some “other (non-White) racial/ethnic group.” In addition, respondents were asked to indicate their family income for 2004. Responses included: under \$10,000; \$10,000–\$19,999; \$20,000–\$34,999; \$35,000–\$49,999; \$50,000–\$74,999; \$75,000–\$99,999; \$100,000–\$149,999; and \$150,000 or more. Values were coded as the midpoint of the category range, with the open-ended category coded as \$175,000. These categories were collapsed into five income levels: under \$20,000; \$20,000–\$34,999; \$35,000–\$49,999; \$50,000–\$74,999; and \$75,000 or more, and respondents were dummy-variable coded.

In addition, the multivariate analysis includes several sociodemographic control variables. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they were male [coded (0)] or female [coded (1)]. They were asked about the last grade or class that they completed in school, and responses were coded to indicate their level of educational attainment (i.e., less than high school, high school graduate or equivalent, some college, or college graduate or more). Age was recorded in years, and ranged from eighteen through seventy-three. Respondents were also asked about their religious preference, and they were dummy variable coded to indicate whether they were Catholic, Protestant, or some other religion (or had no religious preference). Finally, respondents were asked whether they considered themselves to be Republican, Democrat, Independent, or something else, and they were dummy-variable coded to reflect their responses.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Did Black and White victims of Hurricane Katrina differ in how they viewed the disaster? And, if so, do socioeconomic differences account for apparent racial dispar-

ities in perceptions about the aftermath of the hurricane? In other words, can racial differences be explained by other sociodemographic factors? This section attempts to address these questions.

Figure 1 illustrates substantial racial differences on questions about race in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. This diagram shows, for example, that while fewer than one in four White victims (24%) think that the government’s response to the situation would have been faster if most of the victims had been White, three in four Black survivors (75%) hold such views. It is also worth noting that fewer than one in ten victims of other races and ethnicities (8%) think that the government’s response would have been faster if most victims had been White. Figure 1 also shows that the racial groups differ a great deal on their views about whether the disaster shows that racial inequality remains a major problem in this country. Less than one-half of Whites (48%), one-quarter of victims from other racial groups (21%), but more than three-quarters of Blacks (79%) hold the view that Hurricane Katrina pointed out persisting problems of racial inequality.

In contrast to the racial differences in perceptions about the role of race in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, there were few racial differences in perceptions about the role of income. In particular, 55% of Whites, 57% of Blacks, and 60% of victims of other races agreed with the proposition that low-income and middle-income victims of the hurricane received similar treatment. But when asked a similar question about the role of race, racial differences reemerge, as 47% of Black victims, 56% of White victims, and 82% of victims of other races say that Black and White victims of the hurricane received similar treatment.

It is possible that apparent racial differences in views about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina could be explained by racial differences in income and education.

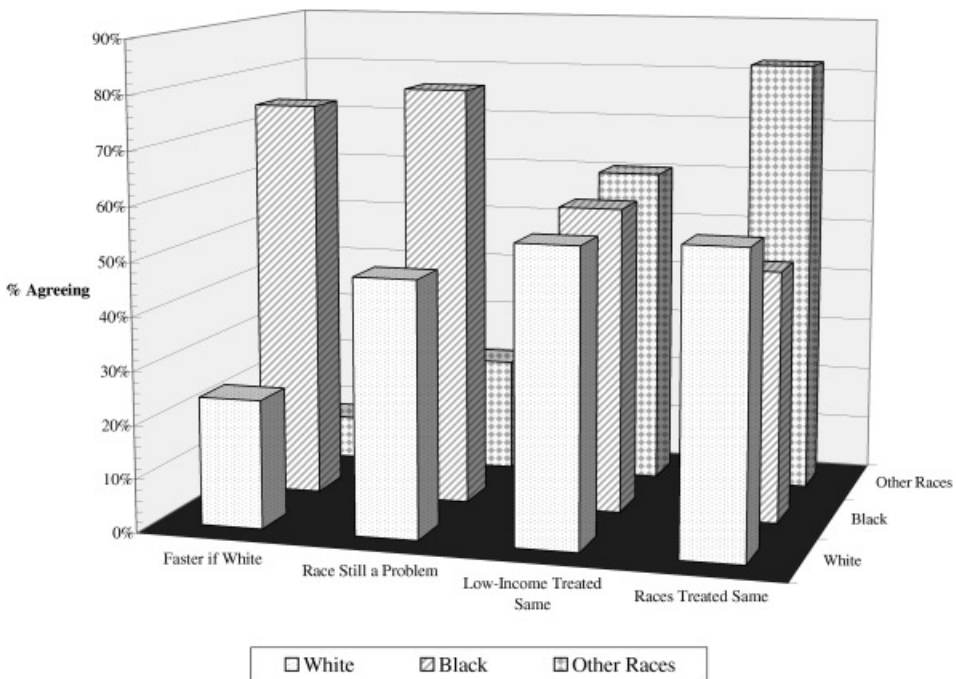


Fig. 1. Survivors’ Perceptions of the Response to Hurricane Katrina by Race

Table 1 presents means and percentage distributions of selected characteristics of survivors of Hurricane Katrina by race. The table shows, for example, that racial groups differed by a great deal in their average incomes. Blacks had incomes of just over \$36,000, on average. This compares with an average exceeding \$64,000 for Whites and \$33,500 for victims of other races. Table 1 also shows that incomes are distributed somewhat differently by race. Specifically, although Blacks and other racial and ethnic groups have similar means, the distributions are very different. Roughly three in ten Blacks have incomes that are less than \$20,000 per year. This contrasts to the more than six in ten of victims of other (non-White) races. Similarly, while more than one-third of Blacks (38%) have incomes in the “middle” (\$35,000–\$50,000) range, fewer than one in six victims of other (non-White) races (15%) have incomes in the middle income category. Nevertheless, roughly one in six (16%) of victims of other (non-White) racial groups have incomes at \$75,000 or more, while less than one in ten Blacks (9%) do. It is also worth noting that more than one in five Whites (22%) have incomes below \$20,000, but more than four in ten (41%) report incomes of \$75,000 or more.

Educationally, Black victims and White victims appear to be much more similar. For example, 70% of Whites report that they graduated from high school and/or attended some college, and 63% of Black survivors say that they have this level of educational attainment. Black and White hurricane victims also report roughly the same one-in-four rate of college graduation. So, education does not appear to be a particularly strong candidate in accounting for racial differences of opinion about the aftermath of Katrina.

On average, Black victims (thirty-seven years old) tend to be slightly older than White victims (thirty years old). And while roughly the same proportions of Black

Table 1. Means and Percentage Distributions for Selected Characteristics of Hurricane Katrina Victims

Characteristics	Race of Victim			Overall
	Black	White	Other Race	
Mean Income	\$36,160.26	\$64,344.55	\$33,559.63	\$52,736.05
% Less than \$20,000	31.3	22.2	60.7	29.9
% \$20,000–\$34,999	12.1	12.5	8.2	11.8
% \$35,000–\$49,999	38.3	13.2	14.8	19.7
% \$50,000–\$74,999	9.2	10.9	0.0	9.0
% \$75,000+	9.1	41.2	16.3	29.7
% Female	62.4	69.6	70.4	65.3
% Less than High School	12.1	6.5	23.0	10.2
% High School/Some College	62.9	69.7	60.7	66.8
% College Graduate+	25.0	23.8	16.3	26.9
Mean Age	37.1	30.2	31.1	32.1
% Protestant	66.3	35.9	47.4	45.1
% Catholic	25.4	26.4	21.5	25.5
% Other Religion	8.3	37.7	31.1	29.4
% Democrat	67.2	33.3	21.5	39.8
% Independent/Other	28.0	45.3	70.3	44.7
% Republican	4.8	21.4	70.3	15.5

and White victims are Catholics (25% and 26%, respectively), Black victims (66%) are substantially more likely than are White victims (36%) to report that they are Protestants. Finally, another rather large sociodemographic difference between Black victims and White victims is political party identification. Blacks (67%) are more than twice as likely as are Whites (33%) to say that they are Democrats. Conversely, Whites (21%) are more than four times more likely than are Blacks (5%) to say that they are Republicans.

Although informative, the descriptive statistics do not provide much information about the net impact of race on perceptions of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. In order to address this issue more rigorously, Tables 2–5 present the results from multivariate analysis. Model I of Table 2 confirms what Figure 1 illustrated: Blacks are significantly more likely and victims of other (non-White) races are significantly less likely than are White victims to believe that the government's response to

Table 2. Logistic Regression Models Predicting the Log-Odds of Believing that the Response Would Have Been Faster if Most Stranded People Had Been White, with Race, Income, and Other Characteristics^a

Independent Variables	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
	Race Only	Race and Income	Race and Income, Net of Other Factors	Race by Income Interaction, Net of Other Factors
Constant	-1.119***	-1.504***	-1.948***	-1.255***
Race				
Black/African American	2.218***	2.542***	2.935***	1.396***
Other Race/Ethnicity	-1.303***	-1.035***	-1.053***	-1.367***
Income Category				
\$20,000–\$34,999 (Low)		-.399	-.145	-1.777***
\$35,000–\$49,999 (Middle)		-.013	-.661**	-2.874***
\$50,000–\$74,999 (High)		.909***	1.093***	.818**
\$75,000 + (Highest)		.696***	.586**	.312
Other Characteristics				
Female			.208	-.034
High School Graduate		-.589**	-.450	
Some College			-.413	-.502
College Graduate +			-.904**	-1.509***
Age			-.004	.001
Catholic			-.030	-.077
Other Religion			1.170***	1.064***
Democrat			1.547***	1.544***
Independent			-.414	-.604**
Race by Income Interaction				
Black * Middle Income				4.097***
Black * High Income				.657
R ² Analog	.196***	.216***	.324***	.367***
N	960	960	960	960

* $p < .1$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$

^aCoefficients are unstandardized. For the dummy (binary) variable coefficients, significance levels refer to the difference between the omitted dummy variable category and the coefficient for the given category.

Hurricane Katrina would have been faster if most of the victims had been White. Race alone explains nearly one-fifth of the variance in these reported perceptions. When income is taken into consideration, in Model II, the same basic pattern persists. This model does show, however, that income makes a difference in perceptions. In particular, survivors with high income and the highest income levels are significantly more likely to believe that the response would have been faster than are their lowest-income counterparts.

Model III also takes into consideration gender, education, age, religion, and political party identification. When these factors are added in, the same basic relationships between race and perceptions, and also between income and perceptions, remain, with one difference: In Model III, survivors with incomes in the middle (\$35,000–\$49,999) category are less likely than their lowest-income counterparts to believe that the government's response would have been faster if most victims had been White. In addition, high school graduates and college graduates are less likely than those with less than a high school education to believe this, and those with non-Christian religious beliefs and those who are Democrats are significantly more likely to believe this than are their Protestant and Republican counterparts.

Model IV adds a race by income interaction to Model III. The relationship between race and perceptions about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina remain basically the same as in previous models. Blacks are still significantly more likely and victims of other races are significantly less likely than are White victims to believe that the government's response would have been faster if most victims had been White. There are, however, some slight changes in the relationship between income and perceptions of the aftermath. Victims with low income become significantly less likely than those with the lowest incomes to believe that the response would have been faster, and victims with the highest incomes are no longer significantly more likely than those with the lowest incomes to believe that the response would have been faster. This model also shows, however, that there is a significant interaction between race and income such that Black victims with middle incomes are more likely than other Blacks and other income groups to believe that the response would have been faster if most of the victims of Hurricane Katrina aftermath had been White. In other words, beyond the idea that there was a difference of opinion between poor Blacks and middle-class Whites in their views, these results suggest that there was also a difference between the lowest-income Blacks and middle-income Blacks and perhaps an even bigger difference between middle-income Blacks and middle-income Whites and others. Middle-income Blacks are the most likely to say that the government's response to the situation would have been faster if most of the victims had been White.

Model I in Table 3 also confirms Blacks are significantly more likely and victims of other (non-White) races are significantly less likely than are White victims to believe that Katrina showed that racial inequality is still a problem in this country. Model II shows that survivors in the low-income category and the high-income category are significantly less likely to hold this view than are their low-income counterparts. Model III shows that when other factors are taken into consideration, these same basic patterns persist. Here, however, there are also differences between the lowest income group and the middle income group, with the lowest income group being significantly more likely to believe that Katrina showed the persistence of racial inequality. Model IV shows that, other factors being equal, Black victims are significantly more likely and victims of other (non-white) races are significantly less likely than are White victims to believe that racial inequality is still a major problem. Generally, survivors from the lowest income group are the most likely to believe that

Table 3. Logistic Regression Models Predicting the Log-Odds of Believing that Racial Inequality is Still a Major Problem, with Race, Income, and Other Characteristics^a

Independent Variables	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
	Race Only	Race and Income	Race and Income, Net of Other Factors	Race by Income Interaction, Net of Other Factors
Constant	-.092	.205*	-.483	-.243
Race				
Black/African American	1.402***	1.280***	1.180***	.484**
Other Race/Ethnicity	-1.203***	-1.390***	-1.930***	-1.975***
Income Category				
\$20,000–\$34,999 (Low)		-1.163***	-1.393***	-1.816***
\$35,000–\$49,999 (Middle)		.135	-.760***	-1.135***
\$50,000–\$74,999 (High)		-.011	-.441	-.439
\$75,000 + (Highest)		-.429**	-1.209***	-1.214***
Other Characteristics				
Female			1.083***	1.035***
High School Graduate			-1.350***	-1.332***
Some College			-.303	-.373
College Graduate +			-1.321***	-1.565***
Age			.008808	.010
Catholic			-.494***	-.554***
Other Religion			.276	.157
Democrat			2.195***	2.169***
Independent			.568***	.543***
Race by Income Interaction				
Black * Middle Income				1.521***
Black * High Income				.204
R ² Analog	.099***	.122***	.267***	.275***
N	960	960	960	960

* $p < .1$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$

^aCoefficients are unstandardized. For the dummy (binary) variable coefficients, significance levels refer to the difference between the omitted dummy variable category and the coefficient for the given category.

racial inequality is still a major problem. Again, however, this model shows that being Black and of middle income makes one even more inclined to believe that racial inequality is still a major problem.

Table 4 presents various logistic regression models predicting the log-odds of believing that low-income and middle-income victims received similar treatment. This table presents some very different patterns from what was presented in Tables 2 and 3. Here, there are no systematic differences in perceptions by race in any of the models. Generally, when income differences in perceptions occur, it is because victims in the lowest income group are the least likely to believe that low-income and middle-income victims received similar treatment after Hurricane Katrina. Model IV does show, however, that victims who are Black and of high income are more inclined than are their counterparts to believe that low-income and middle-income victims received similar treatment.

Table 5 offers various logistic regression models predicting the log-odds of believing that Black and White survivors of Hurricane Katrina received similar

Table 4. Logistic Regression Models Predicting the Log-Odds of Believing that Low-Income and Middle-Income Victims Received Similar Treatment, with Race, Income, and Other Characteristics^a

Independent Variables	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
	Race Only	Race and Income	Race and Income, Net of Other Factors	Race by Income Interaction, Net of Other Factors
Constant	.202***	.046	1.534***	1.633***
Race				
Black/African American	.099	-.032	-.006	-.393
Other Race/Ethnicity	.223	.308	.072	.003
Income Category				
\$20,000–\$34,999 (Low)		1.354***	1.55***	1.406***
\$35,000–\$49,999 (Middle)		.203	.690***	.543**
\$50,000–\$74,999 (High)		1.156***	1.666***	1.348***
\$75,000 + (Highest)		.314	.107	-.289
Other Characteristics				
Female			.010	-.046
High School Graduate			.068	.156
Some College			-.230	-.143
College Graduate +			.257	.353
Age			.001	.001
Catholic			-.603***	-.630***
Other Religion			-1.051***	-1.040***
Democrat			-2.220***	-2.199***
Independent			-.815***	-.814***
Race by Income Interaction				
Black * Middle Income				.405
Black * High Income				.924**
R ² Analog	.001	.051***	.157***	.160***
N	949	949	949	949

* $p < .1$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$

^aCoefficients are unstandardized. For the dummy (binary) variable coefficients, significance levels refer to the difference between the omitted dummy variable category and the coefficient for the given category.

treatment. In Models I, II, and III, Blacks are significantly less likely and victims of other (non-White) races are significantly more likely than are White victims to believe that Blacks and Whites received similar treatment. In Model IV, however, the statistically significant difference between Blacks and Whites becomes insignificant, other factors held constant. Still, this model suggests that victims who are Black and of middle income or Black and of high income are less likely than are their counterparts to believe that Black and White victims received similar treatment. So, again, contrary to the idea that only poor Blacks and middle-class Whites viewed the hurricane's aftermath differently, these results suggest that there was also a difference between the lowest-income Blacks and Blacks with higher incomes and an even bigger difference in perceptions between middle- and high-income Blacks and middle- and high-income Whites and others. In other words, not only do income differences not explain apparent racial differences, but, in this case, they appear to *amplify* racial differences in perceptions.

Table 5. Logistic Regression Models Predicting the Log-Odds of Believing that Black and White Hurricane Katrina Victims Received Similar Treatment, with Race, Income, and Other Characteristics^a

	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
Independent Variables	Race Only	Race and Income	Race and Income, Net of Other Factors	Race by Income Interaction, Net of Other Factors
Constant	.202***	.523***	1.217***	1.002***
Race				
Black/African American	-.286**	-.298**	-.299*	.529
Other Race/Ethnicity	1.331***	1.252***	1.268***	1.302***
Income Category				
\$20,000–\$34,999 (Low)		.296	.354	.798***
\$35,000–\$49,999 (Middle)		-.773***	-.325*	.215
\$50,000–\$74,999 (High)		.029	.804***	.982***
\$75,000 + (Highest)		-.579***	.035	.228
Other Characteristics				
Female			-.576***	-.522***
High School Graduate			.992***	.920***
Some College			-.071	-.129
College Graduate +			.318	.408
Age			.006	.005
Catholic			-.474***	-.417**
Other Religion			-.925***	-.829***
Democrat			-1.555***	-1.599***
Independent			-.479**	-.485**
Race by Income Interaction				
Black * Middle Income				-1.441***
Black * High Income				-.758**
R ² Analog	.034***	.059***	.146***	.154***
N	938	938	938	938

* $p < .1$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$

^aCoefficients are unstandardized. For the dummy (binary) variable coefficients, significance levels refer to the difference between the omitted dummy variable category and the coefficient for the given category.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper began with the observation that Americans like to believe that “we are all in it together” when disaster strikes. It then pointed to surveys of the American general public that indicated that African Americans and Whites held very different perceptions about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and that Blacks and Whites drew very different lessons from the tragedy. The paper then asked whether Black and White survivors of Hurricane Katrina differed in how they viewed the disaster. And if so, did socioeconomic differences account for apparent racial disparities in perceptions about the aftermath of the hurricane?

Using a Du Boisian analytical frame, this article has linked issues of race and class (income) to examine victims’ experiences during the hurricane and their perceptions about the aftermath of the hurricane. The results provide evidence of large

racial differences on questions about race in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Much like national surveys of the general public, the findings indicated that fewer than one in four White victims thought that the government's response to the situation would have been faster if most of the victims had been White, but three in four Black survivors held that view. Similarly, less than one-half of Whites, but more than three-quarters of Blacks, held that Hurricane Katrina pointed out persisting problems of racial inequality. There were, however, few racial differences in perceptions about the role of income in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Most Whites agreed that low-income and middle-income victims of the hurricane received similar treatment. But when asked a similar question about the role of race, racial differences reemerged. Also, despite the idea that there was a difference of opinion between poor Blacks and middle-class Whites in their views, these results suggest that there was also a difference between the lowest-income Blacks and middle-income Blacks and perhaps an even bigger difference between middle-income Blacks and middle-income Whites in terms of how they viewed the government's response to Hurricane Katrina. Not only did income differences *not* explain racial differences in perceptions about the role of race in the aftermath of the hurricane in the cases examined, they actually appeared to *increase* racial differences in such perceptions between people with similar income levels.

African Americans across the country had stronger reactions to the disaster in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast than did Whites. Blacks made harsher judgments of the federal government's response to the crisis, perceived the plight of disaster victims in a different light, and felt more emotionally connected to what happened.

Hurricane Katrina put issues of poverty, class, and race in America back on the front burner when the world saw the plight of poor, mostly Black, storm victims all but abandoned in New Orleans. But the results of this survey also tell another story: There were substantial differences in how Black and White victims viewed the aftermath of the storm. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina exposed the wide gulf between the nation's haves and have-nots. As a society, America needs to address the gross disparities that Hurricane Katrina exposed. Failure to take such actions will have enormous economic and social costs—not just for African Americans, but also for a society living with a disconnect between its ideals and the reality of continued inequality along the color line. Unfortunately, many Whites in the United States are so unwilling to see or even discuss issues of race and class that it is possible that these issues will soon be casualties of the storm, too.

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