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**Mobilization of the Black Community Following Hurricane Katrina:
From Disaster Assistance to Advocacy of Social Change and Equity**

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In August, 2005, Hurricane Katrina dealt a devastating blow to the Gulf Coast region of the United States, and the Black population was hit particularly hard because of its preexisting vulnerability. Thus, this disaster became what Birkland refers to as a focusing event for the larger Black community in the U.S., one that attracted an unusual amount of attention from stakeholders and put it on their agenda for policy change. Katrina resulted in a surge of interest within the Black community regarding the immediate challenges created by the event and the factors perceived to sustain the community's vulnerability. This is reflected in two types of actions undertaken by the Black community in response to Katrina discussed in this paper. First, there was a mobilization across the country to provide disaster relief for victims, which included housing, financial, and educational assistance. Second, Blacks rallied to challenge the government's response to the disaster, to urge it to take more decisive and fair actions and, looking beyond Katrina, to initiate major public policy changes that would alter conditions related to race, class, and poverty which were perceived as major underlying factors in the continuing vulnerability of disadvantaged groups in the society to future disasters. Such actions were frequently undertaken by activists in the larger Black community in collaboration with other groups, reminiscent of the civil rights movement of an earlier era.

Keywords: Vulnerability, Disaster assistance, Social change, Equity

Introduction

Some groups in society, such as children and minorities, are understudied by disaster researchers (Anderson 2005; Barnshaw 2006; Fothergill and Peek 2006; Peek 2008; Perry and Mushkatel 1986). The purpose of this paper is to further the understanding of how minorities cope with hazards and disasters by examining important responses of the Black community in the United States to Hurricane Katrina.

In August, 2005, Hurricane Katrina dealt a devastating blow to the Gulf Coast region of the United States, particularly to the Black population. As a result, this disaster became what Birkland (1997) refers to as a *focusing event*, one that attracts an unusual amount of attention from stakeholders and puts it on their agenda, in this case the agenda of the nation's Black community. The event's catastrophic nature (Quarantelli 2006) resulted from the failure on the part of so many systems—social, political, and technological—to prevent it in the first place and then to reasonably reduce its impacts once it occurred. In recent years only the September 11, 2001 terrorists attacks received comparable attention from the media and the nation as a whole (Cutter et al. 2006). Though attention given to Katrina has been widespread throughout the United States, I will focus on aspects of the response in the Black community, where the disaster had particular salience because so many of the victims were Black and New Orleans, the most prominent city impacted, has long been identified with Black culture and history.

I will begin by noting several theoretical perspectives relevant to the analysis undertaken in this paper. Then I will discuss the mobilization of the Black community to provide disaster assistance after Katrina. This will be followed by a discussion of how the Black community rallied around a set of shared ideas about why the disaster hit African-Americans and the poor so hard and what it would require to reduce their continuing vulnerability. I will conclude with a discussion on the extent to which existing social science theoretical perspectives help explain patterns of Black mobilization following Katrina, and also raise several questions about the possible future implications of this mobilization. This paper is based on discussions with organizational officials and qualitative analysis of scholarly publications, newspaper articles, and Web site documents.

Theoretical Perspectives

No single social science theory can account for actions undertaken by the Black community following Hurricane Katrina. However, as Drabek (2004, 2007) has observed there are several theoretical frameworks in the social sciences useful for explaining and predicting particular aspects of human behavior that occur before, during, and after disasters. For example, he has noted that the social construction formulation used by Stallings (1995) and others helps explain how hazards and disasters are framed as social problems (Kreps and Drabek 1996) and that the structural-functional theory used by Dynes (1970) and extended by Kreps and his colleagues (Kreps and Bosworth 2006) furthers understanding of how groups and organizations respond to community disasters. Similarly, the social vulnerability perspective advanced by several scholars (Bolin 2006; Cutter, Boruff, and Shirley 2003; Enarson 2007; Enarson, Fothergill, and Peek 2006; Peacock, Morrow, and Gladwin 1997; Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, and Davis 2004) places

disasters in their social, political and economic context, thereby helping to explain the differential exposure of groups to disaster risks based on such factors as race, class, and gender.

For purposes of this paper, other perspectives can also be incorporated into the analysis. For example, pioneering disaster researcher Samuel Prince (1920) has provided a useful theoretical perspective on the relationship between disasters and social change, documenting that social change can be an important aspect of the disaster experience. Later researchers have built on this notion, offering the view that disasters provide opportunities for group and organizational learning which can promote change (Anderson 1970; Birkland 1997, 2006). In addition, Olson (2000), Bolin (2006) and other scholars offer the perspective that disasters are inherently political, thus requiring the examination of politics and the policy process in order to truly understand group actions in the wake of disasters like Katrina. The politics of disaster may involve stakeholder mobilization to change existing policies, which can occur when a disaster becomes a focusing event (Birkland 1997, 2006).

These theoretical themes, along with others, have emerged in the scholarly literature following decades of social science hazards and disaster research (National Research Council 2006). While they do not constitute an integrated theory, considered collectively they can strengthen the analysis of disaster-related behavior, actions, and consequences (Drabek 2004, 2007). Thus I will draw on these theoretical perspectives for insights they can provide on key aspects of the post-Katrina actions undertaken by the Black community in the U.S. These particular perspectives were selected because they have provided useful explanations for disaster-related consequences from the pioneering days of disaster research (e.g., Prince 1920) to more recent times (e.g., Birkland 1997, 2006).

Mobilizing for Disaster Assistance

The disaster assistance that evolves after an event assumes many forms, from search and rescue to the provision of food, health care and housing. It typically involves some persons operating as individuals, and others as members of family groups, emergent groups, or established organizations in the public, private, and non-profit sectors (Dynes 1970; Kreps and Bosworth 2006). The response to the Gulf Coast disaster followed this pattern, but perhaps stood out in historical terms because of the extent of Black involvement nationwide.

In terms of disaster assistance, the Gulf Coast disaster offered many unusual challenges, even for a country like the U.S. which is at high risk to such events, has developed an infrastructure for coping with a variety of hazards and disasters, and has had the experience of responding to major disasters in the years just prior to Katrina—including the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the four hurricanes that slammed

into Florida in 2004. Katrina overtook Hurricane Andrew, which struck Florida in 1992, as the costliest disaster in U.S. history. The death toll of nearly two thousand was high for a natural disaster in a developed country, as well as the number of evacuees who resettled throughout the nation. Additionally, an unprecedented number of impoverished Blacks became disaster victims, an important factor in terms of the perception of the causes of the disaster and what needs to be done to ensure that the poor do not suffer greater than other groups in future events. Finally, the overall scope of the disaster proved to be beyond the capabilities of responsible organizations at the local, state, and national levels to effectively handle (GAO 2006a).

The disaster research literature shows that when a disaster management system is perceived to be overwhelmed or responding too slowly, as was the case following Hurricane Katrina, two things tend to happen: new groups and organizations emerge to focus on unmet emergency needs, and some established groups and organizations take on non-traditional disaster-oriented tasks (Dynes 1970; Kreps and Bosworth 2006). Following Katrina, actions of many Black groups and organizations throughout the U.S. reflected this pattern; they mobilized because of concern that official organizations in the disaster management system, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the American Red Cross, were failing or incapable of meeting the needs of Black disaster victims and the poor. The need to be concerned about this is supported by findings from disaster research. Minorities and the poor often do experience difficulty obtaining equitable access to disaster assistance from established groups and organizations as well as complying with their bureaucratic requirements during both the emergency and recovery phases of disaster (Aguirre 2007; Bolin and Stanford 1999; Lindell and Perry 1992; National Research Council 2006; Tierney, Lindell, and Perry 2001).

The mobilization of disaster assistance in the larger Black community included Black families throughout the U.S. providing shelter in their homes to relatives and friends and even strangers from the Gulf Coast region. The need was great because some of the tens of thousands of Katrina evacuees were located in every state in the country (Barnshaw 2006). Black churches, historically a major resource for the Black community in times of need, played a significant role nationwide in assisting Katrina victims. Sometimes partnering with other groups and organizations, they provided housing and other needed resources for evacuees. Those engaged in such activity included local churches and their national organizations such as the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. and the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America (MSNBC.com 2005).

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League, two of the nation's stalwart civil rights organizations, also put Katrina on their agendas, often working through their local chapters throughout the U.S., including those in the Gulf Coast region. Highly critical of the government's response to

the disaster, both the NAACP and the National Urban League established disaster relief funds shortly after Katrina struck, a task far removed from their traditional roles (National Urban League 2005; NAACP 2005). In both cases, contributions to these funds came not only from the Black community but from other sources as well.

Also, some Black philanthropies such as the 21st Century Foundation raised funds for disaster relief for Black and poor victims, marking their first involvement in such activity. Similarly, the Black media raised money for disaster victims. This was also the case with many individual Black artists and athletes (BlackNews.com 2007; Dyson 2006).

Black academic institutions also mobilized efforts to assist those affected by the disaster. Several historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) located in the Gulf Coast region suffered major damage and had to close, interrupting the education of over 9,000 students. It has been reported that about a third of these displaced students were admitted to other HBCUs, such as Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas (BlackAmericaWeb.com. 2006). Also, like many students from majority institutions of higher education, hundreds of Black students at such HBCUs as Howard University in Washington, DC went to the Gulf Coast region between school terms to help with clean up and housing restoration (Ogletree Jr. 2007).

The involvement of these Black community actors added something besides a new look to disaster assistance. These mobilized groups and organizations, including Black colleges and universities, began advocating that the Black community take disaster preparedness more seriously. To such groups and organizations, preparedness efforts now seem more vital because Katrina demonstrated to them the continuing vulnerability of racial minorities and the poor to future disasters in the Gulf Coast region and elsewhere throughout the country. The sustainability of this heightened concern for preparedness, which was also a feature of the mobilization I will discuss next, remains to be seen.

Mobilization for Social Change and Equity

While complementary, the mobilization for social change and equity by Black actors following Katrina was different from efforts to provide disaster assistance, even though some of the same persons and entities were involved. This mobilization featured Black actors linking the perceived vulnerability of minorities to disasters to historical patterns of racial and class injustice that need to be changed through political and policy actions.

Two theoretical themes are relevant at this point in the discussion. One theme emerged at the very beginning of empirical research on disasters, and the other more recently. The first perspective is that disasters often result in social change, sometimes by initiating it and at other times by accelerating it. For example, in his classic book *Catastrophe and Social Change* on the 1917 Halifax, Nova Scotia ship explosion,

sociologist Samuel Prince noted that the disaster resulted in changes in community health organizations, recreation, education, and relations among various voluntary organizations (Prince 1920). This is particularly important because Prince's work is considered the first empirical study in the field of social science disaster research carried out in North America. Years later, Anderson (1970) found that various changes occurred in a sample of Anchorage, Alaska organizations as a result of learning following the 1964 Alaska earthquake. This event also contributed to the federal government creating the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program, which changed the character of earthquake and related hazard research in the U.S. and the application of knowledge by stakeholders in the field (National Research Council 2006). More recently, Birkland (2006) analyzed policy changes occurring following disasters that became focusing events in the U.S. These changes included the creation of the Department of Homeland Security after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and other policy decisions that emphasized the salience of the terrorist threat to the U.S. Social change was also at the heart of Barry's (1997) study of the 1927 Mississippi flood.

Another relevant theme that has emerged more recently in the field of disaster research is that disasters have a political nature. This recognition has drawn attention to the need to look at issues related to the political economy of a nation or community in order to fully understand such events (Bolin 2006; Olson 2000). Bolin, for example, calls on the disaster research community to devote even greater attention to power and class in order to advance understanding in the field, especially to explain differences in group vulnerability and resilience. Others have also noted the role that preexisting political, economic, and social conditions can play in putting certain groups at risk to disasters (Cutter, Boruff, and Shirley 2003; Enarson 2007; Klinenberg 2002; Peacock, Morrow, and Gladwin 1997; Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, and Davis 2004).

As if answering Bolin's call, some actors in the Black community have come forth to discuss what they consider to be the social, political, and economic aspects of Katrina and its aftermath, giving particular attention to matters of class, race, and poverty as they relate to disaster vulnerability. Participants in this dialogue have included individuals from academic institutions, think tanks, civil rights organizations, and media organizations. This loosely connected collectivity has attempted to identify underlying causes of the disaster, frame its meaning for the Black community and the society as a whole, and offer solutions for reducing future risks. This has been done through many platforms, including analyses offered in books and other publications, and discussions at conferences, workshops and on the Internet.

Ironically, this mobilization was prompted in part by the widespread media coverage of Katrina and at the same time was a reaction to it. Like others in the society, Black Americans were distressed to see the slow response of the government and other relevant institutions in meeting the needs of disaster victims, many of whom were Black and poor.

This prompted many of them to take action, such as providing disaster assistance as discussed earlier. But many were also dismayed by the media's reporting, which depicted Blacks engaging in widespread looting, physical assaults and other forms of criminal behavior; this characterization promulgated myths about disaster-induced disorderly behavior that the disaster research community has been trying to dispel for many years (Fischer 1998; Quarantelli and Dynes 1972; Rodríguez, Trainor, and Quarantelli 2006; Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski 2006).

Some actors in the Black community, then, began another course of action in addition to providing disaster assistance. This involved attempting to dispel the negative images of Black lawlessness promoted by the media. It also involved reframing the debate about the underlying causes of the disaster and what should be done about them and the perceived growing vulnerability of many Blacks, especially in urban areas, to future events. This reframing effort focused to a large degree on historical social, political, and economic patterns in American society. A major view that emerged was that factors related to race, class, and poverty—especially in urban areas with their failed schools and lack of housing, job opportunities, and health care—created the underlying conditions that made poor Blacks more vulnerable before Katrina struck, and underserved after it did with such force. Such reframing was an attempt to not only provide an alternative definition of the disaster and its meaning for the nation, but also to suggest an alternative vision of the future and the social, economic, and political changes that were needed in order to realize it. This also involved an implicit, if not explicit, agenda or blueprint for social change.

One aspect of the agenda that emerged within the larger Black community after Katrina was a call for the government and other sectors to help enhance disaster resilience in the nation's vulnerable Black communities. This was considered possible through sound mitigation, preparedness, and recovery planning and by upgrading FEMA and other relevant agencies so that they can respond to natural and human-caused crises in those communities and elsewhere in the nation in a more timely and effective fashion (Dyson 2006).

But far from an exclusively disaster agenda was articulated. A second part of the agenda involved a call for broader changes that would get at the heart of the perceived inequities and injustices experienced historically by racial minorities and which can often be exacerbated by poverty, old age, and poor health. Such changes have obvious links to the vision promulgated by the civil rights movement and is customarily advocated in a context unrelated to disasters. The importance of this link to civil rights and equality should not be underestimated. The Black community's shared history in the struggle for civil rights enabled the emergence of a great deal of agreement about the underlying causes of the vulnerability of Blacks and the poor to disasters such as Katrina and what should be done about them, particularly by government policy makers. With their shared vision, those in the Black community who mobilized to make the case for the need for

disaster-related and broader societal change exhibited some of the characteristics of a nascent social movement. What most linked actors was the shared vision rather than structured social networks.

The National Urban League and the NAACP not only contributed to disaster assistance following Katrina but have also played a significant role in defining the underlying conditions that provided the context for the disaster. This is hardly surprising since historically they have been two of the Black community's major civil rights advocacy organizations. Their views and opinions are watched closely by many segments of the Black community and have significant weight.

The National Urban League called on Congress to pass a "Katrina Victims Bill of Rights". And in the excerpt below from a letter that appeared on the National Urban League's Web site, poverty and race are defined as major factors in the disaster by Marc Morial, the organization's president:

Sometimes it takes a natural disaster to reveal a social disaster. The U.S. Census Bureau recently reported that 4 million MORE people live below the poverty line today than in 2001. And 60% of the neighborhoods hit by Katrina were comprised of people of color, and they were twice as likely to be poor than the national average and not own a car... Katrina is a wake-up call for the nation to lift many from the throes of poverty... This disaster gives the nation an extraordinary opportunity to right many wrongs. And it is an opportunity we cannot afford to waste (National Urban League 2005).

And in discussing his organization's establishment of a disaster relief fund in collaboration with some other Black organizations, Bruce Gordon, then president of the NAACP, is quoted on the organization's Web site as saying: "We also will be relentless in ensuring that the government will more adequately address the unique issues confronting a disproportionate amount of poor African-Americans affected by the hurricane" (NAACP 2005).

In addition to these well established organizations, new ones were also formed after Katrina to advocate on behalf of Black victims. ColorOfChange.org, a Web-based organization, was such a case. It emerged following Katrina to lend its voice to the call for a more effective government response to the disaster and for social and political changes in society that would reduce the vulnerability of the Black community and other disadvantaged groups to future events. ColorOfChange.org has assumed the role of a strong critic of government policies and actions. It has relied on the Internet to mobilize Black stakeholders and potential allies to put pressure on Congress to pass laws to speed recovery in the Gulf Coast region and on government agencies to implement policies it

sees as beneficial to Black and other disadvantaged disaster victims (ColorOfChange.org n.d.).

Black scholars, public intellectuals, writers, and Black performing artists joined the discourse about the conditions that set the stage for the disaster in the Gulf Coast region. Even Black hip-hop artists responded to Katrina through their songs (Adaso n.d.). One example of the discussion is provided by the scholar Lawrence Bobo in his editorial introduction to a collection of papers in an issue of the *Dubois Review* devoted to Katrina. In this introduction, entitled “Katrina: Unmasking Race, Poverty, and Politics in the 21st Century”, Bobo (2006, pp. 1-2) notes that the disaster had failed to shatter major myths in American society:

The first is that the United States no longer needs to focus attention on poverty and inequality as major social ills. The second of these myths is that we have largely solved the race problem in America and can now do without much of the legal and social policy apparatus aimed at achieving racial justice. And the third of these myths is that there are few collective needs—social obligations if you will—that are enduring obligations of an effective federal government (beyond military defense and national security, that is). To wit, Katrina could be read as unmasking the fact that American society is still deeply marked by class inequality and deep poverty, that we still suffer from a great poisonous racial divide, and that there are some duties and services which only an adequately resourced and responsibly managed federal government can hope to deliver to its citizens.

Similar thoughts have been expressed by other Black writers such as Dyson (2006, p. xii) who asks the question:

Can we really afford to proceed as a nation without addressing how race, poverty, and class gang up on too many of our citizens and snatch from them their futures? Unless we answer these questions, we are in jeopardy of becoming a morally and politically lost nation bled dry of our humanity by disasters of nature and soul.

From pulpits to academic institutions to think tanks, actors across the Black community have considered and called for broad changes in society that will lead to equity and fair treatment for the marginalized in society. Such changes include equal opportunity in education, employment, housing, political participation, and health care—all of which have been called for since the early days of the civil rights movement.

Advocates have argued that such changes would be beneficial in broad terms as well as in specifically reducing the conditions that fuel the vulnerability of minorities and the poor to disasters like Katrina. Katrina provided a new context for those in the Black community and elsewhere to discuss long-term societal disparities with renewed vigor.

Academic and other types of conferences and forums have been held both inside and outside the Gulf Coast region to discuss the implications of Katrina and what can be done to bring about needed changes in patterns responsible for the vulnerability of the Black community to such disasters and the slow government responses to them. For example, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a Black think tank located in Washington, DC, has held two national forums to further the development of “never again” strategies to counter factors that make the Black community especially vulnerable to disasters.

Some of these same actors have planned and initiated research activities related to the impacts of Katrina on the Black community and the risks it faces in the future. For example, the NAACP produced a report entitled *Housing in New Orleans: One Year After Katrina—Policy Recommendations for Equitable Rebuilding* (Washington, Smedley, Alvarez, and Reece n.d.). Similarly, with foundation support, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies launched analyses of Katrina-related housing and employment issues.

As noted by disaster scholars, disasters have a major political component. Further illustrating the political nature of the debate surrounding Katrina, the Congressional Black Caucus, comprised of African-American members of the U.S. Congress, has participated with other Black stakeholders in trying to set the stage for social and political change following Katrina. This has included issuing critical commentary about the inadequacies of the government’s response to the disaster and the role of race and poverty in disaster vulnerability in the U.S. The caucus has called for changes in public policies that would help alleviate conditions that make marginalized groups more vulnerable to disasters and sponsored legislative proposals to further Gulf Coast recovery (Congressional Black Caucus 2005).

Surveys show that Blacks attributed the slow government response to the Katrina disaster to race (Pew Research Center 2005). Thus it is not surprising that there was an expectation in the Black community that Black groups like the NAACP, the National Urban League, the Congressional Black Caucus, and the Black intelligentsia would play a leadership role in post-Katrina actions and in helping to define the meaning of the disaster for the Black community and the larger society. At times, some expressed frustration in what they perceived to be a slow response by Black leaders, as was the case of the person quoted below (BlackAmericaWeb.com 2005):

Since my post yesterday, it seems that the Congressional Black Caucus, the NAACP, and other Black leaders and ministers have made some NOISE and I would like to think their efforts contributed to the quicker response by Bush and his homies. It is still my opinion, however, that our leaders were also slow to come to the forefront. I believe, like the other individual asking similar questions, that we have to help ourselves before others can help us.

Another contributor to this discussion directed similar criticism to a publisher of leading Black magazines.

It should also not come as a surprise that there were some competing views in the Black community about the Hurricane Katrina experience. Some groups in the Black community have expressed different perspectives regarding the causes of the disaster and the character of the government's response to it. One such group was Project 21 of the National Leadership Network of Conservative African-Americans. It characterized as incorrect and divisive critical comments made by the Congressional Black Caucus regarding the Bush administration's response to Hurricane Katrina and the suggestion that race was a factor (Project 21 2005). However, such a view has not been widely expressed in the Black community. The overwhelming position articulated in the Black community has been that major policy shifts are called for to improve the status of minorities and that the government's response to Katrina was extremely inadequate.

The recent Gulf Coast event is not the only documented case where the Black community spoke out forcefully against unfair treatment following a major disaster in the U.S. This also occurred after the 1927 Mississippi flood which left many thousands dead, including large numbers of Black citizens. Blacks also suffered widespread and blatant discrimination when emergency relief was dispensed, were forced into labor, and made to live in unsafe areas (Barry 1997). NAACP leaders and the Black press spoke out strongly against this injustice. However, it is not likely that the political mobilization in this case came close to the experience of the Black community following Hurricane Katrina.

Perhaps the more concerted policy response by the Black community following Katrina as compared to the Mississippi flood was due to a number of factors. To mention only a few, these might include the fact that there was much more information available to the public on which actions could be based following Katrina because the disaster occurred during the modern age of mass communications, that the availability of the Internet provided an unparalleled tool for actors in the Black community to widely disseminate their ideas, and that the earlier experience of the Black community during the civil rights era made it easier for it to galvanize around an event with racial and class overtones. Perhaps the response to the Katrina disaster can be seen as an attempt to

rekindle the spark of the civil rights movement and to complete some of its unfinished business.

Conclusion

The theoretical formulations now guiding disaster research emerged after decades of scholarship. Particularly in the U.S., this research has generally focused on disasters far smaller than Katrina. Thus a legitimate question can be raised about the extent to which such perspectives are relevant to catastrophic events like Katrina (National Research Council 2006). I believe that the theoretical perspectives referenced in this paper are very relevant to the Katrina-related developments I have discussed. Collectively, these perspectives help explain the mobilization of the Black community to provide needed disaster assistance and to challenge the society to correct perceived historical inequalities that create disaster vulnerability.

Consistent with observations I have made throughout this paper, these theoretical perspectives point out that: (1) stakeholder mobilization will occur when a disaster becomes a focusing event (see, e.g., Birkland 1997, 2006); (2) a variety of stakeholder entities, both established and new, will mobilize following disaster (see, e.g., Dynes 1970; Kreps and Bosworth 2006); (3) mobilized stakeholders will collectively frame disaster-related problems, leading to efforts to place them on political and policy agendas (see, e.g., Birkland 2006; Drabek 2007; Kreps and Drabek 1996; Stallings 1995); (4) mobilized entities will operate in a decidedly political context following disaster (see, e.g., Barry 1997; Bolin 2006; Olson 2000); and (5) a major disaster will likely function as a social change agent (see, e.g., Birkland 2006; Prince 1920)

I will briefly summarize the agreement between these theoretical perspectives and what I have described in this paper. First, in Birkland's (1997, 2006) terms, Katrina clearly became a focusing event, resulting in a surge of interest on the part of groups and actors in the Black community, including those within and outside the devastated Gulf Coast region. Groups and organizations in the Black community rallied to the cause of disaster victims and called for action against historical patterns that disadvantaged some groups based on race and class.

Second, consistent with the perspective offered by Dynes (1970), a wide variety of organizations and actors in the Black community mobilized to take on roles related to the catastrophe. Some of the groups and organizations emerged in response to the event, while others were established entities that assumed new roles during the crisis. Groups and organizations not only provided disaster relief but also called for greater disaster preparedness in the nation's Black community and changes in the larger society.

Third, in line with the formulation offered by Stallings (1995) and some other scholars, there was a collective framing by mobilized Black groups and organizations,

academics, public intellectuals, and others of problems that need to be addressed and placed on the policy agenda. This included perceived shortcomings in the provision of disaster assistance to Black Katrina victims by authorized organizations like FEMA and the Red Cross. There was also a shared view that the preexisting stratification system, reflected in inequalities in power and resources based on race and class, played a major role in the differential impacts of Katrina as well as the continuing vulnerability of the Black community to future disasters (Barnshaw 2006). This framing by Black stakeholders has much in common with the social vulnerability perspective that has emerged in disaster research, which views preconditions as a central factor in making it difficult for certain groups in society to develop the capacity to cope with and recover from disaster (Bolin and Stanford 1999; Cutter, Boruff, and Shirley 2003; Enarson 2007; Enarson, Fothergill, and Peek 2006; Klinenberg 2002; Peacock, Morrow, and Gladwin 1997; Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, and Davis 2004).

Fourth, consistent with recent observations made by Olson (2000), Bolin (2006) and others, the mobilization of Black actors following Katrina took on political overtones. This included the advocacy of major changes in existing social, political, and economic features in society that were seen as producing disadvantages in employment, education, housing, health care, and disaster resilience. An indication of the political nature of the mobilization can also be seen in the involvement of such entities as the Congressional Black Caucus. Additionally, civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and National Urban League joined in the call for policy changes to redress long-standing inequalities. Thus the mobilization of Black actors came close to resembling a social movement, one that manifested a shared vision that was reminiscent of the historical civil rights movement.

Wisner (2005) made an interesting observation in the aftermath of Katrina: “The U.S. does not need higher levees. It needs another civil rights movement.” Based on the actions of the Black community and other actors, it appears that a kind of nascent civil rights movement did emerge following Katrina, if not a full-fledged one, to address vulnerabilities faced by the Black community both within and outside the context of disaster risks. This is consistent with the perspective offered by Kreps and Bosworth (2006) that the post-disaster mobilization of some stakeholders can take on the characteristics of collective behavior (Aguirre 1994). The nascent movement that emerged following Katrina falls into this category of group behavior. Such mobilization has also been known to occur before on the local level. For example, Latino grass-roots movements emerged in Watsonville, California to address Latino disaster needs following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake (Bolin 2006; Bolin and Stanford 1991).

Fifth, it will be awhile before the extent of social and policy change (Birkland 2006; Prince 1920) resulting from the post-Katrina Black mobilization can be determined. However, past research tells us to expect some changes, even if they are not at the level

called for by various stakeholders. This will, of course, depend on a host of factors, including the sustainability of the push for change, the strength of countervailing forces, the political feasibility of various proposed courses of action, and the amount of learning that is experienced by stakeholders (Birkland 2006). At this stage there are more questions than answers regarding the links between the Katrina experience and social change.

Yet clearly some policy changes have already occurred since Katrina. For example, changes have been made in the Department of Homeland Security in reaction to the widespread criticism about its response to the disaster (GAO 2006a). In 2006, Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act that returned some preparedness activities to FEMA taken from it following the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, which some critics suggest hindered FEMA's response to Katrina. The reorganization included the creation of a new national preparedness division within FEMA to focus on policy, contingency planning, exercise coordination and evaluation. FEMA was also made responsible for maintaining the National Incident Management System and the National Response Plan. Additionally, the National Response Plan was later revised as the National Response Framework. Under the new plan, FEMA took over the primary responsibility for mass care following disasters from the Red Cross. The two organizations experienced strained working relationships over this function following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (GAO 2006b). However, how much such changes can be attributed to the post-Katrina mobilization of the Black community is unclear at this time since so many other stakeholders throughout the country also called for major changes in the disaster management system. This clearly should be the subject of future research.

Of course, strengthening the disaster management system was only one type of public policy change urged by mobilized Black stakeholders following Katrina. As noted, efforts to further equity were also demanded. Thus in terms of public policy research, it will be important to determine if new legislation dealing with social and economic disparities will be one of the results of the post-Katrina mobilization. Such policy changes were certainly something the various mobilized entities, including the NAACP, Urban League and ColorofChange.org, had in mind when they made the case for the government to address the nation's long-standing social, economic, and political disparities.

In my final remarks, I will turn to a few other questions about the prospects for post-Katrina related change that could be the basis for future research and analysis. First, will the emergency-related actions undertaken after Katrina by some of the mobilized groups, such as providing disaster assistance and relief funds, become institutionalized and incorporated into preparedness plans? In his August 9, 2006 inaugural address as president of the National Medical Association, an organization with a membership of

thousands of Black physicians, Albert Morris indicated that, as a result of Katrina, environmental health and disaster preparedness would be on their agenda (National Medical Association 2006). Do declarations like this mean that the Black community has turned a corner and advanced to a new stage of awareness regarding the need for disaster preparedness?

Second, will the drive for social and public policy change be episodic, disappearing after news on Katrina appears less frequently in the media, debated less often in the halls of Congress, and given less attention by government agencies as other issues gain prominence, or will it be more long lasting? Furthermore, what are the chances that this thrust will evolve into a broadly based movement for change in public policy, as was the case during the civil rights era which produced such changes as the 1964 Civil Rights Act, since many of the actions and policy positions taken by Black groups and actors parallel and have been done in collaboration with groups in the larger society?

Third, will the Katrina experience encourage the U.S. Black community to see disaster vulnerability in global terms, resulting in its giving attention to the needs of Black and other minority communities at risk in other societies? It is interesting to note, for example, that the Black advocacy group TransAfrica Forum issued a call for financial assistance to Black communities in Peru hit particularly hard by the August 15, 2007 earthquake (TransAfrica Forum 2007). The organization put its appeal for the support of Black Peruvian earthquake victims in the context of similar support that Black hurricane victims needed following Hurricane Katrina.

Fourth, will the discussion about the vulnerability of the Black community and what to do about it encourage action by other minority communities to have their own disaster vulnerability and lack of access to relevant resources and opportunities addressed by policy makers? There is some evidence that this might be the case. For example, in a National Council of La Raza report, Muñiz (2006) concludes that following Katrina there were major shortcomings in the disaster assistance given to Latinos by FEMA and the Red Cross. The report offers a number of policy recommendations to improve responses by these organizations to the needs of Latinos in future disasters. And reporting on the results of a study on media coverage of the victims of Katrina, Kao (2006) concludes that both Asians and Latinos were seldom covered by the mainstream media, despite the fact that—like poor African Americans—they experienced significant problems such as navigating the disaster relief system. He suggests that attention should be given to the needs of Asians and Latinos in future discussions on disaster vulnerability so that these growing segments of the U.S. population will be properly considered when policies are being developed.

Fifth, will the Katrina experience lead to more minority disaster specialists in the U.S., such as emergency managers and disaster researchers? Today, African Americans are underrepresented in the emergency management field and only a few are found in the

disaster research workforce (National Research Council 2006; Tierney 2002). There is some possibility that the recent Gulf Coast disaster might provide an opportunity for increasing the diversity in both workforces. For example, responding to recent criticisms about cultural insensitivity and the lack of minority participation in its activities, the Red Cross has been working with the NAACP and looking for ways to increase the diversity of its volunteer and paid staff (Salmon 2005).

In terms of the scholarly workforce, after Katrina some African Americans became first time disaster researchers and other Black scholars analyzed and wrote about such disaster-related issues as emergency response, preparedness, and recovery for the first time (Bobo 2006; Dyson 2006; Troutt 2007). Also, some Black researchers who work in the closely-related environmental justice field are now showing an interest in disaster research. It is possible that some of these scholars will remain interested in disaster research in the years ahead and also encourage their students' involvement in the field (Tierney 2006).

Another relevant development since Katrina is that some Black institutions of higher education are now included in new Homeland Security Centers of Excellence funded by the Department of Homeland Security to conduct disaster research and educational activities. For example, predominantly Black Jackson State University is a partner with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in a center focusing on coastal hazards. Also, two other Black institutions, Tougaloo College and Texas Southern University, are partners with the University of Connecticut at Storrs in a center focusing on transportation security.

Such developments could be significant because of the different perspectives that African Americans and other minorities might bring to managing disaster-related problems and conducting critical research and educational activities (National Research Council 2006; Tierney 2002). This may be particularly important at this time because of the increasing vulnerability of society to natural disasters like Katrina, willful disasters like the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the prospects of an avian flu pandemic, and increased risks from natural disasters associated with climate change (IPCC 2007).

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