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Buried Above the Ground: A Study of the Impact of Hurricane Katrina on African-American Women in the Lower 9th Ward and the Case of Underdevelopment

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ABSTRACT

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2011

BURIED ABOVE THE GROUND: A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF HURRICANE
KATRINA ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE LOWER 9TH WARD AND
THE CASE OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

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Dissertation dated December 2018

Hurricane Katrina made landfall 60 miles east of New Orleans, Louisiana, on August 29, 2005. The storm revealed the reality of the socio-economic state of tens of thousands of African Americans living in the city of New Orleans, especially African-American women. This study examines the state of development of African-American women who lived in the Lower 9th Ward area of New Orleans prior to, during, and after Hurricane Katrina. This study was based on the premise that African-American women who lived in the Lower 9th Ward were significantly more affected by Hurricane Katrina than any other group in the area because of their race, class, gender, and state of development. A narrative analysis was chosen as the method for this study. The data were collected from interviews was analyzed to explore how Hurricane Katrina impacted these women's state of development, or the lack thereof. The researcher found that

Lower 9th Ward African-American women were impacted by Hurricane Katrina more than any other group because of their underdeveloped state. The conclusions drawn from the findings suggest that the African-American women from the Lower 9th Ward area lived a life comparable to that of women in developing countries, while living in a First World country. The reality of their underdeveloped state allowed for Hurricane Katrina to impact them more negatively than any other group by leaving them unable to regain normalcy in some areas of their lives, especially those areas influenced by their race, class, and gender.

BURIED ABOVE THE GROUND: A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF HURRICANE
KATRINA ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE LOWER 9TH WARD AND
THE CASE OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

ALICIA M. FONTNETTE

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

DECEMBER 2018

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to investigate the importance of race, class, gender and their dynamic interaction before, during, and after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina on the lives of some African-American women residing in the Lower 9th Ward of New Orleans, Louisiana. This investigation utilized the development and underdevelopment model developed by Alan Colón, a professor of African Diaspora Studies.¹ Race, class, and gender dynamics have been prominent in the United States and reflect a Eurocentric framework that Terry Kershaw has described as one which “centers on the life experiences of people of European descent...with assumptions that have informed their attributes, values, and behaviors and their interaction with non-European descended people, especially during colonialism in Africa and Asia, and enslavement in North and South America.”² In efforts to address this issue, Walter Rodney’s framework of development and underdevelopment focuses on the effects of economic exploitation on colonized Africa, including political and social dynamics of race and class and its

1. Dr. Alan Colón is a retired professor from Dillard University. His research focuses on race, class, and gender disparities in higher education and the many sided process of development and underdevelopment, in which he identifies pillars for each process and applies them to people of color globally, especially in America.

2. Terry Kershaw, “Afrocentrism and the Afrocentric Method” in *The Western Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 16, No. 3 (1992): 3.

role in the development process.³ On the other hand, Colón expands Rodney's model of underdevelopment to include ten pillars: racism, political oppression, economic exploitation, cultural domination, patriarchy, psychological incarceration, spiritual captivity and impoverishment, health and healthcare disparities, homophobia and ecological exploitation and disruption. The uniqueness of both works by Rodney and Colón is rooted in an African-centered framework. Rather than perceiving people of African descent as objects, Rodney and Colón present African-descended people as subjects. The 9th Ward African-American Women in New Orleans, Louisiana, are the subject of this study, which is why the word 'Black' is capitalized throughout this work.

Statement of the Problem

Hurricane Katrina struck the U.S. Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005, hitting 60 miles east of New Orleans. The hurricane significantly transformed the city causing the most damage to minorities in low socioeconomic status and underdeveloped communities like the Lower 9th Ward, which is where the women highlighted in this study lived. Before Hurricane Katrina, African-American women in New Orleans, particularly those in the Lower 9th Ward, constituted one of the most marginalized groups in society. For example, many 9th Ward African-American women in New Orleans, Louisiana, lived in economic constraints prior to Hurricane Katrina. A large number of these women received government assistance, and their basic desire to acquire fuller economic independence remained unfulfilled. Also, while living in public housing as single mothers, 9th Ward African-American women did not have personal and reliable

3. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, (London: Bogle-L'Overture Publications, 1972).

transportation. They had to utilize public transportation because they could not afford or qualify for vehicle loans. The 9th Ward African-American women's lack of personal transportation played a critical role in their failure to evacuate before the storm made landfall. Moreover, transportation was not provided for the majority of these women to evacuate. Instead, local officials allowed thousands of buses to drown in the flood waters of Hurricane Katrina and not utilize them to assist in the evacuation efforts of the women. Additionally, the 9th Ward African-American women had a lifestyle that was poorer, more stressful, and less comfortable than many of their white counterparts. Overall, the 9th Ward African-American women, as well as the community in which they lived were underdeveloped because of the system of white dominance that operated in New Orleans, which controlled access to the resources these women needed for survival and the resources the community needed for growth. Hurricane Katrina revealed that race, class, and gender are still relevant factors in the social and economic development of certain groups of people in the United States of America, especially in terms of gaining the highest level of freedom and the right to survive before, during, and after natural disasters.

Also, it is frequently assumed that only women in developing countries experience inequalities in development; however, women in First World countries, like the United States, also experience similar inequalities in development that cause the same underdeveloped state as those women in developing countries. Furthermore, race also plays a critical role in the rate of development that women experience in the U.S.--the world's richest country. For example, an oppressive social norm for many women in

developing countries is that they lack access to formal education, high-paying jobs, and stable family environments. Similarly, many of the 9th Ward African-American women impacted by Hurricane Katrina included those who did not obtain an education past secondary school, have high paying jobs, if employed at all, or a stable family environment. Moreover, their class status was determined by the very same political factors that placed them well below the poverty line based on their race and gender. The 9th Ward African-American women's socio-economic reality was impacted, as a consequence of their womanhood and Blackness. A pressing question that arises is whether the government's response, at local, state, and federal levels, to the country's biggest natural disaster had more to do with race, class, or gender. Media images revealed that nearly all those left behind to suffer and die were Black, poor, and women. Even though Black women were the group impacted most by the storm and are the focus of this study, it should be acknowledged that Black men were also among those who were either trapped by the flood waters, or fell victim to Hurricane Katrina. However, upper class families who were able to afford homes in safer flood-protected areas, and who were mostly white, had resources to evacuate more easily than poorer families. Additionally, white and conservative Americans vehemently fought the idea that structural racism caused the extreme levels of Black impoverishment that the disaster revealed, and it slowed the government's response pre- and post- Hurricane Katrina.

Public discourse further raised more questions as to whether race or class was the true reason for the lack of urgency to rescue those trapped in the flood waters of Hurricane Katrina. Scholars who debated on Hurricane Katrina from a class perspective

asserted that Katrina's aftermath reflected a dynamic based more on economic structure and status than race. For example, Michael Eric Dyson stated, "[S]ure they're Black, but the reason they didn't get out in time is because they're poor, not skin color."⁴ Likewise, political scientist Adolph Reed argued that blaming racism for the Katrina disaster was a terrible political analysis and strategy. Although he acknowledged historically racialized structures and functions, Reed asserted that those who claimed the existence of contemporary racism did so for the sake of morality. In other words, they wanted to appear to be supportive of those less fortunate who happened to be African American and overemphasize the importance of structural racism. Such comments infer that during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, America could not admit the racial problems that the country was still experiencing, even though a veil had been lifted to expose racial inequalities. The omission of the acknowledgement of race as a factor contributes to the ignored needs of Black populations in marginalized communities, especially the 9th Ward African-American women.

Race and class have been viewed as inextricably intertwined pillars in this country's centuries of racial underdevelopment.⁵ Economic stratification based on race is deeply rooted in New Orleans primarily because of a long history of continuous institutionalized racism. Imposing social stratification based on race and class has typically been used as tools by the white elite, and has usually been supported by the

4. Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 89.

5. Joe R. Feagin, *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 8.

white citizenry, to maintain white dominance and privilege. For many whites, racism is simply a form of prejudice, but for most Blacks and other people of color, racism is a socially constructed systemic racial discrimination ideology and practice that holds many of them at the lowest socio-economic level possible.⁶ In order to fully understand the meaning of racism, prejudice, and discrimination, these terms must be defined. Alan Colón identifies racism as, something that systematically creates, supports, and legitimates the division of people into dominant and subordinate relationships, in which they are assigned human worth and social status based on race, a social—not biological—construction.⁷ More specifically, he defines racism:

Racism entails representatives of one population (or “race”) of people with more or less common genetically transmitted physical characteristics believing in the idea that they are superior to another group of people who share markedly different inherited physical traits and are defined and treated by the former group as inferior. Racism may be overt or covert and may be expressed consciously or unconsciously. White racism’s antagonism towards the color of racially oppressed groups extends also to their ethnicity and culture, often interacting with both as grounds for their perception and treatment as inferior.⁸

Racism is not an individual character flaw, nor a personal moral failing. Within its system, racism structures opportunity and assigns value based on phenotype, or the way people look. It unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities (mostly Black and brown people), while favoring whites, especially those in the higher class ranking. In

5. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and Racial Inequality in Contemporary America* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 8.

6. Alan K. Colon, “Racism in Colleges and Universities,” *Education K-12 and Higher Education: A Volume in the Contemporary Issues for People of Color Series* K. Lomotey Edition, (2015): 1.

7. Ibid.

fact, Catherine Scott infers that the bourgeois class, which is mostly white, can demand services from the government to benefit them, which is something many other groups cannot do.⁹ In other words, whites who are wealthy are organized around the economy and those who control it, in order to ensure their progress and development, while infringing upon the development process for others based upon race. The exclusion of Blacks in the development process is an example of racial prejudice. According to Wolfgang Strobe and Chester Insko, racial prejudice is an attitude towards members of some outgroups and in which the evaluative tendencies are predominantly negative, and allows for discrimination to occur—thus invoking discriminatory acts and behavior.¹⁰ As stated by Devah Pager and Hana Shephard, racial discrimination refers to unequal treatment of persons or groups on the basis of their race or ethnicity.¹¹ Therefore, racism, prejudice and discrimination represent social stratifications to marginalize populations of color and keep them in an underdeveloped state.

Though race and class are obvious factors that should be discussed in relation to those impacted by Hurricane Katrina, gender has often been ignored. Despite the undeniable presence of gender within the media, the dominant Hurricane Katrina

9. Catherine Scott, *Gender and Development: Rethinking Modernization and Dependency Theory* (Boulder, Colorado and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996): 58.

10. Chester Insko and Wolfgang Strobe, "Stereotype, Prejudice, and Discrimination: Changing Conceptions in Theory and Research," in *Stereotyping and Prejudice: Changing Conceptions*, ed. Daniel Bar-Tal, Carl F. Graumann, and Airie W. Kruglasnki, and Wolfgang Stroebe, (Springer Science and Business Media, LLC, 1989), 8.

11. David Pager and Hana Shepherd, "The Sociology of Discrimination: Racial Discrimination in Employment, Housing, Credit, and Consumer Markets," in *Annual Review Sociology* 34 (Jan 2008): 181-209.

narrative that emerges does not see gender as central but instead emphasizes the intersecting inequalities of race and class. Ironically, when gender does not get media coverage it is often from pundits on the political right who are quick to blame unmarried women of color for their own suffering.¹² However, when considering that these women are dependent on the same government officials that determine what resources these women have access to for their development one begins to question who truly is to blame for these women not having adequate resources to evacuate before the storm. Their underdeveloped state did not give them the option to evacuate and the government they depended on did nothing to help them. Overall, gender has not been a primary focus of those analyzing Black women—the population Hurricane Katrina impacted the most.

Dependency theories conceive of the world's producers as individuals who are able, through their own egotistic motivations, to implement the most effective techniques of exploitation.¹³ Walter Rodney utilizes a metaphor in which he states that when a child or the young of any animal species ceases to be dependent upon its mother for food and protection, it can be said to have developed into maturity.¹⁴ Therefore, like baby animals who depend on their mothers, dependent nations can never be considered developed. Since development is a many-sided process, this metaphor can be applied to individual and group human development processes. For example, Rodney further states that independence requires a capacity to exercise choice in external social-relations, and

12. A. Bonavogalia, "Hurricane Pundits Blow Hot Air on Single Mothers," *Women's E-News*, accessed February 12, 2010, Retrieved from www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=2449.

13. Scott, 94.

14. Rodney, 73.

above all it requires that a nation's growth at some point must become self-reliant and self-sustaining.¹⁵ When applying this to human individuals and group development, development in a true sense means autonomous and sustained growth by individuals, communities, and nations. Unfortunately, the 9th Ward African-American women were not granted the right to fully develop; this will be discussed more in chapter three.

Background of the Problem

The background of the problem for this research gives the historical timeline of the development of the city of New Orleans and its Lower 9th Ward, along with how this development also impacted those living in the area. This information is important to this study, as it gives readers information on the history of the foundations of the multi-dimensional process of development and underdevelopment for Blacks—socially, politically, and economically in the city of New Orleans. Additionally, before highlighting the history of New Orleans, it must be noted that the history of people of African descent have always been experiences of struggle. From the uprooting of their bodies from Africa, the terror of the Slave Trade, and life on the plantation, Blacks throughout the diaspora have been isolated to experiences of oppression, meaning whites have normalized oppression in the lives of Blacks.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina: A Brief History of New Orleans (1770-2004)

White slave owners in the U.S. South used race to differentiate themselves from, and privilege themselves over enslaved Blacks. Sugar plantations, commercial shipping, and enslaved labor distinguished the economy of lower Louisiana. The sugar boom of

15. Rodney, 73.

the 1700s and 1800s increased demand for slave labor and turned New Orleans into the principal slave market for North America.¹⁶ During the antebellum period in America, millions of dollars were pumped into the southern economy through the global trade of Africans. The purchase and sale of Africans tightly linked New Orleans to the larger southern economy. Each year thousands from across the South passed through New Orleans holding areas, arriving and departing by boat or driven on foot in chains.¹⁷ Slave auctions and trading were daily, bloody, highly, visible public affairs in New Orleans' cultural life.

Black labor was essential to sugar and other agricultural production, as well as the development of the city's utilities and facilities. Infrastructure improvements were carried out by jailed and enslaved Africans. The city council established a chain gang in 1805, which stipulated that Black prisoners work alongside slave laborers to develop public works projects. These individuals maintained levees, erected public buildings, cleaned streets, and expanded the city's boundaries. Huge amounts of uncompensated Black labor helped to modernize New Orleans, ushering in a new era of city prominence.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the Black slave labor that helped the city gain economic stability did not help Blacks acquire the economic resources needed to survive; instead, it challenged their sense of humanity.

16. Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 83.

17. Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 6-7.

18. Rothman, 83.

The value of African-American humanity in New Orleans was lost during the 1700 and 1800s as the slavery market grew. The city symbolized countless social deaths for those who were separated from their families, communities, cultures, and histories. African-Americans would never see or hear from most family and friends again once they were forced into captivity.¹⁹ Their stolen labor generated billions of dollars in wealth for many whites in the American South. Consequently, Blacks in New Orleans continued to have little or nothing to show for the hard labor their ancestors provided.

Before the Civil War, New Orleans continued to rely on the labor of enslaved Africans and their descendants. The enslaved worked as agricultural laborers on small and large plantations, as well as any other places their owner made them work. During the era of Reconstruction (1865-1877), some Blacks became a part of the nation's political, social, and economic life by becoming attorneys, newspaper publishers, politicians, commission merchants, and insurance executives. However, whites implemented laws that built a glass ceiling for Blacks through the Jim and Jane Crow laws. These laws made it politically and socially harder for Blacks to enroll in schools, vote and acquire well-paying jobs. As Rose Weitz states,

For the most part, New Orleans Blacks worked in the lowest position within the local economy. Only a small percentage of African Americans were able to survive as middle class, and the rest struggled to survive. New Orleans' history was built on a legacy of slavery, racial segregation, and racial discrimination. Virtually since its founding, poor African Americans were relegated to housing in the low-lying areas near the coast, where flooding was most likely.²⁰

19. Johnson, 6-7.

20. Rose Weitz, "American Titanic: Hurricane Katrina and Its Aftermath," *Guardian* (September 2006): 25.

In these areas, the chances of floods increased with time. The city supported the straightening of the Mississippi River which helped shipping and oil production. This increased the river force and destroyed some of its natural protection from the sea. Also, the levee system which protected the city “was allowed to deteriorate by politicians who believed that taxes should be kept to a minimum and that private enterprise could do a better job than government of providing transportation, housing, emergency aid, and other needs of the citizenry.”²¹ Yet, this dangerous area was occupied by lower class, underdeveloped African Americans that were purposely placed in a socio-economic reality where they had no choice but to live in areas not protected by levees and susceptible to flooding.

The sugar plantations in New Orleans stretched from the Mississippi River to Lake Ponchartrain to the Lower 9th Ward (St. Bernard Parish), which is essentially where the coast of Louisiana meets the Gulf of Mexico. The final eastward expansion of the old city of New Orleans came in the early 1800s as the Holy Cross Neighborhood grew along the Mississippi River to the St. Bernard Parish line. By 1834, the U.S. government established Jackson Barracks as an army post to house troops. The rapid growth of the area’s Catholic population prompted construction of St. Maurice Church in 1857. Two years later in 1859, the Brothers of the Holy Cross purchased the Reynes Plantation to establish a boy’s boarding school, the Holy Cross School, from which the neighborhood took its name. Eventually, Holy Cross began to develop as a New Orleans suburb, spanning 60 blocks from St. Claude Avenue south to the river.

21. Weitz, 36.

Since 1986, the neighborhood has been listed on the National Register, and has been designated a Local Historic District since 1990. The remaining area of the Lower 9th Ward was among the last of New Orleans' neighborhoods to be developed. The isolation from the rest of the city and lack of adequate drainage systems contributed to its slow growth. Even as late as the 1870s, the area north of St. Claude consisted of mostly small farms with scattered residences and beyond Claiborne Avenue, mostly undeveloped cypress swamp. Poor African Americans and immigrant laborers from Ireland, Germany, and Italy who were desperate for homes, but unable to afford housing in other areas of the city, risked flooding and disease to move to the Lower 9th Ward.²² Until the 1940's, truck gardens on vacant lots and other types of farming supported by easy access to transportation on the river were common in the Lower 9th Ward. Restaurants and open markets in New Orleans obtained fresh produce from the many small truck farms in the area. This isolation from the rest of the city increased further with completion of the Industrial Canal in the early 1920s, cutting the 9th Ward in half. Afterwards, residents began referring to neighborhoods 'above' and 'upriver' from the Canal as the 'Upper' 9th Ward, and the rest of the area as the 'Lower' 9th Ward.

The City Planning Commission defines the boundaries of Lower 9th Ward as the following: Florida Avenue, St. Bernard Parish, St. Claude Avenue, and the Industrial Canal.²³ The Lower 9th Ward is also commonly used to describe a slightly larger area. This area borders the Mississippi River to the South and St. Bernard Parish to the east.

22. Greater New Orleans Data Community Center, "Lower 9th Ward Neighborhood Snapshot," <http://www.gnocdc.org/orleans/8/22/snapshot.html> (accessed January 14, 2010).

23. Ibid.

To the west is the Industrial Canal, which is the Bywater section of New Orleans. This northern or inland boundary is often given as the Florida Canal with Florida Avenue, a levee, with railroad tracks running beside it. Alternatively, the industrial area north of Florida Avenue is included as part of the Lower 9th Ward, extending the boundary to the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet. Thus, the Lower 9th Ward is surrounded by water with levees to act as a barrier.

In relation to education, economics, and the racial layout of the city since the late 1860s to the 1880s, newly emancipated African Americans saw improvements in their access to national and local politics, public accommodations, and education. Yet, most faced harsh conditions. They experienced a type of slavery without the physical chains. Few Black professionals in New Orleans were able to advance, and many Blacks were severely hampered from economic advancement because of recurring depressions in New Orleans' economy, as well as pervasive racial discrimination. By 1890, formal segregationist statutes were written into Louisiana state law. In the century following the end of Reconstruction, New Orleans was completely dominated by families of the white power structure. White flight from Orleans Parish to surrounding suburbs started after World War II. New neighborhoods were quickly filled by middle-class and working-class whites, mostly from Orleans Parish. It was challenging for Blacks moving to that area because of economic constraints and discrimination from white flight led to a major demographic shift. Between 1950 and 2000, the city of New Orleans lost two-thirds of its white population. Following national trends of white movement from the cities to

suburbs between 1960 and 2000, the city went from 37% to 67% Black.²⁴ Moreover, prior to legally mandated school desegregation, public schools in southern Louisiana had less money because many Catholics sent their children to parochial schools. Also, affluent white Protestants opened their own private schools. This private school system functioned as a gatekeeper for admission to the city's ruling white elite. The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) integration order paved the way for Black children to enter New Orleans public schools, as well as allowed them to attend any school of their choice. National media portrayed angry white mobs in New Orleans reacting to the federal-ordered desegregation in the late 1950s.²⁵ Subsequently, many whites relocated so their children could attend private schools that were still only white.

Many whites feared that integration would ruin the public school system in New Orleans. However, many of the white residents prided themselves as believers of 'diplomatic' and 'fair' race relations—meaning they viewed themselves as treating Blacks 'good.' Yet, integration was met with violent resistance. In terms of institutionalized and normalized racism, New Orleans has consistently shown itself to be a typical southern city.

Substantially grounded in oil, petro-chemical, and fishing industries between the 1940s and the 1980s, the economy of the New Orleans area became centered on tourist-oriented industries, especially following the oil bust of the 1980s. Oil executives moved

24. Greater New Orleans Data Community Center, <http://gnocdc.org/orleans.com> (accessed January 14, 2010).

25. B. Porcupine, "Historical Perspective," message board post November 22, 2004 on http://neworleans.indymedia.org/news/2004/06/1639_comment.php#7199 (accessed May 13, 2010).

from New Orleans, taking their offices and capital with them. New Orleans had few manufacturing jobs to make up for the loss of the oil companies. Tax revenues plummeted and unemployment increased. The Black poor felt the decline hardest because many were not able to leave for better employment opportunities. By 1990, unemployment among Black men was 11%, more than double the rate for whites, which is also consistent with national trends since the 1930s.²⁶ Those who were able to keep jobs were often poorly paid. About 13% of residents were employed in relatively low-wage food and accommodations industries, compared with 7% of all workers nationwide; total service jobs represented 26% of all jobs and paid less than minimum wage per hour.²⁷ This pay also came with long working hours. However, industries such as shipping, oil, and gas extraction, paid above-average wages, and accounted for relatively little employment when Hurricane Katrina hit in the summer of 2005.²⁸ Therefore, little growth had taken place in the city among certain populations and jobs were limited for African Americans.

For years, New Orleans contained one of the highest proportions of African Americans in cities in the South. By 2000, with more white flight, disinvestment in public schooling, and the outmigration of decent-paying jobs, the city became more segregated than ever, and the inequities between rich and poor were as extreme as at any

26. Pierce F. Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape* (Santa Fe, NM: Center for American Places, 2003), 124-125.

27. Harry J. Holzer and Robert I. Lerman, *Employment Issues and Challenges in Post-Katrina New Orleans* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 2006) 1.

28. Edward Glaeser, "Should the Government Rebuild New Orleans, or Just Give Residents Checks?," *Economists' Voices* 2, no. 4 (2005): 34.

time since slavery.²⁹ Prior to Hurricane Katrina, as stated earlier, two-thirds of New Orleans was Black, while just 28% was white. It was the sixth poorest large American city, with more than one out of four residents living below the national official poverty line, and four out of ten Black families living in poverty. This was the highest rate for Black urbanites nationwide in the 2000 census. Graver still was the fact that the majority of the poor survived on incomes of less than half the official poverty level.³⁰ Most of them were Black women.

Significance of the Research

This work is significant because it explores the economic structure that pushed the 9th Ward African-American women into a political, educational, social, psychological, and geographical condition of underdevelopment. Because the women interviewed for this study during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina compared themselves to slaves, this research is significant for the following reasons: 1.) it adds to the literature of continuing underdevelopment in the 21st century in America; and 2.) it illuminates the reality of development in America for Black women, which is a critical component of Africana Women's Studies.

This work is also significant because it explores institutional racism. The system of racism undermines the realization of the full development of individuals, all well as the whole society, because of the waste of human resources that are not equitably distributed. Building upon Colón's definition of racism, in which he claims that racism

29. Glaeser, 2.

30. Lewis, 67, and 124-125.

systematically creates, supports, and legitimates the division of people into dominant and subordinate relationships in which they are assigned human worth and status based on race, a social-not-biological-construction.³¹ Camara Phyllis Jones presents a notable definition of institutional racism. She defines institutional racism as structures, politics, practices, and norms resulting in differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society by race.³² Institutionalized racism is normative, sometimes legalized, and often manifests an inherited advantage. It is structural, having been codified in institutions of custom, practice and law, so there need not be an identifiable perpetrator. Institutionalized racism manifests itself both in material conditions and in access to power.³³ In relation to material conditions, examples include differential access to quality education, good affordable housing, gainful employment, appropriate medical facilities, and clean environment. In relation to access to power, examples include differential access to information (including one's own history), resources (including wealth and organizational infrastructure), and voice (such as voting rights, representation in government, and control of the media).³⁴ Because of this structural racism system, it is important to note that race in America has its origins in historical events, such as the enslavement of Blacks and decades of Jim and Jane Crow (just to name a few), but persists because of contemporary structural factors that perpetuate those historical

31. Colón, 1.

32. Camara Phyllis Jones, "Confronting Institutional Racism," *Phylon* 50, no. ½ (2002): 10.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.,10.

injustices. Therefore, this study is significant because it highlights the consequences of being underdeveloped within an institutionalized racist system. A more comprehensive discussion of the structural foundations of racism follows in chapter three.

When discussing race, class, and development, capitalism is unavoidably linked. Capitalism is the foundation of the economic impoverishment that Blacks experience, especially for the 9th Ward African-American women. Karl Marx defines capitalism as a socio-economic system based especially on private ownership of the means of production and the exploitation of the labor force.³⁵ Moreover, the process of capital accumulation is a, if not, the principal motor of modern history. Structural inequality and temporal unevenness of capital accumulation are inherent to capitalism.³⁶ In relation to capitalism, and how its economic characteristics affect African Americans, Manning Marable states that the most striking fact about American economic history and political reality is the brutal and systematic underdevelopment of Black people. He further asserts that Blacks have never been equal partners in the “American Social Contract” because the system exists to under develop Black people, not to develop them.³⁷ The exploitation of the American government’s failure to ensure development for all citizens makes this research

35. Dino Felluga, “Terms Used by Marxism: Modules on Marx and On Ideology,” *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory* (January 2011): 2 accessed April 2, 2011, <http://purdue.edu/guidedtheory/marxism/modules/marxideology.html>>.

36. Andre Gunder Frank, *World Accumulation 1492-1789* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 238-239.

37. Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1983) 2.

significant because it highlights that thousands of Blacks were unable to evacuate due to their underdeveloped state which was exacerbated by government neglect.

This research is also significant because it places Black women's work at the center of discussion in relation to their underdeveloped state. For example, Eric Williams has long asserted that Blacks, especially Black women, were not viewed as humans who deserved to develop their full potential, but that they were simply viewed as a tool for economic gain for whites.³⁸ He also states that during the Reconstruction era, discipline was an important factor in maintaining the work ethic of the former slaves to ensure they never revolted against their former master in an attempt to obtain complete freedom.³⁹ These assertions can be applied to the current state of poor African-American women in the United States, who might depend on the government to maintain their living conditions since they cannot, by virtue of their disadvantaged economic status, provide for themselves, especially 9th Ward African-American women.

The investigation of 9th Ward African-American women's underdeveloped state contributes to the substance of this research. Taking into consideration the traditional thoughts on development and including gender in the discussion, W.W. Rostow posits that the gap between rich and poor countries, or in relation to this study rich and poor people as well as Black (women) and white people, can be explained by the fact that not all countries, or certain groups of people, enter the development process at the same

38. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 6.

39. *Ibid.*, 199.

time.⁴⁰ Modernization theorists utilize concepts and thoughts of development and underdevelopment in both the human and environmental aspect in relation to gender.⁴¹ These theorists assume that in the United States industrialization would lead to gender inequality. This assumption is based on the premise that industrialization extracts a surplus of capital from female labor, and although it creates and provides jobs for women, it ultimately increases women's economic exploitation.⁴² Therefore, industrialization actually brings more destruction to the lives of the women impacted than actual development. Modernization requires men to leave the household and assume their *rightful place* among other men outside of the home, which is where modernization takes place.⁴³ In fact, women's marginalization from traditional economic activities is viewed as both inevitable and appropriate because women are viewed as being too traditional and less productive.⁴⁴ In this line of reasoning, women are left behind, confined to the household leaving them dependent on the men and of these women, those who are women of color are most dependent upon the government; the dependency takes away their political and economic stability.

40. W.W. Rostow, "Five Stage of Growth," in *Development and Underdevelopment: The Political Economy of Global Inequality*, ed. Mitchell A. Seligson & John T. Passe-Smith (Boulder, Colorado and London: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 1960), 123.

41. Briavel Holcomb and Tamar Y. Rothenburg, "Women's Work and the Urban Household Economy in Developing Countries," in *Women's Lives and Public Policy: The International Experience*, ed. Briavel Holcomb (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1993), 52.

42. *Ibid.*, 52.

43. Scott, 39.

44. Jane Jaquette, "Women and Modernations Theory: A Decade of Feminist Criticism," *World Politics* 34, no. 2 (1982): 271.

This dissertation seeks to unmask the agonizing truth about how Black women in America continuously suffer neglect and underdevelopment in a First World country. According to Hope Lewis, women of color who are poor in the United States struggle with the effects of underdevelopment while surrounded by the resources of the most economically developed nation on earth.⁴⁵ These women experience poor living conditions and limited economic opportunities that are strikingly similar to those affecting poor women of color in developing countries around the world.⁴⁶ The poor living condition of women of color affects them in areas such as their health care, education and employment, and credit, as well as housing. Development implies progress towards a better quality of human life. Lewis asserts that domestic efforts to achieve economic development in low-income communities have their official (governmental) origins in the Johnson-era War on Poverty.⁴⁷ These efforts focused on community projects intended to provide basic needs such as housing, education, food, and access to health care through government sponsored social service structures. Even though there are laws that support due process in the administration of social services, they do not characterize access to economic or social opportunities and services as fundamental rights.⁴⁸ One might add that because 9th Ward African-American women

45. Hope Lewis, "Women (Under) Development Poor Women of Color in the United States and the Right to Development," in *Global Critical Race Feminism: An International Reader* ed. Adrien Katherine Wing (New York, N.Y. University Press, 2000), 96.

46. *Ibid.*, 96.

47. *Ibid.*, 100.

48. Barbara Herz, "Bringing Women into the Economic Mainstream: Guidelines for Policy-Makers and Development Institutions," in *Gender Manual: A Practical Guide for Development Policy Makers and Practitioners* ed. Helen Derbyshire (Department of International Development, 2002), 266.

are not afforded economic and social opportunities for growth and development, they do not benefit in the economically developed country in which they live.

Alan Colón identifies pillars of underdevelopment, which are used in the analysis of the underdeveloped state of 9th Ward African-American women. Also, it is taken into account that Hope Lewis infers that human rights (see Colón's pillars of development on pages 28-29) and economic privileges go hand in hand. Therefore, an assessment of the human rights that 9th Ward African-American women had access to prior, during, and post-Katrina is discussed here.

Lewis asserts that the United States of America mimics programs that influence social relations from corporations that have engaged in work, which parallels development efforts in developing countries, in relation to women.⁴⁹ This work highlights how benefits, such as welfare, Medicare, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) assistance are given to Black women in America by the government in efforts to keep them dependent. Policy makers are increasingly attempting to strengthen the argument of utilizing programs in developing countries to address similar issues in the United States urban centers and poor rural communities.⁵⁰ However, issues significant to African-American women in urban and poor communities, such as the Lower 9th Ward, in the United States have not been a part of the discussion. Ninth Ward African-American women have had a long history of working harder than most for survival. Unfortunately, 9th Ward African-American women *must* continue to work harder because they do not get

49. Lewis, 100.

50. Herz, 266.

the necessary support or resources for a more comfortable and less stressful lifestyle as often as their white counterparts. The unfair and unequal treatment received by 9th Ward African-American women is evaluated in this study to determine how it contributed to their underdeveloped status and if they had a *fair* opportunity to fully develop as a group. The application of Lewis's concept of development will be used by measuring Colón pillars of development and underdevelopment to the lifestyle that these women lived prior to Hurricane Katrina.

Conceptual Framework

This research draws upon the concepts of underdevelopment as Walter Rodney and Alan Colón define it, as well as Patricia Hill-Collins' theory of containment. Also, though underdevelopment is the focus of this research, development itself must be discussed for comparison purposes. This research uses Colón's theory of underdevelopment as the foundational conceptual framework, and investigates the lives of 9th Ward African-American women before, during and after Hurricane Katrina. Colón's theory is inclusive of how being economically underdeveloped brings about struggles in other areas such as psychology, politics, racism, and cultural domination just to name a few.

In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Rodney argues that Europe became developed, and even over developed, at the expense of Africa's underdevelopment during the four centuries of Europe's colonization of Africa, and the raping of its human and natural resources. Under colonial rule, vast amounts of wealth were transferred from Africa to Europe. The imposition of monocrop systems of agriculture destroyed local

economies, contributing to periodic famines and extreme poverty. Politically, African states lost their power, independence and autonomy. Even when certain traditional rulers were kept in office, and the formal structure of some kingdoms was partially retained, real political power had passed into the hands of foreign overlords.⁵¹ Rodney's major theoretical argument was that racism as a social force, in both Africa and the Americas, was generally subsidiary to the dynamics of capitalist exploitation. Rodney observes:

It can be affirmed without reservations that the white racism, which came to pervade the world was an integral part of the capitalist mode of production...European planters and miners enslaved Africans for economic reasons, so that their labor power could be exploited. Indeed, it would have been impossible to open up the New World and to use it as a constant generator of wealth, had it not been for African labor... Europeans at home and abroad found it necessary to rationalize that exploitation in racist terms as well. Oppression follows logically from exploitation, so as to guarantee the latter. Oppression of African people on purely racial grounds accompanied, strengthened, and became indistinguishable from oppression for economic reasons.⁵²

He further asserts that development is more than all other factors combined. The institutionalized hegemony of capitalism as a world system and underdevelopment is a direct consequence of chattel slavery, sharecropping, peonage, industrial labor at low wages and cultural chaos. The current situation of Blacks in America, particularly 9th Ward African-American women resembles the underdevelopment of Africa that Rodney highlighted in his work.

51. Marable, xx.

52. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1982), 88-89.

Building on Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment, Alan Colón defines underdevelopment as the state or process in which a group or individual's capacity to achieve a fuller human potential is arrested or discouraged, through societal structures and processes, and human attitudes and behaviors.⁵³ Though Colón lists economic exploitation as the foundation of underdevelopment, he identifies nine more pillars that impacts the overall development process. They are listed and defined as:

1. Racism—the worldwide system of white supremacy.
2. Political Oppression—the cruel and unjust use of power.
3. Economic Exploitation—the condition or process when a person or a group is taken advantage of by another person or group for selfish, unethical purposes in the discovery, acquisition, and utilization of resources and services that satisfy basic needs and desires.
4. Cultural Domination—the disruption and appropriation of a group's way of life (worldviews, values, creative production, traditions, etc.) by another group to the detriment of the former and the benefit of the latter.
5. Patriarchy—a form of sexism involving male subjugation of women.
6. Psychological Incarceration—the process, state, or condition in which conscious and unconscious activities of the mind are controlled in ways which mitigate against psychological wholeness and wellness.
7. Spiritual Captivity and Impoverishment—the process, state, or condition which negates or undermines the highest order of human interaction and the achievement of the greater good.
8. Health and health care disparities, which contradict the basic human rights to exist and to a just quality of life.
9. Homophobia, which denies, or diminishes the humanity of those with differing orientations to sex and gender identities and relations.

53. Alan Colón, Emailed Lecture, July 21, 2010.

10. Ecological exploitation and disruption, which is marked by the retarding imbalance in human relationships and in humans' relationship to the natural environment.⁵⁴

These pillars represent the common systems and oppressions that many Blacks experience throughout their lifetime; they will be applied to the 9th Ward African-American women in this study to determine the extent of their underdeveloped state.

The theory of containment is also explored in this study because the 9th Ward African-American women in this study were trapped in a specific geographic location, socio-economic status and underdeveloped state, which directly impacted their Hurricane Katrina experience.⁵⁵ Patricia Hill-Collins is a Black feminist scholar who studies the various *traps*, such as low-income neighborhoods, and low-paying jobs, that contain Black women in an insubordinate position in society. She identifies these traps as forms of containment. Hill-Collins further defines containment as a system of segregation and surveillance.⁵⁶ Containment is examined in the lives of the 9th Ward African-American women in relation to their underdeveloped state. For example, the 9th Ward African-American women have the right to vote, but they are more likely not to have access to the voting polls because of their location and lack of transportation.

The politics of containment is a political phenomenon that supports the oppression of women, dissuades their resistance, and helps contain them at the bottom of U.S. socioeconomic and political hierarchies despite other indicators of racial progress,

54. Colón Lecture.

55. Patricia Hill-Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 10.

56. *Ibid.*, 11.

like the *right* to vote. However, having the right and the access to take advantage of opportunities afforded are two separate matters. Hill-Collins explains that segregation and surveillance are two tactics that dominant white society and have been historically used to oppress African Americans, and to exclude them from power and full citizenship.

According to Hill-Collins, race, class, and gender oppressions characterize Black women's experiences in America. Since the founding of America, up until the mid-twentieth century, oppressions based on one's race and gender were mandated and enforced by law. Since the 1950s, African Americans have made tremendous social and political gains as a result of decades of African-American freedom struggles and the ongoing efforts to acquire freedom. Full citizenship is something that Blacks have always been fighting for. Being a *full* citizen also means having the unrestricted ability to participate in American sociopolitical systems, as well as have access to those systems. Part of this American citizenship includes preparation for natural disasters and access to the resources needed to evacuate if necessary. These are all rights that the 9th Ward African-American women lacked.

This research also addresses the question of the 9th Ward African-American women having freedom or not. If a person is in an underdeveloped state, then he or she cannot be free. According to Colón, freedom is what African Americans have been trying to secure, maintain, and expand since the 1600s, while living within the structure of institutional enslavement.⁵⁷ He further posits that the quest for freedom continued through almost a century through legalized segregation, and 57 years of nominal freedom

57. Colón, Lecture.

under structural inequality and inequity after enslavement. Colón also asserts that freedom for African Americans cannot be reliably measured by the achievements and contributions of the group's exceptional few, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Shirley Chisholm—just to name some of those that are most well-known. He states that the measuring of freedom can be better done by learning from the most frequent experiences that impact the quality of life of African Americans as a group. Unfortunately, for Blacks in America, their experiences have been a continuous reminder of their inferior status. However, Colón argues that the accomplishment of freedom for African Americans is the group's ability to acquire and enjoy the benefits of the following pillars that would contribute to their development as a group:

1. Social Cultural Integrity, and Cultural Democracy, which involve developing patterns and traditions which sustain and elevate human life, and address African American cultural particularities in the context of a culturally diverse society and a multi-cultural world.
2. Economic Self-sufficiency, with a fundamentally more equitable distribution of wealth and resources.
3. Political Emancipation, through the use of power to advance a group's enlightened self-interests and to promote the general welfare.
4. Gender Justice, which expands prospects for ideas, conceptual behaviors, and structural arrangements leading to human development unencumbered by discrimination against gender or sexual orientation based on societal norms.
5. Spiritual Salvation, a (not necessarily religious) liberation of the soul and of ideas and social arrangements through redemptive human wholeness and engagement in the highest order of human interaction for the common good.
6. Psychological Liberation, marked by the release from the deleterious impact of psychological influences which diminish mental wholeness and wellness, including physical and mental health care and wellness.

7. Access to adequate and affordable healthcare and maintenance of health and wellness.

8. The reduction and eradication of human hierarchies based on race and class disparities.⁵⁸

The freedom to develop should be viewed not as a static condition or place. A person, or group, arrives at it. It is ever-changing in relationship to a group's status at an earlier time, and to that group's status vis-a-vis other groups. The process of a person arriving to a state of freedom can be called the dialectics of freedom, which is where struggles are compared in time and relative to the struggles of other groups for their right to development and freedom. And, sometimes the meanings of these conditions change. Still, they serve as analytical, organizational and organic measuring rods for progress toward freedom and development though there is no nirvana.

Methodology

This research utilized a narrative analysis of 9th Ward African-American women, and the analysis is supported with quantitative data. The method of narrative analysis was chosen because it proved to be the best tool to explore the 'human' experience of these women. This method was also chosen because it empowered the 9th Ward African-American women to tell their own stories, hear their own voices, and to minimize the psychological distance that often exists between the researcher and the participants. Colette Daiute and Cynthia Lightfoot define narrative analysis as a mode of conceptualizing the storied nature of human development by exploring psychological

58. Colón, Lecture.

phenomena through storytelling to obtain significant information.⁵⁹ Though the psychological state of these women is not the focus of this study, their perception of their underdeveloped state is, which allowed the researcher to understand the existential struggles of this particular group of African-American women. Utilizing these women's personal narratives remains an important form of methodology because the approach expands the knowledge by anatomizing or deconstructing the women's historiography.⁶⁰ Applying the narrative analysis to this study allowed the researcher to interpret the data, even with the difficulties the research presented. This method also proved that interpretive tools were useful when examining the underdeveloped state of women, and perhaps all women in general. Thus, surveys were not considered for this research because narrative analysis revealed more complexities about the women's underdeveloped state in a first world country, a country with more resources to share than any other country in the world.

Sample

The sample size for this research included 25 women who were residents of the Lower 9th Ward area in New Orleans, Louisiana, prior to Hurricane Katrina. The age range of the participants is from 20 to 72 years of age. Some Lower 9th Ward women who presently live in Atlanta, Georgia, are also included in this study. Twenty-five women were selected because of the limitation of access to Hurricane Katrina survivors

58. Colette Daiute and Cynthia Lightfoot, "Theory and Craft of Narrative Inquiry," in *Narrative Analysis: Studying the Development of Individuals in Society*, eds. Colette Daiute and Cynthia Lightfoot (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004), xx.

59. Sherna Gluck, "What's so Special about Women? Women's Oral History," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies: Women's Oral History* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 4.

while conducting this research from Atlanta, Georgia. Some interviews were conducted in person, while others were conducted via telephone.

Instrument

Each participant was interviewed with 38 questions that were both closed-and open-ended. The questions explored demographic, economic, political, and geographical factors of these women's existence. This qualitative method consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews followed by thematic analysis. This qualitative analysis also allowed the participants to describe their lived experiences in an underdeveloped state or condition. Participants answered questions relating to experiences before, during and after Hurricane Katrina. Their answers were analyzed to determine how their underdeveloped state and containment forced them to be dependent upon the government for their basic human rights, for example, rights to develop economically and politically, which were not given to them by the state and federal governments.

For the complete list of questions used for this research, please see Appendix A. Below are focal points for the questions section by section.

Demographic: elicited data on race, class, gender, and other characteristics.

Economic: a range of economic conditions in which these women lived.

Political: the political processes these women participated in or were excluded from and how these women felt the government prepared and responded to Hurricane Katrina. This also included the laws and political barriers these women felt prevented them from acquiring total freedom.

Geographical: contained questions regarding why these women lived in the area known as the Lower 9th Ward.

Emotional and Psychological: how the subjects experienced emotional and psychological trauma, if any, during the preparation for and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Research Questions

This study's goal was to answer the following research questions:

1. How did Hurricane Katrina impact Black women living in the Lower 9th Ward area of New Orleans, Louisiana?
2. How did Hurricane Katrina impact the underdeveloped status of these Black women?

Chapter Organization

Chapter one of this document is the Introduction. It provides the reader with an overview of the problem. In addition, to presenting the research questions, the chapter explores the background of the problem, and provides an historical overview of the Lower 9th Ward area of New Orleans. The Introduction presents the statement of the problem, the study's methodology, conceptual framework, and the significance of the research. Chapter two provides a Literature Review. This chapter critically examines existing research that is significant to the topic of this dissertation. The Literature Review helps readers understand what other authors have written about African-American women and Hurricane Katrina. Chapter three provides the Context of the Problem. In this chapter, the reader will understand the events of Hurricane Katrina and the experiences of African-American women in New Orleans during this time. Also, the treatment of these women by the government at the local, state, and federal levels is highlighted. Chapter four investigates the findings, which answer the research questions, gathered from the interviews of African-American women from the Lower 9th Ward area

of New Orleans. Chapter five gives a general overview of the study, and presents recommendations for future research in relation to African-American women and Hurricane Katrina.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses research related to the history of the policies and social norms that developed in America and continues to directly impact the treatment of Black women. It also highlights scholarship on Black women in New Orleans and the Lower 9th Ward area before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina. The chapter explores historical and current employment patterns for these women, how their race and gender contribute to what employment opportunities they receive their dependency upon the government for economic resources, the political and social structures that cause their underdeveloped state and how institutional racism supports these systems.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina

Social, Political, and Economic Foundations of Underdevelopment for Blacks

Since their emancipation from slavery, Blacks have continuously struggled to obtain political voice and citizenship in America. W.E.B. Du Bois states in *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*, that Black reconstruction was overturned through a process of gradual erosion, culminating in a counter-revolutionary victory of the South with the result of the presidential election, in which came the Hayes-Tilden Compromise of 1877.¹ This presidential election was so closely contested that a compromise was

1. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., 1962), 165.

made between candidates Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel Tilden. The Democrats agreed that Rutherford B. Hayes would assume the presidency and the new Republican administration would withdraw federal troops from the South. In turn, the withdrawal would allow the landowners to re-impose a plantation economy based on the super exploitation of Black wage labor.² Furthermore, as a result, a system that legally bonded Blacks was created, especially for Black women. It was a system that set the path for Black women to be put into a near permanent state of poverty, subjugation, and underdevelopment.

The Black Codes, which were laws passed shortly after the Civil War in 1865, as well as Jim Crow laws in Louisiana, were unique systems because they proved to be more harsh. According to Du Bois, slave owners in Louisiana made it a point to work their slaves to death instead of taking care of the sick and old.³ He highlights how African Americans in Louisiana experienced a harsher enslavement than any other southern state in the United States. The descendants of these slave owners attempted to maintain lasting power for generations. Therefore, Jim Crow laws in Louisiana had a different effect on Blacks, unlike similar laws practiced in other states. Du Bois also suggests that the worst of the Black Codes was passed by Louisiana's Supreme Court, which ruled that there could never be any equality between whites and others.⁴ Blacks could not participate in political processes, nor vote, and their inability to do so was critical to their early

2. Du Bois, 165.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 455.

development as a group. In order to remove the voting power that some Blacks acquired after the Civil War, whites in Louisiana initiated the grandfather clause. John Hope Franklin, in *From Slavery to Freedom*, asserts that this clause stipulated an addition to the permanent registration list of the names of all male persons whose fathers and grandfathers were qualified to vote on January 1, 1867.⁵ During this time, Blacks were not qualified to vote in Louisiana, which was also the norm in many other states. If Blacks wanted to vote, they had to complete educational literacy tests and meet property requirements, from which they were disqualified. Both of these requirements made voting a challenge for African-American people. The limited opportunity for African Americans to participate in the political process affected the economic resources made available to them, which directly contributed to their underdeveloped state.

In *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, Douglas A. Blackmon discusses the context in which Blacks were forced back into a form of involuntary slavery. The only difference is that it was not chattel slavery, but a slavery that promoted impoverishment and poverty. According to Blackmon, this debt peonage continued the impoverishment of Blacks with lower paying jobs when they were available, confined them within segregated neighborhoods, and forced them to live as subjects under the watchful eyes of the government. He provides examples of how Blacks in America were still treated as slaves even after the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment that abolished slavery. After the Civil War ended, powerful white

5. John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (Boston: Burr Ridge, IL, 2000), 288.

politicians, plantation owners and industrialists began reinstating slavery through laws intended to criminalize Black life.⁶ Countless Blacks were arrested on minor misdemeanor charges and held in legal custody. Ultimately, they were sent to work on plantations, build railroads, and work in mines, factories, mills, and lumber camps under convict leasing programs. In many instances, they were charged and hung for their crimes, many of which were fabricated. On the other hand if they wanted to work, millions of Blacks were forced to do so under labor contracts preventing them from leaving without written permission from their employers. These jobs also caused financial strains, which made it difficult for them to provide for their families and to support the development of the Black community, which was representative of the debt peonage system.

Blackmon also provides an analysis of the re-enslavement and underdevelopment of African-American men and women. He focuses on Alabama, which between the Civil War and the early 20th century, eviscerated Black citizenship more completely and enthusiastically than any other state, not only through convict labor policies but by denying blacks access to education, voting, and other benefits of citizenship.⁷ The decades of re-enslavement, he argues, must be taken into account when trying to assess the damage done to African Americans by centuries of involuntary servitude. Also, because Alabama served as a leading example in how to orchestrate such laws and

6. Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (Random House, Inc., New York, NY, 2008), 215.

7. *Ibid.*, 229.

practices, neighboring states like Mississippi, Georgia, and Louisiana followed in creating similar experiences for Blacks. Additionally, the record of forced labor across the South demands that any thoughts about the progress of equal civil rights in the U.S. must acknowledge that slavery did not end even after 1945.⁸ Even after this time period, the perceived state of neo-slavery began to grow rapidly as more ‘colorblind’ policies were put in place, which were not truly colorblind. Blackmon’s research extends to World War II, highlighting the treatment of Blacks that forced them back into this involuntary slavery. His work also examines how these policies were enforced to ensure Blacks did not receive equal treatment in relation to labor that adversely impacted their economic underdevelopment by limiting their access to financial gain.

Building from Blackmon’s research, Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires present how whites legally controlled African Americans after World War II by asserting that the federal policies, particularly those introduced during the New Deal period, were racially discriminatory.⁹ They claim that the social security system categorically excluded two occupations courtesy of members of Congress: farm workers and domestics. African-American men and women were leading holders of these jobs. The GI Bill (1944) provided little education and housing assistance to minorities, compared to the massive benefits whites secured from the program. Even if Blacks did receive benefits from the GI Bill to attend school, they were still denied admission into predominantly white

8. Blackmon, 322.

9. Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires, “*Pre-Katrina, Post-Katrina*,” in *There is No Such Thing As a Natural Disaster*, ed. Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2006), 4.

institutions of higher learning. This left Black people more vulnerable to poverty and living in impoverished neighborhoods, especially in cities like New Orleans where racial, educational, and economic segregation was the norm.

According to Hartman and Squires, Daniel Newhart and Eric Steins assert that segregation during the 1950s and 1960s helped recreate social categories that contributed to the underdevelopment of Black women. White space, or the outer ring suburbs, plays an important role in maintaining an increasingly fragile white privilege within this structure.¹⁰ The authors' research infers that whites live away from the inner city of New Orleans and in areas above sea-level. More importantly, the white population had the required resources to evacuate if necessary, which was a privilege of their developed state. An example of this structure is provided by Margaret Morganroth Gullette. She argues that one must have minoritized space in order to have ethnic minorities. This space, Gillette states, allows the dominant group to naturalize the idea of uneven development among various groups. The dominant group can then use this space as a separator to keep subordinate groups in an unfair position, a component of neo-slavery.¹¹ This arrangement resembles the hierarchy developed during slavery and continues to be seen today with the underdevelopment of Blacks.

10. Hartman and Squires, 69.

11. Margaret Morganroth Gullette, "Katrina and the Politics of Later Life," in *There is No Such Thing As a Natural Disaster*, ed. Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2006), 106.

12. Franklin, 288.

Race influences human conditions and opportunities in America.¹² In other words, the foundation of this country is based on race, and it sets the tone for how a person will be treated throughout his or her life. Maulana Karenga states that in the context of the historical and continual denial of racial justice to Blacks and other people of color, racism and white supremacy are integral and indestructible components of this society.¹³ Because of the use of the word indestructible, it is inferred that Karenga means that racism or white supremacy will always exist because they are too deeply rooted in the structure of American society. It is also assumed that most Black women are trapped in poverty, servitude and an underdeveloped state because of their race, gender and history of slavery. James Turner argues that racism has become so endemic and historically rooted in U.S. society and its institutions, that it exists apart from, and in some cases, in spite of, the social attitudes of the people who administer these institutions.¹⁴ Turner further infers that oppression is directly related to Black women because it is a commonality they have all experienced. He further posits that the process in which they become victims is done in three basic ways: 1) imposition, conquest and oppression of a people, and interruption, destruction and appropriation of a people's history and productive capacity in racial terms; 2) ideology, an elaborate system of pseudo-intellectual categories, assumptions and contentions negative to peoples of color and serving as justification of the imposition and reinforcement of the institutional status quo;

13. Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies* (University of Sankore Press, Los Angeles, 2002), 306.

14. James Turner, "The Political Sociology of Racism and Systemic Oppression: Internal Colonization as a Paradigm for Socio-Economic Analysis," *Studia Africana*, no. 2 (1979): 294.

and 3) institutional arrangement, a system of political, economic and social structures which insures white power and privilege over people of color.¹⁵ According to Turner, this process negatively impacts African Americans, specifically African-American women in the form of underdevelopment.

Furthering the discussion on factors that impact the underdevelopment of Black women, Harold Cruse, in his work *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, emphasizes that cultural oppression is tightly interlocked with political and economic oppression.¹⁶ Cruse assumes that cultural control facilitates political control which ensures economic control over African-American people to keep them in an underdeveloped state. Also, these factors impact the social relationships Blacks have with each other as well as with whites. Maulana Karenga defines social organization that helps social relationships among African Americans as ways of teaching, structuring, validating, changing, and expanding social behavior and relationships.¹⁷ It is the intentionality of these structured oppressions and institutionalized racism that contributed to the underdeveloped state of Black women before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina.

Socio-Economic and Political Foundations for the Underdevelopment of Black Women

Within this structure of underdevelopment, race is an obvious component, but gender also has an equal role. For example, before the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the

15. Karenga, 306.

16. Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, (New York: William Morrow, 1967), 308.

17. Karenga, 317.

lives of African-American women, poverty had already placed them in a challenged position. In the words of Avis A. Jones and Heidi Hartman, Black women affected by Hurricane Katrina were among the poorest women in the nation because of their race, and the least likely to have access to health insurance.¹⁸ They were also more likely to find themselves working in a never-ending cycle of low-range paying jobs, relying on public transportation, and receiving minimum education. In addition, most of these women were single mothers. In both the city of New Orleans and its broader metropolitan area, the percentage of female-headed households falling below the federal poverty line exceeded the national average, topping off at roughly 40 percent.¹⁹ This area has the highest rates of those never married, separated, and divorced of any other area in New Orleans. Also, the average of these numbers is higher than the average for the United States. Thus, the Southern legacy of poverty is not just racialized, but gendered as well.

Sharon Harley, in her work titled *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work*, emphasizes that there is a connection between Black women, work, personal identity, relationships with others, and historical and social conditions such as racism and sexism.²⁰ There are also connections between Black women and their work, in their communities, and in their homes. She asserts that Black women's labor was essential to the very development of the United States, yet the history of their contribution is far

18. Avis A. Jones and Heidi Hartman, "Abandoned Before the Storm," in *There is No Such Thing As A Natural Disaster* ed. Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2006), 85.

19. Ibid.

20. Sharon Harley, *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work* (Rutgers Press University, 2002), xvi.

behind the study of Black men's or white women's labor.²¹ During slavery, Black women performed hard labor just as their Black male counterparts. In fact, more African-American women worked in fields than in the slave master's home. They were under the constant control of the slave holder and his wife, as well as being more likely to be chastised, punished, and sexually exploited.²² Moreover, their work benefited their owner by maintaining this economic security.²³ The work of Black women only ensured white growth and development, while Blacks, especially Black women, stayed at a lower socio-economic status and in an underdeveloped state.

The Naturalization Act of 1790 specified who could become a citizen of the United States of America and what rights would be granted to them. However, the Act identified that only free whites of good moral character qualified for citizenship. Citizens were afforded the right to work jobs that would advance their economic development. When the Naturalization Act was passed, Blacks were enslaved and did not qualify to be citizens based on the Act's specific requirements. Even after the 13th Amendment was passed in 1865 legally ending slavery, American-born Black people, including the women, lived similarly to the way they did during enslavement—not having full citizenship rights, especially in relation to work and economic development. Harley asserts that many Black women continued to hold jobs as domestic workers, servants, laundresses, cooks, and nurses.²⁴ By the end of the Great Depression in the late 1930s,

21. Harley, xvii.

22. *Ibid.*, 2.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 4.

many of the available domestic jobs became scarce and the few jobs available were filled by white women needing work, causing the domestic jobs for Black women to become competitive and in high demand. Also, through institutionalized racism, Black women were banned from clerical jobs that white women held, so Black women had no choice but to continue searching for and working domestic jobs.²⁵ This made it difficult for many Black families to survive and to gain access to a better quality of life. Furthermore, Harley also emphasizes how many Black families, nearly 50% during the 1950s have depended on the woman's income.²⁶ Unfortunately, for many African-American families today, this reality could not be truer. In the late 1960s, Black women began to depend on welfare programs more to help them survive since they could not get stable employment. Many Black women combined welfare with their wages from work because their jobs did not pay them enough to maintain their households during the 1950s as well. Poor Black women on welfare worked, or sought paid work, not only to support their families, but also to have a sense of self-reliance and independence.²⁷ As for Black women in New Orleans, they continue to have higher rates of dependency on welfare than in many other major American cities, according to the 2005 Census. It should also be noted that Black women have often held this ranking throughout the state's history. In his work *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, Manning Marable asserts that the final history of the systemic exploitation of Black women in capitalistic America will not be

25. Harley, 7.

26. Ibid., 8.

27. Ibid., 70.

written by whites, or by men, no matter how sympathetic they might be to the struggle against racism and patriarchy.²⁸ He also highlights how Black women have carried the greatest burden in the fight for democracy in America. Within this reality, Blacks, especially Black women, have endured America's economic history and its induced underdeveloped state for them. As this systemic practice continues, whites advance in their freedom and development, while Blacks live in poverty and are powerless. Marable further states that Blacks are often unemployed, and that when they are employed they are economically exploited. He also suggests that Blacks are also politically disenfranchised because they are excluded from political processes and segregated from others because of caste and racial discrimination.²⁹ In relation to their development, Blacks occupy the lowest socioeconomic rings on the ladder of American upward mobility for the American dream. However, their integration is one of marginalization. They were integrated into the system as workers and consumers. Marable further speculates that Blacks had never been equal partners in the system because it exists not to help them develop, but instead to exploit them as workers and keep them in that state.³⁰ Unfortunately, Black women and their children have the least opportunities to advance from their underdeveloped state because of their race.

Marable also has views on underdevelopment that build from Walter Rodney's theory. He applies Rodney's framework of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* to

28. Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, (South End Press: Cambridge, MA, 1983), xxxvi.

29. *Ibid.*, 2.

30. *Ibid.*

expound on the system of capitalism in the United States. He states that it was the emergence of capitalism that expanded and deepened the process of Black underdevelopment.³¹ He also infers that similar to countries in Africa, capitalism in the U.S. impacts one's ability to obtain an education, which impacts job opportunity. Capitalism also impacted one's access to political power, which in essence sets the stage for underdevelopment to take place. For example, Marable asserts that the historical product of racist and sexist underdevelopment for Black America has been the creation of a unique (because it impacts Blacks the most) national minority within the world's most racist state.³² Ironically, Black labor is the foundation and continued source of America's wealth, and Blacks do not benefit from the wealth that they produce. Therefore, Blacks are an integral and necessary part of an imperialistic and powerful capitalistic society, yet they exist in terms of actual socioeconomic and political power as a kind of developing nation.³³ Black women in America find themselves even lower than their Black male counterparts in an underdeveloped state.

When discussing Black women in particular, Marable further posits that Black women comprise a significant minority within the black laboring population.³⁴ Though Black women have always worked and have been the foundation of building capital for America, they have not had the privilege to advance. The exploitation of Black women

31. Marable, 6.

32. Ibid., 10.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., 69.

has become a permanent feature in American social and economic life because they have been assaulted all together as workers, Blacks, and as women.³⁵ Therefore, Black women's underdeveloped state is one that is perceived to be a permanent feature in America, which impacts their ability to survive in the event of a disaster.

Ramifications of Underdevelopment and Hurricane Katrina

Douglas Brinkley, in *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast*, discusses how the events of Hurricane Katrina were not the first time that the city witnessed massive flooding which revealed the city's racial, class and gender disparities. Moreover, areas where minorities and low-income families live have often experienced severe devastation caused by disasters followed by negligent or discriminatory recovery responses.³⁶ He states that African Americans in the Lower 9th Ward, which is where most Blacks lived, did not trust the government to help them evacuate or even protect them during the hurricane. Blacks did not trust the government because of the history of white officials and police officers who dynamited the levees to flood that area to save the downtown area of the city during the 1927 storm.³⁷ John M. Barry in *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America* describes this event fully. The summer of 1927 experienced heavy rainfall, which caused the Mississippi River to swell and the levee system surrounding New Orleans to weaken.

35. Marable, 70.

36. J.D. Rivera and D.S. Miller, "Continually Neglected: Situating Natural Disasters in the African American Experience," in *Journal of Black Studies*, no. 37 (2008): 504.

37. Douglas Brinkley, *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 2006), 13.

The Great Flood of 1927 impacted southern states, and covered an area comparable to the size of New England and displaced more than 700,000 people.³⁸ Those displaced were mostly Black because the breached levee sent water directly into their communities. Barry explains how the old white men who ruled the monetary flow in the South ensured that they did everything in their power to preserve the city of New Orleans, even if that meant sacrificing the low lying areas of the city where mostly Blacks, especially Black women resided. He also highlights the notion of the Lower 9th Ward viewed as the orphan of New Orleans just like the people who live(d) in the area. He describes the area as separated geographically from the rest of the city by the Industrial Canal; Therefore, its residents were separated by race, class, and gender and were underdeveloped compared to those in other areas of the city.

The idea of residents' distrust of government officials is another important issue that one researcher further explored. K.M. Cordasco, in his study claims that distrust of authorities, in addition to many other things, appear to have played a role in the city's reactions to the evacuation warning and public health authorities' advice.³⁹ Before Hurricane Katrina made landfall, there were various warnings and a mandatory evacuation was ordered. Nevertheless, many residents chose not to follow the instructions. Cordasco further infers that this distrust is rooted in the local history of the city. For example, prior to the Hurricane Katrina, 72% of New Orleans residents were

38. Rivera and Miller, 505.

39. K.M. Cordasco et al., "They Blew the Levee: Distrust of Authorities Among Hurricane Katrina Evacuees," in *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and the Underserved*, vol. 18 (Fall 2007): 277.

Black.⁴⁰ Because the city of New Orleans was predominately occupied by Blacks, who were mostly poor, many assumed that delayed relief efforts were due to racial and class discrimination. Ultimately, even if overt discrimination may not have played a role in the government's response to Hurricane Katrina, the fact that Blacks in New Orleans were disproportionately affected by the storm suggests that other more indirect processes were at work.⁴¹ Though Cordasco does not state what processes he thinks play a role in the disempowerment of Blacks, he raises the question so readers can explore the issues. This research specifically highlights the underdevelopment process of Black women in the Lower 9th Ward and fills the gap in Cordasco's research by identifying a particular process that directly contributes to the disenfranchisement of women, especially the 9th Ward African-American women.

During Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Katrina Unveiling Race and 'Place'

Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005 and hit nearly 60 miles east of New Orleans. The hurricane is also given the recognition for being the most costly storm in U.S. History.⁴² Nearly 80 % of New Orleans was drowned in water as a result of the breeched levees.⁴³ Also, according to Robert Bullard and Beverly Wright it was one

40. Cordasco et al., 277.

41. Henkel, K.E., Dovidio, J.F., & Gaertner, S.L., "Institutional Discrimination, Individual Racism, and Hurricane Katrina," in *An Analysis of Social Issues and Public Policy* no. 1 (2006), 107.

42. D. L. Brunson, D. Overfelt, & J. S. Picou, *Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on Modern Catastrophe*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 15.

43. Robert Bullard and Beverly Wright, "Introduction," in *Race, Place, and Environmental Justice after Hurricane Katrina: Struggles to Reclaim, Rebuild, and Revitalize New Orleans and the Gulf Coast* ed. Robert Bullard and Brenda Wright (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 4.

of the deadliest storms, with a death toll of 1,836 and possibly more.⁴⁴ As the storm traveled across the ocean and the Gulf Coast, it grew from a simple tropical wave to a tropical storm that eventually grew into a deadly hurricane. Though other areas were impacted by Hurricane Katrina, such as the Mississippi and Alabama's coastlines, New Orleans, especially its lower 9th Ward area, experienced more death and damage to the city as a result of the storm. The city is three feet below sea level and it is surrounded by Lake Pontchartrain on the north, Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico at the south. Furthermore, scientists, meteorologists, journalists, policy analysts, and government officials predicted long before Hurricane Katrina the type of impact a storm of its magnitude would have on the city of New Orleans because of the bodies of water that surround the city.⁴⁵ Even with the vulnerability of the Lower 9th Ward to environmental catastrophes, state and federal governments were not proactive in ensuring that a storm like Hurricane Katrina would not have such a disastrous effect.

The depiction of Blacks seen on television worldwide, suffering at the hand of the storm has forced scholars to address the reality of race in present-day America, even though they tried to avoid the discussion. The concentrated poverty seen in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina is the product of decades of public policies, which are political measures that isolated Black households in neighborhoods plagued by severe segregation

44. J. Bond, "In Katrina's Wake: Racial Implications of the New Orleans Disaster," in *Journal of Race and Policy* (May 2007): 17.

45. Mtangulisi Sanyika, "Katrina and the Condition of Black New Orleans: The Struggle for Justice, Equity, and Democracy," in *Race, Place, and Environmental Justice after Hurricane Katrina: Struggles to Reclaim, Rebuild, and Revitalize New Orleans and the Gulf Coast* ed. Robert Bullard and Brenda Wright (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 88.

and economic hardship.⁴⁶ Michael Eric Dyson asserts in *Come Hell or High Water* that President George W. Bush and his administration answered one of the nation's worst natural disasters ever with a political maelstrom fed by ineptitude, inexperience, and ignorance.⁴⁷ Dyson further speculates that if it had been whites that were seen on roof tops at the Hamptons (a notable white neighborhood) that they would have been rescued faster and the evacuation processes would have been managed more effectively.

Poverty among Blacks is a problem that has long existed in America. For example, Dyson infers that former President George W. Bush should have taken actions to address the issue of poverty that African Americans endure.⁴⁸ He asserts that Bush's administration was responsible for fostering public policy and legislation that did not help poor blacks improve their economic condition. Additionally, Dyson states, "We can hide the presence of poverty so long as it does not interrupt the natural flow of things."⁴⁹ Hurricane Katrina was one of those events that turned the tables on America. Hurricane Katrina exposed that people in America are not concerned about the plight of poor African-American people until the world is shown the mistreatment that these people receive. Dyson further comments that former President George W. Bush's criminally slow response to Katrina showed America, and the rest of the world, his priorities and that his actions demonstrated his lack of concern for the poor. Dyson also believes that

46. Michael E. Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Basic, Civita Publishing, 2006), 35.

47. *Ibid.*, 7.

48. *Ibid.*, 35.

49. *Ibid.*

the right-wing ideology of American's weak government under the Bush administration that cared more about market value and trade, helped kill 1,836 people (total from the storm) in New Orleans who were mostly Black.⁵⁰ Republican extreme dislike for social programs aimed at aiding and empowering the lower strata of our society cultivated the conditions that made the impact of Katrina so powerfully devastating because the conditions contributed to the economic disadvantage and incapacities of the people who were mostly affected by Hurricane Katrina. Dyson states that there were few National Guard resources to financially help the city of New Orleans conduct a proper evacuation process, as well as limited resources for public works projects to strengthen the levees before the storm. The lack of support from the government contributed to black families being trapped in polluted waters without food and drinkable water for days. Dyson exposes the government's mistakes during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which hindered effective rescue efforts. However, this study reveals how the government has 'legally' accommodated the white elite, while allowing Black women to become victims of not only racial and class discrimination, but also of disasters like Hurricane Katrina, which is something Dyson omitted in his research.

Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires, in *There Is No Such Thing As A Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina*, discuss the inequalities that African Americans face in America and how Hurricane Katrina revealed the reality of race in the country. They assert that before Katrina, New Orleans became highly

50. Dyson, 14.

segregated by race and developed high concentrations of poverty that were racialized.⁵¹

Because of this, Blacks and whites were living in different economic realities before the storm made landfall. Furthermore, Hartman and Squires also agree with Blackmon that racial disparities and poverty are not the primary result of individual actions, but a cumulative result of a long history of institutional arrangements and structures that have produced current realities.⁵² Consequently, the intent to underdevelop and contain Black women in the city of New Orleans, specifically those in the Lower 9th Ward area, is a planned phenomenon which has long existed within the history of the city.

Hurricane Katrina Revealing Intersectional Oppression of 9th Ward African-American Women

Specifically, in relation to Black women, Avis A. Jones-Deweever and Heidi Hartman assert that many of them who lived in New Orleans were already living at the bottom. Black women in New Orleans, especially of the Lower 9th Ward, often faced limited opportunities and outcomes, especially with respect to employment and earnings and educational attainment.⁵³ Jones-Deweever and Hartman further speculate that poverty is typically tucked away, either confined to an urban enclave avoided by those who are not within its boundaries by accident of birth, or dispersed broadly, on a lonely country

51. Hartman and Squires, 3.

52. Ibid.

53. Avis A. Jones-Deweever and Heidi Hartman, "Abandoned Before the Storms: The Glaring Disaster of Gender, Race, and Class Disparities in the Gulf," in *There is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina* ed. Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2006), 85.

road far away from neighbors, jobs, and in many respects, opportunity.⁵⁴ Because of this isolation of poverty, in the land of opportunity, poverty in the Lower 9th Ward was hidden from view until Hurricane Katrina revealed the true state of poor Black women. For these women, living in poverty meant being trapped in failing school districts, without access to a quality education. For these women, being trapped also meant being ‘put’ in a place where no one else wants to live—isolated, and disjointed from the rest of society, and having a higher likelihood than others to be exposed to environmental dangers. In New Orleans, specifically the Lower 9th Ward, this meant being trapped on low ground. Moreover, the reality of poverty for these women meant having to decide at the end of the month what is most important: electricity, running water, gas, or any of the other pressing expenses.⁵⁵ This reality had become extremely difficult for the 9th Ward African- American women to escape. The impoverished life of the 9th Ward African- American women was revealed to the world, as media images made them the face of Hurricane Katrina.

The discussion of how gendered oppressions impacted these women’s lives still has not been fully explored within this disaster, even with the 9th Ward African-American women as the face of Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Katrina revealed how not only race, but also gender mattered when determining who will be impacted by a disaster.⁵⁶ Most of

54. Jones-Deweever and Hartman, 86.

55. Ibid., 87.

56. Joni Seager, “Noticing Gender (Or Not) in Disasters,” in *The Women of Katrina: How Gender, Race, and Class Matter in an American Disaster* ed. Emmanuel David and Elaine Enarson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), 7.

the survivors trapped in the city were Black women struggling to maintain normalcy at a great risk to their lives. The women included those with children, elderly women in wheelchairs, and young women. According to Joni Seager, women accounted for over 55% of the population of the city and of that nearly 40% were Black (this accounts for the total population of New Orleans, not the Lower 9th Ward).⁵⁷ Race, class and gender all matter in the discussion about Hurricane Katrina. In the days ahead of the storm, many people did not get out of New Orleans. Those who did have access to transportation were able to evacuate. Race, class and gender inequalities produce a disadvantage when considering who has access to mobility. Even in a country as awash in cars as the United States, Black women are less likely to have a car or driver's license than their white female counterparts.⁵⁸ Out of all the residents in the Lower 9th Ward, it is the poor Black women who are least likely to have a car or access to one. Unfortunately, this played a major role in their inability to leave the city.

Furthermore, looking at Hurricane Katrina from a feminist perspective, Loretta J. Ross advances the argument that Black people drowning in filthy floodwaters exposed the reality that this country did not protect the human rights of its own citizens in this disaster.⁵⁹ Ross's argument infers that poverty in America is not only racialized but also gendered. She further posits that the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when examined

57. Seager, 7.

58. Ibid., 8.

59. Loretta J. Ross, "A Feminist Perspective on Katrina," in *The Women of Katrina: How Gender, Race, and Class Matter in an American Disaster* ed. Emmanuel David and Elaine Enarson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), 15.

through a gender lens, identified the myriad violations experienced by women, especially women of color.⁶⁰ A disaster like Hurricane Katrina was a violation against the entire community of the 9th Ward African-American. Moreover, when threats to women's lives are not recognized, and steps are not taken to ensure that they are treated as women are supposed to be based on 'societal standards,' women become doubly victimized. In the case of the 9th Ward African-American women, they were victimized by both the disaster and the response to it.

The violation of these women's human rights because of their color and gender encompasses a multifaceted process of humiliation. Ross furthers this argument by stating that not only was their right to survive threatened by the painfully slow response of local, state, and federal governments, but also their right to stay united as families, their right to adequate and safe shelter, their right to social services, their right to accurate information, and their right to healthcare and freedom from violence.⁶¹ Though all of the aforementioned examples are obvious violations of human rights, one violation that can be compared to citizens of the Middle East, a developing region, is a violation of right to return home.⁶² The 1994 Human Development Report by the United Nations (U.N.) introduced a thought centered on the concept of human security. According to the report members of the U.N. submitted, human security means safety from constant threats of hunger, disease, crime and repression.⁶³ Human security also means protection from

60. Ross, 15.

61. Ibid., 20.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid., 22.

sudden and hurtful disruptions on the pattern of daily lives, whether in our homes, our jobs, in communities, or in the environment. After the 9/11 terror attack on the United States, civil rights activists requested a reconsideration of security that included the protection of human rights and civil liberties, the meeting of people's basic human needs, and the use of peace processes that can prevent human rights violations by the state, individuals and corporations.⁶⁴ Even with this request, no effort was made to support the human rights of the 9th Ward African-American women.

Further, Ross also infers that Hurricane Katrina was not only a teachable moment about race in America, but also an opportunity to have serious discussion about the lack of human rights for the 9th Ward African-American women. Ross also speculates as to why the 9th Ward African-Americans were so vulnerable, but fails to analyze her conclusions. However, she does go on to state that the 9th Ward African-American were denied access to quality schools for themselves and their children. They were also denied jobs that pay decent living wages, communities free of environmental toxins, and the same opportunities as white women to develop their full human potential. Under the classic style of economic development of poor areas of America, Black communities are destroyed, and those who live there are forcibly isolated and relocated. Living under such conditions is the reality of human development for 9th Ward African-American women. However, Ross does not address the complexities associated with the development process. This research attempts to fill this gap in the study presented by Ross.

64. Ross, 22.

Hurricane Katrina: The Aftermath

Ramifications of Underdevelopment and Displacement

The French philosopher Voltaire claims that “the comfort of the rich rests upon an abundance of the poor.”⁶⁵ This attitude was evident after Hurricane Katrina made landfall. Even more impressive than a scale of the calamity was the laissez-faire response of government officials—the rich, who understood that it was not their *place* to question, much less attempt to interfere with an *act of God*; they believed that what happened to ‘those’ people was bound to happen because of where they lived.⁶⁶ The Department of Homeland Security held fast to the policy of principled restraint. According to Lewis Lapham, the homeland security, which is run by rich conservatives, believed that spendthrift liberals rush to help people who refuse to help themselves and that prudent conservatives know that such efforts smack of socialism.⁶⁷ These scholars questioned why the residents of New Orleans did not evacuate the city, even with the threat of a major hurricane. They felt that the government could not be held responsible for the behavior of people who do not follow instructions, or who are not mature enough to carry an American Express card or drive an SUV.⁶⁸ However, they did not recognize that it was indeed the government’s responsibility to assist its citizens during Hurricane

65. Mort Rosenblum, *Escaping Plato’s Cave: How America’s Blindness to the Rest of the World Threatens Our Survival* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007), 192.

66. Lewis H. Lapham, “Slum Clearance,” in *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation* ed. The South End Press Collective (Cambridge, MA, South End Press, 2007), 8.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

Katrina. Because of the underdeveloped state of Black citizens in New Orleans, they did not have the resources to evacuate. If they had access to a quality education, employment opportunities, political voice, and a healthy and secure environment to develop to their full human potential, they could have had the ability to escape the storm. Unfortunately, even after Hurricane Katrina, the government continued to neglect the Black citizens of New Orleans, and reconstruction efforts took forever to materialize in the lives of the hurricane victims.

Eric Mann, author of *Katrina's Legacy: White Racism and Black Reconstruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast*, argues that after three centuries of slavery, Black men have received limited training in politics.⁶⁹ He further contends that the economic system of slavery was reinforced by a series of laws that began with the Black Codes, which criminalized every aspect of Black everyday life, and evolved into the Jim Crow system of formal apartheid.⁷⁰ This, in turn, caused African Americans in New Orleans to be neglected in the development process. The prospect of radical development that he discusses was initiated during the Reconstruction period in America. If, he argues, the modern civil rights and Black liberation movements sought to refashion the post-bellum project anatomized by Du Bois in his work *Black Reconstruction in American*, then perhaps this early 21st century effort to include Blacks in the political and development processes, spreading out along the pathways of dispersal from the epicenter of this crisis,

69. Eric Mann, *Katrina's Legacy: White Racism and Black Reconstruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast* (Los Angeles: Frontlines Press, 2006), 24.

70. Ibid.

may yet reignite the best of those ‘two decades of the sixties’ that shook US society—and the global system it continues to dominate—to its foundation.⁷¹ In addition to providing information on how Blacks have been chained legally, Mann maintains that a new form of slavery and underdevelopment is a part of Black life in New Orleans and is reinforced through economic impoverishment, incarceration, and displacement. He also states that those same foundations were applied to the rebuilding efforts after the storm. He further argues that Blacks today are in need of another reconstruction that focuses on their complete integration into the development process which includes extending political, educational, and employment opportunities—the areas where Blacks, particularly Black women, are not granted access. He claims that the prevailing revelations are needed between people and property and their role in the development process. In other words, he challenges those ideologies that render people as property and workers to only contribute to the development of others while being forced to neglect themselves.

According to Robert D. Bullard, a professor of sociology and environmental pollution studies, after any natural disaster, one must examine the demographics of the city before the disaster. He suggests that looking at such data raises specific questions such as: who will have the right to return? Who will have the right to rebuild? And who will have the right to fully recover? And more importantly, who has the power to make these decisions? He further addresses issues such as the racialized place of Hurricane Katrina, the health and environment hazards that will remain, as well as rebuilding and recovery and policy choices for social change after Hurricane Katrina. For example,

71. Jared Sexton, “The Obscurity of Black Suffering,” in *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation* ed. The South End Press Collective (Cambridge, MA, South End Press, 2007), 127.

Bullard and Wright recall how all eyes were watching New Orleans' rebuilding efforts, especially how it addressed the repopulation of its historically African-American neighborhoods and its strategically sited public housing.⁷² Even before Hurricane Katrina, many residents knew that federal public housing officials had been attempting to destroy many of the public housing neighborhoods and policies, which were occupied primarily by Black women.

When the storm made landfall, and destroyed these areas, public officials referenced the storm as something that supposedly cleaned the city up for them. Specifically, U.S. Congressman Richard Baker, a ten-term Republican from Baton Rouge, told lobbyists, "we finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We could not do it, but God did."⁷³ Furthermore, although Hurricane Katrina did not discriminate, a May 2008 progress report from the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps found a wide disparity in adaptation and recovery between Black and white victims. As D. Alfred points out the following:

There is great disparity in the progress towards recovery, disruption from the storm and levels of progress between Black and white households, even for those with similar incomes. On nearly every indicator, the storm impact and recovery experience for Black households is significantly different than for whites, even after examining these issues by income levels.⁷⁴

72. Bullard and Wright, 28.

73. Ibid.

74. D. Alfred, *Progress from Some, Hope, and Hardship for Many* (New Orleans: Louisiana Family Recovery Corps., 2008), 4.

Many Blacks expressed frustrations and feelings of neglect by the government and those elected to protect them from natural disasters, as well as help them return home should they be displaced. Alfred also states that several years after the storm Black women are still trying to find the road back home and are continuing to struggle mentally with the reality of their underdeveloped state, their Blackness, and what it means to be displaced in America.

When discussing Black women and the road back home to New Orleans, Elizabeth Murakami-Ramalho and Beth Drodoye contend that Black women evacuees share similar experiences with other evacuees and displaced persons globally. Specifically, Murakami-Ramalho and Drodoye maintain that there are compelling similarities between Hurricane Katrina evacuees and internally displaced persons around the world.⁷⁵ Also, if one were to place Hurricane Katrina survivors among the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR) list of countries with major internally displaced populations of concern, the United States would possibly be listed among the ten countries. The UNHCR defines internally displaced persons (evacuees) as civilians, mostly women and children, caught up in civil conflict or persecution, as well as victims of natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, or people that have been impelled to leave their homes because of development projects and/or status.⁷⁶ While the circumstances in which Hurricane Katrina evacuees found themselves were not similar to

75. Elizabeth Murakami-Ramalho and Beth A. Drodoye, "Looking Back to Move Forward: Katrina's Displacement," in *Displaced: Life in the Katrina Diaspora* ed. Lynn Weber and Lori Peek (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2012), 167.

76. *Ibid.*, 117.

those of refugees caught up in civil conflict or wars, similarities do exist in terms of difficulties in gaining assistance and protection. This particular literature relates directly to the significance of this study, which questions if Black women pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina indeed lived a life similar to women in developing countries.

After Hurricane Katrina Black women found themselves displaced with little to no help from the federal government. They were forced to rely on each other for social support and mutual assistance. Jacquelyn Litt, in her work, “We Need to Get Together with Each Other: Women’s Narratives of Help in Katrina’s Displacement,” asserts that women stepped up into leadership roles in their local communities after Hurricane Katrina and were not recognized because of the general disregard for Black women’s labor in households and communities. This was the reality for Black women even though they were the group that led the road to recovery.⁷⁷ Litt, not only discusses 9th Ward African-American women’s invisibility in community involvement pre, during and after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, but she also highlights the reality of their oppression as being invisible. The story of displacement among 9th Ward African-American women victims of Hurricane Katrina during its aftermath is in many ways a story of the shifting boundary between the visibility and invisibility of these women.⁷⁸ Therefore, Black

77. Jacquelyn Litt, “We Need to Get Together with Each Other: Women’s Narratives of Help in Katrina’s Displacement,” in *Displaced: Life in the Katrina Diaspora* ed. Lynn Weber and Lori Peek (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2012), 167.

78. Alia Bierria and Mayaba Liebenthal, “To Render Ourselves Visible: Women of Color Organizing and Hurricane Katrina,” in *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation* ed. The South End Press Collective (Cambridge, MA, South End Press, 2007), 31.

women's visibility and invisibility are both critical factors in their state of underdevelopment before, during and after Hurricane Katrina.

Alisa Bierria and Mayaba Libenthal argue that many Black women not only before, but also after Hurricane Katrina, found themselves having to render visible the experience of women of color within the context of the real disaster—the oppression that these women experienced that made them vulnerable.⁷⁹ The underdevelopment of the 9th Ward African-American women was a direct consequence of their oppression. Oppressors render the oppressed invisible or hyper-visible, relative to how the situation benefits their agenda.⁸⁰ For example, invisibility can be used as a tool of oppression, because if a person or a group of people cannot be seen then their work can be discounted, their experience of violence and oppression can go without recourse, and their lives can be devalued. However, hyper-visibility, like what the 9th Ward African-American women experienced during the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, can be used to stigmatize people or to easily identify them as an object of fear or a target for violence.

The 9th Ward African-American women's invisibility in the process of development before the storm calls for the impact that Hurricane Katrina had on these women's lives to be analyzed not only from a race and class perspective, but also, gender. For example, Elena Everett, who is a community organizer in the 9th Ward, as well as a survivor of Hurricane Katrina, stated in an interview,

79. Bierria and Libenthal, 32.

80. Ibid.

To me, it's not enough to have a solid race and class analysis, because beyond those two, you also need a gender analysis. Because of the absence of the gender analysis of many agencies, organizations who identify as women of color organizations have to constantly fight to render ourselves visible and at the same time, we have to justify our existence in the work that we're trying to do.⁸¹

Therefore, in relation to Black women and the impact of Hurricane Katrina on their underdeveloped state, race and class discrimination do not alone explain their displacement before, during, and after the storm—an analysis of how their gender impacted their state is also needed.

The 9th Ward African-American women have been variously labeled as refugees, victims, survivors, evacuees, exiles, and environmental migrants.⁸² The idea of them actually being American citizens who are entitled to the same rights and protection as everyone else did not cross the mind of many. According to Mtangulizi Sanyika, the most appropriate term for them might be “internally displaced persons,” which refers to people forcibly dispersed from their homes within a country by a disaster.⁸³ This term can also be applied to them in relation to their place in the development process. To further this notion of displacement and truly understanding what it meant for the 9th Ward African-American women, Michael Eric Dyson highlights the words of Jesse Jackson that he argued in an interview,

Dislocation, in the name of relocation, is not to be confused with migration. Blacks migrate of their volition. Because it's more oppressive economically and militarily, Blacks have been forced to rebuild at

81. Elena Everett, “Confronting Gender after Katrina: An Interview with Shana Griffin,” *Dissident Voice*, August 25, 2006, accessed April 3, 2010.

82. Robert and Bullard, 7.

83. Sanyika, 88.

gunpoint. Here in Katrina people are put on planes for uncertain destination landings in Utah, or in California. This became an exile. I would distinguish between exile and migration... They took people away. They didn't migrate; they were taken away. Forcibly. In exile. And now, FEMA will not give the address to the State Board of Elections so they can get their voting material for the upcoming elections. They plan to keep them in exile so it will affect the state's political demographics.⁸⁴

What is more interesting to Dyson is the fact that Jackson also raised the point that these women were separated from their families and children. Men were also separated from women. They did not know where each other were sent and this mimics the reality of slavery as they asked questions about their families: Where is my wife?, Where are my children?, and Where is my mother? According to Dyson, this was the reality for many Blacks, especially the 9th Ward African-American women, as they were dispersed to forty states across America—hence, their forced displacement.

Unfortunately, this displacement lingered years after the storm. While the much disruptive impact of displacement generally was expected to subside in the months immediately following the disaster, the 9th Ward African-American women survivors of the storm expressed the difficulty in being able to return home several years after the storm. Elizabeth Murakami-Ramalho and Beth A. Durodoye assert that there are compelling similarities between Hurricane Katrina evacuees and internally displaced persons around the world.⁸⁵ Their work references Hope Lewis' idea of Black women in America who share experiences similar to women in developing countries. Murakami-

84. Michael E. Dyson, "Great Migrations?," in *After the Storm: Black Intellectuals Explore the Meaning of Hurricane Katrina* ed. David Dante Troutt (New York: The New Press, 2007), 81.

85. Elizabeth Murakami-Ramalho and Beth A. Durodoye, "Looking Back to Move Forward: Katrina's Black Women Survivors Speak," in *NWSA Journal: New Orleans a Special Issue on Gender, the Meaning of Place and the Politics of Displacement* vol. 20, no. 3 (Fall 2008), 116.

Ramalho and Drodoye also infer that internally displaced persons happen to be mostly women and children.⁸⁶ The UNHCR reports that internally displaced people are usually caught up in civil conflict or persecution, and are usually victims of disasters such as earthquakes and floods, or they are people who have been impelled to leave their homes because of development projects.⁸⁷ This reality of continuous conflict applies directly to the 9th Ward African-American women and their state of underdevelopment in the context of Hurricane Katrina.

Conclusion

This literature review has highlighted the intersectionality of race and class in the lives of the victims of the disaster known as Hurricane Katrina. However, the systemic oppression based on race and class in the lives of the 9th Ward African-American women has overshadowed the issue of gender in relation to how the storm impacted these women's lives. This study utilizes the literature presented in this chapter to examine the historical and current systems of oppression. The areas of oppression explored in the study include race, class, and gender. The study also explores how the systems of oppression have contributed to the underdeveloped state of the Black victims of Hurricane Katrina, especially the 9th Ward African-American women.

86. Murakami-Ramalho and Durodoye, 116.

87. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-Seeker, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons Report*, June 2007, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/STATISTICS/467671d4.pdf> [accessed February 2012]

CHAPTER III

CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

This chapter addresses the context of the problem in relation to the victims of Hurricane Katrina, the 9th Ward African-American women and their underdeveloped state. It focuses on the development process for women in America. This chapter also highlights Alan Colón's pillars of underdevelopment and their applicability to the 9th Ward African-American women.

The Underdeveloped State of the Lower 9th Ward

The residents of the area were mostly Black who lived in a low socioeconomic status. The area was poverty stricken with a poverty rate higher than the entire city of New Orleans. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 36.4% of the Lower 9th Ward residents lived below the poverty line, which impacted their ability to evacuate. Of this, 60.8% were Black women. Therefore, because of the intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender, the 9th Ward African-American women were the most impacted and underdeveloped group during the storm.

There were also many Black public schools and Black churches in the area. While 54% of the houses were owned by residents, the area was still one of the poorest. In fact,

like much of New Orleans, the Lower 9th Ward was underdeveloped before August 29, 2005, the day Hurricane Katrina made landfall. Prior to the storm, the population of New Orleans, and its Metropolitan areas, according to the 2000 Census, was 1,333,725 residents.¹ This number includes all races and the parishes in the New Orleans Metro area. The total population in the Lower 9th Ward area was 14,000, 98.3% of which were African American. Also, in the Lower 9th Ward, 60.8% of the African-American population were women living in poverty without a husband living in the home. These numbers demonstrate that African-American women, in the Lower 9th Ward, were adversely affected by Hurricane Katrina because they were limited to and contained in this area because of their poor socioeconomic status.

The Development Process

Economic development or growth is only one aspect of the human development needed to lift the majority of the world's population out of poverty. Though development is often measured by economic progress, it must be pointed out that women also rely on social development, but this is usually ignored in many research studies. However, the void in the research that addresses development as a holistic multi-dimensional process is rather surprising. The right to develop, and have the necessities to do so, to one's full human potential is a part of the development process. According to Colón, a person or community reaches a more fully developed state when they experience the following: social and cultural integrity, economic self-sufficiency, political emancipation, gender

1. John Logan, "The Impact of Katrina: Race and Class in Storm-Damaged Neighborhoods," January 2006, <http://www.s4.brown.edu/katrina/report.pdf> (accessed January 14, 2010).

justice, spiritual salvation, psychological liberation, access to adequate and affordable healthcare and maintenance of health and wellness, as well as the reduction and eradication of human hierarches based on race and class disparities. If a person or group, is denied access to these pillars to develop to their full human potential, then that person or group are underdeveloped. Development is,

a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free, and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom.²

Therefore, development is not only an economic process, but also a process of overall human development. Development becomes an essential component that influences one's right to live and experience the best quality of life.

Gender and the Development Process

The broader goals of human development and access to basic needs and an improved quality of life are denied to millions of people within developing nations, especially women. Rhonda Howard states that the right to develop is especially essential for women.³ However, women are the group that benefits the least from any form of development that takes place around them because they are not often involved.

According to Jayati Ghosh, the effects of any advancement in development is

2. Hope Lewis, "Women (Under) Development: Poor Women of Color in the United States and the Right to Development," in *Global Critical Race Feminism: An International Reader*, ed. Adrien Katherine Wing (New York: N.Y., University Press, 2000), 101

3. Ibid.

disproportionately distributed among the population, with certain vulnerable groups, especially women and girls, more adversely affected than any other group.⁴ Gender discrimination is often accompanied by other forms of social and economic disparities. The location, community, social category, and occupation of women and girls, typically determine the extent of their deprivation. Furthermore, Shirin M. Rai asserts that “women first came into the focus of development as objects of welfare concerns,”⁵ through programs like birth control, nutrition projects for women and children and for pregnant mothers. However, patriarchal and liberal discourses, at both national and international levels, left unchallenged the question of gender relations in society, and how they impact the sexual division of labor that exists within the family, as well as society.⁶ When women are deemed invisible during this process, development efforts are destined for failure. When women do not have equal access to education, training, and entrepreneurial credit, the communities they live in do not benefit from all the resources available. Moreover, the value of women’s work and role in the development process is often taken for granted and not seen as a contribution.

Also, it is assumed that only women in developing countries experience inequalities in development. Unfortunately, women in First World countries, like the

4. Jayati Ghosh, “Financial Crisis and the Impact on Women: A Historical Note,” in *The Women, Gender, and Development Reader*, ed. Nalini Visvanathan, Lynn Duggan, Nan Wieggersma and Laurie Nisonoff (New York: N.Y., Fernwood Publishing, 2011), 23.

5. Shirin M. Rai, “Gender and Development: Theoretical Perspectives,” *The Women, Gender, and Development Reader*, ed. Nalini Visvanathan, Lynn Duggan, Nan Wieggersma and Laurie Nisonoff (New York: N.Y., Fernwood Publishing, 2011), 28.

6. Ibid.

United States, also experience similar inequalities in development that cause the same underdeveloped state as those women in developing countries. Furthermore, race also plays a critical role in the rate of development that women experience in the U.S.

The Underdevelopment of Women of Color in the United States

Many women of color are left behind in an economically developed country like the United States. These women are surrounded by an advanced form of development, yet they do not benefit from the resources of that development.⁷ The human rights violations they experience are strikingly similar to those affecting poor women of color globally, especially those in developing countries. They face limited access to affordable healthcare; encounter discrimination in education and employment; lack of access to credit; cannot obtain affordable housing; and do not receive equal protection from public and private violence.⁸ As mentioned earlier, the idea of development assumes a higher quality of life. However, the lack of access to these resources causes Black women in America to be in a state of underdevelopment. Poor women of color, especially Black women in America, are not simply passive victims of the crushing effects of class, gender, and ethnic discrimination and exploitation—they actively resist these conditions and struggle to maintain the well-being of their families and communities.⁹ While these women attempt to maintain the well-being of their families and communities, they themselves struggle to obtain their own rights and become more independent. Rebecca

7. Lewis, 96.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

Johnson, the lead organizer for Cooperative Economics Women, has spoken with hundreds of poor women of color in America about their needs and what they find to be most important in their quest for equality in relation to development. Based on their responses, she concluded the following:

Poor women feel their economic and human development needs will begin to be addressed when they have access to affordable child care close to home, affordable transportation and universal healthcare; when they have the ability to generate and control income and to make work decisions based on the needs of the family rather than out of fear of public welfare or the desperate inadequacy of multiple-job, minimum wage work; and when they are active participants in renewing the communities where they live and work.¹⁰

The problem is that women of color in America do not have access to these rights, nor access to participate in the discussion about their rights, especially the 9th Ward African-American living in New Orleans before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina.

Underdevelopment and the 9th Ward African-American Women

Just as Colón highlights the pillars of development, he also provides pillars of underdevelopment, which are: racism, political oppression, economic exploitation, cultural domination, patriarchy, psychological incarceration, spiritual captivity, health and healthcare disparities, homophobia, and ecological exploitation (for a fuller description, refer to chapter one). Based on data and research done by various scholars, one can assume that the 9th Ward African-American women experienced underdevelopment based on the pillars listed above, thus, implicating the problem—their underdeveloped state at the time Hurricane Katrina made landfall.

10. Rebecca Johnson, “Letter from the Lead Organizer,” *1 CEW’s News 2* (Winter 1994).

True security and access to development may be determined by the extent to which people have their basic needs met, and whether or not they live in freedom and safety. Human security means safety from constant threats of hunger, disease, and crime; it also means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns in daily lives, whether in homes, at the job, in the community, and even the environment.¹¹ The reality is that the 9th Ward African-American women lived without human security and their basic human needs were not met. These two components rendered them invisible. The poverty, hunger and deprivation of human rights that the 9th Ward African-American women experienced before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina are still primary threats. Therefore, the 9th Ward African-American women were denied their human rights to development and security, even before the storm.

Racism

Racial segregation and concentrated poverty impact community development and human capital. Racial disparities and poverty are not the primary result of individual action.¹² Instead, they are the cumulative result of a long history of institutional arrangements and structures that have produced current realities. Before Hurricane Katrina, the city of New Orleans was characterized by extreme levels of poverty and racial segregation. In relation to racial segregation, “the city was one of the 10 or 15 most

11. Loretta J. Ross, “Feminist Perspective on Katrina,” in *The Women of Katrina: How Gender, Race, and Class Matter in an American Disaster*, eds. David Emmanuel and Elaine Pitt (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), 15.

12. John McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self Sabotage in Black and White*, (New York: Harper Perennial Publishing, 2001), 15.

racially segregated among the nation's 50 largest metropolitan areas, although structural racism in New Orleans is very similar to that of other cities."¹³ As a Brookings Institution report summarized, "by 2000, the city of New Orleans had become highly segregated by race and had developed high concentration of poverty...Blacks and whites were living in quite literally different worlds before the storm hit."¹⁴ Because New Orleans, like many other large cities in America, contain large numbers of poor people who are mostly Black and many neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, and highly segregated housing patterns, it is important to ask why. There is a need to understand the history of inequality and to know why generations of Blacks in America have been and continue to be cut off from opportunity. Because of the history of inequality and segregation in New Orleans, it can be strongly argued that racism influenced the 9th Ward African-American's women state of underdevelopment, as it is the foundation of their deprivation. For example, John Powell and his colleagues at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity assert the role of racism in reference to Hurricane Katrina. They argue the following:

Questions about why African Americans are more likely than whites to be poor, and why poor African American are more likely to live in areas of concentrated poverty, are questions that were neither asked nor answered...there was little critical discussion of how historical patterns of segregation contributed to the racial layout of the city, and how structures worked together to produce racial disparities and economic inequality...broadening how we think and talk about race is critically important to making sense of today's world. Doing so also raises critical questions about the shrinking middle class, our anemic investment in promises and failures of the American experiment—all of which concern every American. Once we are able to discuss race and racism in these broad terms, we

13. Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires, "Lessons from Katrina: Structural Racism as Recipe for Disaster," in *There is No Such Thing As a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina*, eds. by Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires (New York: Routledge, 2006), 488.

14. *Ibid.*

will be able to construct a response not only to damage wrought by Hurricane Katrina, but also to that which occurs across the country every day.¹⁵

Therefore, it can be argued that the racial segregation and poverty the 9th Ward African-American women experience is the result of historical norms and practices that contributed to their placement in the Lower 9th Ward of New Orleans. Juliet Plandphair stresses that between Hurricane Betsy (1965) and Hurricane Katrina (2005), the city of New Orleans got ‘blacker’; the blacker the city had become, the poorer the city and its black residents became, especially its Lower 9th Ward area.¹⁶ The city of New Orleans has long operated with social inequality and racial apartheid-type systems that have operated to create and maintain separate and unequal Black and white populations, which impacted the racial demographic layout of the city. Black communities were impacted more than white communities and blacks affected by the storm have reported higher rates of unemployment, psychological distress, and general disruption than whites.¹⁷ The disproportionate impact of Hurricane Katrina on the 9th Ward African-American women is due to the intersectionality of race and class injustices in policies that were in place long before the storm because of race. The impact the storm had on the 9th Ward African-American women highlights that Black women were ignored and government policies

15. John A. Powell, “Toward a Transformation View Race: The Crisis and Opportunity of Katrina,” in *There is No Such Thing As a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina*, eds. by Chester Hartmand and Gregory D. Squires (New York: Routledge, 2006), 59.

16. Juliet Plandphair, “The Forgotten People of New Orleans: Community, Vulnerability, and the Lower 9th Ward,” in *Journal of American History*, 94 (December 2007): 837.

17. John Logan, “The Impact of Katrina: Race and Class in Storm-Damaged Neighborhoods,” January 2006, <http://www.s4.brown.edu/katrina/report.pdf> (accessed January 14, 2010).

were specifically designed to place this population at a disadvantage. Rose Weitz further argues that “as a result of the inequalities and the oppressions that exist within social structures, and the horrors that illuminate the social division in our nation, the disproportionate burden of illness, injury, disability, and death experienced by those at the bottom is more common among women of color.”¹⁸ In the case of Hurricane Katrina, the 9th Ward African-American women represented the women of color at the bottom who did not have access to protection, recognition, nor access to the benefits of citizenship because of their race.

Political Oppression

Natural disasters often generate discussions of the limitations of citizenship and political power of victims. The lack of political power was evident in the lives of 9th Ward African-American women and was the result of historical policies and practices that have put African Americans at a disadvantage. Hurricane Katrina ironically exposed the underlying power structures of injustices, patterns of corruption, and unacknowledged inequalities of the past. The 9th Ward African-American women were disproportionately impacted as a result of centuries of concerted-decision making at local, state, and national political levels of dating back to enslavement. The political process that impacted the 9th Ward African-American women’s right to development and human security did not give them access to power. They experienced neglect from the government before, during and even after Hurricane Katrina. The 9th Ward African-American women’s lack of

18. Rose Weitz, *The Sociology of Health, Illness, and Healthcare* (Belmont, CA: Thomas and Wadsworth, 2007), 30.

recognition as citizens with a right to development played a critical role in their underdeveloped state. This problem of recognition is an important theme when dealing with issues of identity, difference, and citizenship. This idea of recognition derives from the concept, central to Hegelian philosophy, of *Anerkennung*, or mutually affirming recognition that allows citizens to operate within the confines of the social contract.¹⁹ This correlates with Hegel's philosophy of recognition as an animating struggle of society for humans. *Anerkennung* is a core feature of the relationship between citizens and the state.²⁰ Within this relationship, it is understood that citizens want and are entitled to a fair distribution of resources to truly be recognized. They are also in need of meaningful recognition of their humanity and uniqueness.

The 9th Ward African-American women did not have the recognition of rights and responsibilities within the social contract of a democratic society. A social contract is the basis of democratic citizenship.²¹ The social contract dictates that people understand that they are subject to rules and regulations such as paying taxes, voting, and military service. Likewise, the government, too, is subject to responsibilities, such as ensuring that citizens have access to safety and emergency services, as well as various social programs for further development. The ideal of this type of contract makes recognition an important factor for citizens. This recognition allows for citizens to have a membership in the body politic, nation and community. Within this membership, it is expected that fair

19. Melissa Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2011), 36.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

opportunity (the right to development) become affordable to all. Because of the 9th Ward African-American women's underdeveloped state and their invisibility in the eyes of the government, it can be argued that they were not afforded the same opportunities as other American citizens.

For example, the government failed to repair the levees surrounding the Lower 9th Ward area of the city despite numerous warnings of what could happen should a storm like Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. Moreover, evacuation policies relied on private means of transportation that were less available to Blacks and the local and state governments did not see it as their responsibility to provide transportation or evacuate citizens before the storm hit the city. Also, the national government failed in their bureaucratic response during the hurricane. Blacks were put at heightened risk because government officials did not use discretion as to how to help them without 'breaking' protocol.²² Public administration scholar Christine Stivers has provided several other examples of such failures, ranging from the slow transportation of food and water to the Superdome (the evacuation center), to the denial of small business loans for those hit the hardest after the storm. Although race and class clearly interacted during the government's response to the hurricane, racism within the political system and policies that run the city of New Orleans is one of the major factors accounting for the increased

22. Harvey Molotch, "Death on the Roof: Race and Bureaucratic Failure," *Understanding Katrina: Perspectives from the Social Sciences* (June 11, 2006): 1, accessed February 2011, <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Molotch/>

risk of adversity for the 9th Ward African-American women before, during and after Hurricane Katrina.

Another example of the 9th Ward African-American women's invisibility and neglect by the government was noted when former First Lady Barbara Bush stated: "What I'm hearing, which is sort of scary, is that they all want to stay in Texas. Everybody is so overwhelmed by the hospitality. And so many of the people in the area here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this (chuckle) is working well for them."²³ This quote was from the wife of the former President of the United States during the time of this catastrophe. This statement highlights the government's breach of the social contract by not only failing to provide security for the 9th Ward African-American women, but also failing to provide services for development. Also, during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the term refugees was a common reference for those impacted by the storm, which happened to be mostly the 9th Ward African-American women. This label further represented the misrecognition of survivors as foreigners—not U.S. citizens. Many of those referred to as refugees found the term to be humiliating and irritating. In fact, many of them expressed a want for the media to emphasize their American identity, instead of portraying them as a 'Third World' people. For the 9th Ward African-American women particularly, as they attempted to survive the storm and its aftermath, they were often treated in ways that made them feel ashamed and

23. Editorial, "Barbara Bush Calls Evacuees Better Off," *The New York Times*, September 7, 2005, accessed January 13, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/07/us/nationalspecial/barbara-bush-calls-evacuees-better-off.html>

dehumanized. They felt that because they were Black and women that *their* government refused to acknowledge and respond to their needs as human beings and citizens. An example of this is seen from an interview done by Melissa Harris-Perry with one of the survivors of Hurricane Katrina:

I was one of the people left behind. I was stuck on a roof. I am a taxpayer and a registered voter. I am happy but I am not rich. I have been shifted to five hotels all around the country after leaving the Superdome. I am tired. I have never asked Louisiana for anything. I just want a place to call my own. I didn't need help before this as far as I was concerned; I have always had to fend for myself. I was doing well for me and my children. All I want is a home for my children for Christmas.²⁴

Numerous stories like this depict the 9th Ward African-American women as a neglected group. These women were screaming for help and no one acknowledged their cry. The United States government did not utilize every resource to help the 9th Ward African-American women and it was because of two reasons—they were invisible and not recognized as citizens.

Economic Exploitation

It was not a mishap that most of the African Americans in New Orleans were disproportionately poor African-American women living in the Lower 9th Ward. Economic exploitation and lack of economic opportunities matter just as much as race and gender when analyzing the human condition of the 9th Ward African-American women; their poor condition was a result of the political norms that have long existed in the city of New Orleans. The 9th Ward African-American women had the lowest income

24. Harris-Perry, 149.

in the city. The U.S. Census Bureau data indicated that out of the 4,824 households in the Lower 9th Ward, 67.2% had an income in which over half, 35.8%, received social security income.²⁵ This implies that over half of the population was over the age of 65 years, or disabled. The incomes in 25% of these homes were less than \$10,000 annually.²⁶ In addition, 14.5% made less than \$15,000 annually, and 10.9% made less than \$20,000 annually.²⁷ These incomes were less than half of the national household average, which was \$46,000.²⁸ Thus, the families in these households were not making enough money to pay bills, pay for healthcare, or pay for basic necessities. Also, studies show that food costs cover at least 20-25% of a family's budget.²⁹ Assuming that three individuals live in one household, if food costs are tripled, it still would not be enough to pay for their basic needs.

Furthermore, U.S. Census Bureau data reveals that the 9th Ward African-American women who were single mothers, with children under the age of 18, made up 60.8% of the families that were in poverty in the Lower 9th Ward.³⁰ Out of this

25. U.S. Census Bureau. Census 2000 Full-Count Income by Household Characteristics (SFI). From a compilation by the GNO Data Center. <http://www.gnocdc.org/orleans/8/22/people.html/> (accessed on January 5, 2010).

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. U.S. Census Bureau. Census 2000 Full-Count Family Budget by Household Characteristics (SFI). From a compilation by the GNO Data Center. <http://www.gnocdc.org/orleans/8/22/people.html/> (accessed on January 5, 2010).

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

percentage, 52.1% were not employed.³¹ This data shows that Black women were living below the poverty line. Another major contribution to Black women in the Lower 9th Ward not being able to live above the poverty line was their educational attainment. Additionally, the U.S. Census Bureau data indicates that a least 30% of the 9th Ward African-American women had only a high school diploma or G.E.D., and 11% did not have an education above the 9th grade level.³² In addition, out of the total population, over 90% of women in the area were not enrolled in school at all.³³ One's education status contributes greatly to the access he or she will have to economic mobility. Therefore, the 9th Ward African-American women also suffered a loss of economic gain because of their lack of education. According to Mary Balthazar, a member of the New Orleans Branch of National Association of Collegiate Women, Black women in the city of New Orleans, especially the Lower 9th Ward, were the most illiterate group before the storm.³⁴ Regardless of this, both public and private sectors of businesses depended on the work of poor black women, including the enormous burdens of housework, child care, elder care, domestic, and other service sectors in employment they take on.

Education and employment status, as well as the location in which the 9th Ward African-American women lived, emerge as factors that contributed to their

31. U.S. Census Bureau. *Census 2000 Full-Count Characteristics (SFI)*.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. Kent B. Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2007), 108.

underdevelopment. The lack of access to these opportunities forced these women into a lower socio-economic class, which contributed to their status of inferiority. One's perception of their humanity can be directly tied to their socioeconomic status. If an individual or group, such as the 9th Ward African-American women, suffer these economic limitations, it also challenges their human development by causing an internalized inferiority. According to Paulo Freire, self-depreciation is a characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressor holds of them.³⁵ Having feelings of self-depreciation is also a characteristic of those who are underdeveloped. Those who are underdeveloped and who suffer from self-depreciation tend to also become indoctrinated into a culture of silence and invisibility, in which they find themselves unable to be their true selves; instead, they perpetuate their own oppression.

Cultural Domination

When a person or group suffers from internalized oppression, they sometime seek to assimilate into the dominant culture for validation and self-appreciation. According to Freire, oppressed people become so powerless that they do not even talk about their oppression.³⁶ This stage of oppression creates a culture where it is forbidden to mention the injustices being committed against the oppressed. In relation to the 9th Ward African-American women, Hurricane Katrina revealed the oppression these women faced, letting

35. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Continuum Publishing Company: New York and London, 1970), 63.

36. Iris Young, "Five Faces of Oppression," in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004) 3.

the world know of their suffering. The storm also revealed how the 9th Ward African-American women were products of cultural domination and self-depreciation.

Furthermore, the oppression as a result of cultural domination manifests itself in making the oppressed become the ultimate other.

Audre Lorde further states that Black women in America often find themselves in the position of the ‘other’. In fact, she infers that they are the ultimate other. She speaks of a mythical norm that exists within American society. Lorde asserts that in America, the norm is defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure.³⁷ Within the culture of this mythical norm, there are trappings of power that prevail. For example, Iris Young theorizes that “those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference.”³⁸ For example, race, class, as well as gender all directly impacted the culture of oppression that those outside of the dominant culture experience.

In the United States, the dominant culture has the privilege to create norms on the condition of human difference. According to Lorde, in a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systemized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the people of the dehumanized inferior.³⁹ Lorde infers that Black women often

37. Young, 3.

38. Ibid.

39. Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Crossing Press: Berkeley and New York, 2007), 114.

occupy this space. In this research, the 9th Ward African-American women occupied this place of inferiority.

Since the 9th Ward African-American women are not perceived as a part of the dominant culture, they are seen as inferior and deviant. They are considered inferior because of their status as the ultimate other, and they lacked access to the privilege of the dominant culture. Before Hurricane Katrina, a majority of the whites were privileged with the choice to evacuate or stay in the path of danger; the 9th Ward African-American women did not have this privilege. The dominant culture of white privilege can be viewed, according to Peggy McIntosh, as “an invisible weightless, knapsack of special provisions, assurances tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, accesses, opportunities, and blank checks.”⁴⁰ Unearned white privilege also refers to the benefits that white people as a group have accumulated over time through cultural domination. Whites belong to the group with the benefit over power to enforce structures, laws, and policies that all impact and contribute to maintaining cultural norms, in their own self-interest. Since the 9th Ward African-American women did not fit in any category of privilege, nor had power, they did not have the same benefit to evacuate to safe boundaries. They were forced to remain silent, while they were suffering because of their race, class, and gender.

40. Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” in *Understanding Prejudice and Discrimination*, ed. S. Plous (New York, NY: Wellesley College for Research on Women, Wellesley, M.A. and McGraw-Hill, 1988, 2003.), 3.

Moreover, the intersectionality of the cultural domination that the 9th Ward African-American women experience, correlates to what bell hooks calls the ‘politics of domination’. This idea refers to,

The ideological ground that they (those in the dominant culture) share, which is a belief in domination, and a belief in the notions of superior and inferior, which are components of all those systems. It is like a house. All persons share the foundation, but the foundation is the ideological beliefs around which notions of domination are constructed.⁴¹

Within this culture (politics of domination), the 9th Ward African American Women experience oppression in structured levels determined by their underdeveloped status: the level of personal biography, the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender, and the systemic level of social institutions, which promotes inequality and underdevelopment.

Patriarchy

Many systemic norms in America, as well as the world, are dominated by elite white men. According to bell hooks, patriarchy is a “political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain dominance.”⁴² While this system of male domination manifests in the lives of many women, Black women experience patriarchy differently due to their racial identities and social norms within the Black community. Manning Marable argues that patriarchy

41. bell hooks, *Black Feminist Thought and the Matrix of Domination* (Unwin Hyman: Boston, 1990), 5.

42. bell hooks, *Understanding Patriarchy*, (Louisville, KY: Louisville Anarchist Federation, 2010), 3.

exists within the Black community because Black men have difficulty in considering the triple oppression (race, class, and gender) of Black women with any degree of seriousness.⁴³ This reality stems from the evolution of patriarchy and patriarchal institutions within the black community. In relation to the 9th Ward African-American female community, their underdeveloped state was greatly influenced by their patriarchal structure of the development process.

Within the development process, this system of patriarchy manifests itself through policies that encourage stratification based on gender. The status of women, not only those around the world, but especially those in America, is impacted by the manner in which development takes place. Even though all women in America contribute greatly to the economic development process, the structure of the labor market discriminates against them. Therefore, the experiences of Black women, especially the 9th Ward African-American women, are inherently different.

Patriarchy stemming from the gender ordered division of labor is a major form of oppression. Heidi Hartman summarizes that “in our society, the sexual division of labor is hierarchical, with men on top and women at the bottom.”⁴⁴ The 9th Ward African-American women were placed at the bottom of the bottom because of their race. Moreover, when considering the feminization of poverty, it cannot be ignored that Black women in particular, especially the 9th Ward African-American women, were largely

43. Manny Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (South End Press: Cambridge, M.A., 1983), 76.

44. Leith Mullings, *On Our Own Terms: Race, Class, and Gender in the Lives of African-American Women* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 33.

impacted more than their white counterparts because of their race. The term feminization of poverty was coined in 1970 by Diane Pearce, who noted that women's poverty was increasing at an alarming rate relative to that of men. However, when adding race into the equation, Black women's poverty increases exponentially in comparison to that of white women.

Changes in the economy, influenced by patriarchal norms, have played an important role in contributing to the feminization of poverty. These changes also impact the family structure within the home. According to Sara McLanahan and Erin Kelly, "changes in family composition reflect changes in the needs of the family—the denominator of the poverty function. There have also been important changes in men's and women earnings and income experiences—the numerator of the poverty function—during this period."⁴⁵ There are two economic forces that contribute to the creation of the feminization of poverty—economic restructuring, which is centered on male needs, and the gender perspective. According to the economic restructuring argument, changes in the national economy created concentrations of poverty, as well as lasting inequality in the labor market and income, particularly for women.⁴⁶ This reality is accompanied by a shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a knowledge-based economy where high levels of skill and education are critical, thus putting women at an even greater disadvantage.⁴⁷

45. Sarah S. McLanahan and Erin L. Kelly, "The Feminization of Poverty: Past and Future," in *Network on the Family and the Economy* (Chicago: MacArthur Research Network, 2007), 34.

46. Thibos, Megan, Danielle Lavin-Loucks, and Marcus Martin, "The Feminization of Poverty." *The J. McDonald Williams Institute*, 2007):15.

47. David D. Dabelko and Robert J. Sheek, "Employment, Subemployment, and the Feminization of Poverty," *Sociological Viewpoints* no. 8 (September 1992): 41.

Barber Conable, Jr., former President of the World Bank, spoke on the feminization of poverty, “women do two thirds of the world’s work...yet they earn only one tenth of the world’s income and own less than one percent of the world’s property. They are among the poorest of the world’s poor.”⁴⁸ Although the feminization of poverty is a worldwide phenomenon, the U.S. continues to lag behind other industrialized nations in terms of creating social policies that would contribute to lowering the levels of poverty for women and children. The feminization of poverty results from patriarchal structures that are embedded deeply in American institutions and the 9th Ward African-American women proved to be one of the groups impacted the most.

Health and Healthcare Disparities

Racial disparities in health and healthcare are prominent in many areas of the United States. For example, Louisiana ranks among the lowest of the 50 states in several health indicators: 44th for teen birth rate, 47th for infant mortality rate, and 49th for low birth weight.⁴⁹ Even within Louisiana itself, the 9th Ward African-American women suffer disproportionately because of their race, gender, and location. These identifying factors become markers of differential exposure to health disparities and societal risks.

One of the major contributors that determines one’s health status is socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status can be measured by income, education, or

48. World Bank. “Annual Meeting of World Bank and International Monetary Fund,” *New York Times*, October 1, 1986.

49. Shelia Webb, “Inventing in Human Capital and Healthy Rebuilding,” in *Race, Place, and Environmental Justice after Hurricane Katrina: Struggle to Reclaim, Rebuild, and Revitalize New Orleans and the Gulf Coast*, eds. By Robert Bullard and Brenda Wright (Westview Press: Boulder, CO, 2009), 144.

occupation. For African-American women, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the ability to prioritize between life's responsibilities and family becomes difficult and they are unable to take care of their personal health needs. In addition, and as mentioned earlier, the 9th Ward African-American women had less education than many other populations and were either underemployed or unemployed, which made it harder for them to focus on their own health. Instead, they had to focus on family and making ends meet financially.

Many 9th Ward African-American women did not have access to affordable healthcare. In fact, their households were more likely than white households in the city of New Orleans to lack health insurance. The uninsured rate for the 9th Ward African American women was more than 1.5 times the rate for their white counterparts in the city.⁵⁰ This reality was largely due to their socioeconomic status and what they could afford. Also, those 9th Ward African-American women who did not qualify for assistance, such as Medicare or Medicaid, still did not have a suitable healthcare experience. They often had to endure long waits to be seen, or not be seen at all, if the doctor was no longer available. They also had to get most medicines that were generic and less effective than what they actually needed.

More outrageously, the 9th Ward African-American women had to leave the Lower 9th Ward, where they lived, to seek medical assistance, as clinics and hospitals were not available in the area. Ironically, it was also the 'place' they lived that

50. Bullard and Wright, "Introduction," in *Race, Place, and Environmental Justice after Hurricane Katrina: Struggle to Reclaim, Rebuild, and Revitalize New Orleans and the Gulf Coast*, eds. By Robert Bullard and Brenda Wright (Westview Press: Boulder, CO, 2009), 8.

contributed to their health status. The area was over saturated with landfills and many were exposed to lead. Such neighborhoods, like the Lower 9th Ward, are usually conducive to unhealthy behavior. For example, the area lacked sufficient recreation space, healthy food products were not available at affordable prices in grocery stores—assuming there was a grocery store nearby, and not to mention the invasion of tobacco and alcohol stores that were heavily marketed in the area. Therefore the ‘place’ of the Lower 9th Ward was not only the area the 9th Ward African-American women were forced to live because of their socioeconomic status, but it also contributed to them not being able to escape their underdeveloped status.

Ecological Exploitation and Disruption

The intersectionality of race, class, and gender oppressions matter in relation to where one can live. Hurricane Katrina demonstrated that negative effects of climate change fall heavier on the poor and people of color.⁵¹ Most of Louisiana’s Gulf Coast area, is where the 9th Ward is located, is made up of mostly marshland. The 9th Ward is also an area where the city houses most of its land-fills. Low-income and Black people’s neighborhoods were hit the hardest when Hurricane Katrina made landfall because of their location near the gulf. Because New Orleans is a seaport city at the mouth of the Mississippi that is largely below sea-level, with flooding its main problem, it is not surprising that whites occupied higher and better planned land, protected by natural levees.⁵² The 9th Ward African-American women lived in the lowest lying area of the city

51. Bullard and Wright, 19.

52. *Ibid.*, 21.

on the inland margin of the natural levee, where drainage was bad, foundation materials were hazardous, streets appallingly unmaintained, mosquitoes endemic, and flooding a recurrent hazard. Unfortunately, these factors also contributed to their poor health and exposure to health risks, which was explained in the previous section.

The 'place' (the Lower 9th Ward), where the women of this study occupied prior to Hurricane Katrina mattered in relation to their safety, especially from dangerous flooding waters. These women were in the Lower 9th Ward because they were economically and socially disadvantaged, because of their underdeveloped state. Their underdeveloped state also made them geographically disadvantaged because the Lower 9th Ward itself was underdeveloped. The Lower 9th Ward was at constant risk of flooding, even during a light rainfall. The Lower 9th ward, like many of the Southern states experienced weather that was often warm and humid, and it was near the warm Gulf of Mexico. This location made the area more susceptible to hurricanes. Though this was common, the city still did not ensure that the Lower 9th Ward, with its low elevation (below sea-level), had the proper drainage system. Because of this, the area repeatedly suffered from poor water drainage, which contributed to massive flooding from rainfall, as well as hurricanes, even those not as strong as Hurricane Katrina.

Because of the 9th Ward African-American women's socioeconomic status, the Lower 9th Ward was the most affordable place in which they could live. Although various factors, including race, gender, and place influence the risk of living an underdeveloped life in poverty, it can be argued that place is one of the most important factors. In fact, one's place can be seen as the ultimate determining factor in the access one would have

to develop. For example, it is one's place that influences access to employment, transportation, good schools, affordable healthcare, as well as one's participation in political matters. Since the 9th Ward African-American women lived in an underdeveloped state, and did not have access to the aforementioned necessities, it may be implied that socioeconomic status and place have a direct and proportional relationship. The more underdeveloped and isolated an area is from resources, the higher the likelihood of poverty and underdevelopment among its residents—e.g. the 9th Ward African-American women.

Psychological Incarceration and Spiritual Captivity and Impoverishment

Long before Hurricane Katrina made landfall, 9th Ward African-American women were psychologically incarcerated and trapped in a mental state of inferiority, which contributed to the stress in their lives. These women viewed racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustices as natural, normal, and inevitable parts of their everyday lives. Therefore, they have seen themselves as objects that were manipulated and controlled. The objectification of these women took away their humanity and separated them from knowing themselves based on their own perception. Those who controlled the political, economic, and social realities in the city of New Orleans objectified these women only so that they could control and exploit them, while maintaining their dominance.

Domination often involves the objectification of the subordinate group, which in this case was the 9th Ward African-American women. These women were unable to define themselves, for themselves, as well as others. bell hooks states, “as human beings,

people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identity, and name their history.”⁵³ She further contends that, “as objects, one’s reality is defined by others, one’s identity created by others, one history named only in ways that define one’s relationship to those who are considered insubordinate.”⁵⁴ The treatment of the 9th Ward African-American women as objects who were used for domestic labor and customer service jobs exemplifies one of the many ways in which they were objectified. Such positions not only put them in servile conditions to those of the dominant group, but they also indicated a sense of inferiority that they internalized.

The 9th Ward African-American women were subjected to having their humanity taken away from them because they occupied a position of inferiority. Because of the inferior mindset obtained via socialization, they adopted the same perception of themselves that the dominant group shared—less than human. These women did not think they had the right to have access to development because poverty was the norm. This state of mind also contributed to their spiritual captivity and impoverishment. The life they were forced to live did not contribute to the betterment of society as a whole, or to their self-betterment. Because they were forced into an underdeveloped state, they did not have access to achieve much in life, other than serving others and experiencing the least of the best and the most of the worst that life had to offer. This type of existence

53. bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 4.

54. Ibid.

impacted their ability to gain access to basic necessities, including happiness and an accurate vision of themselves as human beings.

Conclusion

Hurricane Katrina opened the eyes of America to the poverty and subjugation of African-American women in the Lower 9th Ward area of New Orleans. Black women in this area faced limited opportunities, especially in employment and education. African-American women in the Lower 9th Ward were suffering from the continuation of underdevelopment. African-American women in America and their children remain disproportionately poor, homeless, sick, undereducated, underemployed, and discouraged. This reality causes some social scientists to believe that Black women in the United States are on their way to becoming a permanent underclass and underdeveloped group.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, this is a result of the continuous intergenerational oppressions that have existed for years with the outcome of keeping Black women in an underdeveloped state. What is more disastrous is that Black women's status in America is not seen as underdeveloped, especially when compared to women in other developing countries. For example, Angela Miles asserts that,

In the process it is becoming clear that we will call 'development issues' in the 'third world' such as housing, education, health, child care, and poverty are called 'social issues' in the 'first world'.⁵⁶

Therefore, development issues and social issues are different sides of the same coin that

55. Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 13.

56. Angela Miles, "North American Feminisms/Global Feminisms: Contradictory or Complementary?" in *Sisterhood, Feminisms, and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1998), 169.

have been ignored and must be addressed in the lives of Black women in America, especially the 9th Ward African-American women of New Orleans, Louisiana.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter highlights the responses to the interview questions answered by the participants for this study; it also discusses and analyzes their responses. The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of race, class and gender in the lives of women before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina. For this study, the researcher investigated the lives of 25 African-American women residing in the Lower 9th Ward of New Orleans, Louisiana. This investigation utilized the development and underdevelopment models of Alan Colón already discussed in chapter three. In their responses, the participants recounted the aspects of not only their daily lives, but also their social, political, economic, psychological and emotional experiences before, during and immediately after the storm. Their responses were reminiscent of Colón's underdevelopment model and demonstrated the effects of race, class, and gender on the development process for Black women in America. As such, an organized outline of Colón's pillars of underdevelopment has served to illustrate the participants' experiences of living in an underdeveloped state before, during and after Hurricane Katrina.

Data Analysis

A narrative analysis was employed during the gathering of information. A quantitative measure was used to present an analysis of the responses. Additionally, the largest body of information was obtained through these interviews, which were

conducted with each of the 25 participants who were 9th Ward African-American women when Hurricane Katrina made landfall. Accordingly, information was collected from the participants to try to answer the following two research questions utilizing a summative analysis:

1. How did Hurricane Katrina impact Black women who lived in the Lower 9th Ward area of New Orleans, Louisiana?
2. How did Hurricane Katrina impact the underdeveloped status of these Black women?

Information from the interviews was transcribed and read line by line for the purpose of discovering units of data relative to the two research questions identified above. The responses provided by the women were analyzed to explore their relevance to the pillars of underdevelopment utilized in this study. The responses were sorted and categorized based on the pillars they matched during the analysis.

Demographic Survey of Study Participants

Collecting demographic data through the survey instrument yielded varied demographic profiles of each study participant. However, because all the women who participated in this study lived in the Lower 9th Ward area of New Orleans prior to the hurricane, there were also some similarities among the demographic data collected. Some questions on the demographic portion of the interview aimed to identify their age, relationship status, level of education, and if they lived as ‘head of household.’ Additionally, the interview questions also targeted information in relation to the

economic, psychological, emotional, political, and geographic conditions of the Lower 9th Ward African-American women interviewed.

Although interviews with the participants took place mostly over the phone and some in person in Atlanta, Georgia, the location of the participants themselves varied. Some had returned home to New Orleans, but not in the Lower 9th Ward, while some were yet to return to New Orleans; others were located where they were ‘placed’ during the mandatory evacuation right before Hurricane Katrina made landfall. Ages of the study participants fell within the range of 19 to 64 years old. Eight participants reported being between the ages of 19 to 25. Three participants indicated that they were between the ages of 26 to 30. Two participants fit into the 31 to 35 years old group. Additionally, three participants stated that they were 36 to 40 years old. Four participants were 41 to 50 years old. There were also two participants who identified with the 51 to 60 year old age group. Lastly, three more participants reported they were between 60 to 64 years old.

During the investigation of the lives these women had before Hurricane Katrina, and understanding how development, or the lack thereof, impacted their lives, their socio-economic status was relevant, if not one of the most important factors in their lives. Their socio-economic status is important because economics greatly impacts each pillar of underdevelopment as Alan Colón established in his model. In response to this survey item, three (12%) of the participants identified with a lower-middle class socio-economic background. Fifteen participants (60%) responded that they were from a working-class background, while seven participants (28%) responded that they were from a lower-class

background. Also, fourteen (56%) of the participants indicated that they were not employed, while all others (44%) were employed at the time the storm hit.

As mentioned in chapter three, the education that one receives weighs heavily on the opportunities that may be available to that person, especially in relation to employment. All the participants in this study lived in the poorest area of the city of New Orleans, the Lower 9th Ward, but they were a well-educated group. One (.04%) participant had only acquired high school education. Eight (32%) participants identified with having some college, while ten (40%) had acquired their college degree. Six (24%) of the participants had a graduate degree or some type of professional degree beyond the collegiate level.

In terms of the family structure, fifteen (60%) women indicated that they were single when Hurricane Katrina made landfall, while ten (40%) identified themselves as married. All those who identified as single were also 'head of their households,' while those who were married did not identify as such. Additionally, eight (32%) of the women identified as mothers, while the rest (68%) did not. As far as federal government assistance to help their families was concerned, one (.04%) participant stated that she received some form of financial assistance from the government monthly, while the rest (96%) indicated that they did not qualify. Moreover, three (12%) of the women stated that they owned their home. However, strikingly, twenty-two (88%) of them rented where they lived; this space was mostly occupied by those who were single, but at least three (12%) of the married women did rent as well.

The most insightful responses to survey questions were those regarding the participants' specific economic, political, race, and gender experiences before, during and following Hurricane Katrina. These categorizes of questions aimed to determine the underdeveloped state in which these women lived prior to the storm. The demographic profiles of the participants helped to shed light on their struggles. Moreover, a large part of the findings in this study was achieved through employing a narrative and summative analytic method which centered on the underdevelopment model presented by Colón. More specifically, the interviews revealed that all of the women interviewed were impacted in some way by Hurricane Katrina and that they all identified with some, or all, of the pillars of underdevelopment. Thus, the responses of the participants guided the development and organization of this chapter.

Underdevelopment and Hurricane Katrina from the Economic, Racial, Political, and Gender Perspectives

The Economic Perspective (Economic Exploitation)

Within the narrative of each woman's life before Hurricane Katrina made landfall, the participants discussed how they have been socialized to view the economic layout of the city, where they fit into the economic layout of the city, and how their economic condition directly impacted their Hurricane Katrina experience. Their responses included their thoughts on: the influence of race and politics as they relate to the economic structure in New Orleans, the way in which they interacted with each other as Black women when competing for employment, and the jobs that were available to them. The participants indicated that these factors impacted their overall economic condition before

and during Hurricane Katrina, as well as their overall experience with the storm and its aftermath.

Even though the participants noted their economic socialization in relation to the city, as well as to each other, three specific findings emerged as they answered questions about their economic condition before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina. The findings are:

1. The struggle to financially maintain families and communities before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina;
2. The lack of access to full-time employment and generational wealth; and
3. The lack of economic resources to live comfortably and be able to evacuate in case of a storm because of their location.

All the participants interviewed for this study believed that they struggled financially to maintain the well-being of their families and their communities. The inability to care for their families and communities was rooted in the low incomes these women stated they earned, thus making it hard to pay all of their monthly bills and contribute to the growth of their communities. In addition, they did not have access to affordable child care close to home, affordable transportation and healthcare, which they all considered to be essential in relation to their ability to care for their children and themselves.

The participants also stated that they did not have the ability to generate and control their income, which made it harder to care for their families. They also could not make work decisions based on their own needs, as well as their families'. The

participants highlighted how this made them feel inadequate as parents and members of their local community. Also, the participants indicated that they depended on support and resources from informal networks of relatives, neighbors, and others when it came to helping pay monthly bills, childcare, and even transportation. Unfortunately, these resources were not always available. It was these factors together that the participants strongly believed contributed to their powerlessness to economically thrive.

The 9th Ward African-American women's inability to develop economically not only contributed to how Hurricane Katrina disrupted their lives, but it also directly impacted their already underdeveloped state. Walter Rodney, the activist and scholar, argues that much of human history has been a fight for survival against natural disasters and against real and imagined human enemies.¹ For the 9th Ward African-American women, they not only had to contend with the destruction from a natural disaster like Hurricane Katrina, but they also had to live with 'enemies' to their economic development, such as poverty and dependency upon those who have purposely disenfranchised them economically. Rodney further posits that development has meant the increase in the ability to "guard the independence of the social group and indeed to infringe upon the freedom of others."² In relation to Hurricane Katrina, the economic and political decisions made by government officials caused more suffering than even the natural disaster. The economic dislocations—outsourcing of jobs, closing of plants and

1. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1982) 3-4.

2. *Ibid.*, 4.

stores, and the downsizing of staff personnel each year put thousands of the 9th Ward African-American women out of work, and aggravating economic instability, which hindered their ability to gain independence. This economic instability caused them to be more vulnerable by the time Hurricane Katrina made landfall. Even though these women had figured out how to maintain and stabilize their own lives within their impoverished state, they expressed that Hurricane Katrina forced them into an even more demoralized state and dire poverty than before the storm. For example, participants highlighted their economic powerlessness and state of impoverishment before, during and after Hurricane Katrina. One participant noted:

Before Katrina we weren't able to work, and able to have the things that we need. We had to make sure we watched our spending because we basically almost ran out of money every week. We were at our last penny always trying to get children to school and make sure we had everything to eat and clothes.³

Another participant noted the following:

My family was economically devastated prior to Katrina. My father was working for LASDPA which held the largest contract for the city in picking up all of the stray animals. They basically were New Orleans animal control and he wasn't making a whole lot of money. They don't pay that much. Then my mother was working for Rite-Aid and she was working a full-time job but she a non-exempt employee put it that way, so she didn't make that much money. She made enough to get by but not that much and we were living, before Katrina, in government subsidized housing or the projects.⁴

Furthermore, two participants also stated the following which reflected how the city viewed them as poor people during the storm:

3. Ms. G., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 5, 2010.

4. Ms. Q., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 7, 2010.

We have always had to fend for ourselves. People that are poor have to, so when the storm hit it was not any different. We are going to be treated the same way like a homeless person is treated and I think a lot of that has to do with that where we live. I believe if this had happened somewhere else like Atlanta or New York City, then it wouldn't even have occurred that way. Everybody would've been fine. People would have been out of that city. People that were there would've been taken care of. They wouldn't have been left out there for days. I think that had a big impact as far as the response that they had when taking care of the people especially because the lower 9th ward was the most devastated and that's the poorest area of the city.⁵

We had no support. So many of us were left behind because we were poor. For almost a week, there weren't any provisions for us. No one cared about us poor Black people.⁶

In relation to after Hurricane Katrina, many of the themes coming out of the participants' narratives reflect the following about their economic condition and treatment:

It affected us enormously because when we left we thought we were only leaving for three days. It really was a big impact. It was like we were starting from scratch. We didn't have the funds to take care of ourselves. We only had three days of clothing. It's just a bad situation financially and if it wasn't for the grace of God and people in my family, people in New Jersey who donated to us, and helped us with home, clothing, food. I don't know what would've happen to us because the government didn't have the right provisions. If it wasn't for so many people throughout the country that donated and really was there for our family and other people affected by Katrina, we really would have been in a worse situation. We just were not prepared for Hurricane Katrina at all financially.⁷

While there are participants who experienced receiving help from others (non-government agencies) outside of the state, 13 (52%), nearly half (48%) of the participants noted economic experiences such as the following:

We ended up in another city in the other half of the United States. The things that I had to endure while trying to get my life back together economically were

5. Ms. H., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 5, 2010.

6. Ms. F., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 4, 2010.

7. Ms. F., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 4, 2010.

totally ridiculous. I couldn't apply for a driver's license or state ID because I was told that the information that I had at the time was just a state ID from Louisiana and my high school diploma. They told me that that was not applicable to get my license or state ID. As far as receiving assistance from the state such as welfare, that was easy, but trying to find a job was very hard. A manager at Family Dollar told me she didn't want to hire me because I was considered a risk to the rest of the crew once she found out I was evacuated from Katrina. I did find out that FEMA went on with my payments and the owners of the house took advantage of that and jacked up the rent two times as much. There was really no protection for women pretty much, so to speak. It was just a very biased situation that I had to endure because I was poor and they wanted to keep me poor.⁸

Well economically, Hurricane Katrina destroyed my family because we are in debt that we didn't encounter before. Being poor we didn't have to worry about having credit card accounts, having bills that we couldn't afford because we didn't have the money to get things like that. We were just poor and lived that way. But Hurricane Katrina forced us to have to borrow money we couldn't pay back. They had programs for those impacted by the storm so that we didn't have to worry about qualifying like we did before. We went from being poor and having nothing to being poor, having nothing, and now owing people for the rest of our lives because we know we will never be able to pay off these debts. It's not like people or the government is going to help us. No one cares.⁹

The participants' responses presented above provide examples that illustrate their economic disenfranchisement before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina. Moreover, their responses force the acknowledgement that the 9th Ward African-American Women have been neglected and denied access to economic stability. The participants have long been unable to financially care for their families because they have not been afforded the opportunity to become economically independent.

Out of the 25 participants, 21 (84%) stated that they suffered from being unemployed or underemployed, which they inferred was their norm. These participants

8. Ms. X., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 9, 2010.

9. Ms. U., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 8, 2010.

highlighted how their families never had the opportunity to acquire wealth because of the lack of employment. Moreover, their unemployed state contributed to their lack of access to obtaining personal identification because they could not afford the fee to get the identification. They also could not afford to purchase missing documents needed to acquire the desired identification, such as a birth certificate. Not having identification impacted them greatly because they were unable to prove who they were to get a job prior to the storm, get help during the storm, and receive access to the many government assistance programs needed to survive immediately following the storm, as well as apply for employment.

The participants further stated that prior to Hurricane Katrina they could not pick their jobs; they believed that they had to take any job that gave them an opportunity to earn money regardless of how little money it may have been. Unfortunately, they also did not qualify for welfare and government assistance because of their income. Other factors that participants also noted as an economic consequence from being unemployed or underemployed before, during and after Hurricane Katrina was limited access to hygiene products, poor diets, and not having a means of communication. Many of the participants could not afford cell phones with plans nor home telephones. This impacted their capability of being reached by potential employers. During and after the storm, not having reliable communication also contributed to them not being able to get in touch with family members or have access to call places to get help.

In addition, the participants perceived themselves as less important because they lacked employment and generational wealth. The wealth one has, or their family owns,

indicates their worth to society. If a person, or group, cannot contribute economically to the growth of society, they are often viewed as an expense or a ‘burden.’ For these 9th Ward African-American women, it was difficult for them to acquire wealth because of the debt that many of them had—some of these debts were generational, meaning that they had inherited them, but did not inherit access to employment. Therefore, their lack of generational wealth and employment, allowed for them to be viewed as a burden during Hurricane Katrina, which contributed to the lack of support they received to evacuate during the storm. These experiences of the 9th Ward African-American women further proved that economics, and the access that one (or a group) has to wealth, depicts how they will be treated by the government during a disaster, such as Hurricane Katrina. Their experiences with the government’s response also confirmed for these women that they were *not valued* because they could not economically contribute to the growth of society and were viewed as a burden. For example, one participant described her perception of being a burden due to her lack of wealth:

I mean it was the wealthy ones, the people that were able to get out of the city. At the same time, the people who are running the economy are the people who are running the business in the city. Those are the people they have to protect because those are the people who run the city, so if you have people who are receiving welfare and staying in state housing they are not important. You’re going to leave those people because they are considered a burden.¹⁰

Another participant also responded:

If this storm would’ve happened in upstate New York where there’s more people with more money they would’ve responded immediately. They would’ve been there with helicopters and planes and boats trying to get those people out of that situation. In New Orleans because it happened and the way it happened, it is

10. Ms. T., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 8, 2010.

already known as a place of ‘laissez faire.’ Let the good times roll you know. Everybody lazy and we all just walking around chilling and we just going through our day to day lives with nothing to worry about. We are not important to society. We the place people come to retire. We not the city or state you come to because you want to be a millionaire. If it would have happened in Atlanta, where you got Fortune 500 companies and people going out of business who shut down whole cities out here. They would’ve responded immediately. Yes, I think economics had a lot to do with them and the response we got from the federal government. Race had a lot to do with it and income had a lot to do with it.¹¹

The participants in this study were often discounted as unmotivated and irresponsible people because they lacked wealth. However, their ability to stabilize households in poverty proved how valuable they were as people who could survive without access to employment and basic resources needed for daily life.

Because the participants in this study resided in the Lower 9th Ward area of the city, they believed that they were even more neglected than those who lived in the inner city. The participants stated that they lived in the Lower 9th Ward because it was the cheapest area in New Orleans; therefore, the Lower 9th Ward was the only location in which they could afford to live. The location of the participants is very important in this study because 18 (72%) out of the 25 women interviewed stated that their location contributed to the severity of their economic state. The women interviewed felt as if they were trapped in their economic *condition*—a condition they believed left them isolated and hopeless to opportunity. They further expounded on how they were automatically expelled from other areas of the city that were safer (from violence and flood waters) because of their poor economic condition. Because the Lower 9th Ward was the only area the participants could afford or receive housing assistance to live in, they believed that

11. Ms. X., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 9, 2010.

the location left them powerless, hopeless, and incapable of changing their economic condition.

Patricia Hill-Collins asserts that there is a “de facto segregation that continues to exist in the South to keep specific groups contained.”¹² Collins further posits that Black women are “glued to the bottom of the bag.”¹³ In relation to the participants in this study, the containment that the Lower 9th Ward African-American Women experienced left them powerless because they did not have access to social mobility; they were the outsiders within. This means that they were indeed citizens of a country, a state, a region, and a city that did not allow them to participate in the economic growth of their location. The participants were powerless within an economic structure that did not include them; thus, they become the outsider within. This outsider-within status forced the participants in this study into an economic quagmire they believed they could never escape, forcing them to become incapable of economic development.

Even though 16 (64%) of the participants in this study had attained a college degree or higher, interestingly, only one participant identified education as the determinant for access to wealth for the 9th Ward African-American women. This participant, who was a college graduate, believed that education, or the lack thereof, impacted the quality of life that Black women experienced before the storm. In fact, education is a central site of contests in relation to race, class and gender. This is because

12. Patricia Hill-Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 13.

13. Ibid.

knowledge is paramount in the quest to resisting oppression. In other words, the amount of education one acquires may be essential to getting a good job with a reasonable salary and benefits. More importantly, education impacts the overall quality of a person's life. As mentioned in chapter three, the city of New Orleans, especially the Lower 9th Ward, mirrored its segregated past immediately prior to Hurricane Katrina. The 9th Ward African-American women in this study shared a common socialization in a school system that was poorer and considered lower standard. When asked about their educational experiences growing up in New Orleans, especially in the Lower 9th Ward area, over 90% (23) of the participants shared the belief that they were taught about social hierarchies while in grade school. They felt that they were socialized to believe that they were less than others because of their race, where they lived, and the schools they attended. This was a belief even among the 16 (64%) who had acquired college degrees.

One participant also noted that growing up she and her peers knew that they attended a poor school. Students had old textbooks and had also constantly heard their teachers complain about the lack of funding for the school because of their location and because it was a predominantly Black school. Many states allocate funding based on the location of the school. Because of the Lower 9th Ward being the poorest district in New Orleans it has historically been neglected in the distribution of funding. Overall, the respondent believed that the lack of funding and access to a better education contributed to the large number of Blacks, particularly Black women, who did not have access to better jobs and a better place to live. None of the other participants shared this belief. However, this participant's response is discussed to highlight the reality that education

impacts one's access to economic growth. This participant's response also raises the question as to why no other participant in this study discussed education, especially since 16 (64%) of them had acquired at least a college degree. Therefore, it can be assumed that these women's socialization has trained them to be accepting of their condition, without an agenda to change the local economic norms.

The Racial Perspective (Racism)

Throughout the interviews with the 9th Ward African-American women in this study, racial inequalities had become a dominant theme. Among the participants, responses to questions about race allowed for three findings to emerge:

1. There was lack of economic freedom and heavily concentrated poverty because of the normalcy of racism before, during and after Hurricane Katrina;
2. There was a normalcy of oppression during natural disasters based on race that had historical roots within the city; and
3. The media perpetuated an imagery of racial bias.

All the participants in this study believed that they were not economically prepared for Hurricane Katrina because of their struggles against racism. Moreover, all the participants (100%) indicated that their ability to acquire well-paying jobs was not determined by their skills, education, or even their desire to work hard. Instead, they believed that their ability to acquire a well-paying job depended on their skin color and personal bias. When the participants were asked if they believed racism played a role in why Hurricane Katrina impacted them the way it had, especially in relation to their economic preparedness and expectations, participants responded:

Definitely, I lived in the city and I grew up in the 9th ward, grew up around the projects, people with lower income so definitely impacted the people that I lived around in my neighborhoods and stuff. A lot of them didn't move to New Orleans, weren't able to rebuild their houses as others did. I grew up in black neighborhoods and went to black schools and it was definitely that race played a big part in the disaster on why it occurred. The black population of New Orleans being a majority black city, they were treated differently than the other people or white people that lived in the city during Katrina and everything going on.¹⁴

Most definitely, like I said I grew up and at the time of the storm, I lived in the Lower 9th Ward and that was the area that was hit the hardest. The area is predominantly, if not all, black, African American so race definitely played its part in Hurricane Katrina. If it happened in an area that was white, I truly believe that the response would have been different.¹⁵

Yes, it was. It's very racial, like with helping. I mean people flew over houses with African Americans sitting on their roof and they left them there, so you know I didn't really hear too much about Europeans being in water and having to walk through water and that they happened to African Americans and that just goes back to the economics portion of having the money. The most people who needed help were the African Americans because the hurricane hit in a specific area which is mostly filled with African Americans so everyone needed help, but the ones who mostly need it didn't get it.¹⁶

The responses by the participants in this study demonstrate an understanding of how race and class intersect and in fact depend upon one another. According to Patricia Hill-Collins, analyzing class relations through lived experiences sheds light on the intersectionality of race and class in the United States.¹⁷ The lived experiences of the participants during Hurricane Katrina confirmed the reality that their race subjected them to a second-class and inferior status, which has been discussed in the previous section.

14. Ms. C., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 3, 2010.

15. Ms. E., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 4, 2010.

16. Ms. J., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 6, 2010.

17. Hill-Collins, 213.

Furthermore, the participants' responses also exhibit that when one is Black, poor, and a woman there is a 'shared experience' that is common to many women.

This shared experience allows for historically identifiable histories and traditions to exist. The central 'racial' shared experience in the case of the 9th Ward African-American Women in this study is the neglect of those in charge of the city they lived in to ensure that they had access to fair economic stability, regardless of their race. Because of their lack of economic stability, due to their race, specific situations (e.g. not being financially prepared for Hurricane Katrina, neglect before, during and after Hurricane Katrina, job lay-offs, and lack of job opportunity) that the participants had experienced became 'norms' in their lives. They believed it was 'normal' for Blacks in New Orleans, especially the Lower 9th Ward, to suffer economically and that because of this norm they simply lived life 'as they knew it.' This suggests that they had seen generations of poverty and had seen their mothers, grandmothers, and great-grand mothers survive the unjust racial norms that the city had to offer. Essentially, there is a specific way in which the participants had been socialized to respond to life experiences and situations because of their race. They simply responded by stating "that's just the way it is."¹⁸ These exact words were mentioned by 18 of the 25 participants (72%).

It was clear that these women had seen separation and exclusion as part of their lives. And, unfortunately, geographical space (e.g. the Lower 9th Ward), or occupational and employment spaces must be maintained in order for unjust power and economic relations to exist in the city, especially when discussing race in New Orleans, Louisiana. The

18. Ms. C., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 3, 2010.

city's historical patterns of segregation (racially and economically) contributed to the participants' shared experiences. The segregated layout of the city worked hand in hand with the existing racialized structure to produce racial disparities and economic inequality. In essence, what the world had seen in 2005 with Hurricane Katrina was truly nothing new to the 9th Ward African-American Women in this study, in relation to experiences with race and class—it was the norm for them.

There has been an endemic oppression during natural disasters within the city based on race that has historical roots. Nine of the participants (36%) were old enough to remember previous disasters such as Hurricanes Betsy (1965) and Camille (1969). The rest of the participants (64%) did not live through these disasters, but they had heard stories from their parents and grandparents. When asked “Did you expect the government to help and do you think race played a part in their response?,” participants responded:

No. I knew they would not help because we are black and we have been black. It's kind of how I feel when they respond to anything that happens in the United States; just like the hurricanes we have had in the past like Betsy and Camille. They don't help and if they do it, they do it really on what they feel like they are told when the time is right, but when things happen like other places in the world like Haiti, when they had the earthquakes and everything, or tsunamis in Asia they were quick to run and go help out. I think that that's just ridiculous because everything starts at home. You have to take care of home before you move out and take care of others. In a lot of ways, I'm still angry with the government and just mad, even when I see pictures and footage and videos now, I still cry and get heavy hearted and still feel a lot of anguish toward the government because that should have not happened, that should have not occurred, black people shouldn't have lost their lives, their sanity, their loved ones, everything.¹⁹

Another participant responded:

19. Ms. D., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 3, 2010.

I believe that the hurricane response was awful. I believe that the government knew how horrible the city was because they had did similar things when Betsy and Camille came. I believe that the government did not move quickly enough and I believe that all of the information was out there for getting to know to prepare for how this storm was going to hit and the more than likely effects of what the storm would be. I believe that they dragged their feet and that caused many to lose their lives. I believe that they allowed certain areas of the city to flood rather than other parts of the city, just like they had done in the past. I believe that the Lower 9th Ward was more or less, what's the word that I'm looking for, a sacrifice. I believe that they sacrificed the Lower 9th Ward to save New Orleans east area, to save some other uptown areas where they would have flooded. The levees did not conveniently break and I basically think that the government did a poor job responding to Katrina.²⁰

All other participants that responded to this question had also mentioned Hurricanes Betsy and Camille in a similar manner to the two responses above. The participants mentioned the hurricanes, while comparing what they had known from their Hurricane Katrina experiences.

The older nine participants in the study (36%) recalled similar treatment of neglect from the government at the local, state, and national levels during Hurricanes Betsy and Camille, during their Hurricane Katrina experience. In relation to Hurricanes Betsy and Camille, they remembered how the government at these levels cared very little about what should have happened to Blacks, especially those in the Lower 9th Ward, when major flooding occurred. There was no effort to evacuate those living in the low-lying areas of the city and there was very little shelter for those who needed a safe space to wait the storm out because they did not have transportation nor the financial means to

20. Ms. Q., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 7, 2010.

evacuate; all of this was also true for Hurricane Katrina. When asked if they were surprised by how the government responded to Hurricane Katrina the participants stated:

No, I was not shocked that the government didn't come through. I just knew that eventually me and my mother were going to make it out alive one way or another whether I had to rob somebody of their speed boat to get out of town or somehow we were going to make it out alive. The National Guard told me what they told me at the Superdome that if I left to return to my mother they had the right to execute me on the spot. That right there was an eye opener to let me know that the government really didn't give a damn about who got out or who stayed. It was just like the stories my mother told me about the time she was a child and had lived through Camille. It's sad to say because I at that time I saw the beginning of war with that treatment and honestly, this war has been going on.²¹

Another participant noted:

They weren't prepared and I wasn't expecting them to be. You would think with having gone through Betsy and Camille they would have learned, but all they did was show that the same game plan applied—forget the n*ggers. I went back in November, Katrina was in August, to see if my home was okay. Going to the school, and going to the city, it was like a problem. You could see where people had tried to start building their homes, you could go blocks and blocks and it was a ghost town. Nobody was there at all. You would see the police cruising through the neighborhood or a person with guns. It looked like the 60's right after the old storms had hit. This made me realize that I wasn't shocked about how they responded. It's what they knew.²²

Essentially, the participants recalled knowing that the levees were not secure and believed that an experience like, or similar to, Hurricane Katrina could have easily happened years ago based on the history of levees failing in the past (or being blown up like they were in 1927, as discussed in the review of the literature). The government did not help them and the 9th Ward African-American Women in this study did not expect it to help during Hurricane Katrina. Moreover, they were not surprised by the

21. Ms. X., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 9, 2010.

22. Ms. U., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 8, 2010.

government's response, based on what they had known from the past. The 9th Ward African-American Women in this study also believed that this was important to mention not only because of the obvious lack of protection for residents, but also because of the city's long history of racial discrimination and lack of concern for its Black residents, especially during natural disasters.

The participants' responses confirmed the assumed distrust that some scholars mentioned in chapters two and three of this study of Blacks not having confidence in the government, at any level, to help them during a disaster. Disasters historically experienced by African Americans helped to create and perpetuate patterns such as urbanization, poverty, racial segregation, inequality, and social isolation. These women had seen the government neglect them and other Black families during previous storms. This is why they believed that the government would not help them survive Hurricane Katrina. Overwhelmingly, 19 (76%), of the women interviewed for this study, especially the older participants, were not shocked about the government's neglect at the local and state levels. However, they did express feelings of disbelief when the federal government had failed them again. These women had seen themselves as having to be desperate Black women seeking help from people who they thought had the responsibility to help them in the first place.

Lastly, in relation to race, the media perpetuated an imagery of racial bias. The participants in this study proclaimed that media images on television and in the newspapers played a critical role in how they were viewed because of their race, but that more importantly racism had been put on the 'frontlines' and in the 'headlines.' All the

participants (100%) interviewed believed that their experiences, which were aired around the world, forced American citizens to see that racism continues to exist. Out of the 25 women interviewed in this study, 17 (68%) were forced by the floodwaters to seek refuge on their rooftops, while four of them (16%) were forced to walk through waist deep toxic water in order to reach higher ground. Another four (16%) participants were able to make it to the Superdome, which was the primary place seen all over the world as the house of Hurricane Katrina survivors during and after the storm. The women interviewed also expressed how having to fight for their lives made them feel disposable. They expressed concern that they had to fight for themselves because no one cared about them because they were Black and in America. They also stated how they felt that public officials seemed to not care about what they were experiencing because they were Black and poor; unfortunately, this made them feel as if they had to take care of and save themselves. When asked how they felt about how they were portrayed, as a result of government actions, a participant stated:

The whole time, the whole time during the Katrina experience, I felt worthless. And the media made it worse. I saw my life stripped away from me in a matter of minutes and the world was never the same. No one cared because I was black. I became antagonized, a voice of nonexistence on display...how does that happen? I became another statistic of what happens when the government screws you over. Until this day, I still have that feeling of being a nonexistent person simply because I have this wherever I go whatever I do, that will always be tacked onto my resume that I'm a Katrina evacuee. There is no way to fix it, even after I'm long gone and dead rotting in the ground, I will still be remembered as the Katrina evacuee seen on TV as a nobody.²³

Another participant, in tears, stated:

23. Ms. X., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 9, 2010.

I was treated like nothing, the TV put me out in this world as nothing, I did not believe I was anything and no one gave a damn. On TV all they had seen was a poor, ugly black woman who steals. No one gave a damn when I needed help; It was as if they were telling me to go steal what I need since that was probably what I was used to. I have never been so disrespected in my life.²⁴

Being Black, poor, and people no one cared about, was not only the reality of the women interviewed, but it was the reality that millions around the world also believed. For example, CNN analyst Wolf Blitzer stated on September 1, 2005, “you simply get chills every time you see these poor individuals...so many of these people are so poor and they are so Black.”²⁵ The participants internalized these very words echoed by many commentators.

The women interviewed in this study also wondered if they were seen as looters because they were perceived as being Black and poor. They demonstrated much anger over the accusation of being looters while they were trying to survive. They were perceived as being criminals, while their white counterparts who did the same things were ‘surviving.’ While trying to reach safety, survive, search for food, water, childcare necessities, and basic medical supplies they were frowned upon. It was easily seen from these women’s experience that Black survival was treated as a criminal act.

The racial stereotypes that plagued these women were no surprise, even to them. These women represented the overwhelmingly majority of those trapped in the city and in the water. As images of their pain and neglect flooded media and newspaper outlets across the globe, race could not be ignored as a part of the discussion. The 9th Ward

24. Ms. E., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 4, 2010.

25. Wolf Blitzer, *CNN*, “Live Coverage Segment,” aired September 1, 2005.

African-American Women in this study showed anger and pain in the aforementioned responses about how commentators and those covering the storm and its aftermath tried to make it seem that what was happening had nothing to do with race, but instead class; many other participants shared similar feelings.

It can be argued that Hurricane Katrina was colorblind and did not target New Orleans and its Lower 9th Ward because the area was predominantly Black; after all a ‘natural disaster’ cannot pick where it happens. However, the years of systemic and institutionalized racism contributed to how the 9th Ward African-American women interviewed in this study were impacted. The racism isolated them to an area that did not have protection from natural disasters, such as hurricanes. However, the participants were convinced that the government had abandoned them and that the racial divide in the country, especially in the city of New Orleans, had finally been revealed to the world and they were the face of the true horrors of racism in the 21st century.

The reality of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina was different for whites and Blacks. The reality perceived by whites was that there were dangerous Black men and women looting, raiding and raping, and that race did not play a role in rescue, recovery, and relief efforts. Conversely, for Blacks the reality included perceptions that race was a factor in the white authority’s rescue relief and recovery efforts, and that white authority criminalized Blacks in racist ways. Poor Black women represented the majority of those trapped in the city, and it was assumed that they did not have sense to heed pre-storm evacuation warnings because they did not have the knowledge to make sure they were economically secure. Government officials wanted everyone to believe that the poor

people who were affected by Hurricane Katrina *just so happened to be Black*. It seems poverty is what America wanted everyone to see. However, the women interviewed wanted to reveal that the injustice they experienced after Hurricane Katrina was because of many factors but that one factor was the root of their oppression—*racism*.

The crisis that Hurricane Katrina forced people to acknowledge was the issue of class, but the storm also forced many to painfully acknowledge the structural and individual racism that continues to exist in all systems and institutions in America. Many people believe that African-American women in the Lower 9th Ward were in a lower class because of some personal social defect such as laziness or incapability to be anything better. These women should be seen as they are—victims of structural racism. Whites in America believe that they are part of a better, superior race, therefore, the assumption about the Black women in this area are normalized and widely accepted. In the Lower 9th Ward, African-American women perceived themselves to have been victims of those individuals who looked down on them. According to the participants, they identified themselves as victims of structural racism while growing up in New Orleans. Unfortunately, the perceptions they had of themselves were confirmed when they had seen how they were treated during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, due to the city's political acceptance of racism and classism. Five years after Hurricane Katrina, when the study was conducted, the women claimed that they still had not regained a sense of self-worth in their lives.

The Political Perspective (Political Oppression)

Other than class and race discussions, conversations that centered on politics also plagued the Hurricane Katrina debate. When the 9th Ward African-American women in this study were asked questions that focused on the political perspective of Hurricane Katrina three findings were identified:

1. Citizenship status versus refugee status of Black women in America;
2. Unresolved domestic political disparities between men and Black women;
3. Lack of political power (Political Invisibility) and government responsibility.

The questions of who is American, who is a citizen, who is a refugee, and who is seen as human propelled the Hurricane Katrina political discussion. When asked how they thought they were treated by the American government throughout their Hurricane Katrina experience, the following two responses depict how the 9th Ward African-American women in this study replied:

It was obvious that they treated us like animals, like we really didn't matter. We watched the news every day during the evacuation period, we evacuated to Arkansas and all the time on TV they kept calling the black people refugees and it's just ridiculous because they weren't refugees, they lived and were born in this country. It wasn't like they were escaping to the United States, that was definitely ridiculous.²⁶

I mean to say it simply we not were protected, we were not given fair treatment, and we damn sure were not treated like American citizens; I mean they called us refugees.²⁷

26. Ms. D., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 3, 2010.

27. Ms. I., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 5, 2010.

The women interviewed in this study reminisced on being characterized as refugees during their Hurricane Katrina experience. For example, all of the women interviewed (100%) expressed anger about being called a refugee in their own country. The word refugee was used as if the disaster had not happened on American soil. The refugee label had the effect of rhetorically removing Black victims from national responsibility, as though the consequences of the levee failure were to be endured by foreigners rather than by Americans. They were not viewed as evacuees as they sought safety and shelter in nearby towns and cities and even in other states. They were treated as if they were not citizens of America. United States citizens being called refugees, and treated as such, further proved that the politics of race, as well as gender, has been an issue that New Orleans and the nation have suffered from for many years, due to the government not adhering to their part of the social contract of citizenship, as discussed in chapter three of this research. Many African-American women struggle for recognition which is the nexus of human communal and national identity. The 9th Ward African-American women in this study embody this struggle, as they were denied their right to have a chance to survive (racially, economically, politically) before, during and after Hurricane Katrina. They were separated from the other areas of New Orleans by race, class, and gender. This separation was accomplished through political actions, such as containment—which had isolated them to the Lower 9th Ward area of New Orleans in the first place. Beforehand, they had only felt as if they were not viewed as citizens in their own city because of their forced isolation, containment, and now displacement. They were also viewed as refugees in America, their *home*, which also made them feel as they

were not citizens of America. Classified as refugees, the 9th Ward African-American women were treated as second-class citizens, to whites and to men in general. For example, when Ray Nagin, who was the mayor of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, held a meeting with those who were left trapped in the city, one of the women interviewed in this study noted how she attended the meeting and what she had said to the mayor. She remembered telling him the following:

Can you please get the government to stop and pause like they did during 9/11? The entire nation, as well as the world, stopped when that happened and stepped in to help. But now no one even sees us. I am a taxpayer and a voter. I placed my trust in elected officials to do what is right, but instead we got nothing. We are not refugees, we are American citizens.²⁸

Her statement alone represents the ongoing political struggle of Black women in America, as well as the struggle of women of color globally. Black women and other women of color globally are forced to ask *men* for access to citizenship and rights. This is especially true during natural disasters when there is no system in place to protect women, especially Black women in America.

The second finding that emerged during the political discussion in this study was the unresolved domestic political disparities between men and Black women in America. It has been acknowledged in this study that the political dynamics that affected African-American women in the Lower 9th Ward were influenced by race and economics (class). Likewise, it must also be acknowledged that the difference in the treatment of men and

28. Ms. X., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 9, 2010.

women was determined by factors of single motherhood, and a particularly male-dominated government. These limiting factors contributed to the women's underdevelopment, and Hurricane Katrina magnified these limitations, which were established by a male-dominated government. When asked "how do you think the United States government treated African-American women, particularly during the evacuation process?" One respondent summed it up for all those interviewed. She stated: "My personal opinion about how we was treated it was like we were in a Third World country; the exact same as women in a Third World country."²⁹ This one response summarizes all of the women's responses to this question. Also, this particular respondent, using a term such as 'Third World' in her response, raises an issue that is central to this research and its focus on development.

The experiences of the 9th Ward African-American women interviewed in this study represent the contemporary political reality for Black women in the city of New Orleans, especially those in the Lower 9th Ward. When considering what it means to be Black, to be a woman in America, and to be human with the basic human right to survive, the women interviewed demonstrated how from a political prospective they are not viewed as natural citizens. They are seen as unnatural citizens or people of a developing country. During Hurricane Katrina, the majority of the women interviewed recalled their hunger, tiredness, and fear. They described their treatment as that of animals who were herded in large groups not knowing where they were going. The women in this study not only highlighted the government's slow response; they also highlighted that when the

29. Ms. M., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 7, 2010.

government did come that its lack of organizational preparedness showed them something even more horrific than the storm itself—that they did not matter to the government. The women in this study who sought *refuge* at the Superdome, demonstrated in their responses perceptions that some would compare to a Third World (developing) country in their response to how they were treated by government. They responded:

I knew the government would not come. They don't care about us in our own country. A country where we were born and are citizens. It was like we were in a Third World Country.³⁰

There is nothing new about how they responded to the storm. They don't view us as people. We are Black and poor. They don't care about us or our safety and survival.³¹

The 9th Ward African-American women interviewed in this study realized that as natural born citizens of America they were not viewed as such. They were not recognized as citizens, women, nor as human beings. Not being recognized impacted these women's lives greatly and they still continue to struggle with their *place* in America. These women were shamed globally by their own country and instead of being saved, they were portrayed as poor, Black, criminals, and refugees.

The last finding that emerged during the political discussion in this study was that Hurricane Katrina made it clear that the United States has not resolved fundamental domestic disparities and inadequacies in relation to political recognition, freedom and

30. Ms. K., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 6, 2010.

31. Ms. L., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 6, 2010.

government responsibility. When asked if they have regained some type of normalcy in their lives from their struggle with Hurricane Katrina, and if they think the government will help them if they have not yet regained the normalcy they wanted, a participant replied:

I have not gotten anything from the government to help me get even close to the life I had before the storm. It's as if they don't care if I even have clean draws. I cannot function to even go apply for jobs, get an apartment or anything. I am too scared. You think someone helped me figure things out and not be traumatized about starting a life and then having it literally wiped away? No. Not even my own damn government. No one cares.³²

Another participant stated:

Of course not. I didn't feel valued as a person then and I don't now. They still don't care. I felt like crap. I felt sad and lonely and like my world had ended and there was nobody to talk to about the situation. I didn't really feel like anybody understood and people always were like you didn't lose any family members but that wasn't the point. My whole entire college career was down the drain. I lost a lot of stuff. I think people just didn't understand and you wanted them to so bad and they didn't. Who can ever recover from anything like that? They haven't helped and they won't.³³

Hurricane Katrina did not create the inequalities the women expressed in their responses to the question of normalcy referenced above; it simply gave an important reminder that they are deeply embedded in America's metropolitan political, economic, and social decadence as demonstrated in the Lower 9th Ward.

Even before Hurricane Katrina, there has been a continued widening of racial and wealth gaps in the areas of finances, education, and healthcare services. This

32. Ms. Y., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 9, 2010.

33. Ms. P., Interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 7, 2010.

demonstrates a structural defect in American bureaucratic institutions, which is based on the principle of letting 'selected people' decide what is best for others. The disparities that Hurricane Katrina exposed have institutional roots in slavery and Jim Crow laws, which means that the treatment of those left behind was the result of years of oppression and discrimination. This also means that the mistreatment of African Americans in New Orleans, particularly the women in the Lower 9th Ward, has become so common that it is simply the normal way of life for the residents, which is how the women described their experiences of mistreatment.

Though the media focused on the failed political response in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, it also paid little attention to the long-term effects of the mismanagement of relief efforts by the federal, state, and local governments when responding to the needs of Blacks, particularly Black women. For example, it has taken all of the 9th Ward African-American women interviewed for this study (100%) years to regain *some* sense of normalcy in their lives. And, for some, they still struggle with acquiring the basic necessities of life in order to continue to survive. Unfortunately, because Hurricane Katrina happened in 2005, the media no longer highlights the disaster, and the government may be not be interested in assuming the responsibility of assisting the victims, then these women may never regain a full sense of normalcy in their lives. Therefore, the victims will continue to expand the growing population of America's permanent underclass.

With the attention that Hurricane Katrina generated globally, specific desired outcomes have been designed by the government in case of a future disaster. But, not

enough attention has been given to programs that are designed to evacuate potential victims ahead of any natural disaster that may occur. In addition, there are no programs to assist with helping people become economically independent in poorer communities in metro areas of New Orleans, such as the Lower 9th Ward, so they could evacuate themselves should a natural disaster occur again. Though there are some who may reject that this responsibility is a core function of the government, it must be recognized that these are areas that should not be ignored. Further, the historical role of race as a casual factor has shaped the relationship the federal, state, and local governments have with one another, as well as the citizens of America, which allowed Hurricane Katrina to have the impact it did on African-American women in the lower 9th Ward. From the efforts by the government agencies, one should have really wondered if 9th Ward African-American women were ever a priority to save from the storm's destruction. The women in this study wondered if the government thought of them as victims of Hurricane Katrina, and if they were important enough to rescue. Unfortunately, all of the women in this study (100%) did not see their value as human beings nor as citizens when they discussed the role of the government during their Hurricane Katrina experience.

To many, America is the land of opportunity, and equality. It is the melting pot where any person can come and live and accomplish his or her dreams. Unfortunately, for these 9th Ward African-American women born in America, they are still the "Outsider Within." According to Patricia Hill-Collins, the "Outsider Within" represents a group of Black women who are in a location where they do not belong; they only relied on and

supported each other.³⁴ The 9th Ward African-American women in this study are in a marginal location between groups with varying degrees of power—white men in the government, and Black men and white women ‘active’ in the community. The white men in the government dictate their survival, while they and Black men benefit from patriarchy and white women benefit from their white privilege. It is not until Black women, especially those in the Lower 9th Ward, are fully accommodated and granted power through the political machinery of the city of New Orleans that they will truly have the full rights of citizenship that they were entitled to at birth. If they are not recognized as citizens, they will continue to be invisible and forced to wrestle with their sense of powerlessness.

The Gender Perspective (Patriarchy)

The study data reveal that gender invisibility before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina impacted the lives of the 9th Ward African-American women in this study. While much of the discussion that centered on Hurricane Katrina focused on race, class, and politics, scholars that discussed Hurricane Katrina seemed to ignore the overwhelming images of Blackness and women that plagued television screens and newspapers worldwide. When women in this study were asked questions in relation to how gender played a role in their lives before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina three findings prevailed:

1. There was a level of negative gender identity recognized among participants;

34. Hill-Collins, 5.

2. Privileges based on race *and* gender dictated the lack of support that participants endured; and
3. There was a perception that the lack of protection they experienced arose from unrealistic expectations based upon gender roles.

Gender identity determines how women and men treat one another, as well as highlights the power relation between the two. Moreover, gender identity often lends itself to patriarchal ideologies and structures, which were primary factors that influenced how women were treated before, during and after Hurricane Katrina. All of the participants in the study recognized that gender played a role in their Hurricane Katrina experience and that patriarchy (worldwide male subjugation of women) also impacted their overall experience. The women in this study felt that they did not have the privilege to evacuate ahead of the hurricane because they were women and Black. For example, when asked to describe their lives as Black women in New Orleans before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina three participants responded as follows:

Sexists! Racist! It has not changed. Nothing was has changed from before Katrina to after. They just was the same, those issues that we had to deal with during Katrina were there before and after. It's just that Katrina was on television and the situation before it wasn't being shown, so it was just a bright light on what was already.³⁵

I think since pre-Hurricane Katrina pretty much like it is now, just a little more worse than it was before. It is not acceptable for Black women. African-American women, to prosper and accelerate doesn't exist. It's like we are being held back because we are women and because we are Black.³⁶

35. Ms. J., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 6, 2010.

36. Ms. M., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 7, 2010.

Before Katrina, it was hard because by us being Black women there isn't much offered to us as far as jobs were concerned. A lot of the Black women have kids with no fathers. We had to be mothers and fathers. We had maybe two or three jobs; I've had three jobs; I've had three jobs myself just to make ends meet and it's just a struggle. It's hard for Black women. It was definitely hard before Katrina. Katrina came through and took a little of that heaviness away, but it's still there. It's still a struggle.³⁷

More than half of the women in this study, 17 (68%), demonstrated an understanding of intersectionality, even though the technical term may not have crossed their minds. They realized they could not discuss their lives nor their Hurricane Katrina experiences from just a race-only, class-only, or gender-only perspective. Therefore, naturally, intersectional oppression had become a reality for these women prior to, during, and after Hurricane Katrina.

The women in this study had long suffered from the effects of a male dominated political system of imperialism, white supremacy, and capitalist patriarchy, all of which have contributed to their underdeveloped state not only as women, but as Black women in America. As mentioned in chapter three of this study, women of color who are poor in the United States struggle with the effects of underdevelopment while surrounded by an abundance of resources.³⁸ The Black women in this study faced limited access to credit, employment, affordable and safe housing, healthcare, as well as equal protection from human-made and natural disasters, as a consequence of being women and being Black. Hurricane Katrina exposed this intolerable reality for the 9th Ward African-American

37. Ms. V., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 8, 2010.

38. Hope Lewis, "Women (Under) Development: Poor Women of Color in the United States and the Right to Development," in *Global Critical Race Feminism: An International Reader*, ed. Adrien Katherine Wing (New York: N.Y., University Press, 2000), 96.

women and forced America to accept that their gender and racial identifications solidified their oppression. However, in their responses, though they highlight their oppression as Black women, they also highlight themselves as women who actively attempt to resist their underdeveloped condition, while they struggle to maintain the well-being of their families and communities.

A second finding in relation to gender was that privileges based on race *and* gender dictated the lack of support available to participants. The relationship that these women had with the government was structural and based on race and gender. When asked the question: did they believe the government acted in their best interest as women, they responded:

No! Why would they? We black; we poor; we are the mules of the world. No one gives a damn about us.³⁹

I thought they was at first, but then one day passed, another day passed, an then another. All I could do was think that this is how women are treated in America. Then I remembered my whole life I had been let down by men.⁴⁰

Another participant stated:

I knew they would not do sh\$t! What have anyone ever done for Black people in this country? What have anyone ever done for Black women except rape us—in various ways.⁴¹

African-American women in the Lower 9th Ward had had relationships with the government that had formed from interactions based on gender, which were also tied to

39. Ms. X., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 9, 2010.

40. Ms. D., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 3, 2010.

41. Ms. P., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 7, 2010.

racial differences, institutional sources of power, and white-male privilege. The responses of these women demonstrate historical, white-male dominated power structures and ideologies that had become an Achilles heel for the male officials during and after Hurricane Katrina rescue operations. The women viewed the male officials as having certain responsibilities that were not carried out that were not, and that their race should not have mattered. Such expectations included ‘saving’ them, providing protective measures in the first place, and simply being there. These expectations provided the women with a sense of security. Even from the perspective of society, people in government are responsible for the protection of women and children.

When the women in this study did not receive the security they expected a piece of their humanity was lost because their womanhood was indirectly denied. Thus, in this case, women were not treated as women. Instead, they were treated inhumanely. They did not even enjoy the ‘benefits’ associated with womanhood because the ‘white’ male government denied them all of those benefits. These women further believed that they were nothing more than the ‘mules of the world’—animalistic beings. Black women have often had to look after themselves, so the women in this study were not actually surprised with the treatment they received. Lastly, 15 (60%) of the women stated that if they had been white women the men would have made sure they were taken care of. Therefore, being a white woman was seen as a privilege, as human, and as worthy of being saved. Unfortunately, for the 9th Ward African-American women in this study, simply being a woman was not enough for their protection.

The third finding in relation to gender was that there was a perception that the lack of protection the women experienced arose from unrealistic expectations based upon gender roles. White-male dominated governments often decide how women are treated. When asked if they believed they were protected by the government before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina, one of the 9th Ward African-American women respondents said what amounted to a summary of the feelings of most of the women interviewed: “When has the government ever protected Black people? Black women? They do not care about us. Look at our history in America. White women are the ones they provide for and protect. Not us negroes.”⁴² The way the white-male dominated governments of the city of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana created a reality of marginalization and vulnerability for the local women population before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina. This marginalization further allowed for the perpetuation of bias against these women based on their gender identity and race. For example, the public (government) housing that these women and many other Black women in the 9th Ward had access to were in the worst parts of the city. These women lived in government spaces without receiving protection from the same government that housed them. Moreover, the government would house them, but would not protect them, nor give them the opportunity to develop themselves. Essentially, their responses tell a narrative of poverty, marginalization, and limitations that also centered around their race and gender.

The 9th Ward African-American women in this study did not have the assurance of safety from their local government; therefore, they felt powerless. Frustration from

42. Ms. H., interview by Alicia M. Fontnette, New Orleans, March 5, 2010.

not having control over their lives, and not being able to help themselves nor their families, surfaced during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. These women had no trust in the male-dominated government that swore to protect them. Ironically, they felt this way even though they had a woman governor, Kathleen Blanco, who herself was subjugated by her male colleagues and federal government officials. This male domination further disillusioned the Hurricane Katrina victims, since the governor they were counting on to alleviate their suffering was ineffective. Despite her whiteness and class privileges, she too was a victim of male domination.

The issue of patriarchy within the Black community did arise during conversations with those interviewed for this study. Patriarchy has long existed everywhere in America, including the Black community. According to the women interviewed, 18 (72%) felt they had to take care of themselves and their family, thus they developed an individualistic attitude. They did not want to wait for anyone to take care of them given their experiences during the Hurricane Katrina rescue operations.

Conclusion

The neglect of Black women during the aftermath of the Hurricane Katrina disaster was something that all of the participants in the study experienced and identified. All of the women asserted how they were the storm's most visible victims, but still no one helped them. This visual representation of the Black women as victims had a meaningful social and political consequence, which they believed forced people to look at the storm as a 'Black woman's problem.' Throughout history white men have done what was necessary to protect the white woman to ensure her place in society as a

‘woman.’ The 9th Ward African-American women struggled with identification as women and human beings—something that white women never had to do. Furthermore, through the white male-dominated media, the Black women were shown to the world as poor Black refugees, while white women were represented as ‘women’, human, and American. Overall, the 9th Ward African-American women were made visible only because of the systemic oppressions that centered around their race, gender, socio-economic status, and political disenfranchisement.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of Hurricane Katrina on Black women in the Lower 9th Ward area of New Orleans, Louisiana. The 25 women were selected as a sample for the study because they lived in the Lower 9th Ward area of New Orleans prior to the storm, provided a wide age range (ages 20 to 72 years of age), and had been born and raised in the area. The research utilized Alan Colon's theory of under-development because of its relevance to the oppressed. The theory's components included ten pillars: racism, political oppression, economic exploitation, cultural domination, patriarchy, psychological incarceration, spiritual captivity and impoverishment, health and healthcare disparities, homophobia, and ecological exploitation and disruption. Though remnants of each pillar were seen in some of the responses, only four of the pillars emerged as dominant themes: racism, economic-exploitation, political oppression, and patriarchy. Patricia-Hill Collins' theory of containment was also utilized in this study, since the Black women interviewed were contained and forced into the Lower 9th Ward area of New Orleans. This study emerged from the fact that Black women were more impacted by Hurricane Katrina than any other group. Images of Black women appeared on media outlets, in newspapers, and magazines worldwide. The question that needed to be

answered was why. Black women in New Orleans, even prior to Hurricane Katrina, were one of the most marginalized groups in the state of Louisiana. The marginalization proved to be more true for the Lower 9th Ward African-American women. These women lived a lifestyle that was poorer, more stressful, and less comfortable than their white counterparts. This lifestyle drastically impacted their ability to evacuate ahead of the dangerous, life-threatening storm. Consequently, the underdeveloped state of these women was the direct result of their marginalization. Unfortunately, oppression and underdevelopment had been normalized for Blacks, particularly Black women in the city of New Orleans.

The methodology used to carry out this research was a narrative analysis of the voices of the women in the 9th Ward who suffered from Hurricane Katrina; the analysis is supported with quantitative data. The method of narrative analysis was chosen for the study because it proved to be the best tool to explore the ‘human’ experience of these women. This method proved to be effective because during the women’s interviews they realized an empowerment to tell their stories. It also allowed the women to finally have their voice heard and have someone listen to them, as well as believe them, while they answered the 38 questions posed to them. Lastly, the research methodology was effective at minimizing the psychological distance that often exists between the researcher and the participants. There were two major research questions investigated and answered in this study: How did Hurricane Katrina impact the Black women living in the Lower 9th Ward area of New Orleans, Louisiana?; and How did Hurricane Katrina impact the underdeveloped status of these Black women? It was concluded that Hurricane

Katrina impacted the Black women because it revealed their underdeveloped state to the world, as well as proved that the women have been put into a permanent, meaning they would possible never gain an equal amount of wealth as whites, underclass of humans who were not given the right to develop. The impact of these women's underdeveloped state is discussed below, based on the dominant pillars that emerged from the study.

Final Thoughts on Gender

For free white men and women, race and gender had become two important factors that framed their identity. White men have always been viewed as head of households and their wives (white women) were viewed as their helpmates. Whiteness and maleness were the two (and still are) most valued identifying characteristics in America. Moreover, white women, because of their whiteness, were linked to white men and their economic class. White women gained derivative citizenship rights from their husbands and fathers. Because white men have always supported white women and viewed them as 'their own,' that impacted their views of Black women who were seen as insubordinates and inhuman.

The white-male dominated government that intentionally chose not to protect the 9th Ward African-American women during Hurricane Katrina did so because they did not regard Black women as their responsibility. The discriminatory practices of racism, classism, and sexism established by white male patriarchy encouraged gender discrimination and the victims of that were mostly Black women. The gender discrimination the women faced led them to be the most judged and most vulnerable group during the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina. Even after the storm, the 9th Ward

African-American women have yet to regain a full sense of normalcy in their lives. Some of the women still have not returned to New Orleans. Rather than improving the condition of New Orleans and mitigating its embedded practices of discrimination against these women, the government has only made conditions worse for the 9th Ward African-American women. If Hurricane Katrina did one thing for the people of New Orleans, is it certainly exposed the underlying gender inequality in the city. Therefore, it can be concluded that those most vulnerable before, during, and after the storm have had the most difficulty recovering from Hurricane Katrina and regaining a sense of normalcy. The ability to anticipate the storm, survive the storm, and recover from the storm was not applicable to everyone that suffered from the tragedy. The differences between Black women and white women for example, determined how they were able to cope with Hurricane Katrina. Therefore, the government should pay more attention to the different needs of Black and white women before, during, and after natural disasters to ensure the survival of everyone. Until Black women in the Lower 9th Ward area of New Orleans are deemed visible, they will continue to be ‘buried above ground.’

Final Thoughts on Development and Gender

Development of individuals, communities, and nations is a comprehensive economic, social, cultural, and political process. It aims for the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population—not just a select few. In order for development to truly work and benefit all, it must have a plan for people to be active in free and meaningful participation in the development process. More importantly, it also requires a fair distribution of benefits that can result in true reform. The right to develop is essential

to everyone's life. However, women have been largely ostracized and subjugated through centuries of patriarchal practices from the development process. Though women constitute over half of the world's human population, they only earn less than one percent of the world's wealth.¹ For Black women, and other women of color globally, this feminization of poverty reflects the gendered and racial disadvantages they face. Development remains beyond reach for many, but it is especially denied to millions of Black women in countries like America. The 9th Ward African-American women in this study are victims of intentional underdevelopment. The economic, racial, political, and patriarchal (gendered) systems of oppression impact the development process for Black women in America. During a natural and human-made disaster like Hurricane Katrina, the 9th Ward African-American women not only risked losing their essence and being as women, but also their human existence because of their under-developed condition. The four major pillars of underdevelopment highlighted in the findings impacted these women's' lives in such a way that allowed for them to be treated in ways that made them feel ashamed and dehumanized. They believed they were treated this way because they were Black women. They further believed that the white male-dominated government they depended on refused to respond, or even acknowledge their needs as women, citizens, and human beings. In summation, these women were denied their right to develop economically, racially, politically, and even as women long before August 29, 2005—the day Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans, Louisiana. The

1. Julliane E. Kunnie, *The Cost of Globalization: Dangers to the Earth and Its People* (Jefferson, NC.: McFarland Publishing, 2015), 108.

experiences the women recounted have long been shaped by their social position before the levees broke. Hurricane Katrina exposed the white male-dominated government and its mistreatment of Black women.

Many of the women in the Lower 9th Ward, especially those in this study, lived in public housing complexes—entities controlled by male-driven committees and businesses. These public housing spaces did not protect the women from the flood, as they were located in the most vulnerable lowest-lying area of the city. The women also could not afford transportation and other essential needs for survival before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina. The public housing in which the women lived was population-controlled (that is, made for specific ethnic populations) and this control made it easier for them to be abandoned, neglected, disenfranchised, displaced, and criminalized simply because of their race and gender.

In order for the 9th Ward African-American women to become included in the development process and no longer suffer from their economic, political, racial, and gendered disadvantages, there must be more recognition of their formal rights; the recognition requires affirmative actions on the part of those whose policies contribute to the underdevelopment of these women. Those who control the local policies must realize that for the 9th Ward African-American women to acquire full economic and human development they need to have access to affordable child care close to home, affordable transportation, affordable healthcare, the ability to generate and control their income, the capacity to make employment decisions based on their needs and their families, and are respected participants in the communities in which they live and work. Currently, since

the 9th Ward African-American women do not have access to such freedoms, they are forced to provide for themselves and their families by relying on complex networks for support. These networks of support include other members of their families, friends, and their communities to make limited resources stretch for as far as possible. For example, women often babysat for each other, shared meals and accommodation spaces, as well as helped each other with transportation. They also sent their children to live with other relatives out of state to reduce the challenges and stress of rebuilding after the storm. The women did all of this because they understood the necessity to rely on each other for survival.

Final Thoughts on Economics and Gender

Economic exploitation has been something etched into the very making of America. To be denied the right to economically develop promises a lifetime of entrapment, and even generations after, in a permanent underdeveloped state. It is permanent because for generations Blacks have not been able to gain equal access to wealth as their white counterparts and it does not appear they ever will. For women, especially Black women, there is a constant struggle to support their families. Black women are usually the ones solely responsible for feeding and clothing their families, as well as ensuring that they have a roof over their heads. The 9th Ward African-American women constituted a substantial population of the domestic workforce in New Orleans. Many of these women would be considered underemployed, while a significant portion of them remained unemployed. The few that did work were forced into domestic service jobs because of their location within the social relations of race, gender, and class. The

9th Ward African-American women worked, but yet remained poor. These women were economically marginalized.

Economics is one of the most important factors in the development process.

When a person has access to economic prosperity, he or she can more easily navigate the other pillars of development. Though having economic prosperity does not guarantee total freedom in the other areas of development, it can be agreed that it does at least help. Even though the government understands the importance of economic development, it does not look at it as something that everyone has a 'right' to. For example, when there are economic relief programs offered in America, they are viewed as humanitarian efforts to 'uplift' the poor. These efforts are further viewed as a burden because often times people look at those receiving such assistance as people that do not deserve it and are ungrateful. As conceived by many government officials and agencies that provide assistance, the purpose of humanitarian efforts is always to 'empower' those they help. Though Black women can benefit from being empowered, it must be recognized that they also need real opportunities to develop themselves and become independent so that they can realize their own sense of economic power.

Final Thoughts on Race and Gender

Race is a stigma in America that has yet to be truly confronted. Hurricane Katrina brought race more to the attention of many worldwide. It unveiled the daily reality of racism for Blacks in America, particularly in New Orleans and for Black women. For the 9th Ward African-American women, racial disparities were created by the interactions between structures and institutions that were controlled by white bureaucracy and

politicians. Access to opportunity were limited and rejected for these women because of their race. Moreover, government officials did not recognize, or simply ignored, the historical patterns of segregation that contributed to the racial layout of the city and how structures and institutions worked together to produce racial disparities and economic inequalities that the women faced.

When considering the fact that racialized poverty, segregation, and discrimination are common factors faced by many Black women, it must be noted that racial disparities are reproduced through racist structural arrangements designed to only benefit a few and leave a specific group at the very bottom. The racial disparities the 9th Ward African-American women faced were evidence of structural racism that underscores the fact that true democracy does not exist in America. If the women in the study truly had control over decisions that affect their lives, they would not have voluntarily put themselves into areas of concentrated poverty, substandard schools, and high crime areas, as well as an area that is prone to severe flooding. The 9th Ward African-American women continue to challenge the structures that have created racial disparities in their communities; however, it is unfortunate that they need the help from those who have placed them at the bottom of racial and social categories in order to dismantle the existing racist structures and rebuild new structures that do not discriminate based on race.

Final Thoughts on Politics and Gender

When the United States came to be in 1776, it soon granted good moral white men ‘natural’ rights under the Naturalization Act of 1790. The government derives its power from the consent of the ‘governed.’ However, Blacks, who were enslaved were

regulated to the status of chattel or property. They received neither formal nor substantive citizenship rights. During the court case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), Chief Justice Roger Taney summarized the Court's interpretation of attitudes and views in relation to Blacks:

They are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word 'citizens' in the constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides and secures...On the contrary, they were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings. Blacks have no rights the whites are bound to respect.²

The 9th Ward African-American women were treated in 2005 under the same premises of the statement made by Chief Justice Roger Taney in 1857! The 1857 statement was used as an instrument to subjugate African-American women to differential treatment within American social and political institutions based on the belief that they were not supposed to be included in the American political system. Even though the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), the Constitutional Amendments (13th, 14th, 15th, 19th), and the various Civil Rights Acts (1866, 1871, 1875, 1957, 1960, 1964, 1968) guaranteed Blacks access to their 'natural' rights, the 9th Ward African-American women were not recognized as citizens that deserved protection; they were simply chattel herded through the flood waters of Hurricane Katrina.

As bell hooks states, "to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body."³ For the 9th Ward African-American women in New Orleans, living in the

2. Patricia Hill-Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 14.

3. bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From the Margin to the Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), xvii.

Lower 9th Ward was a daily reminder of their marginality. The women were citizens, but not treated as such; they were women, but were not treated as such; they were mothers, but were not treated as such; they were people, but they were treated like animals and outsiders. Hurricane Katrina exposed the evil that surrounded the lives of the women of the Lower 9th Ward. The women were not included in the political process as they should have been. Instead, the women were attached to racial segregation that controlled them with surveillance.

Looking to the Future

The future of the 9th Ward African-American women in the city of New Orleans can improve if they build appropriate community organization networks whose focus would be to abolish many of the obstacles to their progress. Some of these obstacles include: inequitable education, low wages, lack of access to healthcare, structural unemployment and underemployment, violence against women, inadequate childcare, and race, gender, and class discriminations. These women need to be seen as efficient producers and contributors to the economy and their communities. This is the change required for true and necessary development to occur.

For future work, there is a need for more scholars to explore the condition of Black women and their development in America. Too often, scholars apply development theory and practice to women in developing countries, without thinking about women and people of color who live in developed countries, but who are intentionally left out of the development process. Further, there should be an understanding of the similarities in the experiences of Black women globally within the context of underdevelopment. For

example, developing countries refer to their programs that address the issue of poverty as structural adjustment programs; but in America, those same programs are called public policy programs. The linguistic difference in terminologies masks the similarities in the suffering of poor all over the world. Regardless of what such programs are called, they all contribute to help those who have been left out of the development process.

Furthermore, even though every pillar in Colon's model of underdevelopment was not addressed in the findings of this study, the other pillars that did not emerge as dominating themes (cultural domination, psychological incarceration, spiritual captivity and impoverishment, health and healthcare disparities, homophobia, and ecological and exploitation and disruption) must be recognized as equally important when it comes to having a holistic, multi-dimensional discussion and analysis of the development process for Black women. To keep finding answers to the issues of underdevelopment, this researcher will also in the future investigate those pillars not highlighted in this study. They will be investigated to explore their impact on the lives of Black women who consider themselves economically, racially, and politically underdeveloped.

APPENDIX A

INSTRUMENT: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic

1. How old are you?
2. Are you the head of your household?
3. Are you a mother? Single? Married?
4. What is your highest level of education?

Economic

1. In your opinion, did economics or class status of the residents being evacuated, affect the level of response by the local, state and national governments?
2. Were you employed when Hurricane Katrina occurred?
3. If not employed at present, how long have you been out of work?
4. Were you on any government assistance programs prior to Katrina or following Katrina?
5. What is your current occupation? What was your occupation before Katrina?
6. Has being a Katrina survivor, helped or hindered your ability to gain employment?
7. Describe New Orleans prior to Katrina for African American women and their economic experience?
8. For women still living in New Orleans or returning to New Orleans, how would you describe their economic future?

9. If you have not returned to New Orleans, has the state in which you now live, been receptive to helping you make an adjustment economically, or in terms of living arrangements? If yes, how?

Psychological/Emotional

1. How did you feel when/if you were separated from your family? How did you feel when searching for family members you were separated from?
2. How did you feel after you were/if reunited with your family?
3. How did you feel during the 2005 evacuations for Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana?
4. How did the Katrina experience impact you and your family:
 - a) Economically
 - b) Emotionally
 - c) Physically
 - d) Describe in what ways you (and your family) have recovered after Hurricane Katrina?
5. How did you feel while trying to regain normalcy of your life after Hurricane Katrina?
6. In what ways have you regained normalcy in your life since Hurricane Katrina?
7. What strategies and tactics have you used to regain normalcy in your life since Katrina?
8. How do you feel about the state of African American women in New Orleans five years after Hurricane Katrina?
9. How do you describe your life before and after Katrina as an African American woman living in New Orleans?
10. Describe whether or not during the Katrina experience you felt valued or did not feel valued as a person.
11. What lessons did you learn from the Katrina experience?
12. Discuss race relations in New Orleans for African Americans, but African American women in particular, prior to and following Katrina.

Political

1. How do you think the United States government treated African Americans, particularly women, during this evacuation process? How do you think the State of Louisiana treated African Americans, particularly African American women, during the evacuation process?
2. In your opinion, were African Americans treated similarly to European Americans and others impacted by the Hurricane? If no, why not? If yes, in what ways?
3. Describe your views of how the government responded to Hurricane Katrina.
4. From your perspective was racism a factor in the government's response to people living in your area of New Orleans?
5. How did you feel while waiting for the government to come and "rescue" you? Did you believe that the government would come? If yes, why? If not, why?
6. What are your views on whether or not the government did its best to help you get back to your normal life after Hurricane Katrina?
7. What do you think was the most important action the state, local or national governments could have taken to assist victims during and after the Hurricane?

Geographic

1. In what area of New Orleans did you live prior to Katrina? If you have returned to New Orleans, in what area do you presently live?
2. If you relocated following the Hurricane, where did you go and why? Was the place of relocation your choice or that of the state or national government?
3. Will you return to New Orleans to live? If so, why, if not, why not?
4. Did you live in this area by choice prior to Hurricane Katrina? Did you own your property or live in government sponsored housing or rent housing from a landlord who lived outside the area or a landlord who lived in the area as well?
5. Why did you chose this area in which to live?
6. Describe what you think is most needed in this area for revitalization to occur?

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