



Hurricane Katrina Revealed Many Social and Environmental Problems that Already Existed in New Orleans

What is this research about?

The impact of Hurricane Katrina affected both New Orleans and nearby areas. When studied by researchers, global warming is typically the most discussed issue. However, other experiences from Hurricane Katrina need to be seen. Absent from the discussion often are: 1) the problems caused by environmental damage; and 2) issues around race and class, and how communities affected by environmental damage are situated.

What did the researcher do?

The researcher used her experiences teaching a field course in New Orleans with Ryerson University. She also included her findings developed through research and regular travel to New Orleans. The researcher reviewed both New Orleans and nearby areas that were affected by the hurricane. She focused especially on the St. Bernard Parish, a community south-east of New Orleans.

What did the researcher find?

The researcher found that when Hurricane Katrina hit, many of the communities in New Orleans were vulnerable. The effects of race, class and environmental damage had to be taken into account.

The city of New Orleans was built over natural

What you need to know:

Hurricane Katrina reveals how issues that affect people's lives are brought to our attention after natural disasters. These problems include the impact of damage to the environment, race and class. When the natural landscape is replaced with an artificial one, communities become more vulnerable to events like hurricanes. Racial and class divisions also affect where people choose to live. This plays a role during natural disasters, because certain communities are more affected than others- and in their own ways.

wetlands, which typically help prevent flooding. Their destruction was a result of oil and gas industries who constructed canals and pipelines. As a result, the natural landscape was changed, and artificial levee systems developed around New Orleans. These changes caused Hurricane Katrina's impact to be severe. Today, while many continue to recover, the recent oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has worsened the situation.

The researcher also found that Hurricane Katrina revealed how race and class affected communities after the event. The 1960's saw a "white flight" occur out of the city of New Orleans. That is, a number of people living in the city at the time moved out to the suburbs during this period. A majority of these people were white, leaving with biases against black

New Orleanians. As a result, the city of New Orleans was composed of mostly black residents, while its surrounding suburbs were mostly white. The way communities were divided by space determined who was more affected by hurricane flooding: black New Orleanians. These spaces were also racialized. That is, it affected peoples' assumptions of who lived where in the New Orleans region based off of race.

Because of this, white residents in the St. Bernard Parish were vulnerable after Hurricane Katrina in a distinct way. Both New Orleans and St. Bernard experienced serious flooding that caused massive damage. They also shared issues in: rebuilding, receiving government aid, new but poor infrastructure, and re-zoning. However, St. Bernard had no tourism market or middle and upper class residents. Unlike New Orleans, they were unable to fund a tax base while recovering. Their commercial market suffered, along with growing unemployment. The recent oil spill hurt the situation, because families dependent on the fishing and shrimping industry suffered as well.

How can you use this research?

This research can be used in the area of relief assistance following natural disasters. This includes people like relief aid workers, policy makers, scientists, and activists. The research is also a case study for urban planning and environment protection. Finally, it is relevant for both environmental scientists and policymakers dealing with climate change. It allows environmental destruction to be seen in both local and social contexts.

About the Researcher

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Citation

Gulliver, T. (2010). Broken pieces, shattered lives: The lasting legacy of Hurricane Katrina. In L. A. Sandburg & T. Sandberg (Eds.), *Climate change—Who's carrying the burden? The chilly climates of the global environmental dilemma* (pp. 173-184). Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Available online at <http://bit.ly/1oUI0Ud>

Keywords

Natural disasters, Environmental damage, Race, Class, New Orleans, Oil

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York's Knowledge Mobilization Unit provides services for faculty, graduate students, community and government seeking to maximize the impact of academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice. This summary has been supported by the Office of the Vice-President Research and Innovation at York and project funding from SSHRC and CIHR.

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