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Chapter Three

Reframing Crime in a Disaster

Perception, Reality, and Criminalization of Survival Tactics among African Americans in the Aftermath of Katrina

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Hurricane Katrina resulted in desperate measures by displaced, debilitated, and distressed residents in the Gulf Coast. One such response by many residents to the destructive consequences of Katrina, particularly in the New Orleans area,[2] was their involvement in activities considered to be criminal in nature and defined as crime by legal policy. News media accounts described acts of looting and violence. The research presented in this chapter is based on the context of residents' involvement in criminal activity and their reactions to legal intervention for criminal acts immediately following a natural disaster. Of particular interest is how residents redefined what is "criminal" subsequent to this form of devastation, and considering their perceptions of the government's assistance with survival resources—such as food and water, temporary lodging, and medical attention—that may affect them reframing it as their right to endure as best they can, including looting stores to supply themselves with items necessary for their subsistence. A significant consideration in this analysis is the importance of racial identification and the way race shapes the life experiences of the individuals. These factors impacted African American survivors' perceptions of their actions and the responses by law enforcement officials and other emergency workers toward African Americans in the immediate aftermath of the storm and in the temporary sheltering of the evacuees.

Largely, the purpose of this study was to tease out the perpetuation of racially based stereotypes of African Americans as related to crime, particularly since

the media perpetuate these stereotypes.[3] Indeed, prior research has found that perceptions of crime among the general public are highly shaped or produced by information fed by many forms of media.[4] Because of these representations, particularly in the aftermath of Katrina and during the ensuing chaos in New Orleans that was incessantly presented on television news programs and in news print photography, giving voice to the evacuees who found themselves engaging in behaviors that would typically be deemed illegal was another purpose of this project. Interviews were primarily exploratory in nature, but queries were geared toward the questions sought to be answered through this research. That is, (1) When faced with the devastation of a natural disaster, how is crime reframed, redefined, and restructured among those committing criminal acts? and (2) How are these behaviors and perceptions affected by the participants' race/ethnicity and socioeconomic statuses, and their perceptions of how government officials respond to them based on these categories?

The contribution of the present study will be on the impact of environmental factors and race-based typecasting affecting criminality, rates of crime, and the ensuing response of official agencies. As Young writes:

> We pretty much ignore the involvement of Whites in run-of-the-mill crimes and in white collar crimes. It is almost as though White offenders are homogenized. Their behavior is viewed less as crime and more as unfortunate deviance, something that everyone engages in from time to time. This is behavior that is not really worthy of vilification. The harm and costs are downplayed. Thus, the criminality of Whites is either ignored or associated with behaviors that are barely criminal whereas the criminality of Blacks and Black criminals become the crime problem.[5]

The present study adds not only to the research literature on mainstream crime-causation theories, but, more specifically, to a critical theory of crime causation and control. Critical theories on crime and criminal law (including feminist criminology, critical race theory, critical race feminist theory, and Black feminist criminology[6]) place the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status at the center of any analysis on criminal activity and responses by crime-processing system representatives. Accordingly, this project significantly aids in strengthening this scarcity in the criminology research.

STUDY SETTING

The original proposed setting for conducting the interviews and engaging in observation in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina was the city of

New Orleans. It was imperative that this research was to be performed as soon as possible in order to capture residents' close to real-time engagement in committing legally offensive and restricted behaviors in the context of a major catastrophe. However, as the days multiplied after the storm arrived to the Gulf Coast, the majority of New Orleans residents had been evacuated and access was essentially restricted to government officials and others aiding in the relief efforts. As such, it was deemed that it was the people my research assistant and I wished to speak with, not the city we wished to see, so the setting was changed to Baton Rouge, where we would spend time at a shelter interviewing evacuees. By September 7, 2005, I had received approval from the human subjects research committee at the University of Colorado at Boulder and secured funding for the project from the Quick Response Program of the Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder. These funds are made available by the National Science Foundation and provided for social and behavioral scientists to quickly enter the field to conduct research within days or weeks of a natural disaster. The main research setting, we visited during September 15–17, 2005, was at the Baton Rouge River Center, where a temporary shelter had been set up to house Katrina evacuees. During our visit we received various accounts of the number of residents in the makeshift shelter, which ranged between 1,500 and 1,800 inhabitants housed, who resided in two large open areas furnished with cots.

A qualitative approach to answer the research questions provided a framework for a more exploratory and in-depth examination of the subject. Data were gathered from interviews with shelter residents, most of whom had resided in New Orleans at the time of the storm, and through participant observation within and around the shelter. Respondents were located by my research assistant and me immersing ourselves in areas of the study site where survivors were congregated and "public" access was allowed. In general, a "cold-calling" method was used, where individuals were approached in communal areas, engaged in a conversation about survival skills and/or criminal activity in light of the disaster, and ultimately asked if they would be interested in participating in a study on the subject. When potential interviewees agreed to be participants in the study, they were assured of (a) their anonymity, (b) that no identifying data were recorded, and (c) that only demographic information was documented. Using this format also allowed a speedy approval from the human subjects research committee, as it was important for us to enter the field as soon as possible. Thirty-six interviews were completed with adult (at least eighteen years old) evacuees. Of these, about two-thirds (n = 23) were African American men. Another two participants were African American women. The remainder of the sample was White, Latino, or Pacific Islander, which included five women and six men. Interestingly, I personally

interviewed seventeen of the twenty-three Black men. While I approached seven of these men, the remaining ten interviewees approached me. Oftentimes, they approached to inquire who I was and what I was doing, since the other residents of the shelter and the shelter volunteers were recognizable to these men as *belonging* in the shelter. This chapter analyzes only the interviews conducted with the twenty-three African American men and the two African American women.

FINDINGS

Prior to the devastation caused by Katrina, many of the respondents considered their position in U.S. society as one that is situated at the lower ranks of the social hierarchy. They believed their life chances of being African Americans and *poor* African Americans positioned them to be unimportant, devalued, or undervalued, and a burden to society (particularly when in need of government assistance in the form of finances and housing). Respondents regularly shared stories of the racism they have experienced and witnessed throughout their lives. A thirty-seven-year-old male participant stated, "Chances are limited because of skin color. . . Whites over Blacks." Similarly, a forty-eight-year-old male respondent shared his take on racism when asked, "Do you think people in New Orleans were treated differently because of race or skin tone before the hurricane?" He responded with a disdainful comment because of the seeming ignorance of my comment: "You know it's a racist town! . . . They don't want us niggas around their neighborhoods."

The respondents in this study believed that because of their position in society as African Americans, the feeling that they are not supported and trusted by others (i.e., Whites) in society, and their inability to leave New Orleans after the effects of Katrina ravished the city, that they were left to care for themselves using any means necessary. A thirty-five-year-old respondent spoke of the desperation she witnessed among New Orleans residents, recounting that "as soon as they dropped food from the helicopters, people were snatching it up and not leaving any for anyone else." Accordingly, the respondents did indeed reframe acts of "looting" as *lawful*. As was evident in news media reports concerning these acts, individuals and groups seemed to rest on one of two sides of the debate about the utility of the looting that took place in the aftermath of Katrina, and may have further qualified their assessment of the acts by deeming what was allowed to be taken (e.g., food and water) and what was not allowed to be taken (e.g., guns and luxury items such as televisions and stereos). A twenty-six-year-old male eloquently summarized the schism among the U.S. citizenry regarding the subject of culpability for local, state, and federal governments and survivors ensnared in the hurricane-ravaged city of New Orleans:

> But like I told you, it's a give and go situation. It's a thin line between good and bad. Some people look at the government as the bad guys, some people look at the government as the good guys. Some people look at the pillagers as the bad guys, and some people look at the pillagers as the good guys. It depends on what side of the fence you are standing on.

One respondent, a thirty-five-year-old female, expressed her feelings during the rescue efforts of those trapped in New Orleans: "I felt like an outcast in the Convention Center and in the Superdome. When we went to the shelter in Cleborn, Texas, I finally felt like an American, like a citizen." Though the respondents in this study had been rescued or escaped from New Orleans and were being housed in the Baton Rouge shelter, they continued to face the burden of their racial status. Much of this was based on the rumors that emanated in the days following Katrina's landfall and the existing, pre-Katrina stereotypes about African Americans, particularly that of the fallacy of the "criminalblackman."[7] As Rome writes, "Mass media have played and will continue to play a crucial role in the way white Americans perceive African Americans. As a result of the overwhelming media focus on crime, drug use, gang violence, and other forms of antisocial behavior among African Americans, the media have fostered distorted and insidious public perceptions of African Americans."[8] Such beliefs that easily lead many to view "criminal" simultaneously with "African American man," seemingly affected the procedures and management of the temporary shelter.

For each of the aforementioned concerns, I provide a look into (a) the respondents' perceptions of official response by government agencies and agents to provide assistance, (b) the respondents' descriptions and reflections on the so-called illegal acts that took place after Katrina passed, and (c) the management of the shelter at the Baton Rouge River Center and the respondents' insights about their treatment.

Perceptions of Official Response to Assist

Many of the respondents believed the local, state, and federal government officials and the relevant agencies could have been swifter and more prudent in their response to assisting those who remained in New Orleans during and after Katrina (whether by choice, by circumstance, or by incapability). This is

evident in a sampling of several of the respondents' reflections on their experiences of being in New Orleans after the storm:

> They responded terribly.
>
> They just left them [*sic*] there to die.
>
> It was a slow response.
>
> It was like a Third World country.
>
> I felt like some kind of cannibal. They lied and were arguing instead of saving people.
>
> They wasn't there. We didn't have no security.
>
> It reminded me of the old days when there was no law, no order . . . At the Superdome the police were afraid to come to the crowd.

Further, the respondents were asked about the police response specifically and in reference to their trust of law enforcement officials before and after Katrina. Three male interviewees responded with the following:

> *Never* trusted them. When I was a little boy I used to kick them!
>
> I didn't trust the police much before. . . that hasn't changed.
>
> No, I don't trust those fuckers!

A debate among politicians, stakeholders, academicians, and laypeople attempted to promote that the assistance, or lack thereof, afforded to individuals trapped in New Orleans was either color-blind or racist. The color-blind outlook makes the assumption that any paucity in government agencies aiding people with few means to leave the city prior to Katrina's wrath was due simply to government incompetence or lack of compassion, not to any blatant racially biased agenda that intimated that African Americans (the majority of the city's population at the time of Katrina) should be left in the city to perish because of White government officials' prejudices. Whether or not any government inaction was influenced by racist ideology, what is clear is that many of the respondents believed slow or poor official response to be racially motivated. A fifty-four-year-old male participant stated because of the large number of Blacks in the city at the time Katrina hit, "I think that's why they were slow to respond. If it was 70 percent White, they would have responded quicker." One of the other respondents, a thirty-five-year-old woman, reflected, "We have fifty states and every one [of the evacuees] should be placed right now. We don't have to live like this. But since we are Black and poor White trash, they forget about us." In ruminating about the issues of

racism in the United States and the official response to Black residents of New Orleans, a fifty-five-year-old male respondent declared, "I done seen a lot of that [racism] in my life. I'm not really surprised [they didn't respond sooner]. That's what we get for being who we are. When this dies down, we will still be Black."

The Acts

The descriptions of the acts that would generally be considered illegal and criminal varied from collecting food, water, dry and clean clothes, and baby diapers (that is, items considered to be essential for survival) to taking items such as liquor, cigarettes, and electronics (that is, items often deemed as *non*essential). A thirty-five-year-old woman described her experiences with securing merchandise: "We had to break into the Riverwalk[9] to get ice and water, to get shoes, to get clothes, to get socks. We had to broke [*sic*] into Bath and Body Works and took soap." As can be gleaned from this respondent's use of the phrase "had to," the language used by the evacuees aided in leading them to reframe and justify their acts. Interestingly, a couple participants referred to their behaviors in a manner that would be indicative of running errands on an ordinary day, as demonstrated by a fifty-four-year-old male respondent when he replied, "I went to pick up some stuff."

In addition, respondents and other survivors they spoke of either engaged in breaking into and entering a store to secure goods—like the aforementioned account—or entering a store after it had already been breached. For example, a thirty-seven-year-old male reported, "There was a bunch of us [survivors] and the police broke into Wal-Mart and said, 'Go get what you want.'" A similar story of police assistance in securing food was relayed by a forty-seven-year-old man:

> People were dying of thirst. Drinking hot beer. Drinking hot water. With no generator, no power, no water, no electricity . . . the food was spoiling. The police was letting them in to get what they want. Shopping carts full, buggies full of liquor, cigarettes, drugs, pharmacies [*sic*], cold medicine. They didn't give a fuck. Whatever a person needed, they went in and take it. 'Cause they didn't care.

One participant tells the story of crossing paths with a neighbor in the chaos of the aftermath of Katrina. When the participant asked his neighbor which stores were open for business the neighbor replied, "*All* the stores are open!" In another instance, a fifty-year-old female respondent spoke of a store owner's generosity: "They had one decent man that opened up his store and told them to take whatever they want. 'Go ahead and take what you want.' The meat was no good then, after three days. The only thing I had gotten from

there was water. I already had canned goods at home." This respondent believed that all the stores in the area should have employed such benevolence.

Limitations on Behaviors

As previously described, some respondents physically broke into stores, while others entered stores that had already been broken into or otherwise opened (for instance, doors and windows unsealed or broken by the force of the flood waters). However, a few respondents deliberately entered only those stores that were already accessible, as reported by a forty-eight-year-old male evacuee: "I didn't break into the stores. That's for them young fools."

While some of the respondents seized the opportunity to have items they lost because of the flooding or merchandise they could not otherwise afford (that is, "luxury" items), many respondents placed limitations on the materials they acquired. This is evident in the statement, "I didn't take beer, liquor, stereo equipment" (fifty-four-year-old male) and this twenty-six-year-old man's description of the behaviors among others:

> Some people were breaking in stores because they needed it. . .They needed water. They needed some food to eat. . .[But] some people wasn't even taking food, wasn't even taking stuff that they could survive off of. They taking cigarettes. They taking DVDs. What the hell you going to do with a DVD?

Some of these respondents were clearly bothered by the behaviors of other survivors and believed everyone should be limiting the types of items taken or, as depicted in the following account, limiting the number of items taken: "People turned into scavengers. Another lady had a young baby and we tried to steal him some Pampers[10] but couldn't. People should only take one and leave some for others. But people were walking out with their arms full."

Justification for Behaviors

Even though there was variance among the sample regarding what should or should not have been taken, as expected, a common theme among respondents regarding the otherwise illegal behavior of "stealing" or "looting" was that these behaviors were reframed as *survival tactics*. A sampling of the comments to the question (or similar question), "Why did you do what you did?" were:

> How was I to survive?
>
> Basically, we did what we needed to do.
>
> Even though there was dumb, ignorancy [*sic*], that was a survival issue.
>
> I saw it as a survival tactic. We were desperate people.
>
> I try to be a law-abiding citizen, obey the laws. I didn't like it . . . It was wrong, but I had to survive.
>
> People was left without a choice. [The government] didn't care. Women with babies. . .what were they supposed to do?

The act of police officers breaking into stores and otherwise aiding New Orleans residents in attaining sustenance—as illustrated previously—only further justified the respondents' actions, as depicted in a twenty-seven-year-old male respondent's comment, "I don't consider them looters. You gonna throw it out anyway. I call it borrowing or helping in a time of need. If the police were stealin' how they gonna say we're looters?"

A twenty-six-year-old male participant elaborated on this concept of committing classically unlawful acts because of desperation by providing scenarios in his response:

> Just because a person was stealing this and doing that and getting all this stuff, doesn't mean that they wasn't out there helping somebody . . . Some people didn't have no family outside of New Orleans. Some people didn't have no people to check on them. Some of the elderly didn't have nobody to check on them. You know if your family don't know the means to get in contact with somebody—with 25 million, 25 thousand, 50 thousand trying to get in touch with a person; so you're on hold and you can't get through—what would you do? Would you steal a car and go get your family member? Or would you sit there and say, "Well, I'm not going to steal this car 'cause it's a bad thing and I want to do the right thing. And it's a bad thing to steal this car, but ain't nobody around, and I see these keys and I know where they are at, and I know I can get to them and I know it got a full tank of gas. And I know the water ain't too too bad where my family member is. I know that I could get through there"? So what kind of decision do I make as a person, as a human being, trying to keep my morals? Do I keep my morals and stick to my guns? Or do I put it in my own hands and is that God making the way?

Undoubtedly, many respondents demonstrated or outwardly expressed remorse for their actions. This thirty-five-year-old female spoke of her feelings concerning the acts she committed in the pandemonium that ensued from Katrina:

> I feel degraded. It's nothing to be proud of but I had to survive. It was either that or die. It was either that or be funky. I didn't want to be in those wet, damp clothes all day. I really don't feel good about it at all. And in the future, if I could, I would pay back every last penny for the stuff I took . . . Those were the choices we had. Those were the options we had. We had to go in Winn-Dixie

> and steal food to eat. We had to steal food so we could eat, like those in Iraq who are fighting for freedom.

Shelter Treatment

An unanticipated finding of this study was the way in which the temporary shelter was being operated and the resulting effect on the evacuees being housed there. Housing a large number of people in only two large sleeping areas of a facility not intentionally designed for sheltering people in need may indeed warrant security. This is evident in the thirty-five-year-old woman's response that "You don't know who is sleeping next to you. It's hard to live like that." However, the level of safety measures and the inconsistency in who faced security screening inclined me and the residents to believe these operations were likely based on racially-motivated biases. A forty-eight-year-old male participant reasoned, "It's racist in the way they sheltered us. I saw on the news Whites with barbeques. [In here,] it's the White trash of the White folks who got caught up because they were in a poor neighborhood." In particular, these biases were likely generated from the inordinate number of rumors spread after Katrina (many of which were later found to be untrue[11]) and the pre-existing stereotype of African Americans as a group to fear because of their violent and otherwise criminal tendencies.

Safety Measures

Entrance into the shelter was gained through one door, located at the front of the Baton Rouge River Center. The entrances were controlled by National Guard soldiers, most of whom were men. Each entrant was to pass through a free-standing metal detector and had to have her or his bags physically searched by a National Guard soldier. If an individual continued to trigger the metal detector, she or he was scanned with a hand-held metal detector to deem the entrant was not carrying anything that would be harmful to those inside the shelter (that is, contraband). Each of the National Guard members was armed with a rifle, which connected to a strap and draped over his or her chest or back, and a handgun, which was stored in a hip holster. Many of the respondents spoke of the National Guard's presence at the shelter without prompting, while others were asked questions such as, "Why is the National Guard here?" A forty-eight-year-old male respondent simply replied to this question with, "They here for us niggas!" This was the general sentiment among the African American respondents, that the Guard was there to maintain control over Black evacuees, many from New Orleans.

The secure measures in place affected the speed of being able to enter the facility. As it was a non-smoking building, residents had to leave the enclosed area to smoke cigarettes, but typically had difficulty withstanding the high temperatures outside; therefore there was a lot of movement in and out of the center. Several respondents commented, with disdain, on this process, including the fifty-year-old female respondent:

> Black refugees wait in line day in and day out. Look at the line. I think everyone should just go in. What do you need to be searched for every day? You know the people coming in there everyday. We ain't got not weapons, we ain't got no guns. It don't make no sense. The line is way down the street. You can spend the whole night waiting in line. . . Everybody going in the shelter. The same people come out, the same people coming in—except the people coming in on the bus [who haven't been here all day]. I don't understand that. If they've been there [in the shelter] they have tags[12] on; let them on in.

This same respondent was bothered by the restrictions placed on the items that could be taken into the facility, including the prohibition of alcohol, drugs, and cameras. She stated, "They don't want people to take pictures to see how it really is and what's going on. I have a camera in the car." During our time at the shelter, a large number of news media representatives were present. In reference to a photojournalist taking pictures prior to a presidential address,[13] the respondent continued, "See that lady? See! [And] they make me keep [my camera] in the car."

Another set of National Guard soldiers patrolled the perimeter of the building, carrying rifles in front of them, as opposed to the soldiers at the entrance check-in, who hung their rifles on their backs. Between these patrolling soldiers and those inside the entrance to the building, several of the respondents commented on the level of weaponry, the way it made the residents feel, and the implications of such a stance by the National Guard:

> I'm kind of nervous that the National Guard are around with AK-47s. And they wonder how kids get exposed to guns!
>
> They don't need to have M16s with children all around here.
>
> If [the National Guard] can't control [the shelter and the evacuees], they are going to start shooting. They don't have to have the big shotguns. They don't have to be standing in there with them. What, them telling me I'm violent? If they were really going to protect us, they should have this whole place surrounded. I come to the door and I'm greeted with a shotgun . . . It's just the guns that throw the whole thing off. Instead of them guarding the facility, they are ready to shoot anytime.

Assistance by Way of Captivity

An extension of the comments shared in the previous section highlights the multiple references to the shelter feeling as though it was a jail or prison as opposed to a place to assist law-abiding citizens who had been displaced from their homes due to a natural disaster. Comparisons made between criminal incarceration and disaster relief sheltering were based on personal experiences of the respondents having served time in prison and/or jail or on what they believed jail or prison life was like.

> It reminds me of being in jail . . . people walking around with the guns.
>
> It's like I'm back in jail all over again.
>
> We may be refugees, but we're not prisoners. We may be homeless, but we're not prisoners.
>
> Red Cross got beaucoup [a lot of] money. But we don't get three hot meals in here a day. You get three hot meals in a penitentiary. You get three hot meals in a jail. Why not here? And you're free.

The fifty-year-old female respondent continued on from her comments about the use of weapons by the National Guard monitoring the facility by, like the respondents' comments above, equating their operations with prison life:

> People are getting frustrated and tired . . . I think [the National Guard] are trying to see if anybody has drugs on them. Let [the residents] in; I don't understand that. Why should you go through the same thing everyday that you've been here? . . . We don't have no weapons on us. I don't have no weapons on me. We are not prisoners, but they are treating us like prisoners. Just because we're homeless, don't treat us like prisoners.

CONCLUSION

This chapter analyzed in-depth interviews conducted with Katrina evacuees and observations made at the Baton Rouge River Center approximately two weeks after the disaster. It offered evidence for the argument that New Orleans residents' survival tactics and the government's methods in aiding the evacuees were laden with racialized biases and stereotypes. These perceptions indisputably led to the unremitting criminalization of many African American evacuees. Admittedly, though many New Orleans survivors may have been engaged in acts that would generally be deemed illegal, this chapter argued that it is imperative to judiciously consider the types of acts and motivations for committing them (e.g., survival).

Getting individuals to disclose their involvement in criminal activity, especially acts that would not otherwise likely be discovered by police, is generally a difficult task. However, as witnessed by television news video clips on criminal activity (e.g., looting) engaged in by Katrina survivors, the rampant involvement in such activity among scores of people had, at least for the time being, ostensibly *standardized* the conduct. This may have enabled respondents to be more forthright about their so-called unlawful involvement than would otherwise be possible.

Indeed, there was alternative labeling of the "criminal activity" participated in by the respondents or by those they witnessed participating in these behaviors. As looting activities were continuously replayed in news outlets, African Americans were typecast as "criminal" and treated accordingly when they arrived at some shelters. Undoubtedly, these conditions are based on the life chances afforded African Americans in the United States. As Fishman argues, "We need to think seriously about the reality of life in America—a reality in which race strongly interjects itself into the images that whites and blacks hold of one another. In turn, race accentuates the sting of everyday oppression, as well as the sting of the oppression that colors the criminal justice system's differential treatment of blacks."[14]

Perceptions *are* important both for *and* about African Americans. Without a doubt, there are crime-related stereotypes when considering Black people and the poor. Rome suggests that "stereotyping African Americans as criminals feeds into denials of racism, with the parallel assumption that any problems faced by African Americans (or Hispanic Americans, American Indians, or Asian Americans) are their own fault."[15] The perpetuation of racial stereotypes often affects assistance afforded African Americans, whether it is in a natural disaster or in daily life in the United States.

Certainly, because of the impact of the disaster, emergency workers, including law enforcement officials, were confronted with a lack of resources and workforce to deal with crime, while simultaneously dealing with the effects of the disaster. However, among many New Orleans African American survivors of Katrina, there was a continued distrust of the police and criminal justice practices, which was evident prior to Katrina and was confirmed and exacerbated by police officer inaction and *their* (the officers') "survival tactics" during and after the storm. Further, respondents in the study also demonstrated the continued distrust by many African Americans of the government's desire to assist poor, Black people, and a continued distrust that (White) society's (pessimistic) beliefs about Black people will change.

Recommendations made to improve disaster policy should center on how to manage criminal activity in the aftermath as based on the offenders' perceptions of law enforcement intervention, their motivations for engaging in

such behavior, and the nature and extent of the types of criminal activity more likely to be engaged in after a disaster. The practical benefits of the outcome of this study insist that aid by government entities must more adequately address crime-related acts following disastrous events. As with other disaster relief efforts, and what has already been advised by many, contingency plans must be in place to assist with evacuating individuals with few means to leave the area expected to be affected. By confronting this issue beforehand, much of the problem of "looting" and other criminal activity in the aftermath of a natural disaster will be immaterial. Effectively evacuating those (or at least a good portion of those) in impending danger will eliminate the *need* for individuals to resort to any means necessary to survive.

In the assistance provided to survivors in the aftermath of natural disasters, deferring to sociological implications is imperative. Disaster relief agents and agencies must necessarily take into account the stratified cultural, racial, and structural society in which we live within the United States. Seriously taking such heterogeneity and inequality into consideration should aid in the development and implementation of policies that are not focused on longstanding racialized and classed stereotypes and rumors.

NOTES

1. This chapter is based on a study, "Reframing Crime: Race, Gender, Class, Criminality, and Enforcement of Laws in a Natural Disaster," funded by the Natural Hazards Center, Institute of Behavioral Sciences, University of Colorado at Boulder, with funds contributed by the National Science Foundation.

2. While similar acts took place in other cities, like in Biloxi, Mississippi, the majority of the news media reports focused on the deviant behaviors of New Orleans residents.

3. Laura T. Fishman, "The Black Bogeyman and White Self-Righteousness," in *Images of Color, Images of Crime: Readings*, 3rd ed., eds. Coramae Richey Mann, Marjorie S. Zatz, and Nancy Rodriguez (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 2006), 197–211.

4. Dennis M. Rome, "The Social Construction of the African American Criminal Stereotype," in *Images of Color, Images of Crime: Readings*, eds. Coramae Richey Mann, Marjorie S. Zatz, and Nancy Rodriguez, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 2006), 83.

5. Vernetta Young, "Demythologizing the 'Criminalblackman': The Carnival Mirror," in *The Many Colors of Crime: Inequalities of Race, Ethnicity, and Crime in America*, eds. Ruth D. Peterson, Lauren J. Krivo, and John Hagan (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 65.

6. For an overview of Black feminist criminology, in particular, see "An Argument for Black Feminist Criminology: Understanding African American Women's Experiences with Intimate Partner Abuse Using an Integrated Approach," *Feminist Criminology* 1, no. 2 (April 2006): 106–24.

7. Katheryn Russell, *The Color of Crime: Racial Hoaxes, White Fear, Black Protectionism, Police Harassment, and Other Microaggressions* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

8. Rome, "The Social Construction of the African American Criminal Stereotype," 78.

9. The Riverwalk Marketplace is a shopping and dining center connected to the convention center.

10. A general term used for diapers is referring to this specific diaper brand name.

11. Susannah Rosenblatt and James Rainey, "Katrina Rumors," *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 2005.

12. Each evacuee resident of the shelter was fitted with a brightly-colored wristband, used to identify those being serviced in the shelter.

13. An increased number of reporters and photographers were at the shelter before, during, and after President George W. Bush's televised address from New Orleans on the evening of September 15, 2005.

14. Fishman, "The Black Bogeyman and White Self-Righteousness," 208.

15. Rome, "The Social Construction of the African American Criminal Stereotype," 85.