

Bunker Hill Community College

Boston, Massachusetts 02129

KATRINA: WHAT THE HURRICANE TEACHES US ABOUT RACE, CLASS, AND POWER IN AMERICA 2006-2007

Instructor: Stephen E. Slaner, Ed.D.

Class meets _____ from ___ to ___, Room _____, main campus. Office hours: to be arranged. E-mail address: steveslaner@yahoo.com. Phone number: (617) 469-3643.

Course Description

Like 9/11, Hurricane Katrina has become part of our national consciousness. We all know, or think we know, what happened in New Orleans in September 2005. But do we know *why* it happened? And are we aware of the consequences of the official mode of thinking about Katrina? The official view is that it was a once-in-a-lifetime natural disaster, and that surviving Katrina was a matter of individual preparedness and initiative. In fact, however, there is a broad consensus that Katrina was a natural disaster made vastly worse by an absence of public planning and responsibility. Even its "natural" quality was compounded by the man-made contribution to global warming, which is responsible for a greater incidence and severity of hurricanes. Not only that, but it was no accident that the great majority of people in the Superdome and other places of refuge were poor and black, which may explain why the response to this disaster was very different from the response to 9/11. So what does Katrina tell us about race, class, and power in America? That is the question this course attempts to answer.

Required Texts

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

Michael Zweig (ed.), *What's Class Got to Do with It? American Society in the Twenty-First Century*. Ithaca, New York: ILR Press, 2004.

James Lardner & David Smith (eds.), *Inequality Matters: The Growing Economic Divide in America and its Poisonous Consequences*. New York: The New Press, 2005.

Le Monde Diplomatique, *Planet in Peril: An Atlas of Current Threats to People and the Environment*. Paris: United Nations Environment Program, 2006.

Videos

"General Assignment." Talk by Michael Eric Dyson, C-SPAN, March 19, 2006.

"In His Own Words." Compilation of NBC News footage by Brian Williams of Hurricane Katrina. Sundance Channel, October 27, 2005.

"Eyes of the Storm: Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: The Photographic Story." C-SPAN, April 23, 2006.

"Katrina: A Health Disaster." Discovery Times Channel. March 2006.

"Too Hot Not to Handle." Home Box Office film about global warming. April 2006.

"Nickel and Dime in America." Investigative Reports, A&E Channel. August 26, 2002.

"The Spectre of Hope." Discussion between John Berger & Sebastiao Salgado. First Run Films, 2001.

"Class Dismissed: How TV Frames the Working Class." Media Education Foundation, 2005.

Supplementary Papers

Andrew Hacker, "The Rich and Everyone Else," *The New York Review of Books* LIII(9), May 25, 2006, pp. 16-19.

Dalton Conley, "Getting into the Black: Race, Wealth, and Public Policy." *Political Science Quarterly* 114(4), 1999-2000, pp. 595-614.

"The Feminization of Poverty." *Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st*

Century. June 5-9, 2000.

"The Feminization of Poverty." International Labor Organization. October 17, 1996.

"Doubly Divided: The Racial Wealth Gap." United for a Fair Economy.

"The New American Economy: A Rising Tide that Lifts Only Yachts." Century Foundation.

Department of Homeland Security, "A Performance Review of FEMA's Disaster Management Activities in Response to Hurricane Katrina." Office of Inspections & Special Reviews, March 2006.

Understanding Katrina: Perspectives from the Social Sciences (SSRC).

David Alexander, "Symbolic and Practical Interpretations of the Hurricane Katrina Disaster in New Orleans."

Greg Bankoff, "The Tale of the Three Pigs: Taking Another Look at Vulnerability in the Light of the Indian Ocean Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina."

Lee Clarke, "Worst Case Katrina."

Susan L. Cutter, "The Geography of Social Vulnerability: Race, Class, and Catastrophe."

Alex de Waal, "An Imperfect Storm: Narratives of Calamity in a Liberal-Technocratic Age."

Virginia Dominguez, "Seeing and Not Seeing: Complicity in Surprise."

Russell Dynes et al., "Finding and Framing Katrina: The Social Construction of Disaster."

Elaine Enarson, "Women and Girls Last? Averting the Second Post-Katrina Disaster."

Scott Frickel, "Our Toxic Gumbo: Recipe for a Politics of Environmental Knowledge."

Elizabeth Fussell, "Leaving New Orleans: Social Stratification, Networks, and Hurricane Evacuation."

Nils Gilman, "What Katrina Teaches about the Meaning of Racism."

Stephen Graham, "Cities Under Siege: Katrina and the Politics of Metropolitan America."

Jeanne S. Hurlbert et al., "Bridges Over Troubled Waters: What Are the Optimal Networks for Katrina's Victims?"

Stephen Jackson, "Un/natural Disasters, Here and There."

James M. Jasper, "Political Floodwaters."

Sarah Kaufman, "The Criminalization of New Orleanians in Katrina's Wake."

Monica Krause, "New Orleans: The Public Sphere of the Disaster."

Andrew Lakoff, "From Disaster to Catastrophe: The Limits of Preparedness."

Stephen Lukes, "Questions About Power: Lessons from the Louisiana Hurricane."

James K. Mitchell, "Empowering Knowledge: A Modest Proposal for a Broader Social Science Research Agenda in the Wake of Katrina."

Harvey Molotch, "Death on the Roof: Race and Bureaucratic Failure."

Matthew Mulcahy, "Hurricanes, Poverty, and Vulnerability: An Historical Perspective."

Charles Perrow, "Using Organizations: The Case of FEMA."

E.L. Quarantelli, "Catastrophes Are Different from Disasters: Some Implications for Crisis Planning and Managing Drawn from Katrina."

Joseph Scanlon, "Two Cities, Two Evacuations: Some Thoughts on Moving People Out."

Neil Smith, "There's No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster."

Marita Sturken, "Weather Media and Homeland Security: Selling Preparedness in a Volatile World."

Julie Sze, "Toxic Soup Redux: Why Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Matter After Katrina."

Kathleen Tierney, "The Red Pill."

Tricia Wachtendorf et al., "Improvising Disaster in the City of Jazz: Organizational Response to Hurricane Katrina."

Supplementary Papers on 9-11

Walter A. Davis, "Death's Dream Kingdom," *CounterPunch* (website), January 6, 2003.

Walter A. Davis, "Living in Death's Dream Kingdom," *CounterPunch* (website), September 6, 2003.

Book Excerpts

C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (1956); and G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America?* (1967).

Teaching Procedures

The course will utilize a lecture/discussion format, with class participation encouraged to the fullest extent possible. Students' questions, comments, interpretations, and discussions are central to the course. Some audio-visual materials (films and videotapes) will be used, and the required texts will be supplemented from time to time by short essays.

Instructional Objectives

Students will be expected to (1) acquire a general understanding of the main themes of the course as specified above, (2) apply their understanding by doing a brief critical review (see course requirements below), and (3) attempt to express themselves in writing with as much conceptual and stylistic clarity as possible. The instructor will be available to work with students on their writing, as the development of good writing skills is essential to doing well in college. In addition, it is hoped that students will (4) develop critical thinking skills which they can use to analyze particular propositions or theories about race, class, and power in America.

Basis for Student Grading

There will be a take-home mid-term essay examination of around four (4) typed pages (25%), a take-home final essay examination of around eight (8) typed pages (50%), and an in-class presentation based on a critical review of three papers (see list above) of around six (6) typed pages (25%). Other class participation will be factored in if it is to the student's advantage. **NOTE:** Students are strongly encouraged to turn in *rough drafts* of their essays in order to receive feedback from the instructor. Also, it is *very important* to resist the temptation to incorporate material from the Internet or other sources without proper attribution. Students should consult with the instructor if they are uncertain as to how to cite correctly.

Attendance Policy

High achievement in a college-level course requires regular attendance as well as a commitment to reading the assigned material. Students who miss more than three classes may be subject to a grade penalty. In any event, if a student has to be absent due to illness, work, or personal emergency, she or he should contact the instructor and so advise him. Students who know they will be out of class for three or more consecutive sessions should notify the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs. Students who do not attend the class meetings for the first four weeks of the course will be withdrawn and will receive a grade of NA. *STUDENTS CONSIDERING WITHDRAWING FROM THE COURSE MUST DO SO BY THE WITHDRAWAL DEADLINE TO AVOID RECEIVING AN F.*

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

<u>Week</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings/*Videos</u>
Week 1	What happened in New Orleans on 8/29/05?	Dyson, Ch. 4-5 *"In His Own Words" *"Eyes of the Storm"
Week 2	Race and Poverty in the Aftermath of Katrina	Dyson, Ch. 1-3 *"General Assignment" *"Katrina: A Health Disaster"
Week 3	Race and Poverty in America	Zweig, Part I *"Nickel and Dimed in America"
Week 4	Race and Poverty in America	Dyson, Ch. 6-8
Week 5	Class and Globalization	Zweig, Part II *"The Spectre of Hope"
Week 6	Class and Working People	Zweig, Part III Dyson, Ch. 9-10

Week 7	The Destruction of the Natural Environment	Planet in Peril *"Too Hot Not to Handle"
Week 8	The Destruction of the Natural Environment	SSRC Papers (excerpts)
	Take-home mid-term examination due	
Week 9	Class in the Media	*"Class Dismissed"
Week 10	Power in America	Mills and Domhoff (excerpts)
Week 11	Power in America	SSRC Papers (excerpts)
Week 12	Power and Inequality	Lardner & Smith, Part One
Week 13	Power and Inequality	Lardner & Smith, Part Two
Week 14	Power and Inequality	Lardner & Smith, Part Three
Week 15	Where Do We Go From Here?	SSRC Papers (excerpts)
	Take-home final examination due last class	