FOREWORD

In October 2006, I joined members of the Social Science Research Council Research Network on Persons Displaced by Hurricane Katrina on a site visit to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast to view the impact of the storm and floods. As someone who had first become acquainted with the project through an initial meeting convened by Jacquelyn Litt and Kai Erikson in August 2006, I was eager to do whatever I could to encourage and support systematic and principled explorations into the lives and experiences of people who had been directly affected by this disaster, as well as to learn as much as I could about what was being and had been done up to that point.

That trip was a deeply moving one for all of us. For those who had begun to work with displaced families now living in new and unfamiliar communities, it provided context and a better understanding both of what people had lost and what remained. One year later the extent of the devastation was still vast, and the desolation in many areas was eerie. Among the many memorable experiences was a visit to a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailer camp in which one member of the group, Rachel E. Luft, a faculty member at the University of New Orleans, was living. As Rachel showed us the small and cramped living quarters, she asked us to notice the smell. She told us that all of the trailers reeked of formaldehyde and that she kept her windows open so that she was always getting fresh air—even in the heat. She made a wry remark about how it felt like a double assault; first they were displaced, then they returned only to be buried alive in toxic FEMA trailers. About six months later, the issue of formaldehyde in FEMA trailers made national news and created quite a controversy. But Rachel, like so many others who were living the experience of the hurricane, flood, displacement, and relocation, knew the truths of this story long before state and federal officials acknowledged it. This book is about those kinds of truths: truths that arise as people recount and share their lived experiences of having their home and family moorings blown away, flooded out, and scattered across the country; truths that are revealed as people are trying to resettle in new communities or return to the old ones.

The organization of this edited collection reflects the assertion made in Lynn Weber and Lori Peek's introduction: Most of the contributors, when asked how they came to do this work, said, "It came to me." The chapters in the first section grew out of the researchers' engagement with Katrina

survivors who relocated to new communities. This set of essays examines the community context and the interactions and encounters of displaced Gulf Coast residents in Colorado, Louisiana, Missouri, South Carolina, and Texas, where a number of the authors lived and worked. Their analyses show the difference that location makes in a community's ability to welcome, accommodate, and provide resources that facilitate the adjustment of newcomers, many of whom become long-term residents.

The chapters in the second section of the book reflect the authors' engagement in and observation of relationships and interactions among Katrina survivors. It focuses on the ways in which social networks, both within and far from hometowns, simultaneously served as a lifeline for survival and recovery, yet also fractured under the stress and duration of these events. Through their explorations of personal networks, community organizations, and religious institutions, the authors illustrate how race, class, gender, and citizenship intersected to create differing sets of constraints and opportunities regardless of whether people ended up near or far from their former homes. The book ends with a brief final section, "Charting a Path Forward." It describes one post-Katrina social movement's effort to organize displaced New Orleanians, and identifies the possibilities and challenges of movement building in the context of disaster.

This book makes contributions to the scholarship on Katrina that are important and unique for a number of reasons. First, it not only documents the existence of a Katrina diaspora resulting from the dispersion of tens of thousands of people across the United States, but also provides "thick description" and astute analyses of the experience. It tells the insiders' stories. Second, the book is a collaborative product, the result of a series of meetings, conversations, site visits, and shared manuscripts among the authors. Extended intellectual dialogue and collaborative feedback among so many authors, themselves spread across the country, are unusual, yet they are apparent in the intellectual cohesiveness of the collection. Third, an intersectional analytical framework informs all of these essays and reflects the authors' efforts to grapple together with how to best understand and explain what they learned.

Finally, this book is unique in the Katrina scholarship because it is written by and focuses primarily on women. All of the authors, with the exception of one coauthor, are women, and many are noted Women's Studies scholars. Like Weber, they are people who have written extensively on the concept of intersectionality, illustrating how different dimensions of difference and inequality shape and inform each other: Litt a scholar of gender,

family, and carework, and Lein, who has published noted books and articles on women, families, and poverty, among others. Far too little of the writing on Katrina has paid serious attention to gender and especially to the intersections of gender with race and class. This book, then, fills a space that has been almost empty for too long.

Also noteworthy in the case of this particular volume is that the racial and class dynamics being studied are reflected in the very conduct of the research itself. For not only are the authors predominantly women, they are overwhelmingly White and middle-class women, with one African American and two Latinos in the group, while the vast majority of the displaced women they write about are Black, with only a small number of Whites and Latinas. At the same time, however, half of the twelve-member collective were displaced themselves and had their own stories of survival and relocation as a lens and source of engagement with their respondents. What makes the complexities of this particular set of researcher-subject differences worth mentioning here is the reflexive manner in which they are revealed and discussed in the book. In the introduction, Weber and Peek openly share how the research network wrestled with these inequalities and carefully considered how they affected their methodologies and the stories they were told. This self-awareness suggests the possibilities for a level of authenticity in the relationship between researchers and respondents that gives the reader an increased level of confidence in the ethnographic findings reported here.

As someone who, like the authors and so many others, was shocked and angered by the discrimination and inequities that shaped the response to Katrina, I found these studies to be particularly meaningful in revealing the lived experiences that displaced Katrina survivors shared about their hardships and victories, as well as their sources of strength and hardiness. The book, however, is more than a chronicle of human suffering and resilience. As skilled social scientists, the authors deftly analyze structures of power that were at play as people were forced to relocate and disperse and as they sought to return and rebuild. They reveal long-term and intransigent patterns of discrimination and inequality that either resulted in a rejection of evacuees or shaped changing attitudes toward evacuees.

In sharing the “truths” of people who are part of the Katrina diaspora, the authors give us greater appreciation of the ways race, class, gender, age, and citizenship intersect to create the response to, and shape the long-term effects of, the events that began in August 2005. As readers of this volume, we are left with the challenge to use this knowledge to create social changes

that result in enhanced social justice for Katrina survivors and survivors of future social disasters.

Bonnie Thornton Dill
Professor and Dean, College of Arts and Humanities
University of Maryland
January 2011