This chapter provides an analysis of data from victims of Hurricane Katrina to determine whether there were racial differences in their perceptions about rescue and relief efforts after the storm. The data collected from survivors show that blacks and whites drew very different lessons from the tragedy. There was widespread agreement among black survivors that the government’s response to the crisis would have been faster if most of the storm’s victims had been white. Whites, in contrast, were more likely to feel that the race of the victims did not make a difference in government’s response. Less than half of white victims, but more than three-quarters of black victims, held the view that Hurricane Katrina pointed out persisting problems of racial inequality. There were, however, few racial differences in perceptions about the role of income in the aftermath of Katrina. Most blacks and whites agreed with the idea that low-income and middle-income victims of the hurricane received similar treatment. Despite the idea that it was mostly a difference of opinion between poor blacks and middle-class whites in their views, these results suggest that there were also differences between the lowest-income blacks and middle- and high-income blacks, and perhaps an even larger difference between middle-income blacks and middle-income whites in terms of how they viewed the government’s response. Income and other sociodemographic differences did not explain racial differences in perceptions about the role of race in the aftermath of the hurricane. The chapter concludes that the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina exposed the wide gulf between the nation’s haves and have-nots as well as the nation’s persisting racial divide.

After the Storm: Race and Victims’ Reactions to the Hurricane Katrina Aftermath

When disaster strikes, Americans like to believe that no matter the race, color, creed, or socioeconomic level of the victims, “we are all in it together.”
Unfortunately, this is seldom the case. Hurricane Katrina did not affect all people of the Gulf Coast equally. The aftermath of the storm had racial and class dimensions. Any analysis of the tragedy that fails to acknowledge this basic truth misses the opportunity to understand the underlying power structures and patterns of inequality that have made recovery from the storm more difficult for some.

Questions of race and class came into focus as news coverage of the disaster showed primarily black residents stranded in New Orleans. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated the New Orleans population to be 20 percent white and 68 percent black. According to a Population Reference Bureau Report, of the fifteen U.S. metropolitan areas with the most African Americans, New Orleans had the highest black poverty rate, at 33 percent (Saenz 2005). Within the city itself, the poorest tended to live in the lowest parts that are most vulnerable to flooding. Moreover, only half of African American males were employed (Saenz 2005). African Americans were also much more likely than whites to lack basic amenities, such as an automobile or a telephone (Saenz 2005). Given their limited social and economic resources along with their geographic isolation, poor urban African Americans were disproportionately vulnerable to being left behind during crisis situations.

Surveys of the American general public indicated that African Americans and whites held very different perceptions about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (CBS News/New York Times 2005; and Pew Research Center 2005). But it is not as clear what effects the storm and its aftermath had on black and white victims. Did black and white victims of Hurricane Katrina differ in how they viewed the disaster? And if so, did socioeconomic differences account for apparent racial disparities in perceptions about the aftermath of the hurricane? This chapter uses data from survivors of the hurricane to examine racial differences in their experiences during the hurricane and their perceptions about the aftermath of the hurricane.

**Race and Du Boisian Analysis**

What is a Du Boisian analysis? W.E.B. Du Bois was a noted African American scholar, activist, and co-founder of the NAACP. His analysis self-consciously incorporated race and was “committed to empirical research as a source of knowledge to replace ignorance about race, and firmly believing that such knowledge was the basis for movement toward