Researchers Analyze Katrina Fallout from the Perspective of Women

BALTIMORE – A group of faculty members from the University of Akron have used research and creative work to focus a special issue of the National Women’s Studies Association Journal (volume 20, issue 3) on the significance of gender and disaster in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

“Most of the public debate about the disaster focused on the politics of race and social class. We wanted to turn the spotlight on what women went through during and after the tragedy,” says Kathryn Feltey, co-editor and associate professor of Sociology at Akron. “These pieces focus on the meanings of place and politics of displacement through the lens of gender.”

The co-editors of the issue from Akron represent a range of disciplines. Feltey is joined by colleagues Karen Flynn (Anthropology), Laura Gelfand (Art History), Mary Triece (Communication), and TJ Boisseau (History). Many of the issue’s contributors lived in New Orleans or made their way there in the days and weeks following Katrina.

The journal, published by the Johns Hopkins University Press, is a peer-reviewed scholarly publication that features interdisciplinary and multicultural feminist scholarship focused on understanding women’s lives. The journal serves as a leader in the field of Women’s Studies.

The special issue includes poetry, photography, research, reflection, and documentary film review from leading experts across the country. Topics include informal family and community evacuation networks coordinated by women; the plight of battered women and community support services during and after disaster; the responses of mothers and fathers to Hurricane Katrina; the ways that gender, race, and class shape parenting in the context of disaster; the resiliency of relocated African-American women as internal refugees in the United States; and social movement activism by the New Orleans group, “Women of the Storm.”

In addition to scholarship, the special issue includes a pair of reflective essays designed to confront the inadequacy of language in communicating the experience of disaster, loss, and recovery. One provides a personal account of the politics of race, class, and gender in evacuation and relocation. The second comes from a group of Women’s Studies colleagues reflecting on the changes in their programs and efforts to rebuild their personal and academic lives.

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