

Black feminism and radical planning: New directions for disaster planning research

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Abstract

After Hurricane Katrina's devastation of the United States' Gulf Coast, conversations about flooding became focused on the interconnections between so-called "natural" disasters, poverty, gender and race. Although research has long shown that women, people of color and low-income communities are more vulnerable to natural hazards, the disproportionate effects of Hurricane Katrina and subsequent federal and state disaster response efforts forced the national spotlight on the institutional and systemic nature of racism, classism and sexism. Using Black feminism and radical planning theory, two lenses that provides a comprehensive framework for understanding racism, classism and sexism, this article examines the concept and literature of social vulnerability. I argue while social vulnerability research has made significant contributions to planners' understandings of disasters and inequity, it fails to center community knowledge, identify intersectional oppressions and name them as such and encourage community activism, all of which are keys to making meaningful change.

Keywords

Black feminism, disasters, environmental justice, feminism, social vulnerability, urban planning

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina's devastation and the images that emerged from the Gulf Coast in general and New Orleans in particular, the nation began to pay attention to the inequitable impacts of disasters on poor communities and communities of color. This was not a new conversation in urban planning or the broader fields of natural hazards and disasters; rather 2005's Katrina attracted newer, and arguably louder voices to this old conversation.

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This article critiques a subsection of disaster research that has been employed to understand the causes and effects of disasters such as Hurricane Katrina: social vulnerability. Social vulnerability, a concept first detailed by Blaikie et al. in their pivotal 1994 book *At Risk*, has become a popular way of describing and understanding why disasters impact certain communities more than the larger population. The second edition of the book defines social vulnerability it as “the characteristics of a person or group in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard” (Wisner et al., 2004: 11). Scholars continue to build on Wisner et al.’s work to examine community resilience (Cutter et al., 2008), businesses’ vulnerability to disasters (Zhang et al., 2004), social inequality (Tierney, 2006), people’s agency to respond to disasters (McLaughlin and Dietz, 2008) and the effects of municipality size on vulnerability to hazards (Cross, 2001). While the concept of social vulnerability originated in geography and largely resides there and in sociology, its literature has heavily informed the planning discipline’s treatment of disasters and inequities (Berke et al., 2015; Iuchi, 2014; Nguyen and Salvesen, 2014; Zhang and Peacock, 2010).

Disaster research has identified the unequal effects of hazards and disasters on women, poor communities and communities of color. Considering these overwhelmingly consistent findings and the ethical mandates of American Planning Association (American Institute of Certified Planners, 2016), it is critical that social justice and equity issues be of major concern for environmental hazards and disaster planning efforts—whether addressing mitigation, preparation, response or recovery. The question, however, is how best to theoretically address these issues or more specifically, can social vulnerability offer insights to help guide planning efforts and solutions?

To answer this question, I offer a Black feminist and radical planning critique of US-based social vulnerability literature. Emerging from the disaster research literature is the centrality of race, class and gender in shaping the unequal consequences of hazards and disasters. As such, Black feminism’s focus on race, class and gender, and radical planning’s Marxist origins in critical class analysis together offer a comprehensive theory for examining how these key identity markers both shape and determine social processes and structures, provides a uniquely critical conceptual lens for addressing planning issues focused on these factors the context of disasters and hazards. While social vulnerability has made significant contributions to planners’ understandings of disasters and inequity, researchers and practitioners need to center community knowledge, identify intersectional oppressions and name them as such and encourage community activism. I close with a brief overview of some additional theoretical directions that disaster planning literature can take when considering inequities.

Disasters and inequity: beyond physical vulnerability

As climate change continues to increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, the need to understand and address disasters becomes even more critical. While most definitions of disasters acknowledge disasters are created by the convergence of a natural or human-caused hazard and a population that is physically and/or socially vulnerable, discussions begin to diverge when scholars take up the issue of how to investigate disasters, protect populations and reduce losses (Andrey and Jones, 2008; Wisner

and Luce, 1993). This section is a brief summary of some of the issues addressed in research on disasters and inequity.

Traditionally, hazard scientists and disaster management personnel have concentrated on technocratic knowledge in the form of physical vulnerability analyses, risk assessments and engineering projects (Masterson et al., 2014b). Increasingly, scholars are critiquing the disaster field's focus on the physical aspects of hazard and vulnerability and turning their attention to the underlying social, economic and political realities that create and are further exposed by disasters (Bolin, 2006; Mileti, 1999; Wisner et al., 2004). Over two decades of research has begun to quantify and qualify the marked differences between populations' experiences of disasters on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, class, age and ability (Cardona, 2003; Chambers, 2006; David and Enarson, 2012; Enarson et al., 2007; Peacock et al., 1997).

Research has found that low income people and people of color have higher risks of experiencing natural and human-caused disasters (Bullard, 1999; David and Enarson, 2012; Girard and Peacock, 1997; Highfield et al., 2014; Wisner and Luce, 1993). Popular discourses often identify the causes of the disproportionate impacts of disasters on poor communities, communities of color and women as a lack of financial resources and lower levels of resilience (Bankoff, 2003; Chambers, 2006; Hutcheon and Lashewicz, 2014; Pellow, 2000).

More critical research goes beyond the trope that equates being a woman, being poor and/or being a person of color with vulnerability and points to systems of oppression that deny communities access to resources. Bullard (1999), in referring to toxic waste and industrial disasters, posits heightened risks for these communities are as a result of racist and classist systems that deny poor communities and communities of color political and economic power. Gender matters with respect to disasters for a variety of reasons including the feminization of poverty that situates the growing class of single female-headed households below the poverty line and the rise in the physical and sexual assault of women during times of disaster (Bolin et al., 1998; Enarson, 2012; Enarson et al., 2007; Yelvington, 1997). These systemic forms of racism, sexism and classism severely impact communities' abilities to prepare for and recover from disasters.

Planning and the possibilities of social justice

In an essay on theoretical issues in feminist planning, Fainstein (2005) states that planning "has always had running through it a moral current that differentiates it from economics and demands a greater responsiveness to deprivation" (p. 122). Sandercock (2003) makes a similar point, saying that planning, as it emerged post-Enlightenment, was concerned with "the improvement of all members of society, their health, skills, education, longevity, productivity, even their morals and family life" (p. 29). Neither of these scholars are naïve about planning's history of disenfranchising oppressed groups through projects such as urban renewal and redlining. Instead, they argue that planning is a discipline that is capable of holding space for critical thought and social justice, but that space must be actualized.

This "held space" is called for in the guidelines to which all certified planners commit. The professional body of planners, the *American Institute of Certified Planners*

(AICP), requires that all planners commit to the AICP Code of Ethics as part of their certification. The code states the principles, rules of conduct and procedural provisions for advisory rulings, complaints and disciplinary actions. While not entirely revolutionary, the Code of Conduct contains undeniable strains of social justice. The Code states that planners

shall seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration. We shall urge the alteration of policies, institutions, and decisions that oppose such needs. (American Institute of Certified Planners, 2016: 10)

This language lends itself well to goals of understanding and dismantling systems of racism, classism and sexism. It is with this principle in mind, that I contend that planning and planners should be concerned with equity and disasters. In the next section, I argue that Black feminist thought and radical planning provide frameworks for addressing these concerns.

Held space: linking black feminism and the radical planning tradition

Disaster research identifies numerous axes of identity that can shape how individuals and communities experience disasters, but race, class and gender are among the most frequently identified for shaping vulnerability. While conversations between mainstream feminisms and planning have been occurring for decades, thanks to scholars such as Leonie Sandercock and Susan Fainstein, Black feminism is rarely directly employed in a planning context (Osborne, 2015). An even more obvious body of literature for planners to look to for critical thinking in terms of race, gender and, especially, class is radical planning. Although radical planning literature is alive and well in the Global South, it is given little attention in mainstream US planning discussions (Beard, 2003; Miraftab, 2009). In fact, in one of the more comprehensive considerations of the typologies of planning since Friedmann, 1987 *Planning in the Public Domain*, Brooks (2002) makes no mention of radical planning. As Whittemore (2015) puts it, “radical practitioners in the neo-Marxist vein had a small presence in the literature, perhaps indicating, as the radicals lamented, the prevalence of more market-friendly planners” (p.81).

The absence of Black feminism and radical planning in mainstream planning conversations does a disservice to the fields of planning and disaster management as Black feminism and radical planning were early, potent schools of thought that analyzed the relationships between social identities such as race, class and gender and their corresponding oppressions, racism, classism and sexism. While Black feminism and radical planning seem strange bedfellows, in providing an overview of both schools of thought, this section shows that there are many common strains between the two schools of thought. This section also identifies the strengths of the two fields in addressing issues of hazard and disaster related inequity.

The late 1980s and early 1990s were transformative times for Black feminism. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term “intersectionality” arguing the impossibility of considering axes of identities, such as race, class and gender, separately. Instead,

oppression is multidimensional and systems such as sexism, racism and classism interact with each other, to produce a complex social hierarchy (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Although these ideas were not new (Anzaldúa and Moraga, 1983; Combahee River Collective, 1983; Cooper, 1988; Davis, 1981; Truth, 1851), Crenshaw's work gave Black feminists, and other critical race scholars, a new term, a clearly articulated theory and a common language to analyze the complex nature of experiencing multiple oppressions.

Patricia Hill Collins pushed Crenshaw's work further in her 1990 book, *Black Feminist Thought*. The third edition of *Black Feminist Thought* states that Black feminism's aim is the realization of a just community through "a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community" (Collins, 2009: 39). Collins identifies six distinguishing themes of Black feminism: the dialectical relationship between oppression and activism; diverse responses to the challenges of sexism, racism and other forms of oppression facing Black women; the heterogeneity of the Black women's standpoints; the importance of dialogue in knowledge creation; the dynamic nature of Black feminism; and Black feminism as being connected to a broader social justice agenda. Collins's articulation of Black feminism then provides a framework for analyzing and understanding how race, class and gender are created and experienced by communities as well as ways to address their corresponding systems of oppression.

Radical planning, like most other forms of planning, was formulated in response to the failures of rational centralized planning (Friedmann, 1987). Radical planning, or social mobilization, Friedmann (1987) argues, uses dialectic processes to effect systemic change. He argues that a planner, committed to social justice, when presented with a problem must critically analyze the current situation, help mobilized communities identify and evaluate options, provide communities with data related to the problem, and assist the community with the technical aspects of solutions that they choose. In this conceptualization, the planner is a source of information, a facilitator and a tool for the community. Friedmann believes these social justice planners must ensure that there is wide and representative participation in planning processes. By extension, the planner must then be invested in collective learning processes in which these diverse community members, along with the planner, share knowledge and ensure that any actions resulting from the planning process are linked to the knowledge of the group.

An examination of the full breadth of Black feminist thought, radical planning and the parallels between them is beyond the scope of this article; I instead focus on two key theoretical elements that are particularly relevant to disaster management planning: the importance of dialogue in knowledge creation and the dialectical relationship between oppression and activism.

Knowledge creation in black feminist thought and radical planning theory. Planning had long been critiqued for, and guilty of, using a top-down approach that did not create space for community members to contribute to the planning process (Arnstein, 1969). The field heeded the criticism and began mandating communities be consulted during the planning process and a large body of research focuses on how, when and why public participation should be incorporated into planning. This emphasis on participation extends to disaster management planning. Hazard mitigation and disaster recovery literature often speaks to

the necessity of getting communities at the table and ensuring they participate in meaningful ways, rather than just being tokens (Arnstein, 1969; Berke et al., 1993, 2010; Boholm, 2008; Enarson, 2012; Horney et al., 2014).

Both radical planning and Black feminism speak to the necessity of community involvement. Black feminist thought articulates an epistemology that details how knowledge, especially knowledge of oppression, is created. Two of Black feminist epistemology's "contours," as Collins (2009) refers to them, are relevant to this article: lived experience is a way of knowing and knowledge is created and validated through dialogue

Central to radical planning is the notion that the knowledge that communities have about their experiences, particularly their experiences of oppression, should be centered in planning processes and outcomes (Beard, 2003; Friedmann, 1987; Grabow and Heskin, 1973; Miraftab, 2009). Radical planning argues that it is only through the inclusion of this fundamental knowledge of oppression that the structures of oppression can be addressed, modified and changed.

It is worth mentioning that there are other planning theories that align well with the radical planning and Black feminist thought's community knowledge creation. A central tenet of communicative planning theory is that "a communicative approach to knowledge production ... maintains that knowledge is not pre-formulated but is specifically created anew in our communication" (Healey, 1992: 153). Similarly, Collins' (2009) articulation that community-based knowledge must be generated through the inclusion of the diverse lived experiences of Black women and through dialogue is particularly relevant to the equity agenda of disasters and urban planning.

Oppression and activism in black feminist thought and radical planning theory. Black feminist thought is an oppositional force. It exists as a response to the oppression faced by Black women in the United States and globally. Earlier considerations of oppression were often unidimensional: they examined either race *or* class *or* gender. Black feminism argues that this approach to understanding oppression erases Black women and the multidimensional oppression that they face (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). In her article on intersectionality, Crenshaw (1989) illustrates the importance of intersectionality through an analysis of three cases with Black women plaintiffs. In one of the cases, the courts denied the legitimacy of the plaintiffs' claims of workplace discrimination based on race *and* gender arguing that to rule in favor of the plaintiffs would result in "the creation of new classes of protected minorities, governed only by the mathematical principles of permutations and combination [which] clearly raises the prospect of opening the hackneyed Pandora's box" (Crenshaw, 1989: 142). Under Black feminist thought, oppression is understood and treated as a complex system of interlocking dimensions, including, but not limited to, racism, sexism and classism.

Oppression is characterized as being in a "dialectical relationship" with Black women's activism as its existence spurs Black women to fight oppressive practices and their underlying ideas (Collins, 2009: 25). Collins' emphasis on the responsibility people who theorize about and understand the nature of oppression have to act on their knowledge is key to the actualization of Black feminism. Collins identifies numerous arenas that Black women's "pushback" against systems of oppression can take place: by promoting equity within existing organizations, by advocating for laws to be changed; by striving for

self-definition and freedom and by changing the nature of their problematic relationships with people, organizations and systems. This speaks to the very essence of planning as an action-oriented social science.

The emphasis on the activist/revolutionary can be seen clearly in radical planning. In this tradition, planning's job must be to critique and dismantle "the liberal democratic state" (Whittemore, 2015: 78) and the structural forces and ideals that support it (Beard, 2003; Grabow and Heskin, 1973; Miraftab, 2009). Beard (2003) gives an example of an Indonesian community's progression to radical planning. First, the community participated in the liberal democratic state, receiving volunteer training from a state administered health clinic, then mobilized to create their own health care clinic for the elderly. Capitalizing on that momentum of community building, the community engaged in what Beard characterizes as covert planning by opposing the State's denial of land tenure claims with the community planning efforts finally culminating in fully radical planning practices that led to public protests and the establishment of a community-based library. These small changes were key to "creating a sense of collective agency and the social and political spaces for radical action" (Beard, 2003, p.28). Even among more conventional approaches to planning, planning must be responsive to the science generated through research. Hence, for the broader planning community, the evidence of disaster inequalities, demands the development of policies and actions to change these inequalities. The question remains, however, has US social vulnerability literature provided adequate guidance?

Black feminist thought and radical planning provide us with the means of understanding and acting against racism, classism and sexism and their intersections. By extension, given the importance of race, class and gender in disaster literature, Black feminist thought and radical planning can help planners examine and expose the ways disasters are created by and exacerbate inequalities. In the subsequent sections, I evaluate to what extent these key understandings of knowledge creation, intersecting oppressions and activism is integrated into social vulnerability literature.

Social vulnerability

Overview

The body of work that has used the term "social vulnerability" has helped illuminate inequities in communities' experiences of disasters. These studies have provided fact bases that can be used to make decisions that improve the experiences of so-called socially vulnerable communities in disaster events. I begin this section by defining social vulnerability, describing its origins and examining how the literature has grown and changed. I identify its strengths and weaknesses as it attempts to explain and address the relationships between race, class, gender and disasters. Through this critique, it becomes clear that the social vulnerability framework may be well-intentioned but is inadequate. By failing to center community knowledge, avoiding the naming of systemic oppression and not making an explicit commitment to grassroots change, social vulnerability cannot comprehensively articulate and address the issues facing communities that experience the brunt of the effects of disasters.

A large body of US social vulnerability research concentrates on quantifying social vulnerability through social vulnerability indices. A social vulnerability index is essentially a compilation of quantitative variables about individuals and communities that is supposed to represent how vulnerable a community is. The methodologies used to choose relevant variables and construct the indices can vary widely (for more complete discussions of the construction of indices see Gall, 2007 and Yoon, 2012). Indices contain a mix of variables that try to capture individuals' access to resources such their political power, their physical disabilities and the quality of housing they live in. They almost invariably include demographic variables related to race, class, gender and age, housing variables such as the percentage of mobile homes, and economic variables such as income and employment.

Cutter, a prominent researcher in the field, uses a social vulnerability index she created to show how vulnerability varies across the United States both spatially and temporally. Calculating and mapping each county's social vulnerability by decade between 1960 and 2000, Cutter showed that not only did the most vulnerable areas of the United States change over 50 years from the South to a variety of areas including the Great Plains and California's Central Valley (Cutter and Finch, 2008), but the factors that contributed most to vulnerability varied by region. While socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity variables made the South and Southwest most vulnerable, the Great Plains' vulnerability could be largely attributed to its large elderly population. These indices allow researchers and practitioners to quantify levels of social vulnerability and compare them across space and time (Cutter et al., 2003; Flanagan et al., 2011; Godfrey, 2004; Peacock et al., 2012; Van Zandt et al., 2012).

Social vulnerability indices can also be mapped to identify "hotspots" or areas of high social vulnerability (Maantay and Maroko, 2009; Peacock et al., 2012; Van Zandt et al., 2012). These mapped hotspots are communities that will warrant special attention in disaster mitigation, preparation, response and recovery. One study (Van Zandt et al., 2012) mapped social vulnerability in Galveston and found that the identified social vulnerability hotspots did indeed experience worse outcomes in 2008's Hurricane Ike. These hot spots evacuated at lower rates and experienced higher degrees of damage than the larger population. Van Zandt et al. (2012) posit that this shows that their social vulnerability index may prove to be very useful to planning practitioners and other emergency management specialists in the event of disasters by helping identify areas that may need more attention during evacuation and recovery.

Social vulnerability and community knowledge

As previously discussed, Black feminist thought and radical planning necessitate that any lens used to examine disasters and inequities places value on community knowledge. To begin with, it is problematic that the label "vulnerability" is assigned to communities. "Social vulnerability" is a term that came out of academia, and there is no evidence in the literature that it has been accepted, embraced or employed by communities. Allowing for communities to name themselves and their issues should be one of the first steps in the process of valuing community knowledge.

As the earliest, comprehensive consideration of social vulnerability, it is clear that Wisner et al.'s (2004) "At Risk" values community knowledge in some respects.

Throughout the book, the case studies of disasters include some reflection on communities' actual experiences of the disasters mainly filtered through their examination of the work of grassroots organizations (Wisner et al., 2004). They laud projects in which communities are given access to technology that allow them to participate in knowledge creation. Although the terminology they use such as "vulnerable" is taken from the dominant academic conceptualization of hazards and risk, and is not a name that the communities they discuss use for themselves, there is a marked emphasis on community knowledge.

The emphasis Blaikie et al. (2004) place on community knowledge does not consistently filter through research the way that "social vulnerability," the term they coined, does. The current preoccupation of the subfield with creating a robust social vulnerability index is not usually grounded in community knowledge. A notable exception is Van Zandt et al.'s (2012) mapping project which used the social vulnerability index that they created to map highly vulnerable areas on Galveston island. They then conducted random household surveys to determine whether households in the identified hotspots had more difficult experiences before during and after disasters, and they did. This second step is almost unheard of in social vulnerability mapping projects. For most mapping projects, the map showing the spatial nature of social vulnerability, as the authors have imagined and defined it, is the terminal point of the research (Cutter, 2006; Cutter and Finch, 2008; Cutter et al., 2000 (Maantay, 2002; Maantay and Maroko, 2009).

Social vulnerability research generally fails to integrate community knowledge into its understanding of how demographic factors affect people's experiences of disasters. As seen, researchers rarely interface with communities to confirm the results of their mapping projects. I am not aware of any projects in which a social vulnerability index was created in conjunction with a community or used community input to help determine what variables might affect their vulnerability. This does a great disservice to communities and to the integrity of research by not trying to understand what vulnerability looks like to the people who experience it.

In an article that positions the vulnerability discourse as a Western construct, Bankoff (2001) does an excellent job of summarizing the crux of the issue with social vulnerability literature, although he is speaking about broader vulnerability. He states that "despite the undoubted conceptual and methodological advances it represents on previous thinking, its utility and practical application is still hampered by a one-dimensional construction of the processes that transform a hazard into a disaster" (Bankoff, 2001: 30). This coupled with the lack of value placed on local community knowledge and environmental practices results in a serious deficit in vulnerability discourse's ability to move research from identifying the problem to understanding and addressing its root causes.

Social vulnerability, oppression and activism

Understanding systems of oppression is key to understanding how the so-called socially vulnerable communities identified in mapping projects experience disasters. Very little recent social vulnerability research, in planning and elsewhere, names racism, classism, sexism or other forms of oppression as the real issues in communities' inequitable

experiences of disaster even though disasters like Katrina put these words on everyone else's agenda.

These critiques are not unique to social vulnerability literature but to the body of vulnerability literature as a whole. The word "vulnerable" has long legacies in development discourse and in disability studies where it is critiqued for centering "normal" people who are not vulnerable and othering "vulnerable" people as weak and passive (Bankoff, 2001; Hutcheon and Lashewicz, 2014). This research contends that labeling people as vulnerable, locates the fault within them rather than the way the world treats them, which leads to their needs, priorities and disempowerments will be overlooked and overridden. This distracts from the actual problem that being the processes that made these groups "vulnerable" (Burghardt, 2013; Hutcheon and Lashewicz, 2014).

It is important to note that Blaikie et al. (2004) do critique articulations of vulnerability that do not attempt to understand the processes that made that particular characteristic associated with a higher vulnerability. In their pressure and release model, they identify the root causes of vulnerability as being limited access to power, structure, resources and systems. They also take issue with the ways in which socially vulnerable groups are treated in the research as charity cases or "special needs groups" (p. 13).

Despite these progressive promises, the shift they are asking for in this conversation on vulnerability is not enough. For example, regarding increased domestic violence following a hurricane they state that "it is not the female gender itself that marks vulnerability, but gender in a specific situation" and, perhaps even worse, went on to explain that the process that caused the increase in domestic violence was "male anxieties and frustration acted out" when working-class men lost their jobs (p. 16). This framing completely neglects and normalizes the system and culture of misogyny and sexism in which it is acceptable for frustrated, anxious men to hit women. It also does not recognize the hurricane as a moment that uncovered and exacerbated this oppressive social structure. The lesson from that moment then becomes "gender makes one vulnerable at times" when it should have been "sexist structures and culture become even more apparent in disaster recovery." This is a missed opportunity to not only address sexism in that specific situation but to mobilize communities and policy makers to recognize, address and fight sexism on a larger scale. Lessons and opportunities like this are also missed each time we see racism and call it race, as I will discuss next. Recognizing and naming systems of oppression are necessary steps in eradicating them.

More critical research has contested the characterization of poor people and people of color as "vulnerable" but pushes beyond Blaikie et al.'s (2004) suggestion to contextualize the vulnerability as temporary or situational. Critical research calls for naming sexism, racism and classism as the problems as opposed to gender, race and class (or gender, race and class in specific situations). Bullard (2000), for example, believes that the fault should be placed at the feet of systems, and the persons who benefit from them, that discriminate against people of color. Pulido (1996, 2000, 2002, 2015) consistently pushes not only for naming oppressive systems but emphasizing them as historically rooted and currently systemic and pervasive.

This lack of consideration of systemic issues also leaves no space for the dialectical relationship between oppression and activism. Communities are not involved in the

research and oppression is not named. As a result, it is near impossible for social vulnerability to inspire activism against the forces that create it in the first place.

While social vulnerability research, like planning practice and research at large, aims to change policy outcomes, to say that the changes it advocates for are activist in nature much less revolutionary would be a stretch. It arguably provides a fact base for activism—a demographic analysis of areas that are hit harder by disasters—but it is hard to move beyond that when communities are not central to the process.

Summary

Social vulnerability research has contributed much to the field of disaster management but under the lenses of Black feminism and radical planning it falls short. The appeal of the quantifying of social vulnerability is obvious—it lends itself well to comparisons across space and time and it allows for visual displays. However, as it has been operationalized, it essentializes race placing the problem of disasters and inequity at the feet of being Black, being poor and being a woman as opposed to recognizing racist, sexist and classist structures. There are notable exceptions to this, especially in earlier work, but they are few. It is possible that if community knowledge were more central to social vulnerability research, the absence of the consideration of systemic oppression would have become clear and there would be a clear activist agenda.

Moving disaster planning literature forward: beyond social vulnerability

Hurricane Katrina showed the world there is much work to be done regarding race, class, gender and disasters. Over a decade later, planning professionals and academics still have lots of room for improvement. It is important that when looking at the path forward, we have a full understanding of where we are and where we came from. Slavery and Jim Crow left a lasting legacy of racism that intersects with classism, racism and other forms of oppression that place communities of color, poor people and women (three communities that are not mutually exclusive) in situations which make them more likely to get hit by disasters, to get hit harder and to recover more slowly. It is important that we are clear that this is not the result of characteristics that are intrinsic to these communities but rather the processes of systemic oppression that create and shape these identities.

This article has shown, through the lenses of radical planning and Black feminism, that US disaster planning literature must look and push beyond mainstream discourses of vulnerability if meaningful change is to be made. This is not to suggest that these two theories are the only ones that can be employed to ensure that disaster planning research moves in a progressive direction. For example, after reviewing disaster sociology literature, much of which is characterized by discourse on vulnerability, one researcher suggests that the field “could be broadened and enhanced by more fully engaging environmental justice theoretical and methodological issues” (Bolin, 2006: 126). He contends that by wrestling with the historic, political and economic mechanisms that result in the environmental inequalities that are further exacerbated by disasters,

environmental justice approaches have the potential to push our understandings of disasters much further forward.

Though not speaking of disasters specifically, other researchers find environmental justice literature to be not as critical as it should be. Laura Pulido (2000, 2015) argues that both the activism and the research associated with the movement have primarily conducted ahistorical evaluations of current geographies of injustice divorced from understandings of white privilege and white supremacy. Kurtz (2009) builds on much of Pulido's work and using *The Racial State* (Goldberg, 2002) and *Racial Formation in the United States* (Omi and Winant, 2015) argues that critical race theory must be used to understand "both why and how the state manages racial categories in such a way as to produce environmental injustice, and how the state responds to the claims of the environmental justice movement" (Kurtz, 2009: 95). The environmental justice movement is also charged with not adequately dealing with the issue of gender (Buckingham and Kulcur, 2009; Stein, 2004).

This discussion serves to show that there are a number of places planning theorists can look (critical race theory, environmental justice, Black feminist thought, radical planning ...) to strengthen and/or move beyond the field's mainstream conceptions of vulnerability. If social justice and equity are truly concerns for disaster planning efforts, social vulnerability literature as it stands, does not provide illuminate the intersecting, institutional issues of racism, classism and sexism for planners, center community knowledge or provide a true basis for activism with the goal of effecting lasting change for communities.

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