

Pacific Standard

HOME > ENVIRONMENT

WHO DIDN'T EVACUATE FOR HURRICANE KATRINA?

A picture of those left behind.

LISA WADE · UPDATED: JUN 14, 2017 · ORIGINAL: AUG 31, 2015

This is what it looks like when government fails to protect its citizens:

When Hurricane Katrina hit, more than a quarter of people living in New Orleans in August of 2005 lived below the poverty line. Many of the poor in stayed at home to weather the storm. Why?

Twenty-seven percent of New Orleanians didn't own a car, making evacuation even more difficult and expensive than it would otherwise be.

People without the means to leave are also the most likely to rely on the television—as opposed to the radio or Internet—for news. TV news began warning people how bad the storm would be only 48 hours before it hit; some people, then, had only 48 hours to process this information and make plans.

Poor people are more likely than middle- and upper-class people to never leave where they grew up. This means that they were much less likely to have a network of people outside of New Orleans with whom they could stay, at the same time that they were least able to afford a motel room.

For those who were on government assistance, living check-to-check, it was the end of the month. Their checks were due to arrive three days after the hurricane. It was also back-to-school time and many were extra cash poor because they had extra expenses for their children.

A [study](#) of New Orleanians rescued and evacuated to Houston, described [here](#), found that:

...14% were physically disabled, 23% stayed in New Orleans to care for a physically disabled person, and 25% were suffering from a chronic disease....

Also:

- **55% did not have a car or a way to evacuate**
- **68% had neither money in the bank nor a useable credit card**
- **57% had total household incomes of less than \$20,000 in the prior year**
- **76% had children under 18 with them in the shelter**
- **77% had a high school education or less**
- **93% were black**
- **67% were employed full or part-time before the hurricane**

The city failed to get information to its most vulnerable residents in time and it failed to facilitate their evacuation. The empty buses in flood water—buses that could have been filled with evacuees prior to the storm—is a testament to this failure.

This post originally appeared on Sociological Images, a Pacific Standard partner site, as "Who Didn't Evacuate for Hurricane Katrina? A Picture of Those Left Behind."