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Stormy waters

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Black America is doing better than New Orleans suggests. But trouble lies ahead
Carol M Swain

Hurricane Katrina has placed, if only temporarily, America's race problems at the forefront of international consciousness. The slow response of government and the conduct of some of the affected communities were seen as symbols of the catastrophe that is said to be race relations in America: blacks are marginalised and left behind, some of them respond with behaviour that has no place in a civilised country, and only a deluge of federal money and national guilt can wash away the problem.

But this symbolism was mainly misleading or wrong. Contrary to the impression created by the images of black looters and the filthy conditions in the Superdome, the vast majority of blacks in America are law-abiding members of the working, middle, or, increasingly, upper-middle class. And contrary to the domestic hand-wringing, the solution to America's remaining race problems lies at least as much within the shrinking number of black problem communities as it does with government.

Above all, this country still provides something which has made it a beacon to the world—an opportunity for people to overcome the...



Carol M Swain is professor of law and political science at Vanderbilt University

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