

*What has happened down here is the wind has changed  
Clouds rolled in from the north and it starts to rain...*  
Randy Newman, Louisiana 1927

A bartender, a preacher, a pilot, a social worker, a housewife, a boat captain-- this is just a sample from among those who were moved to write books about their experiences in the aftermath of 2005's Hurricane Katrina--by most reckonings, the worst, and most expensive natural disaster to hit the mainland US in its history, killing at least 1500 in Louisiana, causing at least \$100 billion in damages.

A researcher might approach the mass of published books as of the second anniversary of the storm's landfall, August 29, 2007 (500-600 books, the estimate of Susan Larson, book reviewer for The New Orleans Times-Picayune), as a rich database of original and secondary sources for studying the impact of the storm.

A representative sample of 10% of the books, selected as most salient regarding the continuing discussion of the impact of the storm's devastation in New Orleans, might be divided roughly into four categories:

First, "novelty books," *i.e.*, those published soon after the storm, many of them as fundraisers for various rescue groups, along with collections of news coverage and photojournalism, would ascertain the immediate response of the public.

Second, creative books--including photo essays, reproductions of paintings, and fiction--would present a collage of the more in-depth responses of the literarily and artistically sensitive.

Next, first person accounts and essays, by professional writers as well as a sample of works from among the scores by amateurs from all walks of life who felt moved to publish their thoughts, would prove instructional.

Most significantly for the social scientist, a study of general in-depth analyses of the aftermath of the storm by journalists, historians, and natural and social scientists would provide a unique understanding of the social and economic impact of Hurricane Katrina in general and specifically on the environment and race relations, and the impact of the response by the government at the local, state, and federal levels.

## I. Novelty, News Coverage, and Photojournalism

Soon after the storm, at least a dozen books were published which presented the immediate response of people who loved New Orleans and who wanted to help raise funds for first rescue and then rebuilding efforts. For instance, the Best Friends of Animals Society published (mostly photographic) *Not Left Behind: Rescuing the Pets of New Orleans*; the New Orleans Haiku Society produced the charming little *Katrina-ku*.

Two popular mini-books remain available. *Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans? A Collection of Stories and Essays Set in the Big Easy* (Rutledge), is filled with sketches, poems, and other ephemera; mostly written by New Orleanians, it was one of the first books to come out after the storm.

Another 2005 book was designer Tom Varisco's *Spoiled: Refrigerators of New Orleans Go Outside in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina*, a photo sampler of the quarter million dead refrigerators duct-taped closed and left on curbs for EPA pickup, many of them with painted messages clearly indicating the disgust with FEMA of the first wave of evacuees to return to begin the arduous task of cleanup (“Heck of a job, Brownie!”).

By the beginning of 2006, at least half a dozen major news organizations had rushed out collections of photographs and news stories, the original publication/broadcast of which formed the basis for most of the world's understanding of the depth of the tragedy--and which have also served as the basis for the more serious studies of the disaster the past two years. CNN, Time, and the Dallas Morning News all weighed in. The Sun-Herald, the Biloxi daily which claimed never to have missed a day of publication in 129 years (and which was a co-winner of the 2006 Pulitzer Prize in Public Service for its Katrina coverage) published a useful volume describing the devastation in Mississippi.

However, a serious researcher who wanted the most informed and thorough coverage of the immediate impact of the storm and the aftermath in New Orleans would turn to the hometown paper's publication: The Times Picayune's *Katrina: The Ruin and Recovery of New Orleans by the Staff of New Orleans Daily Newspaper*. Unlike many journalists from the national press who parachuted in and inevitably made errors regarding geography, history, and newsmakers, the Times Picayune staff covered the destruction throughout the region and in fact not only shared the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service but also won a well-deserved second Pulitzer for Breaking News.

## II. Artistic Creations and Fiction

Half a dozen collections of photographs and paintings have been published, mostly within the first year after the storm. The New Orleans Museum of Art published *Katrina Exposed: A Photographic Reckoning*, which accompanied an exhibition of photos, many taken by local contributors, including those who did not evacuate and those who did--ranging from professional photographers to school children. The Ogden Museum published a similar collection, *Missing New Orleans*, as did Princeton Architectural Press, its book title making a political statement: *In Katrina's Wake: Portraits From an Unnatural Disaster* (Jordan).

There are also painters' artistic responses: for instance, reproductions of 76 impressionistic paintings of New Orleans, half before the storm, half after, fill Phil Sandusky's *Painting Katrina*. And the accompaniment to a 2007-2008 NOMA exhibition, *Katrina: Days of Terror, Months of Anguish*, features the paintings of Rolland Golden. These are dramatic artistic renderings of scenes of devastation and suffering, modeled on a mixture of sights as seen on television news coverage and in person when the artist returned to New Orleans.

The most successful photographic collections might include Robert Polidori's *After the Flood*, outgrowth of a 2006 Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition and designed as a coffee table book (assuming the coffee table is large and sturdy: the volume checks in at a giant 333 pages, sized 36 by 39 cms). The author of the introduction, Jeff Rosenheim, explains that it is hoped the book, which presents a "terrifying picture of community disintegration, chaos, of a society in collapse" will "provoke serious discussion about environmental protection and effects of global climate change, national emergency planning and response" (at 11).

And *Katrinaville Chronicles*, by photographer David Spielman, who has spent most of his life in New Orleans, offers a unique perspective: he rode out the storm in Uptown New Orleans, guarding the convent of a small group of elderly nuns, the Poor Clares, who evacuated for the first time in their history. In addition to the text (the fascinating e-mails he sent out during and after the storm), his black and white photographs are social commentary as well as art. One of his most haunting pictures a group of returned evacuees in Uptown's Audubon Park in January 2006: lined up for medical services, they are wrapped in blankets from the Red Cross, and except for the moss hanging from the live-oak trees, one would think he was looking at Russian refugees. Ironically, the blankets were donated to the Red Cross for distribution in New Orleans--by Russians.

Fictional stories of life during and after Katrina provide an in-depth account of the impact of the storm. New Orleans lawyer Tony Dunbar has written serious social criticism including commentary on the storm, as well as a series of novels featuring colorful New Orleans lawyer Tubby Dubonnet. *Tubby Meets Katrina*, the first post-K fiction published, presents the perspective of Tubby, a prosperous white professional who lives Uptown. He deals with the panic during the flood, the dangerous conditions as anarchy reigns, and the uncertain future of the city he loves. As does Dunbar himself, Tubby sees some hope in the response of New Orleanians, who resumed such rituals as Mardi Gras celebrations and second-lines mere months after the flood: "That's the spirit of New Orleans, isn't it? To dance away death, to carry on with joy in the face of despair" (at 217).

New Orleans native Patty Friedmann also set her latest New Orleans novel *A Little Bit Ruined*, during and after Katrina. Her wacky protagonist Eleanor Rushing rides out the storm, evacuates to Houston during the aftermath--and faces Hurricane Rita. She returns to New Orleans and finds it, like herself, a little bit ruined. Friedmann keeps fans up to date on her analogous life in the aftermath via blogs and newspaper columns: she recently reported she feels the destruction of the New Orleans she loved may have destroyed her ability to write.

However, Friedmann did contribute a story to the collection *New Orleans Noir*, edited by award-winning mystery writer Julie Smith, with half the stories in the collection set post-K. Smith's own Garden District story "Loot" touches on the always-present racial undertones of life in New Orleans. Greg Herren contributed "Annunciation Shotgun" (and in late 2007 would publish the latest in his Chanse MacLeod series, the post-K *Murder in the Rue Chartres*). One of the most haunting of the *Noir* stories is Christine Wiltz's "Lakeview," which alludes to the problems associated with the post-K influx of Hispanic immigrants. (Wiltz is also reportedly working on a post-K novel.)

Award-winning writer James Lee Burke wrote a poignant post-K story, published in *Esquire* and then as the title story of the collection, *Jesus Out to Sea*, wherein one New Orleanian wonders why "Nobody ever bothered to explain why nobody came for us" (at 240). In the latest in Burke's Cajun detective Dave Robichaux series, *The Tin Roof Blowdown*, Dave ends up haunted by the devastation of New Orleans after the storm: "The job ahead was Herculean and it was compounded by a level of corporate theft and governmental incompetence and cynicism that probably has no equal outside the Third World. I wasn't sure New Orleans had a future" (at 196).

### III. First Person-Accounts and Essays (including Self Published)

Scores--perhaps hundreds--of ordinary New Orleanians and others were so traumatized by their experiences during the storm and its aftermath, they were moved to write entire books sharing all the details for posterity. Many of them are well-written, interesting accounts of the first days and weeks of the storm and would be of interest to the social scientist as original sources of material for study.

For instance, one of the first to publish an account of his ordeal was New Orleans veterinarian Hank Klimitas, a lung-transplant survivor who sent his wife and daughter to safety but stayed to guard their Lakeview homes. As he explained in *Twice a Survivor*: "I worked to hard to get this far, and if something was going to happen to take it away, I wanted to be present to minimize the effect" (at 29). Klimitas survived the flood and says he wrote to inspire others to understand that they can take care of themselves even in a worst-case scenario.

Many others self-published harrowing personal stories and those of other survivors: at the St. Bernard Parish Fire Department (Buuck), Baptist-Memorial Hospital (Deichmann), Tulane Hospital, (Carey), the parish prison (Johnson). Perhaps the most valuable and well written of these stories is *Eye of the Storm: Inside City Hall During Katrina*, written by Sally Forman, who at the time of the storm was Mayor Ray Nagin's Communications Director. Since Nagin has not yet written his own insider account, Forman's work is particularly useful, describing where Nagin was and what he was doing and saying during the four days preceding the storm and the six days after. Refreshingly, Forman admits from the start that government at every level--including the city--failed (easy to do since she quit her job soon afterward to support her husband Ron's unsuccessful challenge to Nagin in the 2006 mayoral race). She also points out that the "media circus" aggravated the problems caused by the communications failures in what her boss famously described on the fourth day after the storm hit, seemingly with Armageddon at hand in New Orleans, as the "biggest damn crises in the history of this country."

Dozens of others found established publishers for their stories which they wrote themselves, such as Capital Appeals Project lawyer Billy Sothern, who described the impact of the storm on the criminal justice system. Some had the help of professional writers, such as parish prison doctor Demaree Inglese and Tulane football coach Chris Scelfo.

Writers who happened to have moved to New Orleans prior to Katrina weighed in: Josh Clark wrote about his adventures in the French Quarter during the storm; Ken Foster wrote a popular account of his dog rescues, before, during and after Katrina. Beloved by many New Orleanians for his repeated mantra during and after the storm ("Hope is not a plan"), CNN newsman Anderson Cooper included lengthy passages on his Katrina news coverage in his 2006 autobiography *Dispatches From the Edge*.

First-person collections include Rosemary James's *My New Orleans: Ballads to the Big Easy by Her Sons, Daughters, and Lovers* and Sally Pfister's *Katrina: Mississippi Women Remember*, both valuable original sources for social scientists. And although they claim to be reporters, contributors to NOLAFugees.com's *Year Zero: A Year of Reporting From Post-Katrina New Orleans*, act more as commentators than journalists, with a decided editorial viewpoint, often satirical: "Nagin to Seek Corporate Sponsorship of Hurricane Season."

Two of the earliest post-K books remain the most successful. Tom Piazza's *Why New Orleans Matters* came out just in time for Christmas 2005. The author had lived in New Orleans for nearly two decades prior to the storm, writing primarily about music, and he contends that despite the poverty, crime and failed schools, New Orleans culture—the food, the music, the Mardi Gras Indians--makes the city worth saving.

And the columns by The New Orleans Times-Picayune writer Chris Rose have had perhaps the greatest impact of anything written during the aftermath of the storm. For many displaced New Orleanians, especially during the month-long forced evacuation, Rose's columns (posted on the paper's website), touched them as nothing else has before or since, and in their original form the 2005 post-storm columns were nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. The expanded collection, *I Dead in Attic* includes columns up through New Year's Day 2007.

Rose's Everyman responses to the reality--and the surrealism--of life in New Orleans since what he calls The Thing, are invaluable material for the social scientist. A mixture of comedy and tragedy, perhaps the most poignant columns are those that chronicle the breakdown of his marriage and his own mental collapse. Rose's not-quite-successful recovery (as of the second anniversary of the storm) despite various earnest attempts, is emblematic of the condition of many New Orleanians more than two years after the storm--and of his beloved New Orleans itself. Anyone wishing to really understand post-Katrina New Orleans should start by reading this collection of columns by the self-described "New Orleans poster boy for all the sorrow in the world."

#### IV. Books on the Social and Economic Impact of Katrina on the Environment, Race And Government

Most valuable for the social scientist are the books which examine the social and economic impact of the storm and the aftermath on the environment and race, as well as the response of the government at all levels: local, state, and federal.

First, a few general journalistic works might be considered. For example, *Hurricane Season* (Thompson) presents the story of one local high school's attempt to continue its football season despite the devastation and the resulting hardships to the school and the players. Then, in *Waters Dark and Deep* (Lewis), a journalist has expanded her news coverage of the rescue of a single New Orleans family during the first week of the storm.

Journalist Michael Tisserand similarly expands a 10-part news series into a book, focusing on *Sugarcane Academy*, the ad hoc school set up for a group of displaced Uptown elementary school students, first in Lafayette, where many families evacuated, then back in New Orleans, where they were given permission to set up in some vacant classrooms of the closed-for-the-semester Loyola University until their regular school opened in January. Tisserand's is a dual perspective--he is a journalist and also a father whose children attended the school-- and his inclusion of children's responses to the disaster are especially useful for the researcher.

Writers from the organization MoveOn.com published a book describing the response of more than 160,000 Americans who offered to open their homes in the immediate aftermath of the storm. And the editors of *The Nation* published a collection of writings on the aftermath of the storm; they blamed the "social catastrophe" primarily on a political system which had abandoned the poor and allowed schools to deteriorate, along with the general incompetence of federal officials charged with responding to the disaster.

In *City Adrift: New Orleans Before and After Katrina*, the Center for Public Integrity (a DC nonprofit that publishes in-depth stories on issues of public interest) specifically commissioned seven award-winning journalists (including one who gave birth to a son in a New Orleans hospital the day before Katrina struck) to focus on various aspects of the impact of the storm and the aftermath, including what was revealed about the state of the environment, the levees, emergency preparedness, social services, health care, housing, and the politics of disaster. They found chaos everywhere--not just in the streets, but in the decision-making and communication processes as well, and a resultant loss of citizen confidence in the government.

Several excellent books examine the impact of the storm on the environment. The most controversial book was the first out in early 2006: *The Storm: What Went Wrong and Why During Hurricane Katrina*, written with the help of writer Mike Bryan by scientist Ivor Van Heerden, PhD. Co-Founder and Deputy Director of LSU's Hurricane Center--which studies the impact of hurricanes and ways to minimize damage--Van Heerden declared that the levee breaches, not the storm, were responsible for 87% of the flooding in New Orleans. He pointed out that the government was well aware of the risk of such a catastrophe, aggravated by the shoddy engineering of the levees, which he described in great detail. Van Heerden's blaming political failure at all levels and placing the primary blame for the destruction on the federal government--which he said should take responsibility for compensating all New Orleanians as victims--caused great controversy, especially in the months before subsequent studies could not avoid the inescapable conclusion that he was right.

Two Times-Picayune newspaper reporters, who had already won a Pulitzer Prize for their environmental coverage, wrote what many critics considered the most comprehensive--and comprehensible--book, *Path of Destruction: The Devastation of New Orleans and the Coming Age of Superstorms*. (In fact, John McQuaid and Mark Schleifstein had co-authored an earlier newspaper series "Washing Away," which was eerily prescient of exactly what happened with Katrina.) Any researcher wishing to understand how hurricanes work and how New Orleans developed into the site of a worst-case scenario would do well to put this book at the top of his list.

Similarly, award-winning environmental writer Mike Tidwell, author of *The Ravaging Tide: Strange Weather, Future Katrinas, and the Coming Death of America's Coastal Cities*, had written extensively on the risks to New Orleans caused by the destruction of the wetlands (e.g., in his 2003 *Bayou Farewell*). In his new book, Tidwell made the point that the same conditions that caused the devastation of New Orleans exist everywhere on the US coastline. He placed major blame on the US government, but he suggested even individuals could take some steps to reduce global warming.

Finally Chris Mooney's *Storm World: Hurricanes, Politics, and the Battle Over Global Warming* was a native New Orleanian science writer's contribution. Mooney called for such steps as worldwide mandatory caps on greenhouse emissions to prevent future disasters such as Katrina caused in New Orleans.



What the impact of the storm revealed about race and class in New Orleans, a city predominantly Black and poor, has also been the subject of much study. *Voices From the Storm*, edited by Lola Vollen and Chris Ying, presented oral histories of 13 storm victims, including several Blacks, an Hispanic, a Syrian immigrant, and a Vietnamese pastor. According to the editors, their stories revealed "monumental shortcomings in the Department of Homeland Security" as well as "exposed America's profound racial and class divide" (at 4.)

*What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation*, published by the South End Press Collective, provided a collage of viewpoints, including a transcript of an interview with singer Charmaine Neville a few days after the storm, and the responses of grass roots activists concerned with the impact of the storm based not only the victim's race but also gender and sexual orientation. The editors concluded that "As Katrina's waters receded, and the body count soared, an ugly truth (re)surfaced; the lives of those who are poor, who are vulnerable, and who are not white are not valued by the US government" (at vii).

Michael Eric Dyson's *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* described the legacy of Black suffering; the cronyism, politicization inexperience and incompetence of FEMA; and the effects of living in concentrated poverty on the 37 million poor people, mostly Black, in the US. He concluded that, "As horrifying as the actual events were, almost more disturbing was what Katrina revealed about the way the nation still thinks about Black people--whether in the media or in the culture more broadly" (at 138).

In *After the Storm: Black Intellectuals Explore the Meaning of Hurricane Katrina* (Troutt), Dyson and other prominent intellectuals discussed such issues as the concentrated poverty in US cities including pre-K New Orleans; the de facto racial segregation of neighborhoods; the politics of race; earlier forced migrations as well as the storm-caused diaspora; and what commentator Katheryn Russell-Brown called the government crime of "a-justice"--the failure of the law to operate as a means to do justice--in response to the storm. As NYU law professor Derrick Bell wrote in the foreword to the collection: "Whites as well as Blacks lost much to the winds and floods of Katrina, but for Black people, the deadly drama of the experience marked an official close to civil rights dreams of equality of opportunity, if not social acceptance" (at xiii).

In another serious collection of essays, *There is No Such Thing as Natural Disaster* (Hartman), more than a dozen authors discussed what the storm and its aftermath revealed about structural racism and social

inequality. For instance, in "A Matter of Choice: Historical Lessons for Disaster Recovery," Michael Powers presented a comparison of the response to Katrina to that of earlier disasters such as the Mississippi flood of 1927, the Dust Bowl/Depression of the 1930s, and Hurricane Andrew in 1992. He concluded that revitalizing, not just rebuilding was necessary; those affected must participate in their own recovery; provision must be made for oversight/accountability; ecological balance must be considered; and government must address issues in the private sector, such as insurance.

A final category of books would be those that examine the social and economic impact of Katrina and its aftermath in regard to what was revealed by the response the government at all levels--local, state, and particularly the federal government of the US.

Doug Brinkley, a professor who had written several popular books on historical topics, caused some controversy with publication of *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast*. A huge (more than 700 pages) volume rushed into publication in spring of 2006, the book was criticized for its heavy reliance on published news accounts, its fact errors and typos, and its lack of original reporting. Many commentators considered the timing of the publication especially suspicious, as it was released (and excerpted in Vanity Fair) just weeks before the mayoral election in New Orleans--and of all the government officials heavily criticized by Brinkley, Mayor Ray Nagin came off the worst. (Nagin went on to win re-election, and Brinkley went on to decide his academic career would be better served by quitting his job and leaving New Orleans for good.)

*Breach of Faith: Hurricane Katrina and the Near Death of a Great American City*, was better received. Written by author and Times Picayune metro editor Jed Horne, the well-researched book puts the storm in context and put a human face on the events by describing their impact on various New Orleanians--including a newspaper photographer faced with ethical quandaries (take photos or participate in rescues?), members of the NOPD, Hispanic immigrants, wealthy Uptowners, poor Blacks in the Lower Ninth Ward, and poor whites down in St. Bernard Parish. Horne also traveled to Kobe, Japan, to study a comparable 1995 catastrophe.

Chris Cooper (former New Orleanian) and his colleague on the Wall Street Journal, Robert Block, wrote *Disaster: Hurricane Katrina and the Failure of Homeland Security*. After conducting more than 100 interviews

and poring over more than 10,000 pages of documents, the authors pointed out that the violence at the Superdome had been greatly exaggerated, and they concluded that the primary blame for the catastrophic aftermath lay with the federal government: "In the end, [Secretary of Homeland Security Michael] Chertoff unwittingly defined the most important lesson of all to emerge from Hurricane Katrina: When disaster strikes, we are all on our own" (at 306).

Finally, there have already been a few academic conferences called specifically to examine the social and economic impact of Katrina and its aftermath, with the papers presented collected and published in book form. In *On Risk and Disaster: Lessons Learned from Hurricane Katrina* (Daniels), the University of Pennsylvania Press published a collection based on a conference held in December 2005. The purpose of the conference was to collect ideas on how the nation might come together to rebuild the Gulf Coast, as well as to gather any broader ideas on lessons to be learned from the events. More than a dozen social scientists discussed risk assessment, the fallibility of engineering projects, the impending change in the flow of the Mississippi River, the importance of ecosystems, the cost effectiveness of various forms of intervention, and the appropriate role of the government in disaster preparedness and response.

The papers presented at a follow-up conference in February 2006 resulted in the publication of *Rebuilding Urban Places After Disaster: Lessons From Hurricane Katrina* (Birch). In "Making Places Less Vulnerable," authors discussed physical constraints such as the need to relocate residents away from floodwalls. Suggestions for restarting the economy included implementing tax incentives for housing and business development, facilitating a well-functioning insurance market, and providing financial, legal, and regulatory forbearance. Other participants presented papers on "Responding to the Needs of the Displaced: Issues of Class, Race, and Recovery" and "Recreating a Sense of Place," the latter including a particularly charming offering by Nick Spitzer, professor of folklore and creator and host of the NPR program "American Routes": "Rebuilding the 'Land of Dreams' with Music."

Finally, *The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe* (Overfeldt), gathered some of the papers presented at the 2006 meeting of the Southern Sociological Society held in New Orleans. In the Introduction, authors Steven Picou and Brent Marshall described the traditional recognition of four types of

disasters: natural, technological, natural-technological, and terrorism, and pointed out that the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina did not easily fit any of these.

In Part I "Framing Katrina," social scientists pointed out that the media portrayals of the first storm to have continuous TV coverage 24/7 were oversimplified, and exaggerated crime (although some of this was due to statements by public officials)--which led to an increased role of the military. Kelly Frailing and Dee Wood Harper presented a quantitative historical comparison of the three most intense hurricanes: the 1947 storm where 11 died, 1965's Hurricane Betsy with 10 dead in Orleans Parish, and 2005's Katrina. Some differences were due to shifts in the population and in the racial makeup of the city, and the severe economic inequality between the races by 2005 in New Orleans, a result of such factors as the loss of higher wage jobs with a concomitant growth in the service industry.

In Part II "Experiencing Evacuation," researchers conducted surveys and studied social networks and community relief. For instance, they found college students' perceptions of the impact of the storm differed widely based on race. In Part III "Ongoing Disaster" in discussing rebuilding of neighborhoods, George Capowich and Marcus Kondkar described a theory of cultural creativity as a phenomenon emerging from local neighborhood social structures.

And in Part IV "Postdisaster Institutional Change," researchers described the losses and opportunities for education, the lack of preparedness for health care emergencies, and the immigrant labor market.

The conclusion of the conference was that institutional failures put people in harm's way--and for the most part the failure was systematic.

### Conclusion

As has been seen, a representative sampling of 60 of the books written in the first two years after Hurricane Katrina hit in August 2005 provides much useful material for researchers interested in the social and economic impact of the storm and its aftermath. Valuable original resources are found among the books collecting news coverage such as that published by The Times Picayune. Even artistic works such as fictional renditions--particularly those by New Orleans writers such as Dunbar--provide details of the effects of the storm

on life in the city. The scores of first-person accounts are an invaluable resource, especially those which present material from an insider's viewpoint (Forman, Rose).

Finally, most valuable for the social scientist are books which examine the social and economic impact of the storm and the aftermath on the environment (McQuaid and Schleifstein), on race (Dyson, Troutt) and examinations of the government response (Horne, Cooper, Overfelt).

Randy Newman's words describing the catastrophic flood after a hurricane struck Louisiana more than 70 years earlier--one which the government eventually was willing to accept some responsibility for, having failed to prevent the decision of some city fathers to blow up the levees up river from New Orleans prior to the flood in order, it was hoped, to save the city from a flood--might be applied to the consensus of the authors of books on 2005's Hurricane Katrina:

*Louisiana, Louisiana, they're trying to wash us away,  
They're trying to wash us away...*

*Award-winning journalist S.L. Alexander, PhD, serves on the faculty of the School of Mass Communication, Loyola University New Orleans. She has written extensively on press coverage of courts, including two books on the subject. She interviewed the authors of many of the books discussed above for "Writer's Forum," a weekly interview program on WRBH 88.3 FM/wrbh.org.*