



# Catastrophe in the Making: The Engineering of Katrina and the Disasters of Tomorrow

*William R. Freudenburg, Robert B. Gramling, Shirley Laska, Kai Erikson*

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When houses are flattened, towns submerged, and people stranded without electricity or even food, we attribute the suffering to “natural disasters” or “acts of God.” But what if they’re neither? What if we, as a society, are bringing these catastrophes on ourselves?

That’s the provocative theory of *Catastrophe in the Making*, the first book to recognize Hurricane Katrina not as a “perfect storm,” but a tragedy of our own making—and one that could become commonplace.

The authors, one a longtime New Orleans resident, argue that breached levees and sloppy emergency response are just the most obvious examples of government failure. The true problem is more deeply rooted and insidious, and stretches far beyond the Gulf Coast.

Based on the false promise of widespread prosperity, communities across the U.S. have embraced all brands of “economic development” at all costs. In Louisiana, that meant development interests turning wetlands into shipping lanes. By replacing a natural buffer against storm surges with a 75-mile long, obsolete canal that cost hundreds of millions of dollars, they guided the hurricane into the heart of New Orleans and adjacent communities. The authors reveal why, despite their geographic differences, California and Missouri are building—quite literally—toward similar destruction.

Too often, the U.S. “growth machine” generates wealth for a few and misery for many. Drawing lessons from the most expensive “natural” disaster in American history, *Catastrophe in the Making* shows why thoughtless development comes at a price we can ill afford.

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