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Review of Shelter from the Storm: Repairing the National Emergency Management System

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Review of *Shelter from the Storm: Repairing the National Emergency Management System*

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Abstract

Review of *Shelter from the Storm: Repairing the National Emergency Management System after Hurricane Katrina*, in THE ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science; March 2006. Volume 604.

KEYWORDS: Hurricane Katrina, natural disasters

Book Review of:

THE ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science.
*Shelter from the Storm: Repairing the National Emergency Management System
After Hurricane Katrina.*

William L. Waugh, Jr., Special Editor

Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, March 2006. Volume 604

332pp., preface, notes, bibliography, 2 appendixes, 5 figures, 11 tables,

Quick Read Synopsis

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Homeland Security Higher Education Commission

In a special topic edition of THE ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, this compendium of 14 articles by leading social scientist provides the reader with the dual opportunity to gain insight from and attain recommendations to meet the challenges posed by the fateful events preceding, during, and subsequent to Hurricane Katrina.

A sampling of the in-depth reviews included in the issue range from policy, politics, emergent behaviors, physical and mental health, sheltering in place, partnerships, social vulnerabilities, and organizational systems, to dispelling disaster myths. A sense of urgency emanates throughout the readings regarding one of the major “focusing events” (p.78) of our time.

A variety of research methods were employed to analyze complex issues from a pragmatic vantage point. Pragmatism becomes apparent to the reader with article summaries that offer glimmers of hopeful solutions. For example, albeit incremental, changes have been put in place to improve mental health resource response for disaster victims that “...for the first time allowed for cross-site analysis of program reach and outputs” (p. 169). The multifaceted issue of social vulnerability, so evident for numerous Gulf Coast victims, was examined through the lens of the Social Vulnerability Index (p. 106). The resulting conceptual framework renders the myriad of social indicators into a blueprint for action to improve the demographics of the region.

In addition to research methods described, the chronologies of Hurricane Katrina media coverage, the morbidity and mortality rates, and an organizational typology will add to the permanence of this issue as a reference manual. As a point of reference, for example, a five-step cost analysis process is presented, which could improve the seemingly overwhelming disarray of the current state of disaster insurance in America.

One strength of the issue is that the amalgam of disaster related concerns is balanced with a laser-focused review of a niche topic, and yet a global integration is evident. One article details the emergent behaviors of specific groups in Louisiana and ponders the question whether or not the occurrences were improvisational or antisocial. If indeed necessity is the mother of invention, then what constitutes social or antisocial behavior, and under what circumstance is a typically antisocial behavior acceptable? The thorough analysis of each aspect of disaster, such as the issue with emergent behaviors, obligates the reader to participate from a micro and macro assessment.

The very strength of *Sheltering from the Storm* presents the reader a challenge to take the requisite time to digest and reflect on the integrated profiles. For instance, the rallying call to address social indicators of vulnerable communities takes time to decipher, prior to considering the possibility of including citizens as partners in building resilient neighborhoods.

As an aide in the task of contemplating broad disaster issues, the reader may access the Quick Read Synopsis (QRS) in section (p. 288) of the compendium. In the QRS, key points, statistics, and recommendations germane to each article are provided in bullet-point fashion for handy reference.

The shelf life of *Sheltering from the Storm* will be long because the book performs a twofold service: providing a snapshot history lesson and at the same time serving as a how-to manual. Insights into the impact of the hurricanes that rocked the Gulf Coast are captured from both wide angle and narrow lenses.

True to the title, the reader is exposed to recommendations intended to repair the National Emergency Management System. Propositions are formulated based on exploration of the consequences derived from shifting roles and responsibilities of the Federal Emergency Management Agency to the Department of Homeland Security.

Findings contributed by researchers through this special issue provide a cache of vital information that can literally change the course of how all United States citizens can and should interact with disasters in the future. This special issue of THE ANNALS is a must-read for all hazards professionals, and its recommendations provide a starting point for collaborative discussions on how to address the issues revealed.