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Review of The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe

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The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe, edited by **David L. Brunsma, David Overfelt** and **J. Steven Picou**. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007. 288pp. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9780742559301.

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This edited collection is the result of a wealth of research presented at the Southern Sociological Society Annual Conference, which was the first association to hold a major conference (March of 2006) in New Orleans after hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Although the exact magnitude of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the gulf coast states of Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana might be contested, it is widely held as the most destructive disaster in our history. With some 20 special Katrina-related sessions and 80 critical sociological analyses of this disaster, the authors thought it was necessary and important to bring the best of these together in this edited volume. Part I addresses the framing of hurricane Katrina by recognizing how the disaster was sociologically constructed in the media, the increasing role of the military in disaster response and application of militarism as an ideology, and an examination of the occurrence and framing of crime. Part II is concentrated on evacuation processes and how people made decisions about whether to evacuate or not, use of social capital as a resource for evacuation, and the role of religious organizations in sheltering and providing other disaster relief services. Part III examines reaction to and recovery from Hurricane Katrina in several contexts. The chapters focus on college student reactions to the media representations of race, class, and gender after the disaster, the importance of perceptions and attachments to place as a source of social change, the unique benefit of community-based research in meeting the localized needs of communities that were affected by the hurricanes in local redevelopment plans, and a theoretical examination of the planning process for bringing unique cultural elements back to New Orleans. Part IV addresses institutional change in what we might consider the recovery phase by exam-

ining Hurricane Katrina's impact on the future of education, addressing the future of health care and the immediate needs in areas directly impacted, and the role of immigrant labor in rebuilding the gulf coast and its impact on future population and immigration trends.

One unique quality of this collection is that the authors call for a "paradigm shift in disaster research and a reorientation and redirection of important research themes throughout the broader discipline of sociology" (p. 1). Past conceptualizations of disasters distinguish between two basic forms by stating that natural disasters produce "therapeutic communities" and are consensus crises accompanied by heightened community cohesiveness and morale while technological disasters lead to "corrosive communities," stigmatizing and dividing community residents by heightening community conflict. More recently, terrorist attacks have been added to this conceptualization. The authors appropriately state that we must abandon such typologies and recognize that all disasters should be viewed as anthropogenic or resulting from human actions and relationships to the environment and that Hurricane Katrina contained elements of natural disasters, technological disasters, and terrorist attacks. This is a very salient point that we all must consider in future disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

The second important element of this collection is that it brings issues of race, ethnicity, gender and social class stratification, inequality and oppression to the forefront of our analysis. Katrina is a name that we give to an event that ripped off the "blanket of equality" and revealed the many layers of segregation, inequality, and oppression that have characterized our society for centuries. One example of this stratification is that approximately 68% of New Orleans residents before the storm were African American with over one-third living in poverty. Approximately one in five families did not own an automobile and 8 percent did not have access to phone service (p. 144). This is the real social problem which existed before and will last well beyond the event we have come to know as Katrina. For students of disaster research, this collection serves as an excellent example of how to apply the sociological imagination to disaster events.

Finally, there are a few minor limitations to the collection. The first is that there is a somewhat narrow focus on New Orleans as the focal point of the research. We must recognize that there are many other communities that were affected and we must not leave them out of our analyses. We can learn many lessons from these communities as well. In the postscript, however, the authors address this New Orleans focus by saying that there were two disasters; one in New Orleans and one in Mississippi. There are key differences because the Mississippi coast had been destroyed before while New Orleans had not (p. 236). Coastal communities in Mississippi and Alabama had past experience and resources that will enable quick recovery while this was a "new" experience for New Orleans. Second, while theory is present in most of the chapters, a few do not directly address a theoretical direction or paradigm shift as suggested in the introduction. This is, however, the tendency of an edited volume. In sum, this collection provides us with the very sobering reality that was Katrina. We all must be aware of the larger socio-political issues that create many of the conditions we witnessed in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. As concerned and affected citizens, policy makers, local, state and federal government officials, practitioners, researchers and educators, we must continue to examine the causes and consequences of a disaster of such magnitude, learn from our mistakes and identify root causes of such atrocities so as to protect the basic human rights of all in the future. This collection moves us in that direction.

POLITICS AND THE STATE

Polling and Public Opinion: A Canadian Perspective, by **Peter M. Butler**. Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press, 2007. 189pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 0802038190.

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Books on polling as a social institution do not appear too frequently, but the past two years have seen three I know of: Christopher Page's *The Roles of Public Opinion Research in Canadian Government*, Sarah Igo's *The Averaged American*, and the volume herein reviewed, Peter Butler's *Polling and Public Opinion*. This latter outlines as objectives to "take some of the mystery out of public opinion polling," to provide a perspective on polling's "influence in determining what we think and how we act," to explain to the uninitiated "the techniques for gathering opinions by conducting polls," and "to explore areas other than politics where public opinion research has had noticeable effects on Canadian society" (p. 4).

To those for whom the stated agenda seems ambitious and diffuse, I agree. It surprised me that the University of Toronto Press, which has a claim to be Canada's premier university press, would take on a project having so little original content and so much exposition of other scholars' research. *Polling and Public Opinion* could have been adopted by a trade book publisher and presented, minus the scholarly citations and with some jazzing up, as a general interest book along the model of Claire Hoy's provocative volume from 1989, *Margin of Error: Pollsters and the Manipulation of Canadian Politics*. Or, it could have been positioned more squarely as a text for undergraduate adoption, perhaps aimed at students taking a second methodology course looking explicitly at survey research. The main readership defined by the author is after all "students of social science." As it is, the book is a little deceptive. From the high prestige publisher and the back cover blurb, it seems initially like a