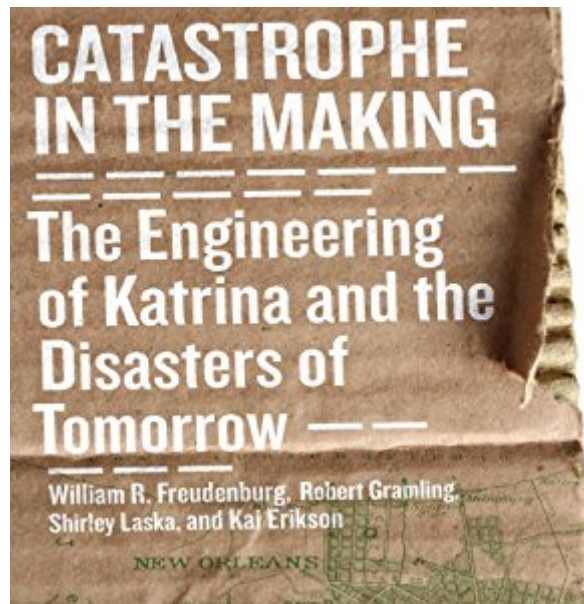


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# Catastrophe In The Making: The Engineering Of Katrina And The Disasters Of Tomorrow



## Synopsis

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 audiobook 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* tells why thoughtless development comes at a price we can ill afford.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Published a few years after Katrina's floodwaters had receded, *Catastrophe in the Making* sets out to highlight several 19th and 20th Century public works projects designed to protect New Orleans that may in fact have contributed to the devastation following the deadly 2004 hurricane. Less of an environmentalist's-soapbox book, *Catastrophe in the Making* takes a sociological standpoint to analyze the historical development of water projects in the Jazz capital of the World. As students of contributor William Freudenburg, we are exposed to his scholarly interest in organizational factors that oftentimes lead to environmental harm. Freudenburg, known for his cross-disciplinary sociological and environmental research, spent his career developing the theory of "the Double Diversion" which explains that structural rather than individual factors are often the root of environmental problems. Freudenburg, along with sociologists Robert Gramling, Shirley Laska, and Kai Erikson provide the reader with a hurricane of New Orleans history, engineering data, and scholarly analysis, that is surprisingly palatable without comprising the integrity of this potentially explosive argument. *Catastrophe in the Making* opens where the typical Katrina discourse leaves off. After summarizing commonly accepted information, the authors begin their alternative analysis with an in depth historical narrative of the development of New Orleans. The history provided details the industrial growth of the city with an emphasis on land development and a pro-growth paradigm. In line with the city's industrial-economic aims, New Orleans land development led to the creation of several canals intended to promote economic prosperity.

There must be a couple dozen books out there with "Katrina" in their titles, but almost all of them have focused on how awful things were and/or on how mother Nature attacked New Orleans. This is the first book to put the disaster in a broader context. It argues that Hurricane Katrina wasn't just a case where humans were attacked by nature, but a case where (a small number of) humans first did significant damage to nature -- with consequences that came back to haunt us all. As the book spells out, New Orleans isn't a coastal city like London or New York -- it was founded 120 river miles from the Gulf of Mexico. One consequence was that, for centuries, the city was protected by two layers of defense -- a thin ring of levees and floodwalls, constructed by humans, and a broad band of coastal wetlands, "constructed" by nature. The book argues persuasively that if another storm exactly like Katrina had hit the city just 40 years earlier -- as did two other equally nasty hurricanes, Betsy and Camille -- it wouldn't have created anything like Katrina's damage. In that last 40 years, unfortunately, so-called "economic development" projects managed to leave the wetlands in shreds. Once Katrina hit, New Orleans was, as well. There are some lessons there. A particularly notable example is provided by what may be the dumbest pork-barrel project that most of us have never

heard of: The Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet, or MRGO, generally called either "Mr. Go" or "the hurricane highway." Thanks to the same U.S.

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