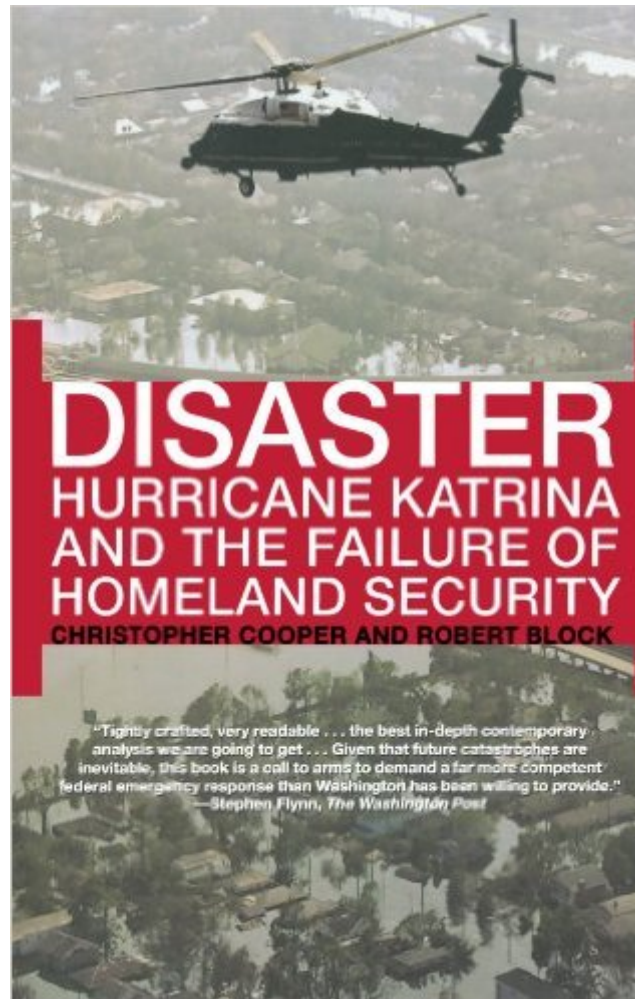


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Disaster: Hurricane Katrina And The Failure Of Homeland Security



Synopsis

"[A] tightly crafted, very readable book . . . the best in-depth contemporary analysis we are going to get."—Stephen Flynn, *The Washington Post* When Hurricane Katrina roared ashore on August 29, 2005, federal and state officials were not prepared for the devastation it would bring. In this searing indictment of what went wrong, Christopher Cooper and Robert Block take readers inside FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security to reveal the inexcusable mismanagement during the crisis—the bad decisions that were made, the facts that were ignored, and the individuals who saw that the system was broken but did nothing to fix it. In this award-winning and critically acclaimed book, Cooper and Block reconstruct the crucial days before and after the storm hit, laying bare the government's inability to respond to the most elemental needs. They also demonstrate how the Bush administration's obsessive focus on terrorist threats fatally undermined the government's ability to respond to natural disasters. The incompetent response to Hurricane Katrina is a wake-up call to all Americans, wherever they live, about how distressingly vulnerable we remain.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you're not angry when you finish reading "Disaster: Hurricane Katrina and the Failure of Homeland Security," then you didn't read it carefully enough. Written by two Wall Street Journal reporters -- Christopher Cooper and Robert Block -- this book offers context for the federal government's failed response to Hurricane Katrina last year. Anyone who's ever worked for the federal government won't be surprised to learn that operational results are often less than the sum of their bureaucratic and even well-meaning parts. But finger-pointers take note: Highlighting the federal government's

miserable performance is not tantamount to forgiving an ineffective state and local response. Identifying federal failures merely confirms that, in the end, there's more than enough blame to go around. "Disaster" is about much more than the anguished wait of those at the Superdome or the Convention Center for days after last August's storm. It's about the bureaucratic bungling that eventually led to FEMA being utterly unprepared to handle the crisis it faced last summer. "Disaster" is more than a history of failure of the levees and floodgates around New Orleans. It's a detailed recounting of how different arms of the federal government failed to protect an urban population for which it had primary responsibility and how, once disaster struck, that same federal government demonstrated itself to be equally incapable of offering aid.

"Disaster" is a superb, authoritative work that readers of any (or no) political persuasion can appreciate. It focuses on the federal response to the disaster--a catastrophe within a catastrophe--but also gives an excellent background on the history of FEMA and of the levee system around New Orleans. I am from New Orleans. I have read many books on Hurricane Katrina and about the levees, the river, and Louisiana's environmental and ecological predicament. Cooper and Block know New Orleans (Cooper lived there 10+ years as a Times-Picayune reporter) and they know FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security. This is a book of reportage: the authors manage very well to keep opinions out and let the facts speak for themselves. They show that the 80% evacuation of metro New Orleans was a resounding, unprecedented success; that the Bush administration severely and repeatedly cut federal funding for ongoing reinforcements of the city's flood protection system; and that the U.S. government through the Army Corps of Engineers failed to protect the city, whose citizens never imagined the canals' floodwalls would ever collapse. Cooper and Block also show that placing FEMA within the counterterrorist Department of Homeland Security reduces its effectiveness as a disaster response agency. Michael "Brownie" Brown had his flaws, but he at least recognized that FEMA needed better funding and more flexibility as a disaster response agency. Now FEMA is ignored down in DHS's basement while DHS secretary Chertoff, along with the administration he serves, concentrates on counterterrorism--an important job but less frequently needed than response to natural disasters.

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