Worst Case Thinking, Institutional Disasters, and Official Panic in Katrina

Lee Clarke
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New Orleans
Gulfport
New Orleans
Cultural loss
Thomas Hardy: “...if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst”
Possibilistic thinking

“Things that have never happened before happen all the time”

Scott Sagan, political scientist, Stanford
The probability is low...
Indian Point twin towers’ domain of damage
Composite Inundation Potential from Fast-Moving Category 3 Storms

Source data courtesy of ESRI and USACE. Map prepared by John Adams, UNO Department of Geography.

Courtesy of Shirley Laska, University of New Orleans
How the New Orleans “Bowl” Will Fill Based Upon Elevation
Flood “control” in New Orleans
Modern Bangladesh shelter
Past and Projected Wetland Loss in the BTNEP (1839 to 2020)
Pipelines and gas wells

Courtesy of Shirley Laska, University of New Orleans
“FEMA here. No, we haven’t had any substantiated reports of earthquakes.”
Neal Eckel, Tucson, Ariz.
First responders: Workers at Drago, 1000 meals served on 9/5, “free meals as long as needed”. By 10/24 when free service stopped, served 77k meals.
Improvisation & intelligent action

Courtesy of Nathan Bassiouni
Cajun Flotilla

Courtesy of Nathan Bassiouni
From St. Bernard to 9th Ward

Courtesy William Freudenburg, Environmental Studies, UC-Santa Barbara
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Courtesy William Freudenburg, Environmental Studies, UC-Santa Barbara
“Law enforcement officers check a passer-by during patrol in New Orleans Thursday, Sept. 8, 2005.”
Interests drive attention
Tend to reactivity about hazards
Human Error: blaming the victim

“I don’t know. What do you want to do?”
"And so I've reached the conclusion, gentlemen, that the Wonker Wiener Company is riddled with incompetence."