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Review of Natural Disaster Analysis after Hurricane Katrina: Risk Assessment, Economic Impacts and Social Implications

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Natural Disaster Analysis after Hurricane Katrina: Risk Assessment, Economic Impacts and Social Implications edited by Harry W. Richardson, Peter Gordon and James E. Moore II (eds.): Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Press, 2008 ix+311 pp., index, \$160.00 (cloth)ISBN 978-1-84720-357-1

Review by Susan L. Cutter, Director Hazards & Vulnerability Research Institute, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208

This book is a collection of mostly original essays that explore some of the social, economic, and engineering issues that arose from Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. Edited by members of the Department of Homeland Security's research center, CREATE, at the University of Southern California, the volume has a decided focus on the economic implications of the disaster. The book is organized into fifteen chapters beginning with an introductory one by the editors. The chapter authors represent some of the most well known scholars in disasters research, risk management, and decision sciences (Detlof von Winterfeldt, Vicki Bier, Lee Clarke, Adam Rose, V. Kerry Smith, John Logan). The substantive content ranges from the principles that should be embodied for disaster insurance as a policy instrument for reduction of future losses (Chapter 2), to optimization of rebuilding levees and lessons learned (Chapters 3-5), to economic impacts (Chapters 9-12), and the social consequences of this disaster (Chapters 13-15). The ever-provocative Chip Clarke provides a nice segue between the technical optimization chapters and those focused on impacts in his discussion of worst case thinking (Chapter 6).

There is no clear statement of purpose from the editors and little in the way of insights into the organization of the chapters. Was this book a product of a symposium or just a random gathering of solicited material? It is not clear what the reader is supposed to glean from the book other than the perfunctory exploration of "some of the issues arising from the Hurricane Katrina disaster" (p. 1). There is no summary chapter by the editors, so the reader is left hanging about the book's purpose in pulling such a diverse group of papers together in one volume. Who is the intended audience, and what take home messages did the editors want to convey? Aside from the mystery of the intent of the volume, there is great unevenness among the chapters themselves in terms of scope and methods. Some seem totally irrelevant to the topic, including the one on the Thames Barrier decision and the contribution by Bier and colleagues on protecting against terrorism. The chapters range from purely descriptive and quite elementary treatments of evacuation (minus the social science background literature and context that would certainly inform the survey results), to highly

empirical analyses of economic impacts, decipherable only to a very narrowly specialized reader.

Despite the talented pool of contributors, this book is a disappointment and offers little that is new. Coupled with the excessive price, I cannot recommend this for anyone's personal collection or even the library. Instead, I would save the money and look to the published journal literature where much of the content of the book has appeared in different forms.