

Lessons Learned From Natural Disasters

Symposium Editor
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Given the recent rise in the number and magnitude of natural disasters that have adversely impacted the United States and other countries in the last five years, the editor of the *Journal of Public Management and Social Policy* generously provided an opportunity for researchers to contribute to this area of research. The call for papers solicited manuscripts from several fields by posing the general question: How do natural disasters impact the administration of government, services, infrastructure, indigenous populations, education, crime, economy, housing and commercial real estate? Six papers were accepted for the symposium. Specifically, the six articles offer a review of significant natural disasters in the United States, a look at the history of natural disaster policy and the philosophies upon which those policies are based, collaboration as a tool to strengthen local government response to disasters, rebuilding trust in government following disasters, and lastly how citizens respond to government officials when natural disasters looms.

The one recurring theme in each one of these manuscripts is collaboration. That is, government officials at all levels must work together and with other nongovernmental organizations in order to efficiently and effectively minimize the impact of natural disasters.

Article Synopsis

The first article by Rivera and Miller lays the cornerstone for the symposium by providing a historical account of natural disaster policy as it has evolved since the mid 1800s. They argue that politicians and bureaucrats must be cognizant of past policies and events in order to avoid repeating past mistakes and better manage future natural disasters. Lastly, they spend time examining current natural disaster policy and the implications of these policies on future policy. Particularly, they emphasize the need for regional and local preparedness to disaster relief using a top down model.

The second article by DuPont-Morales begins with a discussion of hazards, perceived risk and risk and moves on to a comparison of U.S. policy concerning risk, security and governance with that of the international community. She posits that social policy has left the U.S. at risk and the only way to lessen the impact of risk is to examine the lessons learned from the international community.

The third article by Norris-Tirrell and Clay is a case study of Tennessee's District 11 Homeland Security strategic planning process. Specifically, they highlight the need to focus on collaborative activities when the issue of emergency management arises. In so doing, they point out that professionals and government officials often forget the importance of developing and supporting sophisticated collective planning processes and relationships necessary to create community capacity to manage emergencies. Lastly, the authors describe the interactions of state and local officials in Tennessee and how they created a strategic plan that calls for collaboration and partnerships.

The fourth article by Miller and Rivera focuses on the legacy left by Hurricane Katrina and how decades of distrust and policy had a catastrophic effect on the citizens who remained during the disaster. Historically, poor people are the most vulnerable to all sorts of maladies. Specifically, they are the most likely to have little to no health care, poor housing, poor school systems, and so on. As a result, poor citizens have a general distrust of government. This distrust emanated from a history of treatment as second class citizens. They argue that in order for government and public officials to bring about the physical and socio-economic restoration of New Orleans they should consider three guiding principles in order to end the distrust in government and prevent future reactions during subsequent disasters: transparency in government transactions, sustainable equity, and a results-based culture.

The fifth article by Burnside uses simulation data to examine the behavior of New Orleans residents when the call to evacuate is delivered from public officials. The data was collected by the Survey Research Center at the University of New Orleans in 2004. He finds that public officials and the media are important fixtures in the evacuation process because of their central role in disseminating information and communicating risk to the residents of a community. His study argues that not only are public officials and the media important factors in the evacuation process, but their credibility and reliability as sources of information is more complex than previous research has suggested. He uses a direct effects logit model to determine the impact of the "crying wolf" hypothesis and the "black empowerment" hypothesis on the hypothetical evacuation of New Orleans residents. The results indicate that black residents tend to be more responsive to evacuation requests when specific storm related information is disseminated by a black official. While he finds no clear evidence to support the "crying wolf" hypothesis, he does argue that it is important to reiterate that there were no substantive differences in evacuation procedures for those who had a definite evacuation plan and those who did not have a plan.

The last article by Menifield and Joachim examines the frequency of natural disasters in the United States as well as provide a framework in which emergency management can occur through the collaboration of multiples entities at all levels of government and through nongovernmental organizations. They find that the number of hurricanes, tornadoes and floods has increased over time as well as the cost associated with them. However, with few exceptions, the number of those who perish as a result of natural disasters has decreased over time. A review of the emergency management literature provided a plethora of information that was useful in creating an emergency management model. They conclude that government officials in New Orleans ignored "the rules" of emergency management and disaster relief to the fullest extent.

Unfortunately, there really is no venue that will allow researchers or practitioners the capacity to examine every subject related to emergency management.

However, we hope that these articles will stimulate and invigorate other scholars to examine pertinent issues that we do not cover so as assist and educate policymakers, bureaucrats and nongovernmental officials in preparing for and responding efficiently and effectively to natural disasters.

Contributors

Randolph Burnside is an assistant professor of political science at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. He teaches courses in minority politics, American political institutions and political behavior. His current research focuses on the role of religion in politics, minority political behavior and urban politics. His most recent publication appears in the *Journal of Race and Policy*.

Joy Clay is an associate professor at the University of Memphis. She teaches courses in the Department of Public and Nonprofit Administration. Her research, outreach, and publications focus on collaboration and building community capacity, health policy, and public budgeting.

Heather Joachim completed her master's degree in public and nonprofit administration at the University of Memphis. She plans on pursuing the Ph.D. in public policy and administration beginning in the fall of 2007. Since May 2002, she has worked at the Juvenile Court of Memphis and Shelby County as a Program Specialist doing outcome evaluation for all of the courts internal and contracted rehabilitation programs for at-risk youth. She currently serves as Secretary for the Tennessee Juvenile Court Services Association

Charles E. Menifield is an associate professor at the University of Memphis where he teaches research methods, public budgeting and financial management, urban administration and public management information systems in the Department of Public and Nonprofit Administration. His most recent research has appeared in *J-PAE*, *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration*, and the *Journal of Business and Public Affairs*. He has edited two books: *Politics in the New South: Representation of African Americans in Southern State Legislatures* (2005) SUNY Press; and *Representation of Minorities in the American Political System: Implications for the Twenty-First Century* (2001) Austin and Winfield Publishers.

DeMond Shondell Miller is an associate professor of Sociology and Director of the Liberal Arts and Sciences Institute at Rowan University (Glassboro, New Jersey). He has worked as an evaluator for alcohol and tobacco social norms projects and as principal investigator to facilitate research projects involving: environmental issues and community satisfaction. His primary area of specialization is environmental sociology, the study of the social construction of place, community development, and social impact assessment. Several of his professional papers can be found in: *The Researcher*, *The Qualitative Report*, *The Journal of Emotional Abuse*, *Space and Culture*, *The International Journal of the Humanities* and *The Southeastern Sociological Review*.

M.A. DuPont-Morales is an associate professor of criminal justice at The Pennsylvania State University in Middletown, Pennsylvania in the School of Public Affairs. Dr. DuPont-Morales researches family violence, Victimology, social welfare, and advocacy. She consults for local municipalities on policing issues, policy formulation, implementation, and sustainability.

Dorothy Norris-Tirrell is an associate professor and Director of the Division of Public and Nonprofit Administration at the University of Memphis. She teaches courses in the public and nonprofit leadership and administration. Her research has appeared in the *Policy Studies Journal*, *International Journal of Public Administration*, *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *American Review of Public Administration*, and *Review of Public Personnel Administration*.

Jason David Rivera is a research assistant in the Liberal Arts and Sciences Institute at Rowan University (Glassboro, New Jersey). His primary area of focus is national and international policy and disaster mitigation, research to improve university and community relations, and international sustainable development.