

CATASTROPHE
IN THE MAKING

Catastrophe *in the* Making

*The Engineering of Katrina
and the Disasters of Tomorrow*

William R. Freudenburg

Robert Gramling

Shirley Laska

Kai T. Erikson

 ISLANDPRESS / Shearwater Books

Washington | Covelo | London

A Shearwater Book
Published by Island Press

Copyright © 2009 William R. Freudenburg, Robert B. Gramling,
Shirley B. Laska, and Kai T. Erikson

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright
Conventions. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by
any means without permission in writing from the publisher: Island Press,
1718 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20009.

SHEARWATER BOOKS is a trademark of The Center for Resource Economics.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Freudenburg, William R.

Catastrophe in the making : the engineering of Katrina and the disasters of
tomorrow / William R. Freudenburg, Robert B. Gramling, Shirley B. Laska.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-59726-682-6 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-59726-682-5 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Hurricane Katrina, 2005. 2. Hurricane protection—Louisiana—
Evaluation. 3. Flood control—Louisiana—New Orleans—Evaluation.
4. Levees—Louisiana—New Orleans—History. 5. Levees—Mississippi
River. 6. Emergency management—Louisiana—New Orleans. 7. Economic
development—Environmental aspects—Louisiana—New Orleans.
I. Gramling, Robert B. II. Laska, Shirley Bradway, 1944- III. Title.

HV636 2005 .N4 F74 2009 363.34'9220976090511—dc22
2009021516

British Cataloging-in-Publication data available.

Printed on recycled, acid-free paper ♻️

Design by David Bullen

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Keywords: *Army Corps of Engineers, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA),
Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO), natural hazards, environmental justice,
city planning, wetlands, floodwall, storm surge*

To all who have suffered
needlessly from “natural” disasters,
and to future citizens
who may not need to suffer if we begin to act now.

— Contents —

Prologue	The First Days of Katrina	3
Chapter 1	A Mighty Storm Hits the Shore	15
Chapter 2	The Setting	31
Chapter 3	Slicing Through the Swamps	45
Chapter 4	The Growth Machine Comes to New Orleans	55
Chapter 5	A “Helpful Explosion”	67
Chapter 6	The Collapse of Engineered Systems	91
Chapter 7	The Loss of Natural Defenses	111
Chapter 8	Critical for Economic Survival?	135
Chapter 9	The Axe in the Attic	147
Chapter 10	The End of an Error?	163
	<i>Endnotes</i>	171
	<i>References</i>	183
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	197
	<i>Index</i>	201

