

BOOK REVIEWS

Hurricane Andrew: Ethnicity, Gender and the Sociology of Disasters, edited by **Walter Gillis Peacock**, **Betty Hearn Morrow**, and **Hugh Gladwin**. London and New York: Routledge, 1997. 277 pp. \$110.00 (U.S.) cloth.

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As is usually true of reviews of collected works, it is much easier to identify in them significant contributions and lines of reasoning by individual contributors than it is to find theoretical cohesiveness. This is true in my case. Clearly, the collection by Peacock et al. is an important contribution to the literature on disasters, unified as it is by the theme of the impact of Hurricane Andrew on South Florida. Unfortunately, however, Peacock and Ragsdale's introductory chapter on social systems and ecological networks, an insightful treatment of disaster theory, *did not* provide explicit theoretical guidance to the monograph, which lacks theoretical unity.

Grenier and Morrow describe the socio-political ecology of Miami as it existed immediately prior to the storm. They emphasize its demography and history of intergroup relations, that is, the situation of Anglos, Blacks, and Hispanics (mostly Cubans). I was puzzled by the attention they give in an otherwise informative description of the area to the ethnic enclave as an engine of the presumed economic well-being of

Cubans; Grenier's earlier writings have shown it to be relatively inconsequential.

Gladwin and Peacock analyze warnings and evacuation of households. They use information collected from a telephone survey of a random sample of more than 1,000 households in Dade County with an oversample of 300 households in South Dade, the area most heavily impacted by Andrew. The chapter analyzes preparation activities and the decision to evacuate and offers a number of policy considerations. Among their most interesting findings is that the elderly were significantly less likely to evacuate and that the presence of households in a high-risk evacuation zone did not ensure that they would evacuate. Reproducing the well-known finding that objective measures of risk are mediated by social valuations, they show that living in an evacuation zone was not a sure predictor of evacuation and that the longer people lived in South Florida the lower were their odds of evacuation; the same was true of Black households.

Averch and Dluhy painstakingly reconstruct, based on 27 open-ended interviews with key decision-makers and disaster managers, the failure of intergovernmental response in South Florida in the wake of Andrew. They conclude that the EOC failed in large part because it was not designed to operate in a situation of massive destruction like Andrew in which cities competed for scarce resources. Yelvington looks at tent cities created to house displaced persons, offering suggestions for their relative underutilization. One possibility unexplored by him is a neighborhood ethnic heterogeneity effect in which victims who lived in ethnically heterogeneous neighborhoods refused to leave their belongings and move to the tent cities for fear of thefts by their neighbors.

Perhaps one of the most innovative parts of the book is the chapter by Enarson and Morrow offering a "gendering perspective" on Andrew. It is based on interviews and focus groups with women from different ethnic groups. The findings are organized around four fictionalized women: a social worker, a single grandmother in public housing, a relocated trailer camp resident, and a small business owner. Their conclusion, that much can be gained by recognizing the special problems and vulnerabilities of women during community reconstruction, is sound.

Peacock and Girard analyze hurricane damage and insurance settlements. It is an important contribution. They find that Cubans and

Blacks reported higher levels of damage than Anglos. Yet, in contrast to the very empathetic treatment of Blacks, I was puzzled by their apparent animus towards Cubans, reflected in an otherwise unsubstantiated statement: "Cuban-Americans . . . are neither disadvantaged nor a minority in Dade County." Relatedly, there are also problems with their use of an index of residential dissimilarity to measure housing discrimination, for people may *choose* rather than be forced to live among their fellow ethnics! An important finding is that satisfactory insurance settlements were very much determined by being insured by three national insurance companies, State Farm, Allstate, and Prudential, and that, compared with Anglos and Hispanics, Blacks were insured less often by these top companies. Much more problematic, to my way of thinking, is their assertion that these findings are "suggestive of red-lining (refusing policies to residents of Black neighborhoods) by major companies." It may very well be true. Indeed, the history of Black residential segregation included in the chapter by Girard and Peacock may make it likely. Still, they give no satisfactory proof for it.

Girard and Peacock's analysis of postdisaster relocation shows that Blacks and Hispanics living in ethnically segregated areas relocate less often than Anglos. I do not know why they interpret the Hispanic finding away, concluding that "post-hurricane relocation was impeded for Blacks, whereas for most Hispanics, we tentatively conclude, this was not a major problem" (p. 200). Readers are not told about the specific nature of the impedance.

There are other chapters worth mentioning: one offers a systematic, instructive comparison of Homestead and Florida City, dubbed a "neglected Black community"; another offers an extended assessment of the likely impact of Hurricane Andrew on the Miami Metropolitan Area; yet a third examines the impact of Andrew on family relationships.

In sum, this is an excellent collection of original research on a major disaster event. It has many positive features, such as the incisive policy considerations it includes at the end of each chapter.

The Tainted Desert: Environmental and Social Ruin in the American West, by **Valerie Kuletz**. New York: Routledge, 1998. 336 pp. \$80 (U.S.) cloth, \$22.99 (U.S.) paper.

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This sobering book destabilizes the current neoliberal triumphalism about how the U.S. won the Cold War. No victory can be read from this careful historical, ethnographic, and ecological study of more than 50 years of nuclear colonialism in the American West. This is a disturbing tale of environmental injustice, "racism in fact," perpetrated in the name of national security against the indigenous peoples and fragile environments of the western deserts. Kuletz's fine book serves as a model of transdisciplinary analysis, moving deftly across history, geography, anthropology, ecology, and sociology while coherently blending constructivist, poststructural, phenomenological, and critical theoretical approaches to science and nature. Although theoretically sophisticated, the insightful analytic approach never overpowers the narrative structure of the book, making it accessible to a diversity of readers. It is particularly useful for those whose academic interests lie in technological risk, hazards, science and technology, and movements for environmental justice.

Kuletz's analysis moves forward on several levels. She provides a historical geography of the environmental and social impacts of the U.S. nuclear weapons program, from its initiation during World War II through its subsequent expansion during the Cold War and the "Atoms for Peace" program (the latter intended primarily as a generator of plu-

onium for warheads). The environmental destruction and toxic contamination of people, animals, and environments has been produced through the interlocking practices of major centers of power in the U.S.: the military and its atomic weapons testing program; the uranium industry mining on federal and Indian lands to fuel that program; the federally funded "science cities" such as Los Alamos; and DOE laboratories that produce the science and technology (and large amounts of radioactive contamination) for these weapons of annihilation. These often covert activities are concentrated in the Indian country of the Four Corners Region of the U.S., but range to the military sacrifice zones of the National Test Site in Nevada and the militarized deserts of California.

The second half of the book engages the issue of the nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, a state that has seen more than one thousand nuclear weapons detonated (120 of those above ground). Kuletz provides a careful analysis of scientific and political rhetoric that has justified this geography of destruction and the use of deserts as "dumps." Science and its military patrons have discursively constructed the desert as "wasteland," a place empty of people, an undesirable space for anything except scientific and military nuclear colonization. Such scientific discourse renders native dwellers of the land invisible, deterritorializing and silencing them. Scientific discourse, harnessed to military purposes, has historically worked to marginalize and disempower alternative understandings of "nature" held by indigenous peoples (and others) of the region. Rather than privileging one discourse community over another (science versus Indian belief systems), Kuletz shows how alternative understandings of the desert environment (desert as nuclear laboratory/wasteland *versus* desert as spiritual, cultural, and ecological home) have been contested over the last five decades. These contested understandings have come to a head with the battle over the high-level nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain. Science is understood here to be as embedded in social and cultural values as Indian ontologies and ways of knowing. However, there is no New Age romanticism about Indian world views here. Instead, Kuletz shows the power effects (in the sense of Foucault) of discourse communities, with the ineluctable domination of scientific-military rationality over competing understandings (Indians, environmentalists) of space, place, and nature.

Equally important, her analysis illuminates a scientific community

that is deeply imbricated in the economic interests of the military and its corporate beneficiaries, producing an unholy technocratic alliance that has shaped desert landscapes to suit its nuclear project. The big losers in this fifty-year environmental disaster are native peoples across the desert Southwest, the nuclear veterans and down-winders of the region, and all others intentionally or accidentally exposed to radioactivity while the U.S. has pursued its "national security" goals. The vexing legacy of this program, tons of the most toxic substances known to humans, will be with us for hundreds of centuries with no guarantees of safety, now or ever.

This is an important and serious book that deserves a wide audience, both in and out of the classroom, both for the innovative analytic strategies deployed and for the story Kuletz has assembled of this long-running disaster.

An Assessment of Floodplain Management in Georgia's Flint River Basin, by **Elliott Mittler**. Boulder, Colorado: Institute of Behavioral Science, Program on Environment and Behavior, Monograph No. 59, 1997. 181 pp. \$20 (U.S.).

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This monograph presents an extensive and detailed historical reconstruction, going back to 1872, of the many attempts by federal, state, and local governments to study and manage the Flint River Basin. Among its significant contributions is a subtext portraying the primacy of instrumental goals and ways of thinking about the environment and the absence of mitigation and sustainable programs, which made flood protection a secondary consideration. Of particular interest to regional planners is the monograph's competent evaluation of the institutional capacity of the local, state, and federal governments to intervene in floodplain management, the local response to the 1994 flood caused by Tropical Storm Alberto, and the effectiveness of the National Flood Insurance Program in this event.

The review of the extant studies of the Flint River Basin reminds me of the absence in the text of an examination of the relationship between scientific-technical criteria and politics, particularly as it involved the U.S. Corps of Engineers, a formidable institutional actor central to the story. More broadly, however, the monograph presents a very worthwhile chapter on the political setting of public policy. It

describes the most important political considerations affecting the federal response expressed in legislation and presidential initiatives. Importantly, the author shows how the increasing dependence on the federal government for disaster relief has meant the underdevelopment of state and local initiatives and programs. There is also a wonderful example of the irrationality of rationality where cost-benefit calculations by the Corps of Engineers as a key criterion for congressional approval of flood programs meant that projects based primarily on flood control benefits would not be approved until the vulnerability of the flood prone area increased! There is also a very revealing examination of the indeterminacy of flood mapping methodology and of the important difficulties faced by the National Flood Insurance Program.

Mittler mentions how the political system of the state of Georgia with its constitutional emphasis on county independence impacts floodplain management. He alludes to the tendency by the state to develop well-staffed departments such as the Department of Natural Resources, which is capable of serving a diverse, mostly rural, population of local governments. He concludes that this bottom-up approach creates difficulties for the state's effort to develop floodplain management regulations, but he does not discuss what alternative arrangements he would favor. Georgia's failure to regulate and inspect dams is alarming; 2,950 of 3,300 known dams go uninspected!

Also reviewed is the institutional capacity of Montezuma and Albany, the two cities impacted by the 1994 flood. Of great interest to me were two historical circumstances noted by the author. First, in Montezuma, David Peaster's importance as city manager and civic leader was instrumental in the effective recovery and reconstruction of the city. Second, in Albany, the legacy of racial distrust and fear and the continued poverty of Blacks created grave difficulties for attempts at reconstruction. Here we see the imponderable aspects of historical legacy and personality embedded in an account of a flood.

The monograph concludes with a list of recommendations posed as questions. I would have wished to have seen a more straightforward statement by the author of where he stood on the important issues he raises, such as whether or not the federal government should continue to play a leading role in floodplain management practices. Still, it is an excellent piece of scholarship, which, I am fairly certain, is destined to become a classic in the regional planning literature.