

# Forgotten: Race, Class, and the American Disasters We Refuse to Remember

## Introduction

The United States has a long and tragic history of disasters, both natural and man-made. From the devastating hurricanes that have battered our coasts to the wildfires that have ravaged our forests, from the earthquakes that have shaken our cities to the industrial accidents that have poisoned our air and water, disasters have left an indelible mark on our nation.

Yet, despite the frequency and severity of these events, we often forget the lessons they teach us. The stories of those who have suffered and the communities that

have been destroyed fade from our collective memory, and we are left unprepared for the next catastrophe.

This book seeks to change that. By examining a series of forgotten disasters, we can learn from the mistakes of the past and work to create a more resilient future. We can identify the systemic inequalities that make certain communities more vulnerable to disasters, and we can develop policies and practices that prioritize the needs of the most marginalized. We can also learn from the stories of resilience and hope that emerge from even the darkest times.

Through a combination of historical analysis, personal narratives, and policy recommendations, this book offers a comprehensive look at the impact of disasters on American society. It explores the role of race, class, and environmental degradation in shaping disaster outcomes, and it examines the challenges and opportunities of disaster recovery and resilience.

This book is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the complex relationship between disasters and society. It is a call to action for policymakers, community leaders, and ordinary citizens to work together to create a more just and resilient future for all Americans.

The chapters in this book cover a wide range of topics, including:

- The disproportionate impact of disasters on marginalized communities
- The role of environmental degradation in increasing the frequency and severity of disasters
- The challenges and opportunities of disaster recovery and resilience
- The importance of community engagement in disaster preparedness and response
- The need for systemic changes to address the root causes of disasters

This book is a valuable resource for anyone who wants to learn more about the history of disasters in the United States, the impact of disasters on communities, and the policies and practices that can be implemented to reduce the risk of future disasters.

## Book Description

In the United States, disasters are all too common. From hurricanes to wildfires to earthquakes, these events have a devastating impact on communities across the country. But what happens when these disasters are forgotten? What are the long-term consequences for the people and places affected?

This book explores the hidden history of disasters in America, focusing on those that have been largely forgotten or overlooked. Through a combination of historical analysis, personal narratives, and policy recommendations, the book sheds light on the systemic inequalities that make certain communities more vulnerable to disasters, and the challenges and opportunities of disaster recovery and resilience.

The book covers a wide range of topics, including:

- The disproportionate impact of disasters on marginalized communities, such as people of

color, low-income communities, and Indigenous communities.

- The role of environmental degradation in increasing the frequency and severity of disasters, and the need for climate action to reduce this risk.
- The challenges of disaster recovery and resilience, including the need for long-term investment in infrastructure, housing, and community development.
- The importance of community engagement in disaster preparedness and response, and the need for policies that empower communities to take action.
- The need for systemic changes to address the root causes of disasters, such as poverty, inequality, and environmental injustice.

This book is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the complex relationship between disasters

and society. It is a call to action for policymakers, community leaders, and ordinary citizens to work together to create a more just and resilient future for all Americans.

# Chapter 1: Forgotten Catastrophes

## Unremembered Disasters: Exploring lesser-known tragedies in American history

In the annals of American history, there are countless disasters that have faded from public memory. These forgotten catastrophes, often overshadowed by more well-known events, have left an indelible mark on the communities they struck. By examining these lesser-known tragedies, we can gain a deeper understanding of the impact of disasters on American society and the challenges of disaster recovery and resilience.

One such forgotten disaster is the Great Galveston Hurricane of 1900. This Category 4 hurricane made landfall on the Texas coast on September 8, 1900, with winds exceeding 140 miles per hour. The storm surge, reaching heights of 15 feet, inundated the city of Galveston, causing widespread destruction. The official death toll was set at over 8,000, making it the deadliest

natural disaster in U.S. history at the time. However, many historians believe the actual death toll was much higher, possibly as high as 12,000.

The Great Galveston Hurricane exposed the city's inadequate infrastructure and lack of disaster preparedness. The storm surge easily overwhelmed the city's seawall, which had been constructed to protect against flooding. The city's wooden buildings were no match for the hurricane's powerful winds. In the aftermath of the storm, Galveston was left in ruins.

Another forgotten disaster is the Okeechobee Hurricane of 1928. This Category 4 hurricane made landfall in Florida on September 16, 1928. The storm surge, reaching heights of 18 feet, inundated the shores of Lake Okeechobee, causing catastrophic flooding. The floodwaters breached the Herbert Hoover Dike, a massive earthen dam that had been constructed to protect the surrounding farmland. The resulting

floodwaters killed over 2,500 people, mostly African American farmworkers.

The Okeechobee Hurricane exposed the systemic racism and inequality that existed in Florida at the time. The Herbert Hoover Dike had been poorly constructed and maintained, and the African American farmworkers who lived in the area were given little warning about the impending disaster. As a result, they were disproportionately affected by the flooding.

These are just two examples of the many forgotten disasters that have occurred throughout American history. By remembering these tragedies, we can learn from the mistakes of the past and work to create a more resilient future. We can also honor the victims of these disasters and their families, whose stories have been largely forgotten.

# Chapter 1: Forgotten Catastrophes

## The Stories Untold: Voices from overlooked disasters

In the annals of American history, there are countless stories of disasters that have been largely forgotten. These are the stories of communities that have been devastated by floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural hazards, as well as man-made disasters such as industrial accidents and oil spills. The stories of these disasters are often overlooked, and the voices of the survivors are often silenced.

This chapter will tell the stories of some of these forgotten disasters. We will hear from survivors who have lost everything, from first responders who risked their lives to save others, and from community leaders who are working to rebuild their communities. We will learn about the challenges that these communities face,

and we will explore the ways in which they are overcoming these challenges.

One of the most important things we can do to learn from disasters is to listen to the stories of the survivors. These stories can help us to understand the impact of disasters on individuals and communities, and they can help us to identify the systemic factors that make certain communities more vulnerable to disasters.

The stories of survivors can also inspire us to work towards a more just and resilient future. By listening to their stories, we can learn about the strength and resilience of the human spirit, and we can be motivated to work towards creating communities that are better prepared for and more resilient to disasters.

In addition to the stories of survivors, this chapter will also explore the role of the media in shaping public perceptions of disasters. We will examine how the media often focuses on the most sensational aspects of disasters, while ignoring the long-term impact on

communities. We will also discuss the importance of diversifying media coverage of disasters, so that the voices of marginalized communities are heard.

By telling the stories of forgotten disasters and by listening to the voices of survivors, we can learn from the past and work towards a more just and resilient future.

# Chapter 1: Forgotten Catastrophes

## Disasters and Inequality: How social disparities shape the impact of catastrophes

Social disparities are deeply embedded in the fabric of American society, shaping every aspect of life, from access to healthcare and education to housing and employment opportunities. These disparities are also evident in the way that disasters impact communities.

When disaster strikes, marginalized communities are often hit the hardest. They are more likely to live in areas that are vulnerable to natural hazards, such as floodplains or earthquake fault lines. They are also more likely to have jobs that expose them to hazardous conditions, such as working in construction or agriculture. And they are less likely to have access to the resources they need to prepare for and recover from disasters, such as insurance, savings, and social support networks.

As a result of these disparities, the impact of disasters is often unevenly distributed. The poor, the elderly, and people of color are more likely to be killed or injured in disasters, and they are more likely to lose their homes and livelihoods. They are also more likely to experience long-term health and economic consequences from disasters.

For example, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, African Americans in New Orleans were disproportionately affected by the disaster. They were more likely to live in the low-lying areas of the city that were flooded, and they were more likely to be uninsured and to have low incomes. As a result, they were more likely to lose their homes and jobs, and they were more likely to experience health problems and poverty in the aftermath of the disaster.

The uneven impact of disasters on marginalized communities is not simply a matter of bad luck. It is a direct result of the social and economic inequalities

that exist in our society. These inequalities make it more difficult for marginalized communities to prepare for and recover from disasters, and they make them more vulnerable to the impacts of disasters when they do occur.

To address the uneven impact of disasters on marginalized communities, we need to address the root causes of social and economic inequality. This means investing in affordable housing, education, and healthcare. It means creating jobs that pay a living wage and that provide access to benefits like health insurance and paid sick leave. And it means enacting policies that protect the environment and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

By addressing the root causes of social and economic inequality, we can create a more just and resilient society, one that is better prepared to withstand the impacts of disasters.

**This extract presents the opening three sections of the first chapter.**

**Discover the complete 10 chapters and 50 sections by purchasing the book, now available in various formats.**

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