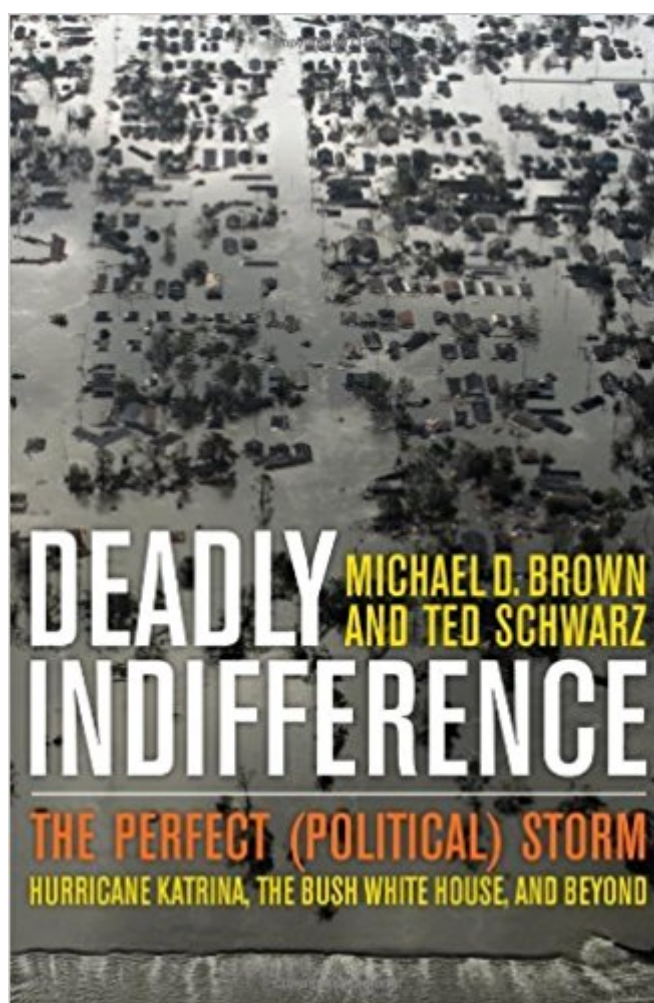


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# Deadly Indifference: The Perfect (Political) Storm: Hurricane Katrina, The Bush White House, And Beyond



## Synopsis

At last, former Under Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Brown—infamously praised by President George W. Bush for doing a "heckuva job" in the wake of Hurricane Katrina—tells his side of the response to one of the greatest natural disasters to occur in the United States. Without making excuses for anyone, least of all the President of the United States or himself, Brown describes in detail what ultimately turned out to be the largest federal response to a natural disaster in U.S. history.

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## Customer Reviews

And if you're shaking your head that Michael "FEMA" Brown would actually have the temerity or boneheadedness to write a Katrina book called *Deadly Indifference*, you don't know Brownie. (BlogOfNewOrleans.com) An excellent additional perspective on the disaster of Katrina, and a critical examination of bungled disaster management. (Midwest Book Review)

Michael D. Brown was Under Secretary of Homeland Security in the administration of President George W. Bush. A consultant and radio talk show host, he lives in Boulder, Colorado. Ted Schwarz is the author of over 100 books, several of them bestsellers. He lives in Cleveland, Ohio.

For those folks who want to know the whole story, Michael Brown's "*Deadly Indifference*" lays out the Katrina response in a logically and accurate portrayal. It is often said that 'all disasters are local'

in that emergency preparedness begins with the family and emergency response begins with your local emergency officials. It is baffling how to this day it is obvious the two biggest failures of the response did not reside with Mr. Brown but instead should have been the two local Louisiana governmental officials, Mayor Nagin for failing to order a timely evacuation and the Louisiana Governor who often appeared confused and indecisive. But as Mr. Brown pointed out in his book, the wrong decision, such as the potentially 'inconvenient' ordering an evacuation could have serious repercussions at the voting booth if the alarm were sounded but no storm came ashore. This fear alone hinders an effective local response as evidenced with Louisiana. Read the book and review the numerous studies on Katrina; compare the differences between Florida and Louisiana and you will see where politics definitely makes a difference. I was there during the recovery phase for a year and can attest to Mr. Brown's observations. With his background of over 160 disasters, (you didn't read that in the newspapers), Mr. Brown had the experience. Politics does not belong in disasters and unfortunately will only get worse in the future. Steven Craig, CEM, MEP, MSAuthor-"Chronicles of Katrina"

I was born and reared in New Orleans and left in 1963. ALWAYS knew the levees were weak and knew it was just a matter of time when they would fail. I enjoyed reading Deadly Indifference because so much I could identify with, corrupt politicians, ignoring reality, never pass up a good meal, not listening, blaming others, talking big. I appreciated Mr Brown's honesty about his own failings. I admire him for not walking away; for his assertiveness; his being a gentleman and so much more. A great read...not to miss. Grace.

Taking responsibility with insight and integrity is difficult. Michael Brown's soul searching self reflection and analysis of specific variables converging in the tragedy we know as Katrina offers the reader an honest portrait of the events surrounding this storm. Katrina was more than a hurricane. The environmental, geographic, social, economic, and political factors are crucial to our understanding of what happened in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Mr. Brown's book is a must read for Americans to understand how disasters can snowball into horror; we can learn from our mistakes. Sherry Roth, Ph.D.

VLG 2011-8-22[This book review published full-text in Eric Holderman's Disaster Zone blog]A Book Review and Critique of DEADLY INDIFFERENCE-The Perfect (Political) Storm-Hurricane Katrina, the Bush White House and Beyond (219 pp)By Michael D. Brown and Ted SchwarzPublished by

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(electronic) An interesting selection of title by former Under Secretary for Emergency Preparedness and Response of the Department of Homeland Security Michael D. Brown. Mr. Brown also served as the General Counsel of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Deputy Director of FEMA before its statutory abolition by the Homeland Security Act of 2002 effective for that purpose on March 1, 2003, when Mr. Brown became Under Secretary. In those positions Mr. Brown served as a Presidential appointee of President George W. Bush. The book serves as documentation in part and apologia in part for the learning curve experienced by Mr. Brown ending shortly after the landfall of Hurricane Katrina in late August 2005. Disclosure: I worked at FEMA from September 10, 1979 until October 1, 1999. From April 1, 1979 until September 10, 1979 I ran FEMA's litigation under IAA between FEMA and HUD. I was the Associate General Counsel for Litigation from 1979 until July 1, 1986. I never worked for Mr. Brown. Even now Mr. Brown is somewhat ambivalent about both his role and those he served during his time in office. He does give substantial evidence that he was at least as qualified as some other FEMA General Counsels, Deputy Directors, and Under Secretaries in DHS. Personally I believe he was qualified to lead FEMA during his time in office. Many would disagree with that conclusion but my standards may be different because I have seen so many totally incompetent and some corrupt political appointees during over 30 years of federal service. The problem of course is that high level federal jobs are not easy jobs and the learning curve for all is very steep. Leadership of the nation's premier organization to response and recovery from disasters given its statutory and other parameters is one of the toughest. Thus, even those with the best of preparation, intention, high intellect and motivation may well fail and often have. I have posted notes on each FEMA Director on my blog at Vacation Lane Blog and that process is not yet complete. The first failure of Mr. Brown was his lack of understanding of the aphorism "Beware the Trust of Princes" because ultimately it was those above Mr. Brown not below that undercut his potential success during Hurricane Katrina. Second, was his failure to understand the USACOE (Corps of Engineers) and its long history in the NOLA area and the problems it solved and created. Mr. Brown should have been expert on NOLA because of what some may find unusual. FEMA had with the cooperation of the Department of Justice (DOJ) filed suit against two Parishes in the NOLA area in 1981. It had referred NOLA (when NOLA referred to it means Orleans Parish) itself to DOJ at the same time. DOJ declined to file suit against NOLA when USACOE argued successfully that its operations in the New Orleans District would not bear scrutiny and becoming entangled in a civil lawsuit where extensive disclosure and discovery of its problems would not help its long term efforts in that area. I would argue that USACOE which is largely a contractor led

operation with a very thin military and civilian overlay was actually corrupt as was the City of New Orleans government generally, as well as various Levee Districts, and the State of Louisiana itself. The bottom line on that lawsuit was a formal consent order susceptible to long term enforcement and oversight and some monetary recovery as well as informal accounting to the defendants by me that in meeting with over 40 opposing lawyers and a single DOJ attorney [later the Associate GC for Litigation in FEMA] now deceased I warned that unless the defendants and NOLA area generally treated their flood hazards with the almost military precision of the Dutch they would be under water. That is pretty much what happened. One specific suggestion we made public was that all pumping stations in the NOLA area have their electric standby generators fueled and operated on the roof tops of the buildings housing them. As do the Dutch which are the source of most of the large pumps in the NOLA area. But of course I am also sure that few if any in FEMA OGC understood that past effort when Mr. Brown arrived as General Counsel in spring 2001. Nor has FEMA had an active subrogation effort with large cases since I left as the Associate General Counsel for Litigation in 1986. That transfer of position by me was to assist in making sure that the National Security portfolio of FEMA and its REPP (Radiological Emergency Preparedness Program) did not end FEMA's existence as an independent agency. Both came close to accomplishing putting FEMA out of business. So first of all I would argue that given FEMA's history substantive knowledge of NOLA and Louisiana in FEMA's programs was something that Mr. Brown should have known cold. It is certainly true that one of the most knowledgeable Congressional delegations about FEMA and its programs, functions, and activities was that from the STATE of Louisiana. And the NFIP might have been the key federal program for those who have property protected by insurance in all of Louisiana. Ultimately FEMA lives and dies politically by the political class of the Gulf of Mexico coastal states. In fact it largely acts as a special subsidy to those states for their negligence in locating properties in hazardous areas and allowing improper and inappropriate construction. Second, Mr. Brown probably should have departed federal service when his mentor Joseph Allbaugh departed from the government because he (Allbaugh) realized he would no longer be what is called a direct report to the President. No FEMA Director without a personal history with the current President has been a total success in their job. This has been documented over time even in academic analysis. Mr. Brown had no personal history with the President. Third, FEMA had attrited in both staff and funding during the years from 2001 to 2005 with its Deputy [FEMA] former Admiral Harvey Johnson testifying under oath that one day before Katrina made landfall FEMA had less than 1500 permanent full time staff on board. Under its prior peak staffing it had close to 3700 permanent full time staff and today has almost 5000. It also has a large cadre of temporary

employees under various labels. The largest being called DAEs (Disaster Assistance Employees). The second largest group were and are CORE staff. Mr. Brown lays out his relations with two DHS Secretaries, first Tom Ridge (former Governor of Pennsylvania) and then Michael Chertoff. Both are intelligent men with very different backgrounds. Secretary Chertoff had a brilliant history in the criminal justice system before his time at DHS. Unfortunately, the skills of Ridge and Chertoff were not those needed for handling large scale domestic catastrophic events, nor were those of Mr. Brown. And certainly the President himself was not up to a domestic crisis the size and scope of Hurricane Katrina. In President Bush's home state of TEXAS the National Guard and the USACOE handle most of the disaster work and has quite a weak EM (emergency management) regime. That regime is what former Governor Bush and Joseph Allbaugh were used to from their time in TEXAS. During his father's administration when FEMA suffered through Hurricane Hugo (1989) and the Loma Prieta Earthquake (1989) and Hurricane Andrew (1982) FEMA's performance was always somewhat questionable. See the report "Coping With Catastrophe" FEB 1993 by NAPA [National Academy for Public Administration]. And in fact George W. Bush's Vice President Richard Cheney from his time as SECDEF in the George H.W. Bush administration had hated FEMA and had encouraged its abolition. And that might have occurred if George H.W. Bush had won re-election in the fall 1992 election. And it should be noted that 95% of all nation-states use their military for disaster response and recovery. This of course is largely to ensure that existing civil power structures are maintained including political leadership. And these issues impact a civilian FEMA as documented in DEADLY INDIFFERENCE. I can only hope that Mr. Brown had read the NAPA study published in February 1993 entitled "Coping with Catastrophe" because it discusses many of the issues and policies addressed by Mr. Brown in his book. I have long recommended that a copy of the NAPA report be given to each new FEMA employee whether full time or temporary followed by Q&A sessions on its contents and recommendations. It must always be remembered that federal programs are political solutions to perceived or actual problems and are not conceived with efficiency and effectiveness as their primary object. FEMA is no exception in this regards. Fourth, Hurricane Katrina turned into what EM refers to as a NO NOTICE or FAST BREAKING EVENT when the flood walls, not levees, collapsed in NOLA. This is where federal, state, and local response is at its weakest. Finally what Mr. Brown faced is in some cases generations of neglect or waste, fraud, and abuse in federal programs, and STATES and their local governments efforts, as operated on the coast of the GOM. Even now the Louisiana Congressional delegation tries to get FEMA to make up for the failures of government in the NOLA area and other parts of the state. And Mr. Brown apparently in his entire time in FEMA did nothing to resolve officially whether FEMA is just a

cooperative and collaborative agency that hands out money and information to all or the federal system's ultimate "safety net" that must do it all when all others fail. My bottom line is that this book should be read by all and all should draw their own conclusions.

Helpful to understand what FEMA is actually capable/not capable of doing. Better decisions could have been made by many along the way but reality is when a disaster this big hits, not the government nor anyone else can swoop in and make it all better.

Eye-opening behind the scene politics even concerning natural disasters. Thanks Michael.

Great, loved it.

Great Book

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