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### **Hurricane Katrina as one of the Most Catastrophic Natural Disasters**

Hurricane Katrina was among the most catastrophic natural disasters within the United States history. On August 23, 2005, the tropical storm formed off the coast of the Bahamas. Throughout the next seven days, "the tropical storm grew into a catastrophic hurricane" (Townsend, 2006) first making landfall in Florida, then along the Gulf Coast of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, "leaving behind a trail of heartbreaking devastation and human suffering" (Townsend, 2006). Katrina brought astonishing destruction, flooding the historic city of New Orleans, and ultimately killing over 1,300 people.

On August 29, in the early hours of the morning, Americans awoke to reports of Katrina's landfall on the Gulf Coast and watched the events unfold. Viewers watched in amazement at the fierceness of nature which quickly changed to disappointment after seeing the inability for government agencies local, state and federal, to effectively respond to the disaster. Hurricane Katrina "exposed significant flaws in Federal, State and local preparedness for catastrophic events and our capacity to respond to them" (Townsend, 2006). Emergency plans at all levels of government were incompetent at aiding during a time of complete devastation. Millions of Americans were left to protect themselves and their families.

Hurricane Katrina's damage was so extensive. It effected the economy, regional power infrastructure, and communications. Between the months of August and September, the most affected areas of Louisiana and Mississippi saw the unemployment rate increase from 6 to 12 percent. But Hurricane Katrina did not just impact the Gulf Coast, it reached the entire country though the rising prices of gasoline. The storm "forced the temporary shutdown of most crude oil and natural gas production in the Gulf of Mexico" (Townsend, 2006).

Gasoline prices rose dramatically across the nation. The storm completely devastated the regional power infrastructure leaving approximately 2.5 million power outages in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. All communication systems suffered as well. Katrina "crippled thirty-eight 11 call centers, disrupting local emergency services, and knocked out more than 3 million customer phone lines" (Townsend, 2006). Those who were stranded were unable to call for help and search and rescue teams had no way of communicating their need for more teams.

Communication systems were rendered useless. But the most terrible damage from Hurricane Katrina was the effect it had on humans. The aftermath of the storm left survivors feeling a mixture of depression, grief and fear. Victims found it difficult to reconstruct their lives. On many occasions, people had left behind basic paperwork such as insurance cards, birth certificates, marriage licenses and other documents that would later prove essential to rebuilding their lives. Many people were left without access to medical records which made it hard to rece

# Hurricane Katrina Papers

**Michael Rajnik**



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