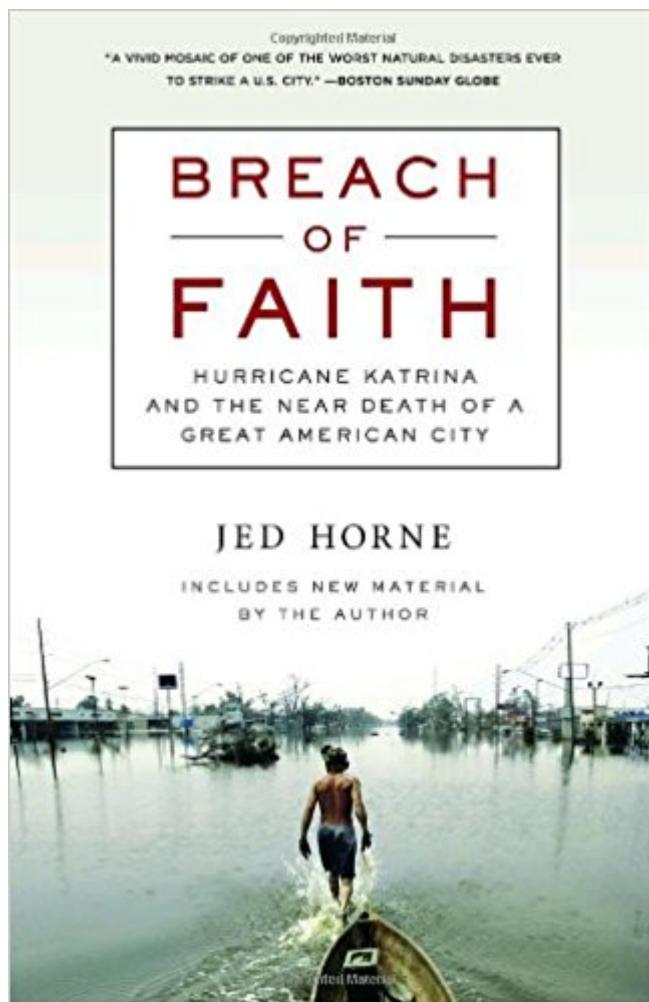


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Breach Of Faith: Hurricane Katrina And The Near Death Of A Great American City



Synopsis

Hurricane Katrina shredded one of the great cities of the South, and as levees failed and the federal relief effort proved lethally incompetent, a natural disaster became a man-made catastrophe. As an editor of New Orleans' daily newspaper, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Times-Picayune, Jed Horne has had a front-row seat to the unfolding drama of the city's collapse into chaos and its continuing struggle to survive. As the Big One bore down, New Orleanians rich and poor, black and white, lurched from giddy revelry to mandatory evacuation. The thousands who couldn't or wouldn't leave initially congratulated themselves on once again riding out the storm. But then the unimaginable happened: Within a day 80 percent of the city was under water. The rising tides chased horrified men and women into snake-filled attics and onto the roofs of their houses. Heroes in swamp boats and helicopters braved wind and storm surge to bring survivors to dry ground. Mansions and shacks alike were swept away, and then a tidal wave of lawlessness inundated the Big Easy. Screams and gunshots echoed through the blacked-out Superdome. Police threw away their badges and joined in the looting. Corpses drifted in the streets for days, and buildings marinated for weeks in a witches' brew of toxic chemicals that, when the floodwaters finally were pumped out, had turned vast reaches of the city into a ghost town. Horne takes readers into the private worlds and inner thoughts of storm victims from all walks of life to weave a tapestry as intricate and vivid as the city itself. Politicians, thieves, nurses, urban visionaries, grieving mothers, entrepreneurs with an eye for quick profit at public expense—all of these lives collide in a chronicle that is harrowing, angry, and often slyly ironic. Even before stranded survivors had been plucked from their roofs, government officials embarked on a vicious blame game that further snarled the relief operation and bedeviled scientists striving to understand the massive levee failures and build New Orleans a foolproof flood defense. As Horne makes clear, this shameless politicization set the tone for the ongoing reconstruction effort, which has been haunted by racial and class tensions from the start. Katrina was a catastrophe deeply rooted in the politics and culture of the city that care forgot and of a nation that forgot to care. In *Breach of Faith*, Jed Horne has created a spellbinding epic of one of the worst disasters of our time. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

You're probably here because you are seeking coverage of this terrible, terrible disaster that is not influenced by ratings. A concise, easy-to-follow insight that is unaffected, balanced and truthful. This is the book you're looking for. As I am originally from New Orleans and have loved the city all my life, I was searching for the truth as well. As a full-time shelter volunteer in Mississippi, I realized--real quick--that we weren't getting accurate and unsensationalized reports on the news, save Anderson Cooper. I grew more and more frustrated with cable news, knowing that most reports bore no comparison to what I was hearing from the actual evacuees. Such shenanigans as repeated footage of one poor looted Walgreens over and over again didn't help matters any--not for the evacuees, who looked like criminals, (one thinks of the poor proud woman holding the Huggies up to her face in shame) not for the people who needed help, and certainly not for race relations in America. Another case in point: Geraldo on Fox News holding up a baby on I-10. I would have much rather seen footage of Geraldo looting a Walgreens in an effort to get some baby formula, but otherwise this parade of news was sadly misrepresentative of the actual event and really didn't help anything but the advertisers. Which is one reason I had such enormous and overwhelming affection for the folks at the Times-Picayune, the venerable and ancient daily paper of New Orleans. They never, ever missed an issue--not one day, even as the lower floors were flooded. As my specialty in the shelter was helping evacuees with the internet, I repeatedly turned to the Times-Picayune website.

I feel this book gives a unique perspective from someone who has the skills to relay the story in a readable fashion. As a person who is living in Baton Rouge, I can tell you what he says is more straightforward than most of the stories and articles I've read and heard to date. What I can add to his story is this: some of the reason why many did not leave New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina that nobody has mentioned so far. Within a year and a half prior to the Katrina, New Orleans

citizens had been asked to evacuate the city no less than (approximately) three times because of other storms that had appeared to be heading to the city, but at the last minute had taken a different track. To evacuate this often is an expensive and difficult thing to do for folks living paycheck to paycheck with limited income. Hurricane Katrina was just one of the many "storms of the century" that appeared to be making a beeline for New Orleans. Other storms, including Hurricane Ivan, had turned at the last moment. Several years of this, including one storm just some years ago which had the same potential as Katrina, but as it made landfall dropped from a category 3 to a category 1 (or 2, I can't remember which)-can cause many folks to begin to ignore the message. Many folks were under the impression this was just another over-calculation by the authorities. After all, they had dodged the bullet many many times in the last thirty-odd years. After Hurricane Katrina moved out of Louisiana and the winds begin to drop and with the power out, a friend and I ventured forth to find a store or drive thru open to get something to eat.

A remarkable page-turner, Jed Horne's "Breach of Faith" has all the elements of the best journalism: vivid reporting, thorough research, fully established human characters, and an ability to boil down a vast breadth of scientific and political detail in accessible and engaging prose. What makes Horne's book so memorable is the detail. His descriptions of floating bodies beset by water moccasins or the harrowing scene at the Convention Center or the recovery efforts for weeks and months after the storm are simply horrifying. Much of what Horne describes - from the lethal incompetence and sclerotic bureaucracy of FEMA to unrivaled heroism of many heretofore unknown private citizens - rekindles alternating currents of anger and pride in the reader. To be sure, the canvass on which Horne paints is broad, and the cast of characters for a fairly compact book is long, indeed.

Obviously, there are the notable figures of Mayor Ray Nagin, Governor Kathleen Blanco and FEMA Director Michael Brown, but there is also a battery of Lower Ninth Ward residents, Uptown residents and French Quarter residents, firefighters, community activists, doctors, nurses, engineers, former public officials, politicians and others. There are also a number of smaller figures whose stories round out the coverage masterfully. One such figure is a lawyer from Massachusetts who, along with his wife, had been dropping his teenage son off to begin college at Loyola when Katrina struck. Horne's treatment of that lawyer's terrible experience, as well as the incorporation of a pseudo-diary that the lawyer kept throughout the storm and its aftermath, make for electrifying reading.

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