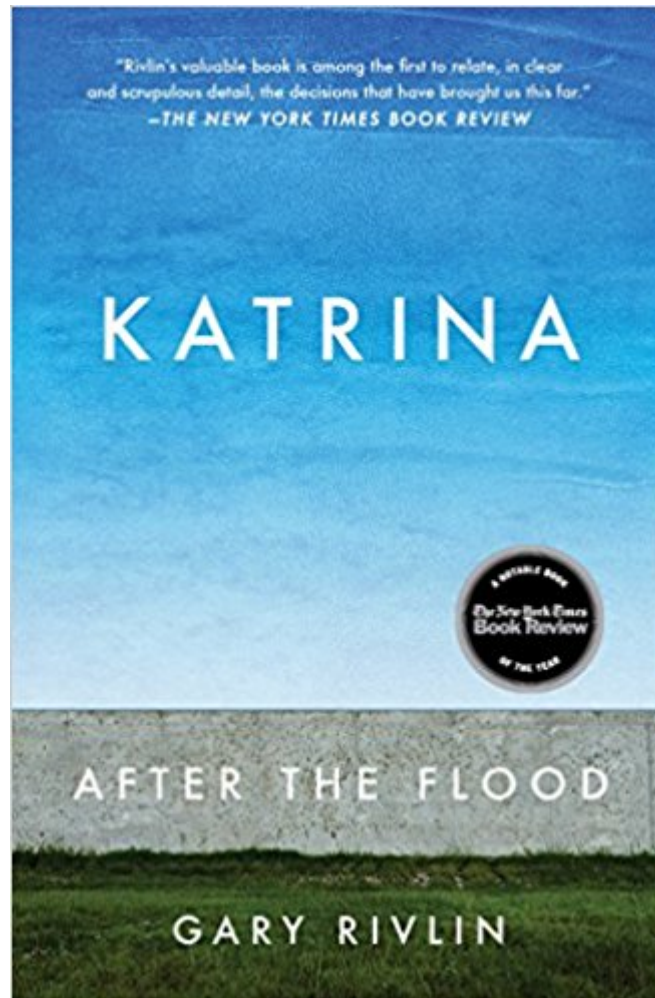




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# Katrina: After The Flood



## Synopsis

Ten years in the making, Gary Rivlin's *Katrina* is "a gem of a book—well-reported, deftly written, tightly focused—a starting point for anyone interested in how The City That Care Forgot develops in its second decade of recovery" (St. Louis Post-Dispatch). On August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina made landfall in southeast Louisiana. A decade later, journalist Gary Rivlin traces the storm's immediate damage, the city of New Orleans's efforts to rebuild itself, and the storm's lasting effects not just on the area's geography and infrastructure but on the psychic, racial, and social fabric of one of this nation's great cities. Much of New Orleans still sat under water the first time Gary Rivlin glimpsed the city after Hurricane Katrina as a staff reporter for The New York Times. Four out of every five houses had been flooded. The deluge had drowned almost every power substation and rendered unusable most of the city's water and sewer system. Six weeks after the storm, the city laid off half its workforce—precisely when so many people were turning to its government for help. Meanwhile, cynics both in and out of the Beltway were questioning the use of taxpayer dollars to rebuild a city that sat mostly below sea level. How could the city possibly come back? "Deeply engrossing, well-written, and packed with revealing stories," Rivlin's exquisitely detailed narrative captures the anger, fatigue, and ambiguity of life during the recovery, the centrality of race at every step along the way, and the generosity of many from elsewhere in the country" (Kirkus Reviews, starred review). *Katrina* tells the stories of New Orleanians of all stripes as they confront the aftermath of one of the great tragedies of our age. This is "one of the must-reads of the season" (The New Orleans Advocate).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Gary Rivlin's sharp eye for detail, grasp of the big picture and thorough reporting reveals the endless errors, egregious official conduct and exploitation that compounded the misery of Katrina victims long after the storm. It's a helluva a book that should arouse every American to demand reform before disasters strike their communities." (David Cay Johnston, Recipient of the Pulitzer Prize, author of *Divided and Perfectly Legal*) "Gary Rivlin is one of our nation's most sharp-eyed cultural observers, and one of our most gifted social historians. Katrina is a provocative and beautifully-rendered book that reminds us that the subject of race is always percolating below the surface. The vividly-told and haunting Katrina is vital, not only for understanding New Orleans, and what happened there over the last ten years, but for understanding how divisions of race and class are perpetuated across America today." (Michael Eric Dyson, author of *April 4, 1968*) "The once-great city of New Orleans wasn't destroyed just by a force of nature. Along with the hurricane came a category-5 tsunami of racism, operating at every level from armed encounters in the streets to serene indifference in the White House. Gary Rivlin, one of our finest journalists, chronicles it all in superb and riveting detail. This is something we have to know, discuss and absorb before the next storm comes along." (Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Nickle and Dimed*) "Katrina is an important book. It's important not because it's brilliantly reported or well-written, not because it uncovers everything from political maneuvering in the White House to despicable acts of selfishness, and not because it also tells stories of courage and tenacity which give meaning to the word "inspirational." It's important as a case study of both how not to handle a disaster and how to survive one. There are real lessons here." (John M. Barry, author *Rising Tide and The Great influenza*) "Deeply engrossing, well-written, and packed with revealing stories, a magnificently reported account of life in a broken, waterlogged city. Rivlin's exquisitely detailed narrative captures the anger, fatigue, and ambiguity of life during the recovery, the centrality of race at every step along the way, and the generosity of many from elsewhere in the country." (Kirkus (starred)) "A sprawling, epic tale, filled with cold numbers and heartbreaking scenes of loss and devastation. It's also an insightful, accessible saga that follows a wide cast of participants including politicians, businessmen, and everyday residents over the course of many

years. [Rivlin] doesn't pull punches as he looks at the political, economic, and social aspects of New Orleans's struggle to recover, nor does he shy away from the complicated racial themes that have always been a part of the city's history. he skillfully balances out the human elements with concrete details of the devastation and the reconstruction that has followed. For those interested in how New Orleans came to the brink of destruction and slowly fought its way back to become a thriving, even improved, metropolis, this is certainly a work worth checking out. (Publishers Weekly) "Rivlin's valuable book is among the first to relate, in clear and scrupulous detail, the decisions that have brought us this far, and to identify those who made them. Rivlin is a sharp observer and a dogged reporter. He is unerringly compassionate toward his subjects. But Rivlin's most valuable journalistic skill is his acute sensitivity to absurdity. He is particularly piqued by the absurdity of racial and economic injustice. The New York Times Book Review "One of the must-reads of the season. Rivlin offers a good report of what happened during the storm, the bureaucratic snarls and blockages that followed and, most of all, the human cost to all New Orleanians. The New Orleans Advocate "Deeply engrossing, well-written, and packed with revealing stories. a magnificently reported account of life in a broken, waterlogged city. Rivlin's exquisitely detailed narrative captures the anger, fatigue, and ambiguity of life during the recovery, the centrality of race at every step along the way, and the generosity of many from elsewhere in the country. Kirkus (starred) "[A] carefully researched, beautifully written book. San Francisco Bay View "A sprawling, epic tale, filled with cold numbers and heartbreaking scenes of loss and devastation. It's also an insightful, accessible saga that follows a wide cast of participants including politicians, businessmen, and everyday residents over the course of many years. [Rivlin] doesn't pull punches as he looks at the political, economic, and social aspects of New Orleans's struggle to recover, nor does he shy away from the complicated racial themes that have always been a part of the city's history. he skillfully balances out the human elements with concrete details of the devastation and the reconstruction that has followed. For those interested in how New Orleans came to the brink of destruction and slowly fought its way back to become a thriving, even improved, metropolis, this is certainly a work worth checking out. Publishers Weekly "A fascinating lesson in urban planning in the face of calamity and financial shenanigans about what has been deemed "the most expensive disaster in history." Booklist "Journalist Gary Rivlin sweeps from street to boardroom in this

history of the aftermath. As Rivlin sharply reminds, overcoming disasters is very much an issue of governance. Nature Magazine "Sweeping and searching, Katrina is a Category Five exposé of disastrous disaster relief. Florida Courier "A gem of a book well-reported, deftly written, tightly focused. It's a book that will appeal to the urban planner and the Mardi Gras reveler. Katrina is a genuine success, and is a starting point for anyone interested in how The City That Care Forgot develops in its second decade of recovery. St. Louis Post-Dispatch "Painstakingly researched Rivlin's reporting allows him to paint deep portraits of his characters and explain relationships. Rivlin does an admirable job keeping the political personal and helping readers understand how deeply and devastatingly Katrina affected everyone in the city. The book is timed to come out a couple of weeks before the 10th anniversary of Katrina, but the timing this summer is equally important as part of the conversation America is currently having on the subject of race relations. Miami Herald "A riveting, wide-ranging but detailed account of Katrina's immediate impact and its aftermath. Tampa Bay Tribune "It is in large part because race lately imposes itself upon our national consciousness with even greater force than usual that Gary Rivlin's vital, comprehensive account of Hurricane Katrina's long-term impact on the city of New Orleans comes across less as a 10-year-anniversary marker of an indelible calamity and more as an up-to-the-minute microcosm of our larger society. Rivlin manages to pack into a lean, taut narrative the heartbreaking setbacks, thwarted dreams and the confounding, repeated inability of anybody in power to either get things done or transcend festering social divisions. As with the finest works of journalism, Rivlin's book deploys the tools of his trade to illuminate the segment of history he examines and make us wonder about the things we all have in common with those in New Orleans. USA Today "[Rivlin] constructs his narrative to give readers unfamiliar with the terrain a cohesive back story and illustrates the aftermath through a cross-section of people. Chicago Tribune "Gary Rivlin's sharp eye for detail, grasp of the big picture and thorough reporting reveals the endless errors, egregious official conduct and exploitation that compounded the misery of Katrina victims long after the storm. It's a helluva a book that should arouse every American to demand reform before disasters strike their communities." David Cay Johnston, Recipient of the Pulitzer Prize, author of Divided and Perfectly Legal "Gary Rivlin is one of our nation's most sharp-eyed cultural observers, and one of our most gifted social

historians. Katrina is a provocative and beautifully-rendered book that reminds us that the subject of race is always percolating below the surface. The vividly-told and haunting Katrina is vital, not only for understanding New Orleans, and what happened there over the last ten years, but for understanding how divisions of race and class are perpetuated across America today.

•Michael Eric Dyson, author of *April 4, 1968* "The once-great city of New Orleans wasn't destroyed just by a force of nature. Along with the hurricane came a category-5 tsunami of racism, operating at every level from armed encounters in the streets to serene indifference in the White House. Gary Rivlin, one of our finest journalists, chronicles it all in superb and riveting detail. This is something we have to know, discuss and absorb before the next storm comes along."

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•John M. Barry, author *Rising Tide* and *The Great Influenza* "As harrowing as it is riveting a balanced and comprehensive chronicle."

•New York Daily News "Gary Rivlin's Katrina: After the Flood is as raw as the title.... Katrina carries you from the days before the disaster through an aftermath so tumultuous and chaotic you can scarcely fathom it happening in a developed country. Rivlin's careful storytelling won't let us escape, however, as he confronts us with testimonials from streets that remain uninhabited 10 years later."

•Sierra Magazine "In the last decade, few tales equal that of Hurricane Katrina in proportion or the amount of media devoted to it, yet non-fiction writer Gary Rivlin has woven a narrative so fresh in perspective and focus, his new book reminds us of how many personal accounts of this monumental event still beg to be told."

•New Orleans Living "A deeply-reported, character-driven procedural, not unlike the classics of its kind, such as *And the Band Played On* or *The Warmth of Other Suns*."

•Virginia Quarterly

Gary Rivlin, an investigative reporting fellow at The Nation Institute, is a former New York Times reporter and the author of five books, including *Katrina: After the Flood* and *Broke, USA: From Pawnshops to Poverty, Inc. How the Working Poor Became Big Business*. His work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Mother Jones*, *GQ*, and *Wired*, among other publications.

I wrote this review on Huffington Post. "Ring out the bells again Like we did when spring began Wake me up when September ends" - Billy Joe Armstrong (Green Day) With the tsunami of media leading into the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina on Saturday, it seems impossible that an author could come up with a new, insightful and passionate history of the 10 years after the hurricane that is not a rehash of something that has been already said. Gary Rivlin made the impossible happen. His book *Katrina: After the Flood* will be the historic book of record for anyone studying that time period or those who want to learn the politics of rationing resources when a region is starting all over again. Gary is an unusual choice to be the definitive voice of the post-Katrina era. As he notes in *Katrina: After the Flood*, Gary had no personal connection to New Orleans and most of his interactions with the city had been those of a typical tourist: The French Quarter, the Jazz Fest, things of that nature. As Gary (and I) found out, the tourist lens of New Orleans is as dramatically different from how the rest of the city operates as Disney World is from the rest of Orlando. They are very different worlds. On the other hand, Gary was an inspired choice for the role. Rivlin has the scientific background of the engineering student that he once was and the literary chops of the best-selling author he has become. He's an interesting combination of analytical and compassionate with a strong sense of social justice thrown in. Thus, in 2005 when the editors of the New York Times moved Gary from his beat covering the Silicon Valley to head up the newspaper's coverage of Hurricane Katrina, they knew that Rivlin was the one reporter who could immediately adapt and start digging into one of the great stories of the 20th century. Not just reporting the day in and day out, but opening up "the rest of the story." In politics and business, the real decisions are made outside of the media glare. *Katrina: After the Flood* shows how incredibly true that was in post-Katrina New Orleans. Gary is a good friend, a journalism mentor and a writer I truly admire. Thus, I have read, several times over, every book and most of the magazine articles that Rivlin has written. Gary once told me that his love of journalism was fueled by his insatiable curiosity to learn about new and usually different subjects. To paraphrase an outstanding feature about Rivlin that Michael Miner wrote for the Chicago Reader, Rivlin doesn't just get a subject--he owns it. Until Katrina, Rivlin's great masterpiece was his first book, *Fire on the Prairie*, which documented the rise of Mayor Harold Washington in Chicago and the politics of race in that city. An important book from a historic time as the environment that produced Mayor Washington ultimately gave us President Barack Obama. I'm vocal and passionate in the fight against payday lenders so Gary and I connected in 2011 when I did a Huffington Post review of *Broke, USA*, which is the "must read" book about payday lenders and the poverty industry. Gary's years in Oakland and covering the

Silicon Valley produced Drive-By and The Plot to Get Bill Gates. Excellent books in their genres. I'm not sure what Rivlin will write next, but it will not suffer from a lack of topic knowledge or research by the author. "I hear babies crying, I watch them grow They'll learn much more than I'll ever know And I think to myself What a wonderful world" -Louie Armstrong There is a reason why Rivlin has become the ultimate perspective on what happened in New Orleans. Rivlin had the advantage of being an outsider. I've read studies saying that New Orleans is one of the more insular cities in the United States. It's very common for people to ask what high school a person went to and what neighborhood they grew up in. Three years ago, my wife accepted a position as an educator in New Orleans, and I commute to the city from Lexington, Kentucky. Connecting to the natives of New Orleans was an easy adjustment for me. I grew up in the Greater Cincinnati area which, like New Orleans, is predominantly Catholic, broken into many different and distinct neighborhoods where people sometimes identify by what high school they attended. People in New Orleans know everything about the Saints. People in Cincinnati know everything about the Reds. Even though both teams have histories of years in last place. "Small market" cities rally around the professional teams in a way that larger communities do not. Very few of my childhood classmates moved out of the Cincinnati area. Why would they? They love the city and have no desire to go anywhere else. The people in New Orleans are the same way. They can't imagine living anywhere else, and I'm not surprised by the millions of tourists who come to see the history and unique culture of the most European city in the United States. Thus the irony. A city not interested in change was hit with the most massive physical and cultural change in North America since the War Between the States ended in 1865. The hurricane and subsequent flooding changed everything and gave New Orleans a chance to "reinvent itself." The dynamics of how the city has done with that reinvention is what Rivlin analyzes and chronicles in his book. Katrina flows like a novel and follows the path of three distinct characters. I don't know Aldon McDonald, a successful African American banker, or Joe Canizaro, a developer, but do know they are powerhouses in the New Orleans community. The third character is former Mayor Ray Nagin whose power has dissipated since he is now serving a sentence in a federal prison. The first chapter sets up the rest of the book. Rivlin tells a riveting story of the days after the hurricane. A group of African American transit employees tried to cross the bridge from New Orleans to a predominantly white neighborhood on the West Bank and were stopped on a bridge by the local police pointing loaded revolvers and shotguns. In a few pages, you can see the incompetence of public officials at every level and a shining example of how the damage from the hurricane spun out of control to complete disaster based on poor decision making. And you see the racial divide. Rivlin's book shows how the same racial divide that exists across the



United States, in locations like Ferguson, Baltimore, Charleston and in the treatment of African Americans in the judicial and political system, plays into many of the decisions that were made in post-Katrina reconstruction. Gary was working on *Katrina: After the Flood* when I started making regular trips to New Orleans, and he was essentially my first tour guide to the city. Shortly after that, I developed a friendship with Moon Landrieu, former member of Jimmy Carter's cabinet and former Mayor of New Orleans, whose son Mitch Landrieu serves as Mayor now. As I noted in a Huffington Post feature about Moon, I donated \$500 to Mitch's re-election, but don't really know him. Moon has been a terrific and candid tour guide into what makes New Orleans one of the most fascinating and complicated cities in the universe. Rivlin gives us a storyteller's perspective on where the city is positioned to go next. As we go into the 10th anniversary, the local economy is booming in many sectors and there has been an influx of young people moving into the community and making an impact. Things are rapidly changing for the city. In a world where winners and losers in the national economy are being more sharply defined, the hurricane and its aftermath made that divide overt and pronounced in New Orleans. Gary Rivlin is hot right now and all the major publications are doing excellent and insightful reviews of *Katrina: After the Flood*. One of the best is one that New Orleans author Nathaniel Rich did for the New York Times Sunday Book Review section. When Gary told me three years ago that he was writing a book about the 10th anniversary of Katrina, I came close to rolling my eyes. I thought the last thing the world needed was another book about New Orleans or the hurricane. I was wrong.

Recently released, *Katrina, After the Flood*, by NY Times reporter, Gary Rivlin, is a rich and focused look at the efforts to help New Orleans recover and is full of lessons for any one who cares about improving conditions in America's cities. There are some inspiring successes and too many colossal failures in the efforts to bring New Orleans back. There are the depressing and even comical leadership failures of Mayor Nagin and President Bush but even more disturbing is the sheer inability of government bureaucracies to even care about being effective. In the chapter entitled "Eight Feet Across," Rivlin describes how the state of Louisiana hired a consultant to map out how to use HUD funds that had been provided for rebuilding housing. His flow chart laying out the steps required to secure HUD funds was eight feet across. Said an official working on the recovery, "It took us six months just to get two feet." Even in the midst of one of the worst disasters in our lifetime, HUD could not get out of its own way. Many American cities face the same challenges of disinvestment and population loss that devastated New Orleans (although in a more slow burn kind of way) and an effective public sector will be essential to their revitalization. But we are going to

need to revitalize or recreate the agencies that are suppose to help.

I loved Katrina: After the Flood. It's a terrific read that walks us through the horror of Katrina from the time when it hit through the rebuilding of New Orleans. The writer, a former colleague of mine at the NYTimes, brings us into vivid conversations and discussions between the New Orleans Mayor, the Louisiana Governor, President Bush and other key officials, as well as the people who were appointed to plan and execute the reconstruction. He describes gripping and heartbreaking scenes during the ordeal, and introduces us to fascinating characters whose lives were upended by the flood. I don't think I understood the magnitude of the devastation, the challenges of rebuilding a ravaged city, or the racial and economic inequities that the hurricane exposed and sharpened until I read this great book. A must read.

This is a book about an important event in history that reads like a novel. Gary Rivlin has found some very interesting characters with different perspectives - from a friend of President Bush's leading the planning after the storm to a radical community organizer working on the ground - and he weaves their stories together to build a really compelling story about what has happened to New Orleans after the storm. Originally sent by the New York Times just after the storm hit, Rivlin apparently found the story hard to leave behind. He follows characters as they initially evacuate New Orleans or stay put to weather out the storm, and then try to navigate the maze of recovery efforts - some working to shape those, some just trying to figure out how to put their lives and neighborhoods back together. A really engrossing read.

Several close family members have lived in New Orleans for decades, and I have always loved the City and its unique culture. Naturally, I read all that I could find both during and post-Katrina, but nothing that I have read or heard tells the story better than this book. I really enjoyed this very readable, but in-depth, journalistic account of Katrina, the rebuilding process, and the impact of both on the City's residents. The book entertainingly and, I believe, fairly, tells the stories of individuals from all segments of the political and socio-economic spectrum. I felt that those individuals came alive in the book. I highly recommend it.

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