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## **The Storm**

Fifty-five minutes of utter chaos and fury, The Storm relives that day of November 22, 2005, when Hurricane Katrina's landfall robbed New Orleans of hundreds of innocent lives and left thousands homeless. In this midst of all this, could be heard the voice of a man saying, " Sure didn't think I'll die this way," which abruptly was how it happened. When asked, everyone (The Administration, the Homeland Security, and FEMA) pointed fingers at one another. When quizzed on who was responsible for the inadequacy in preparation for the disaster, Mike Brown, the former director of FEMA said that, he was well aware of the danger posed by Hurricane Katrina, but wasn't allowed to say that over national television. In response, Walter Maestri, the emergency Manager of Jefferson Parish said that the local people of New Orleans made a direct request to FEMA for help, which didn't come. When President Bush acknowledged the inadequacy of the federal response 6 days later, and that it was not acceptable, Richard Falkenrath, the National Security advisor, said that for days, no one was aware of who was the directing the federal response, and what were the actions taken. The impression he got in those days was indelible.

The problem beneath the whole fiasco was the lack of communication between the stakeholders of national security and safety. In playing the blaming game, all that New Orleans got in return was a week of horrifying disaster that left hundreds dead and thousands homeless. Had FEMA acted earlier enough to evacuate the city of New Orleans, and not left so many people behind, such a catastrophe could have been avoided. None of the three responsible machineries; the administration, the army, and FEMA,

acted in advance or on time to stop the calamity, and when each one of them were asked why they didn't act accordingly, they pointed the finger at the other. The cause for the disaster was that the local and state officials failed to apprehend the magnitude of the disaster, and didn't plan ahead. When former director of FEMA, Mike Brown went on national television a few years after the disaster, he said he misled the public to quell panic. When asked by Frontline why he chose to say that, he said that he wouldn't go on air and say that the mayor and governor are not doing their job, and they don't have the sense of emergency. He went on to say that the federal government just learned about the incident today, which he claims was false. By cutting down on FEMA, the Bush administration did no favour for the country. Replacing people from top posts and replacing them with inexperienced people also did not help. The government hadn't learned its lessons from previous hurricanes, and this caused a loss of unimaginable size. When there are enough satellites tracking the earth, and there was a constant update on the development of Hurricane Katrina from a category 1 hurricane to a category 4, by the time of landfall, FEMA and other government agencies could have acted much earlier and evacuated the people from New Orleans which was below sea level. The whole incident was appropriately answered by Jane Bullock, the Chief of Staff, FEMA, (2005-11), when she said, " My only understanding is that nobody pulled the trigger to get the resources there, and who is responsible for pulling the trigger, is questionable, because I couldn't figure out who was in charge of that disaster." When disasters strike, thousands of people are affected, and so, to prevent or mitigate America from witnessing such disasters in future, there

should be an emphasis on the creation of an Emergency Management Program that brings the three central stakeholders under a single umbrella, that emphasize on communication, and rapid action plan. In the case of Hurricane Katrina, all the three were guilty of not acting in time and playing blaming games, instead of sending rescue teams to help the helpless. At least 80% of New Orleans was under flood water as a result of levee failures from Lake Pontchartrain. Some parts of New Orleans were under water. The government should have ensured that more importance was given in the development of instruments and equipments that can warn of a possible calamity waiting to happen, or look at ways to prevent disastrous after-effects. It would be futile to even think of stopping a natural calamity, but, had the three national agencies acted in unison, the loss of life and property could have been minimized.

## **Works Cited**

The Storm, Accessed July 4, 2014, from <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/storm/>