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Hurricane Katrina: The Mississippi Story

James Patterson Smith

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Hurricane Katrina: The Mississippi Story James Patterson Smith

This book presents the fullest account yet written of the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Rooted in a wealth of oral histories, it tells the dramatic but underreported story of a people who confronted the unprecedented devastation of sixty five thousand homes when the eye wall and powerful northeast quadrant of the hurricane swept a record thirty-foot storm surge across a seventy-five-mile stretch of unprotected Mississippi towns and cities. James Patterson Smith takes us through life and death accounts of storm day, August 29, 2005, and the precarious days of food and water shortages that followed. Along the way the narrative treats us to inspiring episodes of neighborly compassion and creative responses to the greatest natural disaster in American history.

The heroes of this saga are the local people and local officials. In often moving accounts, the book addresses the Mississippi Gulf Coast's long struggle to remove a record-setting volume of debris and get on with the rebuilding of homes, schools, jobs, and public infrastructure. Along the way readers are offered insights into the politics of recovery funding and the bureaucratic bungling and hubris that afflicted the storm response and complicated and delayed the work of recovery. Still, there are ample accounts of things done well, and a moving chapter gives us a feel for the psychological, spiritual, and material impact of the eight hundred thousand people from across the nation who gave of themselves as volunteers in the Mississippi recovery effort.

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