

James B. Taylor, Louis A. Zurcher and William H. Key. *Tornado: A Community Response to Disaster*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970. 191 pp. \$6.95.

On an early June evening in 1966 a devastating tornado struck Topeka, Kansas, USA, killing 17 people, injuring 550 others, and

leaving 1,600 homeless as it raked a four block by eight mile path of destruction. This book is an attempt to answer, on the basis of extensive empirical research into this disaster, such questions as: How do the social processes arising from disaster influence the reactions of individual victims? What are the effects of group action on the governmental process? How

does bureaucracy affect individual behavior under extreme conditions? The focus throughout is on new social structures and emerging social roles as individuals and collectivities purposively adapt to the exigencies of disrupted systems.

The authors, residents of Topeka at the time of the disaster (and the senior author research director at the Menninger Foundation) fruitfully bring to bear their various talents in clinical psychology, social psychology and sociology. Their methodological approach consists of participant observation (authors were volunteer workers in the emergency services restoration phase of the disaster) supplemented by 101 unstructured interviews or reports from a variety of types of participants in the disaster response effort. Their style of writing, that of "allowing the participants to speak for themselves" makes this a descriptively powerful book, as far as it goes. Unfortunately, the reader's appetite is sometimes whetted, but the authors fail to deliver more. This occasional impression of superficiality is exacerbated by excessive use of sub-headings which sometimes make the work appear rather "choppy".

The book begins with a description of the approach of the tornado and the immediate psychological and behavioural reactions of Topekan. It then proceeds to a discussion of victims, making extensive use of case study materials. Here we learn how individuals are socialized into the victim role, how that role clashes with other deeply held values such as those of self-sufficiency, and how incumbents engage in such processes as role bargaining as a way of coping with this enforced dependency. Enlightening also is the social psychological discussion of how victims cope with the tasks of restoring their fractured identities and re-integrating their cognitively and emotionally disrupted world.

The third chapter analyzes the helping role, the neutral role, and the "post disaster utopia". Here we learn about the motives of helpers

and about the evolutionary development and crystallization of the helper role. The discussion of the non-helpers (or "neutrals"), is however, quite unsatisfactory, relying as it does on data from psychiatric interviews.

The fourth chapter is an analytic description of an ephemeral volunteer work group mainly from a functionalist perspective, while the fifth chapter contrasts the operations of a volunteer relief centre with the official Red Cross centre. Unfortunately, as with so many other topics in the book, the discussions of the problems of the Red Cross was not well integrated into the existing literature. Indeed, a general criticism of the book is that rather than coming to grips with the literature, it seems to pick and choose at will. This is perhaps a reflection of the ex post facto nature of portions of the study.

Chapter six, on emergency government, is perhaps the weakest in the book. It not only fails to live up to its stated intentions and is almost devoid of references to the literature, but it also seems to miss the gist of what governing is all about – i.e., resource exchange, procurement, allocation, and mobilization; the exercise of power; and social control and conflict management. Indeed, the authors' treatment of conflict in disaster is superficial and contradictory (p. 138 vs. p. 161) and, in this reviewer's opinion, less useful than Brown and Goldin's more recent (1973, Chapter 6) treatment.

The seventh and final chapter views disaster as a strategic research site for the study of collective behavior. The authors conceptualize collective behaviour as adaptive, rather than pathological, and proceed to delineate the commonalities between disaster response behavior and other processes of discontinuous social change to which the label "collective behaviour" has been applied. Some of these parallels are well drawn, while others are strained and still others are left undrawn. For instance the parallels between their "post-disaster utopia" and Turner and Killian's (1957)

“participation orientation” are not drawn. Nor are the parallels drawn between their “development of perspectives” (i.e. participants’ search for gestalt) and Shibutani’s

(1966) view of rumour as a pooling of intellectual resources for group action.

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