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THE STORM BEFORE THE CALM: FEDERAL DISASTER POLICY FROM THE
FOUNDING THROUGH THE PRESENT

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“The Storm before the Calm: Federal Disaster Policy from the Founding through the Present”

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This paper examines federal disaster policy from America’s colonial past through the present. It shows how this policy evolved from limited, selective intervention to a comprehensive disaster policy. It addresses several important questions: what has been the federal government’s role in dealing with natural disasters and how has this changed over time? Second, why was the federal government, despite a limited role in many areas, involved in disasters (albeit in a limited capacity) from an early time period? Similarly, why has the government continued to have a major role in this area while other areas of the welfare state have been attacked and reduced?

I answer these questions by using an American Political Development approach to examine the historical changes in federal disaster policy and the factors that led to these changes. I use a contextual approach, moving beyond one factor and instead examining multiple factors, to understand the complete context of disaster policy in different time periods and to identify the main factors that led to the expansion of the federal government’s role in dealing with natural disasters. I argue that in order to understand why federal disaster policy was the way that it was during a particular time period, one must understand the context of the situation.

I identify several key factors in the evolution of disaster policy. The expansion of the U.S. in both population and territory, especially into more disaster-prone areas, led to more frequent, costly, and deadly disasters. Traditional areas of response-family, neighbors, churches-were no longer able to adequately respond. Instead, people began looking towards the federal government. This was facilitated by both a growth in the resources and capabilities of the federal government, as well as a shift away from a strictly limited view in government. The result has been a major change in disaster policy, one in which the federal government now assumes the responsibility of preventing and responding to natural disasters throughout the country, and spends billions of dollars every year in the process.

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Chapter 1. Introduction and Literature Review

I. Introduction

Hurricane Katrina was the costliest and one of the deadliest disasters in American history. Governmental response, especially by FEMA, was assailed by the media, the public, and politicians. The public outrage over the inadequate response would lead to Michael Brown resigning as the head of FEMA and a congressional investigation of the entire federal disaster program. The Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for the Response to Hurricane Katrina wrote in its final report: “Our investigation reveal that Katrina was a national failure, an abdication of the most solemn obligation to provide for the common welfare...Not even the perfect bureaucratic storm of flaws and failures can wash away the fundamental governmental responsibility to protect public health and safety” (Government Printing Office 2006, X).

Public opinion polls demonstrated that a majority of Americans held the government responsible for the disaster and thought the federal response was inadequate. An August 2006 CBS/ New York Times poll found that 58% of Americans disapproved of President Bush’s handling of the response to Katrina. Sixty-five percent thought his response was too slow. Seventy-seven percent felt the federal government’s response was inadequate. Eighty percent felt the government did not respond as fast as it could. Seventy percent felt FEMA’s response was inadequate. Seventy percent felt the response of state and local governments was inadequate (Roberts 2006). Some used Katrina to argue for more government spending in disasters and other areas. Eleanor Clift of Newsweek wrote after the hurricane: “If there’s an upside to Katrina, it’s that the

Republican agenda of tax cuts, social security privatization and slashing government programs is over” (Olasky 2006, 26).

It is now expected that we have federal intervention in natural disasters. The outrage over the perceived inadequate response to Katrina provides a clear example of the support many Americans have for federal governmental involvement in disasters. The federal government maintains an expansive role in preventing and responding to natural disasters. There are 50-70 disasters declared a year by the president (Platt 1999, xvi). Events that lead to disaster declarations do not even need to be major calamity: a disaster was declared in Boston in 1998 after a heavy rainstorm (Platt 1999, xvi).

The federal government, however, has not always played a major role in dealing with disasters. Some of the most damaging and deadly disasters in American history were met with little or no government intervention: the Galveston Hurricane in 1906 killed 6,000 people, making it the deadliest natural disaster this country has ever seen, yet was met with no government assistance; the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire in 1905 left 5,000 dead and destroyed much of the city, yet only the army was used by the federal government and this was used mostly for looting/ riot control and medical care; the Mississippi River Flood of 1927 flooded 162,000 homes, destroyed 41,000, and 600,000 were taken care of by the Red Cross, but little was provided by the federal government (Platt 1999, 2). Americans living prior to the latter half of the 20th century could not expect federal disaster relief. The national government responded to a relatively small number of disasters during this time. Response was left to private charities and organizations or local and state government if private organizations proved inadequate.

The federal government did not begin to comprehensively respond to natural disasters until the second half of the 20th century, starting with PL 80-875 in 1950. Public Law 80-875 institutionalized federal disaster response, allowing for the president to declare events as disasters. Disasters prior to this time were met with selective government response.

This paper will examine federal disaster policy from America's colonial past through the present. It will show how this policy evolved from limited, selective intervention (often in the form of temporary remittance from taxes or duties owed by merchants) to a comprehensive disaster policy.

I will attempt to answer several questions. The most basic question is what has been the federal government's role in dealing with natural disasters and how has this changed over time? Why was the federal government, despite a limited role in many areas, involved in disasters (albeit in a limited capacity) from an early time period? What have been the factors driving an expansion in federal disaster policy? Similarly, what have been the factors pushing against this expansion? Last, why has the government continued to have a major role in this area while other areas of the welfare state have been attacked and reduced?

The demand for reduced spending has spilled over into disaster politics and marks one of the major paradoxes of this policy area, especially evident with Hurricane Katrina. Americans have traditionally been against a larger role of the federal government and in favor of less spending. This is true for disaster prevention and relief. Instead, they have favored local control and a large role played by non-governmental organizations like

charities. However, they also do expect the federal government to provide adequate protection from and response to natural disasters, as is evident by the criticism of the government's response to Hurricane Katrina.

The large number of disasters declared and the substantial amount of money spent by the federal government on disaster led to calls by many for a more limited role by the government in dealing with disasters in the late 90s and early 2000s before Katrina; these calls were made by politicians, the Government Accountability Office, the press, House and Senate task bipartisan forces, and others (Olasky 2006). Spending on areas such as flood control have faced opposition and some perceive disaster spending to be less important domestic issue than other issues on the political agenda.

Many have criticized disaster legislation for pork-barrel projects that have been attached. Others have been critical of using government money to support those who chose to live in disaster prone areas. A Fox News/ Opinion Dynamics Poll in September 1999 showed that 44% were in favor of a limit on the amount of times the government provided relief money for families or businesses trying to rebuild in natural disaster prone areas (Olasky 2006, 16).

This criticism, however, has not led to a decrease in the federal government's role in disasters. Instead, that role and spending has continued to increase. This paper will examine why this has happened over the course of over two hundred years.

II. Literature Review

This topic that I am examining has largely been ignored by political scientists. There are also several problems with literature that does focus on disasters. There is no

comprehensive account about what federal disaster policy is and has been and how it has changed over time. Instead, much of the work focuses on individual disasters or on the response of individual agencies and organizations to disasters. The time period prior to the mid-20th century is also largely overlooked in the few pieces that do address disaster policy. The result is that it is difficult to understand what the federal government's policy towards natural disasters was in the past, how it has changed over time, and why it has changed. This work will answer those questions and fill in the gap in the literature.

Writing about individual disasters has a popular topic for entertainment since the turn of the 20th century (Steinberg 2006). Several recent examples include Simon Winchester's *A Crack in the Edge of the World: America and the Great California Earthquake of 1906* (2005), Timothy Egan's *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl* (2006), and John Barry's *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America* (1997). The problem with these types of books is that the focus is on the individual disaster. They do examine many factors that influence/ contribute to the individual disaster, and provide a historical context, but the focus is on a limited time period and not how things have changed over a long period of time. They therefore do not describe the long-term federal disaster policy.

Some work has been done on disaster policy in the United States: Peter May's (1985) *Recovering From Catastrophes: Federal Disaster Relief Policy and Politics*, Rutherford Platt's (1999) *Disasters and Democracy: The Politics of Extreme Natural Events*, and Richard Sylves' (2008) *Disaster Policy and Politics: Emergency Management and Homeland Security* are all examples. However, these books devote only

a few paragraphs or pages at most to the role of the federal government with disasters prior to 1950. Wright and Rossi's *Social Science and Natural Disasters* (1981) has less than a paragraph. Even David Moss's piece "Courting Disaster: The Transformation of Federal Disaster Policy Since 1803" offers only 2 pages on disaster relief before the mid 20th century. Instead, the books focus on the past fifty-sixty years without adequately explaining what policy was in the past and how we have arrived at the policy that we have currently.

Other scholars have examined the subject. Gaines Foster's 2005 book *The Demands of Humanity: Army Medical Disaster Relief* is probably the best piece. However, Foster's book focuses on the role of the Army in disaster relief. This book is illustrative of one the problems with previous research: the focus on one particular area while ignoring others.

Other pieces offer their own explanations as to the change in disaster policy. Pieces like Kevin Rozario's 2007 book *The Culture of Calamity: Disaster and the Making of Modern America* and Ted Steinberg's 2006 book *Acts of God: The Unnatural Natural Disaster in Modern America* have focused on cultural aspects; Rozario's book examines American's fascination with disasters and the impact on culture and society, while Steinberg's piece looks at how the change in popular conceptions of disasters, from "acts of God" to natural events, has affected policy. May's 1985 book argues that politicians extended disaster relief to aid and please their constituents (pork-barreling and log-rolling). Michelle Landis Dauber has authored several articles in which she argues that the main factor in giving federal disaster aid is whether or not the disaster victims(s) prove they are not responsible for their situation. Karen O'Neil's 2006 *Rivers By Design:*

State Power and the Origins of U.S. Flood Control examines the involvement of the government in flood control programs for the Mississippi and Sacramento Rivers, due to pressure on the government from shippers, planters, and other commercial interests connected with those rivers. These works look at one factor such as culture or pressure groups and do not provide a comprehensive account of policy and its changes.

I argue that context matters. I want to move beyond one factor and examine multiple factors, understanding the completing context of disaster policy. My main argument for this work draws upon “contextual” arguments from geographers like James Mitchell et al (1989), political scientists like Paul Pierson (2004), and Kingdon’s (1984) policy stream thesis. I argue that in order to understand why federal disaster policy was the way that it was during a particular time period, one must understand the context of the situation. Policy change does not happen in a vacuum. The context of the change (or the lack of change) must be understood as well, and this is an area previous authors have not fully explored.

Mitchell et al’s 1989 article “A Contextual Model of Natural Hazard” presented a model based upon a case study of a major storm that hit Southern England in October 1987. The storm, the most powerful in decades, caused thirteen deaths and millions in damages. However, the disaster did not lead to a change in the disaster policy for the country. The authors argued that in order to understand the disaster and impact on policy, the context must be understood.

Natural disasters occur in a context. The context may include “spatial, temporal, organizational, environmental, sociocultural, economic, political, or of some other form”

(406). These factors would affect the actual disaster and disaster prevention and response policy. For example, environmental conditions like rain in the preceding days made the disaster worse; the lack of scientific knowledge and infrequency of storms led to a lack of a warning system and thus the disaster caught many off guard, raising the death toll.

There were calls for change in disaster prevention and response policy. The central government played a minimum role in both areas; instead, the “emphasis is on private and local actions directed toward postdisaster emergency response and recovery” (400). Little aid was provided by the central governments and disaster planning was given a “low priority by the British government” (400). The central government had been trying since 1982 to get county governments and civil defense systems to prepare for disasters.

Local governments wanted the central government to help in cleanup and repairing government facilities. There was further political pressure from core constituent members. A majority of storm victims were political supporters of the administration: “the willingness of the British government to deviate from its established policy by providing limited assistance to stricken communities derived from the disproportionate impact of the storm on the constituencies of party-in-power supporters” (407).

The storm, despite constituent interest, did not lead to policy change. There were several factors that led to this:

the perception that the storm was a rare event, unlikely to be repeated; a judgment that lack of economic investment was primarily responsible for failures of protection and that there was little need for a thorough overhaul of hazard-management policy; and a belief that storm-caused losses would pale to insignificance compared with a major collapse of global trading relations...In short, the stimulus for reconsideration of existent hazard-management policy that was provided by the unusually heavily and strategically concentrated burden of losses was offset by other pressures for inaction (408).

One of the main factors was that the storm occurred at the same time as a major stock market crash. The crash received more public, media, and political attention. Also, attention was placed on the channel tunnel which was being built.

The contextual model can be applied to the American system and similarities seen. Local governments in the early and mid-20th century tried to get the central government further involved in disaster policy, including pushing for federal involvement in clean-up and repairing government facilities (which would be accomplished through the Disaster Act of 1950 and ensuing pieces of legislation). The relatively small role of the federal government in disaster response would be seen in the US, although in earlier time periods, and due to similar factors: government attention on other issues (for example, focus on issues like slavery, reconstruction, and civil service reform in the 19th century) which would take priority over disaster relief on the political agenda; the reliance on private organizations to provide aid and assistance to victims; the role of the civil defense system in disaster response (occurring during the Cold War era in the US); the beliefs that disaster occurrences were rare (which, to an extent, was true in the US during earlier time periods because citizens were living in less disaster-prone areas); and the pressure from core constituents (in the case of the United States, constituent pressure would lead a disaster policy more focused on disaster response/ relief rather than mitigation). All these factors will be discussed in further detail.

Applying a contextual model to the United States can help to explain how disaster policy has changed over time, and why (or why not) this change has occurred. In the case of the United States prior to 1950, this model can help to explain why the federal government played a small role in the area of disasters: “the British experience confirms

that an extreme physical event can inflict a major disaster without prompting significant changes in hazard management-programs or policies...even in developed countries, favorable conditions for improved management of hazards are not readily found” (Mitchell et al 1989, 408).

Major disasters like the Galveston Hurricane, San Francisco Fire, and Johnstown Flood would not lead to action and it is important to understand why. It is also important to understand what factors would lead to action in the form of changing disaster policy. Understanding context and these factors can even help to ascertain how policy will or will not change in the future: “it is crucial for analysts and managers to understand the managers of hazard contexts, to chart their trends, and to broaden the process of adjusting to include hazard contexts” (409).

This work, therefore, will contribute to literature on public policy change. A closely related work to a contextual model is John Kingdon’s (1984) streams model. Kingdon argues that there are three separate streams in his book *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. The problems stream consists of issues on which the government could take action and proponents would like to see a policy response. The proposals streams consists of proposed solutions to the issues offered by politicians, academics, interest groups, and others. The politics stream consists of the political environment: elections, which party controls the White House, public opinion shifts, interest group pressure, etc. If all three streams converge, a “policy window: can be opened: an opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems” (Kingdon 1995, 165). This, however, does not mean that policy change is guaranteed to occur.

Kingdon's model is important because it demonstrates how multiple factors can interact to produce a policy change. The contextual model that I will be using will look at one particular area, disaster policy, in which change has actually occurred and the factors that led to this change. It will also examine factors that are not mentioned in Kingdon's streams.

Sabatier's (1988) Advocacy Coalition Framework is another important model. The model examines policy communities that form around a particular issue in the "policy domain." Advocacy coalitions compete within this domain over proposed solutions and policy brokers mediate. The model considers multiple factors: who are the groups that form the coalitions, what are their shared or differing values, the influence of the system parameters (values, the structure of the legal system, the social structure, distribution of natural resources, etc.), the influence of "dynamic events" (changes in society, technology, economy, governing coalitions, policy decisions, etc.), and others. This model looks at policy change, and the mechanisms that lead to this change, over the course of years or decades.

Work within the field of political systems theory also examines different factors. This theory posits that the government responds to the political environment (the social system/ biological setting). Inputs come in the form of demands from the environment and output comes in the form of public policy. There is also a feedback loop in which outputs shape and affect new demands, leading to new outputs (Easton 1965).

Most policy issues must go through the policy process (Anderson, Brady, Bullock, 1984). This process usually begins with identifying a policy problem and agenda-setting/

building. A policy problem is “a condition of situation that produces needs or dissatisfaction among people and for which relief or redress by government action is sought” (Anderson 2006, 82). Birkland (1997) defines agenda setting as “the process by which issues gain greater mass and elite attention” (5). Schneider (1995) defines agenda building as “the process through which social problems evolve into public and governmental concerns” (9).

There are thousands of potential policy problems that could be considered by the government for action. However, few policy problems end up on the public or political agenda. There are multiple conditions that must be met. One of the first requirements is that the policy problem must be seen as an appropriate area for government to act. This is part of the “political culture” (Almond and Verba, 1965; Divine 1972). Political culture is “widely held values, beliefs, and attitudes on what government should try to do, how they should operate, and relationships between the citizen and government” (Anderson 2006, 39).

Some issues like national defense as legitimate areas of government action: maintaining national defense, strengthening the nation’s economy, etc. (Schneider 1995, 13). Government action is usually seen as legitimate on collective goods (Donahue 1989) and older items. Items that have previously been on the agenda are successful due to the existing knowledge on the topic and the fact the previous action can act as a precedent; they are also safer to act on (Schneider 1995, 13).

It must also be an area that government can actually do something about (Anderson 2006, 83). Views of policy problems do not involve absolute objective measures. Policy

problems are socially constructed; values and perceptions matter (Edelman 1988). The problems are defined by the individuals involved. These definitions may be altered as values or conditions are altered (Anderson 2006, 84). The symbolic aspects of the issue matter and impact agenda building (Edelman 1988; Cobb and Elder 1983). The values that an issue is tied to will affect the amount of attention it receives (Edelman 1977). Symbolic values can be tied to an issue to keep it off the public agenda by those in favor of the status quo (Schattschneider 1960; Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Bennett 1988).

Some issues may be viewed as a personal problem, an area in which government should not intervene. For many years, this was how disasters were perceived. Disasters were seen as a part of colonial life, an obstacle that must be overcome on your own or with the assistance from friends, neighbors, or a private organization like a church (Rozario 2007). This tying of disasters to the symbolic value of self-sufficiency kept the issue off the political agenda. Disasters have also been perceived as one's fault for living in a disaster-prone area; this argument has been used against the involvement of the federal government in disaster relief (Landis-Dauber, 2003).

Some problems end up being ignored by the political system due to "agenda denial" (Cobb and Ross, 1997). Those against the policy can argue that the problem is not appropriate to be addressed by government, that the issue can better be handled by non-governmental groups, propose a commission to examine the issue, cast fears about the negative impacts of the policy, deny that the problem even exists, or engage in political activity to elect officials against the policy (Anderson 2006, 95).

Some issues are denied to what Bachrach and Baratz (1970) call "non-decisions":

A means by which demands for change in existing allocations of benefits and privileges in the community can be suffocated before they are even voiced; or kept covert; or killed before they gain access to the relevant decision-implementing stage of the policy process (44).

Issues are kept off the agenda status because the dominant group does not want to allow issues that might challenge their power on to the agenda or because they have successfully forced the subjugated group not to raise the issues (Lukes 1974; Gaventa 1982). Other issues are ignored because they affect under-represented groups. Problems that affect the poor, mentally ill, criminals, etc. are routinely ignored.

Socioeconomic conditions also affect public policy. Policy can often results from conflict between groups (Schattschneider 1960), often due to changes in socioeconomic conditions. An example would be labor conflicts in the latter half of the 19th century. Resources also affect what the government can or cannot do. The government may not possess the resources to deal with a particular issue (Anderson 2006, 40).

Policy problems that are successfully converted to issues end up on the “governmental agenda.” The governmental agenda incorporates the issues on which the government is considering action (Cobb and Elder, 1983).

All these issues on the governmental agenda compete for actual action. When an issue is selected for consideration, the issue goes through the formulation process: “developing pertinent and acceptable proposed courses of action for dealing with public problems” (Anderson 2006, 103). Different plans of action are proposed. These alternatives are examined and then one (or, in the case of inaction, none) is adopted. This policy is then implemented, often by a public administration, and later on evaluated, the final step in the policy process (Anderson, Brady, and Bullock, 1984).

There are several other public policy theories and factors to consider. Carmines and Stimson (1989) offer a model of issue evolution. The model “begins with changes in the positions of elites on an issue, leading to a greater clarity in the policy alignment on that issue. If this issue touches a nerve in the public consciousness, a change in the mass partisan alignment may follow” (160-161). Specifically, Carmines and Stimson were examining the issue of race transformed the American political system.

Policy entrepreneurs can also play a role in public policy. Policy entrepreneurs are “members of Congress, interest-group representatives, agency officials, and citizens who push policy proposals” (Anderson 2006, 92). These figures are usually devoted to the issue and are motivated by “their straightforward concern about certain problems, their pursuit of such self-serving benefits as protecting or expanding their bureaucracy’s budget or claiming credit for accomplishments, their promotion of their policy values, [or] their simple pleasure in participating” (Kingdon 1995, 204).

Interest groups, in particular, have a major influence on contemporary policy (Truman 1971; Lowi 1969). Group Theory examines how public policy is shaped by interest group competition (Latham 1965). There has been an explosion in the number of interest groups since the 1930s (Walker 1983). The political structure of the U.S. government (federalism, liberty, rights, etc.) allows potential interest groups to rise and therefore play a role in representing interests (Truman 1971).

Pressure groups did play a role in affecting disaster policy. 19th century shippers, planters, and merchants successfully lobbied the government to build levees along the Mississippi and Sacramento Rivers (O’Neill 2006). Much of their success would be due

to their resources, foreshadowing Schattschneider's (1960) argument that interest group politics would be skewed towards the upper class. This also ties into the Elite Theory. This theory argues that public policy reflects the preference of the ruling elite (Mills 1956; Domhoff 1967, 1990).

Other factors can also play a role in the policy process. Changes in "statistical indicators" (Anderson 2006, 94) such as prices, births, or deaths can lead to public attention and government action (Kingdon 1995, 95-99); I argue increases in deaths and damages from disasters played an important role in changing federal policy. Changes in political factors such as public opinion (Key 1961; Page and Shapiro, 1983; Stimson 1999) and other conditions Kingdon (1984) discussed in his politics stream can also impact public policy.

Some policies may lose their agenda status. People may feel that the problem has been taken care of or have become accustomed to it. A change in the conditions that caused the problem may have alleviated the issue. Lastly, new, more important issues may force it off the agenda (Anderson 2006, 96).

Anthony Downs (1972) offered his issue attention cycle which explained why some issues fall off the public agenda. Downs argued that American political attention is fickle. Certain issues suddenly rise in the public consciousness, dominate the political debate, and then just as quickly erode away into the shadows due to the realization of costs. In order for an issue to end up on the cycle, the issue has to affect a minority of the population, it affects an arrangement that is beneficial to a majority, and there are no

more events that put major attention on the issue. Disaster policy is one issue in which events, natural disasters, do attract attention.

Some issues end up being “triggering mechanisms” (Cobb and Elder, 1983) or “focusing events” (Kingdon 1984), issues “so large and salient they almost automatically attract public attention” (Schneider 1995, 10). Birkland (1997) defines a potential focusing event as:

an event that is sudden, relatively rare, can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the possibility of potential greater future harms, inflicts harms or suggests potential harms that are or could be concentrated on a definable geographical area or community of interest, and that is known to policy makers and the public virtually simultaneously (22).

Focusing events can lead to greater attention on a policy issue and even policy change (Kingdon 1984; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Birkland 2006).

Disaster policy can be one area that can be affected by focusing events. Thomas Birkland has written two excellent books, *After Disasters: Agenda Setting Public Policies, and Focusing Events* (1997) and *Lessons of Disasters: Policy Change After Catastrophic Events* (2006), that examine how specific catastrophes can serve as focusing events that alter public policy. He examines events like oils spills, nuclear plant accidents, 9/11, aviation security disasters, earthquakes, and hurricanes. It is important to not, however, that Birkland looks at these events as singular issues that individually affect public policy, case studies that demonstrate his model. Also, the examples that he uses are all recent disasters.

I agree that individual disasters can certainly be focusing events and I will examine the factors that have contributed to whether or not particular disasters became focusing events; for example, I will be looking at the role of the media as media coverage

is the first requirement for an event to be a focusing event (Birkland 1997, 33; Cobb and Elder, 1983; Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 49). Media can have a large impact on policy especially through agenda-setting (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Graber 1984).

I will, however, be moving beyond individual case studies of disasters (particularly contemporary disasters) and instead examine disasters and disaster policy over time. Disaster policy is an area that moves beyond focusing events, although this can be an important factor. Disaster policy is an example of issues that:

come and go as their underlying political, economic, and demographics elements change. Problems and proposed solutions move higher and lower on the agenda as a result of conflicting interpretations of facts and trends and changes in the ideological tastes of the electorate... These trends may take years to be recognized and even longer to have an influence on policy making, and in these cases it is difficult to identify one or a few points in time as critical in the life cycles of these issues (Birkland 1997, 1).

Some issues may develop gradually over time: “a series of technological breakthroughs might eventually create a new situation and problems for governmental action” (Schneider 1995, 10). An example would be the impact of the industrialization and ensuing issues of economic change and urbanization. Industrialization and urbanization would have a major impact on disaster policy (as discussed in ensuing chapters), as changes in the country would lead to more people being exposed to disasters (increasing injuries and deaths) and more cities springing up in disaster-prone areas (leading to more damages). These changes would take place over the process of decades.

This is why I am using a contextual model that will examine multiple factors affecting disaster policy over time, broken down into historical time periods. I argue that in order to understand why federal disaster policy was the way that it was during a particular time period, one must understand the context of the situation. The context of

the change (or the lack of change) must be understood as well, and this is an area previous authors have not fully explored. North (1999) wrote: “without a deep understanding of time, you will be a lousy political scientists, because time is the dimension in which ideas and institutions and beliefs evolve” (316).

Pierson (2006) argues:

Contemporary social scientists typically take a “snapshot” view of political life, but there is a strong case to be made for shifting from snapshots to moving pictures. This means systematically situating a particular moment (including the present) in a temporal sequence of events and processes stretching over extended periods. Placing politics in time can greatly enrich our understanding of complex social dynamics (1-2).

This work will place politics in time and thus takes a historical approach that can be found in contemporary American Political Development work. American Political Development is based upon the belief that “because a polity in all its different parts is constructed historically, over time, the nature and prospect of any single part will be best understood within the long course of political formation” (Orren and Skowronek, 2004, 1).

The point of APD is to understand “dynamics of government in the past as they affect practices of government in the present or shed light in future prospects” (Orren and Skowronek, 2002, 722). The work focuses on the United States and uses American history as its main data. Scholars seek to understand politics of the past; however the main goal is seeking “knowledge of how government changes over time...specifying the processes by which political innovations are negotiated and new political relationships generated” (722). APD is comparative in the sense that it compares different points in history to each other, trying to identify patterns. The discipline is concerned with searching for change over time. The basic interest of APB scholars is to “learn more than

is already known about how, and with what effect, American politics changes over time” (Orren and Skowronek, 2004, 5-6).

Previous work has certainly been done in which a historical approach has been taken to politics. Early examples are Tocqueville, Marx, and Weber. Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (1840) examined the history of democracy and put the American democratic society into this context. Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* (1867) examined the history of labor and capitalism. Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904) looked at the influence of religion (Calvinism) on the development of capitalism.

Two scholars would play a seminal role in the development of American Political Development, John Burgess and Woodrow Wilson (Orren and Skowronek, 2004). Burgess’s 1891 piece *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law* would foreshadow much of contemporary APD work. The work examined the civil liberties, political power, and state building in the US, France, Germany, and Great Britain. Wilson’s *Congressional Government* (1885) similarly was comparative in nature and would be a precursor to modern APD work. Wilson argued that the flawed design of the Constitution impacted the path America took, comparing it to the more favorable path taken by the British government.

The American Political Development field rose from a “minor role” in political science to a more important part of the discipline (Orren and Skowronek 2004, 1), becoming a major subfield in the 80s and 90s (Orren and Skowronek 2002, 722). The

research examines multiple areas: the state, political traditions, political development, constitutional development, institutions.

One area of research examines the development of the state in the US. Some, like Skowronek (1982) and Franklin (1990) look at the development of the national government. Skowronek's *Building a New American State* is an important example. Skowronek argues that we did not have a "state" in the traditionally European sense. Instead, the state would be built up due to demands to meet the challenges of industrialization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Skowronek argues that large social forces generated the demands that led to the creation of the American state as we now know it.

Others focus on additional areas of the state. Lowi (1969) argues that there has been a growth of the "liberal state" due to interest groups. The government expanded by responding to the demands of all major organized interests, by assuming responsibility for programs sought by those interests, and by assigning that responsibility to administrative agencies. Through the process of accommodation, the agencies became captives of the interest groups, a tendency Lowi describes as clientelism. This in turn led to the formulation of new policies which tightened the grip of interest groups on the machinery of government.

A recent book, *The Unsustainable American State* (Jacobs and King, 2009), features APD essays on the development of the state from the 19th century. Several of the essays examine changes in the American government and political and economic problems with the state.

Skocpol (1995) wrote about the origins of the welfare state. Skocpol examined early social welfare programs, specifically pensions for Civil War soldiers (and their families) and aid for mothers with dependent children. Her book, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, looks at the role that political parties and leaders, women's organizations, values, and other factors shaped the development of the welfare state.

Other works examine American political tradition, examining the role of ideas on politics. Louis Hartz (1955) examined US history to explain "American exceptionalism." Hartz argued that our lack of a feudal past, in contrast with Europe, has led to a unique culture which is characterized by a massive commitment to individualist liberalism and minimal government involvement in our lives. Lipset (1977) also makes the point that we have not had a feudal past and this helps to explain why we have not had socialism in the United States.

Gordon Wood's *The Creation of the American Republic* (1969) gave a historical account of the development of key ideas/concepts and their effect on government during the American Revolution and beyond. Springing from a concept of single sovereignty used to justify independence from colonial rule, ideas of sovereignty were affected by democratic despotism and problems of representation. This led to the development of popular sovereignty whereby the separation of powers and judicial review became institutionalized and the foundations for a national government were laid.

Kingdon (1999) presents an argument of path dependency. America has entered down a path due to our belief in limited government. This belief continues to shape American public policy, explaining why we do not have social policies like universal

healthcare that other industrialized nations do. Morone (2004) traces the impact of morality and religion on politics. In particular, he examines the impact on abolition, Prohibition, the New Deal, and Civil Rights.

Some of these scholars have examined conflicts of political traditions. Huntington (1983) looks at the historical conflict between democratic ideals like liberty and equality and the realities of government and institutions. Smith (1993) argues that in addition to liberalism, republicanism and ascriptive forms of Americanism (such as racism or sexism) have played a role in shaping American politics, refuting the claim that liberalism is the only shaping force. Smith (1998) also looks at the impact of these conflicting values on citizenship laws and litigation, which has often produced second-class citizenship status for minorities.

Another area focuses on other factors that have influenced the development of politics. Katznelson and Shefter's 2002 edited book *Shaped by War and Trade: International Influences on American Political Development* features essays on the influence of war and trade on politics, the state, institutions, and ideology/ political culture. Bense (2000) looks at how industrialization impacted late 19th century government policies. Orren (1991) examines the history of American labor politics.

A fourth area examines constitutional development, seeing how constitutional law has changed over time. Whittington (2001) examines how political battles in the legislative and executive branches have shaped how the construction of the Constitution. Ackerman (1993) also examines how the constitutional meaning and system have changed over time, breaking down different movements in constitutional politics. Kahn

and Kersch (2006) look at the historical relationship between the Supreme Court and constitutional doctrine.

Finally, APD and Historical Institutionalism look at institutions. Historical institutionalism is “studying political change by way of political institutions” (Orren and Skowronek, 2004, 81). Examples of work in this field include Carpenter’s *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy* (2001). The book traces the evolution of the Post Office, using it as a case study to find what makes bureaucratic agencies successful. Carpenter argues good mid-level management is key. Moe (1987) looks at the history of the National Labor Review Board, attempting to explain regulatory outcomes. Remini (2006) traces the history of the House of Representatives.

There are several APD books on the presidency. Skowronek (1997) argues that there are presidential leadership cycles that can be identified over time and compared. Tulis (1988) examines how the president has evolved from the Founders’ limited Constitutional views to a time period in which presidents are expected to be rhetorical leaders. Milkis (1993) looks at the relationship between the president and the parties, arguing the decline of the parties has led to a decline in the accountability of the president.

III. My Argument

The evolution of federal disaster policy in the United States has been an area of slow-moving policy change driven by multiple factors. This work will apply a contextual historical model to examine what these factors are, which one or ones are most important, and how they interacted to produce gradual change in disaster policy.

There are two important factors that drove this change, economics and vulnerability. The main factor driving this change was economics. The federal government became involved in disaster relief to help economic recovery after disasters and prevent damage to the national economy from disasters. This economic factor would get mixed with other factors, particularly increased vulnerability to natural disasters and the changing role of the government, to push for an expansion of the federal government into disaster response and relief.

America, early on, did not face many disasters due to a low vulnerability to natural disasters. Americans were living in relatively non-disaster-prone areas, and there was a small, mostly agrarian population. This led to infrequent disasters, and the disasters that did affect the country produced fewer deaths and damages. This was a major reason for the federal government's limited involvement. There were fewer disasters in the past, and the disasters that did occur were dealt with by non-governmental groups like neighbors, churches, and other private charities.

The government was not expected to play a major role. Helping out disaster victims and recovery was considered the domain of non-governmental groups and inappropriate for the federal government. From the Founding throughout the 19th and early 20th century, there was belief in a limited government. The promotion of economic growth and territorial growth was the main consideration, an area that was seen as necessary and proper for the government to be active, and this was reflected in federal disaster policy; this can be seen in the Congressional debates and newspaper articles written at the time. Disaster relief, an example of what Katznelson and Kesselman (1979) would call "social capital welfare," was mainly used to help out the American economy.

Even if the public did expect the government to intervene more, it did not have the capacity to do so due to a small administrative state.

Things began to change over time. Americans gradually faced more vulnerability to natural disasters due to territorial expansion into disaster-prone areas, population growth leading to more deaths, and urbanization leading to more damage. This, especially the increased economic losses, led to the increased role of federal government. Disasters proved too much for private organizations, or local and state governments, to handle. The federal government, though, through the expansion of the Army, administrative state, welfare state, and the executive branch did have the capacity to play a larger role in prevention and response to disasters.

A cultural shift occurred as well. The public began to expect the federal government to play a larger role, including dealing with disasters. The role of the government would change in the 20th century. Economic considerations gave way to more humanitarian considerations. Disaster relief was part of social expenses welfare as the government became more active in helping out the poor and other groups. The New Deal would help to establish and institutionalize this role, leading to the Disaster Act of 1950.

Other factors played a role in the growth of federal disaster policy: the change from the popular belief that disasters were “acts of God” to natural events; growth in size and resources for both federal and local/ state governments; other major political issues of the time period; the expansion of the national media and mode; social movements; and the growth of national unity. These are all important factors that must be understood as

well in order to understand why the policy changed when it did and why it did not change for so long.

IV. Time Periods

This research will examine four different time periods, discussing federal disaster policy during that time period and the factors that shaped the policy. The first period is the colonial through the Civil War. Prior to the founding, there was little involvement of the government in disaster prevention or response/ relief. From the Founding through the Civil War, the federal government had a severely limited and selective role in disasters. Victims of natural disasters, instead, turned to families, friends, and private organizations like churches.

The lack of government involvement was due several factors. There was a strong belief in a limited government. This belief was combined with the fact that the federal government lacked the administrative state necessary to respond; there was also no real welfare state. The small number of disaster relief bills that were passed were guided by an interest in promoting commerce and usually came in the form of temporary remittance of duties or taxes owed to the government by merchants.

Disaster response was also curtailed by other factors. A strong belief in dual federalism led to the view that responding to disasters, if done at all, should be done by local or state governments. The lack of scientific knowledge about natural disasters and the strong religious belief that calamities were “Acts of God” contributed to the argument disasters were not an appropriate area for government to intervene. The small media led

to a lack of coverage and publicity about disasters and thus kept them off the public and political agenda.

The country did not experience many disasters early on due to the fact that most citizens were living in non disaster-prone areas (see Map 2 in the appendix); the disasters that did occur did not cause many deaths or much damage due to a small, mostly rural population. This helped to keep disasters off the agenda.

It therefore makes sense that there was a more limited response even if the government did have the capacity to respond, which it did not. The government responded less frequently and with limited support to the infrequent and smaller calamities. They responded the most when the argument was made that their support would help the nation's economy: remitting taxes for Portsmouth merchants after a fire in 1803, building levees for planters and shippers on the Mississippi in the latter half of the 19th century; they did not aid average citizens or respond to non-economically important areas, such as the 1811-1812 New Madrid earthquake victims.

The public expected the government to respond in order to help out the nation's economic and commercial growth. Demands were placed upon government arguing that action was needed to prevent disasters because damages from natural disasters would have an impact on the overall national economy; this can be seen in Congressional testimony of the time period. Pressure groups, especially commercial interests along the Mississippi, began to lobby the government for preventative measures like levee building beginning mid 19th century. They argued that the damage caused by disasters like flooding would have a substantial negative impact on the country's economy. The same

arguments would be made in favor of the response (albeit limited) that was offered by the government; the quicker the recovery the better for the country's economic well-being.

The government mostly maintained this limited role through the second time period, the post Civil War era through 1900. The focus of the government continued to be on disasters prevention measures, especially flood protection for the Mississippi River region, which was as an important area for the nation's economy. Shippers, planters, and other commercial interests connected to the Mississippi River successfully pushed the government to become involved by making the argument that flooding would have a substantial impact on the nation's economy. Commercial interests were also considered in the few instances of disaster relief, which continued to mostly come in the form of remittance of taxes or duties owed to the government by the business class. Citizens affected by disasters still often had to rely upon private sources of relief.

The dominant ideology was still in favor of limited federal government and a strong belief in federalism, and the federal government was still hampered by a small, but growing, administrative and welfare state. The most organized part of the government, and the part with the strong presence nationwide, was the Army. The Army was authorized on multiple occasions to provide assistance to disaster victims through supplies like tents and food.

Other factors would begin to lead to changes. America grew in population and territory and also began to urbanize. More Americans now lived in disaster areas. More citizens were killed/ injured and damages rose. The media and its audience expanded. This helped lead to a more inter-connected nation. These factors contributed to disasters

beginning to end up on the public and political agenda more. People also gained more scientific knowledge about disasters and the view that calamities were “Acts of God” began to fade.

The first half of the 20th century, the third time period I will examine, saw significant changes in disaster policy. The government became increasingly involved in disaster prevention and response. The dominant belief in limited government was challenged first during the Progressive Era and then during the New Deal, which radically changed what was perceived to be the proper role of the government. People no longer expected the federal government to help just for economic growth. They began to expect the government to provide support for them, including more disaster response and relief.

The federal government also developed the resources to play a more active role in disasters. The administrative and welfare states grew significantly. The Army slowly stepped back its presence in disasters. It would be replaced by a quasi-government agency, the Red Cross, which would be the main agent of disaster response and relief through the mid 20th century. The executive did prove resistant at first to these changes. Much of this was due to the weak executive that did exist in the 19th century. There was an expansion in the 20th century. However, republican presidents still proved resistant to these changes. The executive would eventually give into public pressure for more action, especially with FDR and the New Deal.

The number of citizens killed or injured by disasters and the amount of damages caused by disasters jumped radically. This was due to a larger, urbanized population

living in more disaster prone areas. Private organizations and even local and state governments proved incapable of giving them the necessary aid. Too many people were affected and too much damage was caused. People instead turned to the federal government for help as they did in other areas: dealing with class conflict, providing the start of the welfare state, regulating businesses, etc. This shift in demand is reflected by the media coverage of disasters. Newspaper coverage of earlier disasters noted the economic impact. However, disasters in the 20th century also began to harp on the humanitarian needs. The media during the Mississippi Flood of 1927, for example, was critical of the federal government for not doing enough for the victims of the flood. They expected the government no longer to help out in the form of suspending taxes owed by merchants; they expected the government to aid in the rescue of victims and facilitate their recovery.

The expanded help to make natural disasters (and other disasters like the sinking of the Titanic) into focusing events and pushed them onto the public and political agenda, forcing the government to respond. The diminished belief in strict federalism led to the federal government, not the state or local governments, being the one to take up this role. Federal relief bills were passed, agencies were empowered to respond, and preventative measures such as flood control were enacted. These bills often were argued as a means of civil defense.

Economic arguments continued to play a major role: it was argued that by helping disaster victims the government could facilitate their return to the workforce (similar to earlier disasters like the Charleston earthquake). The government, though, did expand who it helped and how it helped them. The federal government was now expected to

provide for the well-being of its citizens, and the president would be the focal point. However, disaster response and relief was still not comprehensive.

This would have to wait until the fourth and last time period, the second half of the 20th century through the present. The passage of PL 80-875 in 1950 made this possible. Disaster response and relief was no longer selective. The president, not the legislative branch, was empowered to declare disasters and authorize the government to respond. The federal government expanded its role and capacity to deal with disasters throughout the nation. The creation of FEMA in 1979 would condense and centralize the state's role.

The number of disaster declarations would grow throughout the end of the 20th century. Major and even minor disasters now lead to federal aid and response in the form of FEMA and other government agencies. This has maintained in an era in which there has been a shrinking of the federal government, in particular, the welfare state. Direct compensation like the 9/11 fund is extremely rare, but most disaster victims can now expect some form of government rescue or assistance. Citizens now expect the federal government to play this role, which, as mentioned earlier, is certainly seen in the backlash over the Katrina response failure.

DISASTER POLICY TIME PERIODS

Era	Federal Policy	Factors Favoring	Factors Against

		Expansion	Expansion
Colonial-Civil War	Limited Response to Selective Disasters; Usually in the form of Temporary Tax Suspensions for Business Class		Ideology (Limited Government); Strong Federalism; Weak Administrative State; Lack of Welfare State; Lack of Scientific Knowledge/ Belief Disasters are “Acts of God”; Small Media; Limited Vulnerability (Small, Agrarian Population Living in Less Disaster-Prone Areas); Lack of Government Resources
Post Civil War-1900	Continued Limited Response to Selective Disasters, Usually in the form of Temporary Tax	Pressure Groups Lobbying Government to Build Levees; Beginning of Welfare State; Growth in	Ideology (Limited Government); Administrative and Welfare States Still Limited

	<p>Suspensions for Business Class; Army Corps of Engineers Involved in Mitigation Projects Like Levee-Building on the Mississippi; Army Response to Some Disasters</p>	<p>Scientific Knowledge/ Decline in Belief Disasters “Acts of God”; Growth in Newspapers; Growth in Administrative State; Growth in Army; Decline in Federalism; Increased Vulnerability (Bigger, Population Living in More Disaster-Prone Areas, Industrialization)</p>	
1900-1950	<p>Response to Disasters by the Red Cross and Army; Other Agencies Involved in Disaster Response</p>	<p>Change in Ideology; Growth in Administrative State; the New Deal; Growth in Welfare State; Advent of Mass Media; Increase in Deaths, Injuries, Damages From</p>	<p>Developers and Business Leaders; Laissez Faire Ideology First 3 decades; Conservative Republicanism</p>

		Disasters (Turns Disasters in Focusing Events)	
1950-Present	Gradual Involvement in Rescue, Response, Recovery, and Mitigation; Centralized Disaster Involvement (FEMA 1979-present)	Cold War/ National Defense System; Modern Welfare State; Mass Media; Vulnerable Population (Large, Urban Population Living in Disaster-Prone Areas); Disasters as Focusing Events; Public Opinion Favors Increased Involvement; President-Centered Politics; Congress Trying to Please Constituents	Attack on the Welfare State

V. Slow-Moving Causal Process

Disaster policy is best approached by an APD perspective for multiple reasons.

As mentioned earlier, many case studies have been done of individual disasters.

However, a long-term study is best. Time is very important for understanding disaster policy and other issues:

When a particular issue or conflict emerges in a society becomes critical for two reasons. First, the resources available at actors at that moment in time help to determine the repertoire of possible responses. Second, once a response is adopted, it may generate self-reinforcing dynamics that put politics on a distinctive long-term path (Pierson 2004, 75).

Disasters were a problem from the founding of the country. The government did not have the resources at the time to play a major role in response and this helps to explain why the typical response, if any, was the remittance of taxes owed; the federal government did not have the capacity to do more such as rescue or rebuilding efforts. Throughout much of the 19th century the government was provided with “positive feedback” (20) which reinforced that policy. This will be seen in newspaper articles later on that praised the fact that the federal government played a small part in relief and instead non-governmental groups are the main source of relief.

In later time periods, however, this would change. The government would have more resources and was able to play a major role through the development of the Army, administrative state, welfare state, and the executive branch. In addition, the positive feedback was no longer there. Instead, the media would become critical of the federal government for not doing more, as will be discussed for the 1927 Great Mississippi Flood. New demands were placed upon the government to play a more active role and the federal government, possessing the resources, would gradually do so. More frequent, deadly, and damaging disasters would also place demands on the government as well. In many ways, federal disaster policy changed as a result of these changing demands and expectations.

Disaster policy, similar to race (Carmines and Stimson, 1989) is an issue that has “evolved.” It is an issue, similar to welfare policy (Melnick 1994), that has been affected by changes in the political and social environment and thus changed itself.

These changes have been mostly gradual and have occurred over a long time period. It is an example of what Pierson calls a slow-moving causal process in which changes “develop over an extended period of time” (Pierson 2004, 82).

One of the main questions that needs to be addressed revolves around PL 80-875 (1950), the piece of legislation that led to a comprehensive disaster policy when before it was selective. Was this bill a radical change in federal disaster policy? Did this bill place a new obligation on the federal government to play a major role in disasters that it did not have before?

Most scholars have argued yes. They divide federal disaster policy into pre and post-1950; the earlier time period saw a limited and selective role in disaster response, and the latter saw a comprehensive and more engaged role. 1950 was certainly a “threshold” (Pierson 2004, 85) in the sense that there would be a somewhat dramatic change in federal disaster policy in the following decades. However, this bill was part of the overall slow-moving causal process. There were many gradual changes that culminated in this bill. By taking a look at the long-term changes, tracing the path back to the Founding, and examining the factors that led to changes in disaster policy, we can better understand this legislation was passed and why it would lead to a comprehensive disaster policy.

VI. Operationalization

The concept of disaster is a fiercely debated term. Scholars continue to debate on how to actually define what a disaster is. The 1998 book *What is a Disaster: Perspectives on the Question* offers arguments from scholars in six different disciplines. Points of contention arise due to the fact that it is often hard to distinguish between what are perceived to be acts of nature and catastrophes caused by man.

Disasters are usually broken up into two types, natural and technical. Natural disasters are disasters that happen as a result of nature (often referred to as "acts of God") and technological disasters are "human caused." However, it is often difficult to differentiate between the two types:

If people begin to commit to a worldview in which all elements of the environment are befouled by the spoils of human endeavors, then all disaster events may be perceived as rooted in anthropogenic forces. Indeed, Beck (1992) argues that it is no longer viable to refer to the environment as "natural," since the sheer expanse of humanity and its by-products have extracted the "natural" from the environment (Picou et. al, 2004, 1497).

It is often necessary then to reach some type of compromise. The compromise is the term compound disaster. Compound disasters are “those involving interaction between nature and technology” (Stallings 2002, 281). Hurricane Katrina is one example of a compound disaster.

This research will focus mainly the federal government’s response to “natural” or “compound” disasters. Technical disasters will be mentioned, but will not be the focus (the one exception will be the examination of the 9/11 victim compensation fund).

There are multiple ways that the government is involved with disasters. Alexander (1993) argues that there are four stages in responding to natural disasters: 1 Pre-Disaster Planning/ Preparation, 2 Emergency Response/ Rescue 3, Short and Long-Term Recovery, and 4 Mitigation.

The first phase concerns government agencies planning in advance to respond to potential disasters. The second phase involves the response and rescue. During this period, rescue operations are carried out and “agencies are primarily concerned with problems of disease, injury, food, and clothing...and with sufficient shelter” (Whitlow 1979, 395). The short and long-term recovery phase is the one “in which endeavors to bring the stricken community back to its former level of existence” are carried out (395).

The final phase is the mitigation phase. Mitigation is “any action taken to permanently eliminate or reduce the long-term risks to human life and property and the negative impacts on natural and cultural resources that can be caused by natural and technological hazards” (Interagency Flood Management Review Committee 1994, 6). Mitigation can happen before a disaster but often occurs in reaction to a disaster in an effort to prevent a future problem (Platt 1999, 71). This work will examine disaster policy dealing with all four phases.

There are also several other terms that will be used. Risk is defined by Pelling (2003, 5) as “under threat of harm.” Pelling defines vulnerability as “exposure to risk and an inability to avoid or absorb potential harm” (5).

VII. Conclusion

Research into this area is important for several reasons. First, examinations of disaster can provide insight into our system: “disasters provide opportunities to examine aspects of social structures and processes that are hidden in everyday affairs” (Dyson 2007, 283). By examining this topic, we can learn not only about disasters and disaster policy but also about the existing social system and structure.

Second, the number and intensity of natural disasters are expected to increase in the future. Thus, disaster policy will be an important area to understand. Thousands of lives throughout the nation will be affected and costs will be billions of dollars.

Federal disaster policy prior to 1950 has largely been ignored by scholars. Understanding how disaster policy has changed over time, and the factors that led to this change, can help us to understand why disaster policy is the way that it is now and what will happen in the future.

Given the fact that disaster relief was for a long time period the responsibility of private organizations or local/state government, and also the fact that the federal government assumed responsibility for this area less than sixty years ago, it is not surprising that Americans continue to debate federal disaster policy. Disaster relief, like universal health care and other social welfare policies, is still opposed by many. Americans continue to hold on to a strong belief in limited government that stems from our historical experience (Kingdon 1999). This will not change, and thus the debate on federal disaster policy will continue. However, understanding how we got here may help to illuminate what the next step will be.

Disaster policy is an example of path dependence, a process in which “each step makes it more difficult to reverse course” (Pierson 2004, 21). Path dependence theory is an important way to understand major issues such as Tocqueville’s belief that by understanding the origins of a country we can foresee their futures. It can be used to understand a particular policy, as Kingdon (1999) argues when discussing why America does not have similar social policies to other industrialized Western nations.

Despite the calls for less government spending on disasters, the welfare state, and in general, the amount allocated for disaster prevention and response has continued to increase every year. This is unlikely to change due to the fact that this path has been pursued.

Scholars who examine contemporary disaster policy are not getting the full picture. By focusing on this time period, they are missing a lot (Pierson 2004, 79; Goldstone 1998; Kitschelt 2003). By doing so, there are “important things we do not see at all, and what we see we often misunderstand” (Pierson 2004, 79). This is why the work that has been done on disaster policy is incomplete. By ignoring or lightly examining the long-term sequence, the picture is not complete.

Lastly, I believe that this work will contribute to the existing field on long-term policy change and American Political Development. A contextual historical model for long-term policy change can be applied to other areas such as immigration and healthcare. This work will also contribute to existing American Political Development research on evolution of the American state and the national government.

VIII. Breakdown of Chapters

My dissertation will be broken down into seven chapters. The first chapter is this one, which includes the Introduction and Literature Review. The next four chapters include the four afore- mentioned time periods: Colonial-Civil War, Post Civil War-1900, 1900-1950, and 1950-present. The last chapter is a conclusion.

1. Chapter 1. Introduction and Literature Review: 1-44

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2. Chapter 2. Conflagrations and the Constitution: Federal Disaster Policy Through the Civil War: 45-75
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 - II. Prior to the Founding: 46-52
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Chapter 2. Conflagrations and the Constitution: Federal Disaster Policy through the Civil War

I. Introduction

The central government played a limited role in disaster response from the colonial time period through the Civil War. Instead, victims were forced to rely on charity briefs, support from friends or neighbors, or assistance from an outside group like a church. The few instances in which the government did intervene usually came in the form suspension of taxes or duties owed by merchants/ business owners, and the motivations were economic interest.

There are several important factors to consider. Americans living prior to the Civil War did not face many large-scale natural disasters due to low vulnerability. Most disasters caused relatively few deaths/ injuries or damage. America had a small, agrarian population living in areas which were not very prone to disasters. Population and territorial expansion along with urbanization would lead to more vulnerability (and injuries, death, and higher costs), but this would be a process ongoing for decades. Therefore, the government did not have to play a major role with disasters.

This limited involvement also fell in line with the ideology of the time period. The majority of citizens believed in a limited government, one in which local and state governments played a more powerful role. The government also lacked the administrative or welfare state to respond even if it was as acceptable.

Disasters also failed to become focusing events. Media was still developing and did not successfully place disasters on the public or political agenda. Little was also know

about disasters. Scientific knowledge was being accumulated, but the most widespread belief was calamities were “Acts of God” not natural events, and this led many to oppose government intervention.

The government did become involved towards the mid-19th century with some projects aimed at disaster prevention. Pressure was placed upon the government by business leaders, shippers, and planters to undertake projects like building levees along the Mississippi River. Government involvement in this form was seen as acceptable because it helped the nation’s economic and territorial expansion. However, the federal government played a minimal role in disaster response and rarely granted relief.

II. Prior to the Founding

Victims of natural disasters, prior to the Founding of the country, usually received no aid from the government. Instead, they turned to support from friends, neighbors, loans, or some type of voluntary organization/ charity (Rozario 2007, 53); this fell in line with the general treatment of the poor (Trattner 1989). Dealing with disasters was seen as part of the colonial life. Very few had insurance before the American Revolution and some were simply forced to move away after being afflicted by a calamity.

Colonists were no strangers to disasters. Many had experienced natural disasters in the countries that they had emigrated from. In England, victims of disasters in 17th century could be supported with charity briefs (Mulchahy 2005), usually from church members, following the belief that it was the “responsibility of parishes to support the destitute with funds raised from taxes” (Rozario 2007, 54). The parish would ask the government for approval to use their tax dollars to aid the victims. Most of the briefs

were used to relieve fires (Mulchahy 2005, 144). Briefs were usually used to help out victims from neighboring communities where “donors had firsthand knowledge of the calamity and the sufferers” (144). There were some successful nationwide briefs in the 17th and 18th century, but the majority were used to aid local communities. This system of charity briefs was brought over by the settlers to the colonies (144).

There was a turn away from charity briefs in the mid 18th century. Private donations took their place, usually raised by committees. This system was favored due to the amount of time saved (they did not need to seek government approval), the ability to reach a larger audience than members of churches, scandals like middlemen taking percentages of the funds, and a “growing middle-class distrust of government sponsored briefs, whose high administrative costs reduced the amount of money that reached victims” (148).

Local governments in the American colonies, following the English tradition, did respond to some disasters. Municipal governments throughout the 17th century increased their powers to respond to disasters, passing laws on how to fight fires and building codes to prevent fires (Rozario 2007, 49). Seventeenth century disasters, according to Rozario (2007), “contributed to an expansion in the power of the constituted authorities” (49).

New England governments, foreshadowing the actions of the federal government in the 19th century, responded to disasters mostly through a temporary reduction or cancellation of taxes (54); this was a common form of aiding the poor in general (Trattner 1989, 18). In the second half of the 18th century some local governments began to give aid to victims (Rozario 2007, 54). The Lt. governor of South Carolina successfully

petitioned Parliament for 20,000 pounds for victims of the 1740 fire in Charleston (most of which went to elite merchants); this was the first and only time that Parliament gave aid to colonial disaster victims (Mulchahy 1998). In 1760, the Massachusetts colonial legislature approved 3,000 pounds for victims of the 1760 Boston fire (Rozario 2007). However, these were very rare instances of rare government disaster relief. Individuals, instead, following the shift in the middle 18th century towards private donations, had to rely on neighbors and private organizations.

Disaster relief money that was allocated by the government was usually used to help the local economy. Relief money sent to Boston after the fire in 1760 helped pay for rebuilding and stimulating the local building trade (Mulchahy 2005, 151). Overall, aid from Britain (both private and governmental) for colonial disasters increased in the latter half of the 18th century due, in large part, to the growing economic importance of the colonies; it was also due to better information/ communication, “the emergence of a sense of British nationalism” with the accompanying view that colonists were Britons, the linking of producers and consumers in the colonies and Britain, and the investment of many in Britain in land in the colonies (151-153). Similar changes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States would lead to increased support for government disaster relief.

Finally, increased disaster relief (though still very rare) was supported by several beliefs. The latter half of the 18th century was an age of reform (treatment of the insane and criminals, abolition of slavery) and saw the rise of a “culture of sensibility” in which sympathy for fellow man was argued over the Calvinist and Hobbesian belief in the depravity of human nature; Jefferson, part of this tradition, wrote: “Nature hath implanted

in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short, which prompts us irresistibly to feel and succor their distresses” (158).

Poverty was a major problem in the colonies during this time period. In fact, as the number of poor grew, due to factors like immigration and disability from work, providing for the poor became the largest municipal expenditure in the mid/late 17th century; 10-35% of funds were used for this purpose (Trattner 1989, 29). The problem grew too big for the local government to handle and there was a turn to private charity.

Colonists in the 18th century were able to turn to private charity due the increase in wealth and the rise of individuals, private groups, and churches (especially the Quakers) that were interested in helping the poor (32). It was an “age of humanitarianism” (34). The Great Awakening, which occurred in the late 1720s, spread the interest in helping others and improving the human condition.

One of the major tenets of the Enlightenment was that everyone had reason and thus was equal. Poverty and suffering could be eliminated by human beings, not just divine intervention; they were not a natural state but rather something that could and should be eliminated (36). The Hobbesian state of nature that was nasty, short, and brutish was challenged and the belief that everyone should be helped spread, especially through religious messages.

Private charities, although a major source of aid for the poor, was not the only source; instead, it was believed to play a complementary and “cooperative” approach with local governments (34). State governments would start to play a role as well, especially as suffering grew due to the problems caused by the American Revolution.

More were in need and local governments proved insufficient. Some government agencies like the New York Committee on Superintendence of the Poor were set up (37). Mostly, though, private charities, especially churches and religious groups, provided aid for the suffering, including disaster victims.

Religion would face a challenge in the latter half of the 18th century, one that would impact disaster policy. Writers and the upper class began to turn to Rationalism, more scientific knowledge of nature, and away from a strict belief that all events were examples of God's divine will (Mulchahy 2001). In November 1755 an earthquake struck New England. A description of the event, one that focused on facts and looked for a scientific explanation, was reprinted in many colonial newspapers. However, this belief was of the educated elite, not of the masses. The popular view was that the event, like other disaster, was an act of God. Preachers discussed this and other events as signs that God was upset for their sins (Campbell 2008, 29-30).

The Hurricane of Independence (September 1775) was another disaster that reflected the divide between scientific knowledge and religious belief. Some believed that the hurricane was a natural event. Benjamin Franklin said of the hurricane: "Surely the thunder of heaven is no more supernatural than the rain, hail, or sunshine of heaven, against the inconvenience of which we guard by roofs and shades without scruple" (Williams 2008, 25). Franklin, America's leading scientist, studied and wrote about occurrences in nature throughout his life; he gained international celebrity for his writings and for delivering lectures while an ambassador in Europe. For example, in December, 1784 Franklin read his report "Meteorological Imaginations and Conjectures" before the

Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester, in which he argued that volcanic eruptions could have an impact on the climate (SEMP 2005).

Most in America did not share Franklin's belief in scientific explanations for events of nature. Many saw the Hurricane of Independence as a divine pronouncement on the revolt against the British government; the war had started several months earlier at Lexington and Concord. Some believed that the event served notice of God's disapproval with the revolutionaries as at least 163 people were killed in North Carolina and Virginia and much damage was done (Williams 2008).

Overall, disasters prior to the founding were met with little support from the colonial or British governments. The few instances in which there was disaster relief occurred only after political struggle. The Great South Carolina Hurricane hit in September 1752, killing up to 95 people, although the exact number is unknown. Charleston and the surrounding area were devastated by the storm. A political battle would rage over part of the rebuilding effort. The state assembly wanted the Fortification Committee to be in charge of the rebuilding of Charleston's forts and wanted the British government to subsidize the efforts. The governor, a royal appointee, received a petition to that end from the assembly but delayed in sending it back to Great Britain as he felt the legislative body was infringing upon his royal power; he appointed his own engineer to be in charge of the project. The assembly blocked allocations for his plans and threatened to directly petition the king. The governor, feeling criticism from the British government eventually backed down. However, the forts were not rebuilt until 1755-1756 when war with France loomed. The new forts would incorporate growing knowledge of disasters as they were built four feet higher than on the past to be protected from storm surges.

Neither the colonial government nor the British government provided any disaster aid other than the money for the rebuilding of the forts (Williams 2008, 25-26).

A key factor in the lack of disaster relief may have been the relative lack of death and damage from the relatively few disasters that did occur. The colonial population was small: 250,888 in 1700; 1,170,760 in 1750; and 2,780,369 in 1780 (Bureau of the Census 1998, 378). The colonists were mostly subsistent farmers living in smaller rural towns. The small rural population meant that major disasters, which have killed thousands and resulted in millions, or billions of damage in contemporary times, instead had little casualties or costly destruction. For example, the afore-mentioned New England earthquake of 1755, while only a 5.8 on the Richter Scale, would today cause billions in damages and cause many deaths; the earthquake in 1755 killed no one and caused only minor structural damage as the population in the affected areas was small, scattered, and lived in small dwellings (Campbell 2008, 29-30).

III. The Founding Through the Civil War

Federal disaster relief in the late 18th and 19th centuries was limited and selective. From 1803, the year of the first federal disaster relief, to 1933, the start of the New Deal, there were only 128 pieces of legislation to provide disaster assistance (Chane 1960); in comparison, President Bush declared 75 disasters (which allowed federal money to be used in the disaster relief effort) in the year 2008 alone. Only about 40 pieces of disaster relief legislation, less than a third of the afore-mentioned 128 disaster bills, were passed from the Founding through the Civil War. This was less than one bill per year on average.

In most cases disaster victims were not aided by the federal government. Federal disaster policy was selective and infrequent. If it was provided, it often came in the form of suspension of taxes owed. There were several factors that contributed to this policy.

IV. Factors In Favor Of Limited Policy

A. Limited Vulnerability

A major factor that may have led to a limited role for the federal government in disasters was the limited impact of natural disasters. The United States had a much smaller population in this time period. The population of the country in 1790, the year of the first census, was 3,929,214 (Geography Division (c) 1993). The population was mostly spread out and lived in rural areas. Only 5% of the population lived in towns of 2,000 or more people when the country was founded (Geography Division (c) 1993). The areas that were lived in were mostly at low-risk for disaster (See Maps 1 and 3 in the Appendix). The result was less vulnerability to disasters. Natural disasters were infrequent caused substantially less damage and deaths in the early part of the country's history.

An example of the limited impact (and thus their limited capacity to serve as focusing events) of disasters can be seen with the New Madrid earthquakes of 1811-1812. This series of earthquakes, lasting from December, 1811 through February, 1812, included several earthquakes with magnitudes near 8 on the modern Richter scale. These are the most powerful earthquakes to have hit North America east of the Rocky Mountains (Campbell 2008, 55). Yet, no one was reported killed. Major damage was reported in towns in western Kentucky, Tennessee, southeastern Missouri, and

northeastern Arkansas. However, these areas were sparsely populated and there were few urban centers affected so losses were limited. A similarly powerful earthquake and ensuing fire in San Francisco would lead to the deaths of an estimated 3,000 people and caused \$400 million in damages in 1906 due to a much larger, more concentrated, and more urbanized population (198). A quake of that magnitude affecting the same area of the Mississippi River Valley, which is highly likely to occur in the next 50 years, would cause billions in damages and kill hundreds or thousands. The 1994 Northridge Earthquake killed 33, caused \$20 billion in damage, and was not even a 7 on the Richter Scale; the 1995 Kobe, Japan Earthquake killed 5,500 people and caused \$100 billion dollars in damage and was also less than a 7 on the scale (USGS 1995).

B. Private Relief and Ideology

Disaster victims after the Founding, like in the time period prior, were primarily aided by private organizations, churches, neighbors, or local governments (Bourgin 1983; Popkin 1990). Most forms of aid to citizens were not provided by the government: “most Americans considered health care, social welfare, and other aspects of disaster relief to be tasks left to the individual or private charity” (Foster 2005, 7).

Churches, in particular, were important for early Americans in many areas. Churches “came to be the main institution of social cohesion and control”; the church played a major role in “defining bonds of community and promoting neighborly behavior,” particularly as Americans spread west and South (Nobles 1997, 113). One means through which they accomplished these goals was through aid to disaster victims.

Churches proliferated throughout the young country and had their own system of welfare for those in need (Trattner 1989, 40).

Ideology played a major role in determining Americans' attitudes towards disaster relief. American ideology was shaped by several beliefs. Liberalism focused on the individual, called for less government interference, an emphasis on private property, and a protection of freedoms (Hartz 1955). Republicanism celebrated community and civic duty (Wood 1969). Americans also had a strong belief in religious communalism (Shain 1994). Given this, and the colonists' experience of receiving little aid from the British Parliament, it is not surprising that they turned to private sources of relief rather than the federal government.

The colonists had brought with them a spirit of charity, which had been exemplified in the English tradition of charity briefs for disaster victims. The early Americans supported philanthropic institutions like schools, churches, orphanages, hospitals, and almshouses (Wyllie 1959). The first hospital, the Pennsylvania Hospital, had been established in 1765 in Philadelphia; it was supported entirely by voluntary donations (SSA 2010). The first organized medical care service, the Boston Dispensary, was set up in 1796 (SSA 2010).

Support of charity varied by the colony; those in the Massachusetts Bay Colony even "accepted the English idea that society had an obligation to relieve the poor through tax funds" (Wyllie 1959, 203). Thomas Paine, one of the rhetorical leaders of the Revolutionary War, advocated in his pamphlet "Agrarian Justice" (published in 1797) for a potential social insurance program (SSA 2010). This belief was not widespread though

as the colonists had brought with them the idea that disasters should be met with private donations starting in the mid-18th century (Mulchahy 2005).

Most Americans at the time period favored a limited federal government. The American federal government that was created by the Constitution was both limited and small. Americans incorporated their experience with the British government into their founding doctrine. Their perception that the British government had abused its powers and hurt the colonists through taxation without representation, combined with the political thinking of Enlightenment thinkers like Hobbes, Locke, and Montesquieu, led them to call for a limited government, one whose powers are listed and constrained by a written constitution (Kingdon 1999). Americans have traditionally distrusted government: “Distrust of government is as American as apple pie” (Huntington 1997, 88). Americans incorporated their distrust and support of limited government to a *laissez faire* ideology, a belief that “government should never interfere in the private market” (Platt 1999, 2). Americans have also continually opposed taxes and, as a result, an expansive role of the government in the public sector (Kingdon 1999).

Federalism also affected disaster policy. There was nothing in the Constitution that discussed disaster assistance and “a pervasive parsimony in Congress reinforced [these] constitutional scruples” (Foster 1983, 2). Federalism proscribed to the states the powers not enumerated in the Constitution and since disasters relief was not mentioned, the prevailing belief was that this responsibility would fall to the states. The ratification of the Constitution was marked by a sharp battle between the Federalists, who favored the Constitution and a strong central government, and the Anti-Federalists, who were in favor of strong state and local governments instead. The Federalists had to convince

many people who shared the Anti-Federalist belief in stronger state and local government that the Constitution would not infringe upon state rights. Madison wrote in Federalist 46 that “the first and most natural attachment of the people will be to the governments of their respective states” and that the power of the state governments would be protected by the Constitution. The government that was created by the Constitution reflected this. The 10th Amendment granted all powers that were not given to Congress to the states. This would include disaster relief.

The early system of federalism was one of dual sovereignty. The two governments, state and federal, were separated. Each had their own powers and policies. There would be a shift to cooperative federalism during the New Deal. The federal government, which had become stronger in the later 19th and early 20th centuries, was able to use grant-in-aid programs to get the states to pursue their policies. Disaster policy would also radically change during this time period as the federal government institutionalized disaster policy, giving aid to the state and local governments after the president declared a disaster in that area. This would be very similar to the grant-in-aid programs that marked cooperative federalism. However, this shift would have to wait until the 1930s and 1940s (Peterson 1995).

C. Weak Administrative State

The national government at the time period did not have the means to carry out disaster relief, even if ideological considerations had not prevented it. The early federal government was decentralized and had yet to develop a strong, centralized, national administrative apparatus (Skowronek 1982). It was small and most of the manpower

concentrated in the capitol; there was a “lack of means to send support” to disaster victims (Foster 1983, 2). The army, which would respond to disasters after the Civil War, was small and fragmented up until the mid-19th century and thus could not provide relief (Foster 1983).

There were few federal agencies or bureaucracies as they were not included in the federal Constitution. Originally, there were no executive agencies at all until Washington created the State, War, and Treasury departments. Federal agencies that did exist had bad reputations and were as perceived as inefficient and incapable of tackling major problems: “through most of the 1800s administrative capacity in the United States...was the minimally sufficient ability to distribute federal largesse to electorally favored constituencies” (Carpenter 2001, 47). Thus, many felt that it would be a mistake to rely upon the government for problems like disaster response.

Local governments usually did not have adequate resources either (Teaford 2002, Stratton 1989). Mayors and local politicians outside of big cities were relatively weak and responses were poorly coordinated (Stratton 1989, 2). Any type of response to disasters was thus usually organized by private groups like citizen committees. For example, when Philadelphia was plagued by yellow fever in 1793, a citizen’s relief committee, funded mostly through private donations, responded after most local politicians had fled (Foster 2005, 6).

Thus, the normal script for disasters would start with word spreading about the event. Volunteers and local authorities would be the first to respond. It was only if the disaster was severe and local authorities experienced “overload” that they would look to

external sources for assistance (Stratton 1989, 26); only if there was extraordinary need would they turn to the federal government.

D. The Welfare State

Disaster policy reflected the overall feelings towards social welfare in the country. The welfare state in America would not begin to really develop until after the Civil War (Skocpol 1995). There would be some vestiges of the welfare state seen in the late 18th century. In 1789, the federal government established a pension program for Revolutionary War veterans (SSA 2010). Congress established the Marine Hospital Service, the predecessor to the Public Health Service, in 1798; this would be first tax-funded medical care program in the country (compulsory employer tax); the service provided aid for sick and disabled seamen (SSA 2010). However, the welfare state at the time period was mostly decentralized and reflected state laws and judicial decisions (Trattner 1989, 39).

The government at the time was unwilling to help the unemployed or other groups who were believed to have caused their own problems (Mink and O'Connor, 2004). This belief can be traced back to the English Poor Laws. The English Poor Law of 1601, often cited as the beginning of the poor law system, set up an early welfare system. The law set up a distinction between “deserving” and “undeserving.” Those who were deemed as “deserving” (also known as the “impotent poor”) were citizens that were too old or sick to work. The government collected taxes to be used to provide relief in the form of clothing and food. These supplies were then distributed by parish (local) leaders (a tradition that would be followed by the government in the 19th century with their

distribution practices of relief for disaster victims: funds were appropriated by Congress, supplies were purchased and transported by the Army, and local officials distributed). Almshouses were also established to house the deserving poor. Those deemed as undeserving, the able-bodied poor, were subject to fierce treatment from local officials, including imprisonment, and were not given aid (SSA 2010).

The American colonists modeled their charity laws after the English Poor Laws, including the distinction between the “deserving” and “undeserving.” Local leaders were designated the authority to make these classifications and the welfare system remained mostly localized. State almshouses and poorhouses were created. However people were discouraged from poverty and the use of these institutions by the substandard conditions of the housing and punishments like the potential loss of the right to vote, the right to move, and some were forced to wear the letter “P” on their chest (SSA 2010).

This division would also be applied to disaster victims in America. Disaster victims usually had to prove that they were not responsible for their situation, which was often seen in debates over disaster legislation (Dauber 1999). Merchants and business leaders who had been affected were usually treated as more “deserving” of aid than other victims.

E. Scientific Knowledge

Response to most disasters was limited by a lack of scientific knowledge (Foster 2005). Disasters, in fact, were often believed to be and referred to as “acts of God” rather than natural events (Steinberg 2006). This led to less government involvement: “disasters tended to be viewed as unavoidable “acts of God,” which, by definition, transcend the

power of government to intervene” (Platt 1999, 2). Governments often responded to disasters in the 18th and 19th centuries by issuing orders of prayer and fasting (Foster 2005).

F. Media and Focusing Events

Disaster response was also limited by a lack of media. Media in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was rather small (Emery and Emery 1996). Most Americans still did not have access to an everyday source of news, due to low rates of literacy and the high cost of newspapers. Technological changes that would allow for the proliferation of newspapers would not occur until the second half of the century. These factors would contribute to the limited ability of the media to focus the nation’s attention on disasters. Some disasters would serve as focusing events that would increase government involvement in disasters. However, these incidents of focusing events leading to disaster policy change were rare.

V. Factors In Favor of Expansion of Policy

A. Increased Vulnerability: Population Growth, Territorial Expansion, and Urbanization

Americans vulnerability to disasters would increase throughout the 19th century. The population had grown to 5,308,483 by 1800; 1810 it was 7,239,881; 1820 it was 9,638,453; 1830 it was 12,866,020; 1840 it was 17,069,453; 1850 it was 23,191,876; and 1860 it was 31,443,321 (Geography Division (c) 1993). The population gradually became more urban. By the start of the Civil War, 20% of the population was living in cities, up from 5% at the Founding of the country (Geography Division (c) 1993). As the country’s

population grew and became more urban, disasters increasingly caused more damage and led to more deaths (See List of Major American Disasters in the Appendix).

This urbanization also began to undermine the traditional support system for the poor. Traditionally those in need, including victims of disasters, would turn to friends, family, and neighbors first for aid. However as people migrated to the cities, they were cut off from their traditional support system. Counties, which had assumed the government responsibility of providing for the poor from the towns beginning in the 1820s, were forced to deal with more and more people in poverty. County institutions were criticized for their terrible care; the mid-19th century was a period of reform in which advocates publically lauded against institutions like poor-houses. They turned to the states, who got more involved over the course of the century, and the federal government as well in mid-century (Tratten 1989, 56-59).

Where Americans lived changed and impacted disaster policy. America would see substantial territorial expansion in early 19th century (See Map 1 in the Appendix). The country would acquire territory in the West and South. This expansion occurred dramatically in the early part of the century: the government acquired 11.25 million acres from France with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803; West Florida was declared a US possession in 1810 by Madison; the Red River Basin was acquired from the UK in 1818; the Adams-Onis Treaty with Spain got the country the East Florida and Free Sabine State (part of west Louisiana); and Texas was formally annexed in 1845. Much of this expansion was in territory that was prone to disasters (See Maps 2 and 3 in the Appendix).

This territorial expansion and ensuing settlement was a “process that depended on the participation, even the active promotion, of the national government” (Nobles 1997, 15). Settlement of the country was one area in which the federal government played an active role. Congress was in control of settling the West. The government also carried out a policy of fighting and pushing the Native Americans further west and on to reservations.

B. Economic Growth

Disaster response and prevention could thus be justified in support of this territorial expansion as a legitimate federal interest. It could also be justified in support of economic growth. The federal government would play an active role in the facilitating economic growth and capitalism. This was seen as an accepted area of federal policy (McClosky and Zaller, 1984; Lowi, 1969).

Disaster policy would be closely associated with this. Many of the cases of disaster relief were tied to the economic interests of the country. An example of this occurred in 1792 when aid was sent to the Creek Indians who were suffering from famine; this was done mostly because the government wanted to become better trading partners with the Creeks (Foster 2005, 8).

International disaster relief was also pursued with economic considerations. Congress sent \$50,000 in aid to Venezuela after Caracas was hit with a major earthquake in 1812. The aid was intended to strengthen the commercial relations between the two countries. Congress instructed their agent in Venezuela to let the government and the people of the country know that the aid presented “strong proof of the friendship and

interest which the United States took in their welfare...and to explain the mutual advantages of commerce with the United States” (Foster 2005, 10).

Similarly, disaster relief was in some cases provided for economically important cities and citizens in this country. The first major piece of disaster legislation was passed in 1803 to aid Portsmouth, New Hampshire, which had been devastated by a fire on December 26th, 1802. Portsmouth was a major port at the time. One hundred buildings were destroyed, including many commercial buildings (May 1985).

Portsmouth relied on private donations to help the majority of the victims. The town’s committee placed editorials in the *National Intelligencer* and *Washington Advertiser* on January 23rd, 1803 asking the “humane, benevolent citizens of the commercial cities and sea ports, and of the interior of the United States” ¹ for help. The committee spoke of the “late terrible fire with which Divine Providence has visited us.” ² The town, which had just been recovering from damages inflicted during the Revolutionary War, was destroyed. The editorials described the suffering of the residents, noting how the sick, old, widows, and orphans had been left homeless for the winter. They argued that the relief from their neighbors was not and plead with the “opulent and the prosperous; indeed with all in a comfortable state, who feel themselves exposed to like calamities, and that they may need like assistance from sympathizing friends and countrymen.” ³ They also noted that their citizens have given aid when other towns had been affected by disasters.

¹ W.W. Woodward. “Fire at Portsmouth, NH.” *Gazette of the United States*. 11 January 1803: 1.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Newspapers across the country ran articles on the Portsmouth Fire. They particularly focused on the suffering of the widows and orphans. A former Portsmouth resident, living in Philadelphia ran an article in the *Gazette of the United States* on January 11th in which he ask for aid and donations for the town to help “console the widow and the fatherless.”⁴

An article in the *Gazette* four days earlier, described the destruction of the town and also focused on widows and orphans being left homeless and destitute. The article also mentioned that the fire had destroyed “that part of the town which most materially affected the gentlemen in trade.”⁵ Three quarters of goods in the town had been destroyed, but “by the kind assistance of their friends the merchants and traders have preserved the greatest part of their stock, and hope soon to be accommodated as to supply their customers again.”⁶

The federal government did consider disaster relief for the town, focusing, like the above article, on the commercial impact of the fire. The House Committee of Ways and Means was directed by a House resolution “to inquire into the expediency of prolonging the terms of payment on bonds due by such merchants who may have been sufferers in the late fire at Portsmouth, in New Hampshire” on January 13th. The committee passed out a bill which was approved by the House on February 10th. The bill was titled “An Act for the Relief of the Sufferers by Fire in the Town of Portsmouth, New Hampshire.” The federal relief act only aided the merchants of the town, by temporarily suspending the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Portsmouth Dec. 28 Fire.” *Gazette of the United States*. 7 January 1803: 1.

⁶ Ibid.

collection of bonds owed to the government. The text of the relief act was printed in the *National Intelligencer* and *Washington Advertiser* on February 13th.

The federal government, for the first time, had passed a piece of legislation designed to aid a group of American citizens that had been affected by a disaster (and even printed the bill for all to see in major newspapers). The suspension of duties or taxes by merchants was a common form of federal disaster relief in the 19th century. The 1835 New York Fire would be met with similar government relief. The fire severely affected the commercial district. The insurers were also destroyed, leading to fear of an economic crisis (SEMP 2007). Congress responded by suspending the collection of duties for up to 5 years after the mayor and local business leaders petitioned the government for aid; the New York state legislature also passed a relief bill for the merchants. Neither the federal nor state governments attempted to help out working class families whose homes had been destroyed or whose rents had jumped dramatically after the rebuilding of the city caused the property values to increase (Greenberg 2006). Congress, in fact, denied a petition put together by a committee of 125 NYC elites for direct relief, similar to the petition that was successfully presented by victims of the 1811-12 New Madrid Earthquakes (Foster 2005, 13).

Similar piece of legislation would be passed after the 1804 fire in Norfolk (Roberts 2009), the July 1845 fire in New York City (HR 169, January 1846), the Nov 1871 Boston fire (HR 3037, December 1872), and the Great Chicago Fire of October 1871 (HR 1936, March 1872). A fire in Savannah Georgia in 1820 led Congress to create a bill:

authorizing the remission of twenty-five per cent. On all bonds due or becoming due at the Custom House at Savannah, in Georgia, executed for the payment of duties on imported goods, wares, and merchandize, not ensured against fire, and which have been destroyed by the conflagration in that city; and extending the additional credit of two years on such bonds.⁷

The commonality among these disasters is the economic importance of these cities. Norfolk, New York, and Boston were all major ports for the United States. Savannah and Chicago, similarly, were economic hubs. Congress acted quickly to return them to their prominent role in the nation's growing economy.

C. Pressure Groups

During the early 19th century business leaders and other upper class formed into groups in order to seek special support from the federal government. The government responded by creating agencies to deal with their requests: by the early 19th century the “government had established an institutional structure that legitimized assistance to the advantaged while marginalizing the destitute” (Mink and O’Connor 237). This included disaster intervention.

Planters, shippers, and merchants on the Mississippi and Sacramento Rivers were one group that was successful with this strategy. This group wanted to compete with the commercial success of the Northeast. During the mid 1800s they lobbied the federal government and were able to get federal flood control aid and flood control programs. They argued that this was necessary because the nation relied on the areas, especially the Mississippi Valley, for crops and food. The group framed “aid for flood control as a

⁷ “Friday February 25, 1820.” *Journal of the Senate of the United States of America, 1789-1873*. 25 February 1820.

program for economic development” (O’Neill 2006, xii). They also threatened to stop their production if they did not receive federal aid.

They were successful in getting indirect assistance from Congress starting in the 1820s through river surveys and swampland grants. In the late 1850s, farmers, merchants and investors in Northern California similarly demanded flood control for the Sacramento River. Farms in the valley around the river had experienced more flooding due to hydraulic mining operations in the Sierra Nevada. Some levees were built by private individuals or by local levee districts. Many were interested, though, in getting the assistance of the federal government. Farmers and cities wanted the government to drain land for use and to eliminate flooding. The farmers, shippers, planters, and local levee districts “formed alliances with downstream merchants, passed subnational state government levee regulations, and promoted the issue of flood control within their home regions”; they also campaigned for “federal aid by organizing river conventions and gaining support from their members of Congress” (O’Neill 2006, xiii).

This lobbying of the government was done at a time period when local elites played a powerful role in government. The federal government was particularly open to the economic elite. They were able to lobby members of Congress to get legislation for their districts. These two groups in the Mississippi River Valley and Sacramento River Valley were able to utilize their claims that flooding was damaging the national economy in order to get federal involvement in flood control projects in those areas.

D. Internal Improvements

The federal government pursued other national improvement projects that were designed to facilitate economic and territorial growth and also affected disasters. Internal improvement was one of the most important domestic issues for James Monroe and other early 19th century presidents (Milkis and Nelson 2008, 113) and commerce was looked at as a means to unify the disjointed American states (O'Neill 2006, xvi). The government, towards that end, created a national bank, passed protective tariffs, and improved transportation to link the west with east.

The Army Corps of Engineers was involved in national improvement projects in this time period. In the 1820s, the Corps built roads, waterways, and canals to help the settlement of the West and economic growth. The Corps also worked on coastal improvement projects, rebuilding harbors damaged by storms, carrying out storm damage reduction projects, and erecting lighthouses (Lockhart and Morang 2002).

Much of this work was done after the Supreme Court ruled in 1824 that the interstate commerce clause “made the federal government responsible for free access to river transportation” (O'Neill 2006, xvi). After this ruling, legislation was passed which directed the Army Corps of Engineers to work on improving river navigation channels.

Federal government continued to remain limited in flood control:

This court case became the key constitutional justification for central government intervention into the economy, although for decades funding was usually limited to aiding the interstate distribution of goods, not their production. Because flood control work would directly enhance agricultural production by allowing farmers to control soil moisture, it was not acceptable under this view of the Constitution (O'Neill 2006, xvi).

This is what would lead to planters, shippers, and merchants actively lobbying the federal government to become involved. Mississippi settlers also put pressure on the federal government to acquire the Louisiana territory from the French. They believed that

this would improve shipping on the Mississippi River and add protection from flooding. The French had settled New Orleans in 1717. Levee districts, which were run by landowners, were created to coordinate the levee building that was done on the river. This would change, as mentioned earlier, as business elites pressured the federal government to become involved:

Under United States rule, large landowners, politicians, bankers, and shippers from port cities all along the Mississippi organized river conventions from the 1840s on to protest the disproportionate share of federal river and railroad going to the northeast. Many river activists from the lower Mississippi also began to argue that the river's volume and meandering ways caused flooding as well as navigation problems and that the two problems should be solved together. As a low-cut gesture typical of the time, Congress approved grants of federal government swamplands to a dozen sub-national governments west of the Appalachians beginning in 1849. The subnational states were to sell these lands to subsidize flood control works (O'Neill 2006, xvii).

The Swamp Lands Act of 1849 transferred control of swamp lands and overflow lands from the federal government to the state governments along the lower Mississippi River. The states were allowed to use internal revenues to construct levees and drainage channels in order to prevent flooding (River and Miller 2006, 6).

Other internal improvement projects related to disasters were also carried out. President Jefferson established the Survey of the Coast (later renamed the US Coast Survey) in 1807. In 1814 President Madison's Surgeon General ordered surgeons to keep weather diaries; this would become the government's first collection of weather data. In 1842 James Espy was appointed as the first official government meteorologist. The Smithsonian Institute began to recruit volunteer weather observers in 1848. The following year, the Institute established a weather observation network (NOAA 2002).

VI. Conclusion

The government continued to maintain its policy of responding to individual disasters rather than a systematic response, and even these responses were met passed after fierce debate. Fear of setting precedent was mentioned in many debates (Dauber 1998). Illustrating this debate, one congressman in an 1847 debate over disaster warned his fellow legislators that disaster relief was a “dangerous exercise of power” which was “best left to the “liberality and generosity and better judgment of their constituents” (Foster 2005, 8).

President Franklin Pierce in 1854 vetoed a bill designed to cede land to be used to take care of the mentally ill in the future. In his veto message, the president argued that this bill was a violation of Congress’ powers under the Constitution. He called for a strict interpretation of the Constitution. He believed that bill would be a violation of federalism and that the issue was a power that had been given to the states. He further argued that if the federal government began to take care of the insane, that they would soon be in charge of taking care of all the poor. This was a responsibility that was left to the states:

If Congress may and ought to provide for any one of these objects, it may and ought to provide for them all. And if it be done in this case, what answer shall be given when Congress shall be called upon, as it doubtless will be, to pursue a similar course of legislation in the others? It will obviously be vain to reply that the object is worthy, but that the application has taken a wrong direction. The power will have been deliberately assumed, the general obligation will by this act have been acknowledged, and the question of means and expediency will alone be left for consideration. The decision upon the principle in any one case determines it for the whole class. The question presented, therefore, clearly is upon the constitutionality and propriety of the Federal Government assuming to enter into a novel and vast field of legislation, namely, that of providing for the care and support of all those among the people of the United States who by any form of calamity become fit objects of public philanthropy.

I readily and, I trust, feelingly acknowledge the duty incumbent on us all as men and citizens, and as among the highest and holiest of our duties, to provide for those who, in the mysterious order of Providence, are subject to want and to disease of body or mind; but I can not find any authority in the Constitution for making the Federal Government the great almoner of public charity throughout the United States. To do so would, in my judgment, be contrary to the letter and spirit of the Constitution and subversive of the whole theory upon which the Union of these States is founded. And if it were admissible to contemplate the exercise of this power for any object whatever, I can not avoid the belief that it would in the end be prejudicial rather than beneficial in

the noble offices of charity to have the charge of them transferred from the States to the Federal Government...⁸

This belief would lead to a limited amount of relief legislation passed prior to the Civil War. Constitutional arguments were presented against further federal involvement into an area that was considered the domain of state and local governments (Roberts 2009, 13). Also, the argument was made that appropriations issued by Congress should be made for the general population and not a specific location, such as victims of a natural disaster (Gillman 2005).

Also, the nation increasingly turned its attention to the issue of slavery in the decades leading up to the conflict, leaving little room for disaster policy to stay on the public agenda. Disaster legislation, infrequent in preceding decades, became even more rare in the two decades leading up to the Civil War as groups within Congress feared that federal disaster relief would be seen as a further expansion of the federal government's power and agitate already growing tensions about the scope of the federal government and states' rights (Roberts 2009, 14).

The time period from the Founding of the country through the Civil War saw limited and selective federal disaster response. The federal government did become more involved in disaster policy as a means to aid territorial expansion, work on internal improvements, and help economic growth. The last issue in particular was a major impetus for disaster policy. Disaster relief was usually directed at the economic elite. Pressure groups comprised of planters, shippers, and merchants were successful in getting the federal government to become involved in flood control along the Mississippi

⁸ Peirce, Franklin. "Veto Message." 3 May 1854.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=67850&st=calamity&st1=>

and Sacramento Rivers. Disaster policy aimed at helping the nation's economy was seen as acceptable form of government involvement.

Federal disaster response, though, still remained limited and rare, not comprehensive. Many Americans continued to have a strong belief in a limited federal government and more powerful governments. Powers not described in the Constitution, like disaster relief, were left to the states.⁹ The belief in limited government often translated to disaster relief being carried out by friends, neighbors, or private organizations. Charity was seen as a worthy goal, one supported by the pre-colonial and colonial past; however, it was not an area for the government to be involved in. The welfare state in America was still years away from forming.

Disaster response was also limited by other factors. America lacked an administrative state strong enough to implement and carry out disaster response. Disasters were often not focusing events due to a small media and relative few deaths and damage. This latter part was due to the fact that America had yet to extend to more disaster-prone areas, and those areas that were affected by disaster usually had few people living there and were mostly rural. Lack of scientific knowledge about disasters and the dominant belief that disasters were acts of God, and thus not areas where the government should intervene, also contributed. All these factors led to America's limited disaster policy.

⁹ One of the few examples of direct government relief, \$20,000 appropriated by Congress for victims of a fire in Alexandria, Virginia was justified because the area was at the time considered part of the District of Columbia and thus under the constitutional powers of the federal government (Foster 2005, 12).

Much of the federal government's role in disasters was indirect and focused on prevention rather than response. The government's involvement in flood control through projects like levees and expansion like the creation of the Weather Bureau all helped to limit the impact of disasters. Response, other than tax remittance for merchants, was mostly left to other organizations.

This is the first time period in which a federal disaster policy was established, beginning with the Portsmouth New Hampshire Fire in 1803. It was not a comprehensive policy; rather, it set a precedent of selectively responding to disasters and when it did respond, often it was not in a direct way. Instead, it was through the suspension of taxes.

The timing of the creation of this policy matters, as I argued in the Introduction. The policy was established at a time period when disasters were not a major problem due to low vulnerability; when Americans were in favor of a limited government; when the federal government did not have the resources to respond. Economic growth, territorial expansion, and internal improvements were seen as acceptable areas for the government to act so this is the form that disaster policy took: suspension of taxes for merchants, aid to the Native Americans and foreign countries to increase trade, and prevention projects like building levees to protect shipping and planting along the Mississippi River.

This policy was maintained through positive feedback. Newspaper articles of the time period celebrated the philanthropic spirit of America as reflected by the aid to disaster victims by private charities and committees. Providing aid to those in need in general was seen as the realm of private charities or the local and state governments.

Federal intervention into this area would have been decried as an undue exercise of power.

The afore-mentioned New York Fire of 1835 dealt a substantial blow to the nation's economy, causing fifteen million dollars worth of damage and destroying much of the financial district, including the New York Stock Exchange. Proponents petitioned Congress for federal aid, arguing the importance of recovery for the nation's economy; however, Congress refused to act as it would go against precedent and expand the obligation placed upon the federal government (Roberts 2009, 14).

Things would begin to change. Increased vulnerability, changing beliefs on the role of government, pressure from planters and shippers to get further involved in disaster prevention, and petitions from victims themselves would challenge the positive feedback and the selective, limited federal disaster policy of the time.

America's disaster policy would change radically within a hundred years. By 1950 the federal government had started to implement a direct and comprehensive federal disaster policy. It was a policy that was focused more on response than prevention. Changes in many of the factors that have already been examined would account for this overall change in policy. Some of these changes would begin in the aftermath of the American Civil War.

CHAPTER 3. CONSTRUCTION, RECONSTRUCTION, AND DESTRUCTION: FEDERAL DISASTER POLICY FROM THE CIVIL WAR THROUGH 1900

I. Introduction

The latter half of the 19th century would see an expansion in disaster relief. From the seventy-plus years from the Founding through the Civil War, there were less than forty pieces of disaster relief legislation passed. This number would more than double to nearly 90 in the forty years after the Civil War (Roberts 2009, 15).

The type of assistance would also change. In prior decades, when Congress did grant relief, which was rare, it often came in the form of suspension of taxes owed merchants. An exception was victims of the New Madrid earthquakes in 1811-1812. They were successful in petitioning the government to grant them new property for their property that had been damaged. This practice would foreshadow the practice of latter efforts of the federal government in distributing surplus land for disaster victims. However, the practice was abandoned for the time period as court cases over this land were tied up for years and there were many allegations of fraud (Roberts 2009, 11). This type of aid was very rare.

Disaster relief expanded in the decades following the Civil War. Congress continued its practice of suspending taxes for merchants, but also gave assistance other forms: new land; food; transportation by US Navy; seed; loan of army tents, ordinances, clothing, etc for state militia; medicine stores; hospitalization; relief from liability insurance; mileage allotment for Army officers; rent payments; Army reindeer in Alaska; and employment (Chane 1960).

Disaster policy also expanded in other areas. Pressure groups representing commercial interests continued to push for the government's involvement in levee-building and other forms of disaster prevention. The federal government became involved for the first time in a new area, response, primarily through the Army and Freedman's Bureau.

These expansions were due to multiple factors. First, the problem of natural disasters increased as vulnerability to natural disasters increased. The growing and more urban population was living in more-disaster prone numbers. The number of natural disasters increased as did the damage and deaths from natural disasters. The increased connection of citizens, facilitated by better modes of transportation and communication, coupled with the growth in the media and increased scientific knowledge led to more interest in natural disasters. Disasters increasingly became focusing events and more pressure was put on the government to intervene, especially from the afore-mentioned commercial interests.

This growing problem occurred at the same time that the federal government itself was changing and expanding. Following the Civil War, states began to lose their sovereignty. The government began to become more unified and the federal government grew larger and stronger. The federal government's capacity expanded as the welfare and administrative states began to grow.

Still, the federal government's role in disasters continued to remain rather limited and selective. The government, although responding to more disasters, did not respond to all, including major disasters like the Great Peshtigo Fire in 1871, Johnstown Flood in

1889, and the Sea Isles Hurricane in 1893. The focus for federal government disaster response continued to remain on promoting national economic prosperity. The government maintained its practice of suspending taxes/ duties owed by merchants. The dominant ideology of the time period, although it started to change with the Progressive Era, continued to favor limited government and helped to stymie major changes in disaster policy. Citizen donations and aid provided by private organizations remained as the main source of disaster relief and relief efforts were often coordinated by citizen committees, usually made up of business elites.

II. Factors In Favor of Expansion Of Policy

A. Increased Vulnerability: Industrialization, Urbanization, and Territorial Expansion

This time period, often referred to as the Gilded Age, was a period of rapid industrialization and the rise of corporations. The Industrial Revolution exploded in America after the Civil War. Production rose dramatically. By the end of the century, America was producing more iron, steel, and coal than any other nation on earth (Painter 2008, xxxi).

It was an era dominated by the capitalists, economically, politically, and culturally (Trachtenberg 2007, 382). The first billion dollar corporations were created during this time. All this had a substantial impact on ordinary Americans. This time period saw the shift from most Americans being self-employed to now working for managers and corporations. This “incorporation” that was dominating the country helped bring to an

end the era of “heroic endeavor” and start an era of “corporate manipulation” (Painter 2008, 5).

The country was becoming an urban nation. By 1900, there would be 1,743 cities in America, up from 362 in 1860, and nearly 40% of the population lived in cities, up from less than 20% in 1860 (Geography Division (c) 1993). The population also continued to grow rapidly; it was 31,443,321 in 1860 and would be 76,212,168 by 1900 (Geography Division (c) 1993).

The population shifted and expanded to new areas. America continued its territorial expansion in the second half of the 19th century. The keys to this expansion were the gold rushes and the railroads. The California Gold Rush and subsequent rushes for other precious minerals brought millions to the West. Many came via steamboat. Steamboats proliferated rivers after Robert Fulton’s successful launch in 1807. The Erie Canal, opened in 1807, “linked the western interior with the Atlantic” (Brogan 1999, 271). Perhaps the most important change in transportation was rail. The Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads were set up in 1862, the Northern Pacific Railroad two years later; the golden spike, marking the joining of the eastern and western rail lines, was driven into the ground in 1869. By the start of the Civil War there were 31,256 miles of railroads (Borgan 2001, 378); there were 166,703 miles of railroad by 1890 (380).

People also settled the Great Plains. This was accomplished due to the forced removal of the Native Americans by the Army (379). Much of the territorial expansion brought settlers to lands that were much more disaster prone than areas in the East (see Map 1 in appendix).

Americans embraced expansion as part of their national identity and a source of pride:

The Western lands provided resources essential as much to industrial development after the Civil War as to cultural needs of justification, incentive, and disguise. Land and minerals served economic and ideological purposes, the two merging into a single complex image of the west: a temporal site of the route from past to future, and the spatial site for revitalizing national energies. As myth and as economic entity, the West proved indispensable to the formation of a national society and a cultural mission: to fill the vacancy of the Western spaces with civilization, by means of incorporation (political as well as economic) and violence” (Trachtenburg 2007, 17).

Overall, this transformation would have several affects. Urbanization along with the increasing population would lead to increase in the amount of damage and deaths caused by natural disasters (see List of Major American Disasters in the Appendix). Cities were built in more disaster prone areas (see Maps 2 and 3 in Appendix). Increased population and concentration in cities would lead to more risk and vulnerability to disasters; urbanization would lead to environmental degradation and thus contribute to more disasters (Pelling 2003). All of this would make it increasingly more difficult for the government not to become more involved in disaster relief.

Natural disasters were more frequent, more deadly, and more costly than in early decades of the Republic. Notable disasters during this time period included: the Great Chicago Fire in 1871 (200 killed; \$200 million dollars in damages, the equivalent of \$3.4 billion dollars today); the Great Peshtigo Fire in 1871 (1200 killed; unknown damages); the Great Boston Fire in 1872 (\$75 million dollars in damages; \$1.3 billion today); the Southern Tornado Outbreak of 1884 (800 killed; unknown damages); the Johnstown Flood in 1889 (2200 killed; \$17 million dollars in damages; \$390 million today); and the Sea Isles Hurricane in 1893 (2000+ killed; unknown damages) (Campbell 2008).

The fires in particular demonstrated the vulnerability of cities to disasters, especially in an era when there was a lack of building codes and buildings made with poor material. The expansion into more-disaster prone areas and the ensuing potential for calamity were also demonstrated. The problem of earthquakes in California, for example, were first seen during this time period. The Fort Tejon Earthquake in 1857 severely damaged most of the buildings in the forts and killed 2 on the present-day location of Los Angeles; the Hayward Earthquake in 1868 damaged most of the buildings in the town and killed 30; and the Owens Valley Earthquake in 1872 caused \$250,000 worth of dollars in damage to the town and killed 27 (Campbell 2008). While nowhere near the death and destruction that would be seen in the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, these early disasters would demonstrate the threat that earthquakes and other natural disasters would pose to Americans in new areas.

This increase in frequency of and deaths and damage caused by natural disasters would put pressure on the federal government to play a more active role in prevention, response, and recovery. Non-governmental groups would be pushed to their limits. This problem would become even more acute in the opening decades of the 20th century.

Furthermore, this urbanization would affect the victims of disasters as well. People who moved to cities could no longer count on traditional disaster support from neighbors, churches, and other private sources, that they did when they lived in rural areas. The older way of turning to private donations/ organizations or forming citizen committees was gradually being undermined. Victims increasingly turned to cities, who in turned to the state or federal government due to a lack of resources (Stratton 1989).

This turn to government aid could arguably be seen in the West as well. The conquest of the land, the frontier experience, had created a unique American identity for most of young country's history. This identity was embraced in the popular culture of the time. The authors of the era, such as James Fenimore Cooper, and the painters, especially the Hudson River School, celebrated the frontier spirit. Artists painted American landscapes with "almost mythical power... They depicted nature as the stage of dramas of growth and decay, of aspiration and defeat-and invested it with emotions appropriate to visions of destiny" (18). The dominant vision of the rugged individual struggling against the land and nature on their own was a source of pride; however, there would be a shift, beginning in the late 19th century with the "closing of the West," away from this frontier individualism.

As the western settler began to face problems of magnitude, the areas he was occupying, as he began to adjust his life to the modern forces of capital and to complex productive process, as he began to see, that go where he would, the question of credit and currency, of transportation and distribution in general conditioned his success, he sought relief by legislation. He began to lose his ...attitude of individualism, government began to look less like a necessary evil and more like an instrument to this perpetuation of his democratic ideals" (Turner 1921, 277).

Some of this may have reflected the changing demographics of the country. In the 1890 census there were nine million foreign-born people out of a population of 63 million (Brogan 2001, 392). This number would continue to grow. There was also a shift in where immigrants were coming from. Immigrants were no longer coming from Ireland, Germany, and northwestern Europe; they were coming from southern, central, and eastern Europe (Painter 2008, xxx). They originated from countries that had larger, more involved government, and where socialism was much more widely accepted. However, these groups also settled together and often turned to each other rather than the government for assistance.

While the so-called “death” of the frontier spirit has certainly been debated, citizens throughout the country began to call for the government to do more towards the end of the 19th century. The electorate of the country was becoming more liberal. Many elites, business and political, continued to adhere to a belief in limited government and laissez faire; the masses, though, were increasingly influenced by a call for a stronger government by movements like the Progressives Movement, which called for more government protection of citizens (Milkis and Nelson 2008, 209).

The era would see the challenge of existing ideology: “by the early 1900s, the Progressive reform movement was beginning to challenge laissez-faire as outdated and dangerous in a complex capitalist society” (Platt 1999, 4). The ideology of the movement would have a major impact on the role of the government in the early years of the 20th century.

B. National Unity and the Media

Americans began to form a stronger sense of national unity, aided by technological improvements in transportation (railroad, steamboat), communication (the telegraph), and the media. Congress began to reduce postage rates beginning in the late 1840s and there was a dramatic increase in letter-writing. This brought about the “emergence of a postal culture,” which would be solidified by the end of the 1870s (Henkin 2007, 7).

People began to become more interconnected: “During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, ordinary Americans began participating in a regular network of long-

distance communication, engaging in a relationship with people that they did not see” (2). They also began to focus on events outside their own area, which included disasters.

This was aided significantly by the growth in media, which brought disasters to people that were not victims. During the 1870s and 1880s there was a large growth in newspapers and journals; major newspapers already in existence vastly increased circulation (Trachtenberg 2007, 122). Growth in literacy helped lead to a demand for more newspapers, especially newspapers targeted towards the masses rather than the elites. America saw dropping rates of illiteracy in the 19th century. By 1870, 80% of people 14 or older were literate; by 1900, it would be 90% (Snyder 1993). Newspapers were also more accessible due to a drop in cost. The advent of the “penny press” in the 1830s, notably the New York Sun, was possible due to increasing reliance on advertising as a major source of revenue; this led to the majority of the public (not just the upper class), for the first time, being able to afford newspapers and led to the proliferation of newspapers in the 19th century (Cook 1980).

Technologies like the telephone, telegraphy, printing presses, and the typewriter, as well news organizations like the Associated Press, improved news gathering and circulation and helped to facilitate this growth in media (Trachtenberg 2007, 123). Not only were citizens now reading about outside experiences, they were also seeing visual representations: “steam-powered printing presses, improved methods of lithography and photoengraving, and, in the 1890’s, the halftone method of mechanically reproduced photographs in newspapers, periodicals, and books, led to an unprecedented quantity of visual data” (122). Photographs would become common by the end of the century (126). These journalistic changes would the readers to feel more connected with the story, an

emotional attachment to complete strangers,¹⁰ and the outside world in general (Anderson 1991). Newspaper stories had become “an urban form of village gossip, designed to make the lives of distant others seem near and “human” (Trachtenberg 2007, 124).

Photographs also helped contribute to a cultural and mass media focus on the spectacular. The three ring circus, mass-spectator sports, and pageantries were all popular forms of entertainment (123). The focus on the spectacular was seen in newspaper practices as well. The battle between Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal* would help to ignite the “yellow fever” journalism that would be marked by an emphasis on the sensational in order to attract more readers (Campbell 2006).

Other journalistic practices had changed as well. Newspapers by the Civil War had begun to use the “on-the-scene correspondents” at battles; journalists were able to use the telegraph to transmit the information back to the newspaper (Trachtenberg 2007, 123).

These changes would be reflected in the coverage of disasters. People were now reading about disasters and seeing visual representations of them. They were getting first hand information from correspondents on the scene. The stories on disasters emphasized the sensational, focusing on tales of suffering of innocent victim like children. The public became increasingly more fascinated with disasters (Rozario 2008) and this further led to more coverage.

¹⁰ Anderson argues that newspapers help form “imagined communities” in which we are attached to strangers by reading about them.

C. Disasters as Focusing Events

The media would allow some disasters to become “triggering mechanisms” (Cobb and Elder, 1983) or focusing events. Kingdon (1984, 10) defines focusing events as problems “so large and salient that they almost automatically attract attention.” The media would help thrust disasters onto the public’s and government’s agenda, although major disaster policy change would not occur. The late nineteenth century would see multiple high-publicity disasters.

The Avondale Mine Disaster of 1869 killed 110 miners. The event was followed by an outpouring of sympathy. \$155,000 was raised to support the families of the dead. The event was covered by newspapers nationwide and did lead to some government response: the Pennsylvania state legislature passed the Mine Safety Act the following year (Campbell 2008, 122-123).

The Boston Fire of 1872 killed 30 and caused \$75 million in damages. The inadequate response to the fire would lead to the modernizing of urban firefighting techniques. It would also lead to new construction of a commercial district, forecasting the major commercial construction done in San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake (133-134).

Locusts invaded the Great Plains in 1873 and lasted for five years. The locusts caused huge losses in crops, an estimated \$56 million lost alone in 1874. Families were left without food or money to buy food. Citizens appealed for aid; local charities and state governments allocated some funds. The federal government allowed homesteaders to take leave of claims to find work without losing rights to land. They also appropriated

\$30,000 for purchase of seed wheat for affected farmers. However, this had to be spread throughout five states and thus did little. The Great Plains and West would be plagued by droughts and locusts again in the 1890s, which led to protests and demands for greater government attention and aid (138-139).

The first major dam disaster of the 19th century occurred in 1874 with the Mill River Dam Collapse in Massachusetts. 139 were killed, 740 were left homeless, and there was an estimated \$1 million in damages. Local committees were in charge of relief. They successfully pleaded for donations and were able to raise \$100,000. The event was a major story in newspapers throughout the country. Massachusetts and nearby states, in the wake of the disaster and ensuing national attention, passed dam safety laws (140-141).

The United States was hit with another epidemic of yellow fever in 1878. 20,000 died in the outbreak. Volunteer relief organizations were created to help poor victims. This epidemic (and the \$100 million in lost trade and relief efforts) led to a federal commission investigation, the passage of the Quarantine Act of 1878, and the establishment of the National Board of Health in 1879, following the commission's recommendation (150-151).

D. Scientific Knowledge

Not only were more Americans more aware of natural disasters, but they also knew more about them. Business leaders in the late 19th century attempted to “normalize” natural disasters: “the concept of “natural disaster” developed when those in power in disaster stricken cities sought to normalize calamity in their quest to restore order, that is,

to restore property values and the economy to their upward trajectory” (Steinberg 2006, xix-xx). They attempted to eliminate the commonly held belief that disasters were “acts of God,” for the masses to believe that they were natural events instead. They did so to get employees back to work, instead of in church or leaving the area due to the belief that the people there had fallen out of favor with God. Also, if calamities were looked at as natural events rather than “acts of God” (events in which it was believed that it was inappropriate for government to intervene), it would be easier to have public support for government relief (Steinberg 2006).

This was seen after the Charleston earthquake in 1886. The 7.0 quake killed 70 and caused six million (\$136 million dollars currently) in damages. The city’s leaders had already been concerned due to the fact that the city seen its commercial importance decline in recent years. The business leaders worked hard to convince the large group of poor working Blacks in the town that the event was not divine in order to have them return to work rather than attending church or leaving town (Steinberg 2006).

This normalization would help to remove one of the barriers to government involvement. If disasters were caused by God, than it was felt that the government should not be involved with relief; however, if they are caused by nature, then it was appropriate for the government to participate. This reflected an overall trend of an increasing separation between God and nature over the course of the century (Turner 1985).

This push towards seeing disasters as natural events was also facilitated by increased scientific knowledge. Government agencies like the Weather Bureau, National Health Board (established 1879), local and state public health agencies (local agencies

originated in the 1790s, state agencies in the 1870s), and the Department of Agriculture (created in 1862) all contributed to knowledge of disasters. The USDA focused on providing new scientific knowledge, provided support for scientists like meteorologists, established a partnership with the states, created and provided public funding for an institution for agricultural experimentation and research, and established agricultural experiment stations (Barney 2006). Private organizations contributed to increased scientific knowledge as well. The American Medical Association was founded in 1847 and state and local chapters followed. The American Public Health Association was organized in 1872 (SSA 2010).

The 19th century was a period of great scientific discovery; in fact, the term scientist was coined in 1833 by William Whewell. The second half of the century would see contributions to various fields of science by the likes of Charles Darwin Louis Pasteur, Thomas Edison, Marie Curie, Alfred Nobel, and Alexander Graham Bell. Contributions would be in the study of disasters as well. The time period saw increased knowledge in the field of geography, including discoveries that would contribute to plate tectonics theory of the 20th century (Snyder 2006).

There were many discoveries about major illnesses. In the mid 19th century, doctors discovered that bacterium caused cholera. British physician John Snow in linked the spread of cholera to contaminated drinking water. German scientist Robert Koch and French scientist Louis Pasteur had a well-publicized race to find a cure for anthrax. Pasteur, one of the fathers of microbiology, developed a vaccine for anthrax as well as rabies. His work contributed to the growing germ (Debre 2000). The Great Sanitary

Awakening of mid-19th century, in which people began to see the environment as source of disease, would help to start a worldwide public health movement (Morris 2007).

E. The Mississippi, Business Class Pressure, and National Prosperity

Support for federal disaster legislation continued to be argued on economic grounds. This can be seen in a newspaper article written after flooding of the Mississippi in 1867. The author of the article endorsed the building of levees by the national government in Louisiana. The flooding of the area “redoubles the importance of our early suggestions to the capitalists of the North, who are supposed to be interested in everything that contributes to the prosperity of the country.”¹¹ The affected areas had seen the loss of millions of dollars: “examining the subject purely from a monetary point, it’s argued that the material interests of the nation call loudly for the adoption of the measures.”¹² The citizens in the region were asking for \$3 million dollars to build the levees to protect an area that would produce \$11.5 million dollars a year.

in these few statements is presented an argument more potent with capitalists than would be a hundred narrations of the damage done to life and health by the flood”; “It is claimed that the actual labor of over 600,000 people, residents of the State, depends upon the reconstruction of the levee; and it is argued with great cogency that “if Congress possesses the power to feed them from the Federal coffers, it is absurd to deny its authority to do what is absolutely necessary to make them self-sustaining. If we can build schoolhouses to give bread to the mind, we can build levees to save the body from starvation”; “Soon the floods will subside, leaving only submerged lands, ruined crops, broken houses and destitute, idle people as its record.”¹³

The Mississippi River continued to be much of the focus of disaster relief and prevention. The region was an integral part of the nation’s growing economy and was plagued with flooding. This led to action: “by 1879, the need for improved navigation and flood control on the Mississippi had prompted the federal government’s direct

¹¹ “The Mississippi Levees-Necessity of National Help.” *New York Times*. 4 April 1867: 4.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

involvement” (Moss 1999, 314). The Mississippi River Commission was created to deal with “regulation and coordination of private-sector effects” (Moss 1999, 314). The commission, an agency of the War Department, also became involved in dealing with flood control.

The expanding role of the government in this area was pushed for extensively by Midwest businessmen and planters (Moss 1999; O’Neill 2006). They continued to point to the importance of the river system for the nation’s economy; they were also in need of a new source of levee construction due to the loss of their previous free labor source, slaves. The alliances of planters, shippers, and merchants, along with support they had lobbied from Congress, proved to be very successful:

By 1900, they had built regional and national lobby organizations that worked with business leaders, civic groups, and elected officials from river areas throughout the country to lobby Congress for flood control aid to the Mississippi and Sacramento Rivers. Congress unofficially directed the Corps of Engineers to repair and improve Mississippi River levees in the 1880s...Most voters and politicians at that time felt that the U.S. Constitution restricted the federal government to aiding the interstate distribution of goods, not their production. Northern voters were especially unlikely to support aid benefitting planters in formerly rebellious southern states. Until 1917, this work (building levees) was therefore justified publically as benefiting river navigation, rather than as flood protection for riverfront lands. (O’Neill 2006, xiii)

Planters and shippers were able to play a large role in the politics after the Civil War, particularly in the South, where politics was “based...on the determination of the planting class” (Brogan 1999, 366). Their domination in the political and economic systems allowed them to be a powerful pressure group and forced Congress to take up their demands like the building of levees along the Mississippi.

Commercial interests testified before Congress to this end. In March 1882 the House Committee on Commerce held a hearing on the “Improvement of the Mississippi River and its Navigable Tributaries.” Shippers, planters, farmers, chambers of commerce,

and merchants continued their refrain of the importance of improvements on the Mississippi for the country's economy: "I believe it, therefore, to be the duty of every patriotic citizen, in or out of Congress, to do what he can to increase facilities for transportation of this commerce, and thereby to increase the wealth and happiness of the entire community" (4). They spoke of the need of the region's cotton, rice, sugar, and fruit, and the potential loss of millions of dollars if levees were not constructed and flooding occurred. They also warned that if prevention was not undertaken the federal government would have to spend even more money in supporting those who would become destitute from the flooding.

Politicians reflected the belief that it was the government's position to support the economic well-being of the nation. President Arthur, in support of the Mississippi River Commission's request for appropriations from Congress in order to deal with flooding, discussed the impact of flooding on commerce:

The immense losses and widespread suffering of the people dwelling near the river induce me to urge upon Congress the propriety of not only making an appropriation to close the gaps in the levees occasioned by the recent **floods**, as recommended by the commission, but that Congress should inaugurate measures for the permanent improvement of the navigation of the river and security of the valley. It may be that such a system of improvement would as it progressed require the appropriation of twenty or thirty millions of dollars. Even such an expenditure, extending, as it must, over several years, can not be regarded as extravagant in view of the immense interest involved. The safe and convenient navigation of the Mississippi is a matter of concern to all sections of the country, but to the Northwest, with its immense harvests, needing cheap transportation to the sea, and to the inhabitants of the river valley, whose lives and property depend upon the proper construction of the safeguards which protect them from the **floods**, it is of vital importance that a well-matured and comprehensive plan for improvement should be put into operation with as little delay as possible. The cotton product of the region subject to the devastating **floods** is a source of wealth to the nation and of great importance to keeping the balances of trade in our favor.

It may not be inopportune to mention that this Government has imposed and collected some \$70,000,000 by a tax on cotton, in the production of which the population of the Lower Mississippi is largely engaged, and it does not seem inequitable to return a portion of this tax to those who contributed it, particularly as such an action will also result in an important gain to the

country at large, and especially so to the great and rich States of the Northwest and the Mississippi Valley.¹⁴

He also noted that the appropriations of such money was lawful and “the constitutionality of a law making appropriations in aid of these objects (building levees) can not be questioned.” Arthur would continue to push for Congress to continue to appropriate millions for the commission’s work, continually pointing to the commercial importance of the project. In a January 1884 message to Congress, requesting an additional one million dollars to the seven million already approved, Arthur reminded the representatives that “the harvests of grain and cotton produced in the region bordering upon the Mississippi are so vast as to be of national importance.”¹⁵ In April of that year he called for an additional and “urgent” one hundred thousand dollars to repair the levee system, so that “an enormous destruction of property may be thereby averted.”¹⁶

Arthur, in addition to supporting the Mississippi River Commission, also advocated conservation as a means of preventing disasters, foreshadowing Theodore Roosevelt by a quarter century. He called for the preservation of forests in the West to prevent flooding, and the subsequent negative effect on farming:

During the past year severe suffering and great loss of property have been occasioned by profuse **floods** followed by periods of unusually low water in many of the great rivers of the country. These irregularities were in great measure caused by the removal from about the sources of the streams in question of the timber by which the water supply had been nourished and protected. The Preservation of such portions of the forests on the national domain as essentially contribute to the equable flow of important water courses is of the highest consequence.

Important tributaries of the Missouri, the Columbia, and the Saskatchewan rise in the mountain region of Montana, near the northern boundary of the United States, between the Blackfeet and

¹⁴ Arthur, Chester A. “Special Message.” 17 April 1882.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=68719&st=flood&st1=>.

¹⁵ Arthur, Chester A. “Special Message.” 8 January 1884.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=68882&st=flood&st1=>.

¹⁶ Arthur, Chester A. April 2, 1884. “Special Message.” 2 April 1884.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=68928&st=flood&st1=>.

Flathead Indian reservations. This region is unsuitable for settlement, but upon the rivers which flow from it depends the future agricultural development of a vast tract of country. The attention of Congress is called to the necessity of withdrawing from public sale this part of the public domain and establishing there a forest preserve.¹⁷

The emphasis on commerce and the economy in general reflected the changes that America was undergoing and the national focus on its growing financial role. The country was continually growing as an economic powerhouse in the world, and the federal government actively supported this growth through programs like flood control of the Mississippi and relief for merchants in major industrial centers affected by disaster.

Disaster bills fell in line with other legislation of the time period. Other policies also provided risk protection to promote investment and trade: property rights, common internal currency, deposit insurance (provided by state legislatures), and bankruptcy law, among others (Moss 1996, 40-41). Moss (1999) calls the time period prior to 1900 the “risk management policy phase” as a result. Disaster policy would fall into this category as relief was mostly aimed at helping businesses and merchants recover quickly, so that they could become involved again in commerce, and also projects, like levees, that would protect crops and thus encourage planters and shippers to invest and produce. Policies of the time were designed to promote economic growth and security, and disaster legislation was no exception.

Advocates also made several other arguments in favor of disaster legislation. Proponents testifying before the afore-mentioned House Committee on Commerce’s hearing on the “Improvement of the Mississippi River and its Navigable Tributaries” argued that the river was the different than other property. The Supreme Court and other

¹⁷ Arthur, Chester A. “Annual Message.” 4 December 1883.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29524&st=flood&st1>.

statutes, they argued, gave the federal government jurisdiction over the Mississippi River. This jurisdiction, stated former Louisiana Senator James Eustis, placed an obligation upon the federal government to make improvements like levees:

Now, I ask, Mr. President, why is it, if every individual in this land, ever corporation, is obliged to discharge the obligations and the responsibilities and the duties arising from the mere tutorship or total control of property-I ask upon what grounds can the United States absolve itself from the obligation and from the responsibility, particularly when we consider the immense loss and devastation and ruin which result from omitting to discharge the obligation? And I do not understand that there is any as degree in national duties and national obligations. If I can convince the Senate that is the duty of the United States Government, that it is an obligation of the United States Government, it then follows that it is as much a question of national faith to discharge that duty, to discharge that obligation, as for the Government of the United States to pay the interest on its public debt (81).

Furthermore, proponents argued, other did not have the resources to adequately carry out the improvements: “The government is able to do this great work. It cannot be done by individuals. It cannot be done by the states” (4). Only the federal government, in their opinions, had the capacity to respond.

The federal government, beginning in the 1880s, finally possessed the wealth to respond to more disasters due to budget surpluses. Thus, a budget deficit could no longer be used as argument against disaster relief (Dauber 2005).

Advocates of disaster legislation would further argue that precedent had been set by previous relief acts. The 1887 Texas drought relief bill, mentioned above, was sponsored by Texas Senator Richard Coke. Coke argued for aid for the state despite also acknowledging that the state did not need the aid due to its wealth; he argued for the relief

because money is expended here every year for the relief of people in different parts of the United States. Money was expended for the relief of the people of the great State of Ohio when they suffered from floods. There is not a session of Congress that money for the relief of people somewhere in the United States is not expended. We ask no departure from any precedents established by the Government ... we are not asking for anything except for that which has always been freely granted to others having no greater rights or equities than ourselves. (Dauber 2005, 1)

F. The Army and the Freedman's Bureau

The federal government began to respond more to disasters, mostly through the Army. The Army after the Civil War was still relatively large and was the only federal agency with the resources necessary to respond to natural disasters; it possessed stockpiles of rations, clothing, and tents. It also had an adequate transportation system to get the supplies to disaster victims. Finally, it was the only federal agency with a presence throughout the country (Foster 2005).

The Army began to participate in disaster relief, mostly floods. The Army provided relief, mostly in the form of the supplies mentioned above, for victims of at least seventeen disasters from 1868-1898: the Great Chicago Fire of 1871; yellow fever outbreaks in Memphis, TN and Shreveport, La, in 1873; flooding of the Mississippi River in 1874; a locust plague in the Southwest in 1874-75; a yellow fever outbreak in the South in 1878; storms in Texas and Mississippi in 1880; flooding in the Missouri River Valley in 1881; flooding in the Mississippi River Valley in 1882; flooding in the Mississippi and Ohio River Valleys in 1884; the Johnstown flood in 1889; a fire in Seattle in 1889; flooding of the Mississippi River in 1890; a drought in Oklahoma in 1890; forest fires in Minnesota in 1894; tornadoes in St. Louis, MO in 1896; and flooding of the Mississippi and Rio Grand Rivers in 1897 (Foster 2005, 16). The Army may have provided aid in other disasters as well; this list only includes disasters in which Congress authorized the Army to respond.

The Army carried out primarily administrative and transportation tasks. Once money was appropriated by Congress (in some cases Army officers would go to the

disaster area in advance and telegraph the Secretary War of War what was needed; in other cases, the War Department was given a sum from Congress and told not to exceed it), the military would purchase supplies, transport the supplies to the disaster areas, and then turn over distribution to local officials. This latter practice “preserved the primacy both of local control and of voluntarism” (17). The Army Medical Corps, at the forefront in medical technology, also provided some medical aid. There were, however, problems with the system as there allegations of corruption in the South: local officials took supplies intended for black victims and selling them, foreshadowing similar problems during the relief effort of the Great Mississippi Flood in 1927.

In addition to the Army, the Freedman’s Bureau, created in 1865 to help former slaves, offered some disaster aid to both blacks and whites. Freedman’s Bureau’s medical officers helped out and provided aid during outbreaks of smallpox and cholera, and sometimes provided beds and tents; aid was also provided for some victims of floods and famines (14). The Freedman’s Bureau became involved in disaster response in. Crop failures that spring led to famines in the South. This was followed by flooding of the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers; levees damaged during the Civil War had not been repaired. Local Bureau agents asked for permission from the War Dept. to aid the victims, both black and white. The head of Bureau received authorization from Congress to use funds, from their already appropriated budget, for emergency relief of victims. \$50,000 was allocated for aid. Some of this money was used to purchase corn and wheat to feed the victims, which was distributed from April through August (this aid dwarfed was by private charities that raised over \$5 million in supplies and other forms of aid).

Similar to the Army's involvement in disaster response, supplies provided by the Freedman's Bureau was quickly turned over to civilians to distribute (15).

The involvement of the Army and Freedman's Bureau in disaster relief was a significant step for federal involvement in disasters and helped to alter people's attitudes towards the role of the central government: "the resulting display of the potential for federal assistance helped inspire local authorities and the American public to turn increasingly to the national government for supplementary relief" (15). In fact, the mere purpose of the Freedman's Bureau, to give aid African Americans, would lead many members of Congress to ask why couldn't the government "not also help its citizens everywhere when afflicted by a natural disaster" (13).

G. Expansion of the Administrative and Welfare State

The federal government would expand in size and scope in the late 19th century, allowing for an expanded role with disasters. After the Civil War, the federal government began to wrestle power away from the states and deal with areas that were traditionally considered state issues (Peterson 1995). The administrative government would increase in order to deal with labor conflicts, business factional conflicts, railroads, and large corporations (Foner 1980, Skowronek 1982).

The welfare state also grew during this time period. The Civil War caused much suffering throughout the country and led to an expansion in public aid (Trattner 1989, 73). The federal government would assume some of this responsibility. The Freedman's Bureau "had shown that the federal government could provide for the welfare of people on a broad scale when poverty and hardship could (or would) not be treated locally" (79).

The welfare state would thus start to grow, although modestly at first. The federal government allocated a substantial amount of its annual budget to pensions for Civil War veterans and their widows or families; some years spending on pensions would exceed 50% of the budget (Skocpol 1995). Government aid was also provided to dependent mothers.

The federal government became further involved in natural disasters. The Army Corps of Engineers expanded projects to prevent disaster damage and prevent previous damage; the government began to focus on disaster prediction and implement warning systems. The Weather Bureau was created in 1870. It was originally part of the Army Signals Corps but was transferred to newly created Department of Agriculture in 1891. The agency would conduct research and data collection on disasters. The first daily weather maps were published in 1871 and a hurricane warning service was established in 1896 (NOAA 2002).

III. Forces Maintaining the Status Quo

The factors mentioned above did not lead to a complete break with the old system. Most disaster victims were still forced to rely on private local sources for disaster aid. Two large private national organizations also sprang up to provide more direct relief. The Red Cross was recognized in 1881; it gained national attention and respect for its responses to disasters like the Thumb Fire in 1881, the Ohio River Flood in 1884, and the Johnstown Flood in 1889 (Chane 1969, 17). The Salvation Army became involved in disaster relief in the 1890s (Stratton 1989). These two agencies would battle for government recognition and disaster relief dominance. The Red Cross, in particular,

would play a key role in the gradual expansion of the federal government's involvement with disasters in the 20th century.

The dominant ideology of the time period continued to call for a limited government, and thus a limited federal role in disaster response. Americans still had a pervasive belief that disaster response was best left up to local government or private organizations. This can be seen the reaction to the Johnstown Flood in 1889. The flood, which killed over 2000 people, was a media spectacle, described by David McCullough as the “biggest news story since the murder of Abraham Lincoln” (1968, 203). Citizen committees were formed to respond and nearly \$4 million dollars was raised nationally. The federal government did not respond to the disaster, yet, this was not met with criticism. In fact, the opposite was seen. Editorials written on the disaster praised the response of ordinary citizens and were against government intervention. One read:

in the interval very serious and complicated problems have been presented in the valley such as it is usual to say can be dealt with only by a centralized power, highly organized, provided with large resources and commanding still larger, That unquestionably would be the view that would suggest itself to any European observer. But, as a matter of fact, it has been found that these problems have been taken up and either solved or put in a fair way to be solved by processes almost voluntary in their sources, and certainly controlled by a very loose and in part improvised organization.¹⁸

President Harrison echoed this popular sentiment. He called for private donations and committees to be formed to address the suffering of the flood victims. He did not advocate that either the federal or state governments become involved in the disaster relief. On June 4, 1889 Harrison delivered a message on the disaster:

“In such meetings as we have to-day here in the national capital and other like gatherings that are taking place in all the cities of this land, we have the only relief to the distress and darkness of the picture. When such calamitous visitations fall upon any section of our country we can only put about the dark picture the golden border of love and charity. It is in such fires as this that the

¹⁸ “Restoring Johnstown.” *New York Times*. 10 June 1889: 4.

brotherhood of men is welded. And where more appropriately than here at the national capital can we give expression to that sympathy and brotherhood which is now so strongly appealed to by the distress of large bodies of our fellow-citizens?... I suggest, therefore-and the occasion is such that bells might be rung in your streets to call the attention of the thoughtless to this great exigency-that a committee should be appointed to speedily collect contributions of food in order that a train loaded with provisions might be dispatched to-night or in the early morning to these sufferers.

I suggest, secondly, that as many of these people have had the entire furniture of their houses swept away, and have now only a temporary shelter, that a committee be appointed to collect from your citizens such articles of clothing, especially bedclothing, as can be spared; and, now that the summer season is on, there can hardly be many households in Washington that can not spare a blanket or a coverlid for the relief of the suffering ones.

I suggest, thirdly, that, of your substantial business people, bankers, and others, there be appointed a committee, who shall collect money; for, after the first exigency has passed, there will be found in those communities very many who have lost their all, who will need aid in the reconstruction of their demolished homes and in furnishing them in order that they may be again inhabited.

Need I say, in conclusion, that as a temporary citizen of Washington it would give me great satisfaction if the national capital should so generously respond to this call of our distressed fellow-citizens as to be conspicuous among the cities of the land for its ample and generous answer.¹⁹

Other major disasters, like the Chicago Fire of 1871 and the Boston Fire of 1872, were met with similar results. Citizens and private groups continued to provide the majority of aid. President Grant, in his 1872 annual celebrated the fact that although the fire “swept from the earth with a breath, as it were, millions of accumulated wealth in the city of Boston,” that it was

gratifying to note how, like their fellow-citizens of the city of Chicago under similar circumstances a year earlier, the citizens of Boston are rallying under their misfortunes, and the prospect that their energy and perseverance will overcome all obstacles and show the same prosperity soon that they would had no disaster befallen them”²⁰

The Great Chicago Fire of 1871, one of the most famous disasters in American history, destroyed much of the city, resulting in over \$200 million in damages. 300 people died and 90,000 were left homeless (Campbell 2006, 127). The response to the

¹⁹ Harrison, Benjamin. “Special Message.” 4 June 1889.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=76203&st=calamity&st1=>

²⁰ Grant, Ulysses S. “Fourth Annual Message.” 2 December 1872.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29513&st=calamity&st1=>

Chicago Fire would prove to be typical for late 19th century disasters. The government continued its practice of suspending duties and taxes owed by merchants. The government would also be involved, as in other disasters, through the military. Martial law was declared by the mayor and federal troops were used to maintain order. They also provided supplies.

However, the majority of aid was provided through donations from private citizens and came in from throughout the country. A private citizen organization, made up of mostly business elite, was in charge of coordinating the relief effort for two years after the fire. The Chicago Relief and Aid Society provided food, clothing, “help in restarting stores and medical offices, and... sewing machines so that victims could get back to work quickly and help themselves” (Olasky 2006, 33). The Society’s main focus was self-sufficiency for victims as they did not to end up “permanently supporting the ‘chronic poor’” (Powers 2006, 14). To this end, they created an Employment Bureau to connect employers with labor and set a rule that all able-bodied men could not get aid unless they had tried to get a job through the Employment Bureau. Middle and lower-class victims, though, received little aid from the society or other groups, including insurance companies (15).

Newspapers across the country once again called for private donations and praised the charity of citizens and private organizations. Newspaper articles also focused on the economic recovery of the city. The New York Times in their first front page story on the disaster, two days after the fire had ended, emphasized the commercial interests:

The news received yesterday from Chicago was of such a character as to restore confidence among all classes of business men, and assurances were expressed and sincerely felt that as time wore on the merchants of that city would be enabled to recuperate, and that the demands of trade

would be even greater than before. Among the creditors in this cit of Chicago houses no fears were expressed of their solvency and ultimate ability to meet every liability against them. The news from the afflicted city was, on the whole, decidedly cheering, and our merchants will be doubtless as ready to extend credit as they have been to donate from their substance to the relief of the sufferers from the fire.²¹

The article also noted that the stock market in New York had not taken a big hit from the disaster.

This time period was the “golden age of laissez faire and deference to wealth” (Platt 1999, 3). Americans still believed in a limited federal government and limited government interference. Many politicians continued to fight against disaster legislation out of fear that the government would become more involved in providing relief. President Cleveland, reflecting this attitude, explained his 1887 veto of emergency funds for Texas drought victims in 1887:

I can find no warrant for such an appropriation in the Constitution and I do not believe that the power and duty of the General Government ought to be extended to the relief of individual suffering which is in no manner properly related to the public service or benefit. . . . Federal aid encourages the expectation of paternal care on the Government and weakens the sturdiness of our national character.²²

This veto was supported by both the press and public leaders. Newspapers called for readers to send money to prove that the president was right in his belief that the American people would do the right thing. Clara Burton, head of the Red Cross, after seeing the drought-stricken area, said: “the counties which have suffered the drought need help, without doubt, but not help from Congress” (Olasky 2006, 34).

Citizens and politicians alike were against the majority of government programs that provided aid. President Cleveland, delivering his 2nd inaugural address in 1893,

²¹ “Aid From Other Cities.” *New York Times*. 12 October 1871: 1.

²² Cleveland, Grover. “Veto Message.” 16 February 1887.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=71489>

wrote: “The lessons of paternalism ought to be unlearned and the better lessons taught that while the people should patriotically and cheerfully support the Government, its functions do not include the support of the people.”²³ Direct relief, as a result of this dominant belief, was very rare. Instead, programs like levees, aimed at preventing disasters in order to prevent damage to the national economy, were supported.

The federal welfare state, while growing, remained relatively small. Expansive programs like the Freedman’s Bureau would not be seen again until the 20th century (Trattner 1989, 81). Most welfare programs, instead, were administered by the state. Even state-run programs were considered “second fiddle” to private charity (82). The public remained against government welfare. A dominant belief in social Darwinism reflected the maintained belief that the poor were failures and that self-help was the cure. This is one the main reasons why advocates for disaster relief argued that they should be aided because their situation was caused by a natural disaster and not through a fault of their own (Landis-Dauber 2005).

The public was also against government welfare programs because they distrusted the government. The post-war era was an era of fraud and corruption. Scandals like the Tea Pot Dome Scandal rocked the country and made the public wary of government-run welfare (Trattner 1989, 85).

The government also found itself focusing on other issues in the last several decades of the 19th century. Reconstruction, civil service reform, and industrial growth would be the dominant national public and political issues (White 1958; Milkis and

²³ Cleveland. Grover. “2nd Inaugural Address.” 4 March 1893.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25826#axzz1nJuuFPbn>.

Nelson, 2008). Economic panics continued to be a major problem in the country. Major financial panics and depressions hit in 1819, 1837, 1857, 1873, and 1893. Class issues also occupied government attention. Major labor strikes would occur in 1877 (the Great Railroad Strike), 1886 (the Haymarket Square Incident), 1892 (the Penn Strike), and 1894 (the Pullman Strike). Disaster relief thus often found itself forced off of the crowded political agenda.

The expansion of the administrative state would prove to be difficult. The majority of federal agencies, minus the Army, still were not equipped to deal with disasters (Chane 1959, 15). The central government did become more powerful in the aftermath of the Civil War with Reconstruction as the focus of national politics and the Republican Party as the dominant political force at the federal level (Bensel 2000, 2). Power was vested in the central government to implement Reconstruction and also to help the economy (2).

However, in-fighting within the Republican Party would lead to splintering and the return of the Democratic Party would help to end the “Civil War Party State” that had been created to carry out the war and the post-war recovery efforts (3). Reconstruction would end in 1877, and the growth of the central state would be effectively slowed until the 20th century (3).

Party patronage and corruption would also halt the administrative state’s expansion (Skowronek 1982, Bensel 2000). Congress, not the executive dominated the administrative state (in part due to a series of weak presidents from Johnson-Cleveland and also the wresting away of control of Reconstruction by the Radical Republicans in

Congress), and did not provide necessary staff and resources to effectively carry out its expanded duties. Politicians were often most interested in helping out economic elites (Foner 1980, 10). State-building as a whole would be brought to a grinding halt during the Gilded Age (the last decades of the 19th century) as many believed that there was not a need for a large administrative state, just one big enough to help the economy grow (15).

IV. Conclusion

The major focus of federal disaster policy continued to remain on disaster prevention, not relief; the relief that was given continued to be selective and infrequent. A more comprehensive federal disaster program would have to wait until the mid 20th century. In the first half of the century, particularly during the New Deal, ideology would shift and support the expansion of a larger government, one that would intervene in more areas, including disaster relief.

Relief that was passed remained disaster-specific. Local politics and politicians continued to play a pivotal role in national. Congress often focused on local issues instead of national ones. Log-rolling and pork-barrel legislation was dominant and the limited disaster legislation that was passed was no exception (May 1989, 18). In order to secure support for disaster relief for their districts, legislators often promised support to other members of Congress if a disaster were to affect their district or included provisions in the current disaster relief bill that would apply aid retroactively to a previous disaster (21). Disaster legislation, thus, was a contentious political battle that often required compromise and promises.

Disaster politics in the late 19th century falls into what Skowronek (1982) calls “state building as patchwork”:

the early American state was stretched to the limits of its governing capacities. New institutions emerged to meet the most immediate demands on government, but governmental elites could not sustain support for efforts that threatened to undermine long-established political and institutional relationships. They concentrated on perfecting the machinery of the early American state and held at bay an alternative governing culture that attacked their regime head-on in the interest of building national administrative authority (16).

New major problems faced the federal government in this time period, including growing class division, problems in emerging urban centers, and the new international role of the United States (8-9). Government was pushed to the limit by these problems, and disasters were no exception.

Increased vulnerability, due to population growth, territorial expansion into disaster-prone areas, and urbanization, made natural disasters a larger problem than they were in the preceding decades. Commercial interests, increased scientific knowledge, and a growing media further pushed disasters onto the public’s and government’s agenda. The government responded by expanding the number of disasters it sent aid to and the type of aid that was sent. Preventative measures like levee-building expanded. The government also became involved in direct response to disasters through the Army and Freedman’s Bureau.

A radical change in disaster policy would have to wait until the 20th century. Existing institutions were used to respond to disasters in the late 19th century; new institutions would be created in the 20th century to deal with disasters. Relief was granted on a case by case basis, and many disaster victims received no aid; by the second half of the 20th century legislation would create a comprehensive disaster policy. Mitigation efforts would also be significantly expanded. However, Forces maintaining the status

quo-a limited involvement of the federal government in disasters-would prevent all this from happening until the new century.

Chapter 4. Pseudo-Government Response to Civil Defense (or From the Red Cross to Fighting the Reds): Federal Disaster Policy From 1900 to 1950

I. Introduction

The first half of the 20th century would see an expansion of the federal disaster policy. Preventive measures like levee-building increased and became a major political issue in the first three decades. Response also expanded. The Army, then the Red Cross, and later, various federal agencies became involved. Disaster relief and recovery efforts were also increased, culminating in the Disaster Relief Act of 1950 which would eventually create a comprehensive disaster policy for the first time.

This expansion was the result of several factors. More pressure was put on the government to act. Vulnerability was again a key factor. Increased population and population shifts to more disaster-prone areas led to an increase in deaths; urbanization led to more damages. The growth in media would help to focus public attention, turning events like the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 into spectacles, and increased scientific knowledge helped more about disasters to be acquired and utilized. It became nearly impossible for the government not to become more involved.

A change in ideology changed what was considered the proper role of the government. A belief in strict limited government would be abandoned with the influence of the Progressive Movement, the hardship of the Great Depression, and the ensuing New Deal. Citizens began to expect the government to take care of them, including disaster relief. Disaster relief, primarily aimed at economic recovery, would also begin to reflect more humanitarian interests.

The government would prove able to do more with expanded resources. The federal government would expand significantly. The administrative state grew as did the welfare state. The executive branch, and the presidency itself, became more powerful and added new responsibilities. Eventually, the president would become the focal point for disaster policy. Lastly, civil defense grew and would incorporate disaster response for a short time period.

Factors would still stand as obstacles against government involvement. Beliefs about the limited role of the government in disasters, and in many areas, would take time to die out. Republican presidents, in particular, would continue this role. Non-governmental groups, especially the Red Cross, would continue to play a major role in disaster response and relief through the first several decades of the century. However, the Red Cross itself would act as a quasi-governmental organization following Congressional designation and the increased scope of disasters would make it impossible for private organizations, or even local and state governments, to shoulder the burden without more involvement by the federal government. Ironically, commercial interests would also stand in the way. They stood against further government involvement as areas seen as disaster-prone would have difficulty in being developed; disasters, however, would become too much though and even they would be interested in government

II. Galveston Hurricane of 1900

The 1900s began with one of the worst disasters in American history; the reaction of the federal government would be prototypical to the late 19th century model. In September 1900 a category 4 hurricane severely damaged Galveston, the wealthiest city

in Texas. Over 6,000 were killed, making it the deadliest natural disaster in U.S. history. Thousands were left homeless and there was over \$20 million dollars in damages (the equivalent of over \$500 million dollars today). The local government was unable to respond and a citizen group comprised of local bankers and corporate officials assumed control (Stratton 1989, 27). The federal government did not respond other than using the Army to help with relief effort. However, once again, editorials at the time argued that help should come first from the people and from the state, not from the national government.

Newspaper articles were quick to celebrate the assistance of ordinary citizens for the storm's victims and also to argue against government involvement. One article written six days after the disaster noted that the governor had appealed to the nation for food and tents, but the "great bulk of the assistance must from the people"²⁴

Other articles were quick to celebrate the assistance that poured in from private sources all over the country, noting the

prompt and generous assistance. It was inevitable that this should be so, but it is no less a matter of pride to every American, illustrating as it does anew the solidarity of the Nation in times of peril or distress, and covering with confusion the misguided few who would, if they could, create or perpetuate lines of division between North and South, East and West.²⁵

The generosity and wealth of the nation's citizens, and business, would serve to help the victims, not the government. *The New York Times* detailed how the city's residents were "proving magnificently that it understands the obligation resting upon the steward of great wealth."²⁶ The richest, who normally contributed to charity every year,

²⁴ "The Galveston Disaster," *New York Times*. 12 September 1900: 6.

²⁵ "Topics of the Times." *New York Times*. 13 September 1900: 6.

²⁶ "New York's Helping Hand," *New York Times*. 15 September 1900: 6.

were sending donations, the Chambers of Commerce and Merchants Association were “great powers for good in such times,” and even “soulless corporations” demonstrated that they had a heart by helping out.²⁷

There was debate on whether the victims were to blame for their situation: “it is hinted that carelessness, if not recklessness, was to blame for the creation of a city in such a place, and that the present sufferings of the inhabitants, while not exactly deserved, were at least to be expected.”²⁸ The argument was made that if the city was rebuilt, it would not receive the same amount of aid if another disaster struck:

Indeed the chances of other storms are not receiving quite so much attention from the people of Galveston as it would be the part of wisdom to give them. They are to be commended for rebuilding their city, but what was once pardonable carelessness now deserves a harsher name. If Galveston again neglects to guard her citizens and her property from the threatening waves, a second disaster will seem more like punishment than calamity, and outside sympathy may be slow in duplicating its contributions.²⁹

Others were quick to advocate rebuilding the city and defend it against claims of recklessness. The claim was made that the danger was not ignored; rather “it was estimated in relation to the commercial advantages to be secured by taking the risk.”³⁰ The commercial advantages of the city were balanced against the probability of a disaster, and it was a risk worth taking.

Col. Lowe of the *Galveston News* predicted that the city would be rebuilt within two years, and be even stronger, thanks to business:

It voices the genuine American spirit of indomitable energy and pluck. It is determination of this sort that has made the material prosperity of the United States the talk of the entire world...The

²⁷ “New York’s Helping Hand,” *New York Times*. 15 September 1900: 6.

²⁸ “Topics of the Times,” *New York Times*. 9 January 1901: 8.

²⁹ “Topics of the Times,” *New York Times*. 9 January 1901: 8.

³⁰ “Topics of the Times,” *New York Times*. 12 September 1900: 6.

city will rise better and stronger. And it will owe its ability to do so largely to the right hand of business fellowship held out to it by the railroads and the merchants.³¹

There was some criticism of how the relief effort was being carried out. One article described the help as “plenty” but not “wise” and argued that it was needed to better use the materials to help the victims, pointing out that it would be quicker to bring in water from Texas or Louisiana rather than New York.³²

Another pointed out that there had been difficulty with insurance claims as the disaster had wiped out all the records, leading to lawsuits against the insurance companies; the suggestion was made for using a board of arbitration rather than lawsuits.³³ There were also allegations of wrong-doing with distribution of funds and supplies. A committee appointed by the Texas legislature found that some with little needs had received aid over those with greater needs, supplies intended to be freely given to victims had instead been sold to them, and that some of the richer residents had built temporary housing for victims for which they were charging rent.³⁴

One of the articles suggested creating a loan association that would give every former homeowner a low interest loan to get around the difficulties that had been encountered distributing funds.³⁵ All this criticism seemed to suggest that a better effort was needed to coordinate the relief efforts and help the victims of disasters.

Some even called for direct relief by the federal government. Major Lloyd Randolph DeWitt Fayling, a journalist who had been deputized in the wake of the disaster to help out with the relief effort, argued “the situation demands federal aid...It

³¹ “The Recovery of Galveston.” *New York Times*. 18 September 1900: 6.

³² “Topics of the Times.” *New York Times*. 13 September 1900: 6.

³³ “Arbitration in Insurance Disputes.” *New York Times*. 21 September 1900: 6.

³⁴ “Topics of the Times.” *New York Times*. 27 March 1901: 8.

³⁵ “Of the Times.” *New York Times*. 4 October 1900: 6.

demanded it from the very first.... The disaster is so great and so terrible no municipal authority in the country could be expected to handle it unaided” (Cox 2008, 1).

Galveston would be rebuilt after the disaster, and the federal government would eventually become involved in protecting the city. The city and its residents funded a project to raise the city and build a protective seawall along the ocean front (NOAA 2000). The Army Corps of Engineers became involved in the seawall project, extending it in 1905 to protect Fort Crockett and again in the 1920s to protect Fort San Jacinto (Smith 2000).

III. Factors Leading to Expansion in Policy

A. Increased Vulnerability: Population Growth and Shifts, and Urbanization

The Galveston Hurricane was the beginning of half a century of death and destruction caused by natural disasters. Disasters were affected by the continued increase in population and urbanization. The population was 76,212,168 in 1900; by 1950, it was 151,326,798 (Geography Division (c) 1993). There were major population shifts as well, towards the South and the West. There were big population growths in these areas; Texas, California, and Florida had the biggest growths (Geography Division (a) 1993). These three states are all prone to natural disasters (See Maps 2 and 3 in the Appendix). The country was becoming even more urban as well. In 1900, 39.6% of the population lived in cities; it was 51.2% in 1920 and 59.6% in 1950 (Geography Division (c) 1993).

The result of these factors was more deadly and costly disasters in the first half of 20th century. The increase in population, and subsequent increase in those at risk, led to 50% increase in the number of disaster deaths every decade from 1890 through 1950

(Kreimer and Mnuasinghe, 1990). The “movement toward urbanization and agglomeration of building has provided a bigger target for violent natural occurrences, and so the likelihood of property destruction for any given occurrence has increased” (Dacy and Kunreithe, 1969, 4). From the early 20th century through the mid-century there was a huge increase in property losses from disasters.

Major disasters from the time period demonstrate this. The San Francisco Earthquake and Fire in 1906 killed over 3000 people and caused \$400 million in damages (nearly \$10 billion today); the 1926 Great Miami Hurricane killed 373 and caused \$100 million in damages (\$1.2 billion today); the 1928 Lake Okeechobee Hurricane killed 1836 and caused \$25 million in damages (\$300 million today); the 1935 Labor Day Hurricane killed 408 killed can caused \$6 million in damages (\$90 million today); the 1937 Ohio River Flood killed 385 killed and caused \$500 million in damages (\$7.2 billion today); and the 1938 New England Hurricane killed 600 and caused \$308 million in damages (\$4.5 billion today) (Campbell 2008).

There were several effects. First, the increased death and damages, along with expanded media, helped disasters become focusing events. Disasters were so prominent that they became difficult for the public or politicians to ignore.

Second, disasters proved too big for private organizations or local governments to respond (Schneider 1995, 17). The Great Mississippi Flood is one example. As described in previous sections local and state government officials pled with the president for federal government as responding was beyond their capacity. Even the Red Cross told

Hoover and Coolidge that responding to the disaster was beyond their capacity (Barry 1997, 272). This led to pressure for the federal government to play an increased role.

B. Knowledge and Attention

Not only were disasters more frequent, but more was also known about them. Much more research, for example, was done on studying earthquake risks in the 20th century than the 19th. Mapping of earthquake faults was undertaken (Steinberg 2000, 40). Knowledge of other disasters increased as well; for example, in 1948 the Pacific Tsunami Warning System was established in Honolulu and the first Tornado Alerts were released in 1950 (NOAA 2002).

More media attention on disasters occurred as well. The media played an important role in leading to attention on the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and other disasters of the time. The early 20th century saw the further spread of the media, as new mediums like magazines and radio were used for the first time (Emery and Emery 1996). The early 20th century would see the further expansion of the media and media coverage of natural disasters. The muckraking and yellow journalism that marked the end of the 19th century would continue in the early decades of the 20th. Newspapers began to form chains and syndicates starting in the 1920s. Newspaper production grew quickly, facilitated by increased advertising. Other forms of mass media appeared as well. The first commercial radio station appeared in 1920; by 1922, there were 500 stations and two million people had radios in their homes. Radio stations proliferated in the 20s and 30s due to technological changes and the introduction of radio networks. By the end of WWII, 95% of all homes had a radio (Boyd 2008).

Disasters also became a popular form of entertainment. Disasters were “big business” in the early 20th century. The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, for example, became an entertainment spectacle. 82 popular accounts of the event were published in 1906 alone along with photos, postcards, newspaper accounts, songs (Steinberg 2000, 38). MGM’s film *San Francisco* prominently featured the earthquake (40).

Other films from the time period, especially historical epics, also featured natural disasters, although they did not focus on the event (Campbell 2008, 427). Dramas in the 1930s often focused on disasters as the climax of the film. Technological changes like synchronized sounds and improved special effects allowed films like *Deluge* (1933) and *The Hurricane* (1937) to seem more realistic (427). These movies also focused national attention on disasters.

C. Progressive Reforms and Ideological Challenges

The Progressive Movement and its belief in a more active government were becoming more accepted in the early 20th century: “by the early 1900s, the progressive reform movement was beginning to challenge laissez faire as outdated and dangerous in a complex capitalist society” (Platt 1999, 4). Advocates of the movement had started at the local and state level; however it became clear that they lacked the resources and they began to focus on the federal government (Peterson 1995, 78). The movement was aided by big national and international focusing events: the Triangle Shirtwaist (1911) and the sinking of the Titanic (1912) “focused reform attention specifically on the need for public intervention to protect lives from corporate misfeasance” (Platt 1999, 4).

People began to expect more from their lives. Changes in medical knowledge and technology brought about a lowering of the death rate and a rise in life expectancy in the beginning of the century (Painter 2008, xiv). The result was a rise in the standard of living and the beginning in a change in ideology:

by the second decade of the century most Americans had accepted as commonplace many new policies that promised to make the economic order more equitable...The federal government could now proclaim an intrusion of acting in the interests of ordinary people that a generation earlier would have been unthinkable in all but labor circles (xxxv).

People began turning to the government in order to help improve their lives. The Progressives wanted the president to be the leader of reform (Milkis 1993). Those who had left small towns to move to cities were used to a communal reliance on friends, neighbors, and the church); they now, feeling alienated and isolated, turned to the welfare state (Wilensky 1975, 24).

D. Growth in the State

The federal government responded. The Square Deal under President Theodore Roosevelt incorporated many of the Progressive Movement's reforms and was "dedicated to the progressive concept of active, executive-centered government (Milkis and Nelson 2008, 209). Roosevelt was determined to have an active government that served the public interest: government regulated the railroads, broke up monopolies, created the FDA, pursued conservation, and carried out civil service reform (Milkis and Nelson 2008, 212). Other progressive era reforms would include workplace reform (abolition of child labor, establishing a maximum number of hours that could be worked), women's suffrage, a system of gradual income taxes, bank reform, more democratic political

measures (referendum, recall, initiative, direct election of senators), and workmen's compensation (Painter 2008, xxxv).

The government began to focus its attention of the middle and lower class, no longer just the business class and wealthy. The population of the country was growing rapidly. The nation's population more than doubled between 1880 and 1920. Most people were poor: they worked long hours for little wages and lived in bad housing conditions (Painter 2008, xxxv). The reforms and initiatives carried out by the government during the progressive era were designed to help these citizens.

The role of the federal government expanded as a result. The administrative state continued to grow in the early 20th century (Skowronek 1982). The government also started to provide more social insurance in the first half of the century: deposit insurance, crop insurance, and old age insurance (Moss 1999). The federal government's expansion into this field followed the states and the private sectors. Rural states like Minnesota had already begun to offer social programs like unemployment insurance (Amenta et. al, 1987).

The public and the Courts supported this transition. The Supreme Court began to move away from laissez faire strict policy "toward grudging acceptance of the need for governmental intervention in the private economy to protect the public health, safety, and welfare" (Platt 1999, 4-5). The Courts upheld money for social welfare and did not challenge grant-in-aid programs (Peterson 1995, 80).

Disaster relief would grow during the Progressive time period, especially under Theodore Roosevelt. In 1902 a volcanic eruption occurred on the French island of

Martinique. Roosevelt took as much action as he could “within the Executive discretion” and also asked for Congress to appropriate funds to help the victims:

I have directed the departments of the Treasury, of War, and of the Navy to take such measures for the relief of these stricken people as lies within the Executive discretion, and I earnestly commend this case of unexampled disaster to the generous consideration of the Congress. For this purpose I recommend that an appropriation of \$500,000 be made, to be immediately available.”³⁶

The US would respond to another international disaster in 1903 when epidemic and famine afflicted the Philippines. Congress, according to the president, “generously” sent three million dollars for relief. Roosevelt asked for further assistance “not merely from the standpoint of wise governmental policy, but as a measure of humanity in response to an appeal to which this great people should not close its ears.”³⁷ However, just as aid to the French for the Martinique disaster was designed to strengthen ties with an important trading partner, the aid for the Philippines was also economically motivated. Roosevelt argued that “the indispensable and preeminent need” for the Philippines was the “resurrection of productive industry.”³⁸ Aid from Congress would help relieve suffering and a “permanent basis of future prosperity assured if the economic relations of the islands with the United States are put upon a satisfactory basis.”³⁹

The federal government also increased domestic aid as well under Roosevelt. In April 1908 Congress appropriated \$250,000 dollars for the relief of Southerners who had been affected by tornadoes and subsequent flooding; the Army was used to distribute the funds and other supplies (Foster 2005, 67).

³⁶ Roosevelt, Theodore. “Message to Congress.” 12 May 1902.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=69703&st=calamity&st1=>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Roosevelt, Theodore. “Special Message.” February 27, 1903.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=69340&st=disaster&st1=>.

³⁹ Ibid.

Roosevelt's successor, William Howard Taft, while marking a return to a more limited executive, also played a role in disaster politics. In 1912, President Taft authorized the Army to aid victims of Mississippi River Flooding without Congressional approval. Traditionally, Congress had to appropriate funds first; after Taft's action, presidential approval with Congressional reimbursement became standard (Chane 1960, 68-69). Other national agencies followed the president's lead and acted without legislative authorization in the hope that Congress would later reimburse them (Chane 1960).

Other issues were slowly added. The government began to provide relief payments and loans for victims of all kinds of disasters starting in 1915 (Stratton 1989). National weather forecasting was an area that saw growth. The first fire weather forecast was issued in 1914; better communication technology was utilized for weather information in the 20s and forecasting in the 30s (NOAA 2002).

International aid still continued to be motivated by commercial ties and other policy considerations. Aid was sent to Japan after a 1923 earthquake in order to strengthen economic ties (Foster 2005, 100). Aid, in the form of 33 million tons of food, was also sent to post World War I countries dealing with famine in order to promote democratic governments and fight the spread of bolshevism (80).

E. Flood Control

The federal government continued to act in economic interest in other areas besides direct relief to disaster victims, especially in prevention. Flood control continued to be a focus for national disaster policy. The push for flood control was advocated by

both of the major parties. The 1912 Republican National Party Platform contained a section entitled “Flood Prevention in the Mississippi Valley”:

The Mississippi River is the nation's drainage ditch. Its flood waters, gathered from thirty-one States and the Dominion of Canada, constitute an overpowering force which breaks the levees and pours its torrents over many millions of acres of the richest land in the Union, stopping mails, impeding commerce, and causing great loss of life and property. These floods are national in scope, and the **disasters** they produce seriously affect the general welfare. The States unaided cannot cope with this giant problem; hence, we believe the Federal Government should assume a fair proportion of the burden of its control, so as to prevent the **disasters** from recurring floods.⁴⁰

The Republican National Party was advocating for an extension of federal involvement in disaster prevention, specifically flood control in the Mississippi Valley. Once again, the argument in favor of this extension was that flooding would negatively impact the economy and “seriously affect the general welfare.”⁴¹

The party platform for Theodore Roosevelt’s Progressive Party (commonly referred to as the Bull Moose Party) made a similar push:

It is a National obligation to develop our rivers, and especially the Mississippi and its tributaries, without delay, under a comprehensive general plan covering each river system from its source to its mouth, designed to secure its highest usefulness for navigation, irrigation, domestic supply, water power and the prevention of floods.

We pledge our party to the immediate preparation of such a plan, which should be made and carried out in close and friendly co-operation between the Nation, the States and the cities affected.

Under such a plan, the destructive floods of the Mississippi and other streams, which represent a vast and needless loss to the Nation, would be controlled by forest conservation and water storage at the headwaters, and by levees below; land sufficient to support millions of people would be reclaimed from the deserts and the swamps, water power enough to transform the industrial standings of whole States would be developed, adequate water terminals would be provided, transportation by river would revive, and the railroads would be compelled to co-operate as freely with the boat lines as with each other.⁴²

⁴⁰ “Republican Party Platform of 1912.” 18 June 1912.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29633#axzz1nK9lYWp2>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Progressive Party Platform of 1912. 5 November 1912.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29617#axzz1nKBSN0lW>.

The Democratic Party also was involved in the issue. Their 1908 party platform advocated improving national waterways. Their 1912 platform included the following:

The present devastation of the Lower Mississippi Valley accentuates the movement for the regulation of river flow by additional bank and levee protection below, and the diversion, storage and control of the flood waters above, their utilization for beneficial purposes in the reclamation of arid and swamp lands and the development of water power, instead of permitting the floods to continue, as heretofore, agents of destruction.

We hold that the control of the Mississippi River is a national problem. The preservation of the depth of its waters for the purpose of navigation, the building of levees to maintain the integrity of its channel and the prevention of the overflow of the land and its consequent devastation, resulting in the interruption of interstate commerce, the disorganization of the mail service, and the enormous loss of life and property impose an obligation which alone can be discharged by the general government.

To maintain an adequate depth of water the entire year, and thereby encourage water transportation, is a consummation worthy of legislative attention, and presents an issue national in its character. It calls for prompt action on the part of Congress, and the Democratic party pledges itself to the enactment of legislation leading to that end.⁴³

The 1916 Democratic Platform included a provision called “Waterways and Flood Control”:

We renew the declaration in our last two platforms relating to the development of our waterways. The recent devastation of the lower Mississippi Valley and several other sections by floods accentuates the movement for the regulation of river flow by additional bank and levee protection below, and diversion, storage and control of the flood waters above, and their utilization for beneficial purposes in the reclamation of arid and swamp lands and development of water-power, instead of permitting the floods to continue as heretofore agents of destruction. We hold that the control of the Mississippi River is a National problem. The preservation of the depth of its waters for purposes of navigation, the building of levees and works of bank protection to maintain the integrity of its channel and prevent the overflow of its valley resulting in the interruption of interstate commerce, the disorganization of the mail service, and the enormous loss of life and property, impose an obligation which alone can be discharged by the National Government.⁴⁴

Congress would eventually respond to wishes of the political parties and the lobbying efforts of shippers, planters, and farmers from the Mississippi and Sacramento Rivers. PL 64-367, passed in 1917, appropriated \$45 million dollars to for flood control

⁴³ “Democratic Party Platform of 1912.” 25 June 1912.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29590#axzz1nKC94Soo>.

⁴⁴ “Democratic Party Platform of 1916.” 16 June 1916.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29591#axzz1nKQ3ACpz>.

programs for the Mississippi and the Sacramento Rivers and authorized the Army Corps of Engineers to carry out surveys for flood control; the program was later expanded to all rivers in 1936 (O'Neill 2006). The legislation also required that state governments in those areas appropriate funds for these programs (Rivera and Miller, 2006, 7). Congress passed another flood control act in 1923. The legislation authorized the Mississippi River Commission to carry out flood control programs along with Army Corps of Engineers, which would be supported by ten million dollars annually. Although both of these acts did extend the federal government's role, they still "emphasized local responsibility" (Moss 1999, 314). The Corps expected local offices to oversee construction; hired local contractors; and worked with local and state flood control agencies, along with large landowners, were included in the decision-making process and in planning specific works (O'Neill 2006).

The 1917 Flood Control Act was also passed in the wake of the 1913 Ohio River Flood. The disaster killed 467 and caused hundreds of millions in damages. The flood's damage "served as a catalyst for change by drawing public attention to flood control issues" and led to the creation of the House of Representatives Committee on Flood Control in 1916 (River and Miller, 2006, 7). Flooding was the major focus of disaster policy during this time period due to the fact that floods were the most "chronic disaster issue" (Rivera and Miller, 2006, 7) of the time period (Comerio 1998).

F. The Red Cross

The biggest change was the government's role in responding to disasters, coming primarily in this time through the Red Cross, an organization that unofficially represented

the federal government. The Red Cross had limited involvement in the Galveston disaster relief, only hinting at the role that it would play throughout most of the first part of the 20th century. Clara Burton, nearly 80, and other volunteers went to Galveston to help distribute relief supplies, built an orphanage, and helped acquire rebuilding material; money for the effort was raised by selling photographs of the disaster's aftermath and also through a deal with the New York World Magazine, which agreed to donate all the contributions it received to the Red Cross of Barton went to Galveston (Smith 2000).

The Red Cross would expand its role in disaster relief greatly and served as the government's main form of disaster response in the first decades of the 20th century. In 1905 the Red Cross was officially recognized by Congress for its disaster relief role; it would serve as an unofficial government relief agency. John Davis, solicitor general of the US said of the Red Cross in 1918 that it was a

quasi-governmental agency operating under congressional charter, officered, in part, by government appointment, disbursing its funds under the security of a governmental audit and designated by presidential order for fulfillment of certain treaty obligations into which the government has entered. It owes, therefore, to the government to which it serves the distinct duty of discharging all those functions for which it was created (Chane 1960, 19).

The first major disaster that the Red Cross would respond to after its recognition was the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire in 1906. The earthquake and subsequent aftershocks devastated the masonry buildings in the city. Fire sprang up from the destroyed wooden buildings in the business and waterfront district and a separate fire started in the residential district. The fire was responsible for ten times the damage of the earthquake (Campbell 2008, 200).

The disaster killed up to 5,000 and left half of the city's four hundred thousand residents homeless (Rozario 2007, 73). The Army was utilized for the disaster but was

used mostly to prevent looting and remove debris, although the medical corps did provide care for civilians (Foster 2005, 52-66). The *Sunset Magazine* praised the Army for using troops to help police the city, distribute relief, and the assistance of surgeons; the citizens of San Francisco citizens, according to the magazine, owed to the troops “a debt that can never be repaid.”⁴⁵ The *Boston Traveller* wrote:

The army went about the work of policing the city and bring about sanitation and good order in a business-like way, and to it is due all praise for the results accomplished. Without the army there would probably been anarchy and chaos.⁴⁶

The Red Cross was the organization that stepped in to provide the majority of government assistance and loans to victims (Stratton 1989, 29). This was a difficult situation for the organization, one in which they were forced into action by President Roosevelt. Roosevelt, bypassing the governing board of the Red Cross, said it was the only organization that could respond and that it was “the only organization chartered and authorized by Congress to act at times of great national calamity” (Red Cross 2009, 1). The Red Cross had never before responded at that the level that it was supposed, had recently been reorganized, and had no financial reserves. In addition, the organization was actually criticized when it arrived in San Francisco.

As in earlier disasters, a citizen committee, the San Francisco Committee of Fifty, was created to coordinate the relief. The *San Francisco Chronicle* argued that it was this group of citizens that should be in charge of the disaster relief. Eventually the Red Cross negotiated with the committee to form a unified organization, the San Francisco Relief and Red Cross Funds, to be in charge of the distribution of the \$8.5 million in private

⁴⁵ “Water Discussion Brings Dissention.” *Sunset Magazine* “New San Francisco Emergency Edition” Vol. XVII, No. 1. May 1906: 10.

⁴⁶ “The San Francisco Situation.” *Boston Traveller*. 27 June 1906: 3.

donations. The Red Cross and Army were also appropriated \$2.5 million by Congress. Overall, the Red Cross was mostly praised for its relief efforts by newspapers nationwide (Red Cross 2009).

The media coverage of the San Francisco relief effort was similar to coverage of the Galveston Hurricane relief effort. As mentioned above, the *San Francisco Chronicle* was critical of the involvement of an outside organization (although it did later thank the Red Cross for their efforts). Other newspapers also criticized the involvement of the government through the Red Cross. The *Boston Traveller* wrote:

The work of Dr. Devine, sent to San Francisco by the President to represent the rehabilitated Red Cross, has not been satisfactory. It was full of the characteristic red tape which is not acceptable or satisfactory to a people who are not asking for charity, but relief.⁴⁷

Local newspapers like the *Chronicle* claimed that local relief efforts were the most effective (Red Cross 2009). Articles also praised the private donations of citizens nationwide:

When the long roll of friendship for San Francisco is called there will be many towns that can reply. On California San Francisco leaned most heavily. Sixty-eight cities in this home State responded to the call of distress with one or more cars of supplies. Seventy-five per cent of the relief supplies came from the Pacific Coast, though trainloads of Eastern supplies are yet moving westward along the Harriman lines between here and Omaha as fast as steam can bring them. The South and other sections responded generously in cash, and therefore are not represented in the relief shipments largely. The figures above given do not include the Government material, which according to the present Government reports, aggregate fully a hundred cars. If these cars of mixed supplies had been handled as commercial freight instead of free by the Harriman lines, the charges would have aggregated nearly a half million dollars.⁴⁸

Once again, private donations far surpassed government aid. Donations from throughout the country totaled \$9 million dollars, compared with the \$2.5 million appropriated for the Army and Red Cross relief efforts (Rozario 2007, 73).

⁴⁷ "The San Francisco Situation." *Boston Traveller*. 27 June 1906: 3.

⁴⁸ "Rapid Freight Work Done by Southern Pacific Company." *San Francisco Chronicle*. 7 May 1906: 2.

There were several criticisms of the way that the relief effort was carried out by the relief committee and local government. There were claims that poor victims were being treated badly. Disaster victims that had been left homeless were temporarily housed in Lafayette Square in tents. However, a plan was proposed by the relief committee to move them to a public square on Thirteenth and Fourteenth Avenues. The people living in the tents on Lafayette Square complained that the wealthy did not want victims, mostly poor, living there: “there is but one reason why the people of Lafayette square should be singled out for removal, and that is the objection of certain people of wealth to their presence.”⁴⁹ There were also complaints that money designed to help victims never reached them and allegations of embezzlement of the relief funds by the mayor.

The Red Cross would play a major relief role in ensuing disasters and would grow through the early 20th century, especially during World War I. Membership swelled to over 30 million and the number of local chapters increased from 107 in 1914 to 3,864 by 1918. Public contributions for the Red Cross during the war topped \$400 million dollars. The organization began to offer training programs on public health like nursing. Thousands of Red Cross members served as nurses or ambulance drivers during the war. The group would also aid victims of the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in 1911; the sinking of the Titanic in 1912; the capsizing of the S.S. Eastland in 1915; the influenza pandemic in 1918; civilians starving in Europe during World War I; the earthquake and fires in Tokyo and Yokohama, Japan in 1923; the Mississippi River Flood in 1927; the Dust Bowl; and World War II (Red Cross 2010).

⁴⁹ “Jeweled Woman Leads Refugees: Adorned with Diamonds, She Protests Removal from Lafayette Square.” *San Francisco Call*. 27 September 1906: 2.

There was pressure for the Red Cross to become an official government agency in the 1930s. However, the organization turned down direct federal funding, amounting to \$25 million dollars; this was done because, argued Red Cross leader Judge John Barton Payne, the organization belonged to the people, not to politicians (Stratton 1989, 29-30). Although it was not an official government agency, the “Red Cross created a program of disaster response and relief that established expectations on the part of community leaders and individual families of consistent aid in times of disaster” (Popkin 1990, 104).

The Red Cross would struggle for government recognition and support with the Army during the early 20th century (Foster 2005). The Army continued to provide medical care, food, clothing, and tents to victims of some disasters. However, the Army played a more limited role. The Army had been the only governmental department in the 19th century that had the resources to respond to disasters; this was no longer the case in the 20th century. The Red Cross and other federal agencies were playing an increased role. In addition, state boards of health had been developed sufficiently to respond to outbreaks of diseases, the federal Public Health Service had expanded, and National Guard units began to respond to disasters (Foster 105).

The result was a gradually diminishing role for the Army in disaster relief after the 1910's. Congress, starting in the 1920's, stopped automatically reimbursing the Army for their relief actions. As a result, reimbursement often became a contentious battle between the War Department and Congress, often resulting in delays of years for reimbursement for the Army's actions, or no reimbursement at all (106). In response, the Army published a new policy, AR 500-60, in the 1920s to guide their relief efforts. It stipulated that the Army would only respond when requested by Congress, or if

compelled by the “overruling demands” of humanity or a complete inadequate response by local officials (104). The Army stopped automatically responding to requests by local governments for disaster assistance. It would respond to some disasters during the following decades, but in fewer instances and in a smaller capacity. However, the Army Medical Corps would continue to play a prominent role in providing medical care for disaster victims.

The Red Cross, rather than the Army, would continue to serve as the main agency of government disaster response throughout most of the first half of the 20th century. The organization, despite the fact that it was not an official government agency, enjoyed a special relationship with the federal government. President Wilson would be named the first honorary president of the Red Cross in 1913; all presidents since have maintained this tradition. Wilson would also appoint a War Council in 1917 to guide the operations of the RC during World War I (Red Cross 2010).

Calvin Coolidge, delivering his annual message to the organization in October, 1926, celebrated its success. America’s wealth and industrial spirit would provide for victims of disasters, and it was an obligation:

Nothing is clearer than the requirement which is laid on society to use its resources for the relief and restoration of such conditions...The success and completeness with which these obligations are discharged measure the moral rank of a people.” ⁵⁰

The country’s wealth, given generously through charity, would allow Americans to get quickly back on their feet. Americans, according to Coolidge, wanted to be independent; they did not want to be taken care of by the government:

⁵⁰ Coolidge, Calvin. October 4, 1926. “Annual Message to the Red Cross.”

Aid is given freely, necessity being the only requirement, and in such a way that the benefactor does not feel himself an object of charity. He does not lose his self-respect. Rather is he inspired by a fine example to a better and more efficient life, that he in turn may render service to others... While America has been and is surpassingly great in its charities, it looks upon those ministrations to our inhabitants as temporary and accidental. The normal state of the American people, the standard toward which all efforts are bent for attainment, usually with success, is that of a self-supporting, self-governing, independent people. That represents to us a condition of health and soundness which it is exceedingly desirable to maintain. After all the ideal charity is to place in the hands of the people the means of satisfying their own requirements through their own efforts... After all, human nature does not want permanent charity but permanent independence through the opportunity to work out its own destiny. It is at this point that the economic well-being and prosperity of a nation passes over into the ideal... The higher idealism, the true philanthropy, is not that which comes to the rescue after the catastrophe, but rather that which through obedience to sound economic laws creates a prosperity among the people that anticipates and prevents the need of charity.⁵¹

There would be hints of a smaller role for the Red Cross in disaster relief. The organization began focusing on other issues like water safety and first aid. After WWI, the RC “focused on service to veterans and enhanced its programs in safety training, accident prevention, home care for the sick and nutrition education” (Red Cross 2010, 1). The group would also begin its blood collection efforts for the military during WWII, and expand to civilians in 1948. Membership fluctuated. As stated before, there were over 30 million adult and junior members during WWI. There would be less than 16 million by 1920 and less than 9 million by 1927. Membership grew during late 30s and during WWII; there would nearly 57 million adult and junior members and 5.7 volunteers at its peak during the war (Red Cross 2010a).

IV. Factors Against Expansion

A. Developers and Business Leaders

The aftermath of San Francisco and other disasters in the early 20th century would reveal a major group that would fight the expansion of the government in disasters.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Similar to Charleston's leaders after the 1886 earthquake, business leaders and developers tried to downplay the disaster and return the city as quickly as possible to its previous economic position. This group attempted to frame the event as a fire, not as an earthquake. They wanted to do this in order to convince others that the city was not prone to earthquakes, but rather, the true calamity had been the result of a fire, which could be prevented in the future. They were also able to use this argument against further government involvement in mitigation/ preparedness (Steinberg 2000, 27).

Other areas experienced similar situations and local politicians supported the positions of business leaders and developers (38). This was especially true in the development of southern Florida in the early 20th century:

Why is South Florida a disaster waiting to happen? One reason is that private developers have sought to maximize the region's tourist and agricultural potential by building in areas susceptible to hurricanes and flooding. Meanwhile, the state of Florida, playing the role of accomplice, has not been able to give away land and natural resources fast enough to private interests, providing a hefty subsidy to developers who gobbled up the region's scenic but hazardous barrier islands and other places prone to recurrent inundation. Private-property-driven economic development helped to sew the seeds of future destruction, while Florida's business community sought to deny the very real risks involved (47-48).

Developers were so successful at downplaying the risk of disasters that Jon Payne, the head of the Red Cross, complained to reporters the organization, for the first time in its history, was not able raise the amount that it estimated was needed for its relief operation after a category 4 hurricane struck Miami in 1926 (53).

However, the increase in damages affected the business leaders and developers who had fought against further government intervention. Damages became so severe that it was no longer in their best interest to downplay the disasters: "it was clearly self-defeating, if not foolhardy and bad business, to fail to protect such vast amounts of public wealth and people against a risk that clearly existed" (38). This led to a turn to earthquake

insurance in the 1920s. Local politicians also recognized that denying a problem existed (i.e. risk of an earthquake) could lead to public panic during and after the disaster.

California, in particular, had been rocked by several earthquakes in the 1920s and 1930s. The damage from the 1926 Santa Barbara Earthquake, unlike the 1906 San Francisco event, could not be blamed on a fire because there was no fire associated with the quake (36). Local leaders began to acknowledge the disaster risks and also turned to the federal government for assistance. A 1933 earthquake in Southern California killed 116 and caused \$40 million in damages. Local leaders turned to the federal government for help and received \$5 million dollars in assistance (38-39). The same thing occurred in Florida. Hurricanes like the one in 1935 attracted national attention (the 1935 event for the death of several hundred veterans working on projects for the Civil Works Administration) and forced state officials to turn to the federal government for aid (67).

B. Conservative Republicanism

The 1920s marked an end of the Progressive Era; the movement fizzled out as many of the leaders of the movement began to focus on keeping America out of the war during the 1910's and the public became "indifferent to the plight of the poor" (Trattner 1989, 167). It also marked a return to laissez faire governmental politics administered by the "conservative republicanism" of Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover (Milkis and Nelson, 2008, 258). These three administrations marked the "nadir of presidential power in the twentieth century" (259). Both the executive and the government's role shrank.

The laissez faire approach would also impact federal involvement in disasters. For example, the federal government appropriated no money for relief for the 1926 category 4 Miami Hurricane which killed 373 and caused \$150 million in damages (Campbell 2008, 241). American also turned away from internationalism and instead focused on nationalism (Brogan 1999, 495). This was reflected in international disaster relief: the relief effort undertaken for victims of the 1923 Japanese Earthquake would be the last until the Roosevelt administration (Foster 2005, 104).

V. The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927

The Mississippi Flood of 1927 challenged the disaster system of the time period. The flooding inundated 1.6 million acres, affecting 930,000 people, and causing hundreds of millions in damages (Platt 1999, 2). Representatives from states that had been affected urged the President to call a special session of Congress; he did not (Moss 1999). The governors of Oklahoma, Illinois, Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Kentucky all pleaded with the president for help and asked him to name Commerce Secretary Hoover as head of a special federal rescue effort (Barry 1997, 262). The President refused to until Governor Dennis Murphee of Mississippi wired the White House:

“Unprecedented floods have created a national emergency...This territory will be water covered one to twenty feet in twenty four hours contains population 150,000...Highways covered...Railroad operations suspended...Beyond capacity local and state agencies to relieve and control” (19).

Coolidge then appointed Hoover to coordinate the government’s work with the Red Cross.

The government, though, was not directly involved in a large scale recovery and relief effort. Instead, the federal government deferred to local authorities and the Red

Cross. Coolidge continued to play a limited role. Requests by mayors, senators, and governors to visit the affected areas were initially refused, as was an inquiry by NBC to make a nationwide radio broadcast appealing for help (287).

President Coolidge, speaking on the disaster, told the nation:

The government is giving such aid as lies within its power. Government boats that are available are being used to rescue those in danger and carry refugees to safety. The War department is providing the Red Cross with tents for housing refugees. The National Guard, State and local authorities are assisting. But the burden of caring for the homeless rests upon the agency designated by the Government charter to provide relief in disaster-The American National Red Cross. For so great a task additional funds must be obtained immediately. It therefore becomes my duty as President of the United States and President of the American National Red Cross to direct the sympathy of our people to the sad plights of thousands of their fellow citizens, and to urge that generous contributions be promptly forthcoming to alleviate their suffering. (Moss 1999, 308-309)

The Red Cross was in charge of the day to day management and cared for over 600,000 victims (Platt 1999, 2). One hundred and fifty-four camps were set up in seven states; 325,554 lived in these camps for up to four months and an additional 311,922 people outside of the camps were fed and clothed (Barry 1997, 285-286).

Through the Red Cross and other agencies the federal government spent \$10 million dollars on relief, which represented only 3.3 percent of total damages from the flood; another \$17 million dollars in cash donations and six million in supplies was collected by the Red Cross (Moss 1999, 309). Hoover said of the Red Cross that it had become the “one guarantee to the American people that the loss of life shall be prevented in calamity and that suffering shall be mitigated to the utmost degree” (309).

Some defended the limited involvement of the federal government in the relief effort for the 1927 flood. The *New York Times* stated: "Fortunately, there are still some things that can be done without the wisdom of Congress and the all-fathering federal government" (Greenberg 2006).

Others were more critical of the government. The *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* wrote: "It has been necessary to school President Coolidge day by day a bit more towards the realization of the immensity of the catastrophe"; the *Paducah News-Democrat* wrote that President Coolidge had "the coldest heart in America or the dullerest imagination, and we are about ready to believe he has both"; Will Rogers, the actor and comedian, stated that Coolidge delayed passing relief legislation in "the hope that those needing relief will perhaps have conveniently died in the meantime" (Greenberg 2006).

Newspaper articles, editorials, and letters to editors across the country criticized the government for not providing more aid for victims and taking a larger role in the relief/ recovery effort. Local leaders, the Red Cross, and the National Guard were criticized for their treatment of African Americans. Blacks were forced to do labor for no compensation and not allowed out of the Red Cross camps by the National Guard; Whites, were allowed to leave and not forced to do work. African Americans were treated harshly by the National Guard soldiers. Some were beaten and those caught trying to leave the camps were whipped. Protests were made to Hoover and Coolidge by local leaders but were ignored. A press conference by the NCAAP in March 1927 alleging discrimination and coverage of the treatment by Black newspapers eventually led to national media attention. Hoover was forced to appoint a Colored Advisory Commission to investigate (Barry 1997, 307-328).

Further criticism was also leveled. Local distributors of supplies for the Red Cross were accused of profiteering and theft (331). In New Orleans, local business leaders ordered levees around poor areas in St. Bernard and Plaquemines to be dynamited in

order to protect the commercial center in New Orleans. The residents were promised compensation. However, business leaders denied most compensation claims. The situation received nationwide media criticism (340-359).

This criticism spilled over into the 1928 election. Hoover gained national attention for his role in the disaster and was elevated to the status of a national hero. Newspapers began to speculate about him running for president, which he would (287-288). His opponent, Al Smith, criticized the Republicans for the lack of a national flood policy and argued that more was needed to be done to prevent disasters:

With the development of inland waterways goes the control of floods thereon. The Mississippi flood of last year brought home to the nation the imperative need for a national policy of flood control. The last two administrations waited for this **calamity** and for universal demand that something be done instead of taking leadership in this important work. Forethought, courage, and leadership and knowledge of what real ultimate economy means would have done much to prevent this **calamity** with its ensuing waste and misery. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of first aid and relief. In the last Congress the Reid-Jones Bill laid down sound lines for the solution of this great problem. The policy thus initiated for the Mississippi must be carried through. The money actually appropriated for flood relief is too small to make even a start. Too much time has been spent in squabbling over who shall pay the bill. The Mississippi river and its tributaries constitute a great network of waterways flowing through a large number of States. Much more than flood control is involved. Fulllest development of the Mississippi river and its tributaries as arteries of commerce should be the goal.⁵²

The flood and ensuing criticism would help to serve as a catalyst for further federal involvement. The media and citizens nationwide called for an increased role for the federal government in disaster relief and prevention. Congress responded by passing Mississippi Flood Control Acts in 1928, against Coolidge's wishes (Greenberg 2006), 1936, and 1938. The 1928 Flood Control Act (PL 70-391) moved beyond previous approach, which focused on levees as a means of flood control, and appropriated \$300

⁵² Smith, Al. "Address of Acceptance at the State Capitol, Albany, New York." 22 August 1928. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=75571&st=calamity&st1=>.

million dollars for land control-before, land control had been considered a local issue (Platt 1999, 2). The 1938 act authorized the federal government to full fund the building of dams and reservoirs (Moss 1999, 314). The flood control acts “placed the responsibility of the Mississippi River in the hands of the federal government” (Rivera and Miller, 2006, 7). Economics continued to be the major political argument in favor of the government’s increased role in disasters as the acts were “focused on the reclamation of land for agricultural and commercial enterprises” (Moss 1999, 314).

This increased role for the federal government was widely supported. The *New York Times*, which had initially applauded the federal government for staying out of the early relief efforts for the 1927 flood, now endorsed the expanded role:

Ten years ago the calculation was made that for an expenditure of \$60,000,000 the levee system along the main river could be made floodproof. In 1923 Congress authorized the expenditure of \$10,000,000 annually for six years by the Mississippi River Commission. Probably no competent army engineer would now set a limit to the sum required to protect completely the lands, buildings and crops of dwellers along the Mississippi and its tributaries...Unfortunately, levee construction never seems to be thoroughly well done. Heavy rains confound the most confident predictions. The Mississippi and its tributaries drain 1,244,000 square miles of land. That is why there has been so much insistence upon the Federal Government doing the job of flood control. The crops produced, cotton, the cereals, fruits and vegetables, and the cattle raised are used by the whole country. In 1916 the Mississippi River Levee Association polled the Governors of the country, and their opinion was almost unanimously that the flood problem was the special concern of the Federal Government.⁵³

VI. The Great Depression and Dust Bowl

The Great Depression would be a major impetus in the transition to comprehensive disaster relief. Hoover responded to the crisis much like he responded to the Mississippi Flood: to Hoover, the solution to the situation “lay not in expanding the national government, but in using the presidency and the rest of the executive branch to encourage private institutions to develop more equitable and rationale economic

⁵³“The Mississippi Floods.” *New York Times*. 21 April 1927.

arrangements” (Milkis and Nelson 2008, 272). Hoover hoped that private organizations would help the country get out of the depression; this did not prove to be the case. Local welfare systems and governments also proved to be inadequate in dealing with the crisis (Mink and O’Connor 2004). This led to more demands for more government assistance. He resisted and continued to try to coordinate private measures.

Hoover also took a hands-off approach to the Dust Bowl, the severe drought, dust storms, and crop failures that affected the Great Plains and lasted for a decade, from 1930-1940. Fifty million acres used for agricultural production were lost and half of all residents of the affected areas migrated away (Campbell 2008, 261).

The president argued that dealing with the drought should be the responsibility of local governments, supplemented by donations (Chane 1960). Others, including those affected, argued for a national program of relief. Hoover responded by calling on the citizens of the country for more non-government support for the Red Cross and private donations to help them deal with the crisis:

The Red Cross now appeals for \$10 million of additional funds in order that that essential task may be adequately performed. There is no question but that funds are needed. It is unthinkable that any of our people should be allowed to suffer from hunger or want. The heart of the Nation will not permit it. It is to the heart of the Nation that I am appealing tonight. I urge all of my fellow countrymen to contribute promptly and in accordance with their means. It is a call to citizenship and to generosity in time of trial, but it is a call for protection to our greatest American institution of charity and above all a call on behalf of those in need.”⁵⁴

Hoover wanted the government response to the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl to be similar to the relief effort that he had coordinated for the Great Mississippi

⁵⁴ Hoover, Herbert. “Radio Address on the Drought Relief Campaign of the American National Red Cross.” 22 January 1931. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=22776&st=calamity&st1=>

Flood. He wanted the national government to coordinate recovery rather than step in and provide. He told the Indiana Republican Editorial Association on June 15, 1931:

For the first time in history the Federal Government has taken an extensive and positive part in mitigating the effects of depression and expediting recovery. I have conceived that if we would preserve our democracy this leadership must take the part not of attempted dictatorship but of organizing cooperation in the constructive forces of the community and of stimulating every element of initiative and self-reliance in the country.⁵⁵

Hoover's reluctance to offer government assistance even in the face of demand by citizens and politicians alike led to his landslide defeat to FDR in the 1932 election. FDR's election, according to journalist William Allen White, signified a "firm desire on the part of the American people to use government as an agency for human welfare" (Milkis and Nelson 2008, 280). The New Deal marked a rejection of the older principles of a strictly limited government and laissez faire ideology (Sunstein 2006, 3). The government was now playing a larger and much more socially accepted role in many areas previously not seen as appropriate (Lowi 1967). It also marked the end of the limited view of the executive held by Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover, and the beginning of the modern presidency, with the president becoming the center of the American political system (Nuesdtadt 1960).

FDR first announced his "New Deal" while campaigning. He argued that the government should play a much more active role in providing for housing, unemployment, and jobs for the poor and unemployed (Sunstein 2006, 19). The welfare state would grow exponentially under the New Deal. Public welfare spending would peak

⁵⁵ Hoover, Herbert. "Address to the Indiana Republican Editorial Association at Indianapolis." 15 June 1931. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=22706&st=&st1=>.

at 60% of total government expenditures in 1936, at the height of the program (Clayton 1976, 376).

FDR created public works programs like the Work Progress Administration. The Social Security Act of 1935 marked the transition to social expenses welfare (Katznelson and Kesselman, 1979). Other programs included the Federal Emergency Relief Act of 1935 and the Tennessee Valley Authority. The latter included flood control measures as well as employment.

There was a significant expansion of federal disaster relief during the New Deal. Aid and housing was provided for farmers who were victims of Dust Bowl in the Midwest, especially after Black Sunday swept topsoil from the Midwest over the nation's capitol, in one the most important focusing events of the time (NRCS 2008).

Ironically, as noted earlier, the Red Cross actually fought against money being appropriated by Congress to be used by the organization in a relief effort for the Dust Bowl victims. Legislation was proposed which would have given 25 million to the Red Cross to be spent on food, supplies, medicine, and other supplies for drought victims. Leaders of the Red Cross testified before the Congressional committee against the appropriation saying that it would destroy the fundamental principle of operating only through voluntary contributions (Chane 1960, 19-20). However, the organization did play a major role in the relief effort. Acting under the general supervision of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Red Cross distributed food and clothing to Dust Bowl victims in the Midwest. It used 85,000,000 bushels of government-owned wheat

and 844,000 bales of cotton. The provided aid overall was valued at \$73 million dollars (Chane 1960, 20).

Disasters and the New Deal were closely intertwined. FDR and other advocates of a government that provided more social welfare “represented the Depression as a national catastrophe that deserved traditional forms of disaster relief” (Mink and O’Connor 2004, 237). FDR and others told the story of disaster “in order to show how the New Deal was consistent with this precedent for federal assistance and thus legitimate” (237). Harry Hopkins, testifying on FDR’s behalf before Congress in 1933 in favor of direct relief for unemployment, presented a table with the history of federal disaster spending in support of the measure (Dauber 1998). This and other disaster rhetoric helped to convince the public, Congress, and the Courts that the New Deal was necessary. The acceptance of the New Deal, in turn, convinced many to support the expanded role of the government in responding to disasters: “if the federal government took charge in times of economic depression, why not in emergency situations (Olasky 2006, 36).

Official federal agencies ⁵⁶ began to become involved with disaster relief. Agreements were reached between the Red Cross and other agencies over specific areas of disaster relief. FDR authorized the Federal Works Agency to distribute surplus federal property to disaster victims; this property soon ran out (Chane 1960, 24). The Works Project Administration then started to distribute surplus commodities to victims. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation, created in 1932, was another important organization that dealt with disasters. The organization was originally designed to help deal with the

⁵⁶ The Red Cross was not an official federal agency.

Great Depression. It also dealt with disaster relief as it provided loans for repairs or reconstruction of some public facilities affected by disaster. It also gave out some loans to individuals and business for their repairs and reconstruction. Later on, the Small Business Administration would assume control of this effort after the RFC was abolished (Butkiewicz 1995).

Numerous other federal agencies were involved in disaster relief as well: the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Work Projects Administration, Public Works Administration, Civil Works Administration, and Civilian Conservation Corps (Chane 1960, 22). Other programs were created specifically to respond to the Dust Bowl: the Soil Conservation Service, Resettlement Administration, and Farm Security Administration (Campbell 2008, 261).

Federal disaster funding was expanded beyond public facilities in 1934 when the Bureau of Public Roads was delegated the authority to give aid for highways and bridges that had been damaged in a natural disaster. 1934 also saw the passage of the Flood Control Act. The act gave more authority to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to plan projects to control flooding. The Corps was also authorized to conduct rescues and emergency repairs in 1941 (Butkiewicz 1995).

The expanded role played by many federal agencies led to mass confusion. As noted above, there was a several decade long struggle between the Red Cross and the Army over disaster relief. In 1938, the Army did officially recognize the Red Cross as the primary disaster agency (Foster 2005, 121). The Army would still take part in relief operations, but the Red Cross would be the first responder. Also, their rescue efforts

would be under civilian control. The Army was now delegated to a supplementary role, even for their medical corps, which had been the primary medical response to disasters for decades. Civilian and National Guard medical personnel would now be the primary responders (123).

However, this did not end the confusion as to the role of other federal agencies. There was no centralized unit coordinate the activities of all the federal agencies involved in disaster relief. A lack of communication and organization resulted.

Federal expansion into disasters was also facilitated by the Great Depression's impact on the economy. Donations were curtailed and private organizations did not have the adequate resources to respond. For example, state leaders were not able to rely upon in-state fundraising to cover the costs of the response to the 1933 southern California earthquake; instead, they were forced to turn to the federal government (Steinberg 2006, 39). Federal legislation was authorized for \$5 million dollars in aid for the earthquake victims (Rivera and Miller, 2006, 7).

Disaster aid even became a political issue. In 1936 a category 5 hurricane hit Florida. Two hundred and fifty-nine veterans working on a New Deal highway project and 164 civilians were killed. Republicans blamed the Roosevelt administration for the deaths of the veterans (the camp supervisor had waited too long to evacuate). In 1936, they introduced legislation to compensate the families and a small amount was approved (Olasky 2006, 36).

Aid was also provided for international disaster victims. The military provided much of this support. The Army and Red Cross provided supplies for victims of a storm

in Puerto Rico in 1928; aided victims of an earthquake in Venezuela and typhoon in Philippines in 1929; used the Army and Marines to help in the rescue victims of an earthquake in Nicaragua in 1931 (facilitated by the fact that the military was occupying the country at the time); sent tents and supplies after a flood in Honduras in 1934; helped victims of a fire in Manila in 1937; and brought supplies and helped transport victims of an earthquake in Chile in 1939 (Foster 2005, 114-124). The military had a mostly limited response to foreign disasters in the 1920s and 30s. This was due to the confusion over its role in disaster relief, the battle over Congressional reimbursement, and technology. Troops and the Army medical corps were often not sent in due to the limited ability for them to be deployed internationally quickly. However, the development of better and faster planes would allow an expanded role for the military in international disaster relief after World War II (124).

There continued to be, in addition to the role played by the government, a major role played by voluntary organizations and private donations. For example, FDR, after ordering the military to send supplies to the victims of the 1939 Chile earthquake, also made a national speech in which he appealed to private citizens to make contributions to the Red Cross to aid the victims:

“The effects of the catastrophe which has overtaken the people of Chile become hourly more serious. The need for hospital supplies, food and clothing is imperative. Perhaps greater than all else is the need for prompt and practical help that may further strengthen the magnificent morale shown by a people afflicted by an appalling **calamity**.

It is desirable not only to make the best effort we can to help our friends and neighbors who are in distress, but to make this effort in the most effective way. Therefore I urge all those individuals, institutions and organizations whose sympathies are aroused by the grief and suffering of thousands of individuals in Chile to coordinate their efforts and to make their contributions through the American Red Cross which, from the outset of this disaster, has been giving assistance through its sister society, the Chilean Red Cross.

Some days ago I instructed the United States Army and Navy to cooperate in every practical way. Since medicines and other hospital supplies are of paramount importance, I am glad to say that United States Army planes have already landed in Chile with emergency medical supplies. This cooperation on the part of this Government will be continued.

In accordance with their traditional practice, the American people will surely wish to give such assistance as they can to peoples of other lands who are in distress, particularly when, as in the present case, those suffering from disaster are the nationals of an American republic bound to the people of the United States by close ties of understanding and of friendship. The Chilean disaster is of such tragic proportions as to merit the most prompt and generous response from the American public.”⁵⁷

The president also emphasized the role of private organizations in domestic relief, despite the expansion of the federal government into this area during the New Deal. Organizations like the Salvation Army continued to provide aid for disaster victims. Groups like Volunteers of America provided assistance to those affected by the Great Depression and Dust Bowl. FDR gave a radio address to the nation in October 1941 in which he told the country that the government could not do it all and private support was still needed to support those in need:

Once more I am making a straightforward, simple appeal to the people of our country to support a great annual event—the Community Mobilization for Human Needs. Many of you do not recognize this name but it represents the tying together of hundreds of local community efforts known as "community chests" or "community funds" or "welfare drives." These represent consolidations of many thousands of local charities run by churches, social welfare organizations, health associations, and many others. The American people have given generously in the past—very generously. But this year I hope the American people will give more than ever before. That is because, in a great world threat to our future, we must, for ourselves and our country, preserve—and make secure our values and the strength of our institutions. It is true that more people are at work in our land today than ever before. It is true that our national income is rising. But it is still true that millions of our fellow citizens are still undernourished, ill clad and poorly housed. And bad health maims too many of our American households. We must build up, not merely our Army and our Navy, but we must build up the well-being of our civilian population. In past years we have done this through a great humanitarian revival. This year we must do it for the added reason that adequate national defense definitely needs it. Once more I point out to you that the Federal Government cannot and ought not to try to cover the whole field of social service. Private agencies in every locality are essential not only for the good of the sick and the children and the mothers and the poor but they are of the utmost importance in instilling charity, or greater love of our fellow beings in the hearts of all of us as individuals. We can afford to be better neighbors to our neighbors. We can afford to give support to those noble men and women whose lives are devoted to the help of their fellows. It would be a **calamity** for the Nation and for its future if private

⁵⁷ Roosevelt, Franklin Delano. "Appeal for Chilean Earthquake Victims." 30 January 1939. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=15705&st=calamity&st1=>.

charity did not exist and grow. That is why I am asking each and every person in every town and village and on every farm to contribute something, large or small, toward this great and proven service. You will be helping to build a stronger and a better America. When I have said that, I have said all that is necessary for it is a spiritual as well as a practical appeal to the better natures of my fellow citizens.⁵⁸

VII. Civil Defense

World War II and the Cold War would also play a role in disaster policy growth. Civil defense was a major initiative in the postwar era. The states were not prepared to respond to disasters until after World War II (Stratton 1989, 28). During the war, the states were asked by the administration to form councils of defense which would later become defense agencies (28). The states built up their institutions for national defense and no longer had to rely upon citizen groups or private organizations during disasters (Sylves 2008). These institutions would serve as a primary response unit for the states during disasters.

The American public largely supported this national defense initiative. This was mostly driven by the “primary” role played by national defense in the “evaluations of the American public” and also by the perceived threat of the Soviet Union (Wlezien 1995, 997). American support for defense spending grew during World War II and the Cold War; it would not be until the latter part of Vietnam that a large percentage of the public would begin to favor less defense spending (Kriesberg and Klien, 1980). The result of this support was more spending on defense, and, in turn, more spending on state disaster response. In fact, the Disaster Act of 1950, which would be the piece of legislation which would create the modern comprehensive disaster policy, was a companion piece to the

⁵⁸ Roosevelt, Franklin Delano. “Radio Address on Community Mobilization for Human Needs.” 3 October 1941. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=16016&st=calamity&st1=>.

Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950, which created the Federal Civil Defense Administration and took the burden of civil defense off of the states (Syvles 2008, 48).

The war period also continued American ideological support of an expanded role of the government in providing for those in need:

The threat from Hitler and the Axis powers broadened the New Deal's commitment to security and strengthened the nation's appreciation of human vulnerability. At the same time, the external threat deepened the need for a fresh understanding of American's defining commitments, an understanding that could have international as well as domestic appeal and could serve as a beacon of hope, an example of what free societies and decent government offer their people (Sunstein 2006, 1-2).

Economics also continued to be a major reason for support of disaster spending in the post-war period. President Truman, speaking to Congress in July 1947, urged further flood control for the Mississippi River Basin as a means to help the national economy:

The major opportunity of our generation to increase the wealth of the Nation lies in the development of our great river systems... This continued threat and the recurring and accumulative damage to the national economy and well-being call strongly for the prompt use of more effective counter-measures.⁵⁹

Truman, in addition to highlighting the economic reasons for expanding flood prevention measures, also discussed a more humanitarian aspect:

In the short 10-year period from 1937 through 1946 a total of more than a billion dollars in flood damage has been suffered in the Mississippi Basin. The real cost to the Nation, of course, has been much greater. Dollars are not adequate to measure the toll in the hundreds of lives lost and the suffering of millions of persons affected.⁶⁰

VIII. Conclusion

Federal disaster policy had expanded throughout the first half of the 20th century. Prevention, usually in the form of flood control, became a platform issue for both major

⁵⁹ Truman, Harry S. July 6th, 1947. "Special Message to Congress on Flood Control in the Mississippi River Basin." <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=12701&st=calamity&st1=>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

parties and multiple bills were enacted by Congress, extending the federal government's responsibility in this area. More monetary relief for victims, both domestic and international, was given. Response, primarily through the Red Cross, a quasi-governmental organization, increased. More and more federal agencies, particularly during the New Deal, became involved in disaster policy.

The federal government, similar to the previous time period, was responding to changes in the environment. Demands for the government to play a larger role increased as natural disasters caused more death and destruction due to population growth, shift, and urbanization. More was known about disasters and more media attention was placed upon them; the significance of this media attention would be best demonstrated during the 1927 Great Mississippi Flood in which newspapers criticized the government for not playing a more active role. The government had also begun to play a more active role in other areas of providing for its citizens as the era of laissez faire ideology and strict limited government slowly died out.

More was expected of the government in many areas, including disaster policy, and the federal government had the resources to expand its role. Disaster relief was still not comprehensive, though, and policy was fragmented. This would change in the second half of the 20th century as the Disaster Act of 1950 would open the gates for America's modern, comprehensive, and expansive disaster policy.

CHAPTER 5. EXPANSION, EXPANSION, EXPANSION: FEDERAL DISASTER POLICY FROM 1950 THROUGH THE PRESENT

I. Introduction

Federal disaster prior to the historic Disaster Relief Act of 1950 was selective, not comprehensive, as discussed in previous chapters. The federal government, however, had become gradually more involved in disaster relief and response over the course of 160 years. Federal agencies had become directly involved with the issue, despite the lack of a comprehensive policy, during the 20th century. This had occurred especially during the New Deal. Federal agencies, though, assisted and then had to hope that they would be reimbursed by Congress for their actions and aid. This did not always happen and led to reluctance by some agencies to play a role (Chane 1960, 15). Response and relief efforts were also plagued by the problem that they were not coordinated. The second half of the 20th century would see an incredible growth of the federal government's role in dealing with disasters, beginning with the passage of PL 80-875 in 1950.⁶¹

The growth would be facilitated by multiple factors: the use of the bill to establish a precedent for expanding the services provided by the federal government and the types of disasters covered; the prominent role of a more powerful presidency; the involvement of the government in civil defense; the expanded role of the federal government in areas of welfare and other social services, health, safety, and the environment; the continuation

⁶¹ As noted in the Introduction, several scholars have examined this time period and thus this chapter will be less in-depth than previous chapters. For more in-depth analysis of federal disaster policy after 1950 see Peter May's (1985) *Recovering From Catastrophes: Federal Disaster Relief Policy and Politics*, Rutherford Platt's (1999) *Disasters and Democracy: The Politics of Extreme Natural Events*, and Richard Sylves' (2008) *Disaster Policy and Politics: Emergency Management and Homeland Security*.

of large amounts of death and destruction due to vulnerability; and the ability of disasters to serve as focusing events. The result would be a vast increase in federal disaster policy and spending as the national government assumed the prominent role in not only prevention but relief, and to a lesser extent, response as well.

II. PL 80-875 (1950)

The federal government in the mid-20th century played a much larger role in disasters than in previous time periods. Preventative efforts like flood control, primarily through building levees, had expanded as both parties had championed the issue. Direct relief, both domestic and international, had increased. Lastly, the federal government had begun to play a larger role in direct response to disasters, mostly through the Red Cross, a quasi-governmental agency.

More and more was expected of the government in this area though. In general, citizens accepted a large role for the federal government in providing for their welfare: “By the late 1940s, the American people had been accustomed to Social Security, federal housing programs, veterans benefits, farm subsidies, public higher education, federal aid to highways, and other federally supported social programs” (Platt 1999, 11).

Natural disasters in previous decades had become a major issue. Increased vulnerability, due to population growth and shifts as well as urbanization had led to more deaths and damages. Previously Americans had expected the federal government to play a limited role and private agencies to provide most of the response and relief. Disasters, however, had become too big of a problem for them adequately respond to. Instead, the

federal government, bolstered by expanded resources and capacity, gradually assumed this role.

Disaster policy was still not comprehensive. The government did not respond to all disasters and many victims did not receive direct federal aid. This would change in the second half of the century.

Rep. Harold Hagen of Minnesota introduced PL 80-875 in 1950. The bill was designed to provide relief for areas in Minnesota and South Dakota that had been flooded by the Red River. Specifically, it allocated \$5 million dollars to repair public roads and bridges.

The role of the Disaster Relief Act of 1950 (PL 80-875) would go beyond the allocation of aid for one specific disaster, however; instead, it would be used to institutionalize federal disaster relief. Up until this act, federal agencies were only delegated the authority to aid in specific disasters. This piece of legislation attempted to change that. The purpose of the act was, according to the wording of the act itself, “

to provide an orderly and continuing means of assistance by the Federal Government to States and local governments in carrying out their responsibilities to alleviate suffering and damage resulting from major disasters, to repair essential public facilities in major disasters.

The concept of major disaster was broadly defined as

any flood, drought, fire, hurricane, earthquake, storms or other catastrophe in any part of the United States which, in the determination of the President, is or threatens to be of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant disaster assistance by the Federal Government and which the Governor of any State in which such catastrophe may occur or threaten certifies the need for disaster assistance.

Although the bill was not originally designed to go beyond earlier legislative efforts, it set a precedent “by establishing federal policy for providing emergency relief, by laying out national responsibility in disasters and by transforming the

intergovernmental context of disasters”; these actions would “essentially the law created the first permanent system for disaster relief without the need for Congressional post-disaster action” (Sylvester 2008, 49). The federal government’s role in disaster relief would grow throughout the rest of the century. Proponents would use the broad language of the legislation to create a comprehensive disaster policy, replacing the selective policy that had previously been the norm. Victims and advocates of major disasters would soon be able to expect significant involvement in disaster prevention, response, relief, and recovery.

III. Factors Leading to Expansion

A. Expansion of the Executive

One major change in the designation was the role of the president in disaster policy. The language of the bill gave the president a broad delegation of power. Previously, members of Congress would introduce a specific piece of legislation in order to get relief for an individual disaster. The president, with the new legislation, was now responsible for determining if a disaster had occurred; members of Congress no longer had to introduce the individual pieces of disaster relief. The president was only prevented from acting if the governor refused to certify the need for aid. However, in most cases it would have been in the best interest of the governor to certify this need and thus receive aid. Once the governor did this, the president was then able to direct any federal agency he saw fit to use its resources to help out the affected area.

Disaster policy, similar to other policy areas, was now executive-centered. As stated in the previous chapter, FDR marked the beginning of the modern presidency

(Nuestadt 1960). The political system transformed into a presidency-centered model in which the president was expected to be the one responsible for leading government and setting national policy (Miroff 2006; Tulis 1988). The president has become “the embodiment of government” (Lowi 1985, 96) and the clerkship model of the past has been abandoned: “the prior choice of mere clerkship, of simply fulfilling the constitutional responsibilities of the office, have been rendered moot by recent, dramatic events (the New Deal and World War II) that had made crisis management a normal state of affairs” (Skowronek 1997, 5).

One such manifestation of this new leadership was in disaster politics. Presidents were placed in control of declaring disasters under the Disaster Act of 1950. Governors make a request to the president to make a disaster declaration for an affected area. This declaration would then allow federal money to be used for relief work.

B. Disaster Policy as Civil Defense

The federal government as a whole continued to expand in scope and size. One such area was in defense spending. Defense Spending grew significantly in the decades after World War II. A majority of Americans favored maintaining or increasing defense spending; during the 1950s and early 1960s public opinion polls showed that only about 20% of citizens favored less defense spending. This number would increase during Vietnam, peaking at 40% in 1973, but dropping to 24% by 1978 (Kriesberg and Klien, 1980).

Natural disaster response was considered an area of national civil defense. Originally considered a duty for state civil defense units, the new disaster system was

placed under the dominion of national defense. Initially, Truman assigned disaster response to the Housing and Home Finance Agency, as he felt the new Federal Civil Defense Administration already had too many responsibilities; however, in 1952 he did transfer this duty to the FCDA (Foster 2005, 134). Disaster response would stay under civil defense control until 1974, although under the control of different agencies: the FCDA until 1958, the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization until 1962, and the Office of Emergency Planning until 1974 (Platt 1999, 15). After this, it would leave civil defense and be placed under the control of the newly created Federal Disaster Assistance Administration, part of HUD, and then the Federal Emergency Management Agency (created in 1979).

C. Expanded Responsibility for the Government

Other governmental areas saw growth. The Post-war period was time of economic growth and prosperity, and also expanded social spending under Truman, Eisenhower, and JFK. The two are often connected. Wlezien (1995) writes: “as economic expectations become more optimistic, the preferred levels of spending for social programs should increase” (989). The 1950s and 1960s was an era of increased social spending, especially during LBJ’s Great Society.

There was an expansion of government services for the poor during this time period. The Aid to Dependent Children was a provision of the Social Security Act (enacted in 1935). The legislation aided children under sixteen in a family whose breadwinner had died, left, or become incapacitated. The provision was amended to become the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and now was expanded to

include the mother of children that were covered under the previous act. Legislation was passed in 1956 which required social services to be provided by the government for the poor. Welfare was amended to be provided purely based upon need in 1962. In 1969 the Family Assistance Plan added poor working fathers and families with absent or unemployed fathers. The time period also saw the addition of Food Stamps, Medicare/Medicaid, expanded public housing, increased public health, minimum wage laws, and farm subsidies (Koven et al., 1998, 268-269).

Government also expanded its actions into health, safety, and environmental protection (Moss 1999, 322). Much of this was the result of major focusing events. The Center for Disease Control, at first a small branch of the Public Health Administration, developed in the post-war period and established its credibility through its response to polio, swine flu, and smallpox outbreaks in the 1950s-1970s (Campbell 2008, 300). The Federal Aviation Agency (the precursor to the Federal Aviation Administration) was created in 1958 in response to a midair collision between two commercial flights over the Grand Canyon (304-305). The 1950s and 60s saw the government become involved in desegregation and other civil rights issues. The FDA strengthened its monitoring and regulations in 1962 with the Kefauver-Harris Act, a piece of legislation passed in the wake thousands of birth defects, miscarriages, and babies' deaths due to the sedative Thalidomide (309-310). The surgeon general and Congress began to issue warnings about cigarettes in the 1960s (322). The 1969 Santa Barbara Oil Spill would lead to a series of state and federal environmental regulatory laws (342). The EPA was established in 1970 in response to concern over the dangers of pesticides, especially DDT (311-312).

Disaster relief spending would be a “manifestation of the larger trend toward greater public-sector responsibilities and obligations” (Schneider 1995, 23). The increase in federal defense, social welfare spending, and protection/ regulation spending occurred at the same time as increased disaster spending by the federal government. Overall federal spending on disasters would grow exponentially during this time. The federal government’s share of disaster costs was 1% in the early 1950s and twenty years later, it was up to 70%. Federal disaster expenditures were \$5 million dollars in 1950 and up to \$52 million dollars within three years; the federal government now spends over \$10 billion annually on average (Platt 1999, 23).

D. Vulnerability

Natural disasters continued to be a major problem for the United States. Many Americans continue to live in disaster-prone areas. Deaths from natural disasters, which increased dramatically through the first half of the 20th century, would actually decline in the second half. Much of this was due to the increase in scientific knowledge, advanced warning systems, stricter building codes, better building material, and more mitigation efforts.

Damage, on the other hand, has continued to increase. Natural disasters, on average, now cause about \$20 billion dollars worth of direct damage annually and \$30 to 35\$ billion in indirect damage (Birkland 2006, 105). Major hurricanes in this time period demonstrate how much of a problem natural disasters continue to be: Hurricane Betsy in 1965 (76 killed, \$1.4 billion in damages-\$7.8 billion today); Hurricane Camille in 1969 (256 killed, \$1.4 billion in damages-\$6.7 billion today); Hurricane Agnes in 1972 (130

killed, \$3 billion in damages-\$12.3 billion today); Hurricane Hugo in 1989 (49 killed, \$13.6 billion in damages-\$21.4 billion today), Hurricane Andrew in 1992 (65 killed, \$35 billion in damages-\$42.8 billion today); Hurricanes Charles, Frances, and Jeanne in 2004 (combined 88 killed, \$32.1 billion in damages-\$36.2 billion today); and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 (combined 1956 killed, \$180 billion in damage-\$197 billion today) (Campbell 2008).

E. Disasters as Focusing Events and Precedent

Disasters increasingly became focusing events during this time period and, similar to other areas of governmental regulation discussed above, resulted in political action. Natural disasters in the 1960s and 1970s “served to focus attention on the issue of natural disasters and brought about increased legislation” (FEMA 2009).

The media continued to expand in the latter half of the 20th century. Television ownership rates jumped dramatically starting in the 1950s due to better technology and the creation of major networks (Boyd 2008). The media in general plays a major agenda-setting function (Zaller 1992; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; McCombs and Shaw, 1972) and helped to play a major role in focusing attention on disasters (Schneider 1995).

Disasters are natural focusing events due to the fact that they are severe events, often lead to large losses in life, and cause substantial damage. Disasters are highly visible problems and possess all of the “characteristics necessary to attain immediate agenda status” (14). Also, disasters are the types of events that the media, television in particular, likes to cover and are easily transmitted (15).

Media coverage of disasters may have the similar “CNN Effect” that coverage of international crisis does. The CNN Effect is: “media drives Western conflict management by forcing Western governments to intervene militarily in humanitarian crises against their will” (Jakobsen 2000, 132). The media’s coverage of the event leads to demand from the press and the public for the government to do something. The public pressure eventually becomes too much and the government is forced to react.

Disasters also received cinematic attention. Disasters were central parts of historical epics and science-fiction films in the 1950s. Disaster films even became their own genre in the 1970s. Films like *Airport* and *Earthquake* realistically portrayed disasters as the central part of the movie, all aided by technological improvements in sound, visuals, and special effects. The genre was very popular in the 1970s and early 1980s and has seen a resurgence since the mid 1990s (Campbell 2008, 428). These films would further focus public attention onto disasters.

This attention would be facilitated by increased scientific knowledge of disasters and better technology. Researchers began to focus on natural disasters and reducing vulnerability to disasters beginning in the 1950s and 1960s (Svenson 2009, 178). This followed research done during World War II examining death and damages from war and technological disasters. The “Chicago School” of disaster research would focus on mitigation techniques like creating evacuation plans and risk mapping. Works like Rachel Carson’s *Silent Springs* (1962) would focus attention, both academic and public, on issues like environmental damage and pollution, and help start the environmental movement (180).

In 1967, the Weather Bureau became the National Weather Service. It was no longer part of the Department of Commerce; instead, the National Weather Service would become part of the newly created National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in 1970 (Campbell 2008, 347). The NOAA would expand its capacity through better computer technology, radar, satellites, and communication systems in the ensuing decades. The 1970s saw the initiation of projects by the National Severe Storms Laboratory and the development of the Doppler radar (NOAA 2009). These technological changes have allowed for better forecasting and warning systems. The 1980s would see the advent of research on topics like global warming and the 1990s would be designated the “International Decade for Natural Disasters Reduction” by the United Nations (Svenson 2009, 180).

Disasters would also impact further involvement by demonstrating inadequacies in response. Mary Comerio, a disaster scholar, argues: “every few years, a new disaster demonstrated a particular need. That need would be met with a new program or special funds. Each time, the programs would be carried forward to the next event” (Olasky 2006, 38). For example, the federal government began to play a larger role in rehabilitation following the 1964 Alaskan earthquake. Congress passed legislation which allowed federal funds to be used to help pay off mortgages for the earthquake’s victims, a practice which would continue for future disasters (FEMA 2007, 11).

In addition to establishing these precedents in new types of relief, new types of disasters were added to the original list from the Disaster Act of 1950. The original list included floods, droughts, fires, hurricanes, earthquakes, and storms. Politicians in areas affected by disasters not included on the list pressured the government to provide relief

for that event. This would eventually lead to the addition of tornadoes, high water, wind-driven waters, tidal waves, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, landslides, mudslides, snowstorms, and explosions (Olasky 2006, 38).

IV. Increased Role in Disasters

The result of these factors was an increased role for the federal government in disasters. Much of this legislation has focused on rehabilitation over response: “Since 1950 all disaster acts...endorsed a division of function that charged the federal government with greater responsibility for rehabilitation and left most immediate aid to local and voluntary agencies” (Foster 2005, 143). This may be due the fact that the second half of the 20th century has seen a decline in deaths from natural disasters; this decline actually started in the 1930s (Steinberg 2006, 171-173). The decline was due to a multitude of factors such as less major disasters striking heavily-populated efforts, stricter building codes leading to more disaster-resistant buildings, and better forecasting/advanced warning systems. However, damages from disasters continue to increase due to continued urbanization and more people living in disaster-prone areas (Steinberg 2006, 82; Foster 2005, 143; Platt 1999). The result has been an emphasis on the federal government’s responsibility for rehabilitation over response.

Legislation has been passed to add specific provisions since the original Disaster Act of 1950. Areas that have been addressed include: emergency housing, the repair of higher education facilities, debris removal, the distribution of food coupons, unemployment compensation, temporary housing and relocation, funding for legal aid,

and mental health counseling. Legislation also created federal agencies to deal with disasters.

Legislation has been passed to add on to the categories of those eligible for public assistance. The 1950 made local government facilities eligible for repair or temporary replacement; state government facilities were added by PL 87-502 in 1962. PL 89-769 in 1966 added “higher-educational facilities” and authorized the federal government to reimburse state or local governments for work done to repair or restore damaged public facilities. Highways or roads that were not previously supported by federal aid were eligible for grants that would cover 50% of repair costs with the 1969 PL 91-79; the Department of Transportation was in charge of repairing highways or roads that were previously supported by federal aid. PL 91-606 in 1970 created grants that would cover up to 100% of the costs that were incurred repairing or replacing public facilities, as long as the repairs/ new buildings met the necessary building codes. PL 92-209 made private non-profit medical facilities eligible for grants. The Disaster Relief Act of 1974 expanded the definition of public facilities to include educational and recreational buildings and non-profits that carried out the same work. It also allowed localities to use up to 90% of the estimated costs for repairing/ rebuilding public facilities to build new facilities. The bill also created new requirements. State and local governments applying for disaster grants were now required to take necessary steps to mitigate damages from future disasters and also to have insurance. PL 100-707 in 1988 required the federal government to provide at least 75% assistance in debris removal and repairing public facilities; reimbursement was authorized for the costs incurred administering federal aid and assistance; and required that state and local governments participate in the National Flood

Insurance Program to be eligible for federal aid in repairing public facilities located in flood zones (GAO 1996, 53-54).

Other bills were passed covering other areas of disasters. In 1961 President Kennedy delegated to the director of the Office of Emergency Preparedness the responsibility of coordinating all federal disaster relief activities. Congress would appropriate funds for the OEP annually and the OEP would use these funds to reimburse government agencies for disaster relief actions. The OEP was also able to direct any federal agency to any type of relief service such as providing equipment, supplies, food, or loans. In addition, the OEP was responsible for dispersing funds for emergency repairs and the reconstruction of public facilities. The Department of Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965 created HUD as a cabinet level agency, which would also play a role in providing assistance, in the form of temporary housing, for disaster victims.

The 1968 Federal Flood Insurance offered new flood protection to homeowners. Through the act, the federal government offers federally-subsidized flood insurance to citizens living in flood-prone areas, provided the communities they lived in adopted regulations about the floodplain (Steinberg 2006, 103).

The Disaster Relief Act of 1969 created the Federal Coordinating Officer. This individual was appointed by the president and was responsible for the management of Federal disaster relief.

In December 1970 President Nixon signed into law the Disaster Relief Act of 1970. Nixon stated in his signing statement that the bill

establishes a permanent, comprehensive program to extend emergency relief and necessary assistance to individuals, organizations, businesses, and States and local communities suffering from major disasters. It also strengthens the administration and coordination of Federal disaster assistance effort.⁶²

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act of 1974, similar to the 1970 Disaster Relief Act, addressed the issue of presidential discretion. This Act allowed the president to either declare a catastrophe to be an emergency or a major disaster. The classification determined the amount of federal aid that will available for relief. More funds were usually available for situations that were designated as major disasters. Like the 1970 Act, the governor had to certify the situation. In this case, the governor had to determine that state resources would not be sufficient enough to adequately respond and thus need federal assistance.

The act also accomplished several other things. It created the Individuals and Households Grant Program, it established a State Coordinating Officer to work jointly with FCO, established a partnership between federal and state disaster relief operations, and gave support to Tribal resources. The act attempted to expand disaster relief beyond the state and local government to individuals and families.

The National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Act of 1977 created the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program. This was the first federal act to focus on reducing earthquake losses (Platt 1999, 80).

By the mid 1970s, the federal government had assumed the leading role in disaster relief. 50 federal agencies, bureaus, and offices were directly involved, including all of the cabinet departments except (GAO 1996, 4). The government had increased its

⁶² Nixon, Richard. "Statement on Signing the Disaster Relief Act of 1970." 31 December 1970. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2875>.

share of disaster from 1% prior to the 1950 Disaster Act to over 70% (Platt 1999, 23). State and local governments no longer focused on disasters. A survey of state and local politicians in the 1970s by Wright and Rossi (1981) found that “natural disasters are placed down towards the bottom of the list of problems that are pressing for solution” (65).

V. FEMA

Rehabilitation, as stated earlier, has been the emphasis over response for the federal government. Most immediate response is carried out by local agencies and voluntary organizations. However, the federal government has increasingly played a role in this area. Six different agencies, as mentioned above, have been responsible for federal disaster relief since 1950 (Platt 1999, 15). Other groups have also been involved. Over 100 federal agencies would be involved with disasters at its highest peak as well as the Army, Public Health agencies, the National Guard, local civil defense organizations, and other state/ local agencies (Foster 2005, 135-136).

The Red Cross would continue to play a role in disaster relief; however, that role would shrink. The Red Cross, with the passage of the Federal Disaster Act and the assignment of disaster relief to official federal agencies (first the HHFA and then a series of civil defense agencies), was no longer solely in charge of federal disaster relief. The organization did continue to play in responding to disasters: the Alaska earthquake (1964); Hurricane Agnes (1972); the Loma Prieta Earthquake (1989); Hurricane Andrew (1992); Mississippi River Flooding (1993); Hurricanes Charles, Frances, Ivan, and

Jeanne (2004); the Southeastern Asian Tsunami (2004); and Hurricane Katrina (2005) (Red Cross 2009).

It also expanded its efforts to other areas. The organization aided in the relief effort in Europe after WWII; began a National Blood Program in 1948; aided Vietnam War refugees; began doing research on AIDS, stem cells, bone marrow, and in the biomedical field in the 1980s; helped in the relief effort for the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995; and started the Measles Initiative in Africa in 2002 (Red Cross 2010).

Federal response to disasters started modestly in the 1950s and expanded over time. In 1953 a category 5 tornado hit central Massachusetts, killing 94 and the area suffered \$53 million dollars in damages. The Federal Civil Defense Administration, in one of its first disaster relief missions, used air force cargo planes to send in cots and bedding and 200 federally owned trailers were sent in (Campbell 2008, 303). In 1964 a 9.2 magnitude occurred off Alaska, killing 154, causing millions in damages, and triggered tidal waves throughout the region. The Office of Emergency Planning, the Army, civil defense organizations, and other federal agencies responded with food, clothing, shelter, and medical assistance for the victims (FEMA 2007, 11; Foster 2005, 137-139).

In 1972 a flood devastated the West Virginia hollow of Buffalo Creek. Most of the homes in the valley were damaged by the flood and many were destroyed. Four thousand of the five thousand residents were left homeless. One hundred and twenty-five people were killed (Erikson 1976).

Response came in the form of the National Guard, nearby hospitals, the Civil Defense, the Red Cross, and the Salvation Army. The Office of Emergency Preparedness authorized twenty million dollars for emergency relief. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers came in to help remove the debris. Most of the refugees remained in the valley and the U.S. Department of Urban Development was in charge of finding temporary housing. HUD supplied seven hundred mobile homes, sheltering twenty-five hundred people (Erikson 1976).

This disaster demonstrate one of the major problems with federal disaster response: the response continued to remain fragmented. The involvement of so many agencies in disaster response led to inefficiency. Often the same programs would be carried out by different agencies or at different levels of government. This led to the National Governor's Association lobbying the president to condense disaster work. President Carter responded by creating the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 1979 to condense the fragment disaster agencies and works. FEMA was given the power to coordinate planning and preparation, response and recovery (FEMA 2009).

The Stafford Act of 1988 further expanded FEMA's scope. The legislation created a public assistance program to be administered by FEMA, not Congress. The program provided aid for repairing or restoring public facilities or non-profits, including government buildings and equipment, non-federal aid roads and bridges, water control systems, parks and recreational facilities, public utilities. The assistance usually covers 75% or more of costs. The aid can be used debris removal; emergency protective measures, such as search and rescue, providing temporary transportation and communication facilities, and demolition of structures that could pose a problem to

safety; and permanent restorations, meaning restoring the building to its state before the disaster or making improvements to prevent future disaster damages (GAO 2006, 10).

The organization in its early years was “unwieldy” and “ill-equipped” to response to the new task (Sharples 2008, 1). It faced problems from the beginning. The large number of political appointments to top positions (three times that of normal agencies) and perception serving in the agency was a lower prestige position led to a large number of inexperienced workers (Lewis 2009, 9-10). No director until 1992 had any previous emergency management experience (13). There was often a revolving door at top level positions due to the low prestige and nature of being a political appointee (often served less than two years). Positions often went unfilled for long time periods; George H. W. Bush took 19 months to appoint a director (13). Those that did serve faced allegations of misdoings. Director Luis Guiffrida resigned in 1985 amid allegations of fraud (PBS 2005; Sharples 2008). In 1983 the number three official resigned due to allegations that he used \$170,000 dollars of the agency’s funds to renovate a building in which he was planning to reside. The executive director was removed in 1992 after it was found that he had tried to force a gay employee to make a list of all gay employees working for the agency (Lewis 1999, 13).

The agency was also divided in its focus. FEMA brought together a large and diverse group with different experiences: military, firefighters, emergency responders. As a result, there was littler cooperation and no clear mission. There was struggle between those who wanted to focus on civil/ national defense issues and those that wanted to focus on responding to natural disasters (10). Money and personnel were split between the two projects with little interaction between the two (complicated by the fact that work

done on the civil defense side was often classified as national security and thus could not be shared with non-classified personnel working on other projects). President Reagan instructed the agency to focus on responding to a nuclear attack (Sharples 2008).

FEMA was also plagued by its oversight. Five different Senate committees confirmed the appointees and twenty had jurisdiction over its programs. Each of the committee had different visions and expectations for the agency (Lewis 1999, 12).

As a result of these factors, FEMA developed a poor reputation during the 1980s. It became known more for its scandals and unqualified political appointees. A bad relationship existed career employees and appointees and surveys of employees showed that a majority had low morale (13). However, the agency did not face a major disaster during most of the decade.

FEMA would be tested by two major natural disasters in 1989. Hurricane Hugo hit Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Carolinas in September of that year and caused \$13.6 billion in damages. FEMA's response proved to be slow and inept (Lewis 1999, Sharples 2008). Seven of the eight top positions had not yet been appointed yet. Bureaucratic red tape slowed down the response. The governor of Puerto Rico's request for help was returned by mail because he forgot to check one of the sections; this held up aid for several days. Food and clothing took up to six days to reach some areas; there were also delays in aid for individuals caused by the requirement of filling out detailed request forms (14). FEMA was heavily criticized for their response. Senator Fritz Hollings stated that the agency was the "sorriest bunch of bureaucratic jackasses I've ever known" (Sharples 2008, 1).

The Loma Prieta Earthquake occurred a month later. The 6.9 magnitude earthquake caused \$6 billions in damages to northern California. The response was better but still slow and plagued with bureaucratic problems. The agency was overwhelmed with the numerous request for aid (15). Congressman Mineta, discussing FEMA's response to the disaster, stated that it "could screw up a two-car parade" (Sharples 2008, 1).

FEMA faced continued criticism in the early 1990s. FEMA and the government were criticized for wasteful spending and for disaster legislation laden with pork (Olasky 2006). In 1992, the Congressional Research Service labeled federal disaster relief as "an entitlement program" that creates "a potentially expensive arrangement" (Olasky 2006, 42).

The 1990's saw a series of major disasters affect the U.S. In 1992, Hurricane Andrew hit Florida. Andrew was a category 4 hurricane, with winds up to 142mph. 100,000 homes were damaged and 30,000 were destroyed. There was about 30 billion dollars worth of damage, only 15.5 of which was insured. The insurance companies involved were facing financial trouble due to insurance claims. As in the case of 9/11, the government stepped in to bail out the floundering industry. The government covered the liabilities of the failed insurance companies and ensured payments to policyholders (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, 1999).

The government was criticized in their initial response to this disaster. FEMA was disparaged for its inadequate response to the disaster. Critics charged that FEMA was not prepared for the storm (Dyson 2007). Miami-Dade County officials went on television

and criticized the president for not doing enough and arguing that he did not care (Olasky 2006, 42). FEMA was criticized for its late arrival (once again, the agency waited to respond until a formal request was made by the governor of Florida; this led to a four day delay in aid) and insufficient aid (Lewis 2009, 16).

FEMA's performance in the early 90's demonstrated many of the agency's problems: "hurricanes Hugo, Andrew, and Iniki revealed the flaws in FEMA's system and process of responding to emergencies" (Dyson 2007, 13). It also led to wide-spread criticism and calls for changes by politicians and the press. There were Congressional investigations and even demands by some to do away the agency.

As a result of FEMA's inadequate response to the series of disasters, FEMA was re-staffed by President Clinton (Dyson 2007). James Lee Witt was appointed as the new director. Witt was the first director of FEMA with previous emergency management experience; he was the former head of Arkansas' emergency response.

Witt pledged to do better. He took a look at reports by the GAO and other recommendations and implemented multiple changes. Witt reduced political appointments and played an active role in selecting appointees, choosing appointees with previous experience. He also shifted the focus of the agency away from civil defense (which had been the priority under Reagan and Bush) to an all-hazards approach, focusing on responding to all types of disasters and emergencies. Several other changes were also initiated: Witt began to put personnel on the ground before hurricanes hit; shifted resources to mitigation, response, and recovery; used grants to build relationships with those at local and state level; improved communication and relations within the

agency; made response quicker and more efficient; created an improved public relations system including surveys of disaster victims to find out what could be done better; informed the public about different programs of FEMA; worked with all key legislators involved; and created correspondence units to eliminate delay in request by governors (Lewis 2009 18-19).

The updated agency faced two major disasters in the next several years in the Northridge earthquake and the Midwest floods in 1993. In 1993, the Mississippi River overflowed. 84,000 square kilometers were flooded; 10,000 homes were destroyed; thousands were left homeless; and 50 people died. In total, there was over 15 billion dollars worth of damage (Campbell 2008, 398-399). FEMA's response was quicker and better organized than in the past, and received mostly praise from politicians and the press (Lewis 2009, 21).

The Northridge Earthquake happened in 1994. The quake was 6.7 on the Richter scale. Over 20,000 people were displaced by the earthquake. Estimated losses from the disaster were nearly 44 billion dollars. Once again, FEMA was praised for their quick (personnel were on the ground within ninety minutes of the earthquake) response to the disaster (23). FEMA processed 681,000 applications for assistance and dispersed 11 billion dollars for individual and public assistance. HUD also stepped in to provide temporary housing and housing grants (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 1999, 104).

One problem in the Northridge disaster, and the majority of disasters, has been the disproportionate impact on the poor and minorities (Peacock et al., 1997). Those who are most the most vulnerable and have the most difficulties in attempting to get recovery aid

are traditionally marginalized groups: “lower-income African Americans, female-headed households, lower-income elders, farm-workers, marginalized Latino ethnic groups, and Haitian immigrants” (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 1999, 108).

In the case of the Northridge earthquake, the poor, mostly comprised of Hispanics, were the ones who the most vulnerable to the disaster (the poor could not afford to have their houses meet building codes meant to prevent damage from disaster) and also the ones who received the least amount of aid. Much of this has to do with barriers in the actual recovery system: language barriers, complex recovery program requirements, the necessity of carefully documented losses and expenses, and fear of being deported even for documented victims. Also, as in other disasters, there was a general reluctance of poor Hispanic victims to even attempt to receive aid. Some of this can be attributed to a lack of knowledge and experience with the system but much of it can be attributed to constantly being at the bottom of the power structure (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, 1999).

Nevertheless, the newly re-staffed FEMA was mostly praised for its work in the 90s under Witt including its response to the 1993 California wildfire, the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing, and severe storms in 1997 (Lewis 2009, 23). The agency “enhanced their reputation for technical sophistication and efficient response to natural disaster” (Dyson 2007, 46). FEMA was praised for its strong leadership, skilled disaster relief professionals, and emergency management degree programs. The organization was also elevated to a cabinet level position in 1996 by Clinton.

Major changes occurred under President Bush. Witt, despite being praised by Bush in his run for president, was replaced with Joe Albaugh, Bush's campaign manager. Albaugh had no previous experience in disaster management. Bush also increased the number of political appointees from 27 to 38 (Lewis 2009, 27). At the same time, many conservatives, including Albaugh, criticized FEMA's spending and questioned whether the agency should even exist. Albaugh was replaced by Michael Brown, who also had no prior disaster management experience; in fact, only one top-level position had any prior experience (28).

Deep budget cuts occurred, mostly in mitigation programs (Lewis 2009, 29). Bush also cut the federal share of disaster funding from 75% to 50% in 2001 (Olasky 2006, 45). This drew sharp criticism from members of Congress whose states are affected by disasters. John Edwards stated: "The disaster response program is critically important... You can't just put this burden on the state government. They just can't carry the burden themselves" (Olasky 2006, 45).

The organization was praised for its initial response to the terrorist attacks on 9/11. However, FEMA was criticized for its recovery efforts (Lewis 2009, 29). September 11th also impacted FEMA's status. The agency was placed under Homeland Security and lost its cabinet level position. This was part of a shift of its focus away from an all hazards approach to a focus on terrorism, reverting back to its original emphasis on national security/ civil defense.

There were several effects of this move. First, the number of political appointees was increased again. However, due to its lower position, FEMA lost its prestige and

many potential workers chose to serve in other agencies (31). Many of the “skilled” personnel left (Dyson 2007, 52). This was particularly problematic as many of those who left were middle-level management, which Carpenter (2001) argues is necessary for an agency to be successful. Morale within the organization fell again and the relationship between FEMA and state emergency agencies was weakened.

FEMA was further weakened in the ensuing years. The agency was “gutted” and made into a “weakened response and recovery agency rather than an all hazards preparedness and response agency... FEMA lost its preparedness functions, personnel, and budget” (Lewis 2009, 33). Quick turnover resulted in inexperienced leaders and personnel, poorly trained and funded, and unprepared. This would be demonstrated most visibly in the response to Hurricane Katrina.

VI. Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Katrina, which impacted the Gulf Coast in late August 2005, was the costliest natural disaster in U.S. The damage to the Gulf Coast from Hurricane Katrina was substantial. Eighty percent of New Orleans was flooded. 55% percent of the population received four plus feet of water to their houses and severe damages. Eleven hundred people in the city were killed. It is estimated that at least one-third of homes must be demolished. Two hundred and eighty-five thousand people were left homeless. An estimated 250,000 houses were lost in the state of Louisiana. Mississippi was also deeply affected. Sixty percent of the state was left as a catastrophic disaster area; 200,000 people were displaced; and 230 people were killed (McCarthy et al., 2006).

The region suffered large financial losses. It is estimated there was at least 170 billion dollars worth of damage, 100 billion dollars worth of which is uninsured (McCarthy et al., 2006). The economy was severely impacted. Thousands of jobs were lost. Hundreds of thousands were left homeless, unemployed, and in poverty.

The federal government was highly criticized for both its preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina. Storm forecasters were able to project within 15 miles where the storm would land and within 10 mph how powerful it would be. The predictions gave government officials 56 hours to properly prepare and evacuate; the evacuation was not called for (Townsend 2006).

Flooding was reported the night before landfall. The 350-mile levee system that was designed to protect the city failed. Many were overrun with water or breached. Many of the pumping stations in the city also failed. The National Weather Service received a report that the levees and floodwalls had been breached at 9:12 am on August 29th and issued a flash flood warning. Reports of the levees being breached were ignored by the government, a costly mistake. The failure of the levee system would lead to 80% of the city being covered in up to 20 feet of water (Townsend 2006).

On December 14, 2005 the U.S. House of Representatives released “A Failure of Initiative: Final Report of the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for the Response to Hurricane Katrina.” It was highly critical of the government. The commission found:

the levees did fail and the government and other organizations failed in turn-in many, many ways. It remains difficult to understand could government could respond so ineffectively to a disaster that was anticipated for years, and for which specific dire warnings had been issued for days. The crisis was not only predictable, it was predicted” (Government Printing Office, 2006, 1).

The commission reached multiple conclusions. There was a failure at all levels of government. The National Response Plan for disasters was not met. The levees were not built for most severe hurricanes, a fact that the government was aware of and did nothing about. The governor and mayor delayed ordering an evacuation. The Secretary of Homeland Security should have acted sooner. The White House ignored critical information and earlier involvement would have resulted in more effective response. DHS and FEMA lacked trained and experienced personnel. There were massive communication problems. The Department of Defense and DHS's coordination was not effective. The Coast Guard, National Guard, and Army Corps of Engineers were criticized for slow and inadequate response. The report was critical of hospitals, nursing care facilities, the VA, and law enforcement. FEMA's overall weakness overwhelmed its ability to provide emergency shelter and temporary housing. There were inadequate local and state shelters. The government ignored the storm projections (Government Printing Office 2006).

Critics have pointed to the Bush administration's afore-mentioned handling of FEMA as a major cause of the failure of the disaster response (Dyson 2007; Hartman and Squires, 2006). FEMA, after being criticized for inadequate disaster responses in the early 1990s, had been re-staffed and praised for its strong leadership, skilled disaster relief professionals, and emergency management degree programs in the mid and late 90s (Dyson 2007).

FEMA, though, began to focus on terrorism rather than natural disasters after 9/11. The agency was reorganized under Homeland Security and was no longer a cabinet level agency. The agency was also placed under the direction of political appointees, like

Director Michael Brown, with little or no previous disaster management experience. Many of the “skilled” personnel left (Dyson, 2007, 52) and deep budget cuts occurred. All these things came to a head in Katrina.

It is important to note that the federal government is not the only branch of the government that has been held responsible. Disaster response is normally a bottom-up process: local-state-federal (Schneider 1995). Both the reports by Congress’s select commission and the White House found that the local and state governments failed as well. Local governments were overwhelmed, Governor Blanco and Mayor Nagin delayed action, and public agencies failed (Schneider 2005). Reports by the Government Office of Accountability also noted how ill-prepared local and state government agencies were.

Many Americans agreed with the findings of these reports. Public opinion polls demonstrated that a majority of Americans held the government responsible for the disaster and thought the federal response was inadequate. A September 8th, 2001, CBS poll found that 58% of Americans disapproved of President Bush’s handling of the response to Katrina, 65% thought his response was too slow, 77% felt the federal government’s response was inadequate, 80% felt the government did not respond as fast as it could, 70% felt FEMA’s response was inadequate, and 70% felt the response of state and local governments was inadequate (Roberts 2005).

Allegations of discrimination were also made. The victims of Katrina victims were disproportionately poor minorities as New Orleans was 67% African American before Katrina (Bartels 2006; Macedo and Karpowitz, 2006). Critics have argued that race and class played a role in the slow, inadequate response to Katrina and may have

played a role in the decision not to establish a compensation program similar to the ones for the 9/11 victims (Dyson 2007; Hartman and Squires, 2006).

VII. International Disaster Relief

America has continued to aid foreign countries stricken by disasters, and this has continued to be shaped by economic and foreign policy considerations along with humanitarian goals (Foster 2005; Margesson 2005; Drury et al, 2005). In the early post-war era, aid was used to help rebuild Europe and fight the spread of the Soviets. Foreign relief operations were improved by technological developments (such as improved aviation) and the increased presence of the American military worldwide (Foster 2005, 147).

Congress began to pass legislation which was similar to the changes made to domestic disaster policy in the 1950s. The Agricultural and Trade Development and Assistance Act 1954 authorized the president to send surplus food to countries suffering through a famine or other emergency (150). The 1958 Mutual Security Act created a contingency fund to finance the relief of countries going through a disaster (151). Both of the acts were provisions of larger security/ trade legislation.

A series of government agencies were designated to be in charge of foreign disaster aid during this time period. First was the Foreign Operations Administration, followed by the International Cooperation Administration, and then the Operations Coordinating Board. The Operations Coordinating Board, part of the Executive Office of the President, created a special commission to be in charge of the area and made guidelines under which the Department of State would make recommendations for the president, who had

final approval over relief missions (151). There were, however, limited disaster relief missions in the late 50s (151).

This relief expanded in the early 60s. In 1961 Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act (PL 87-195). The act created a more comprehensive foreign disaster policy and established a fund to cover relief efforts (155). The same year, the State Department created the Agency for International Development and gave it the responsibility of coordinating relief (164). The State Department, Defense Department, and USAID made a decision in 1963 to allow ambassadors in any affected country to spend up to \$25,000 dollars without the approval of the State Department; this amount has been expanded to \$100,000 dollars currently (Margesson 2005, 5).

There was an increase in relief missions and aid in the 1960s and 70s. Disaster aid was sent to allies in the Middle East and Asia to support their efforts against communism and developing nations in Africa and Asia (Foster 2005, 155).

One problem, similar to domestic disaster relief, was coordination. There were many agencies and voluntary organizations involved and often duplication of aid (Foster 2005, 172; National Research Council 1978, 8-10). USAID responded by creating the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance in 1972. The organization helped to shape policy; reported to Congress; coordinated relief efforts by government agencies and voluntary groups; was in charge of planning, training, and working with foreign governments.

Aid in the 1980s and 1990s continued to be shaped by foreign policy and economic considerations. Reagan sent \$500 million dollars to famine-stricken Ethiopia in

1983; part of the motivation was in interest in undermining the socialist regime.

Similarly, \$300 million dollars was sent to El Salvador after a 1986 earthquake, partially to help the government fight against communist guerillas. The aid also opened up economic opportunities for American business and led to lowered trade barriers. Clinton sent aid to Haiti in the early 90s for famine relief and to help weaken support for the government of Lieutenant General Raoul Cedras (Painter 2010).

Drury et al. (2005) examined the impact of foreign and domestic policy on foreign disaster aid from 1964-1995. The authors found the US is more likely give disaster aid if a country is an ally, democratic, and wealthier (466-468). Domestic factors also impacted foreign aid: the US was more likely to give aid if the deficit was lower, media saliency of the event was higher, damage in the US from the event was low, and deaths in the US from the event were high (469).

Spending would continue to grow. From 1964-1995, the US spent an average of \$151 million dollars a year on foreign disaster aid (Drury et al, 2005, 455). This figure does not include expenditures on relief operations by the government. From 1968-2002 the government sent aid on average to 28 disasters a year (Eisensee and Stromberg, 2007, 2). Spending increased in the 2000's. The US spent \$1.4 billion on aid in 2002 (6). That number would double by 2004 (Margesson 2005, 2), driven up by large expenditures like the \$800 million dollars in aid to victims of the 2004 Tsunami (Painter 2010).

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

I. Introduction

The federal disaster policy of current times can only be understood by placing it in historical context. Similarities and differences between the past and the present must be examined to understand why policy is the way that it is and how policy will change in the future. Federal disaster policy has expanded rapidly since the passage of the Disaster Act of 1950. However, only by examining how what policy was in the past, how it changed, and what led to these changes can we fully understand it.

Disaster policy has been an evolving policy much as has been the problem of natural disasters itself. Natural disasters were not a major problem in the early history of this country. America had a small, agrarian population which mostly lived in non-disaster-prone areas. In addition, most Americans believed in a limited federal government. Even if the public did want a larger involvement by the federal government, it did not have the capacity or resources to respond. Aiding disaster victims was instead left up to non-governmental organizations.

America was involved in some ways with disasters, driven mostly by economic arguments. Relief was granted to some disaster victims, usually merchants, and usually came in the form of remission of taxes. The federal government also became involved in building levees along the Mississippi River. Economic reasons were behind both of these: advocates pushed for a larger role by arguing that these actions would help the nation's economy.

The role of the federal government would expand throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The changing nature of natural disasters was a major factor. Americans were

increasingly more vulnerable disasters. The population greatly expanded over the past two hundred plus years. The growing population shifted to more disaster-prone areas. Industrialization and urbanization occurred in the later half of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century. All this led to increased injuries, deaths, and damages from disasters.

Natural disasters became more and more of a problem, and almost impossible to ignore. The growth of the media put more attention on them, allowing some to become focusing events. More was known about them and the belief that disasters were “acts of God” disappeared.

More demand was placed upon the government to intervene. Economics continued to be a major argument for this larger role. However, the very role of government itself also changed. A belief in a strictly limited government and federalism eroded and instead was replaced by the belief that government should play a much larger role in providing for citizens’ well-being.

Increased resources also were important. The administrative and welfare states grew over time. The federal government gradually developed the capacity and resources to respond to disasters: first through the Army, then the Red Cross, and later executive departments. Disasters became too big of a problem for private organizations to handle.

The result was an expanded disaster policy in response, relief, recovery, and mitigation. Understanding this evolution and the important factors allows us to view the Disaster Act of 1950 not as an unheralded expansion of the federal government into a

new area. The dichotomy of dividing disaster policy into pre and post 1950 is a false one. Instead, it is a major step in an expansion that is understandable.

II. The Future

Natural disasters will continue to be a problem for Americans in the future. Vulnerability to disaster has continued to increase. More Americans are living in disaster prone-areas and these areas are more urbanized, leading to the potential for greater death and destruction (Platt 1999).

Disasters have also increased recently. The 2005 hurricane season saw a record 28 storms; the previous high was 21. Fifteen of these storms become hurricanes, four of which were category 5's. There was over a hundred billion dollars worth of damage and 2200 people died (Dyson 2007, 351).

The increase in the number and severity of hurricanes has been blamed on global warming. Studies have shown that sea temperatures have risen approximately one degree (Dyson 2007, 351) and global temperatures have risen 0.74 degrees Celsius in the past century (Smil 2008, 177). During the same time period, the total power of hurricanes has more than doubled (Dyson 2007, 351). Maximum winds have gone up an average of 15% and storms are lasting 60% longer. Research conducted by the Georgia Institute of Technology concluded that "global data indicate a 30 year trend toward more frequent and intense hurricanes" (Dyson 2007, 351).

Global warming is expected to increase even more in the future. Experts are predicting a change in an increase in temperatures by 2-4 degrees Celsius by 2100 (IPCC 2007); some think it could increase up to 8 degrees Celsius (Smil 2008, 180). This

increase will further impact disasters. It is believed that global warming will lead to an increase in the magnitude and frequency of natural disasters (Nott 2008, 266). Global warming will lead to melting ice caps, increased flooding due to rising sea levels, increased coastal erosion, and stronger storm surges (Woo 1999, 270; Smil 2008, 180-186). It is also expected that this will lead to more powerful El Nino's which will cause higher rainfall, major flooding in the Southern US and drought in the Western US (Smil 2008, 180-186). There are also concerns other than global warming: potential collisions with a near earth-object (such as an asteroid), an eruption of a super-volcano (most dangerous one in the United States is in Yellowstone), and the near 100% certainty of another pandemic (Smil 2008, 180-186).

More people worldwide have been affected by disasters in recent years and are expected to be affected in the future. During the 1990s an average of 211 million people were affected by disasters; this century the average has increased to 256 million people (Svenson 2009, 156).

Costs have also gone up world-wide. Costs of damages from natural disasters doubles or triples nearly every decade (USGS 2007, 1). These costs are expected to rise: "current trends point to increasing number of hurricanes making landfall, more destructive wildfires, and an increasing number of people moving into coastal and other high-risk areas"; this will lead to greater "risk and vulnerability to natural hazards and disaster relief costs rising" (1).

The result of all this is disasters worldwide will increase, resulting in more injuries, deaths, and damages. In the United States, a major disaster could have a

substantial impact. A multi-disciplinary group of scientists known as the Working Group on California Earthquake Possibilities put together the “Uniform California Earthquake Rupture Forecast” (UCERF) in 2008. The forecast estimated that there is a 99% chance of being hit with an earthquake of 6.7 or higher within the next 30 years (Science Daily 2008). This type of disaster would cause tens of billions in damages and could kill hundreds or thousands. Scientists working for the California Geological Survey in 2003 looked at the potential damages of a future earthquake in California; they estimated that a repeat of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake would cost \$54 billion dollars in damages (Rowshandel et. al, 2003). As stated in Chapter 2, a repeat of the 1811-12 New Madrid earthquake is also expected within the next 50 years; this also would cause billions in damages and kill hundreds or thousands (USGS 1995). Lastly, the recent example of Hurricane Katrina demonstrates just how much of an impact a major disaster can have upon this country.

There are also global implications for disasters as well. Katrina showed how a natural disaster in the US can affect the rest of the world:

disruption of oil and gas production in the Gulf of Mexico, which helped drive up the world price of oil; worldwide insurance and reinsurance implications of the major loss (more than 40 billion); and a tarnished image of the United States as billions of people saw televised images of distress and devastation with a tardy and limited response from government (Smil 2008, 6).

Disasters outside of the US can similarly affect us, especially due to the inter-connected global economic market.

Lastly, the US continues to be financially involved in the relief effort and sending of foreign aid to disaster-stricken countries. The USAID gives aid to nearly 20% of all disasters worldwide, for an average of 28 per year, and average spending of over \$1.5

billion dollars (Eisensee and Stromber, 2007, 6). This figure does not count the millions spent on relief operations carried out by government agencies like the military. An increase in the number and intensity of disasters will lead to more demand for aid from this country.

The question to be asked then is what will be the guiding disaster policy for these future disasters, both foreign and domestic.

III. The Welfare State and Disaster Spending

There have been attempts in the past several decades to shrink the welfare state. The 1970s and 1980s saw a general decline in support for governmental assistance programs (Baggette, Shapiro, & Jacobs, 1995; Shapiro, Patterson, Russell & Young, 1987). Nixon cut social spending, economic crises in the late 70s during Ford and Carter's administration saw a further decline, and Reagan proceeded to directly try to gut the New Deal and Great Society: "The Reagan administration ostensibly was committed to reestablishing family values in America, promoting self-reliance, and advancing the notion that welfare would serve as only a family's last resort and temporary safety net" (Koven et al. 1969, 269).

A number of welfare programs were also cut in the 1990s. AFDC was also replaced by TANF. This was all part of a call to get rid of so-called entitlement programs. The new TANF program placed limits on cash benefits and required recipients to start working within two years.

There have been multiple reasons offered for this assault on the welfare state. Orloff (2001) argues that the replacement of AFDC with TANF was gender-motivated

and was designed to eliminate full time care-giving. Gilens (1996) and others posit that opposition to welfare programs is racially-motivated.

There are also several other reasons. America has a much less-developed welfare state: “the United States has had a relatively less-developed public system of supports for the working-aged population than has existed in other Western countries since at least the Second World War” (Orloff 1999, 142). America has not had a feudal past which has led to a weak union and a lack of a socialist party (Hartz 1955). Kingdon (1999) argues that path dependency explains the lack of strong social programs, like welfare, that other industrial nations have: our strong belief in limited government, our distrust of central government, our belief in a limited role for the government in the social welfare sphere, and our strong abhorrence of taxes, all resulting from events in the colonial path that have set us down a near irreversible path.

Another explanation is based upon constituency. Social welfare recipients are a weak constituency group. This group look criminals and the mentally ill are poorly represented and do not have politicians fighting on their behalf. This has resulted in “weak political support for welfare provision aside from Social Security, the one U.S. social program that covers almost the whole population” (Orloff 2001, 143). Democrats traditionally have favored social spending. However, they were “put in the unenviable position of defending a deeply flawed welfare program in order to defend poor people and a safety net” (154). This support comes at the risk of alienating and losing the support of “traditional working-class constituencies who are against perceived entitlement programs” (154).

This attack on the welfare state began during the Nixon administration and has been carried out aggressively by Presidents Reagan, H.W. Bush, and W. Bush. These administrations have been marked by the “rise of (neo)liberalism as an ideological and cultural force—a preference for private provisionism and for minimizing state interventions, reflected in pressures to keep taxes and social spending low” (143). The result has been a “popular antipathy” towards most welfare programs; public opinion polls in the mid-90s showed that majority of Americans favored welfare reform (154).

This strong reaction against most welfare programs, however, has not translated into less disaster spending by the federal government, despite the criticism discussed above. Disaster spending has proven to be resistant to spending cuts. For example, Reagan attempted to stiffen the criteria for disaster declarations and reduce the share of the federal government’s costs of disaster spending from 75% to 50%; this was proposed in 1986 but was met with fierce opposition from many members of Congress and other government officials (Olasky 2006, 41).

In fact, disaster spending has increased in recent years (Platt 1999) and looks to continue to increase in the future. Disaster declarations have steadily increased ever decade. The 1950’s had an average of 13.43; 60’s: 18.6; 70’s: 30.9; 80’s: 23.7; 90’s: 47; 00’s: 56.

“Disaster Declarations Per Year”

Year	# of Disaster Declarations	Year	# of Dec.’s	Year	# of Dec’s	Year	# of Dec.’s	Year	
1953	13	1965	25	1977	22	1989	31	2001	45

1954	17	1966	11	1978	25	1990	38	2002	49
1955	18	1967	11	1979	42	1991	43	2003	56
1956	16	1968	19	1980	23	1992	45	2004	68
1957	16	1969	29	1981	15	1993	32	2005	48
1958	7	1970	17	1982	24	1994	36	2006	52
1959	7	1971	17	1983	21	1995	32	2007	63
1960	12	1972	48	1984	34	1996	75	2008	75
1961	12	1973	46	1985	28	1997	44	2009	59
1962	22	1974	46	1986	28	1998	65		
1963	20	1975	38	1987	23	1999	50		
1964	25	1976	30	1988	11	2000	45		

(Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency 2010)

Disaster spending has also jumped dramatically. The federal government spent \$5 million dollars on disasters in 1950; that number had reached \$52 million by 1953 (Platt 1999, 23). The 1990s had average regular appropriations of \$300 million dollars (23). That number has increased to the billions in recent years.

Disaster costs also include supplemental appropriations. Supplemental appropriations include money allocated to FEMA for distribution under the Stafford Act and for other federal agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of Transportation (24). These numbers have increased dramatically. From 1988-1997 there was \$30.1 billion dollars appropriated in supplemental disaster legislation (24). There are other expenses that are not included: “on-budget disaster appropriations, subsidized loans and insurance payments, and other federal expenditures relating to disasters not pursuant to a disaster declaration” (26). In the past twenty years,

supplemental appropriations for disasters have totaled nearly \$250 billion dollars for thirty-three individual appropriations (Congressional Research Services 2008, 2). This comes out to an average of \$7.5 billion dollars per each appropriation and \$12.5 billion dollars per year. Over half of the total appropriations, \$130 billion dollars, was allocated for 2005 Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma (2).

The appropriation numbers continue to increase. In comparison to the \$250 billion dollars appropriated from 1989-2008, \$34 billion dollars was appropriated for the twenty year period (Platt 1999, 25). That is over seven times the amount in appropriations.

The 1995 Senate Task Force concluded that the federal government spent \$119 billion dollars in total disaster-related expenses from 1977-1993 (26). This comes out to an average of \$7 billion dollars per year. The 21st century has seen even higher spending. FEMA's Fiscal Year 2008 "Total Direct Expenditures or Obligations" was \$12.7 billion dollars (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). This does not include money allocated for disaster-related services/ programs carried out by other federal agencies and other supplemental appropriations.

IV. Reasons for High Spending

Federal disaster spending has continued to increase at the same time that welfare and other government programs have had spending cut. There are several possible explanations for this. One reason may be due to an increase in the number and intensity of disasters, as discussed above, and an increase in disaster damage. Another may be the changes in federal law. Legislation has added both the types of the disasters that are covered (i.e. tsunamis, snowstorms, and other disasters were added to the original list

covered under the 1950 Act), areas that are covered by federal spending (i.e. food coupons, counseling, debris removal, temporary housing), and compensation (i.e. expanding the definition of what is considered government-related property).

One reason has to do with the fact that Americans “have a tight linkage of benefits to employment” (Orloff 2001, 142). Americans are opposed to so-called entitlement programs like welfare because they give out benefits without the person working. They do support programs that lead to self-sufficiency (Cook 1979, Heclo 1986, Jaffe 1978, Gilens 1996).

Disaster relief has framed differently than entitlement programs. As discussed in this work, an argument made in favor of disaster relief has been based upon economics and employment. Disaster mitigation programs like levees on the Mississippi were supported because flooding would have a substantial impact on the nation’s economy. Disaster relief, as illustrated by the Charlestown Earthquake in 1886, has been supported as a means to temporarily help victims with the goal being able to return them to the workforce quicker.

Disaster relief is not seen as an entitlement program. Proponents have presented how sufferers of disasters are victims; they are not at fault for their status, unlike welfare recipients (Dauber 2003). Aid from the government is designed to get victims back on their feet and back to work. Disaster relief seen as entitlement programs, such as compensation for Hurricane Katrina victims, has been opposed.

The 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund, which provided over six billion dollars to 2,879 victims and families of victims of the terrorist attack-an average of over 2 million

dollars per claim-has been an exception to the rule (Lascher and Martin, 2008). Several factors may have contributed to this program's unique level of support: the potential lawsuits against the airlines, the special "deserving" status of the victims, the fund as a means to prevent the terrorists from achieving their goals, and the overwhelming public approval and positive media coverage.

The main argument behind the Fund was that it would serve as a "substitute for tort recovery" (Lascher and Martin, 2008, 148). The bill was designed to prevent large lawsuits against the Federal Airline Association or the Port Authority. Congress feared lawsuits against the airlines could cause a major national economic crisis even if there was not a ruling against the airlines (Sebok 2007; Lascher and Martin, 2008; Feinberg et al., 2004). The bill gave loan guarantees and financial protection to the airlines. It also discouraged lawsuits and limited the financial liability of the airlines. Finally it stipulated that lawsuits against the airlines and others associated with the disaster, like the owners of the World Trade Center, could only be pursued in federal courts. They could not be brought in local courts where a hometown jury and judges might be more sympathetic to the victims (Feinberg et al., 2004).

Legal factors contributed to a majority of victims choosing to participate in this program rather than pursuing lawsuits against the industries. Limited caps meant that victims were not likely to receive much money even if they did win in court. Cases could potentially drag on for years and would be costly. Also, attorneys would receive a large percentage of whatever money was won. The fund, on the other hand, was portrayed as an easier alternative. Liability did not have to be proven. The compensation process would be quick, efficient, and much more certain than the legal route. Victims and their

families could enter into the fund only if they agreed not to pursue lawsuits against the airlines, the World Trade Center, and other groups. These factors contributed to make the vast majority (97%) of victims and their families apply for the compensation fund instead of pursuing individual lawsuits (Feinberg 2005).

One claim, accepted by Lascher and Martin (2008) as meeting utilitarian rationale, was that the fund would help to defeat the purpose of the terrorist attacks. The attacks were designed to spread fear and chaos and “compensation for victims may prove an efficacious method to facilitate a return to normalcy contrary to terrorist intentions” (149). This is one of the reasons the authors argue that there will be a serious consideration of compensation if another terrorist attack were to occur. Another factor may have been the perception of the victims: “Because they were killed by Osama Bin Laden, they seemed to be more than victims, and seemed, thus, to deserved to receive more compensation than "mere" victims” (Sebok 2007, 1).

Public and media support may have contributed. The public seemingly overwhelmingly supported the fund (Rabin 2004; Feinberg et al., 2004; Feinberg 2005; Dauber 2003): “The American people not only endorsed the program but embraced it” (Feinberg, 2005, 163). The fund was seen as an act of patriotism and national unity, a collective response to the attack: “the 9/11 Fund was a demonstration of American resolve in the wake of tragedy... The nation would stand as one” (Feinberg 2008, 1).

Public opinion would reflect this belief. In an ABC NEWS/ Washington Post Poll in January 2002, 72% favored compensation for the victims (ABC News 2002). However, it is important to point out that the Fund was passed through Congress and

implemented so quickly (a staggering eleven days after the terrorist attack) that it is hard to argue that this public support was a driving factor (Lascher and Martin, 2008).

Compensation was also supported by the high amount of positive media attention on the victims and overwhelming support for the plan. All the victims of 9/11, not just the rescue workers, were portrayed as heroes: “We came to see them as heroes who had borne the brunt of an attack that had been meant to target our whole nation” (Sebok 2007, 1).

The public support for the fund continued for months after it was passed. The editorial pages of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Chicago Tribune* were all flooded with letters in support (Feinberg 2005). There was an “outpouring of sympathy and demands for massive and practically limitless compensation” (Dauber 2003, 79).

A final argument that could be made in support of the compensation was that the government was partially responsible for the attacks. The 9/11 Commission found that the government did ignore information that may have prevented the attack and there is philosophical support for the belief that there should be government compensation when the government is at fault (Lascher and Martin, 2004). However, this argument never really took form due to the quick response of the government in the form of the Fund and also because the government did not acknowledge their culpability in the attacks (Lascher and Martin, 2008).

The 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund, whatever the contributing factors may have been, is a historical outlier. American ideology in general goes against compensating victims of disasters no matter how the portrayal. Americans have been taught to “learn to

adapt-to endure the trials that life imposes upon us and to harden ourselves to the burdens that others must bear” (Scheingold 1974, 132). A dominant belief is that people have free choice over their lives (Dworkin 2000). They choose where to live, what work to do, what risks they will take, what dangers they should avoid. The purpose of the government is not to act as an “insurer of last resort to compensate those who die as a result of their own choices or life’s misfortunes” (Feinberg 2005, 179). Compensation would go against this belief, which is deeply embedded in American ideology.

This belief also mixes with the idea of limited government (Kingdon 1999):

Yes, the government may come to the rescue by providing basic benefits such as low-cost loans to rebuild homes and emergency assistance after a hurricane or earthquake. But the government shouldn’t pay out millions in personal compensation for death or injury as an entitlement owed to each citizen. That is unsound policy, and it runs counter to the American tradition of self-reliance (Feinberg 2005, 179).

Instead of relying on the government, it is argued that people should rely on insurance and “other free market initiatives to act as a hedge against the unforeseen” (Feinberg 2005, 180). Critics of compensation programs also argue that these funds would lead to less risk reduction as people would feel that their risk would be protected by the government (Dworkin 2000). Hence, they would be more willing to live in dangerous or disaster-prone areas.

Lastly, there was a backlash against the 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund. The Fund enjoyed overwhelming support through the end of 2001 (Dauber 2003). However, this changed with the release by the Commission of the Interim Final on December 21st, 2001. This report included the information that each victim’s family would receive a nearly 2 million dollars. The public comments received by the Fund’s commission in response to this report were “often little more than bitter screeds accusing the families of

unbridled greed” (Dauber 2003, 82). Many began to think to think of victims as “self-interested recipients seeking “welfare” rather than as blameless victims” (83). Hundreds wrote letters in which they “speculated that it was only because the victims of September 11 were rich and powerful compared to other victims that the VCF was created in the first place” (86).

This cynicism toward the government’s compensation program was probably fueled even more when the use of the program’s funds for previous events was denied. Congress was considering legislation to extend the Fund to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing victims, the African embassy bombings, and the Oklahoma City Bombings (although this last group was later able to successfully use the Fund as precedent to get tax breaks). The White House opposed this legislation and the bill was killed in the Senate (Dauber 2003, 86-87).

Similarly, victims of Hurricane Katrina did not receive compensation. The 42 members of the Congressional Black Caucus, supported by the NAACP, National Urban League, and Reverend Jesse Jackson, among other, in November 2005 introduced HR 4197, the Hurricane Katrina Recovery, Reclamation, Restoration, Reconstruction and Reunion Act of 2005 which included a victim restoration fund based on the 9/11 Fund. It differed, however, in that the fund attempted to restore the victims to their pre-Katrina status rather than determining the “worth” of the person who was killed (Dandridge 2005). The bill was never passed and Congress did not consider any other similar bills.

General disaster relief spending, not directed at individual victim compensation, has been supported and grown over time. The same economic arguments made in favor

of disaster relief in the past continue to be made. Members of Congress from throughout the country spoke at the Committee on Agriculture's "Hearing to Review Disaster Conditions Across the United States" on Oct. 25th, 2007. Testimony was presented by Representatives from Minnesota, Virginia, Georgia, Texas, Alabama, Tennessee, Missouri, NC, Idaho, California, and Kansas; in addition, testimony was also presented by others like farmers, a state commissioner on agriculture, the Executive Secretary of Virginia's Cattlemen Association, and an agricultural meteorologist. All were arguing in favor of more drought relief for their states. They discussed how the drought victims were not at fault for their situation and the threat to the nation's farmers and crops. Governor Easley of North Carolina argued:

for America to continue to be strong, we have to have a strong agricultural community...The farmers have to continue to be strong and have to know that when the weather knocks them down, there will be somebody to help them out (Committee on Agriculture 2009, 39).

Congressman Davis of Tennessee made the case there was a need for supplemental appropriations for drought relief because "the soldier's ability to perform their duties depends on the food that is in their bellies" (30). He said this was the second most important concern to the war effort after actual funding for the war.

Another explanation has to do with politics. Olasky (2006) argues that disaster declarations by the president may be electorally motivated. Several presidential elections years do have substantially larger numbers of disaster declarations. Notable examples include the year 2004, which had 68 disaster declarations, and 2008, which had 75; the rest of the decade (minus those years) averaged 52. 1996 had 75 disaster declarations; the rest of the decade averaged 44. 1984 had 34 declarations; the rest of the decade averaged 23; 1972 had 48 disaster declarations; the rest of the decade average 29; 1964 had 25; the

rest of the decade averaged 18. These years have also seen higher percentage of disaster declarations approved. In 1996, for example, 85% of declarations (requests made by the governor of the affected state to the president) were approved; normally, the average is about 66% (Olasky 2006, 44).

The president may have an electoral incentive to push through disaster relief/response spending: “voters significantly reward disaster relief spending, holding the incumbent presidential party accountable for action taken after a disaster” (Healy and Malhotra, 2009, 388). Healey and Malhotra (2009) examined disaster spending and elections from 1988-2004. Their research demonstrated that voters reward incumbent presidents for relief spending, especially direct payments to individuals: “large increases in relief spending lead to substantial vote gains for the incumbent party” (400). They did not find a relationship between preparedness/ mitigation spending and electoral support. Presidents also reward areas that vote for them with increased relief spending:

counties that more strongly supported the incumbent party in the previous election received more relief spending than did other counties...a one percentage point increase in the incumbent’s previous vote share leads to an average increase of 1.8% in the amount of relief spending that a county receives (397).

Government officials can use disaster response/ relief spending for political gains. Politicians responding to a disaster are presented with an “almost perfect win-win situation” (Schneider 1995, 16). They have an opportunity to demonstrate skills like leadership and garner positive media attention and public approval: “it is virtually impossible to oppose or criticize an official who steps in and takes charge of the situation in order to help disaster-stricken situations” (Birkland 1997, 16).

Presidential disaster declarations can also be a good opportunity to create what Miroff (2006) calls a presidential “spectacle.” They can be used to craft the image of the president as caring and a strong leader. Failure to properly respond can damage a president’s political standing. President Bush hurt his popular support and damages his political reputation for his failure to respond promptly and adequately to Hurricane Katrina (Pew Research Center, 2008))

Members of Congress can also use disaster spending to their political advantage. Disaster relief spending is similar other types of distributor policy, which politicians prefer over regulatory policies (i.e. policy prohibiting people from living in an area because it is disaster-prone) because it benefits and thus pleases their constituents and may help their chance of reelection (Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978; Birkland 1997; Petak and Atkisson, 1982). Politicians who do not try to please their constituents face potential repercussions (Wolensky and Miller, 1981).

Congress, therefore, has an electoral incentive of their own to push through supplementary appropriations. This is especially true for members of Congress who face a constant electoral struggle and disasters present them with an opportunity to do something substantial for their constituents, boosting their reelecting hopes (Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978; Birkland 1997). This is similar to why some politicians in the 19th century tried to push through disaster relief for their affected districts (May 1985). Similar to presidents, relief spending may lead to increased electoral support (Healey and Malhotra, 2009, 401).

This is an area that differentiates disaster aid from other areas of public assistance. A large percentage of Americans oppose welfare state programs like AFDC and food stamps that are predominantly targeted at the poor (Shapiro et al. 1987, Gilens 1996). This opposition comes from multiple reasons. Some argue that opposition comes from those that these programs are not helping; for example, the middle class opposing programs predominantly helping the poor (Jencks 1992; Skocpol 1991). Opposition to welfare may also stem from racial attitudes (Kluegel and Smith 1986; Sears and Citrin 1985; Gilens 1996).

Disasters are different though. Some individual disasters may affect predominantly poor or minority population (i.e. Hurricane Katrina, as discussed in the previous chapter). Poor minorities are disproportionately affected by natural disasters in general (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, 1999). However, this group is not the only group that is affected. Most disasters affect a cross-cutting segment of the population, going across class and racial groups. This may lead to a larger support for disaster relief than other welfare programs because all groups are affected, and thus eligible for relief.

Politicians are also more supportive of this group as well. Disaster aid recipients include citizens in the upper class. The 2001 APSA Task Force on Economic Inequality and American Democracy concluded:

Public officials, in turn, are much more responsive to the privileged than to average citizens and the least affluent. Citizens with lower or moderate incomes speak with a whisper that is lost on the ears of inattentive government officials (Jacobs and Skocpol 2006, 27).

Welfare recipients are poor and are ignored; they are a constituency that members of Congress are not interested in pleasing; disaster aid recipients, on the other hand, include the upper class, a constituency group that they are interested in pleasing.

The interest in pleasing constituents has also helped to shape the type of policy that is favored. Most of federal disaster funding is spent on disaster response/ recover rather than planning/ mitigation (Healy and Malhotra, 2009; Birkland 1997; Petak and Atkisson, 1982). This disparity has continued to grow in the past twenty years (Healy and Malhotra 2009, 393).

There are several reasons for this. First, disaster response/ relief is favored over mitigation/ preparedness due to a lack of a strong constituency (Petak and Atkisson, 1982; Birkland 1997). No major interest groups exist to pressure the government for disaster mitigation problems. Instead, the government may be faced with the opposite political pressure. Voters and local governments often oppose high-cost mitigation efforts like building codes and land use planning (Birkland 1997, 48-49).

There exists a “policy monopoly” that defends this preference of response over mitigation:

Public work committees have historically been constituent-oriented and project-oriented bodies that seek to serve members’ local political goals (Davidson and Oliszek 1994; Ripley and Franklin 1984; Smith and Deering 1984). This policy-making environment is characterized by mutual accommodations, logrolling, locally inspired projects, and close-knit, distributive policy relationships between the bureaucracy (in this case, the Army Corps of Engineers as the agency responsible for flood control and beach preservation projects) and the committee. In such an environment, it is unlikely that a policy entrepreneur, either from inside or outside the committee, would be able to substantially change the way this business is transacted (Birkland 1997, 64-65).

This policy monopoly is boosted by developers and builders. These groups have fought mitigation efforts and battled labeling areas as disaster-prone (Rozario 2007, Steinberg 2000, Davis 1998). They have done so in order to attract businesses and make a profit by building and selling in areas with high risks of disasters, like southern California and Florida.

Citizens that are in disaster-prone areas have had difficulty mobilizing against this policy monopoly. One problem is a lack of awareness. Those at risk have to be aware of the risk that they face in order to mobilize (Cobb and Elder, 1972; Schattschneider 1960, Petak and Atkisson, 1982). However, many are not aware of these risks (Petak and Atkisson, 1982).

This has translated into voting. The same electoral benefits that result from supporting disaster relief do not apply to supporting disaster preparedness/ mitigation. Healey and Malhotra (2009) found that there was no relationship between increased spending on preparedness and a voting boost, unlike increases in disaster spending. Voters do not respond to mitigation/ preparedness the same way. Part, as discussed above, is that relief spending, unlike preparedness spending, can come in the form of direct assistance to the individual. Relief is a salient issue to voters; preparedness is not (Healey and Malhotra, 2009, 402). Other more salient issues serve to keep mitigation off the political agenda as a result (Birkland 1997; May 1985; Rossi et al., 1982).

The growing disparity between relief spending and preparedness spending may also be due to criticism. The government was widely criticized for their failure to assist victims of the Loma Prieta earthquake and Hurricane Andrew (Healey and Malhotra, 2009, 395). This may help to explain why the government has increasingly been spending more on relief/ response and less on preparedness/ mitigation.

The media may play a role as well. Media coverage of disasters is similar to that of foreign conflicts which focuses on the conflict phase and not the pre or post phases which can “shift focus and funds from the more cost-effective, long-term efforts directed

at preventing violent conflicts and rebuilding war-torn societies to short-term emergency relief” (Jakobsen 2000, 132). Disaster, similarly attract media attention during the crisis phase but this attention moves on quickly, making it difficult to support long-term recovery or future preparation/ mitigation efforts (Schneider 1995, 24).

Lastly, ideology may play a role. Americans are against mitigation practices for the same reasons they were against British laws passed in the mid-18th century that forbid them from settling west of the Appalachian mountains: they are in favor of values like individualism and personal and against rules limiting our behavior like where we can or cannot live (Williams 1974). Americans do not like being told that they cannot live in areas because they are disaster-prone.

V. Criticism of the Policy

This focus on relief/response over preparedness/ mitigation can be seen as problematic for several reasons. First and foremost, this type of spending may be costly in the long-run. Researchers estimate that “the average \$1 spent on disaster preparedness reduces future disaster damage by more than \$7 in a single election cycle, and that the total value of a dollar of preparedness spending for all future damage reduction is about \$15” (Healey and Malhotra 2009, 388). This means that a small increase in preparedness spending could save billions (402).

Second, disaster response/ recovery spending and programs like the federal flood insurance program may encourage more people to put themselves at risk for disaster. A 1994 House Bipartisan Natural Task Force reported:

If state and local governments believe that the federal government will meet their needs in every disaster, they have less incentive to spend scarce state and local resources on disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. This not only raises the cost of disasters to federal taxpayers, but also to our society as a whole as people are encouraged to take risks they think that they will not need to pay for (Olasky 2006, 43).

Criticism has also sprung up over the distribution of federal funding. The Senate Bipartisan Task Force on Funding Disaster Relief reported: “FEMA has no method for evaluating the capabilities of the state and local governments” (43). They also predicted the costs would continue to soar unless Congress established clearer and stricter criteria for providing assistance. The task force recommended incentives to reduce hazards and rely more on private insurance and argued in favor of cutting costs.

Al Gore also weighed in on the subject. The then vice-president, as part of his Reinventing Government Program, was the chair for the National Performance Review on FEMA. The committee found the criteria for disaster declarations was unclear and that the “ready availability of funds may actually contribute to disaster losses by reducing incentives for hazard mitigation and preparedness” (44). These criticisms were one of the reasons that FEMA was reorganized in the mid-90s under Clinton. However, these perceived problems would persist.

FEMA urged Congress in 1998 to stop funding the Army Corps of Engineers program which was replacing beaches that had been eroded by storms as it encouraged people to live close to flood-prone areas. The idea was rejected by Congress (45).

Critics argue that people are encouraged to build in disaster-prone areas because they know that they will be compensated for their losses by the government. This is what Olasky (2006) calls “welfare for the rich”: “What welfare created in the inner city, the federal disaster program created for those living in risky areas. Fifty years of increasing

payouts suggested that anyone who did not take what Uncle Sam offered was a chump” (45). He argues that we are rewarding those who choose to build in disaster-prone areas because they want to not because they are forced to due to poverty. A 2000 article in USA Today, “High-risk Life, High Expenses to Taxpayers: Federal Disaster Aid Makes It Feasible to Build In Harm’s Way,” echoed this belief:

What began as a trickle of aid for people living near the seacoast has turned into a tidal wave of financial support. The government’s ever-expanding generosity has created a vicious cycle for taxpayers. By reducing the economic risks of living near the water, Washington has spurred development. So when each new disaster strikes, the cost of federal assistance rises to cover all new private buildings and public facilities...Just as welfare for the poor brought about multigenerational dependency on government, so welfare for the rich has birthed a moral hazard act irresponsibly and the government will still provide a stipend (Olasky 2006, 89).

The strong influence of developers has also left more people at risk for disasters and contributed to gentrification. The rebuilding of San Francisco after 1906 was so expensive that it turned into a private reconstruction effort. The head of the Red Cross tried to get relief funds to be used for low income housing but was unsuccessful. The market, not government officials, directed the rebuilding effort as government officials were reluctant to interfere with the market for private property; instead they used funds to build temporary housing which were “unsanitary shacks that became...lasting scars on the San Francisco landscape” (Rozario 2007, 97).

Other cities in California would have similar experiences. Cities like San Diego and Los Angeles were built in disaster prone-areas as a result of developers denying susceptibility to disasters: “Historic wildfire corridors been turned into view-lot suburbs, wetland liquefaction zones into marinas, and floodplains into industrial districts and housing tracts”; the result, argues Davis (1998,7-9) has been that Southern California has

“reaped flood, fire, and earthquake tragedies that were as avoidable as the beating of Rodney King and the ensuing explosion in the streets.”

Other areas are similarly exposed. Charleston, the site of the major earthquake in 1886, faces the same problems. Leaders worked quickly to get people back to work and put the disaster behind them. These leaders were very successful in that effort as the disaster was:

consigned to obscurity, where it could do little harm to the area’s prospect for continued economic growth. In the century after the quake, construction went on, and builders for the most part were unconscious of the seismic hazard, functionally producing the same fatalism in the act of God’s interpretation (Steinberg 2006, 22).

Recent surveys have found that many people living in Charleston are unaware of the earthquake risk and that many buildings do not have adequate “seismic resistance” (22).

Even the mitigation projects that are chosen may not be the best. Local government officials favor large construction projects as a means of providing jobs although they may be the most efficient. They also like them because they attract public attention and praise. This has led to a “project-driven culture that is driven by the belief that engineered solutions are often the best way to mitigate flood, storm surge, and erosion damage” (Birkland 1997, 65). They have chosen these projects rather than preventing construction in some areas due to the high risk of disaster.

Political battles continue to occur in this area between federal efforts and local governments and business leaders. Currently, there is controversy over FEMA’s effort to draw new flood plain maps. Tens of thousands can be affected, especially in areas like Southern California. Redrawing these maps, some of which are forty years old, can add homes to floodplain zones. These homes then have to have flood insurance if the

homeowners have a federally-backed mortgage; over half of all mortgages are owned or supported by Fannie or Freddie Mac. Some local governments are paying for private companies to conduct their own research to refute FEMA's new designations (Saillant 2010).

Criticism of FEMA continues in other areas as well. Politicians continually press for compensation for more disasters and in higher amounts amidst claims of favoritism and discrimination. Allegations of fraud and embezzlement are in Katrina relief distribution are still being investigated. These criticisms have contributed to a call for a bigger involvement by non-governmental organizations

VI. Non-Governmental Disaster Involvement

Disaster response and relief is now an area in which the federal government plays a major role. However, private organizations have also played a prominent role in recent years. Voluntary organizations in general have expanded in recent years. This has been encouraged through government programs like the Peace Corps (1961); Volunteers in Service to America (1965), known as VISTA; and AmeriCorps (1993). Government has also brought together volunteer groups in order to encourage growth and coordination. The Nixon Administration encouraged the formation of ACTION, which brought together 24,000 volunteers from six prominent voluntary organizations like the Peace Corps, VISTA, and Retired Senior Volunteer Program; and President Bush helped to create the Points of Light Foundation, a coalition of non-profits (FEMA 2007, 6).

Major volunteer organizations have been created and expanded. For example, Habitat for Humanity was founded in 1976 and its volunteers/ workers have built 350,000

houses world-wide ⁶³; the United Way, originally founded in 1887, now has 1,300 local organizations in the US ⁶⁴; the Salvation has 3,500 centers and provides services for thirty million people annually ⁶⁵; and the American Red Cross has 700 chapters, 35,000 employees, and more than a million volunteers annually. ⁶⁶ There has been a doubling of non-profits in the past two decades (Grim, Jr. et. al, 2006, 7). Volunteer numbers have also gone up. Volunteer rates have increased by 32% in the past twenty years (4). 63.4 million people volunteered at least once through a voluntary organization from September 2008 through September 2009 , representing nearly 27% of the population (BLS 2010).

There have been factors that may have contributed to this increase. Overall recent events like 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina may have caused more people to become interested in helping others. The increase in the number of volunteer organizations has led to more opportunities and greater demands for volunteers. The 16-19 year old age group has doubled its volunteer rates due to increased school-based service and service-learning. The 45-64 year old age group has seen a 30% increase in volunteer rates due to higher levels of education; the delay in marriage and having children; and participation in school-related organizations for their children. The 65+ age group has seen their volunteer rate increase by 64% due to better health, education, and income (Grim, Jr. et. al, 2006, 7-11).

⁶³ "Habitat for Humanity Fact Sheet." 2011. Habitat for Humanity International.

<http://www.habitat.org/how/factsheet.aspx>.

⁶⁴ "About the United Way." 2011. United Way Worldwide. <http://www.liveunited.org/about/>.

⁶⁵ "About the Salvation Army." 2011. The Salvation Army.

http://www.use.salvationarmy.org/use/www_use.nsf/vw-text-index/f9ec92f0c508905e85256de100519ca0?opendocument.

⁶⁶ "About the Red Cross." 2011. The American National Red Cross.

<http://www.redcross.org/portal/site/en/menuitem.d8aaecf214c576bf971e4cfe43181aa0/?vgnextoid=477859f392ce8110VgnVCM10000030f3870aRCRD&vgnnextfmt=default>.

FEMA's "A Citizen's Guide to Disaster Assistance" lists more than 8 non-governmental groups that participate in the disaster relief effort.⁶⁷ The large amount of non-governmental organizations involved in disaster preparation and response/ recovery has led to problems. After Hurricane Camille in 1969, there was criticism that minority groups were discriminated against by volunteer groups and that the relief effort by these organizations was fragmented and uncoordinated. This led to the creation of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster in 1970 in order to coordinate disaster-related efforts by these groups (FEMA 2007, 11).

Voluntary organizations have played major relief roles in response to major disasters like the Alaskan Earthquake (1964), Hurricane Camille (1969), Hurricane Hugo (1989), Hurricane Andrew (1992), the Midwest Floods (1993), and Hurricane Marilyn (1995), Hurricane Ivan (2005), Hurricane Rita (2005), and Hurricane Katrina (2005). Hurricane Andrew, in particular, was a tremendously difficult task as 250,000 were temporarily left homeless. Volunteer agencies, for the first time ever, worked together with military to set up large-scale shelter areas and distribute food and supplies (12-13). This would lead to an effort by the federal government to work with voluntary organizations to coordinate their combined relief effort (13).

Much of the recovery effort for Katrina (like in the past) has been carried out by private organizations and religious groups. In the first two months after the hurricane, 9,000 Southern Baptists from 41 states volunteered 120,000 days. They served ten million meals and helped in recovery efforts. The Salvation Army served 5 million hot

⁶⁷"Disaster Relief Agencies." 2011. The Disaster Agency. <http://www.disastercenter.com/agency.htm>.

meals, 6.5 million sandwiches, snacks and drinks in 178 mobile feeding units and 11 field kitchens. 158,000 cleaning kits and 130,000 boxes of groceries were distributed. The work was carried out by 12,000 employees and 28,000 volunteers (Olasky 2006, 58). Half a million volunteers traveled to the Gulf Coast to participate in disaster relief activities (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2006). Over \$3 billion dollars was raised by non-profit organizations through donations within six months of the disaster (Salmon and Smith, 2006). Aid and assistance were also provided by other countries.

Similarly, billions in donations and support has been provided by non-governmental organizations for international disasters. Two billion in private aid was provided for victims of the 2004 tsunami (Keen 2010). Donations for victims of the recent Haiti earthquake are expected to far surpass that.

Some are now calling for a return to the past. They are interested in private organizations taking on the primary responsibility for disaster response and relief. Much of this is due to criticism of the current system.

Part of this may also stem from the declining levels of trust in government. Recent Gallup polls demonstrate that Americans have record low levels of trust in the legislative branch. Only 45% of those polled in September 2009 said they had a great deal or fair amount of trust in Congress; the executive branch was higher at 61%, state government was an all time-low 51%, local government was at 69%, and trust in elected officials in general also reached an all-time low of 49% (Gallup 2009).

Private organizations like the American Red Cross show higher levels of public trust. A 2008 Harris poll found that 88% of those polled had a great deal or fair amount of trust in the Red Cross (Red Cross, 2008). Trust in the Red Cross and non-profits in general remains significantly higher than trust in the government; religion/ churches also have higher levels of public confidence at 81% (Gallup 2010).

The image of private organizations remains better than the government. A January 2010 Gallup poll found that 46% of those polled had a positive image of the federal government and 51% had a negative image; small business was at 95% positive and 4% negative; free enterprise was at 86% positive and 10% negative; entrepreneurs at 84% positive and 10% negative; capitalism at 61% positive and 33% negative; and big business at 49% positive and 49% negative (Gallup 2010). Americans continue their historical distrust of federal government and their aversion to perceived socialist programs (Kingdon 1999). Socialism was the only institution that had a lower image than the federal government at 38% positive and 58% negative (Gallup 2010).

The government as a whole has faced criticism and calls for less involvement. Page and Simmons (2006) wrote: “In the United States, if not everywhere in the world, governments face a crisis of confidence...Advocates of free market want governments out of the way” (2). The media often focuses on wasteful government spending. The “cumulative effect is to suggest that all government spending must be wasteful and inefficient, if not counterproductive” (2).

These arguments have been made about federal disaster relief. As discussed before, the federal government’s disaster programs have been criticized for wasteful

spending and the perception that programs like flood control are full of pork (Olasky 2006). FEMA and the federal government have been criticized for the way that money has been distributed. After the Northridge Earthquake in 1994, FEMA was assailed for giving out \$142 million dollars in “fast-track assistance” to without inspecting the victims’ homes (43). The increased disaster spending led to concerns throughout the decade and similar criticism occurred after Katrina. Senator Susan Collins of Maine was the ranking Republican on the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, which oversees FEMA. Collins said of FEMA’s Katrina relief effort: “FEMA seems incapable of paying legitimate claims quickly and effectively and yet reimburses fraudulent claims without asking any questions” (64).

This has all contributed to negative public image for FEMA. In a 2007 poll, 49% had a favorable view of FEMA and 41% had an unfavorable view (Gallup 2010). These numbers have grown since Hurricane Katrina in 2005. A poll taken a week after Katrina hit had 24% saying FEMA’s response was adequate and 70% inadequate; the response by the federal government as a whole was seen by 20% as adequate and 77% as inadequate (Roberts 2005). FEMA’s image has been helped by perceived more adequate responses to ensuing, smaller disasters. For example, a poll taken after the 2007 California wildfires had 69% approval and 13% disapproval for the government’s response (Gallup 2007).

Still, many Americans remain concerned about the ability of the government to respond to future disasters. A January 2010 CBS News poll showed that 34% of those polled felt the government was adequately prepared to respond to a major earthquake in the future 59% felt that the government was not prepared (CBS 2010). Public confidence is actually lower than it was several years. An August 2007 poll had 59% of respondents

saying that they had a great deal or fair amount of confidence in the ability of the federal government to adequately respond to a disaster and 39% had not much or no confidence; 51% had a great or fair amount of confidence and 49% had not much or no confidence in a poll taken by CBS a week after Katrina (CBS 2010).

All this has contributed to a major role for non-governmental organizations in disaster response and relief. A 2008 report by the Government Accountability Office stated:

Voluntary organizations have played a critical role in providing care to people affected by emergencies or natural disasters...In the United States, hundreds of voluntary organizations, most often locally or regionally based, routinely assist disaster victims with mass sheltering and feeding and other services...voluntary organizations have been critical components to local, state, and federal agencies during disasters (USGAO 2008, 6).

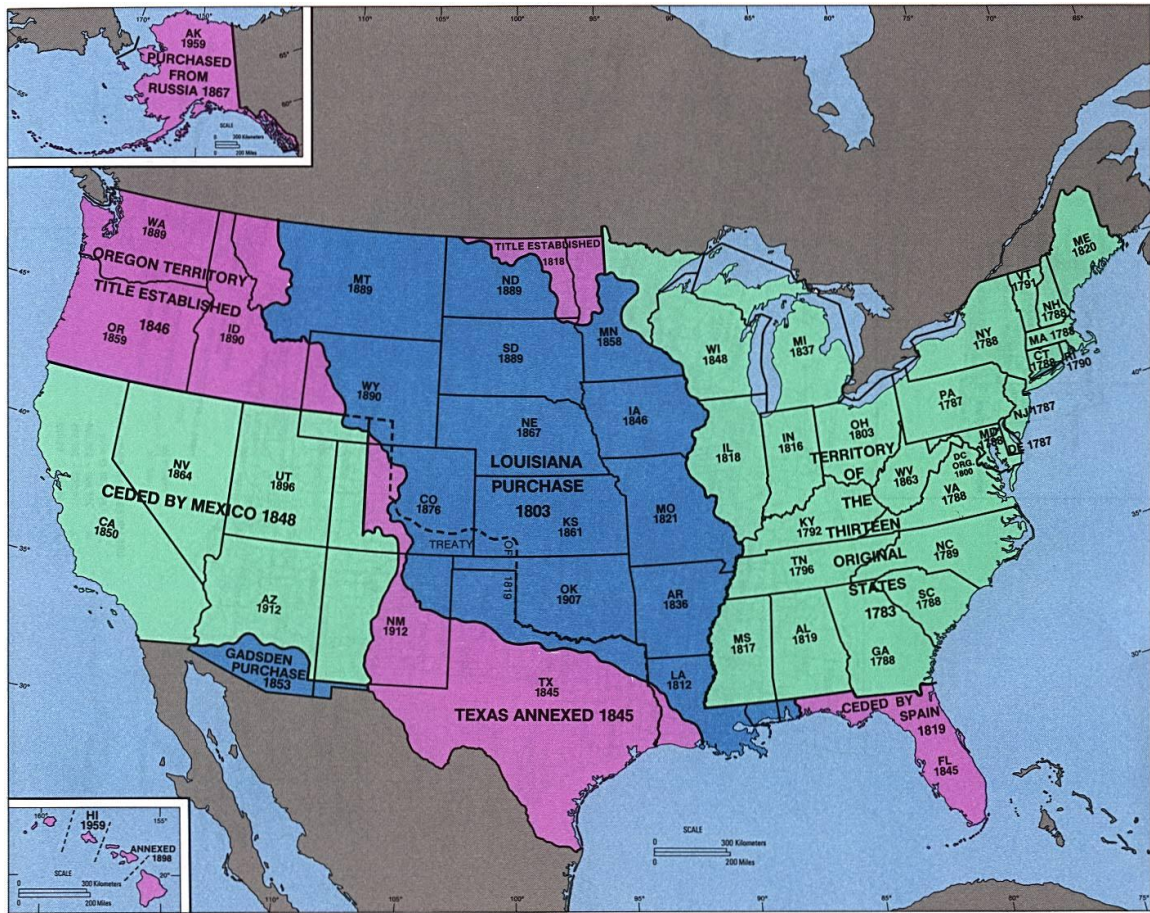
The GAO noted that the Red Cross played such a prominent role in this field that that the Department of Homeland's National Response Framework had designated the organization as "the primary agency for mass care" (6). This is very similar to the primary role that the Red Cross played in disaster relief as quasi-governmental agency in the early 20th century. However, the GAO faulted DHS for doing so because the Red Cross as a "nongovernmental agency" cannot "legally direct federal resources" (6). The report, though, did call upon the government to work with the Red Cross and other voluntary organizations and integrate them into the National Response Framework.

VII. Conclusion

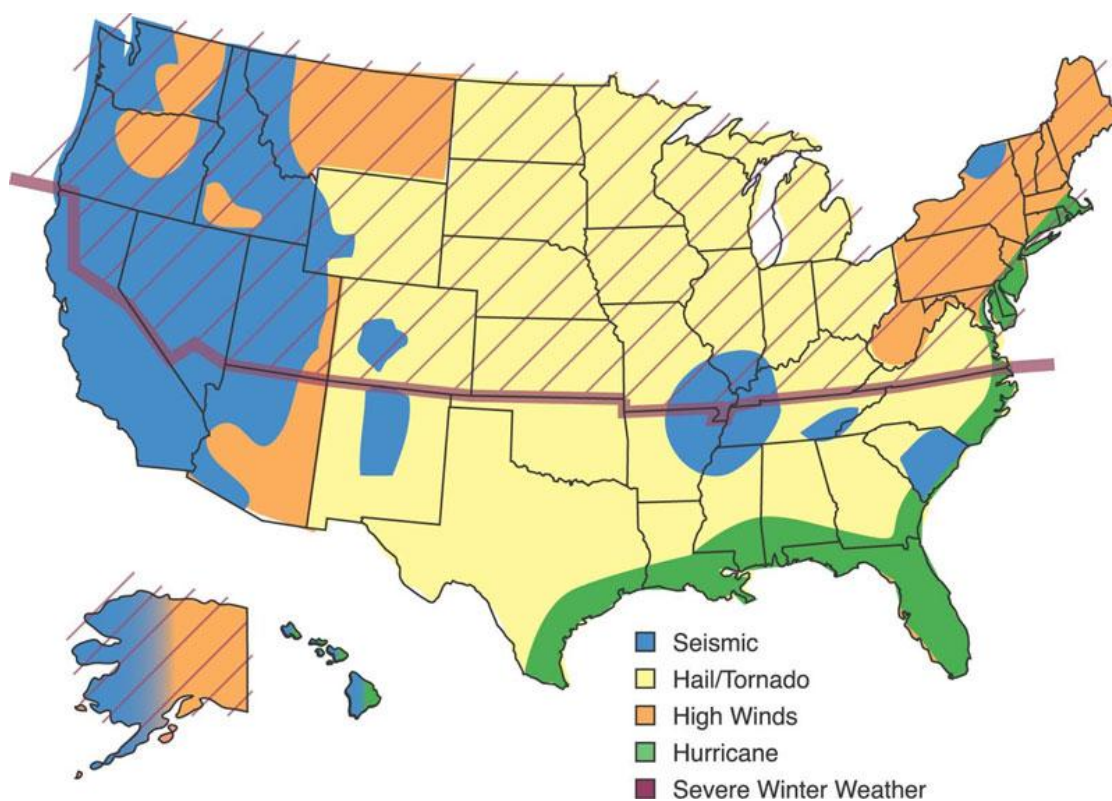
How much have things changed from the past: the Red Cross in many ways acts as a quasi-governmental agency, similar to the first half of the 20th century; state and local governments play the "lead role" in response and recovery efforts (USGAO 2008, 3), similar to the past; this effort is supplemented by non-governmental organizations like

the Red Cross and religious groups, similar to the 18th and 19th centuries; the federal government allocates funding for state/ local governmental response/ relief efforts, which is distributed and used by the local and state governments, similar to the latter half of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries; and the focus of the main federal disaster agency is defense/ responding to an attack, similar to the Cold War; and foreign disaster aid continues to be affected by political factors like foreign policy. The largest way that things have changed is the amount of money that the federal government allocates and how comprehensive the relief is. The federal government now spends in excess of twelve billion dollars in regular appropriations and even higher amounts for supplementary appropriations in response for 50-70 disasters per year. 1,868 disasters were declared from 1950-2009 (FEMA 2010); in comparison less 150 pieces of legislation dealing with disaster assistance passed from 1789-1950. It does not appear that this spending will decrease in the future; to the contrary, the potential for more powerful and prolific natural disasters in the future will likely lead to an increase in federal disaster spending.

APPENDIX A “Map 1: American Territorial Expansion”



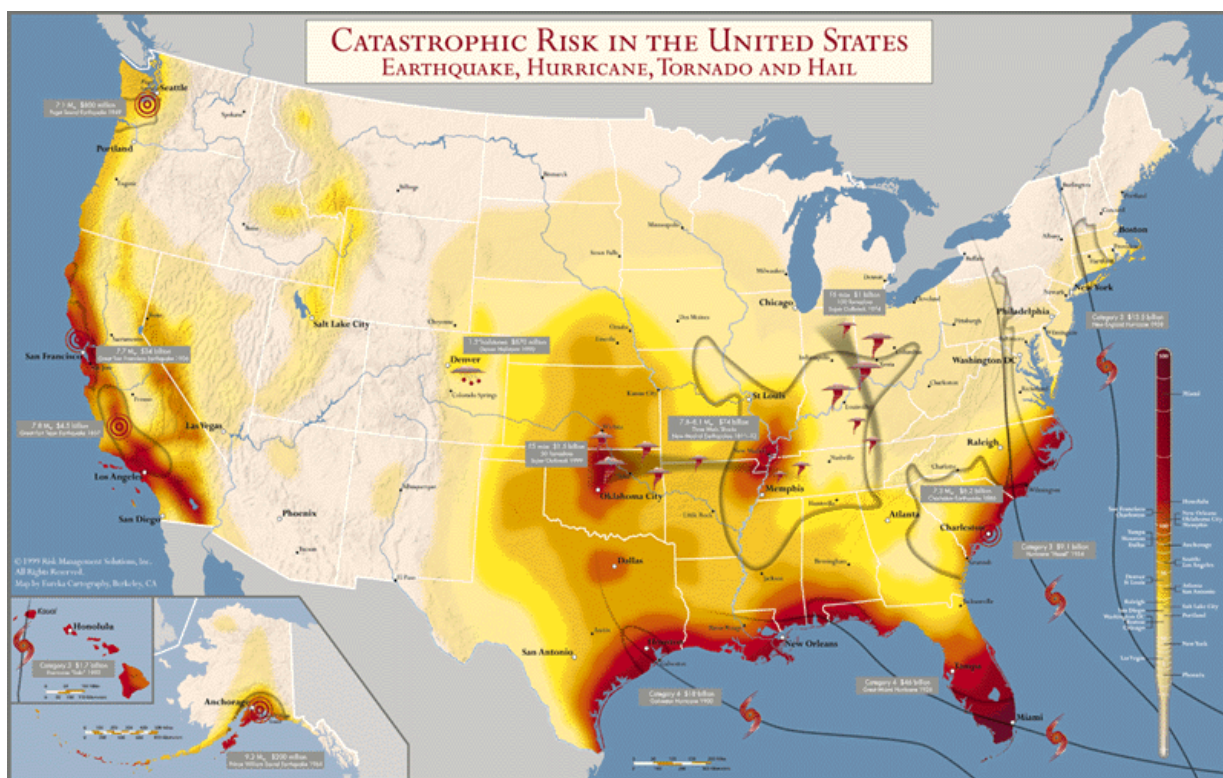
Source: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/united_states/territory.jpg

Appendix B “Map 2: Disaster Risks United States”

Source:

http://www.disastersafety.org/resource/resmgr/Images/fortified_map.jpg

Appendix C “Map 3: Catastrophic Risk in the United States”



Source: http://www.rms.com/Catastrophe/Models/United_States.asp

Appendix D “List of Major American Disasters through the Present”

Year	Type of Disaster	Location	Deaths	Damages
1727	Earthquake	New England	0	Unknown (minor structural damages)
1740	Charleston Fire	Charleston	Unknown	Unknown (most of town destroyed)
1755	Earthquake	New England	0	Unknown (minor structural damages)
1760	Great Fire of Boston	Boston	Unknown	Unknown (350 buildings destroyed; 100,000 pounds in damage)
1775	Hurricane of Independence	North Carolina and Virginia	163	Unknown (severe damage in New Bern, NC and Norfolk, Hampton, and York VA)
1793	Yellow Fever Epidemic	Philadelphia	4,000+	NA
1811-1812	New Madrid Earthquakes	Central Mississippi Valley	Up to 1000	Unknown
1816	Year Without a Summer (Cold)	Nationwide	Unknown	Unknown (many crops died)
1832	Cholera Epidemic	New Orleans	7,000+	NA
1835	Great New York Fire	New York	Unknown	530 buildings destroyed
1840	Great Natchez Tornado	Natchez, MS	317	Unknown
1845	Pittsburgh Fire	Pittsburgh	Unknown	Unknown (700 houses, 500 buildings destroyed)
1848	Cholera	New York	4,000	NA
1849	St. Louis Fire	St. Louis	Unknown	Unknown (400 buildings, 23 steamboats destroyed)
1849	Cholera Epidemic	Mississippi Valley	5,000+	NA
1853	Yellow Fever Epidemic	New Orleans	7,790	NA
1856	Last Island Hurricane	Last Island, La	200+	Unknown (all buildings in Abbeville and Last Island, LA destroyed)
1857	Fort Tejon Earthquake	Las Angeles	2	Unknown (severe damage to most buildings in Fort Tejon, CA)
1867	Yellow Fever Epidemic	New Orleans	3,093	NA
1868	Hayward Earthquake	California	30	Unknown (most buildings in Hayward, CA damaged)
1871	Great Chicago Fire	Chicago	250	200,000,000 (1871 USD) 3,385,000,000 (2009 USD)

1871	Great Peshtigo Fire	Wisconsin	1,200	Unknown (1.2 million acres burned; several million dollars in damage)
1872	Great Boston Fire	Boston	Unknown	75,000,000 (1872 USD) 1,268,000 (2009 USD)
1872	Owens Valley Earthquake	Lone Pine, CA	27	250,000 (1872 USD) 4,229,000 (2009 USD)
1873	Yellow Fever Epidemic	South	2,000 in Memphis	NA
1878	Yellow Fever Epidemic	Mississippi Valley	13,000+	NA
1880	Marshfield Tornadoes	Missouri	99	Unknown (Marshfield, MO almost completely destroyed)
1881	Thumb Fire	Michigan	138	2,347,000 (1881 USD) 47,578,000 (2009 USD)
1884	60 Tornadoes	South	800	Unknown
1884	Ohio River Flood	Midwest	Unknown	Unknown (2000 homes, 126 businesses damaged)
1886	Charleston Earthquake	Charleston	60	6,000,000 (1886 USD) 134,104,000 (2009 USD)
1888	School Children's Blizzard	Northern Great Plains	235	Unknown
1888	Great Blizzard/ Great White Hurricane of 1888	East Coast	400	20,000,000 (1888 USD) 445,390,000 (2009 USD)
1889	Johnstown Flood	Johnstown, PA	2,200+	17,000,000 (1889 USD) 389,827,000 (2009 USD)
1889	Seattle Fire	Seattle	2	15,000,000 (1889 USD) 343,960,000 (2009 USD)
1893	Sea Islands Hurricane	Georgia and South Carolina	2000+	Unknown (all buildings in Georgia and South Carolina barrier islands destroyed)
1894	Hinckley Fire	Minnesota	600	Unknown (Hinckley, Mission Creek, Brook Park, MN destroyed; 160,000 acres burned)
1894	Fire	Wisconsin	Unknown	Unknown (Several million acres burned)
1896	St. Louis Tornado	Missouri, Illinois	255	10,000,000 (1896 USD) 235,220,000 (2009 USD)
1899	New Richmond	Wisconsin	117	300,000 (1899 USD)

	Tornado			6,929,000 (2009 USD)
1900	Galveston Hurricane	Galveston, TX	8,000	20,000,000 (1900 USD) 449,120,000 (2009 USD)
1900	Scofield Mine Explosion	Utah	200	Unknown
1900	Hoboken Fire	New Jersey	326	4,267,000 (1900 USD) 95,821,000 (2009 USD)
1902	Fire	Washington	38	Unknown (1 million+ acres burned)
1902	Goliad Tornado	Texas	114	50,000 (1902 USD) 1,063,000 (2009 USD)
1903	Adirondack Fire	New York	Unknown	Unknown (637,000 acres burned)
1904	Baltimore Fire	Baltimore	0	150,000,000 (1904 USD) 2,965,000 (2009 USD)
1906	San Francisco Earthquake and Fire	San Francisco	3000	400,000,000 (1906 USD) 7,759,000,000(2009 USD)
1907	Monaghan Mine Explosion	West Virginia	361	Unknown
1907	Jacobs Creek Mine Explosion	Pennsylvania	239	Unknown
1908	Amite-Pine-Purvis Tornado	Louisiana, Mississippi	143	500,000 (1908 USD) 8,926,000 (2009 USD)
1909	Grand Isle Hurricane	Louisiana	350	5,000,000 (1909 USD) 89,487,000 (2009 USD)
1909	Cherry Mine Explosion	Illinois	259	Unknown
1910	Big Blowup (Fire)	Idaho and Montana	86	Unknown (3 million acres of forest burned)
1911	Heat Wave	Northeast	380	NA
1913	Omaha Easter Sunday Tornado	Nebraska	153	8,000,000 (1913 USD) 133,878,000 (2009 USD)
1913	Ohio River Flood	Midwest	467	Unknown(40,000 homes damaged)
1913	Dawson Coal Mine	New Mexico	263	Unknown
1915	New Orleans	Louisiana, Mississippi,	275	13,000,000 (1915 USD)

	Hurricane	Alabama, Texas		208,850,000 (2009 USD)
1916	Polio Epidemic	Nationwide	7,000+	NA
1917	Mattoon Tornado	Illinois	101	2,200,000 (1917 USD) 25,426,000 (2009 USD)
1918	Influenza Epidemic	Nationwide	500,000+	NA
1918	Cloquet Fire	Minnesota and Wisconsin	1,000	1,000,000 (1918 USD) 9,919,150 (2009 USD)
1919	Atlantic Gulf Hurricane	Florida, Texas	600+	22,000,000 (1919 USD) 212,960,000 (2009 USD)
1920	Palm Sunday Tornado Outbreak	Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Georgia, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin	153	Unknown
1925	Tri-State Tornado	Missouri, Illinois, Indiana	695	118,400,000 (1925 USD) 1,209,000,000 (2009 USD)
1926	Great Miami Hurricane	Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana	373	100,000,000 (1926 USD) 1,0016,000,000 (2009 USD)
1927	Poplar Bluff Tornado	Missouri	82	4,000,000 (1927 USD) 41,651,000 (2009 USD)
1927	St. Louis Tornado	Missouri	79	53,000,000 (1927 USD) 551,890,000 (2009 USD)
1927	Great Mississippi Flood	Mississippi River Valley	246	400,000,000 (1927 USD) 4,165,000,000(2009 USD)
1928	San Felipe-Okeechobee Hurricane	Florida	1836	25,000,000 (1928 USD) 258,380,000 (2007 USD)
1930s	Dust Bowl	Great Plain	Unknown	Unknown
1932	Deep South Tornado Outbreak	Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia	330	Unknown
1933	Long Beach Earthquake	Long Beach, CA	115	40,000,000 (1933 USD)

				554,950,000 (2009 USD)
1933	Chesapeake Potomac Hurricane	East Coast	30	27,200,000 (1933 USD) 377,369,000 (2009 USD)
1935	Florida Keys Labor Day Hurricane	Florida	408	6,000,000 (1935 USD) 77,330,000 (2009 USD)
1936	Tupelo Tornado	Mississippi	233	3,000,000 (1936 USD) 38,254,000 (2009 USD)
1936	Gainesville Tornado	Georgia	203	12,500,000 (1936 USD) 159,393,000 (2009 USD)
1937	Ohio River Flood	Midwest	385	500,000,000 (1937 USD) 6,111,000,000 (2009 USD)
1938	New England Hurricane	New England	600	308,000,000 (1938 USD) 4,532,000,000 (2009 USD)
1944	Appalachians Tornado Outbreak	West Virginia, Pennsylvania	153	3,000,000 (1944 USD) 30,347,000 (2009 USD)
1944	Great Atlantic Hurricane	East Coast	46	100,000,000 (1944 USD) 1,012,000,000 (2009 USD)
1946	Earthquake and Tsunami	Alaska and Hawaii	165	26,000,000 (1946 USD) 229,000,000 (2009 USD)
1947	Bar Harbor Fire	Maine	Unknown	Unknown
1947	Woodward Tornado	Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma	181	8,964,000 (1947 USD) 71,254,000 (2009 USD)
1947	Fort Lauderdale Hurricane	Florida, Louisiana	51	110,000,000 (1947 USD) 874,000,000 (2009 USD)
1947	Texas City Fire	Texas	516	Unknown (hundreds of millions in damages)
1950	Storm of the Century (Blizzard)	Plains	383	70,000,000 (1950 USD) 522,000,000 (2009 USD)
1951	Great Flood of 1951	Kansas, Missouri	28	1,099,000 (1951 USD) 7,646,000 (2009 USD)
1953	Worcester Tornado	Massachusetts	94	53,000,000 (1953 USD) 385,220,000 (2009 USD)

1960	Tsunami	Hawaii, Alaska	61	500,000 (1960 USD) 2,937,000 (2009 USD)
1961	Hurricane Carla	Texas	43	325,000,000 (1961 USD) 1,887,000,000 (2009 USD)
1964	Alaskan Earthquake and Tsunami	Alaska	115	341,000 (1964 USD) 1,904,000 (2009 USD)
1965	Palm Sunday Tornado Outbreak	Midwest	271	299,980,000 (1965 USD) 1,645,000,000 (2009 USD)
1965	Hurricane Betsy	Florida, Louisiana	76	1,420,000 (1965 USD) 7,787,000,000 (2009 USD)
1969	Hurricane Camille	Mississippi, Alabama, Virginia	256	1,420,000,000 (1969 USD) 6,715,000,000 (2009 USD)
1970	Lubbock Tornado	Tornado	26	312,000,000 (1970 USD) 1,400,000,000 (2000 USD)
1971	San Fernando Earthquake	California	65	505,000,000 (1971 USD) 2,160,000,000 (2009 USD)
1972	Hurricane Agnes	Eastern US	130	3,000,000,000 (1972 USD) 12,303,000,000 (2009 USD)
1972	Buffalo Creek Flood	West Virginia	125	Unknown (507 homes destroyed)
1972	Rapid City Flood	South Dakota	238	160,000,000 (1972 USD) 656,000,000 (2009 USD)
1974	Super Outbreak Tornadoes	Midwest and Southern US	315	1,073,000,000 (1974 USD) 3,823,000,000 (2009 USD)
1976	Big Thompson Canyon Flood	Colorado	145	40,000,000 (1976 USD) 123,000,000 (2009 USD)
1978	Blizzard of '78	New England	99	1,300,000,000 (1978 USD) 3,514,000,000 (2009 USD)
1980	Mount St. Helen's Eruption	Washington	57	1,000,000,000 (1980 USD) 2,287,000,000 (2009 USD)
1980	Heat Wave	Central and Eastern US	10,000	20,000,000 (1980 USD) 45,750,000 (2009 USD)

1989	Hurricane Hugo	Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, Carolinas	49	13,600,000,000 (1989 USD) 21,400,000,000 (2009 USD)
1989	Loma Prieta Earthquake	California	62	6,000,000,000 (1989 USD) 9,427,000 (2009 USD)
1992	Hurricane Andrew	Florida	65	30,000,000,000 (1992 USD) 42,820,000,000 (2009 USD)
1993	Superstorm	Eastern US	270	4,500,000,000 (1993 USD) 6,283,000,000 (2009 USD)
1993	Mississippi River Flooding	Midwest	50	15,000,000,000 (1993 USD) 20,950,000,000 (2009 USD)
1993	Storm of the Century	Eastern US	300	6,600,000,000 (1993 USD) 9,215,000,000 (2009 USD)
1994	Northridge Earthquake	California	57	44,000,000,000 (1994 USD) 60,170,000,000 (2009)
1997	Red River Flood	North Dakota, Minnesota	0	2,000,000,000 (1997 USD) 2,583,000,000 (2009 USD)
1999	Oklahoma Tornado Outbreak	Midwest and South	48	1,301,000,000 (1999 USD) 1,638,000,000 (2009 USD)
2004	Hurricane Ivan	Texas, Florida, Eastern US	124	19,000,000,000 (2004 USD) 21,450,000,000 (2009 USD)
2004	Hurricane Charles	Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina	35	16,300,000,000 (2004 USD) 18,400,000,000 (2009 USD)
2004	Hurricane Frances	Florida	49	9,000,000,000 (2004 USD) 10,159,000,000 (2009 USD)
2004	Hurricane Jeanne	Florida	4	6,800,000,000 (2004 USD) 7,675,000,000 (2009 USD)
2005	Hurricane Katrina	Gulf Coast	1836	170,000,000,000 (2005 USD) 186,000,000,000 (2009 USD)
2005	Hurricane Rita	Louisiana	120	10,000,000,000 (2005 USD) 10,920,000,000 (2009 USD)

2005	Evansville Tornado	Midwest	25	92,000 (2005 USD)
				100,490,000,000 (2009 USD)
2007	California Wildfire	California	14	4,000,000,000 (2007 USD)
				4,113,000,000 (2009 USD)

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