Clarion Review

Political Science

Eye of the Storm: Inside City Hall During Katrina
Sally Forman
978-1-4343-2997-4
Four Stars (out of Five)

"*In this crisis and on TV you just need to look more hard-working…ROLL UP THE SLEEVES!*"

—E-mail from Sharon Worthy to FEMA Director Michael Brown (September 3 2005)

Perhaps no other individual has more information on the historic heartbreaking events in New Orleans when the levees broke than Sally Forman. *Eye of the Storm* is an on-the-spot narrative from the former director of communications for the city of New Orleans. Written in honed economical language set during and immediately after Hurricane Katrina it spreads blame between various political players and staffers.

Readers of Dougas Brinkley's *The Great Deluge* will see a substantially different balance here. Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco is portrayed as paralyzed by territorial disputes the FEMA folks were too obstructionist to be purely useless and the White House though sporadically concerned was most interested in favorable ink. Even the originally pragmatic Mayor Ray Nagin is criticized for occasional paranoia but she clearly respects his desire to do right by the people. The Mayor's penchant for extemporaneous spouting off as in the electorate-shifting "chocolate city" speech and his tendency to act on incorrect information are chalked up to ceaseless pressure and media attention. Forman is forthright regarding her own shortcomings going so far as to describe behavior toward NBC News anchor Brian Williams as "unprofessional." Her apparent relief at hearing of looters being shot is an eyebrow-raiser.

Building blocks for an agenda are present but this lacks an air of malice. The author's husband Ron CEO of the Audubon Institute ran for mayor against Nagin only months after this book's timeline finishing third. Forman had no choice but to resign her position. Furthermore stepson Dan Forman was named campaign manager to gubernatorial candidate John Georges in June 2007. Nagin only opted out of the governor's race on the day of the filing deadline. Whether these developments tint the story is difficult to determine but such perceived conflicts are minimal by Louisiana standards and Forman's treatment of her former boss comes off as

largely humane.

The White House graciously sent a “Communications Team” purportedly to improve telephone service. They planted listening devices in city offices and the emergency command center. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff whose “angular jaw and devil’s beard promoted a sinister appearance” gave Forman “the heebie jeebies.” Chertoff’s man the get-er-done dynamo General Honoré seemed to be the only Fed not fascinated with long lunches regulations red-tape and nay-saying.

Challenges to communication were insane; the sheer number of problems screaming for immediate solutions were beyond impossible. At a low point Forman says “I began to panic for the city and everyone in peril wondering how in the hell we would help everyone who needed it.” In the end numbers show a mix of successes and failures with 1700 dead and 300000 homes destroyed but thousands of people rescued from rooftops. *Eye of the Storm* is an essential record of outstanding bravery and breathtaking governmental dysfunction. Roll up your sleeves America.