William Freudenberg's interesting articles show the man made nature of natural disasters. What they highlight is the way in which concentrated interests have been hiding the real dangers of what they can do. It takes the power of a hurricane to show the problem with consistently spending money on what developers and the elite desire, regardless of the possible future impact, in life or money. It is similar to the school system we read about in Mississippi where money wasn't being sent to schools because there was no concentrated interest lobbying for it.

My question is:

After Katrina it became obvious that the minority population was far more affected in the long term then the white population. Similarly in education, a lack of funding usually is seen to affect minority school districts with greater intensity. Does the fact that America has a very set class system, and yet chooses to ignore that fact, produce an excuse for concentrated interests to openly lobby against programs it knows will save lives? Or put more succinctly: Does our ignorance of class in the US, allow us accept the suffering of minorities, at the hands of the wealthy concentrated interests.

The manmade catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina was caused by many "perverse priorities." 13.4 million taxpayer's dollars were spent to dredge MR-GO where only dozens of ships would cross the channel per year. Today, New Orleans has "continued to overlook the environmental realities of this site, going largely to rebuild the inner ring of floodwalls, not the broader ring of wetlands" (Freudenburg 19). What have humans shown the capacity to do but not reverse in times of disaster? Why should economic benefits take precedent over our environment and what can be done to stop the concentrated power of large corporations and those with power? How is the construction of environmentally dangerous levees and channels occurring under our nation's watch? Who needs to face the evidence FIRST in order for any progress to be made?

{How to prevent this from continuing?}

- Freudenberg's views on the social causes of 'natural' disasters. As an avid environmentalist, I have followed with increasing interest these issues occurring down in New Orleans. I have felt for some time that we as a
nation are responsible for our own flood issues. It seems we are putting our (very) short term needs ahead of the fact that without proper maintence (or at least space to let natural processes such as siltation occur), we are very much damaging the ecosystems that are the only viable means of protection we have against these major storms.

Two questions from Fruedenberg:

1) Where do you see the next "MR-GO" type project occurring in our nation, and what can we do to prevent the same mistake from being made.

2) How can we break this cycle of "Circular Liability" so that we can take actions which benefit our society as a whole for the long term?

{What about global warming, etc?}

In your article you write about hurricane Katrina. It seems that you wanted to stress the idea that we need to listen to the warnings about the risks of damage in the environment. I would like to know more about your views on this idea. What do you think will happen if people do not take these warnings seriously? What are your views on global warming? Do you think that we are taking enough precautions or are there more that we could be doing? Do you think that we really learned anything from hurricane Katrina?

{What about capitalism, social action, etc?}

I took Professor Freudenberg's environmental studies class my first quarter here at UCSB, so I was already familiar with his work and study of Hurricane Katrina, but I had no idea he had written a magazine article and I had forgotten what his argument was, so it was very interesting to read it. It scares me a lot how the government funds projects for economic development but ignores the environmental factors and the people it might put in danger. My parents live very close to the Delta in Northern California, and it is another place in a lot of danger from flooding because of development on wetlands. I would like to ask Professor Freudenberg if he believes it is our capitalist society in the United States that have shaped our thoughtless decisions, and if he thinks the government might have made different choices if we had a different type of government, like communism? And I also want to know what we can do now that all of this damage has already been done.. especially a college student. I also remember from his class, and he quoted from it in his second article: the
book Overshoot. In the book they talked about a place called Easter Island, and how the island became overpopulated and the resources were overused so everyone died out. I wonder if he could explain it a little more because I think it's very interesting, and if he thinks it is probable that the same thing will happen to our world. Also, in what ways can the people of today shape our society to prevent something like Hurricane Katrina, or something like Easter Island from happening again?

Mr. Freudenberg, I was very interested in both of your articles that I read as part of our course readings this week. It is obvious that individuals do not intend to harm the natural environment, but I strongly agree with the fact that humans play a huge role when it comes to environmental disasters. Not so long ago, I wrote an essay in regards to the Exxon Valdez oil spill that took place in Prince William Sound, Alaska, which was one of the most devastating man-made disasters to occur at sea. I would imagine you to be familiar with such disaster and I would like to know what you have to say about it. I know that once an environment has been perturbed it may or may not return to the way it was depending on whether it is a stable or unstable environment. Therefore, I would also like to hear your opinion about the effectiveness of restoration processes after a natural disaster occurs. I believe that as a society we frequently take advantage of the natural environment for personal gain and that we have taken it for granted. Do you think it will ever be possible for humans and the natural environment to exist without harming one another?

The "World Watch" Katrina article takes on a different perspective in terms of what a "natural disaster" is. Freudenberg and other authors talk about the human's role in the August 2005 disaster in New Orleans. The article begins to talk about the improper building of the levees in the city and how they failed to protect from flooding. The main concern, however was the building of the MR-GO. This structure allowed salt water from the Gulf of Mexico to destroy trees and plants parallel to the Mississippi. Known as the "Hurricane Highway", this ditch is an example of how much damage was brought on as a consequence of poor human decisions.

What can we as a society do to aid scientists in voicing their environmental concerns? How can we bridge the gap between the political agenda and the true ecological and environmental concerns so that we know about the potential damages of natural disasters? Can the damages of the MR-Go be reversed?
In Freudenburg’s “Katrina: Unlearned Lessons?, he discusses a canal project in New Orleans known as the MR-GO. This project turned out to be a costly mistake for the city when it destroyed the cypress trees that helped to protect it from Hurricanes. Although many environmental groups warned that introducing this canal would kill many of the plants in the wetland due to a high amount of salt water, the corps built it anyway. This canal could be a reason for the extreme damage to and flooding of New Orleans during hurricane Katrina. A question I have for Freudenburg is what would he suggest cities do to prepare for natural disasters, or should they do nothing at all? In his article “Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters”? He states that the more the United States spends on flood protection, the more they end up paying to repair the damage caused by floods. It seems as though everything we are trying to do to improve the problem is actually making things worse.

In their articles "Katrina: Unlearned Lessons," and "Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters?: Improving the Recognition of Political-Economic Factors in the Creation of Disasters," Freudenburg, Gramling, Laska, and Erikson heavily stress the necessity for the general populous to shift its perception of horrific environmental phenomena from awe of "natural disasters" to analytic of paralleled human impact. This contention revolves around the idea that in extension with human influence, environmental and geological damage is exploited as a means to political-economic advancement. The authors coincide this provocative thesis with specific incidences of "natural disaster" - flooding of the Mississippi River Valley and Katrina-related New Orleans - that seemingly vindicate the notion that "[the] underlying cause of damage to humans as well as to the environment has involved a three-part pattern, supported by the political system - spreading the costs, concentrating the economic benefits and hiding the real risks."(Organizing...1015) The most prominent form of "spreading the cost" is demonstrated through government expenditures, known as "rent-seeking," that make land more valuable to special interests, regardless of the cost imposed on the whole of society. The second part of the pattern mentioned, "concentrating the economic benefits," is exemplified by the profit made by developers who build in the floodplains. Finally, a sense that exploitation of environmental damage is economically manipulated by "hiding the risk" may easily be exposed through the cyclical evasion of responsibility; ultimately, the victims are accused of insufficient insurance and ignorance of the inevitability of environmental catastrophe. Granted, one may reasonably acknowledge the validity of such proposed arguments; examples of ineffective levees along the Mississippi and the destruction of marshlands in Louisiana adequately portray infrastructure projects.
as causal factors for worsened environmental disaster. As a sociologist concentrated on inequality, one must demand clarification as to how these politically driven occurrences promote an uneven distribution of power or wealth among classes. The authors might respond by stating that "[disasters] worsen pre-existing inequalities, amplifying the challenges faced by those in vulnerable social categories of class, race, gender and ethnicity." (Organizing...1018) One then recognizes the grip of political incentive as a method of widening the gap between social classes. What, in that case, is the responsibility of the people and the relevance of intervention? Are there feasible precautions that people of the mentioned regions can take to protect themselves from disaster? Finally, does a suspicion of hidden government agenda exist, and if so, what motivation would a governing body have to maintain a social imbalance of power and wealth?

After reading Freudenburg's articles, I've noticed that a lot of the major points he makes about the Hurricane Katrina disaster are just reflections of the injustices in our society that reoccur and that have been prevalent since modern society. Freudenburg focuses on the consequences that result from putting economic interest over collateral damage such as the environment and the suffering of the taxpayers. When he discusses how Hurricane Katrina had more factors that lead to its phenomenal destruction other than just being a "natural disaster" I realized that none of the issues he brought up were mentioned in detail by the media at all. While Freudenburg discusses how a large part of the destruction was actually caused by the Corp's construction of MR-GO which destroyed nature's natural defense against floods, the media had a field day with sensational yellow page journalism which magnified the human suffering and the governments inefficient emergency response to the disaster, and thus finding a new way to target President Bush and the Iraq War. I'm not saying that what the media brought up was insignificant; sobering issues such as the government's failure to do its duty sufficiently and the issue of racism are important. However, the events that occur previous to the disaster are just as if not more important to the public. Corporate entanglements with government projects has always been a problem where the top
percentage benefits from the toils of the majority. Hypothetical profit must be evaluated by a neutral party and the environmental damage must be taken into consideration. Taxpayer money should not be spent on levees and trenches that magnify the problem they are suppose to prevent, which causes even more money from the people to repair the damage done. Now the question I pose is that even if we are exposed to this, what actions can be taken if the real situation is much more broad than just isolated events like Hurricane Katrina? How can these events be stopped prematurely if the government is unwilling to factor in the potential damage when they are baited by the possible chance of profit? What can we do so that the general public can be more aware of the domino affect that general societal injustices have on specific instances?

When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005 it wreaked more havoc than any other hurricane to hit the Gulf of Mexico. One would think that it must have been the strongest or most powerful, however it was not either. The difference was that MRGO was built and it destroyed the natural flood wall of around New Orleans. Katrina caused so much destruction to many innocent people because of the poor decisions made by humans who championed the construction of MRGO. MRGO was only used for a dozen round trips meaning that it was just a privileged few that benefitted from the 200 million it cost tax payers to build and maintain MRGO. The New Orleans/ Katrina tragedy is an example of how the environmental and social costs largely outweigh the economic gains. Professor Fruedenburg seems to be a new paradigm on how to look at these tragedies. So my question is how will this new type of looking at how economic gain does not have to be at the cost of the environment be approached with the economic meltdown that has occurred and how soon will we start to see the changes occur?

Are there more projects out there like MRGO; where the people with power and money are putting all of their money into a project that only benefits a small population? (In MRGO's case only twelve.) How can we make sure this doesn't happen to us? Most of the people in Louisiana had no idea that all of their money was going towards a project which helped benefit very few people. Is it our fault for living in these areas where floods, fires, and hurricanes
are known to occur? In a world that has reached carrying capacity (according to Catton), how do we avoid that?

You end your ?Katrina: Lessons Unlearned? article with: ?the question is whether we will actually learn from it?? I would just like to know your opinion on this. Do you think that because so many consequences that scientists predicted were proven, that we have learned from this? Do you think that because this was the most costly disaster that we might actually listen to scientists and understand that proceeding with our plans will eventually end up costing us so much more?

Would you consider some tragedies to be actual "natural disasters" that are not the result of humans? Or are they all tragedies caused by us?

Even though there is so much evidence on the disasters of Hurricane Katrina being man made, why isn't it more in the public eye? Is it the press that doesn't print it or the government that are hiding it?

Can you elaborate on why exactly MR-GO was built, how could such a massive project be undertaken without more serious estimation of the (supposed) economic gains, and the potential ecological impact? What do you think should be done about MR-GO now, given that the Army Corps of Engineers has suggested it be closed? Will there be any further detrimental environmental effects from filling in MR-GO?

Whose to blame for the continuous building of residential areas and shopping centers in areas that are known to be unsafe and have a very high likelihood of getting hit by a "natural" disaster? Is it just the government for allowing and giving permits out for building in these dangerous areas? Is it the actually builders who are just looking to make a buck? Or is it the individuals who move into or start businesses in theses dangerous areas? Also why is this pattern never brought to light and continues to happen?
This week's readings were heavily weighted on class, and how American society reflects and defines hierarchical status in the United States. Freudenburg's essay was particularly intriguing in his comparison between the environment, the economy, and social class. He states that environmental sociology is both macroscopic and microscopic in that one can view the government institution of a "natural disaster" as well as the individual repercussions upon the people. In most cases, Freudenburg utilizes sociological studies to justify the idea that "natural disasters" hurt the middle class, and barely effect the upper class. He also states that in these tragedies there are always sellers, buyers, and government agencies who build on the natural environment in order to re-build their economy. My question lies in the statement that, "environmentally damaging programs are critical for economic survival." Is it true to say that the government is fully aware of the repercussions in building on open land (ex. after Katrina knocking down the swamps and trees)? And, is the government knowingly endangering the people by building up their economy?

I know the article said that fixing the MRGO is not a plausible option, but then how could someone possibly resolve that issue? Is New Orleans simply going to be uninhabitable to anyone without a death wish?

I've heard lots of blame towards FEMA for not doing their job during the rescue and clean-up, but why is MRGO still in operation? Why hasn't there been any legislative action or prodding of politicians by the scientific community to dam up the canal and shut it down? If this canal isn't dammed up, New Orleans remains a sitting duck for the next big hurricane.

I want to know if he agrees with Hernstein's and Murray's argument from the excerpt "Why Inequality?," that intelligence largely determines how well people do in life. The rich are rich mostly
because they are smart, the poor are poor mostly because they are dumb, and the middle Americans are middling mostly because they are of middling intelligence. (Fischer, Hout, Jankowski, Lucas, Swidler and Voss, pg.6) Wouldn't knowledgeable more educated people know of the hazardous property they are buying? Are the less knowledgeable people more subjected to buy property in this area, bringing them to a lower stance than they are now once a disaster hits?

The articles also states that disasters increase the inequalities between rich and poor and amplify the challenges for the lower class individuals. I feel that the reasons that the rich and poor are divided even more after a disaster is justified by the fact that rich people have money saved for certain disasters. They also can afford houses in places that are not vulnerable to natural disasters. No rich white man would buy a house in the lowlands of New Orleans simply because he can avoid that risk by buying a house on higher ground. Most poor families do not have that risk. Are lower class families affected more than middle and upper class families simply because they cannot afford houses in low-risk areas, or is there a correlation between the causes of disasters and poor people being devastated by them?

Due to the aftermath of Hurricane Betsy, floodwalls were established to cease destruction from any unfortunate future hurricanes. In the time lapse of after Hurricane Betsy and before Hurricane Katrina, people were blamed for the changes that went on besides the establishment of floodwalls (Freudenberg 18). The United States has been doing a lot of reacting. As discussed in the reacting precautions were taking after Hurricane Betsy. These implications were set in place after a horrific event. The US expected another hurricane in the area that is why they prepared. My question is when the US will be in a position where it will have an action plan for horrific events instead of creating solutions instead of plans for victims of events like Hurricane Katrina. The long term needs to
be an action plan while the short term is considered a solution for
the time being. In reality majority of the time, people, in
particularly, minorities, are not at ease after being presented with
short term help.

In William Freudenberg's essays, "Katrina: Unlearned lessons" and
"Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters" they talk about what
humans did to nature in order to prevent disasters but ended up
coming back to cause more harm. The economists didn't listen to
the scientist's warnings about the risks of environmental damages
seriously. The man made floodwalls caused more damage then
help, and there is a relationship between economic activity and
environmental harm. I was wondering what solutions you think
could help this problem? Is the fact that Katrina has a lower class
population a reason why the economists did not care to listen to
the scientists as much? If Katrina had a high-class population
would things be different?

The key element that stood out to me in these articles, which shed a
new light on the causes of such disasters as Hurricane Katrina
and the flooding in the Mississippi River Basin, was what
Freudenberg refers to as the circular evasion of responsibility. As
Freudenberg describes, the circular evasion of responsibility is a
vicious cycle in which all parties that should be to blame for the
initial cause of such ?natural disasters,? namely, the Federal
Government, local developers, and FEMA deny their involvement in
the root of the problem, and ultimately place blame on the
victimized bystanders, who ironically are the ones most harmed
by the aftermath of such disasters. By evading responsibility
these higher political powers mask the fact that they are the
reason these unavoidable natural occurrences become disasters
in the first place. Rather than tackling the root of the problem,
which lies in environmental reform, the government spends billions
of dollars in Flood Protection Projects which seek to further
economic development at the stake of worsening the conditions
that lead to such disasters in the first place. In these articles Freudenberg demonstrates his sentiment that if these higher political powers were willing to take responsibility for their role in creating such natural disasters they could potentially be avoided in the future. How does he propose that we evoke this possible change among the Federal government and others responsible for the creation of such disasters? In other words, how can we shift the blame from the victims to the government? How can we make people understand the potential danger of buying homes in such disaster prone areas?

My question for Professor Freudenburg is how can we ensure this does not happen again? How can we be certain that the people in charge are taking the greatest precautions to protect the "little people" and at the same time make sure that when a mistake is made, those "little people" do what is necessary to keep themselves safe?

According to the essay written by William R. Freudenburg, along with a number of research studies, age, rather than race, was the main predictor of survival following the traumatic events of Hurricane Katrina. This makes sense to me, as it seems obvious that younger people would have more physical strength and perseverance to make it through such harsh conditions. The essay also claims, however, that "rates of return and recovery have been far lower for black former residents of New Orleans than white ones" (p. 1018). This, on the other hand, is very unclear to me. Why would it be that race affects people's abilities to survive a hurricane? Regardless of color, there do not seem to be enough physiological differences among humans that would cause this result. What is the explanation for this? Is there an explanation at all?

Secondly, the article argues that as people, we have focused too much on how we respond and organize help-groups after the fact of disasters, but not enough on paying more attention to what causes these events in the first place. After reading this, I realized how true this was. Groups in response to Hurricane Katrina were formed all over the country shortly after the storm took place, but rarely do people hear about groups beforehand, other than scientists and researchers. Now that America has experienced an event like this, as well as many others, we would think that this problem would be solved, but it still seems
to be unaddressed. Why is this? Why haven’t people taken the necessary steps in order to change this? Hopefully sometime in the future we will be able to find a way to prevent the effects of natural disasters from being so horrific.

I recently had a discussion with a friend about if it was possible to be both a capitalist nation and an environment-minded nation. I argued that the capitalism promotes “every person for their self” which doesn’t leave much room for individuals to be mindful of their social/natural environment. The examples in your writing of the wasteful and unproductive spending in New Orleans to expand development on the wetlands (that actually protect the coast) prove that our government clearly places capitalism first. In your opinion is it socially impossible to have both capitalistic and truly environmentally friendly society due to the individualist nature of capitalism?

Prof Freudenburg, in his article "Katrina: Unlearned Lessons", labels the disaster associated with Hurricane Katrina as a "man-made disaster", placing much of the blame on the economic progression project, MR-GO. If the damages were caused by the increases in wetland salinity and subsequent destruction of cypress groves and the wetlands in general, why are funds now still being directed primarily towards rebuilding levees? Can this be interpreted as yet another misguided government effort, or is it possible that some kind of greater manipulation is occurring? If the issue is as straight-forward as diminished wetlands, why are only a few able to see it?

After reading "Katrina: Unlearned Lessons," I learned how much natural disasters are tied to unnatural human actions. For example, the prominent causal factor of hurricane Katrina was the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) which killed vast amounts of marsh biota and became better knows as the "hurricane highway." Also, "Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters?..." discusses hurricane Katrina and the floods around the Mississippi river. Both of these natural disasters are believed have been worsened by human actions. The floods by the Mississippi river were antagonized by levees and areas in flood prone areas are continually developed though it is well known that they may be flooded within the near future. Freudernburg’s main argument is that we need to focus more on the social factors affecting disaster. This is important because many of the actions that promote natural disaster are promoted because they will stimulate the economy. But, not only is the economic stimulation often non-existent, but it usually only helps the richest in the area and does not benefit the
rest of the population. Then, when a disaster does strike laws prevent those affected from suing the companies that sold them houses in flood zones, or promises sturdy levees, and they are left helpless. This system needs to be changed and money needs to be put into disaster prevention through awareness via things like accurate flood maps rather than building that will stimulate the economy?

After reading this I want to ask Freudenburg what he personally thinks is the best way to change the system to better prevent disasters. What needs to change first? Do laws need to be changed so companies in the wrong can be sued, or does the government need to enforce stricter rules about inhabiting disaster prone areas? What should be done first?

The article, "Katrina: Unlearned Lessons," was very interesting to me. I did not fully understand the human hand in the destruction of this hurricane until I read this article. I found it truly terrifying that something that was as environmentally dangerous as MR-GO was allowed to be completed even after the warnings of experts and even though it had very little economic benefit to New Orleans. The article says that the destruction of Katrina was tragically graphic evidence that scientists’ warnings about the risks of environmental damage need to be taken seriously?. Do you think that issues like global warming fall into this same category? Are there other environmental issues that humans are creating without listening to what experts think? How would you propose to make experts' opinions more heard and headed?

The readings this week were by William Freudenberg he wrote "Katrina: Unlearned Lessons." And Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters?: Improving the Recognition of Political-Economic Factors in the Creation of Disasters." In both he talked about the widespread pattern in disaster research and environmental sociology of seeing environmental damage and as consequences of economic growth and development. In the first article he focuses on a specific case that is later reiterated in the second article along with other facts. Overall it shows how natural disasters are not just nature affecting humans but they are caused by humans affecting nature. In addition these affects caused by humans are in the name of economic development, though in the end they cause the most problems to the greater masses and benefit only the select few in power. This is shown in the hurricane Katrina case where lives of thousands of poor residents of New Orleans were affected by poor planning and not taking environmental conditions into mind.

When William Freudenberg comes to give his speech I would probably ask him that in Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters?: Improving the
Questions for Freudenberg

Recognition of Political-Economic Factors in the Creation of Disasters. He says but it [economic affects on natural disasters] is one that deserves more attention in the years ahead. But with the economic crisis and all the other issues how can we ensure that this topic is taken seriously and major progress is made? After something that got as much media coverage as Katrina one would expect that changes would be made but in your article you say that still the problem has not been taking seriously, do you think that we will ever get to a level that that these issues will be taken seriously? And do you think that the few people with the most money will ever be selflessness enough to help the greater majority, or is it against human nature?

William R. Freudenburg's articles on environmental sociology focusing in particular on the effects of Hurricane Katrina (2005) and the flooding of the upper-Mississippi River Valley (2008) were very eye-opening and interesting. A point that I found particularly interesting in the "Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters" article was the idea of the "circular evasion of responsibility." The circular evasion of responsibility as described in the article basically means that the victims of natural disasters ultimately will become responsible for the cost and blame of natural disasters. The system is set up so that blame flows from developers, to the local government, to FEMA, then to Congress. Once the issue gets to Congress, they are protected by the Flood Control Act of 1928, and the victims cannot sue them. This is unfair because as explained later in the article, the majority of the people these hazards effect are people who cannot protect themselves from them; therefore they do not have the means to support themselves in dealing with the damages and consequences of the disasters. I do not understand why people remain ignorant of this; I was ignorant of this until I read this article. So? What is Professor Freudenburg doing to spread this message? Has he submitted his findings to large magazines? Has he talked to city officials? How does he plan on spreading his important ideas and findings?

William Freudenburg and Environmental Sociology

In William R. Freudenburg's "Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters? Improving the Recognition of political-Economic Factors in the Creation of Disasters," he says that humans were responsible for the tragedies that occurred with both the Mississippi River and in New Orleans with Hurricane Katrina. First, he notes that people were at fault for these mistakes due to the "overall impact of human economic activity in the finite 'carrying capacity' of the biophysical
environment" (p. 1016). Also, Freudenberg notes that the poorer people were devastated more by these tragedies than the wealthier people. He notes that in general, the government supports misguided construction projects and that builders of these projects are "spreading the costs [of the project], concentrating the benefits and hiding the risks" (P.1021). The people who are tricked by builders into living in these dangerous flood zones are stuck with the bill, due to Congresses' power over the situation.

How can we/ Congress let developers get away with ruining lives, killing people and harming the environment? Congress is suppose to be working for the people, but it sounds like they are working for special interest groups?including local governments?who derive increased tax basis from projects that are approved. Why does Congress support developers and why didn?t Congress look into things like the dysfunctional "MRGO" before Katrina (p. 1026)? Why didn't Congress help reimburse the people devastated in the tragedy and/ or compel contractors to warn people about flood danger zones? In California, when a house is purchased, the buyers are informed if they must purchase flood insurance due to its location on flood maps. Why was this not the case in New Orleans? Were people unaware or were the 100 year maps just inadequate? Right now, residents of Montecito are engaged in rebuilding their fire ravaged homes. What should the government be doing regarding those projects? Also, Santa Maria has a levee that is being considered. It will help the economy locally but are the ramifications of the project potentially devastating? Is it comparable to the New Orleans' mistake?

I found the readings this week to be very interesting because they deal with important issues in our world that we face in our everyday lives. In the Fisher, Lucas, etc. article, they talk about inequality and discuss certain views for why it occurs. There is a claim in a text called ?The Bell Curve? that explains that inequality is a natural occurrence and cannot be avoided. It also says that inequality is based on people?s intelligence?in other words, the more intelligent you are the higher status you will have in society. The authors of ?Why Inequality?? strongly disagree with these claims, saying that it is policies and what social milieu a person grows up in which determine what status individuals have in society. I, personally, find ?The Bell Curve? to be ridiculous. What if, for example, someone is very intelligent but grows up in a very poor family and neighborhood without the resources to get a good education. In this case, the person would be very intelligent, but not high on the social ladder due to the environment in which he or she grew up in. It is a naïve way to look at inequality, saying it is ?natural? in order to pretend that nothing can be done to prevent it.

In his articles, Freudenberg discusses an issue that affects all us in some way or another, even if it is not directly. He talks
about hurricanes in the New Orleans area, and more specifically, Hurricane Katrina. In his ?World Watch? article, he says that it is not nature which is harming us, it is we who are destroying nature and it is ?coming back to haunt us.? He discusses our destruction of the wetlands around the area that, had they not been damaged, would have made the impact of the flood much less severe. If people know that it?s because of the lack of wetlands that are making flooding much worse than it otherwise would be, then why aren?t any measures being taken to restore these wetlands? Is restoring the wetlands to the way they were even possible? Is there a way we can make sure that scientists? voices and warnings are being heard?

In ?Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters??, one point asserted in the article is the misuse of funds from the Army Corps of Engineers: ?Louisiana actually received far more money for Corps civil works projects than any other state?the state's leaders usually ?invested? in projects that were supposedly intended to help the region's economy,not its safety? (1028). Since the geographical dangers of the New Orleans area were already well known and well established, what sociological factors influenced this decision? More importantly, why, despite overwhelming evidence, do people in positions of power consider themselves impervious to such disastrous yet preventable predicaments such as Hurricane Katrina?

So here is my question for Freudenburg.

"Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters?: Improving the Recognition of Political-Economic Factors in the Creation of Disasters" by Freudenberg, Gramling, Laska and Erikson

I find the circular evasion of responsibility that Freudenberg identifies to be extremely disrespectful. I cannot believe that in a country where consumers rely on higher-ups and professionals to be trustworthy when seeking guidance; that there is such a childish diffusion of responsibility. Especially when developers put their clients' lives in danger, I don't see how they can't be held responsible. The fact that real estate developers aren't under any obligations to inform the home buyers that such a large hazard exists is unbelievable. I first heard about FEMA during Hurricane Katrina, and it is unreal what they get away with. Especially after reading Freudenberg's other article, "Katrina: Unlearned Lessons," any doubt that the lack of response to Katrina was partially racially motivated, has dissipated. FEMA seems like another crooked government organization just trying to get away with whatever they can by
"spreading costs, concentrating the benefits, and hiding the risks." The way FEMA creates the "100-year floods" maps just seems stupid; as the articles expose that levees and other kinds of so-called flood protection tend to worsen flooding.

I feel like this diffusion of responsibility could be used as a discourse of individual and institutional centered perspectives. Adam Smith believed that if you leave individuals alone to pursue their own interests, needs, and rational calculations, then the greatest good for the greatest number will result. Without a doubt, if home buyers in flood hazard areas were aware of the danger, then they would make the best possible choice for themselves, and probably live elsewhere. However, when an institution such as the government is purposely misleading those in society, they begin to lose the trust and reliance of their people. Especially with the presidency of Bush, I feel like it is now or never for our government to prove that they really are trying to protect our needs and freedoms. I don't even have a particular question for Freudenberg, but I am very glad that he exposed such wrongdoings by FEMA and all those involved in the mishandling of hazards such as flooding. I find it very interesting that powerful individuals hide behind their own institution and accomplice institutions when they are looked at for answers by the individuals in society that they have mislead and mistreated.

Week 6: Freudenberg Readings

Out of all the articles we have read, these two by William Freudenberg were the ones I have connected to most. Perhaps it is because his writing is less theoretical and more factual that I felt I understood more of the material, but either way I enjoyed both of his articles discussing Hurricane Katrina.

I was provoked by his reversed theory of the damaging nature of hurricanes. I had never heard someone claim that it was the fault of humans instead of nature that led to mass destruction in the past. However, after reading both articles, I find myself supporting Freudenberg more and more in his arguments. In addition to being fascinated by this, I was taken aback by the lack of acknowledgement the scientific community received when they were protesting plans for MR-GO’s development. To me it just proves that our entire society is so economy-driven that we easily forget about our environment until a “natural disaster” has occurred.

One of the things that Freudenberg brings up in his
The article “Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters” that I was unaware of was the line of people that blame the person in front of them for the damage that was done by the hurricane. In my opinion it is completely unjust that those who have suffered the most as a result of Katrina (for example those living in the 9th ward) are those that are blamed in the end for promoting the projects that destroyed the wetlands and marshes of New Orleans. How irresponsible are higher power corporations that they must play the blame game to take the spotlight off of themselves?

My question for Freudenberg relates to the “levee effect” that he spoke of in “Organizing Hazards, Engineering Disasters.” I understood this to mean that when we try to prevent nature from doing what it does naturally, the resulting effects are worse than what would have initially happened. Can this effect be related to other parts of society? In what other sociological areas have you seen the course of nature interrupted by humans only to result in consequences?

The article you wrote really opened my eyes to what is happening around me. There was no doubt in my mind that natural disasters were occurring but to find out that the underlying factors were not as "natural" as I had imagined was surprising. It had never occurred to me that these events were side effects of economic greed and "development" of land important to keeping away these very disasters. Even the Congress is in on it, creating legislation preventing them from being sued! How can we, as students, help to raise awareness of what is happening and show others that this disastrous cycle needs to be put to a stop?

With hurricane Katrina doing this much damage to the city of New Orleans i.e. the billions of dollars it cost us in total to rectify ourselves from its destructive power. Not only is it saying that the damage it has done has hurt our economy in ways that negate all of the economic "building" humans do to harm nature, but I believe it is saying something about our institutions. Do you believe that the institutions that are present in today's society are actually helping the human race by making the technological advances as well as other advances to protect us from harmful events such as Katrina? Or are our institutions that we are so intwined in digging each and every one of us a hole leading to extinction and if so how do we change that?

Mr. Freudenberg, after hearing your detailed account of how capitalist and environmental interest are at polar ends of the
Questions for Freudenberg

spectrum, what are your thoughts on capitalism as a system in general. Do you oppose the unchecked unregulated free market? Do you agree with Adam Smith's 'Invisible Hand' Theory that states-- A completely free market will result in the greatest good for society? Is it possible for capitalism and environmentalism to coexist?

William Freudenburg's work on World Watch on the Hurricane Katrina disaster describes how potentially beneficial economic projects permanently harmed the environment and provided major factors in the massive destruction of the city of New Orleans. The canal Mississippi-River Gulf-Outlet (MR-GO) was a bypass for ships to shorten their length for trade which destroyed an outer ring of Cyprus trees which exponentially increased the havoc of Hurricane Katrina. The important questions arise such as why did the construction of such a project be approved, despite such overwhelming scientific evidence that it would cause detrimental repercussions? It seems that the project which was designed to increase economic activity only caused a huge loss of funds toward the rebuilding of the damage it let happen. Is economic success in our culture more appreciated than science and welfare of life? Do we exist in a "do now ask questions later" society? Is there a connection between the success of our economy and the welfare of our environment? If so, what kinds of measures can we take to create a healthy equilibrium between the two?

In his essay titled "Social Forces," William Freudenberg states that "...the suffering is done not by those who initiated the cycle of harm, but by others - particularly those who are least able to protect themselves from it." I found this statement to be very profound because it is unfortunately very true. It is very disheartening for me to learn that there is much that the government can do to ameliorate the damage caused by natural disasters, yet they only take minimal precautions. They are basically more concerned with economic gain than they are with the welfare of the working class. Furthermore, I would like to know Professor Freudenberg's opinion of whether he thinks things will get better in the future. Based on the article, things do not seem to be getting much better. Would things finally start to improve if the working class people were better informed of their situation. Would they ask more from their government if they knew what was actually going on?

In "World Watch," Freudenberg mentions "healthy wetlands" numerous times. He talks about how the levees and canals destroy otherwise healthy wetlands and how if there were more healthy wetlands the damage from Katrina wouldn't have been
as bad. I'm assuming that a healthy wetland partly consists of having more fresh water as opposed to salt water, but other than that I don't know much else. Could you explain in more detail what exactly a healthy wetland would consist of, or what exactly it is? Also, could you talk a bit more about why it would prevent damage from flooding? Is it because a wetland would absorb a good amount of water rather than let it inland?