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Reaction Paper #1
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Pelling, Mark. 2003. "Chapter 3: Social Vulnerability in the City" in The Vulnerability of Cities: Social Resilience and Natural Disaster. London: Earthscan, pp 46-67.

Pelling, Mark. 2001. "Natural Disasters?" In Castree, N. and Braun, B. (eds.) Social Nature, London: Blackwell, pp. 170-188.

Pelling reiterates the notion that 'disaster' be attributed to a confluence of social and physical factors that jointly contribute to the end effect of a particular hazard; it is their interaction that determines the magnitude and frequency of "humanitarian disasters with natural triggers". He discusses the *entitlement* (environmental stress exacerbates economic stress) and *Marxist* (socioeconomic structures control the effect of a hazard on a particular population) approaches to assessing vulnerability, resistance, and resilience. These are useful frames through which to understand the frequency of natural disasters in the developing world as well as the reinforcing effect of many technological and emergency relief aid solutions. I am somewhat troubled by the assumption that a disadvantaged individual has no capacity or responsibility to make healthy economic and social choices to decrease his vulnerability. Is this an issue of inadequate education leaving certain segments of the population unaware of natural hazards and the social networks that mitigate their risk? Or, is it a simple economic decision for a subsistence farmer to locate her family in a fertile flood plain? Certainly, many support networks (insurance, foreign aid, large-scale irrigation projects, and development grants) enable risky development in geographically unsuitable areas, but economic practicality also plays a significant role in stratifying risk just as it does wealth, political clout, and social status. South African townships continue burgeoning in some of the most hazardous locations and risky conditions despite the ostensible lifting of legal restriction because of an inability of the black working class to meet the cost of living in more secure and affluent suburbs that enjoy adequate infrastructure to provide resistance and resilience to disaster.

Bull-Kamanga, L., Diagne, K., Lavell, A., Leon, E., Lerise, F., MacGregor, H., Maskrey, A., Meshack, M., Pelling, M., Reid, H., Satterthwaite, D., Songsore, J., Westgate, K., Yitambe, A. 2003. "From Everyday Hazards to Disasters: The Accumulation of Risk in Urban Areas." Environment and Urbanization, 15(1): 193-203.

Urban areas are a good place to focus disaster mitigation efforts because their large, concentrated population and hierarchical social structures can either be a liability, significantly increasing risk among some or all groups, or an asset, allowing effective resistance, resilience, and relief if well organized. Especially in developed urban centers, the detrimental extent of a 'natural disaster' is determined directly by the community's response to a physical stressor, not by the magnitude of the particular event. For this reason, socioeconomic/political/ethnic inequities largely determine the vulnerability of certain populations. Things like access to and quality of basic infrastructure (both physical and social), econo-geographic constraints on development, educational opportunities, and political clout all contribute to disparities in risk burden. One of the major questions is how to rank the significance of various risk factors according to local values and most efficiently decrease overall disaster vulnerability. Is it necessary to take on additional disaster risk in exchange for economic livelihood?

Pelling, Mark. 2002. "Assessing Urban Vulnerability and Social Adaptation to Risk: Evidence from Santo Domingo." International Development Planning Review, 24(1): 59-76.

In this paper Pelling discusses *adaptive potential* as a 'human response to environmental risk' through practical *coping* and *institutional modification*. He emphasizes the importance of decentralized and 'bottom-up' social and political structures in order to most effectively and sustainably serve the needs of the entire community. In this way, local values are acknowledged, legitimate stakeholders are involved in cooperative decision-making and local knowledge and social capital is effectively utilized.