



# Disaster Deferred: How New Science Is Changing our View of Earthquake Hazards in the Midwest

*Seth Stein*

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Known as the New Madrid seismic zone, the Midwestern rift between two geologic plates on the continental US has led many people to believe in strong likelihood of an imminent and hugely destructive earthquake in the Midwest. After the San Francisco earthquake of 1905 the biggest and most damaging earthquake in US history was the one in New Madrid, Missouri in 1811-1812. This New Madrid story has been written about and debated for years in advanced scientific communications and in the popular media. Yet, there has never been an accurate and approachable telling of the real science and the hazard preparation policy that is warranted in light of the science. With the 200th anniversary of the New Madrid earthquake coming up in 2011 and numerous predictions of doom in the media there will be a lot of interest in this topic. After Hurricane Katrina the whole topic of disaster preparation has become a major issue in scientific media and the public eye.

Seth Stein is THE author to tell this story. He is a major figure in US Geoscience and a leading seismologist. He was actively involved in doing the research on the New Madrid Rift Zone. He writes beautifully and has a knack for telling stories about how science is done - the give and take of different hypotheses and the scientific leg work to test these ideas all get a clear and engaging exposition in what the author calls a "Discover Magazine" style. How the science gets played out in a policy arena and how the media can distort sound science to create a good story are also important features of the book. Along the way this book presents a solid dose of real science - the basics of earthquake science and seismology are given a very lively treatment here all within the context of a fascinating tale that features science, history, psychology and public policy.

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