



The Galveston Hurricane of 1900: The Deadliest Natural Disaster in American History

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures

*Includes survivors' accounts of the hurricane

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“First news from Galveston just received by train which could get no closer to the bay shore than six miles where the prairie was strewn with debris and dead bodies. About 200 corpses counted from the train. Large steamship stranded two miles inland. Nothing could be seen of Galveston. Loss of life and property undoubtedly most appalling. Weather clear and bright here with gentle southeast wind.” – G.L. Vaughan, Manager of Western Union in Houston, in a telegram to the Chief of the U.S. Weather Bureau on the day after the hurricane.

In 2005, the world watched in horror as Hurricane Katrina decimated New Orleans, and the calamity seemed all the worse because many felt that technology had advanced far enough to prevent such tragedies, whether through advanced warning or engineering. At the same time, that tends to overlook all of the dangers posed by hurricanes and other phenomena that produce natural disasters. After all, storms and hurricanes have been wiping out coastal communities ever since the first humans built them.

As bad as Hurricane Katrina was, the hurricane that struck Galveston, Texas on September 8, 1900 killed several times more people, with an estimated death toll between 6,000-12,000 people. Prior to advanced communications, few people knew about impending hurricanes except those closest to the site, and in the days before television, or even radio, catastrophic descriptions were merely recorded on paper, limiting an understanding of the immediate impact. Stories could be published after the water receded and the dead were buried, but by then, the immediate shock had worn off and all that remained were the memories of the survivors. Thus, it was inevitable that the Category 4 hurricane wrought almost inconceivable destruction as it made landfall in Texas with winds at 145 miles per hour.

It was only well into the 20th century that meteorologists began to name storms as a way of distinguishing which storm out of several they were referencing, and it seems somewhat fitting that the hurricane that traumatized Galveston was nameless. Due to the lack of technology and warning, many of the people it killed were never identified, and the nameless corpses were eventually burned in piles of bodies that could not be interred due to the soggy soil. Others were simply buried at sea. The second deadliest hurricane in American history claimed 2,500 lives, so it's altogether possible that the Galveston hurricane killed over 4 times more than the next deadliest in the U.S. To this day, it remains the country's deadliest natural disaster.

The Galveston Hurricane of 1900 chronicles the story of the deadliest hurricane in American history. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the Galveston Hurricane like never before, in no time at all.

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