

Category 5: The Story of Camille, Lessons Unlearned from America's Most Violent Hurricane

Ernest Zebrowski, Judith A. Howard
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Ernest Zebrowski, Judith A. Howard : Category 5: The Story of Camille, Lessons Unlearned from America's Most Violent Hurricane before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Category 5: The Story of Camille, Lessons Unlearned from America's Most Violent Hurricane:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. KATRINA'S PREDECESSOR By Severin Olson I have always found something quite haunting about Camille. It struck at night along the gulf coast with ungodly winds of perhaps 200

mph. The howl can only be imagined. Storm surge was of course at record levels, swallowing up those unfortunates too close to the ocean. Never before or since has a hurricane of such intensity hit the US mainland. Zebrowski has certainly crafted a winner here. His description of the landfall is especially good. He writes as a scientist but can be appreciated by all audiences. He is also to be praised for including the flooding in Nelson county Virginia, ignored by most writers. Hurricane destructiveness does not always end when the winds die off. The author also draws on disaster research, explaining how disasters like Camille impact the victims and residents of a community. The only thing I didn't like, and it is quite a small thing, was the frequent social commentary, something apparently mandatory in all writing on the American South. More natural disaster, less sociology, please.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Hurricane History By Elaine H. Campbell Enjoyed reading this book. I had family who survived Camille in Nelson County, spent several weeks there during the summers visiting during my youth and remember vividly going there as soon as we were allowed in to see the damage. This book did an excellent job describing the storm, the aftermath and how it changed the lives of so many people who lived in that area.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Meticulous reporting on the tragedy and lessons of Camille By ealovitt According to "Category 5: The Story of Camille," the United States only experienced three Category Five Atlantic Hurricanes during the Twentieth Century: The Florida Keys Labor Day Hurricane in 1935; Hurricane Camille in 1969; and Hurricane Andrew in 1992. I'd just finished reading a couple of books that claimed the 1935 Labor Day hurricane was the most violent of the three (see "Category 5: The 1935 Labor Day Hurricane" by Thomas Knowles and "Storm of the Century: The Labor Day Hurricane of 1935" by Willie Drye.) Some sources indicate that there were actually 22 category 5 hurricanes from 1900 to 1999, but Camille had the strongest sustained winds (172 mph or 190 mph, depending on which account you read). However, the Labor Day Hurricane had a lower barometric pressure--around 892 millibars--as opposed to Camille's reading of around 905 millibars. I suppose if you're writing a book about a hurricane, you want your storm to be the biggest and toughest of them all. Camille certainly qualifies in almost all respects. It ripped into the coast near Biloxi, Mississippi with wind speeds equaling those of a strong F3 tornado, but it was the record storm surge, measured at 24.6 feet, that did the most damage to the coast. Then the still-dangerous storm wandered inland and dumped 32 inches of rain on the hills of Virginia in just six hours. According to the authors, this "generated floods of almost Biblical proportions." Another 152 victims died in the landslides and flash floods generated by the dregs of Camille. "Category Five: the Story of Camille" captures both the science and the human anguish generated by this major hurricane. The authors track some of the survivors into the new Millennium, where the storm is still affecting their lives and their sleep. There were heroes born of this storm, and the authors celebrate the deeds that may have saved a thousand lives or a single life. Villains, mostly racist politicians, also had their words and segregationist policies laid bare by the storm. The penultimate chapter, "A Knotty Legacy" brilliantly summarizes the legacy of this ferocious storm and the lessons that the United States did manage to learn. However, as the slow emergency response in the aftermath of Katrina has proven, we still have major improvements to make in preparing for and reacting to the major hurricanes that are an inevitable part of our future.

". . . the authors sound a pessimistic note about society's short-term memory in their sobering, able history of Camille" --Booklist "This highly readable account aimed at a general audience excels at telling the plight of the victims and how local political authorities reacted. The saddest lesson is how little the public and the government learned from Camille. Highly recommended for all public libraries, especially those on the Gulf and East coasts." Library Journal online

As the unsettled social and political weather of summer 1969 played itself out amid the heat of antiwar marches and the battle for civil rights, three regions of the rural South were devastated by the horrifying force of Category 5 Hurricane Camille. Camille's nearly 200 mile per hour winds and 28-foot storm surge swept away thousands of homes and businesses along the Gulf Coast of Louisiana and Mississippi. Twenty-four oceangoing ships sank or were beached; six offshore drilling platforms collapsed; 198 people drowned. Two days later, Camille dropped 108 billion tons of moisture drawn from the Gulf onto the rural communities of Nelson County, Virginia--nearly three feet of rain in 24 hours. Mountainsides were washed away; quiet brooks became raging torrents; homes and whole communities were simply washed off the face of the earth. In this gripping account, Ernest Zebrowski and Judith Howard tell the heroic story of America's forgotten rural underclass coping with immense adversity and inconceivable tragedy. Category 5 shows, through the riveting stories of Camille's victims and survivors, the disproportionate impact of natural disasters on the nation's poorest communities. It is, ultimately, a story of the lessons learned--and, in some cases, tragically unlearned--from that storm: hard lessons that were driven home once again in the awful wake of Hurricane Katrina. "Emergency responses to Katrina were uncoordinated, slow, and--at least in the early days--woefully inadequate. Politicians argued about whether there had been one disaster or two, as if that mattered. And before the last survivors were even evacuated, a flurry of finger-pointing had begun. The question most neglected was: What is the shelf life of a historical lesson?" Ernest Zebrowski is founder of the doctoral program in science and math education at Southern University, a historically black university in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Professor of Physics at Pennsylvania State University's Pennsylvania College of Technology. His previous books include *Perils of a Restless Planet: Scientific Perspectives on Natural Disasters*. Judith Howard earned her Ph.D. in clinical social work

from UCLA, and writes a regular political column for the Ruston, Louisiana, Morning Paper. "Category 5 examines with sensitivity the overwhelming challenges presented by the human and physical impacts from a catastrophic disaster and the value of emergency management to sound decisions and sustainability."--John C. Pine, Chair, Department of Geography Anthropology and Director of Disaster Science Management, Louisiana State University

From Publishers Weekly Camille, which swept through coastal Mississippi and Louisiana in August 1969, was the storm that inspired the five-level scale currently used to predict the damage inflicted by hurricanes, and remains the only Category 5 storm the strongest to make landfall in modern American history. Zebrowski and Howard ground the storm's story in personal narratives, opening with the tale of a couple who fear their son has been killed when the storm hits the Mississippi coast. They interview other survivors in the region and up in Virginia, where Camille collided with another storm system, tracking the destruction and the confused response of local authorities. Zebrowski, a physicist, and Howard, a political columnist for a northern Louisiana newspaper, also focus on the role of Southern racial politics in shaping the civic response, particularly in one remote Louisiana parish. It's a serviceable recounting, with a thin layer of analysis discussing how Camille influenced the eventual creation of FEMA. Brief reference is made to Hurricane Katrina, but at this early stage, the authors can't say more than that authorities appear not to have learned from the earlier storm's effects. Photos, maps. (Dec.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist Following his Last Days of St. Pierre (2002), Zebrowski collaborates with Howard to examine 1969's Hurricane Camille. Partly a narrative and partly a pondering of how people and authorities prepare for predictable risk, the work focuses on the areas devastated by the maelstrom: Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana; Mississippi's Gulf Coast; and faraway Nelson County, Virginia. As prelude, the authors recount the local living memory of hurricanes, and further set the stage with the local political and social landscape (segregation hung on in 1969). Settling in with events, they chronicle forecaster Robert Simpson's monitoring of the advancing storm, then magnify its climax with several harrowing survival stories. The authors tell of Luke Petrovich, a Plaquemines politician who found refuge in a water-treatment plant, and Ben Duckworth, a Mississippian swept inland by the storm surge. Closing with Camille's aftermath--years of reconstruction and some reform of disaster preparedness--the authors sound a pessimistic note about society's short-term memory in their sobering, able history of Camille. Gilbert Taylor Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "This highly readable account aimed at a general audience excels at telling the plight of the victims and how local political authorities reacted. The saddest lesson is how little the public and the government learned from Camille. Highly recommended for all public libraries, especially those on the Gulf and East coasts." - William D. Pederson, Louisiana State Univ., Shreveport, Library Journal online "The story [the authors] tell of Camille is fascinating, easy-to-read, yet informative. Of note is the ease with which [they] explain the science of storms. They distill the particulars into a narrative that makes sense." - Richmond Times-Dispatch "... a riveting read, almost like sitting in front of the television watching the events unfold. A page-turner from the very first page, the writers capture every aspect of human emotion in this book." - Ruston Morning Paper "It is to our benefit as readers that the authors are not only scrupulous in their research but also know how to weave it into a narrative with human faces.... There is much we can all learn from this relevant and highly engaging chronicle." - Sun Herald (Biloxi) "... the authors tell the story of America's forgotten rural underclass coping with immense adversity and inconceivable tragedy. They show, through the stories of Hurricane Camille's victims and survivors, the disproportionate impact of natural disasters on the nation's poorest communities. It is, ultimately, a story of the lessons learned--and, in some cases, tragically unlearned--from that storm." - American Meteorological Society Bulletin"