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***Category 5: The 1935 Labor Day Hurricane* by Thomas Neil Knowles**

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immigrants experience, their survival strategies, as well as the ways in which they are helping to build a new Florida.

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Category 5: The 1935 Labor Day Hurricane. By Thomas Neil Knowles (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009. xxviii, 350 pp. Preface and acknowledgments, maps, prologue, B&W photographs, epilogue, exhibits, selected bibliography, illustration credits, index. \$29.95, cloth)

Hurricanes are among the most powerful forces found in nature. When they strike land, they reshape local geographies and terrains in a matter of hours. They also have profound economic and social consequences. The financial losses from Hurricane Katrina in 2005 were approximately \$100 billion. Massive population shifts took place as well, with hundreds of thousands of people leaving the Gulf Coast area and permanently relocating themselves in other parts of the country.

While storms such as Katrina are fascinating as natural events, they are even more interesting as forces that reshape local communities and, sometimes, even national politics. Thomas Neil Knowles, in *Category 5: The 1935 Labor Day Hurricane*, skillfully takes into account the natural events, social consequences, and politics in his comprehensive history of the Category 5, Labor Day Hurricane that struck the Florida Keys in 1935.

Born and raised in Key West, Knowles is a thorough historian who draws on a wide range of personal accounts, as well as newspapers and government documents, to chronicle the history of the storm. With winds estimated as high as 225 mph, the 1935 Labor Day Hurricane was the first recorded Category 5 hurricane in the United States. With its extraordinary winds and seventeen-foot storm surge, the storm caused the deaths of more than four hundred people.

Knowles's contribution to hurricane history includes not just his description of the storm and its immediate impact, but also the role played by the federal weather service in warning people of potential hurricane threats and the need to evacuate. Contained within Knowles's history of the storm is an equally interesting chronicle of the development of weather-forecasting services in South Florida and the beginnings of the less-than-perfect art of storm forecasting.

Knowles constructs much of his history by interviewing eyewitnesses who survived the storm. In doing so, he brings to life many aspects of life in the Florida Keys, its isolation and poverty, as well as its simplicity and closeness to the natural world.

While the 1935 Labor Day Hurricane will continue to be of interest to

historians simply because of its magnitude, it has another part of American history because it caused the deaths of hundreds of World War I veterans who had been sent to three camps in the Keys to work on the construction of roads and bridges as part of the economic recovery efforts of the Roosevelt administration. In spring of 1933, disgruntled, out-of-work veterans had begun to reassemble in Washington, D.C., to resume the “bonus” payment protests begun under President Hoover the previous summer. Franklin D. Roosevelt was now in the White House, and he did not wish to repeat the embarrassment of sending armed troops against former veterans. Steps were taken to incorporate veterans into the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and to employ them in various public works projects around the country. A further plan set up work camps for veterans in Florida, where they assisted with building roads and bridges in places such as the Florida Keys.

As a result, by the end of August 1935, a total of 1,358 war veterans were assigned to seven camps around the state. A total of 707 men were sent to three camps in the Upper Keys, working primarily on road and bridge projects. Veterans at the camps received thirty dollars a month for their efforts, as well as cots, tents, and food. The federal government perceived many of the people sent to Florida as troublemakers, and the government’s attitude was one of “keep them happy and keep them out of Washington.”

When the hurricane hit in early September, the results were devastating for the veterans in the camps. Evacuations prior to the storm had been limited. The storm had its greatest impact directly over the site of the camps. Of the 485 persons killed in the storm, 228 were civilians and 257 were veterans. The tragedy of the hurricane and its impact on the people living in South Florida and the Keys became a national issue, one concerned with the thoroughness of federal weather reporting, the types of warnings sent out, and the evacuation procedures provided to the veterans prior to the storm. What began as a public works project to deal with a group of volatile war veterans became a national tragedy.

In summary, Knowles’s book is a useful contribution and provides a unique perspective on an important episode in the state’s history that had not just local but national consequences. While his research provides the reader with considerable insight into life and culture in the Florida Keys during the 1930s, it also speaks significantly to how storms such the Labor Day Hurricane of 1935 or, more recently, Hurricane Katrina have the potential to become national issues.

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