



Taken by Storm, 1938: A Social and Meteorological History of the Great New England Hurricane

Lourdes B. Avilés

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On September 21, 1938 one of the most powerful storms of the twentieth century came unannounced into the lives of New Yorkers and New Englanders, leaving utter devastation in its wake. The Great Hurricane, as it came to be known, changed everything, from the landscape and its inhabitants' lives, to Weather Bureau practices, to the measure and kind of relief New Englanders would receive during the Great Depression and the resulting pace of regional economic recovery.

The storm formed near the Cape Verde Islands on September 10 but was not spotted until several days later, and was predicted by the understaffed Weather Bureau to head toward Florida. Junior forecaster Charlie Pierce correctly projected the northerly storm track, but senior meteorologists ignored his forecast, a mistake that cost many lives—including those of immigrants who had arrived to the Northeast in waves in the preceding decades. To be published on the storm's 75th anniversary, this compelling history successfully weaves science, historical accounts, and social analyses to create a comprehensive picture of the most powerful and devastating hurricane to hit New England to date.

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