

Brand, U., N. Bullard, E. Lander, and T. Mueller, eds. 2009. *Contours for climate justice: Ideas for shaping new climate and energy politics*. Uppsala, Sweden: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation.

Hurricanes of the Gulf of Mexico. Barry D. Keim and Robert A. Muller. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009. xv and 216 pp., maps, diagrams, photos, credits, epilogue, and index. \$29.95 cloth (ISBN 978-0-8071-3492-4).

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Two professors from Louisiana State University, each having had personal experiences with hurricanes and extreme weather and each with a deep interest in weather and climate, join forces to highlight tropical storms and hurricanes that have affected the Gulf of Mexico over the past 100 to 150 years. They aim to provide a description of the climatology and history of the most notorious hurricanes of the Gulf coast for the weather and storm enthusiast as well as for the residents who “persevere in the face of hurricanes for the bounty the Gulf brings” (p. v), and they largely succeed.

The book is a creole of history, climatology, and personal accounts. The figures are a jambalaya ranging from old snapshots to satellite images to gridded elevation values of New Orleans from remote sensing. The viewpoint is one of a historian of past events and a synoptic meteorology of the more recent hurricanes with a tasty mixture of historical accounts and climate statistics. The writing style is formal and concise but at times lacks fluidity, which might make it somewhat less approachable for the casual reader. The blend of exposition and narration used by the authors suggests an approach that lies between the largely narrative treatment of hurricanes in *North Carolina's Hurricane History* (Barnes 1995) and *Florida's Hurricane History* (Barnes 1998) and the dense statistical treatment in *Hurricanes of the North Atlantic: Climate and Society* (Elsner and Kara 1999). The book includes a list of sources and suggested readings and a comprehensive index.

The first chapter is a historical account of the Galveston hurricane of 1900. The story has been told before, most dramatically by Larson

in *Isaac's Storm* (1999), but it serves as an excellent reminder to all coastal residents that these violent winds of nature mean business. Galveston was an important shipping town that was nearly completely destroyed by the wind and water of this catastrophic event. The second chapter provides a similar narrative to Hurricane Katrina of 2005. Whereas the Galveston hurricane resulted in the largest loss of life in U.S. history, Katrina was the most destructive in terms of the amount of property lost. Surprisingly, the author's paraphrasing the National Hurricane Center's advisories on Hurricane Katrina in chronology provides a bit of dramatic suspense, as we are familiar with the devastating outcome. In contrast, the chronology of the Gulf's most memorable hurricanes (chapter 5), although informative, lacks this tension.

The climatology and individual listing of memorable and historical hurricanes all along the Gulf Coast from Key West to the Yucatan Peninsula is the subject of chapters 3 through 6. These chapters contain various lists, including a summary of the damages in Mississippi from Katrina, major hurricane strikes around the Gulf of Mexico, and the deadliest storm events. At times it is hard to follow, as there are many storms and dates that all begin to run together. Particular emphasis is given to the central Gulf Coast from Panama City, Florida, to Galveston, Texas. The environmental and social impacts of hurricanes that affect the Gulf Coast are considered in chapter 7. Population statistics and evacuation times are provided, along with descriptions of various hazards associated with hurricanes including heavy rainfall, storm surge, and coastal erosion. Hurricane impacts to the oil and gas industry along the northern Gulf of Mexico are also briefly described. The text is informative and the anecdotes are enjoyable.

The important concern of how hurricanes have been, or might, change in a warmer world is saved for the final chapter. The focus is largely on the work of Bill Gray and his “climate cycles theory.” The authors provide a single paragraph on the alternative view of Kerry Emanuel that the strongest hurricanes are getting stronger as ocean heat content increases in accord with the second law of thermodynamics. In the end, the authors play it safe with this contentious issue by concluding

that regardless of who turns out to be right there are other more serious issues that folks in this part of the world face, including wetland restoration, the risk to the oil and gas industry, and population growth that swamp changes that might be happening with hurricanes. As if to emphasize the cyclical nature of these violent tempests, the authors in the epilogue summarize the Gulf Coast hurricanes of the destructive 2008 season, which ended with Hurricane Ike hitting Galveston 108 years after the 1900 tragedy.

Key Words: *Gulf of Mexico, history, hurricanes, twentieth century.*

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