

Hurricane Agnes of 1972

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Historical Paper

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Process Paper

My topic is based on Hurricane Agnes which happened during the summer of 1972, which has caused many issues throughout mostly the United States as a natural disaster. I chose this topic because I am most interested in natural causes and I wanted to see how the victims were resolving their problems during the struggle of communication. This disaster resulted in about 128 deaths total.

My research is made up by primary sources such as photos and newspapers referring to the damage done in some states and the weather at the time. My secondary sources are from articles describing communication from people who needed help. I found some sources as well but I thought that they gave irrelevant information and was off topic from mine.

I conducted my research by typing in my topic and finding documentaries or videos showing the destruction and the aftermath of the hurricane. I put the information I learned from the different sources by incorporating the communication between the people, state officials and the government. The history of communication connects to this topic by how the victims would communicate with one another to spread the news that these certain areas need more help than others. I also wanted to see how people felt about losing all of their personal belongings in this disaster.

This relates to the annual theme because it was a time in history where we didn't have much technological advances and I wanted to see what they did to reach for help. Communication during this storm such as weather apps and live streaming on news channels.

My topic is significant in history because during times like this people can find a way to get out of their problems. I also think that my topic isn't that important or relevant in history because I feel like no one pays attention to natural disasters and how the nation deals with the aftermath. Over the years after this hurricane people can create new ideas that can help with any future disasters.

Paper

June 14 through July 6 of 1972 some parts of the Caribbean and some states from the United States of America were affected by one of the worst storms during that time: Hurricane Agnes. This happened during the summer of 1972, which has caused severe issues throughout some of the US's states as a natural disaster. As a category 1 hurricane there were probably around 130 plus deaths total and a lot was lost along with that. Around the affected area the people were lacking their living necessities and everyday things, plus they lost all of their personal belongings. Houses were torn down and the streets were flooded. During this storm it was basically Man versus Water. People communicated with others for help to get out of the mess, but communication was difficult during these times. Food, shelter and clothes were given to the victims of this dramatic hurricane. The history of communication connects to this topic by how the victims would try to reach one another and how the news spread. Communication between the people, state officials and the government was not the best. But people have tried to contact each other by using their phones or broadcasting live action on the radio. This was important because it changes people's mindsets after the destruction of the event and could possibly change history by the amount of money and work put into fixing all the damage. After this "emotional hole" in history it brought new ideas to others and possibly led to new modern inventions that can slightly give ways to deal with any other upcoming hurricanes.

This storm shattered hearts because businesses and buildings and homes were destroyed by the floods and fires. The photos that were taken of this hurricane were by

the nearby residence of a college student, James Abram¹. He was a student at York College in Pennsylvania. The photos showed how much damage there was. Most of the photos described the amount of rain flooding the streets on his campus. Cars were being pushed around from their original parking positions and the streets were cracked and falling apart or opening. Trees were being ripped out of the ground by their roots and there were tree branches and debris from surrounding buildings scattered everywhere. The river near James Abram's university was overflowing and was higher than it should have been. Adding on, these screenshots from the *National Weather Service*² reveals numbers for the states Virginia and Maryland. This explains how much US dollars (during 1972) that cost to pay for all the loss of the cities. Economically this hurricane caused not just damage in buildings and roads, but also money wise. At that time money was actually more valuable than the amount of money today in the United States, some states that were affected by the hurricane paid to fix everything that happened and to help the people of the state seek for a better home. So the amount that was needed to pay to fix and modernize cities was way up there. Around \$2.1 billion US dollars was needed for the damage of hurricane Agnes. This led to a long recovery for America's economy and political aspects.

Back during these depressing times houses were torn down, streets were invisible and everything that was valuable was lost. Families who lived in Virginia, Pennsylvania,

¹ Donated photos to the *York Daily Record* by James Abram "Tropical Storm Agnes arrived in York this week in 1972 bringing over a foot of rain and causing tremendous damage"

² National Weather Service from June 22 1972

West Virginia, Maryland, New York, Massachusetts and the other states around the East coast of the United States. Along with properties getting lost, so have lives. According to the *Leominster Enterprise*³, a newspaper of Massachusetts on June 20 gave out statistics of how many deaths there were, “Tells of Hurricane Agnes causing havoc after hitting Florida.” These were one of the worst floods in America’s history. This newspaper included how the weather was in Florida as well. Around all of the edges of Florida was where there was the worst damage. *“At the time, it was the most damaging hurricane ever recorded, surpassing Hurricane Betsy, and it would not be surpassed until Hurricane Frederic in 1979.”* This quote from the newspaper proves that Hurricane Agnes did go down in history and was one of the most expensive recoveries. Socially this hurricane affected the people by everyone staying paranoid especially if they live in an area where hurricanes hit more often. People have lost a lot so everything would have changed drastically. Part of the Caribbean and some states from the US had around 130 deaths. The table from the National Weather Service also included information showing how strong and how fast the wind speeds were during the storm. This also gave strict numbers about how many inches of rain fell in the different states. In Maryland there were numbers reaching up to 40 miles per hour of wind and around 15 inches of rain.

The summer of 1972 wasn’t the only struggle for the residents of these states, the following months were hard for many families and individuals. It took a long process for

³ “LEOMINSTER ENTERPRISE” from Leominster, Massachusetts (June 20, 1972)
Hurricane Agnes. A two column headline at the bottom of the front page: “Hurricane Agnes leaves death path”.

the federal government to give the state government⁴ the help they needed for the storm. During these harsh times, the role of governing was not the best of the best. The communication was difficult and was even worse while trying to transfer the help. In this tropical storm it was a struggle for people to reach out for others because of the situation they were in. The local politicians helped work to the rebuilding of their cities little by little by acting as partners to the federal and state governments. The citizens helped as much as they could with them as well. This disaster didn't show the destruction of it but also the effort people put into trying to bring back the home they were once happy in. But what has advanced over the times is how quickly and easily people who are stuck in a disaster like a hurricane can get help. With new technology today such as new vehicles and smartphones can benefit the signal for help. Hopefully people won't be as devastated from these kinds of storms in the 20th century compared to the 21st century. As well as the amount of help that is given to the citizens of the United States today in another tremendous storm like this one should be easily accessible. The people who were affected by the storm the most should get their necessities such as food, shelter and clothes.

During these times help was needed for the states from all the way down Florida to all the way to the tip of New York. This disaster led to hundreds dead and thousands homeless and lacking the basics. Hurricane Agnes took a good amount of time to recover from, the price that was needed to pay for everything that has happened was a tremendous amount. This hurt not only the economy but others as well because of the

⁴ "Nazareth College: Lessons in Disaster" Ph.D., is a professor of history and director of the Center for Public History at Nazareth.

devastating losses due to the storm. Thanks to the acts of heroism, strong workers have helped get back at some of the missing things from the victims, such as finding a place for them to stay and keeping them safe. The cleanup took some time for the affected areas of the United States, there were some ups and downs but the recovery of the states went well. People don't really lean into the history of natural disasters in the United States as much, but it reveals some hidden gems about recovery and new ideologies. Try comparing the hurricanes from the 20th century to the hurricanes that have recently occurred in the 21st century. The nation is more prepared when it comes to another disaster like Hurricane Agnes. Even if we get hit by an even worse one our nation's support will be there and ready when they are needed. The amount of money that is needed to pay off all of the damage of a recent hurricane will now be ready to be spented on and the communication between the citizens of the states, the state governments to the federal government should now be as smooth as possible. But with strength and compassion the citizens should be able to make it through all the pain and devastation of the problems they come across when it comes to a natural disaster.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:

York Daily Record, “*Tropical Storm Agnes arrived in York this week in 1972, bringing over a foot of rain*” - Published in June 2019

<https://www.ydr.com/story/news/2019/06/18/tropical-storm-agnes-arrived-week-1972-hurricane/1488256001/>

- This demonstrates a slideshow of photos from the flooding in different from different states newspapers.

Photos of Tropical Storm Agnes donated to York College of Pennsylvania James Abram.

<https://www.ydr.com/story/news/2019/06/18/tropical-storm-agnes-arrived-week-1972-hurricane/1488256001/>

- Abram was a student at York College and his photos were taken around his campus, they showed cars being misplaced and fallen buildings.

Leominster Enterprise Leominster, Massachusetts, Tuesday June 20, 1972 “Hurricane Agnes leaves death path” <https://www.rarenewspapers.com/view/561791>

- This newspaper states the deaths after the hurricane in the affected areas, in this case Florida and Cuba. The beaches were “wiped off” and full of debris on the shores.

“The Washington Post, *Hurricane Agnes: A look back after 40 years* (The National Weather Service” Published by Don Lipman 2012

https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/capital-weather-gang/post/hurricane-agnes-a-look-back-after-40-years/2012/06/21/gJQAnDS0sV_blog.html

- These screenshots from the National Weather Service shows numbers for the states Virginia and Maryland about how strong the wind was and how much rain fell. This source explains how much US dollars (from 1972) that cost to pay for all the loss of the cities.

Secondary Sources:

Cities Under water, Under Siege: Hurricane Agnes by Yevgeniya Lyudmilov 2010

<http://pabook2.libraries.psu.edu/palitmap/Agnes.html>

- Problems people went through during the hurricane and how much they lost. There are some pictures included of broken down houses and there are also examples of how people tried to clean up their neighborhood and helped others.

Nazareth College: *Lessons in Disaster* Ph.D., is a professor of history and director of the Center for Public History at Nazareth.

<https://www2.naz.edu/connections/past-issues/spring-2013/life-mind>

- By the end of July of 1972, this article gave information about how the communication went between the state and the national government. The states that lost the most needed help for the citizens living there.