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One Year After

One year after Hurricane Katrina slammed into Louisiana and Mississippi, the rebuilding continues.

It was neither the strongest nor the deadliest U.S. storm. Hurricane Camille, which passed over the same region in 1969, packed stronger sustained winds when it made landfall, as did Carla in 1961, Frederic in 1979, Andrew in 1992, Opal in 1995, and Ivan and Charley in 2004. And the death toll of 8,000 from the Galveston hurricane of 1900 has yet (thankfully) to be eclipsed.

Still, none of that detracts from the impact of Katrina.

No description can capture the extent of Katrina's destruction. It encompasses the annihilation of an entire coastline and the transformation of far more lives than the 1,836 lost. The entire face of a renowned city has been forever altered, and the "easy" way of life that defined the region has been rubbed out, at least for the foreseeable future. No doubt, volumes will be written for ages about the changes this one storm has had on the personal, political, economic, and cultural domains that thread through every facet of the American experience.

The big question we live with in Katrina's wake is how many more like it will come?

By the time this issue makes it off the press and into the mail, we will be into the height of the 2006 hurricane season. The chances during August and September of another major tropical storm making landfall on the Atlantic or Gulf seaboard will be as high as it can get for the year. Yet even if some unnamed depression brewing off the coast of Africa should mount to a great storm before this issue falls into your hands, I'm willing to wager that it won't obscure the impact of Katrina.

Don't read too much into that prediction. It's more of an appeal: Let's never forget this storm. Rather, with unfaltering respect for the lives that ended and those that were upended by that powerful storm, let's continue to learn from its lessons. Most of all, let's learn from the scores of professionals dedicated to building better who have become keen students of Katrina. There will be other storms, some as great. But if we apply the lessons of Katrina, none will ever be so destructive. — Clayton DeKorne



ILLUSTRATION BY JOSEPH ADOLPHE

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