



Pvt. Lucien Weakley's weathered headstone is shaded by a towering magnolia tree in Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery. ARVIN TEMKAR/AJC

Civil War's harsh toll still a topic for study

New findings detail its disproportionate impact on the South.

By Jeremy Redmon
jeremy.redmon@ajc.com

Pvt. Lucien Weakley's weathered headstone stands beneath a towering magnolia tree that is surrounded by the graves of thousands of other Confederate soldiers in Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery. Cracked and then repaired, the marker says the Tennessee native died in Atlanta in 1863, a month after he was mortally wounded in the bloody Battle of Chickamauga.

Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered his army two years later in Virginia. In the 160 years since, researchers have repeatedly sought to quantify the Civil War's staggering death toll. That task has proven challenging partly because of poor record-keeping and the loss of documents to fires that consumed much of Richmond, Virginia – the capital of the Confederacy – during the war.

For more than a century, historians have cited a rough estimate of 618,000 deaths from the war, though that has long been viewed as a serious undercount. In 2011, a demographic historian used a 1% sample of census records to compare wartime and peacetime death totals. He estimated the death toll was 750,000.

Newer research armed with more data provides the fullest picture yet of not just the overall death toll but its disproportionate impact on the South, including Georgia.

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Civil War continued on E15



PHOTOS COURTESY OF EXPLORE ASHEVILLE

AFTER THE FLOOD

In the wake of Hurricane Helene, Asheville is on the road to revival this spring, and residents hope tourists play a part in the comeback.



Two-thirds of Asheville's River Arts District was either washed away or left in rubble by Hurricane Helene. But last month, the district bustled with construction crews, debris removal teams and artists working in newly reopened studios and galleries or in the process of reopening them.

IF YOU GO

Find out where you can go to stay, play and dine in Asheville, E8

By Blake Guthrie | For the AJC

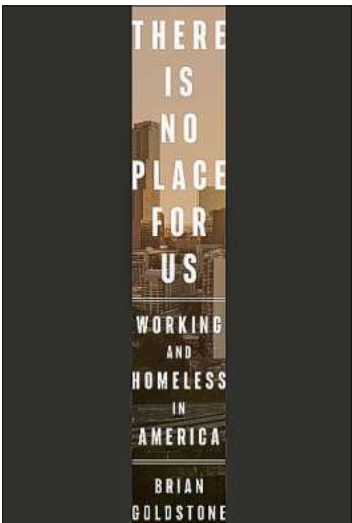
Hurricane Helene tore through Western North Carolina on Sept. 27 last year causing a historic level of flooding and knocking out power, water and cell service.

Helene dropped 42 trillion gallons of water over the Southeast and killed 221 people – at least 106 of them in North Carolina – making it one of the country's deadliest storms on par with Hurricanes Katrina and Maria. The storm caused an estimated \$60 billion in damages, though some estimates put the number well over \$200 billion when factoring in lost wages, loss of life and economic output.

After the storm passed, Asheville residents gathered on the sidewalk outside of the new Moxy hotel. The downtown area escaped the worst of the flooding because it sits on a hill, but most of the city and its outlying areas were cut off from the outside world. The Moxy Asheville, which had its grand opening two weeks before the storm, still had Wi-Fi and made it available to residents. Phone calls weren't going through, but texts and emails were.

"There were hundreds of people outside the hotel trying to get in touch with loved ones," recalled Vic Isley, president and CEO of Explore Asheville,

Asheville continued on E8



Brian Goldstone's "There is No Place for Us" publishes March 25. COURTESY OF CROWN PUBLISHING

Putting a face on Atlanta's housing crisis

A new book sheds light on five families – and the city's role in their plight.

Journalist Brian Goldstone spent five years examining Atlanta's affordable housing crisis for his new book, "There is No Place for Us: Working and Homeless in America" (Crown Publishing, \$30). Government records, legal documents, published reports and interviews with experts, policymakers and stakeholders provide the foundation for his reporting. But it is his up-close, personal accounts of five families and their desperate pursuits for a place to call home that makes this book equal parts heartbreaking, infuriating and riveting. An excerpt from the introduction follows.

By Brian Goldstone

By the time I met Cokethia Goodman and her children, they had been homeless for three months. Their ordeal began on an afternoon in August 2018, when Cokethia discovered a terse letter from her landlord in the mailbox. The home she had been renting over the past year was in a quiet Atlanta neighborhood, within walking distance of a playground and her kids' schools. But the area was gentrifying, and their landlord had decided it was time to cash out on her investment. The property would be sold; the family's lease would not be renewed. Unable to find another affordable apartment nearby, they relocated to a dilapidated rental in Forest Park.

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Atlanta author Brian Goldstone. COURTESY OF ELAINE BROWN GOLDSTONE

AUTHOR EVENT

'There is No Place for Us'

A Cappella Books and Georgia Center for the Book present author Brian Goldstone in conversation with journalist Malaika Jabali at 7 p.m. March 26. Decatur Library, 215 Sycamore St., Decatur. georgiacenterforthebook.org, acappellabooks.com.

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Mix up fun coffee drink to indulge when life slows down

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New cookbooks spring up as new season blooms

New cookbooks coming out now through April include recipes for Ice Cube Tray Sushi, Pimento Cheese Patty Melts and Green Herb-Crusted Salmon, E11



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Buncombe County’s destination management organization.

Aerial footage of the flooding shared on social media and broadcast on the national news was shocking and left many wondering how a tropical storm could make it so far inland into the Blue Ridge Mountains. Isley, who is from the area, has dealt with natural disaster responses in more hurricane-prone places in previous jobs.

“One of the things that precipitated this was a large amount of rain before Helene showed up,” she said. “Having experienced hurricanes in flatland areas like Florida and Bermuda where they tend to go fast and water recedes into water, here, mountains that have protected us for generations acted as funnels for all that water. And then the rivers had nowhere to go. That’s really what made this so different.”

For 53 days the city didn’t have potable water. Some communities like Swannanoa and nearby Chimney Rock still have a long way to go toward recovery. They aren’t ready for visitors yet. But what about Asheville, a major tourist hub for the region and a favorite travel destination for many Atlantans? Some may wonder, is it OK to visit?

“The answer is a resounding yes from businesses and entrepreneurs and creators and makers in our community,” said Isley. “Springtime has always been a time of renewal here in the mountains, and I think it certainly will be this year. We’ve made remarkable progress.”

The hardest hit areas were the river corridors and the communities surrounding them. In Asheville, two-thirds of the River Arts District – a former abandoned industrial area revamped into artists’ spaces – were either washed away or left in rubble.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, artists who had no way to communicate gathered in the district. Feeling helpless seeing the torrent of water rushing by, they watched equipment from wineries, breweries and artwork float down the river.

“It was like the spirit of Asheville was just flowing away,” said jeweler Jeffery Burroughs, president of the River Arts District Artists organization and owner of Jeffery, The Jewel of Asheville.

The district has two parts, the lower-lying area next to the river where an estimated 80% of buildings were either damaged or destroyed, and what is now being called the Upper RAD on a slope above it.

“The lower part of the district is where our largest buildings were so it was a substantial amount of loss of square footage for artists,” Burroughs said.

But last month, the River Arts District bustled with construction crews, debris removal teams and artists working in newly reopened studios and galleries or in the process of reopening them.

“In the Upper RAD, we’ve worked really hard to reopen and have a lot of artists, galleries and collectives that adopted displaced artists that lost space,” said Burroughs. “We still represent over 700 artists in the district and have well over 400 artists still showcasing.”

Among the studios and galleries open in the Upper RAD are Jaime Byrd Contemporary Art Gallery, Trackside Studios and Clayworks inside the Aura Arts building on Depot Street, plus more than 30 artists working out of the large Wedge Studios building on Roberts Street. The RADA Outpost recently opened downtown showcasing a rotating roster of artists.

Two blocks up the street from Burroughs’ gallery is the RAD’s only hotel, The Radical, an eclectic 70-room boutique property located in a former warehouse space built in 1923 that bills itself as a living art installation.

The hotel, which contains a rooftop bar, coffee shop and the restaurant Golden Hour, had been open one year when the storm hit. Like many businesses on higher ground it wasn’t flooded but remained closed because of lack of water and other services. Upon reopening in early January, it garnered the No. 2 spot in the USA Today Readers’ Choice poll of best new hotels in the U.S. for 2025. Down the street, The Bull and Beggar, an upscale bi-level restaurant in the Wedge building, which was flooded on its first level, reopened Jan. 31.

Biltmore Village, the historic planned community that serves as the gateway neighborhood to Biltmore, also suffered heavy damage but is still welcoming visitors.

The Grand Bohemian hotel in the heart of Biltmore Village saw substantial flooding on its



Anne Schneider (right) hugs friend Eddy Sampson as they survey damage caused by Hurricane Helene last year. For some, watching rushing waters in city streets felt “like the spirit of Asheville was just flowing away,” jeweler Jeffery Burroughs said. JEFF ROBERSON/AP 2024



A rescue team paddles down the Swannanoa River two days after Hurricane Helene hit western North Carolina last year. Swannanoa and nearby Chimney Rock still have a long way to go toward recovery. TNS 2024



The Radical, an eclectic 70-room boutique property in a former warehouse space, bills itself as a living art installation. It was named as one of the top hotels in the country by USA Today. COURTESY



Wrong Way River Lodge fully reopened Dec. 31 and threw a sold-out New Year’s Eve party. COURTESY OF WRONG WAY RIVER LODGE AND CABINS

first level and remains closed. The lobby was under five feet of water at the height of flooding. The hotel plans to reopen in May. But about half the village’s businesses have reopened including Tukit Tour Co., Mountain Metalworks and Guajiro Cuban Food Truck, which lost its brick-and-mortar location in the River Arts District but is still operating out of Hi-Wire Brewing in the village.

At Hillman Beer, a brewery and restaurant on the edge of the village, business was booming on a Monday evening in mid-February, signaling a healthy comeback. While wiping down the bar, one of the two bartenders on duty said he’d never seen so many people there at 8 p.m. on a Monday.

The timing of Helene couldn’t have been worse for the local tourism and hospitality industries coming as it did in early fall when travelers flock to the region to take in the burnt-orange and golden hues of autumn foliage in the mountains.

“It was really crippling for our local economy to miss the month of October,” said Shelton Steele, co-owner of the Wrong Way River Lodge and Cabins in the French Broad River corridor. “That’s our breadbasket month. That’s when we make the money to get through winter. We, as a little town (Asheville’s population is less than 100,000) can’t support the number of restaurants, bars, breweries that we have here, so we need that augmentation of tourism to

make our economy work.”

Located just steps from the French Broad River, Wrong Way River Lodge suffered varying degrees of flood damage to nine of its 16 cabins and in the lower level of the lodge building. Catering to urban adventurers and outdoor enthusiasts, the property, open since 2022, features a distinctive row of A-frame cabins built on concrete pilings up to 16 feet off the ground. Steele said the cabins were built two feet above base flood elevation.

“We had this vision of the running A-frames as being a landmark in the area, something noticeable. Post-flood, now it’s looked at as sort of a new river gauge, a place you can point to and say the water got that high.

This flood was five feet higher than the highest ever recorded.”

Wrong Way fully reopened Dec. 31 and threw a sold-out New Year’s Eve party to celebrate. “We’ll be on the river this spring with plenty of river activities kicking back in gear such as paddle boarding, float trips and tubing.”

Visible across the river from Wrong Way are the grounds of the 8,000-acre Biltmore Estate, the crown jewel of Asheville attractions which sees an average of 1.4 million visitors each year. The estate’s damage mainly occurred in its lower-lying pastureland, where some farm buildings flooded and animals were lost, and at its entrance in Biltmore Village.

“The estate’s main entrance experienced significant flooding and will see new tree plantings this spring as part of our ongoing restoration efforts,” said Biltmore’s senior PR manager Marissa Jamison.

But the estate was able to reopen much earlier than most businesses in the area, signaling what Steele called “a beacon of revitalization” for the area.

“We reopened the estate Nov. 2, about a month after the storm,” said Jamison. “The conservatory, restaurants, winery, gardens and hotels all came through the storm with minimal or no damage.”

Meanwhile, Asheville’s celebrated food scene ramps up this spring, too, both figuratively and literally.

“It’s ramp season,” said Isley, “so there are restaurants that do special ramp menus and the like.”

One is The Market Place downtown.

“As our local farms begin again with new life, our menus showcase ingredients like wild ramps and morel mushrooms, radishes, mountain trout, asparagus, peas and strawberries,” said chef William Dissen, semifinalist for the 2025 James Beard Award for Outstanding Chef. “As we’ve rebuilt after Helene, our community has become even stronger and gotten back to our roots as a creative, independent and outgoing city.”

Citing Asheville’s creativity and resilience in the aftermath of Helene, the James Beard Foundation has chosen the city to host its annual Chef Action Summit, a food service industry event, in April. Dissen will be a featured speaker along with local James Beard Award winner Meheran Irani, chef and co-owner of the Indian restaurant Chai Pani (which also has an Atlanta location).

“I’ve heard too many business owners confess that if tourism doesn’t return to normal by April, they may have to close,” Irani acknowledged. “So many businesses and beloved food and beverage establishments have already closed, and we can’t afford to lose any more.”

Right now, Asheville is in a similar place as New Orleans in the months following Hurricane Katrina and Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. Both locations saw a big surge in tourism after opening back up with people wanting to play a part in their comebacks. Ashevilleans hope the same will happen in their city this spring.

“They say the economic impact after a natural disaster starts to be felt at five to six months, and that’s where we are,” said Burroughs. “We’re at a key and pivotal place where we need people to come and visit and support and give us hugs.”

IF YOU GO

Asheville, North Carolina, is 208 miles northeast from Atlanta via I-85 north to I-26 west to U.S. 70 east. One-hour direct flights are available from Atlanta.

ATTRACTIONS

- **Biltmore.** \$99 and up. “Tutankhamun: His Tomb and His Treasures” on view March 21-Jan. 4, 2026. 1 Lodge St. 800-411-3812, biltmore.com.
- **River Arts District Artists Outpost.** 24 N. Lexington Ave. riverartsdistrict.com.

STAY

- **The Radical Hotel.** \$159 and up. 95 Roberts St. 828-412-0200, theradicalavl.com.
- **Wrong Way River Lodge and Cabins.** \$185 and up. 9 Midnight Drive. 828-771-6771, wrongwaycampground.com.
- **Moxxy Asheville.** \$116 and up. 61 Biltmore Ave. 828-949-0179, marriott.com.

EAT & DRINK

- **The Market Place.** \$22 and up. 20 Wall St. 828-252-4162, marketplace-restaurant.com.
- **Chai Pani.** \$15 and up. 32 Banks Ave. 828-254-4003, chaipani.com/asheville.
- **Hillman Beer.** \$12 and up. 25 Sweeten Creek Road. 828-505-1312, hillmanbeer.com.

VISITOR INFO

Asheville Visitor Center. 36 Montford Ave. 828-258-6129, exploreasheville.com.