

Conor unruh



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Conor Unruh Geography 108 The Effects of Natural Disasters Natural disasters have been shaping and reshaping our planet since the beginning of time. These natural disasters have had a devastating effect on communities all around the world. No matter how far societies have come throughout history, natural disasters humble mankind with their disrupting nature. Natural disasters come in all shapes and sizes. Earthquakes can rip apart the earth and destroy infrastructure along the way. Hurricanes come and rip through cities and uproot everything in their path. These are just a few of the many types of natural disasters that can devastate a society. There are many natural disasters that have reshaped regions within the world. One of these disasters that reshaped a region was the 1902 eruption of Mt. Pelee. On May 8th, 1902 the island of Martinique, located in the Caribbean Sea, was in for a natural disaster of epic proportions. Mt. Pelee is a stratovolcano located on the subduction zone between the Atlantic and Caribbean plates. Early in the morning, locals spotted many rare animals such as snakes were moving down from Mt. Pelee to the lower lying cities. This was unusual for this to happen. Minutes later, the volcano spewed hot ash miles in the air. Pyroclastic flows proceeded the first blown, ripping down the hillside stifling anything and everything in its way. This ended up taking upwards of 28 thousand lives in one day. This was one of the most tragic volcanic eruptions in history. Another volcanic eruption that altered a society was the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. In the year 79 A. D., The surrounding towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum were not prepared for what was to come. One morning, a giant column of smoke, ash and pumice exploded from the top of Mt. Vesuvius, startling many of the local townspeople of Pompeii and Herculaneum. From there, pyroclastic flows worked their way down the mountainside and

blanketed both towns. Townspeople were stifled by these pyroclastic flows and blanketed dead in their tracks. These sites are preserved and have become very popular tourist attractions to people all around the world. Pliny the Younger, a Roman administrator and poet, was the only surviving eyewitness of the eruption. He wrote two letters detailing the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. Volcanic eruptions are not the only natural disasters that ruin societies. The 1989 San Francisco earthquake shook the Bay Area to its core. Located along the San Andreas Fault, San Francisco experienced an earthquake of epic proportions on October 17, 1989. A slip in the fault caused an earthquake with a 7.1 magnitude on the Richter scale. Many surrounding areas like Oakland, Santa Cruz, and Santa Clara also suffered large amounts of damage. The Cypress Street Viaduct located along the Nimitz Freeway was the cause of the majority of fatalities. Many buildings in Santa Cruz did not hold up to the strength of the earthquake due to the fact that they were built on loose, sandy soil. These buildings were in the neighborhood of fifty to one hundred years old. At the time of the earthquake, the San Francisco Giants were getting ready to play the Oakland Athletics at Candlestick Park. This gave the earthquake much more exposure and viewers witnessed good amounts of footage due to the fact that the Goodyear blimp was in the sky. This earthquake totaled upwards of 300 deaths. Although there have been many more natural disasters than just these three, these are the ones that interest me the most. Many recent disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, the tsunamis in Japan, or the typhoons in Indonesia have caused more worldwide awareness to what these disasters can really do to people. It shows that these disasters can happen at any time and they can be devastating to human beings all around the world.