

# High-Resolution Analysis of Cloud-Radiation Feedback Systems During Hurricanes

## Team 4

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Earth's solar reflectance, or albedo, is one of the most significant influences on climate change. Over the past decade we've observed an alarming decrease in albedo, which effectively means that Earth is absorbing more solar energy. However, one consequence of this is an increase in the intensity and frequency of hurricanes -- and since the low-lying clouds associated with hurricanes are especially reflective, we expect to observe a cloud-radiation feedback system that "self regulates" global warming to some degree. Although previous analyses have identified a strong positive correlation between cloud cover and albedo, no work has been done to understand these trends during severe spikes in cloud cover during hurricanes. So we used high-resolution cloud data from the GOES satellite and solar flux data from the CERES instruments to identify trends in the northern Atlantic, a hotbed of tropical storm activity. After correcting the data and deriving the desired values, we performed a superposed epoch analysis to filter out extraneous signals and isolate the relationship between cloud cover and albedo. Our results strongly support previous conclusions on the positive correlation between cloud cover and albedo. However, we also identified interesting patterns in the timing and rate of albedo variations surrounding cloud cover spikes, for which we were unable to identify any underlying physical phenomena and warrant further study. This analysis will soon be repeated with data from BBSO's Earthshine project, which will help us understand the evolution of Earth's climate in light of extreme global warming.



# TEAM 4

## ZAIN KAMAL

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RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

Zain Kamal is a freshman in the Rutgers Engineering Honors Academy majoring in engineering physics. He has written research papers in computational mathematics and engineering, with specific recognition for his papers on predicting the transition from diesel fuel to electricity in the long-haul trucking industry and a framework for intelligent animal management system at NJ's Space Farms Zoo. In his free time, he pursues STEM education/outreach by creating video lessons on computational physics for his "Space Science with Python" club, volunteering for his town's Environmental Commission, and teaching middle school students Arduino electronics/programming. In the future he hopes to continue research in computational physics, specifically pertaining to supermassive black holes and gravitational waves.



## SOPHIE DENGLER

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RUMSON-FAIR HAVEN REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

Sophie Dengler is a junior at Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School in Rumson. Her interests lie mostly in outer space and aerospace engineering. She has had an interest in STEM since elementary school and has made STEM a prominent part of her life. She was elected to be the DNA Day Chair of her school's Science National Honor Society her sophomore year and helped coordinate a game to celebrate the discovery of DNA. This past year she was elected as President of the Science National Honor Society which she will serve throughout her junior year and majority of her senior year. She also participates in her school's Science League, STEM Club, and Environmental Awareness Club. In the future, Sophie hopes to make STEM education more accessible and hands-on for children. She also hopes to further her education in STEM and work in an interactive environment that will pave the way for new discoveries and inventions.



## ALEKSANDER GARBUZ

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BIOTECHNOLOGY HIGH SCHOOL

Aleksander Garbuz is a sophomore at Biotechnology High School. He recently participated in a hackathon and placed first with his team on a project related to solar panel systems. Additionally, he participates in various clubs and is a co-founder of the Young Investors Society (YIS) chapter at his high school. In previous years, he attended and won awards at the Jersey Shore Science Fair and the Delaware Valley Science Fair for a physics-based project on wi-fi signals. In the future, he is dedicated to continuing his focus and maintain his studies in the fast world of STEM.



## MOHO GOSWAMI

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JOHN F. KENNEDY MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL

Moho Goswami is a senior at John F. Kennedy Memorial High School. She has participated in the NASA STEM Enhancement in Earth Science internship, where she researched mosquito ecology and land cover and worked on a group research project on the relationship between mosquito prevalence and the urban heat island effect. She has also conducted chemistry research on the environmental applications of synchrotron radiation and x-ray analysis. Within school, she is involved with Science Olympiad, Ecology Club, and SWENext. She is an intern for the Green Party and participates in climate activism. In the future, Moho intends to study chemical engineering and work in renewable energy.





## ANDRIC LU

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ACADEMY FOR BIOTECHNOLOGY,  
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Andric Lu is a senior at the Academy for Biotechnology in the Morris County Vocational School District, which is located at Mountain Lakes High School. He has conducted research on the efficacy of various corrosives and acids on biofilms. He has also participated in summer programs using R programming to identify cancer biomarkers and separate samples using mRNA samples. He is currently conducting research at Northeastern Ohio Medical University on studying neuromodulatory functions in hearing physiology. He enjoys volunteering at his local ambulance squad and hopes to pursue this in the future by acquiring an EMT certification. Andric is the founder of the third GIDAS (Genes In Diseases And Symptoms) chapter in New Jersey which is an outreach program for miRcore, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting medical research. Outside of school and research, he enjoys volunteering as an English teacher for underprivileged Chinese students and plays the piano.

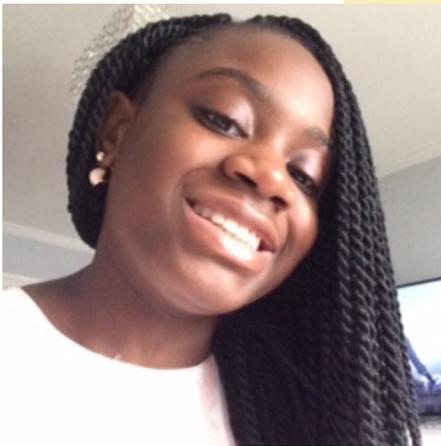


## ELAINA MANN

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LIVINGSTON HIGH SCHOOL

Elaina Mann is a senior at Livingston High School. Her primary interests lie in computer science, applied physics, and electrical engineering. As an MIT-Lemelson InvenTeams finalist, Elaina is currently working with her team to develop a system that utilizes radio and radar technology to detect and alert motorists of the presence of pedestrians when road visibility is low. With her robotics team, she has competed on the international level to explore artificial intelligence systems by building and programming a pair of robots that coordinate to complete specific tasks. Elaina is also interested in researching how the brain mediates social processes and behavior related to social prejudice and morality. Elaina has previously studied the relationship between antisocial personality disorder and amygdala volume and deformation. She also studied the treatment of minority groups in professional sports and the scientific credibility of the regulations, policies, and prejudices that bar many transgender women from participating in sports alongside biological women.



## DEBORAH MCDUGALL

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EAST ORANGE STEM ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL

Deborah McDougall is a junior at East Orange STEM Academy High School. She plays an active role as Captain of the NASA Research Team, also known as Centauri Proxima B. She is an Advanced Space Academy Graduate and recipient of the John Lewis Good Trouble Scholarship from the National Society of High School Scholars, where she is also an ambassador. Recently, Deborah finished her first semester at the Harvard Secondary School Program. Deborah hopes to attend Harvard in the future and obtain a degree in aerospace engineering or astrophysics, and eventually pursue a career as an astronaut or an Aerospace Engineer for NASA.



## ANTONIO MENA

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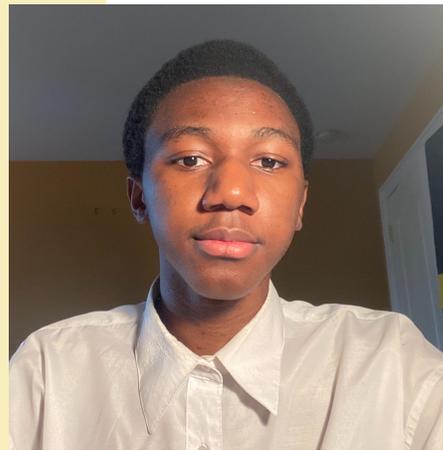
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

Antonio Mena is a computer engineering major at Rutgers University–New Brunswick. He was a design engineer on the Union County Drill Works Team whose design was amongst the finalist to be used in the upcoming Lunar Artemis Mission. He has also participated in the NASA Community College Aerospace Scholars program, NASA's LSPACE program, and served as Student Government Association Secretary. Currently, he is working at a COVID-19 lab during the pandemic. He will be searching for research opportunities at Rutgers focusing on computer engineering.

## ACHUNIKE OKAFOR

SCIENCE PARK MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL

Achunike Okafor is a junior at Science Park Magnet High School. He is the co-founder and Vice President of the local science club, where he uses documentaries and research papers to formulate a thesis for research. He is a participant in the W.E.B. Du Bois Scholars Institute at Princeton University, studying anatomy and physiology and molecular biology. Achunike is a member of his school's Environmental Club, where he advocates for change in environmental laws by sending letters to elected officials voicing concerns for pH levels in water and lake acidification. In the future, Achunike wants to study biochemistry and environmental science to give back to his community and become a cardiovascular surgeon.



## CHRIS SEBASTIAN

RANDOLPH HIGH SCHOOL

Chris Sebastian is a senior at Randolph High School. He is the president of his school's chapter of the Mu Alpha Theta (Math) National Honor Society as well as his school's Speech and Debate Team. Furthermore, he is a member of his school's Science Olympiad Team, competing in topics such as cryptography, thermodynamics, geology, and topography. Individually, Chris has taken interest in data analytics, often competing in online competitions, and doing independent research projects. Next year, Chris will be attending the University of Pennsylvania: majoring in Logic, Information, and Computation in the college of arts and sciences.



## ANANYA SHRIVASTAVA

PARSIPPANY HILLS HIGH SCHOOL

Ananya Shrivastava is a junior at Parsippany Hills High School. She is the co-founder of her school's Mental Health Awareness Club as well as first place winner at her previous school's technology competition in 2018. She has won 1st Place in JV Chemistry for Science League and enjoys participating in many online mathematics competitions and hackathons. As an active member of the math team and as Secretary of her class, Ananya currently works on pursuing higher education in mathematics and computer science through self study, and plans on gaining research experience. Her biggest interests revolve around quantum computers and psychology.



## SHIVAM SYAL

MIDDLESEX COUNTY ACADEMY FOR SCIENCE, MATHEMATICS  
AND ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGIES

Shivam Syal is a senior in the electrical and computer engineering program at the Middlesex County Academy for Science, Mathematics and Engineering Technologies. He has conducted novel STEM research to improve assistive technology for people with disabilities including mental illness, deafness, and postural dysfunction. He was an oral finalist and placed third at the New Jersey Junior Sciences and Humanities Symposium for his osteoporosis prevention research. He recently attended an eight-week research internship at Stanford University, focusing on improving NLP model tokenization for educational applications to help intellectually disabled people. His primary research interests lie in improving Assistive Technology using computer science and biotechnology. Outside of research, Shivam is working to build an inclusive society through his community involvements. His nonprofit Speak2Lead provides public speaking classes for youth to become effective communicators, leaders, and advocates. His nonprofit STEMNinjas promotes STEM equity by providing free tutoring services and has grown to nine chapters across five countries. Shivam is president of the Technology Student Association (TSA) at his school and has won state/national awards at TSA conferences. Shivam has received the President's Volunteer Service Gold Award and the Congressional Award Gold Medal. Shivam aspires to pursue management/technology studies to address social inequalities.



## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Earth's Albedo

Earth's albedo, or solar reflectance, is the proportion of incoming solar energy (shortwave radiation) that is scattered back into space. This reflected energy significantly affects Earth's energy balance, as changes in our climate can be broadly attributed to the interplay of solar intensity, terrestrial albedo, and greenhouse gas insulation (Goode et al., 2021). Since the late 1990s, albedo variations and their impact on Earth's climate were (and probably still are) the least understood of those three parameters and have been fiercely debated over centuries (Gray et al., 2010; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2009).

The launch of NASA's CERES (Clouds and Earth's Radiant Energy System) instruments aboard various low-Earth orbit satellites in 2000 marked the beginning of an era of high-quality terrestrial reflectance data. Specifically, they measure top-of-atmosphere (TOA) shortwave (SW) and longwave (LW) radiative fluxes in order to extend previous climate data records with two to three times less error (Wielicki et al., 1996).

At the same time, the Earthshine Project began in Big Bear Solar Observatory (BBSO) in the mid-1990s to measure the Earth's albedo by observing the Moon with a technique pioneered nearly a century ago (Danjon, 1928). Earthshine can be understood as the sunlight reflected off of the dayside Earth to the dark side of the Moon as seen from Earth (Figure 1).

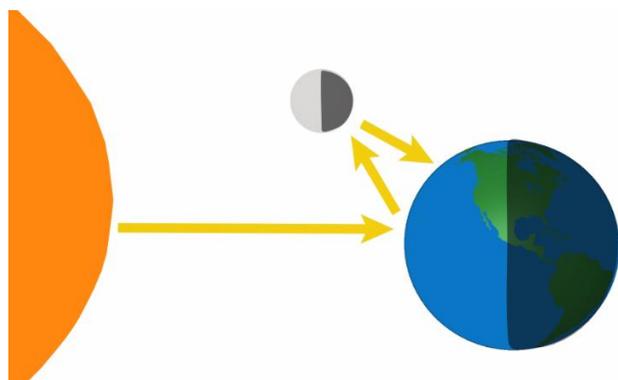


Figure 1: Diagram of earthshine

The CERES and earthshine measurements complement each other nicely. This is because CERES uses bi-directional reflectance models to infer the "Bond" albedo, or light reflected more perpendicular to Earth, whereas earthshine measures light reflected at wide angles (Loeb et al., 2012).

A recent landmark paper by Goode et al. provided the first comprehensive summary report of Earthshine Project findings over the past two decades. They found

striking agreement between inter-annual earthshine and CERES albedo measurements, clearing up previous criticisms of strong anti-correlation between the two time series. The CERES team has also discarded the possibility of long-term calibration issues causing a drift in the data, further increasing our confidence in current albedo trends. But more importantly, the earthshine albedo showed a gradual but climatologically significant  $\sim 0.5 \text{ W / m}^2$  decline in the global albedo over the past two decades (Goode et al., 2021). In plain language, this means that the earth is absorbing more sunlight than it was before—a significant concern for global warming.

### 1.2. Cloud/Radiation Feedback Systems

As the earth gets warmer, we observe a rise in atmosphere/water surface temperatures which intensifies the evaporation of the oceans, transferring more energy from oceans to air (Loeb et al., 2018). We expect this to provide more "fuel" to tropical storms (especially on the east coast), increasing the frequency of hurricane formation and overall intensity/size. More importantly, the associated increase in low-lying cloud cover would serve to increase Earth's albedo. This is because low-lying clouds are highly reflective and there's no cancellation between changes in short-wave (SW) and long-wave (LW) fluxes, compared to other cloud types for which SW and LW effects are similar in magnitude but opposite in sign (Goode et al., 2021). Effectively, this would result in a cloud/radiation feedback mechanism wherein global warming would "self-regulate" to some small extent.

Taking all of this into account, our research seeks to hone in on the association between the large spikes in cloud cover we observe during North Atlantic hurricanes and variations in Earth's albedo in order to better understand cloud/radiation feedback systems.

## METHODS

### 2.1. GOES Cloud Cover

Although the CERES instruments also measure cloud cover, we opted to use the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite (GOES) operated by the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Specifically, we used data from the GOES Sounder instruments ("GVAR\_SND"), which were downloaded from NOAA's CLASS ordering system ([avl.class.noaa.gov](http://avl.class.noaa.gov)) over the "Northern Atlantic" region. We downloaded data for multiple north Atlantic hurricanes between 2000 and 2015, spanning the period from seven days before the hurricane formed to seven days after the hurricane dissipated.

The GOES sounder cloud products have three main advantages over the CERES products. First, over the same region captured by GOES's "North Atlantic scanner"

(21° → 44° longitude to -71° → -28° latitude), the CERES instruments measures 968 pixels while the GOES satellite measures 45, 657 pixels—more than a 47 times increase in resolution. Second, the GOES sounder collects four measurements per day, while the CERES instruments only measure once per day. Finally, the sounder measures emitted radiation in 18 thermal infrared bands that are sensitive to temperature, moisture, ozone, and reflected solar radiation. The advantage of sounder over imager instruments is their ability to measure vertical profiles of the atmosphere, which helps us isolate the low-lying clouds created by hurricanes.

Following the last advantage, we chose to use band 13 measurements from the GOES sounder which captures light at a 10.3 μm wavelength. This is less sensitive than other infrared window bands to water vapor absorption, and therefore improves atmospheric moisture corrections and aids in identifying/classifying cloud particles and other atmospheric features. It also allows for accurate measurements at nighttime. As such, band 13 is primarily used for measuring the intensity of convective severe weather signatures in hurricanes (Schmit et al., 2005). Regardless of which band we use, later experimentation showed that all 18 bands are in general agreement during adverse events such as hurricanes.

**2.1.1. Data Corrections**

Although the GOES sounder offers great spatial, temporal, and wavelength resolution, that accuracy makes the data sensitive to many sources of variability and corruption.

The data were downloaded in netCDF format for processing and analysis. The cloud variables came as a set of "data frames", or 2D integer arrays corresponding to each measurement. Intuitively, this could be thought of as a series of six-hourly "snapshots" or "frames" of the North Atlantic, with each "pixel" representing the raw satellite counts at that location. To visualize these, we wrote a Python script that uses NASA's Panoply tool to plot, project, and color-code individual data frames, as can be seen in Figure 2.

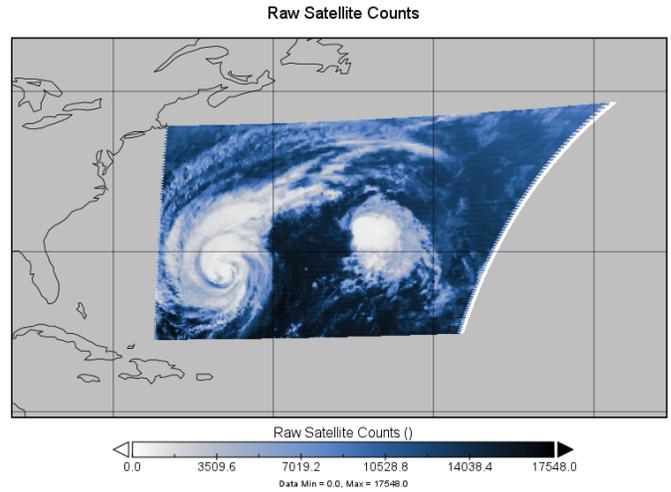


Figure 2: Visualization of low-lying cloud cover (~10.3 μm wavelength) over the north Atlantic on September 19, 2010, captured by GOES-12. The cloud group on the left is Hurricane Igor, and the cloud group on the right is tropical storm Earl.

Since each time measurement came as a separate file, we began by using Python's Xarray library to concatenate the files into a single data frame, which was optimized for Numpy calculations and enabled us to make full use of Python's indexing capabilities and other searching algorithms. When visualized in series, we noticed that a portion of the daytime measurements had "hot pixels", or individual values that were absurdly large as seen in Figure 3. Our suspicion is that this is caused by cosmic rays flipping bits in the data. For fun, we noticed that after converting some of the "hot pixel" values to binary, they were sometimes one bit away from a number much closer to the surrounding pixel values. Regardless, this skewed the data so we corrected it by applying a median filter to regions with abnormally high values, which effectively "smoothed out" the values.

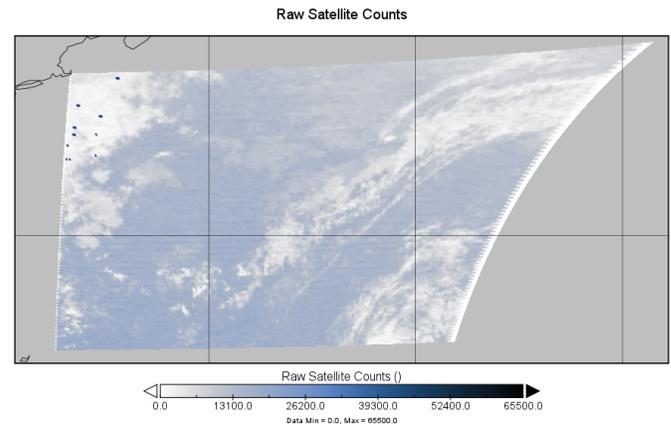


Figure 3: "Hot pixels" can be seen as dark spots in the top left, which skew the coloring of the entire plot. Notice how the maximum value here (~65K) is significantly larger than in Figure 2 (~17K).

### 2.1.2. Quantifying Cloud "Cover"

Having pre-processed the data, we were left with a single file containing a series of 2D arrays/"snapshots" over the course of the hurricane. In order to quantify the "cloud cover" for a single instance in time, we used a nested for loop to calculate the percent of pixel values less than or equal to a certain threshold value, which we chose to be 10,000 satellite counts. This threshold was arbitrarily chosen based on Panoply visualizations, but we found that  $\pm 25\%$  changes to the threshold value have little effect on the trends of the graph. Additionally, we will later perform a superposed epoch analysis which will correct for upwards/downwards shifts caused by threshold variability. Finally, we plotted the percent cloud cover versus time over the course of various hurricanes.

### 2.2. CERES Albedo Averages

Although we could order albedo quantities directly from CERES-EBAF-TOA-Ed4.1, we weren't satisfied with the regional and temporal resolutions. So we opted to derive the albedo ourselves, which required accessing the latest raw solar flux data sets from the CERES instruments (CERES-SYN1deg-Ed4A) downloaded from the NASA LARC ordering tool ([ceres.larc.nasa.gov](http://ceres.larc.nasa.gov)). These data comprise the period from March 2003 to present. For earlier dates, the all-sky fluxes used here were derived from CERES Terra between March 2000 to June 2002 and CERES Terra + Aqua from July 2002 onwards. We downloaded hourly values of the TOA Shortwave Flux and the TOA Solar Flux variables, in the spatial range of  $21^\circ \rightarrow 44^\circ$  longitude to  $-71^\circ \rightarrow -28^\circ$  latitude (chosen to match the GOES "north Atlantic scanner" spatial range) with  $1^\circ \times 1^\circ$  resolution.

The CERES data was in netCDF format as well. The albedo is derived by dividing the shortwave flux by the solar flux value (intuitively understood as the percent of all incoming sunlight reflected back into space), meaning all albedo values are between 0 and 1. To clean up the data and improve continuity, we first had to filter out nighttime measurements (as albedo is obviously zero at night) and average the remaining albedo measurements over the course of the daytime to remove extreme noise/variability. This leaves us with a series of daily albedo data frames or "snapshots", each of which can be visualized with a Python script and NASA's Panoply tool such as in Figure 4.

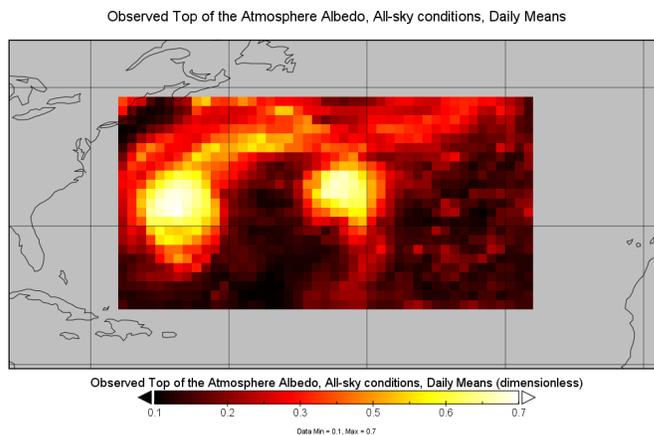


Figure 4: Albedo measurements from CERES instruments on September 19, 2010, plotted and colored with NASA's Panoply software. The bright spot on the left is Hurricane Igor, and the bright spot on the right is tropical storm Earl. Note the striking resemblance to Figure 2.

Having pre-processed the data, we used a nested for loop to find the average albedo value for each day. This was plotted against time over the course of various hurricanes.

### 2.3. Superposed Epoch Analysis

The "percent cloud cover" and "average albedo" measurements over time are mostly dimensionless, so naively plotting them on the same graph does not allow for trends/correlations to be recognized. So we used a technique called superposed epoch analysis, also known as Chree analysis after a paper by Charles Chree ("III. Some Phenomena of Sunspots and of Terrestrial Magnetism at Kew Observatory," 1913). This method of analysis is used in several geophysical disciplines either for testing the relationship between two diverse phenomena or to search for periodicities in the data. The general idea is that if we average the data in some meaningful way in relation to some event, then that event signal will remain and all other influences will tend to average out.

Since our analysis focuses on the effect of cloud cover on albedo, we manually selected hurricanes that produced distinct "spikes" in cloud cover as they passed through our viewing window. We ended up choosing five out of the fifteen hurricanes we originally collected data on: Hurricanes Karl (2004), Bill (2009), Igor (2010), Sean (2011), and Sandy (2012).

To perform the analysis, we manually defined the peak cloud cover in each hurricane as "key times" and averaged together the cloud cover plots. We took the average albedo measurements over the corresponding time periods of each hurricane, averaged them together with the same "key time" signature, and then superposed, or plotted it against, the average cloud cover. Finally, we vertically scaled the graphs to minimize the square distance between datasets while preserving

relative changes. From this, we could isolate periodicity/correlations between variations in cloud cover and albedo during hurricanes.

compared to other cloud types for which SW and LW effects are similar in magnitude but opposite in sign.

## RESULTS

## CONCLUSION

After processing the GOES cloud data and CERES solar flux measurements and averaging/superposing five hurricane events, we plotted cloud cover versus albedo over the north Atlantic in Figure 5.

We sought to investigate the correlations between cloud cover and albedo over the north Atlantic region. Where our analysis differs from others is how we look at dramatic spikes in low-lying cloud cover during hurricanes and our processing/derivation of high-resolution GOES cloud data and CERES solar flux data. The original scope of this project was a comparison of cloud cover with the BBSO's new earthshine data, but unfortunately, we were unable to obtain the data since December.

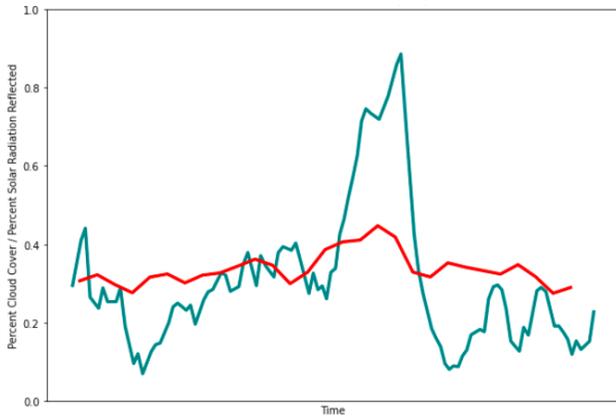


Figure 5: Superposed epoch of cloud cover (blue) versus average albedo (red) averaged over five northern Atlantic hurricanes.

We identified five hurricanes that passed through our spatial window [Karl (2004), Bill (2009), Igor (2010), Sean (2011), and Sandy (2012)] and performed a superposed epoch analysis to average out extraneous signals and isolate the relationship between cloud cover and albedo. We found remarkable agreement between cloud cover and albedo trends as expected, but qualitatively noticed some strange phenomena in Figure 6 such as the main albedo peak being "wider" than the main cloud cover peak, and albedo increasing more dramatically than cloud cover in the periods right before and after the main spike. Further work should stratify the GOES data to isolate any physical causes of these phenomena, and also repeat this analysis with earthshine data to compare trends.

However, the incomparable/dimensionless y-axes make this a poor way to gauge correlation. So we scaled the graphs to minimize the square distances between points to create Figure 6.

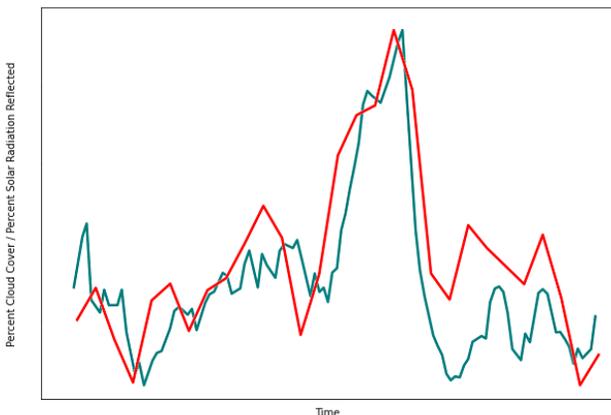


Figure 6: Superposed epoch of cloud cover (blue) versus average albedo (red) averaged over five northern Atlantic hurricanes — scaled to minimize the square distance between points.

## DISCUSSION

As expected, our results show a remarkably strong correlation between cloud cover and albedo during hurricanes. This supports the idea that low-lying clouds are highly reflective and there's no cancellation between changes in short-wave (SW) and long-wave (LW) fluxes,

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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