

Katrina Strikes

As Hurricane Katrina bore down on New Orleans, Louisiana, in August 2005, many people could not help thinking about Galveston a century earlier.

Like Galveston, New Orleans is a large city with a busy harbor. New Orleans also has a very low elevation, with many parishes, or communities, below sea level.

Similar to the 1900 Texas storm, Katrina also made landfall on the eastern side of the city—the worst possible location in terms of flooding. Katrina unleashed a 10- to 20-foot **storm surge** in portions of southeastern Louisiana and triggered even more severe flooding in Mississippi and Alabama.

In terms of wind speed, Hurricane Katrina reached 120 miles per hour at landfall on August 29 in Louisiana, earning a high Category Three classification. Hurricane Katrina could easily have surpassed Galveston's death toll had it not been for the massive evacuation that took place on the Gulf coast. The evacuation, which saved so many lives, was made possible by modern weather forecasting and constant alerts to the public. Meteorologists were able to track Katrina as it formed in the Bahamas, cut a path through Florida, and then zeroed in on Louisiana.

As it was, Katrina caused at least 1,800 deaths, making it the third-deadliest U.S. hurricane. It is the most destructive storm in U.S. history in terms of economic loss. Through enormous effort and a global outpouring of donations and help, however, New Orleans, like Galveston, is making a comeback.—J.L.

A **storm surge** is a rise of water above tide level associated with a storm and caused by the combined effect of low pressure and strong winds.

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