

SECONDARY SCHOOLS' UNITED NATIONS SYMPOSIUM 2015

Hurricane Katrina

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Dear delegate,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 23rd session of the Secondary Schools' United Nations Symposium! Crisis committees are the best part of Model UN conferences. Crisis allows for a faster-paced, more dynamic and engaging experience than regular committees, and Hurricane Katrina will not make an exception to the rule! Our entire team has been working months ahead to ensure that the next four days are both instructive and exciting. You're in for a great weekend!

My name is Ben Dillard. Being born in New York 21 years ago from French parents, I am fortunate enough to be a French-American dual citizen. Things got even better when my family moved to Kansas when I was three years old. No, that's not even sarcasm. When we returned to live in France in 1999, I already knew I wanted to go back to North America and pursue my higher education in an English speaking university. I've been studying Biochemistry and Political Science at McGill for more than three years, and living in Montreal has been very fulfilling, on both academic and personal grounds. This is my last semester in college, and I made it a personal challenge to make the most out of the time that I have left here. That entails making the Hurricane Katrina committee my fifth and best experience as a Model UN staffer.

André Capretti will assist me in making our committee sessions work smoothly and efficiently. André is a second-year Law student at McGill, and hopes to one day work in the fields of International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law. As the son of a UN agency diplomat, he's had an interest in foreign relations for a long time, having twice been a delegate at SSUNS, as well as a committee director and two-time delegate at McMUN. André is excited to see how you will choose to reshape the response to Hurricane Katrina, the most devastating natural disaster in 21st century America.

Remember to be creative and innovative during committee; history was made to be rewritten! The enjoyment that you derive from crisis simulations depend on the effort and commitment you are willing to put into your research and your character. Make sure to communicate effectively, be willing to compromise and most importantly, have fun!

We're looking forward to meeting you all,

Ben Dillard



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André Capretti

Geoffrey Nicholson

Jeremie Ponak

Introduction

Delegates, the great state of Louisiana has faced a large number of hurricanes and natural disasters through its history. In the last five years, hurricanes Isidore, Ivan and Cindy caused little damage, but have highlighted the weakness of our preparation and capacity to respond to a large scale natural disaster¹. Today, what could possibly be the greatest hurricane that has ever challenged the city of New Orleans will test our ability to answer swiftly and effectively to the crisis situations that may arise. State officials, congressmen, NGO directors and members of the civil society have been gathered in this room for that purpose, and we bear the responsibility to limit both the short and long term impact of the hurricane on the city and the state of Louisiana as a whole. This briefing note has been designed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in order to assist you in this task. First, you will find information regarding the latest reports on the expected trajectory and strength of the hurricane, as well as the range of measures and resources that are at your disposal to pre-emptively protect our state and its citizens from the hurricane. Should hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, the section pertaining to the history, geography, and socio-economic reality of the city will be of crucial importance when defining what the priorities are and deciding on the allocation of resources. Having

¹ Roth, David. «Louisiana Hurricane History.» *National Weather Service* 13 January 2010



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learned from its past experiences dealing with natural disasters and the coordination of humanitarian relief operations, FEMA has listed a number of crises that may arise and will have to be addressed by this committee. Hopefully, you will make good use of this information, and will succeed in protecting our fellow citizens.

Preparing for the Hurricane

Latest reports

The National Hurricane Center has announced that a tropical depression, formed in the Bahamas, has grown into a tropical storm by the name of Katrina, on August 24th, 2005². As the storm moved northwestward at a fast pace, it reached hurricane status and made landfall in Florida in the evening of August 25th³. The NHC's initial forecasts seem to have predicted the storm would head north after making landfall in Florida, but it appears that Katrina has begun moving west into the Gulf of Mexico, on a collision course with the city of New Orleans⁴.

Today is Friday August 26th; the NHC has upgraded Katrina to a Category 2 hurricane and declared that the storm is heading towards the Louisiana coast⁵. The hurricane is expected to increase in strength immensely as it traverses the warm waters of the Gulf. It is not yet known how strong it would be if it made landfall in New Orleans, although meteorologists believe it has the

² National Hurricane Center. "Hurricane Katrina 2005." Last modified May 30 2012.
<http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/outreach/history/#katrina>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ National Hurricane Center. "Tropical Storm Katrina." Last modified August 24 2005.
<http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/archive/2005/dis/al122005.discus.005.shtml?>

⁵ Infoplease. "Hurricane Katrina Timeline." Accessed June 5th 2015.
<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/hurricanekatrinatimeline.html>



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potential to reach a Category 5 storm. The situation is so critical that Governor Kathleen Blanco has declared a state of emergency in the state of Louisiana⁶.

Resources and money to prepare for the storm have come from various sources, including FEMA, the Department of Defense, the Louisiana National Guard, the US Coast Guard and the American Red Cross⁷.

The New Orleans Police Department workforce is composed of approximately 1,688 commissioned police officers who could potentially be called upon to help deal with law enforcement and public safety issues arising from the storm⁸. The Louisiana State Police force could also be made available for assistance, with its own 1,050 troopers⁹. In addition, the New Orleans Fire Department has a roster of 683 firefighters¹⁰, although the NOFD owns no boats in the event that water evacuations become necessary (luckily the NOPD owns five).¹¹

Unfortunately the city's 2005 budget has been the subject of serious cuts, most notably a \$71 million reduction in New Orleans' budget for crucial levee projects¹². Similarly, the Louisiana state budget is also operating at a less than desirable level, having recorded a deficit of \$11 million in

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ U.S House of Representatives. Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina. *A Failure of Initiative*. By Tom Davis. Washington, D.C, 2005, p. 59, 63-70.
<http://www.disastersrus.org/katrina/USHousereport.pdf>

⁸ Michael Peter Wiggington Jr, "The New Orleans Police Emergency Response to Hurricane Katrina: A Case Study" (PhD diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2007).

⁹ U.S Senate, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared, by Susan M. Collins (Washington, D.C, 2006), 446.

¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, "Health Hazard Evaluation of Police Officers and Firefighters After Hurricane Katrina," Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 55 (2006): 456-458, accessed June 28, 2015.

¹¹ A Nation Still Unprepared, p.332.

¹² Andrew C. Revkin and Christopher Drew, "Intricate Flood Protection Long a Focus of Dispute," New York Times, September 1, 2005, accessed June 28, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/01/us/nationalspecial/intricate-flood-protection-long-a-focus-of-dispute.html>.



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the 2004 financial year¹³. Consequently, both levels of government are cash-strapped and may be lacking the necessary funds to properly deal with the potential aftermath of a major storm.

In the event that FEMA is called upon to provide assistance, its 2005 budget of \$5.5 billion¹⁴, full time staff of 2,511 people and disaster staff of 2,265 people may prove to be insufficient, in which case an appropriation of funds and resources from other departments may be necessary¹⁵.

New Orleans

History

First inhabited by the French, New Orleans remains one of the oldest cities in the New World. Founded in 1718, its cultural mix is like no other, as it has been under the control of both the French, the Spanish, and the United States. A tremendous amount of its festive, musical culture can still be attributed to the French Creole roots of the city. Until the Civil War, New Orleans could even claim to be one of the most racially integrated cities in the United States, and it had obtained a vibrant free African-American community; somewhat of an anomaly vis-a-vis its compatriots in the South. New Orleans has a contentious racial and socio-economic history. Whereas it once was regarded as a model for racial and income integration, even as late as the 1950s, it has since become a city of rampant internalized segregation¹⁶ and dramatic poverty. Of course, these two problems occurred in conjunction

¹³ Congressional Research Service, *The Impact of Hurricane Katrina on the State Budgets of Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi*, by Steven Maguire (Washington, D.C., 2005), 4.

¹⁴ Associated Press. "FEMA budget so complex it defies consensus," NBC NEWS, September 24, 2005, accessed June 29th, 2015, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/9460436/ns/us_news-katrina_the_long_road_back/t/fema-budget-so-complex-it-defies-consensus/#.VZCPTIVViko.

¹⁵ Department of Homeland Security, *Budget in Brief: Fiscal Year 2005*, by Tom Ridge (Washington D.C, 2005), 37.

¹⁶ Smith, David. "The Poverty Pit." AHI: United States. October 14, 2005. Accessed June 2, 2015.



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with each other; the city's white upper-middle class moved more and more towards the suburbs and thus the impoverished African-American population began to dominate New Orleans demographics. Certain areas such as the Lower Ninth Ward became nearly 100% non-white, an obvious example of the kind of segregation which New Orleans experienced.

Certain factors contributed and in fact worsened aspects of this segregation. For example, lower-income housing agencies located in New Orleans are congregated around the center and the east of the city, which also are regions of most risk of flooding. As much as 9% of the population of New Orleans was situated in these federal-subsidized houses¹⁷. This is equivalent to a population of 50,000 people.

Demographics

New Orleans demographics speaks of a city in relative crisis. It has had a receding population since the 80s, decreasing by 140,000 between 2000 and 2005, one of the highest crime rates in the country, and a significant poverty rate. Nearly 1 in every 2 New Orleans household is living on an annual income of \$25,000 or less, and nearly 1 out of every 4 is located below the poverty line¹⁸. This clearly reflects problems of an endemic nature occurring in New Orleans, the drastic need for change in the city, and the potential unpreparedness in the face of a potential crisis.

¹⁷ Smith, David. "The Poverty Pit." AHI: United States. October 14, 2005. Accessed June 2, 2015.

¹⁸ Demme, Jonathan. "I'm Carolyn Parker' In Context." POV. 2012. Accessed June 6, 2015.

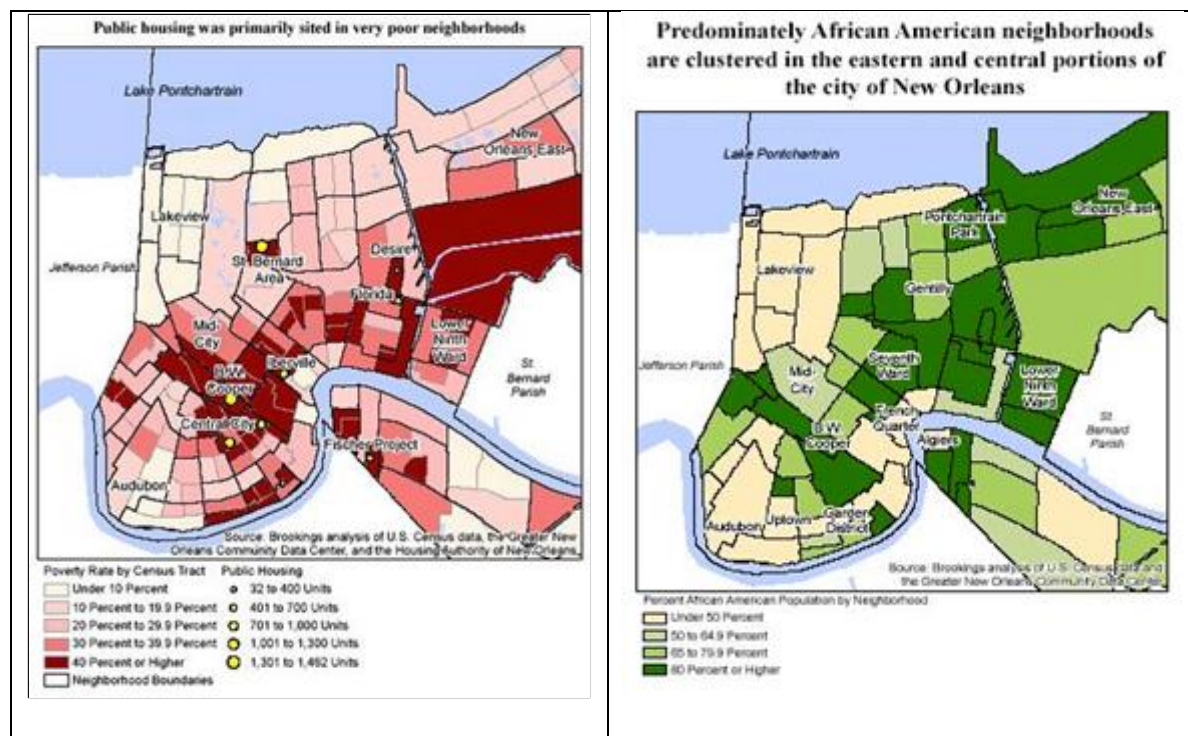


Figure 1: Smith, David. "The Poverty Pit." AHI: United States. October 14, 2005. Accessed June 2, 2015.

Geography

It is no secret that much of the big easy is located below sea-level. Once a damp marsh located just north of the Mississippi Delta, New Orleans had to be extensively dried and developed in order for it to become adequate for building and living. In order to do so, the city of New Orleans created an extensive levee system throughout the city. This levee system runs predominantly along in the east of the city, and thus is very much within close proximity to the some of the city's poorest regions, such at the 9th Ward and Viavant. There are three major outfall canals to keep in mind: the 17th street canal which runs alongside the border between the Jefferson and New Orleans Parish, the Orleans Avenue Canal which extends into Lake Pontchartrain from the Tremé neighborhood, and the



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London Avenue Canal which runs through New Orleans' 7th Ward from the Gentilly area to the Lakefront area. These three canals in particular are vital to the city's regulating of water levels, as they are all equipped with large pumps that drain the water from the city in the event of heavy rain¹⁹.

Most of these levees and flood walls were originally constructed in 1965, as part of the Flood Control Act. This bill mandated that the levees be built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, but also stressed the importance of local and state level assistance in maintaining the flood walls²⁰. Although this maintenance project was supposed to take 13 years, one should note that 40 years later, it had not been completed yet. This is in large part because of environmental, structural, and financial issues, but despite all best efforts, only 60-90% of the project can be truly described as complete²¹. Nonetheless, these flood walls have been built with steel sheet foundations which reach down to approximately 17 feet below sea level, which assures the structural integrity of the levees, while the levees themselves stand 12 feet tall. These measurements were created with storm surges in mind, and should be able to withstand a storm surge of anything less than 12 feet²².

¹⁹ "Individual Environmental Report #5, pages 69-72" (PDF). Retrieved 2013-06-17.

²⁰ GAO Report on Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project, September 2005

²¹ Seed, R.B.; et al. "Preliminary Report on the Performance of the New Orleans Levee Systems in Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005." University of California, Berkeley. November 2, 2005

²² Marshall, Bob. "Short Sheeted." Times Picayune. November 10, 2005.

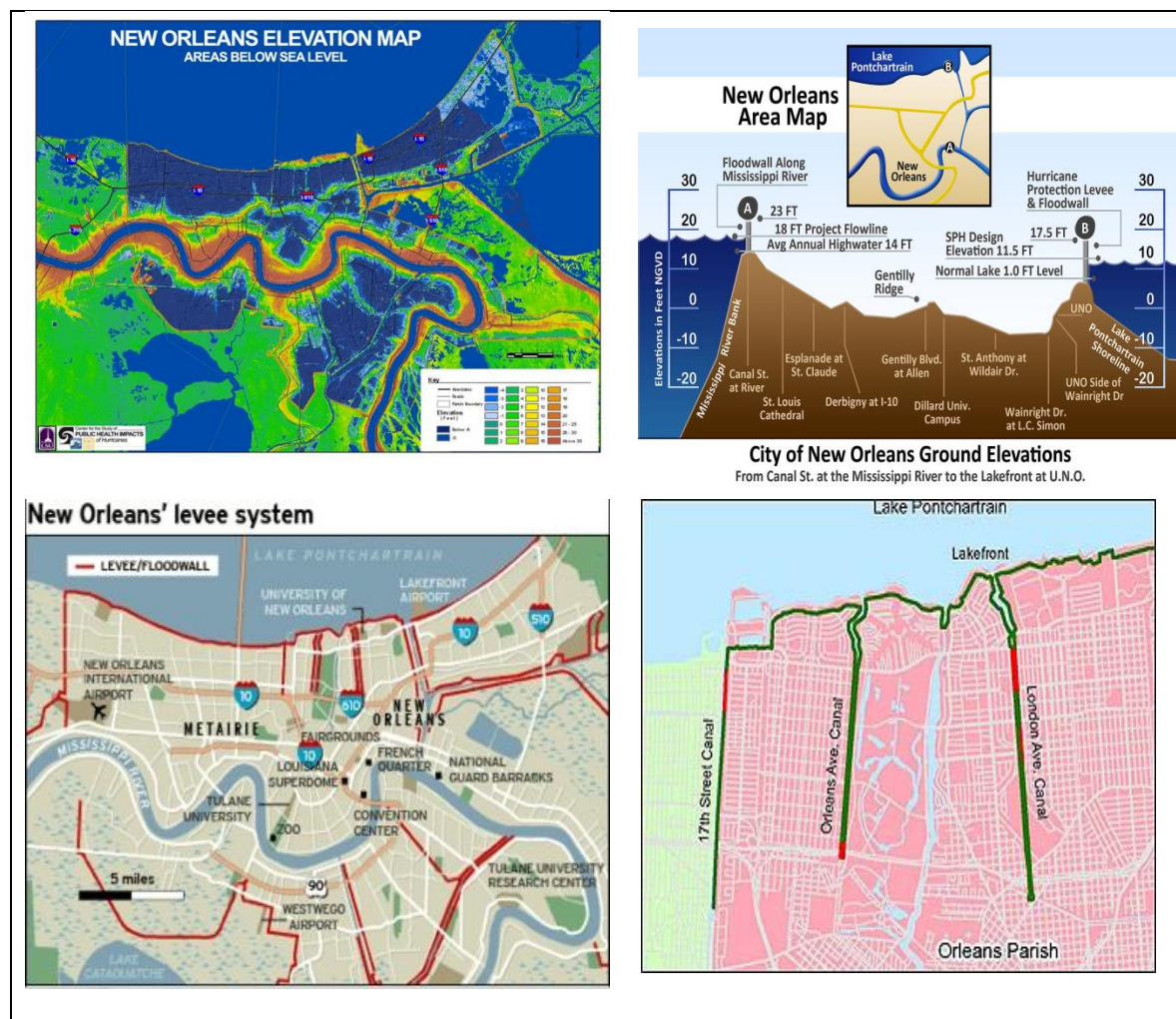
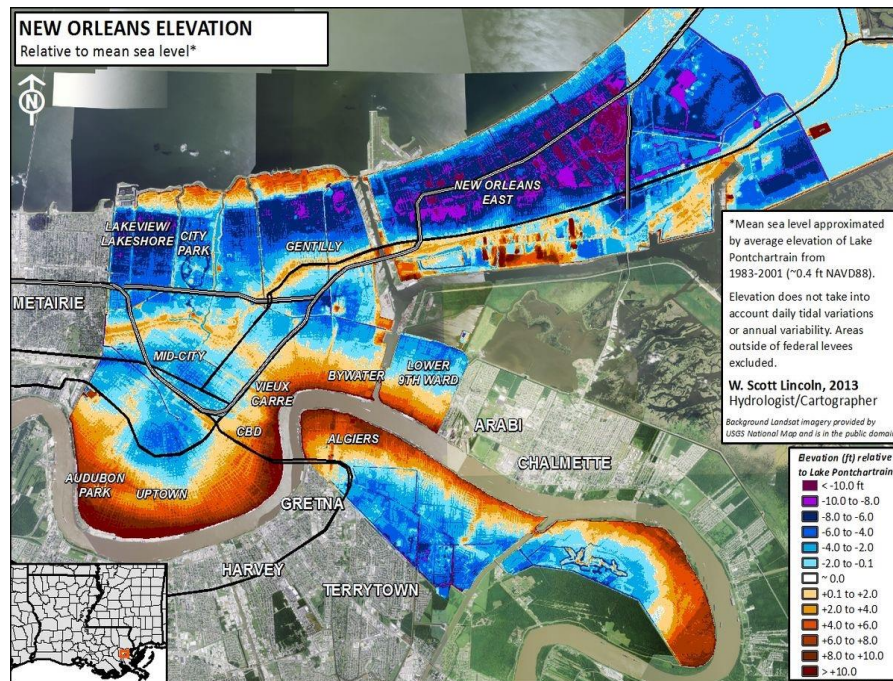


Figure 2: Lane, Doug. "History of the New Orleans Levee System before Katrina." Katrina & the Army Corps of Engineers. June 4, 2014. Accessed June 6, 2015.



Potential crises to address

Human casualties and health issues

If the hurricane strikes, the top priority of the committee will be to limit the death toll by all means. The hurricane can potentially inflict severe damage. In the immediate aftermath of the hurricane, rescue teams may have to be mobilized to look for survivors trapped in the ruins of their houses, evacuate the people living in flooded areas, and ensure that wounded people receive medical attention. Should it be necessary, authorities should also aim to prevent the spreading of diseases caused by a contamination of drinking water, the accumulation of corpses in the most severely hit areas of the city, or wounded survivors left untreated, which would further increase the death toll.

Massive relocation



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In several parts of the city, many houses lack the solid foundations required to ensure their resistance to strong winds. American families could lose their home, and their relocation to shelters would also have to be taken care of after hurricane Katrina hits. Letting people live in the streets could cause severe harm to New Orleans in terms of public health, safety, and image.

Infrastructure damage

The hurricane and the floods that may result from it are more than likely going to damage the city and the state's infrastructure. Roads could become unusable, bridges and tunnels may be inaccessible, thus delaying rescuing operations. Power outages are highly probable. These could result in blackouts, disrupt house's heating, or prevent people from staying connected and informed about the evolution of the situation.

Crime

Crime has been an ongoing problem in many American cities and New Orleans unfortunately makes no exception. In 2004, there were 56 murders, 40 rapes, 400 assaults and over 4,000 thefts per hundred thousand inhabitants²³. Crime is most prevalent in low income neighborhoods, where gang warfare is almost omnipresent. Cities are more exposed to violence and riots in the aftermath of natural disasters, when safety cannot be properly enforced and public authorities are spending their time and resources elsewhere.

Facilitating the post-Katrina reconstruction

²³ City Data. "Crime rate in New Orleans, Louisiana." *City Data*. 2012. <http://www.city-data.com/crime/crime-New-Orleans-Louisiana.html> (accessed June 6, 2015).



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When setting out its priorities, this committee should also keep in mind the long term potential consequences of the hurricane. The destruction of homes, businesses, and infrastructure could bring the city's economy down to its knees. Thousands of New Orleanians could flee the city with no intention of coming back, and crime and health issues may irreversibly stain the image of the city. The future of the city will thus not only be determined by the committee's ability to address the different crises, but also by its ability to communicate to the press and the public. Preserving the image of New Orleans will limit the negative economic consequences by encouraging people and corporations to invest in post-Katrina New Orleans.

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