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**FLOOD WATERS RISE: HURRICANES, DISASTER RESPONSE, AND RACE
RELATIONS IN COASTAL ALABAMA, 1906 – 2006**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of South Alabama in
partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the Degree of

Master of History

in

History

By
Danielle Leonardi
B.A., University of Alabama, 2021
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ABSTRACT

Danielle Leonardi, M.A., University of South Alabama, May 2024. Flood Waters Rise: Hurricanes, Disaster Response, and Race Relations in Coastal Alabama, 1906 – 2006. Chair of Committee: Henry McKiven, Ph.D.

This thesis examines the changes in social relations after natural disasters, specifically hurricanes. The Hurricane of 1906 caused massive damage to Mobile due to the limited warnings. Tensions before the hurricane were already heightened from the Atlanta Race Riot and boiled over after the storm, resulting in a double lynching. Mobile received very little federal aid after the 1906 hurricane and relief heavily on their own communities and the Alabama National Guard. Hurricane Frederic in 1979 was much different because of its position in the Civil Rights Movement. The government relief was slow due to the overwhelming amount needed, and community members of all kinds joined together to help. There were no discussions of racial discrimination besides some lower-income African American areas receiving aid after other cities. Hurricane Katrina in 2005 was similar to Hurricane Frederic in Mobile. However, low-income residents waited years for aid funds, and African Americans in New Orleans were discriminated against.

INTRODUCTION

Cornelius Robinson was coming of age when he was accused of sexually and physically assaulting Ruth Sossaman. He was found by police a few hours after the incident, taken into custody, and even given a pre-trial, where some newspapers noted the young girl was unsure if he was her alleged assailant. The jury found a guilty verdict, and Robinson was taken to jail in Birmingham. Several large mobs tried to enter the Mobile jail, and one incident even became violent. On the way to his trial in Mobile, with another man accused of a similar crime, William Thompson, they were taken from the train by an organized mob. Cornelious and William were lynched on October 2, just six days after the 1906 Hurricane destroyed the Gulf Coast.

Multiple newspaper articles discussing the tragic end of Cornelius Robinson mention a hurricane that affected the passage of information or people themselves. Storms cause destruction, especially the category four hurricane that hit Mobile on September 27th, 1906. The storm desecrated many cities, especially small coastal towns, on the Gulf Coast. Houses and families were left vulnerable to starvation and theft. Tensions being heightened after the storm were noted in several newspaper articles due to fear of Mobile's present circumstances, crime, and the future. The Atlanta Race Massacre of 1906 also happened a week before the hurricane, on September 22nd, and only ended the day before the hurricane on September 26th. Word quickly spread through

the south of the riots, and although a mob of white men started it, the articles do not depict that as the case.

The state of civil unrest after the effects of the hurricane and the inadequate response of city and state leaders led to the death of two men. Cornelius Robinson and Will Thompson were lynched on October 2nd by a mob of 300 – 500 men. Neither man made it to trial due to delays and miscommunications between the Mobile police and state officials. Instances where African Americans are falsely accused and perceived as violent offenders when they are fighting to survive have continued throughout American history. These instances can still occur in recent times, but they depend on the social and political situations that surround the events. Hurricane Frederic was in 1979, over a decade after massive Civil Rights legislation, and had an adequate recovery and community response from the category four hurricane. There were some complaints about federal agencies not moving fast enough, but no major racial violence or issues occurred. The latest example was Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which was widely covered thanks to modern media. Most Americans will remember the hurricane and the lack of response from the state and federal governments. African Americans were portrayed as looters and criminals, leading to several deaths. However, before the thesis is discussed further, some background information on the Progressive Movement in the South and African American activists in Mobile will be provided.

The Progressive era started around 1896 and gave hope to African Americans for a brighter future. It was a grassroots movement and pushed for a larger government and more democratic power for the people. However, the movement focused mostly on working-class whites, not people of color, and ultimately extended the system of legal

segregation. From 1890 to 1910, the population of Alabama cities of 2,500 people or more increased by 7.2 percent because of the industrial job markets. Moralistic, middle-class reformers led the movement to harness industrialization and protect the people. They broke up monopolies, regulated big businesses, established the Federal Reserve Bank, legislated progressive taxes, enacted food and drug laws, campaigned against vice and corruption, and ushered in women's suffrage and prohibition. Progressive reformers during this time saw race as a biological fact that severely influenced their proposals, especially with the increased publications on eugenics and race.¹

The Black Belt was known in the North as an area of “backward people,” predominantly poor blacks and whites. Due to these views and past divisions, tensions between the North and the South only rose as more northerners moved south. Wealthy northerners saw potential in southern land and a place to cultivate more northern views once they got there. The various political and social changes led to a more industrialized South and a third-party political system with the Progressive Party.² In Mobile, the influx of African Americans in 1896 heightened racial tensions, and city leaders intimidated and segregated citizens by municipal ordinance in 1902. The influx also overtook conversations about progressive subjects like disease and illiteracy and turned all attention to “the negro question.” The influx of others, like white northerners, pushed the African American business district and residential areas north in the seventh ward.

¹ David W. Southern, *The Progressive Era and Race: Reaction and Reform 1900 – 1917*. (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2005), 1, 44.

² C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877 – 1913*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971.), 134.

Between 1880 and 1900, 15,000 people, over half the black population in Mobile, lived with their central district being an underdeveloped Davis Avenue.³

The United States, especially the South, seemed to regress more than ever in terms of race relationships. The era was influenced by psychology, especially Darwinism, and scientific racism. The education of white superiority began early, as children were taught about the races in school and at home. A small percentage would continue to college and read progressive material, often including topics on race and scientific racism. White prejudice was supported by the idea that African Americans were born with a lack of control. A study conducted by Dr. Robert Bennett in 1906, the same year as the hurricane, compared the brain sizes of different races. He believed it would be futile to educate African Americans. Propaganda from white society and learned views created the false perception that African Americans could and wanted to physically harm others.⁴

For these reasons, African Americans were excluded from white society and the workforce. They were pushed to the lowest socioeconomic class, aiding white Americans in their preconceived notions and not allowing African Americans to progress after Reconstruction. Most jobs available to black people in Mobile were similar to the ones African Americans held before the Civil War, like domestic housework. Sharecropping was also one of the few options African Americans had available for employment. Still, state boards continued to make it more difficult for African Americans by requiring licenses and eliminating uneducated and unskilled workers from textile, oil, and gas

³ David Ernest Alsobrook. "Alabama's Port City: Mobile During the Progressive Era, 1896 – 1917," (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, Auburn, 1983) 1, 9, ProQuest Dissertation & Thesis Global.

⁴ David W. Southern, *The Progressive Era and Race: Reaction and Reform 1900 – 1917*. (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2005), 47 – 50, 63, 68.

companies. The few available jobs tended to be the more dangerous ones that white Alabamians refused to do. Some Black businesses did prosper during segregation because they filled needs that the white community could not. However, the widespread poverty of African Americans led to dilapidated housing, poor health, and family instability. These conditions led to a growing African American criminal class, which racists exploited to feed white fear and sense of superiority.⁵

The South was a difficult climate in which to cultivate a radical movement, especially a progressive one. Indoctrination of racism disguised as white solidarity and a Continual Democratic party domination allowed constant repression. However, the Southern Populist Party started in the 1890s and intended to use the progressive movement to help African Americans in the South. Farmers and laborers became interested and involved in politics to prevent the wealthy minority from dictating the lives of the poor majority. Low and middle-class citizens were frustrated with Republican and Democratic leaders because the hardships regular citizens, especially African Americans, faced daily were overlooked.⁶ The Southern Populist Party was described as "...a combination and alliance along regional, class, and racial lines – first an alliance between South and West; second a combination of farmers and city and factory laborer; and third a political union with the Negro farmers and laborers of the South."⁷ This new party only added to the hostile environment in the South, where restrictive voting legislation was put into place.

⁵ David W. Southern, *The Progressive Era and Race: Reaction and Reform 1900 – 1917*. (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2005), 55, 75 – 77, 80, 85.

⁶ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877 – 1913*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971.), 249 – 252.

⁷ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877 – 1913*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971.), 252.

Literacy tests, taxation, gerrymandering, and grandfathering were all ways to keep African Americans out of the voting stations.⁸

Theodore Roosevelt's election in 1901 gave African Americans the same hope the Progressive Movement did. Roosevelt seemed to embody the spirit of progressivism, but social tensions would alter his views. As the Alabama House Representative from 1904 to 1920, J. Thomas Heflin held and openly spoke out on his anti-black, anti-Catholic, and antisemitic views. Even moderates and black abolitionists before the progressive era became defeatists and chose not to support African American rights. Others became deeply racist and white supremacy-focused. Instead of supporting other black people of all kinds, leaders of African American abolition spoke in agreement with their racist white counterparts. Moderate southern Episcopal minister Edgar Gardner Murphey visited Alabama and spoke out against the unfair systems in place and lynching. However, he was also one of the best spokesmen for the Jim Crow system.

The Supreme Court only heard 19 out of the 528 cases involving race between 1890 and 1910. One of these cases was *Giles v. Harris* from Alabama in 1903. The case was conducted with the Supreme Court, which decided that states' voter registration and qualifications requirements were constitutional. Whites quickly installed poll taxes and secret ballots to keep African Americans disenfranchised. Even worse, this allowed white leaders to install segregation everywhere, including schools, bathrooms, buses, and more. White education was often of a higher quality than African Americans, but segregation did not stop their literacy rates from increasing. African Americans were only educated

⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877 – 1913*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971.), 332.

until 6th or 7th grade and received used books from white schools that were outdated and littered with white supremacist ideas. Customs were another unspoken outcome of white supremacy to place segregation where laws could not. For example, an African American had to go to the back of a restaurant or a white person's house instead of the front so they would not be seen.⁹

Legal segregation and widespread African American disenfranchisement pushed northern moderates and progressives to support white supremacy. Religious organizations, even liberal Protestant and Catholic churches, ignored the need for race reform and only focused on ridding greed and vice from the world. The women's suffrage movement was in its very early stages, but most of these women shared the same racist views as their male oppressors. Few, but some, African Americans joined in on discriminating against their own race in a personal attempt to gain acceptance from the white majority. If any African American tried to speak out against the systems in place in the South, they were faced with violence and potential death, the same tactics used to drive successful African Americans out of towns. White supremacy was the way of life in Alabama, and it took the state until 1928 to remove the convict lease system.¹⁰

The restrictions and violence African Americans faced did not stop them from fighting to improve their lives in a racist South. The first recorded African American protest in Mobile was in 1867, when white companies refused black passengers access to street cars. The federal government passed the Reconstruction Act that same year and African

⁹ David W. Southern, *The Progressive Era and Race: Reaction and Reform 1900 – 1917*. (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2005), 43, 58, 91 – 93, 97, 100 – 105, 131.

¹⁰ David W. Southern, *The Progressive Era and Race: Reaction and Reform 1900 – 1917*. (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2005), 3, 52, 64 – 65, 67, 96, 107.

Americans were granted voting rights. As stated, they used this newfound power to organize boycotts, losing the bus company's money. Brigadier General Wagner Swayne, the assistant coordinator of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, made a deal with the company to create African-American-only street cars. However, African Americans were unsatisfied with this answer and demanded to remain on the white street cars. Finally, in 1871, companies agreed to allow African Americans in segregated cars. The Supreme Court decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 legally excluded African Americans from public transport and accommodations. The decision hit black Mobilians hard, especially when Mobile created a city ordinance in 1902 to enforce segregation. This did not stop black activists in the city; it even encouraged them.

The same day the city ordinance was issued, July 1st, Anderson McEwen, an African American editor of the *Mobile Southern Watchman*, and Albert Owens, an African American pastor from Union Baptist Church, organized a two-month-long protest. Again, the company was economically affected and began partially ignoring the city ordinance. African Americans still faced prejudice and often had the driver or white passengers enforce the regulation. Looking deeper into African Americans' choice of boycotting for direct action, it is evident that they were protesting against racism. However, they also accommodated it because they feared the whites' reaction if they protested on the streetcars.¹¹

¹¹ Delene M. Case, "'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around': The Black Freedom Struggle in Mobile, Alabama, 1902–1969," (Master's Thesis, University of South Alabama, 2004.), 10 – 21, <http://libproxy.usouthal.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.usouthal.edu/dissertations-theses/aint-gonna-let-nobody-turn-me-around-black/docview/305101974/se-2>.

Black-owned retail businesses thrived on Davis Avenue, and eventually, white citizens had stores there, too. Some African American tradesmen had businesses on East Dauphin Street, showing African American businessmen breaking into white areas. White citizens still blamed yellow fever and other diseases on African Americans and foreigners, but every outbreak led to a push for better sanitation and health programs. In 1906, the Red-Light district on David Avenue was thriving and stretched ten blocks, bringing all types of customers to the area. The municipal offices of Mobile expected police officers to monitor and control the activities of African Americans, even in their own areas. They did this through liberally interpreted vagrancy ordinances. During this time, African Americans could be accused of all sorts of crimes and severely beaten for accusations, which the municipal offices turned into new evidence of black proclivity.¹²

The laws and customs across America, especially the South, forced African Americans to be under surveillance constantly. This surveillance meant any minor infraction of the location's customs could lead to false accusations and racial profiling.¹³ Between 1900 and 1917, 90% of African Americans in the United States lived in the South. Subsequently, heightened racial tensions occurred and created new competition for white men. Black men began applying for the same jobs as whites or gaining economic prosperity from black-only businesses. African Americans' attempt to gain employment in a majority-white job market caused labor unions also to promote white supremacy, even if it meant weakening the labor movement of the time. Violence broke out around

¹² David Ernest Alsobrook. "Alabama's Port City: Mobile During the Progressive Era, 1896 – 1917," (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, Auburn, 1983) 10 – 12, 19, ProQuest Dissertation & Thesis Global.

¹³ Barbara J. Fields, "Origins of the New South and the Negro Question," *The Journal of Southern History* 67, no. 4 (November 2001): 811 – 826.

most companies that hired African Americans to work as scabs during workers' strikes.¹⁴ In Mobile, between 1906 and 1917, the police, sheriff's department, and state militia worked together to deal with riots during strikes and racial violence in the aftermath of hurricanes.¹⁵ It is not clear if this practice began before or after the 1906 Hurricane.

Racial tensions were increased by racial reform progress, but race riots resulted from false accusations of black crime against white women. Juries that tried African Americans for these crimes were all white juries, not a jury of their peers. Almost all African Americans accused of rape or sexual assault were found guilty. However, only 25% of the African Americans executed at this time had been accused of sexual assault. The punishments they faced for minor or no legal infractions, like walking on grass, were met with harsh penalties and legal ramifications. When the cases of white violence against African Americans were brought to court, most cases were found to be justifiable. Even black-on-black violence was ignored mainly because of the ideas of social Darwinism. By 1906, Theodore Roosevelt and the federal government had made no attempt to pacify this violence and had not passed desegregation or educational improvements for African Americans. Federal agencies also remained segregated, supporting the ideas of white supremacy in the United States federal government.¹⁶

Mobile's city ordinances that enforced segregation and heightened surveillance in their areas led to some police officers using excessive force when arresting African

¹⁴ David W. Southern, *The Progressive Era and Race: Reaction and Reform 1900 – 1917*. (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2005), 2 – 3, 79, 98.

¹⁵ David Ernest Alsobrook. "Alabama's Port City: Mobile During the Progressive Era, 1896 – 1917," (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, Auburn, 1983) 18, ProQuest Dissertation & Thesis Global.

¹⁶ David W. Southern, *The Progressive Era and Race: Reaction and Reform 1900 – 1917*. (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2005), 98, 106, 108, 117.

Americans. It was never confirmed by city leaders that officers were using these measures, but some information leads the reader to believe it was true. Between 1913 and 1917, around 60 percent of arrests in Mobile were African Americans. During this time, several policemen were discharged for being drunk on duty, accepting bribes, brandishing pistols in public, and consorting with prostitutes, notably black prostitutes. An Officer J. A. Kinnamon was dismissed “for the good of the service” in 1914 after brutally assaulting a black prisoner with his nightstick. Although the city officials praised officers for keeping the public safe, they were poorly trained and needed discipline.¹⁷

Multiple lynchings occurred between 1906 and 1910, but the exact number is unknown. These instances tightened segregation and increased social and economic discrimination, which led many African Americans to look to the North for employment. The Greater Mobile Act was passed in 1907 and was used to help with city building debt and improve municipal services. However, the northern suburbs were omitted from these services, and we can only suspect it was because the population there was largely black. The first African American school in Mobile was founded under segregation in 1868. However, even in 1910, 30 percent of adult male African Americans were illiterate, and the progressive movement that wanted to improve literacy was nowhere to be found. Over 15,000 African Americans were in the city, and only 193 were registered to vote in Mobile County by 1908. Most of Mobile’s lower class was African American, and the

¹⁷ David Ernest Alsobrook. “Alabama’s Port City: Mobile During the Progressive Era, 1896 – 1917,” (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, Auburn, 1983) 19, ProQuest Dissertation & Thesis Global.

progressive movement only brought poverty, substandard municipal services and housing, disease, and premature death.¹⁸

The primary sources for this thesis rely heavily on newspapers from Alabama and Mobile archives and online databases. Multiple newspapers in Alabama have been found discussing race relations and hurricanes during 1906 in Mobile, including *The Mobile Register* and *the Birmingham News*. The articles focusing on hurricane information extensively discuss the damage to Mobile's business district and the flooding that occurred afterward. Some reports mention looting, suspicion about African Americans, and fear of African American backlash. Most articles discussing racial tensions discussed a double lynching in Mobile of Will Thompson and Jim or Cornelius Robinson. Various Alabama newspapers were also used to describe the events and aftermaths of Hurricane Frederic and Hurricane Katrina. Articles discuss the damage caused by hurricanes, federal and state aid programs, recovery from the storms, and effects that remain years after the storms.

The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile's collection on the 1906 hurricane and the double lynching that followed includes personal comments written by Mobilians after the hurricane, city documents, newspaper articles, and images of the damage. Newspapers have mentioned that white areas and the business district were cleaned first, while African American residents waited for city assistance or community efforts to repair their neighborhoods. There was barely any preparation or prevention system to protect Mobile residents from hurricane damage. This archive also

¹⁸ David Ernest Alsobrook. "Alabama's Port City: Mobile During the Progressive Era, 1896 – 1917," (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, Auburn, 1983) 25, 37 – 41, 61, ProQuest Dissertation & Thesis Global.

contained newspaper articles from all over the state about Hurricane Frederic's damage and recovery efforts. As the storm occurred during a new era of the Civil Rights Movement, racial tensions during the disaster had changed. Cities were working to improve conditions overall, and that included the community. More newspaper information about how Hurricane Katrina affected citizens and racial tensions was collected from the Local History and Genealogy division of the Mobile Public Library. They discuss the unpreparedness of the federal and state governments and the conditions residents were living in years after the storm due to slow funding. There was no major racial violence in Mobile after Katrina, but New Orleans was a different story.

The Progressive Era and Race: Reaction and Reform, 1900 – 1917 by David W. Southern was published by Wiley-Blackwell in 2005. Southern's book examines the brutality African Americans faced in the political realm and their daily life in the South during the Progressive era in the first two decades of the twentieth century. He takes his idea further and discusses Northern neglect of African Americans' lives. Many northerners and political leaders addressed eugenics and African American stereotypes that harmed their progress. The book examines the rise of anti-black and pro-black repression and violence that circled the country, continually feeding off the other's ideology. Southern also explores the origins of the Civil Rights Movement during this era, focusing on the rivalry between W.E.B Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. He finishes his book by looking at the discrimination African American veterans faced when returning from World War I.

Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Islands Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South by Carolina Grego was published by The University of North Carolina

Press in 2022. Although the book is dated earlier, the hurricane's lasting effects on Jim Crow can be helpful in seeing how the progressive era affected how leaders responded to hurricanes and the destruction afterward. In August 1893, a deadly hurricane hit the Lowcountry of South Carolina, killing thousands and most African Americans. The storm's devastation lasted much longer due to the economic effects, environmental change, and increased racial oppression. White landowners and politicians fought with black workers and politicians on how to move forward to protect the city they cared for. Grego argues that the different views of South Carolina's future by white and African Americans involved did nothing to help prevent situations like the 1893 hurricane in the future.

Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination by Richard M. Mizelle was published by the University of Minnesota Press in 2014. The flood of 1927 affected seven states, but the book focuses on the Mississippi Delta. It discusses the federal and state governments' methods to control floods and harness the water to make it helpful to residents. The Mississippi Delta is similar to the Mobile Delta in how residents used the area and their preservation of the antebellum South. Mizelle discusses how African Americans were not seen as environmentally conscious and often left out of the rescue and survivor counts. This led to thousands of African Americans' deaths being unrecorded. The book explains African Americans' efforts to create change for their environmental displacement and unfair situations during natural disasters.

Katrina: A History, 1915 – 2015 by Andy Horowitz was published by Harvard University Press in 2020. It discusses Hurricane Katrina from a different perspective, focusing on the history of significant hurricanes in New Orleans since 1915. Horowitz

chose 1915 because a cyclone had minor effects on the city, leading developers to believe they could build houses closer to the shorelines. To build homes closer to the coastline, the city had to fund a levee system to keep the houses dry, which failed and devastated those same houses, which happened to be occupied by lower-income residents. Horowitz examines the responses of officials to flooding and hurricane damage since 1915.

Although his book is focused on New Orleans, the cities have a close history. Katrina takes a different approach to hurricane history and can show evidence of racial inequality even during the disaster.

Dissertations and theses on race relations in the South and Alabama during or after the turn of the twentieth century are used to understand where Mobile was during the progressive era and after. “Alabama’s Port City: Mobile During the Progressive Era, 1896 – 1917” by David Alsobrook discusses the social, economic, and political history of southern urban progressivism in Mobile, Alabama. Alsobrook’s dissertation for Auburn University argues that prominent white businessmen were focused on their own primary endeavors instead of the social reform that was needed in the city. Delene Case discusses African American protests and organizations in Mobile, Alabama, and their struggle for civil rights in “‘Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around.’ The Black Freedom Struggle in Mobile, Alabama, 1902 – 1969.” Case’s Master’s Thesis for the University of South Alabama examines the nature of protest tradition in Mobile by African Americans since Reconstruction. She uses interviews of African American activists in Mobile and African American newspapers to argue her point.

Several articles have been found on subjects relating to the thesis topics, including the South during the turn of the century and the progressive era, as well as Hurricanes of

1906, Hurricane Frederic, and Hurricane Katrina. ““Origins of the New South” and the Negro Question” by Barbara J Fields was published by *The Journal of Southern History* in 2001. Barbara Fields discusses Woodward’s *Origins of the New South* to support her analysis of focusing on African-American race relations. She defines race relations as the analysis of the traits that constitute race and uses the example of the historic white belief that African Americans were lazy, criminal, immoral, and so on. Articles from each hurricane discuss the damage Mobile faced and the efforts of state and federal relief associations. Articles typically run from a couple of months to years after the storms and discuss what residents dealt with during the storm and recovery periods, with many personal stories from these residents or the journalists themselves.

The United States, especially the American South, neglected and stunted African American growth in everyday life. In times of crisis, these conditions only became more severe and visible, as shown in this thesis and other sources cited. Mobile is a coastal city, making it susceptible to hurricanes and natural disasters. City governments had prevention methods in place, but the effectiveness of those efforts is questionable. Studies discussed in *Katrina* by Andy Horowitz and numerous articles analyzing Hurricane Katrina have found wealthier, typically white, neighborhoods are more protected from hurricanes.¹⁹ Recovery was similar to prevention, as the city government focused on the business district and docks after the storm of 1906. The hurricane damage shown in the images seems substantial enough that more aid from the state was warranted. Based on Alabama’s racial laws created by Democratic policymakers, African

¹⁹ Andy Horowitz, *Katrina: A History, 1915 – 2015*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2020).

Americans received limited assistance after hurricanes or city disasters. African Americans also tended to live in lower-lying areas because the property was more affordable and less out of the public eye. However, these areas were more likely to be affected by natural disasters.

Natural or unpreventable disasters, like hurricanes, epidemics, water level changes, erosion, and fires, were common in coastal towns like Mobile during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The proximity of downtown Mobile to the ocean allows it to be hit by some of the strongest wind and water currents. The flood currents from hurricanes or high water levels can last for days and affect the neighborhoods on the city's coast. Floods affect not only the short term but the long term as well. It creates deterioration in building materials, making them more susceptible to damage. The damage of the 1906 hurricane, Hurricane Frederic, and Hurricane Katrina destroyed buildings and homes, left debris on the streets, and left hundreds homeless or living in friends' or families' houses or loaned Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers. Many of the struggles with federal and local government and property damages stayed the same throughout all three hurricanes. However, the society in which hurricanes happened had changed drastically, leading to shifts in the effects of classism and racism.

Mobile is used as a case study to examine the racial divide and its expansion when exacerbated by hurricanes. Natural disasters bring destruction, raising social tensions with fear and despair. The damage of hurricanes and floods leaves people and property vulnerable, creating more fear and raising tension. Historically, African Americans have been scapegoats for white Americans' anger, no matter the situations presented. Although many of those affected in the Mobile area were black, each hurricane affected citizens of

all colors. There is no record stating the percentage of those affected or those arrested for crimes, but many white and black citizens held the same economic standing. Race does not determine the upstandingness of a citizen; their mental states do. I used letters from Mobilians in 1906 and secondary sources about African American suffering and social tensions during hurricanes and other natural disasters. Letters, newspapers, and media coverage stated that African Americans were causing all the crime after the hurricanes.

Mobile felt alone during their recovery from the Hurricane of 1906 because the Red Cross and Federal Emergency Management Agency were not present. However, both organizations were there for the recovery of Hurricane Frederic and Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Frederic in 1979 had hints of classism and racism, but nothing more than that was clear in newspaper articles. Although some secondary sources stated there was evidence of both the federal and state governments acting with classism and racism, those claims were not substantiated by primary sources. It would appear that American society was finally progressing until Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The improved digitized media allowed people to watch what was going on during the publicized events and draw their own conclusions about racism and classism being expressed by local and federal governments. However, this media mainly focused on New Orleans because it was hit the hardest, and thousands of residents did not evacuate. The lasting effects of Hurricane Katrina in Mobile were evident from the newspaper articles published years later of people of all races still dealing with delays in disaster relief.

The first chapter discusses the recovery process and efforts to improve conditions after storms. The level of state government support depends on the destruction caused by tropical storms. The Hurricane of 1906 was a category four hurricane and caused

subsequent damage to downtown Mobile and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Newspapers report that the downtown business district was flooded for days in some locations, and residential areas faced devastation. It was also noted that clearing the city was a top priority for resuming business after the flooding subsided. However, the neighborhood, typically African American, was neglected and left to community efforts. African American neighborhoods were often by the water to access food, which created jobs or self-sufficiency. Therefore, they were also more prone to flood damage. This thesis will examine the city and community efforts to recover after a tropical storm and whether some residents were assisted by the city more than others.

The second chapter is about the social effects of the devastation the storm caused in the city of Mobile, Alabama. The destruction of people's properties allowed looters more access and was often reported after the hurricane. Newspapers sometimes comment on fears that African Americans would commit criminal acts after a storm. For example, an African-American man was accused of assaulting a young white girl a few days after the hurricane, and a week later, he was lynched. Using African Americans as scapegoats for crimes was highly effective for white citizens because of the scientific racism and progressive ideas in the United States. These beliefs' power over whites in the South allowed them to stunt African Americans' progress to becoming a full citizen. It often excluded them from almost all financial or equal opportunities.

A specific aspect of the second chapter is the deaths of Cornelius Robinson and Will Thompson. Less than a week after the hurricane, while the destruction was still fresh, Cornelius Robinson allegedly assaulted a young white girl, Ruth Sossaman. He was found by a group of white men a couple of days later, and Ruth positively identified him,

but with much hesitation and pressure from her father. Will Thompson was also accused of sexual assault on a young black girl who allegedly identified him. It came out through his pretrial that he had also allegedly assaulted two young white girls around the time of the storm. Both men were taken to jail in Birmingham and were supposed to be transported back to Mobile for trial. However, because racial tensions were so high due to the hurricane's damage and loss, a mob of 300 – 500 stormed their location and took the men by force. They were hung on Holt Road in Pritchard Station, Alabama, on October 2, 1906.

The third chapter discusses Hurricane Frederic, a category four hurricane that hit Mobile in September of 1979. The storm caused massive damage to all areas of the Gulf Coast that it encountered, but Mobile and Baldwin Counties were hit the worst. Local officials and officers worked to evacuate citizens and with the early stages of recovery right after the storm. However, they complained about delays with federal aid programs such as the Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The recovery after Frederic showed community support for all kinds of people, while the secondary sources attempted to show there was racism or classism by government officials. Hurricane Frederic occurred after major Civil Rights legislation and a time when race relationships were improving. These new social constructs were present in Mobile, with neighbors helping neighbors where the federal and local governments could not or were delayed.

The fourth chapter discusses Hurricane Katrina, which occurred almost a century after the 1906 Mobile Hurricane. Hurricane Katrina was a catastrophic category-three storm that made landfall on August 29, 2005. Mobile was devastated by the storm but did not

receive the same media attention that New Orleans did. Federal relief agencies worked in Mobile to aid recovery, and their shelters quickly filled up. However, many people complained about the restrictions and influx of New Orleans citizens. The areas most affected were low-lying and close to the water. These mixed-race, low-income areas waited years to receive their funding for repairs.

This thesis examines how African Americans were neglected in support and recovery efforts from natural disasters, leading to racial discrimination and violence. The focus is on Mobile's 1906 hurricane, which left the city struggling for weeks. Newspaper articles, personal notes, and official telegraphs are analyzed to understand how Mobilians felt after the event. Most of this information is from an assumably white perspective, showing how little African Americans' voices were heard during that time. Mobile is similar to many coastal cities on the East and Gulf Coasts, frequently affected by hurricanes and storms. Examining Mobile specifically allows readers to see how a seemingly progressive city, because of its long history of foreign occupation and freedmen, allowed racial tensions to reach the point of lynching after the hurricane of 1906.

Hurricanes Frederic and Katrina are examined to show how American society shifts with the social constructs that were popular at the time. The common good of the community was coming back into trend and did not exclude African Americans anymore. Neighborhoods looked after each other no matter what race and picked up in places the local, state, and federal governments could not. The same was present during Hurricane Katrina, but Mobile and New Orleans were so devastated that neighbors could not do much for each other. All citizens were in the same boat during these storms, but the

attention of news media during Hurricane Katrina's recovery showed a government reacting with excessive force to those in need, especially African Americans. Although times have changed, and only a century has passed between the Hurricane of 1906 and Hurricane Katrina, the federal, state, and local legislatures reverted to old ways of focusing on improving the cities instead of those living in them.

CHAPTER II

THE HURRICANE OF 1906

Menerva Spottswood, a blind African American widow, lived near St. Medar Street on the west side of Hickory Street in Mobile, Alabama. During the 1906 September hurricane, she reportedly paced her room all night, listening to the rain and wind. The story is that at first light, she got the urge to leave her home, even if it meant facing the danger of the storm. Fearfully, she walked to the front door and screamed for help. A nearby neighbor, Fuller Henderson, heard her call and went to her aid. Within minutes of Ms. Spottswood and Mr. Henderson leaving the yard, a tree fell, crushing Ms. Spottswood's home.²⁰ The hurricane is only known by its year, 1906, as hurricanes were not named until after World War II.²¹ Its strength and the subsequent flood damage brought to lower-income areas of Mobile caused many citizens to have stories like Menerva Spottswood.

The hurricane started on the afternoon of Tuesday, September 25th, in Pascagoula, Mississippi, as a category two hurricane.²² Mobile-only felt its fitful winds, and the sky

²⁰ "In Fisher Tract and Wolf Heights," *The Mobile Register*, September 28, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²¹ Joey Bunch, "1906 Hurricane Among Deadliest in U.S. History," *The Mobile Register*, March 19, 2000. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²² Diana Ritzie, "1906 Hurricane." *The University of West Florida Digital Humanities Lab*. Public History Projects. https://archives.uwf.edu/PublicDH/?page_id=1193.

was lead-colored.²³ With scattered showers and high wind, the storm began to pick up in Mobile around eleven p.m. on Wednesday, September 26th.²⁴ By one in the morning, a gale wind blew, with the anemometer showing the wind speed between 34 and 47 knots. The following day, Thursday, September 27th, the hurricane came to the city, bringing substantial rainfall and fierce winds.²⁵ By the early morning, the electric lights all over Mobile were forced out by the storm.²⁶ Newspapers stated, "Oldtimers recalled the wild howling like a million banshees and the rain pounding in torrents."²⁷

The storm ended around nine on Friday morning, September 28th, when the storm shifted to the west.²⁸ The anemometer's lowest winds were 28.84 miles per hour,²⁹ but the highest was 50 miles per hour. However, the anemometer broke during the storm, and Mobile could not accurately account for the entire storm.³⁰ The weather bureau officials stated that the winds could have gotten higher than 75 miles per hour,³¹ but some believed they reached 118 miles per hour.³² Pensacola reported winds as strong as 150

²³ Bruer, Frank. "Tide Caused Most Losses," *The Mobile Register*. 1906 Hurricane Claimed 250 Lives in Area. The Jack Friend Research Library.

²⁴ "The Storm at Mobile." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁵ "West India Hurricane Strikes Mobile," *The Mobile Register*, September 28, 1906, Hurricane Collection. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁶ "The Storm at Mobile." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁷ Arch McKay, "Devastating 1906 Hurricane: Register EXTRA Tells Grim Story," *The Mobile Register*, September 17, 1967. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁸ "West India Hurricane Strikes Mobile," *The Mobile Register*, September 28, 1906, Hurricane Collection. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁹ "The Storm at Mobile." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

³⁰ "Rages for Nine Hours, During Three of Which Was Severest Ever Known Here," *The Mobile Register*, September 28, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

³¹ "Paid a Heavy Price," 1906 Hurricane Claimed 250 Lives. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

³² Joey Bunch, "1906 Hurricane Among Deadliest in U.S. History," *The Mobile Register*, March 19, 2000. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

miles per hour³³ and 952 millibar intensity.³⁴ Due to the hurricane's fury, some coastal towns said 10 to 14-foot tides above normal ranges also occurred during the hurricane,³⁵ with the Mobile River noting 9.9-foot waves, a new high record for the city.³⁶ The highest waves recorded before this was 8.8 feet during a storm on October 2, 1893.³⁷ There were 6.4 inches of rainfall recorded during the entire event.³⁸ The 1906 hurricane broke all previous records in wave height and damage done.³⁹

This chapter examines the technology in place during the 1906 hurricane that affected the Gulf Coast's ability to prepare for the event. We will also look at the recovery process for the destruction caused, using telegraphs and letters from leaders of Mobile to Alabama state officials, including the governor. Mobile County and the surrounding coastal towns, like Pensacola, New Orleans, and Pascagoula, share similar geographic and social features and will be included for context and further examples. Among the multiple Mobile articles, we will look at the Great Sea-Island Storm of 1893 on the South Carolina Coast to examine how a hurricane affected the small island towns only occupied by black sharecroppers and a few small white landowners and their servants. The Mississippi River Flood of 1927 is also examined due to areas of the massive range of

³³ Cottrell-Ashley Studio Photographer. View of the Damage from the Hurricane of. Florida Pensacola United States of America, 1906. [Place of Publication Not Identified: Publisher Not Identified] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021669941/>.

³⁴ Diana Ritzie, "1906 Hurricane." The University of West Florida Digital Humanities Lab. Public History Projects. https://archives.uwf.edu/PublicDH/?page_id=1193.

³⁵ "Rages for Nine Hours, During Three of Which Was Severest Ever Known Here," *The Mobile Register*, September 28, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

³⁶ "Paid a Heavy Price," 1906 Hurricane Claimed 250 Lives. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

³⁷ "The Storm at Mobile." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

³⁸ "Paid a Heavy Price," 1906 Hurricane Claimed 250 Lives. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

³⁹ "Stories of the Hurricane September, 1906." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

damage the flood caused across seven states, focusing on Louisiana and Mississippi.

These comparisons will give context to how African Americans were being treated during disaster recovery around the time of the 1906 hurricane.

The United States has a long history of flood defense, starting in the 1840s, when the federal government believed they needed to do something about the seasonal floods that were hampering the plantation economy. The Swamp Acts were passed in 1849 and 1850, allowing Congress to sell swamp and overflow land to states. The states could then drain the land and build levee systems to develop their territory. However, the states could not coordinate to make a continual, effective levee system, so the Acts were seen as overall failures. Still, levees are active in many coastal towns to assist with high tides and storms. During the Civil War, attention was brought back to levees because Union forces destroyed them to cause damage to low-lying cities. Even during the Progressive Era, conservationists debated how to make the land and water more helpful to humans, and levees were a large part of the debate. Progressives believed that science and development would make new landscapes possible, but someone with the technical training was needed to make a just assessment.⁴⁰ Although protecting the nation from environmental disasters was on the federal government's mind, there was very little technology to alert citizens of dangerous weather.

Mobile's 1906 Hurricane had no warning system to prepare citizens for what was to come. These environmental disasters have limited data on the preparation for their damage. This is because there is a lack of communication and a short time to prepare

⁴⁰ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 5 – 6.

before a storm. A newspaper also noted that a lack of respect for the storm led to the Gulf area's damage. The cyclone was first reported on September 22nd, south of the Cayman Islands, 1,000 miles from Mobile. These reports were sent from ocean vessels via telegraphs to large cities near the coast. Then, the coastal cities would relay the messages to smaller coastal towns. Updates on the hurricane came to Mobilians for three days before the cyclone looked like it was headed to the Gulf Coast. Information was received only three hours before the storm hit Pascagoula and the coast.⁴¹ Storm flags were raised, but there was no way to tell how bad the storm would be. Back then, the most accurate storm prediction was from people who lived and knew coastal areas. Native American and African American people knew their places so well for their survival that they would feel it in the air or understand what the elements around them were saying.⁴²

This would only change in 1912, after the Titanic, when all ships were required to have wireless radios to alert coastal towns of bad weather offshore.⁴³ They also had the invention of the telegram in these times, but storms could easily damage lines. The damages caused by the following flooding were similar in all events: property loss and property damage. The amount of damage in Alabama was estimated at \$3 million, but the totality of the damage on the Gulf Coast was around \$15 million.⁴⁴ An article in March 2000 stated that the 1906 hurricane was ranked 15th on the National Hurricane

⁴¹ "Paid a Heavy Price," 1906 Hurricane Claimed 250 Lives. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁴² Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 37.

⁴³ Tom McGehee, "A Hurricane to Remember: The Tragic 1906 Storm that Struck Mobile," *Bellingrath Gardens and Home*, <https://bellingrath.org/a-hurricane-to-remember-the-tragic-1906-storm-that-struck-mobile/>.

⁴⁴ "The 1906 Hurricane in Mobile, Alabama," Geneajournals. Word Press. <https://geneajournalsbyapearl.wordpress.com/2021/11/13/the-1906-hurricane-in-mobile-alabama/>.

Center's list of the 30 deadliest cyclones in history.⁴⁵ It took weeks for the complete death toll of the event to be revealed. It was found that 250 Gulf Coast citizens had either died from the storm or were lost at sea. Different areas were affected differently based on how intense the hurricane, its winds, and the waters were in relation to the coastal towns. In Mobile, it was noted that there was only one loss of life, the baby of Harry Warren, a black janitor for the Bank of Mobile.⁴⁶ Coden and Bayou La Batre have been compared to having the same mass amount of damage, but Coden suffered many losses of life that Bayou La Batre did not.⁴⁷

After the 1906 Hurricane, all around Mobile, slates and shingles were ripped from roofs, and widows were damaged, meaning most interiors of affected locations were also damaged. The shipyard was greatly affected, with some ships being wounded or lost.⁴⁸ Between Three Mile Creek and Choctaw Point, 14 boats were sunk, and 34 had crashed ashore. Fifty Barges and small launches were also lost or severely damaged. Every oyster fleet in the area, except one, was destroyed.⁴⁹ The river steamer, Mary, was wrecked on the St. Anthony Street slip, and the steamer, Hattie B. Moore, was wrecked on St. Francis Street.⁵⁰ A story from Captain McKay of the steamer Gussie states he was headed from Mobile to Tampa with cargo and 12 passengers. They rode out to Dauphin

⁴⁵ Joey Bunch, "1906 Hurricane Among Deadliest in U.S. History," *The Mobile Register*, March 19, 2000. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁴⁶ "Stories of the Hurricane September 1906." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁴⁷ "An Appeal to the State of Alabama, to the World at Large, and to the Press of the State." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁴⁸ "West India Hurricane Strikes Mobile," *The Mobile Register*, September 28, 1906, Hurricane Collection. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁴⁹ "Paid a Heavy Price," 1906 Hurricane Claimed 250 Lives. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁵⁰ "1906 Hurricane Claimed 250 Lives," The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

Island and decided to anchor within the harbor to brace for the storm.⁵¹ The captain said the wind sounded like “1,000 devils” were screaming around them.⁵² All passengers stayed aboard the ship, and his crew worked to keep the boat steady, but around four in the morning on Friday, they hit Dauphin Island. Only one crew member sustained injuries from this by breaking his ribs. The group could see the damage to the Gussie and the island when daylight broke. McKay stated that all that stood on the island were the lighthouse and a tree that had been trapped under the Gussie when blown ashore. This hurricane blew a steamship to high ground and on top of a tree; the sheer force to achieve that is astounding.⁵³

The flooding in downtown Mobile was so high that most business stocks were damaged, even with vendors' efforts to protect them.⁵⁴ *The Mobile Register* reported five blocks of the business section were under five to six feet of water.⁵⁵ Fallen trees and debris scattered the residences and parks in downtown Mobile.⁵⁶ Reverend A. F. Owens, a prominent African American leader, toured the “Fisher Tract,” an almost exclusively black area on Davis Avenue with some white businesses.⁵⁷ The tract was bound on the

⁵¹ Doris Rich, “Hurricane of 1906: Mobile’s Worst Storm Recalled,” *The Mobile Press-Register*. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁵² “Hurricane: The 1906 Blow Was a Major One,” *Eastern Shore Courier*, December 2, 1976. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁵³ Doris Rich, “Hurricane of 1906: Mobile’s Worst Storm Recalled,” *The Mobile Press-Register*. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁵⁴ “West India Hurricane Strikes Mobile,” *The Mobile Register*, September 28, 1906, Hurricane Collection. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁵⁵ “The 1906 Hurricane in Mobile, Alabama,” *Geneajournals*. Word Press.
<https://geneajournalsbyapearl.wordpress.com/2021/11/13/the-1906-hurricane-in-mobile-alabama/>.

⁵⁶ “West India Hurricane Strikes Mobile,” *The Mobile Register*, September 28, 1906, Hurricane Collection. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁵⁷ Martin Luther King Junior Avenue was formerly known as Davis Avenue. It was named for Jefferson Davis, the only Confederate president, which is ironic since it has historically been a mixed-race area. I will refer to the Avenue as Davis because that name still recognized in Mobile’s current African American

south by Davis Avenue, east on Marmotte Street, west by Owens Street, and north by Three Mile Creek, with 1000 cottage homes in the parameters.⁵⁸ Owens reported that the streets were covered with leaves and broken fences. Houses had been lifted off their pillars and dropped back on the group, destroying everything. The residential costs of repairs were \$25,000, giving each home \$25, or about \$838 in today's market.

Historical and prominent locations in the area were massively affected by the storm. Days after the storm, there was shoulder-deep water in the Southern Hotel on Conti Street. The Methodist Episcopal Church on Hercules Street was lifted off its pillars and thrown into the cottage next to it. Unfortunately, the church could not be repaired, and the cottage was not commented on. The Union Star Hall, a large two-story frame building on Wilkinson Street, was crushed and could not be repaired. The steeple of the St. Louis Street Baptist Church, an African American establishment on Dearborn and St. Louis Streets, was blown onto the sidewalk. The roof of the spacious brick building was significantly damaged, leading to a \$4,000 loss. The Big Zion Church and the State Street Church were damaged, costing \$2,000 each. The Franklin Street Baptist Church, the Metropolitan A.M.E Church, the Warren Street Church, and Union Baptist church sustained \$500 to \$1,000 in damages.⁵⁹ A woman who lived on St. Anthony Street

community. To express its significance, Paulette Davis-Horton wrote *Avenue: The Davis Avenue Story: The Place, The People, The Memories 1799 – 1986*.

⁵⁸ "In Fisher Tract and Wolf Heights," *The Mobile Register*, September 28, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁵⁹ "In Fisher Tract and Wolf Heights," *The Mobile Register*, September 28, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

outside the flood zone reported that the winds were 94 miles per hour when the eye passed through Mobile.⁶⁰

The downtown area, especially near Water Street, was greatly affected. Erwin Craighead took a boat to Bay Minette a day after the storm and reported Mobile had at least \$3,000,000 worth of damage, and the business section was underwater with cotton floating around the streets.⁶¹ The Coca-Cola Bottling Company, owned by Walter Bellingrath, was on Water Street and sustained roof damage. The building was partially damaged, and the floods washed away merchandise.⁶² The great oaks in Bienville Square were stripped of their foliage and missing limbs. Some were lost entirely, but most could be recovered. The clock on the courthouse was destroyed, leaving debris inside and outside of the building. The tower also sustained damage below the clock, and one of the pagodas at the front of the building was ruined. "Justice," one of the figures on top of the courthouse, and the animals around her at the entrance plummeted to the pavement, destroying them. The Historic Christ Church on Conception Street was in ruins because the steeple fell through the roof, destroying the galleries and interiors of the building. The St. Francis Street Baptist Church also lost a spire, but the building sustained minor damage. The waves and storm surge damaged Bay Shell Road and the pier. Railroad traffic was down, with many trains being damaged or knocked off tracks.⁶³

⁶⁰ "The 1906 Hurricane in Mobile, Alabama," Geneajournals. Word Press.

<https://geneajournalsbyapearl.wordpress.com/2021/11/13/the-1906-hurricane-in-mobile-alabama/>.

⁶¹ "Report from Unknown," *The Montgomery Journal*, September 28, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁶² Tom McGehee, "A Hurricane to Remember: The Tragic 1906 Storm that Struck Mobile," Bellingrath Gardens and Home, <https://bellingrath.org/a-hurricane-to-remember-the-tragic-1906-storm-that-struck-mobile/>.

⁶³ *The Mobile Register*, September 28, 1906. Hurricane Collection. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

Other areas of the Gulf Coast were just as affected by the hurricane as Mobile. The neighborhood of Delchamps, north of Mon Louis Island, only had two houses standing after the storm. Between Coden and Bayou la Batre, San Souci Beach was utterly swept away.⁶⁴ The Kennedy Hotel in Coden protected citizens for a short while until the impact of the waves led it to collapse. Only nine people survived.⁶⁵ In Portersville, a section of Coden, 75 houses were destroyed, and half of the residents living there were said to have died from the storm.⁶⁶ Oliver Werneth is noted to have died trying to save his family. The family took refuge on a boat with local boy Cal Williams.⁶⁷ When they attempted to board the boat, it sank, and the flood swept away Mr. Werneth, his wife, their baby, and his mother-in-law.⁶⁸ His daughter, Adele, and Cal survived by swimming to a tree.⁶⁹ Bayou La Batre faced the same extent of damage as Coden but did not suffer the same loss of life.⁷⁰

Dauphin Island was reported to have disappeared under the sea,⁷¹ but only four residents died.⁷² When it resurfaced, it was revealed that 26 houses had been destroyed,

⁶⁴ "Great Loss of Life on South Shore." *The Mobile Register*, September 28, 1906. Hurricane Collection. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁶⁵ "Paid a Heavy Price," 1906 Hurricane Claimed 250 Lives. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁶⁶ "An Appeal to the State of Alabama, to the World at Large, and to the Press of the State." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁶⁷ Joey Bunch, "1906 Hurricane Among Deadliest in U.S. History," *The Mobile Register*, March 19, 2000. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁶⁸ *The Mobile Press Register*, August 8, 1971. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁶⁹ Joey Bunch, "1906 Hurricane Among Deadliest in U.S. History," *The Mobile Register*, March 19, 2000. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁷⁰ "An Appeal to the State of Alabama, to the World at Large, and to the Press of the State." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁷¹ "Paid a Heavy Price," 1906 Hurricane Claimed 250 Lives. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁷² *The Mobile Press Register*, August 8, 1971. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

and all the buildings faced some damage.⁷³ It was said that soldiers from Fort Gains, on the island's north end, offered to take islanders to the fort for protection, but many preferred to stay in their homes. The Catholic and Mission churches were destroyed, and the island's wharf was swept away entirely.⁷⁴ Between Choctaw Point and Three Mile Creek, 14 boats had sunk, and 34 had crashed ashore. Three miles east of Fort Morgan, Navy Cove was completely wiped out, with a lagoon taking its place. Forty of its residents survived by tying themselves to large oak trees on a high knoll. Citizens who reached inland or clung to debris during the storm survived, but many lost their lives in the hectic waters.⁷⁵

An estimated 134 people were killed in Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida by the storm.⁷⁶ The Relief Association of Alabama immediately asked for donations for the communities affected.⁷⁷ The Mobile Citizens Relief Committee met Saturday after the storm and appointed Dr. H. T. Ingle as chairman, J. Paul Wilson as secretary, and M. J. Duggan as treasurer. E. J. Buck, president of City Bank and Trust Company and treasurer of the San Francisco relief committee, ordered \$2,222.50 to be given to Mobile. Mr. Buck and Mr. M. J. McDermott, president of the Bank of Mobile, added to the San Francisco relief money with \$500. Twenty-one individuals oversaw committees to

⁷³ "Paid a Heavy Price," 1906 Hurricane Claimed 250 Lives. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁷⁴ *The Mobile Press Register*, August 8, 1971. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁷⁵ "Paid a Heavy Price," 1906 Hurricane Claimed 250 Lives. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁷⁶ Kelley Kazek, "A Look at Alabama's Deadliest Floods." *Alabama Living*, December 28, 2015. https://www.al.com/living/2015/12/a_look_at_alabamas_deadliest_f.html.

⁷⁷ "Press Association Seconds the Call," *The Mobile Register*, October 26, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library.

reimburse the banks and add to the relief fund. A committee of seven people, including Colonel R. B. DuMont and Captain Alfred S. White, was created to disburse relief money to stores and general relief for those in need.⁷⁸

The Mobile Register reported on the storm's outcome on September 28th, meaning publishing companies were up and running the day after the storm's close.⁷⁹ Newspapers reported little of the relief efforts besides mentioning donations for Mobile or other cities. The only support mentioned was by the relief committees and Captain P. W. Thompson, who left his station in Galveston with permission from the Treasury Department to sail to Mobile and assist in aid efforts.⁸⁰ It was also mentioned that those in Coden suffered massively from the storm. A visiting reporter stated that women and children were "scantily clad, hungry, and exhausted." He finished by stating that the relief committee distributed food and then searched for the dead.⁸¹ The Coden-Bayou La Batre Relief Association tried to appeal to the state the damage they had faced during the storm. Citizens felt there was not enough knowledge of their suffering and as if the country did not care about them. The Association pleads with their reader for assistance in gaining building supplies, tools, and money to help rebuild their city.⁸²

The telegraph wires were down for a few days, and the first recorded telegram was sent on September 29th, two days after the storms ended. The editor of *The Mobile*

⁷⁸ "The Storm at Mobile." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁷⁹ "The 1906 Hurricane in Mobile, Alabama," Geneajournals. Word Press.

<https://geneajournalsbyapearl.wordpress.com/2021/11/13/the-1906-hurricane-in-mobile-alabama/>.

⁸⁰ *The Mobile Press Register*, August 8, 1971. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁸¹ Doris Rich, "Hurricane of 1906: Mobile's Worst Storm Recalled," *The Mobile Press-Register*. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁸² "An Appeal to the State of Alabama, to the World at Large, and to the Press of the State." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

Register and the L&R Railroad telegraph operator left on September 28th and went to Bay Minette by boat and on foot to dispatch a message but could not send it through until the next day.⁸³ The message was sent to the Governor of Alabama, William Dorsey Jelks, asking him for assistance after the storm. The message was kept short and appeared as if Mayor Lyons felt terrible asking the governor for assistance.⁸⁴ On September 29th, a letter from Governor Jelks was sent to the *Port-Dispatch* in St. Louis, Missouri, stating he was unsure of the conditions in Mississippi and Mobile, but he assumed assistance would be needed.⁸⁵

Multiple messages were sent out by various Mobile officials on October 1st, most with conflicting reports. The Rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, Richard Edmonds Bennett, sent a short message to Governor Jelks asking if state funds could be appointed to relieve the destroyed Mobile area, but no response was found.⁸⁶ Mayor Lyons sent another telegram to the governor asking for state aid again. He also mentioned the state of Mobile and the southern coast on October 1st, stating that many citizens were homeless and needed food, shelter, and clothing.⁸⁷ Mayor Lyons sent another letter to the governor on the same day, mentioning the loss of life and property in the areas surrounding Mobile. He said that at least a hundred citizens were destitute, but the city was doing its

⁸³ "The 1906 Hurricane in Mobile, Alabama," Geneajournals. Word Press.

<https://geneajournalsbyapearl.wordpress.com/2021/11/13/the-1906-hurricane-in-mobile-alabama/>.

⁸⁴ *Telegram from Mayor Patrick J. Lyons to Governor William D. Jelks*. October 1, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁸⁵ *Letter from Governor William D. Jelks to Port Dispatch, St. Louis, Missouri*. September 29, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁸⁶ *Telegram from Rector Richard Edmonds Bennett to Governor William D. Jelks*. Jelks Official Papers. October 1, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁸⁷ *Telegram from Mayor Patrick J. Lyons to Governor William D. Jelks*. Executive Department. October 1, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

best with relief work and could use outside assistance.⁸⁸ Erwin Craighead, the editor of *The Mobile Register*, also sent a telegraph to the governor telling him that people in Tower Coast were devastated by the storm and the facilities they depended on were all destroyed. Mobile was doing everything it could for the community, but there was too much damage, and the state needed to act.⁸⁹ Colonel A. S. Lyons and Dr. H. T. Inge, Chairman of the Relief Committee, wrote to Governor Jelks about the destruction of the lower coast and asked for \$25,000 in state aid.⁹⁰

Governor Jelks responded to each of the individuals above on the same day their messages were sent. The governor sent telegrams to Mayor P. J. Lyons, Colonel A. S. Lyons, and Dr. H. T. Inge, stating that the state cannot help Mobile until the legislature approves. Still, they have called on communities in the state to send aid.⁹¹ A Colonel of the Alabama National Guard (A. N. G.) from the 1st Infantry sent Captain Y. W. Pringle of the First Artillery, A. N. G., of Mobile, Alabama, a letter telling him they would appreciate at least six men sent to Coden for aid. The group would need to bring their own equipment, such as tents, ponchos, knives, forks, spoons, cups, and blankets. Colonel A. N. G. told the men to report to Captain Maddox so that he and his executive

⁸⁸ *Letter from Mayor Patrick J. Lyons to Governor William D. Jelks*. Jelks Official Papers. September 29, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁸⁹ *Telegram from Erwin Craighead to Hon. Governor William D. Jelks*. Jelks Official Papers. October 1, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁹⁰ *Telegram from Colonel A.S. Lyons to Governor William D. Jelks*, October 1, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile; *Telegram from Dr. H. T. Inge to Governor William D. Jelks*, October 1, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁹¹ *Telegram from Governor William D. Jelks to Colonel A.S. Lyons*. The Western Union Telegraph Company. October 1, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile, *Telegram from Governor William D. Jelks to Dr. H. T. Inge*, The Western Union Telegraph Company, October 1, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile; *Telegram from Governor William D. Jelks to Mayor Patrick J. Lyons*. The Western Union Telegraph Company, October 1, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

officers could ensure the volunteers got paid for their service.⁹² The leaders of Mobile quickly organized relief efforts and instituted martial law to protect the area's citizens. The business district was guarded by militia, and multiple mass meetings were held to establish relief committees. The community raised \$47,000 for southern Mobile County. The M&O train arrived in Mobile on September 29th, giving Mobilians hope that other counties could send food and supplies. The mayor led clean-up efforts starting on September 30th, and by October 1st, as reported in telegrams, Mobile was focusing relief on the south coast, like Dauphin Island, Bayou la Batre, Mon Louis Island, Coden, and Delchamps.⁹³ On October 1st, Governor Jelks issued another proclamation to the communities in Alabama to send aid to the Gulf Coast, as the state could not do anything until the legislature approved it.⁹⁴

Mayor Patrick Lyons sent another letter to the governor on October 2nd, stating the coast was in serious condition and needed state aid.⁹⁵ The same day, *The Mobile Register* reported that the mayor told the Associate Press that Mobile did not need assistance because the business district was up and running again, just five days after the hurricane. The newspaper stated the help required to go south of Mobile to the lower coast, as many were still without food, clothing, or shelter.⁹⁶ Mobile rebounded quickly; even the Coca-

⁹² *Letter from Colonel, 1st Infantry, Alabama National Guard to Captain Y. Pringle, First Infantry, Alabama National Guard*, October 1, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁹³ "The 1906 Hurricane in Mobile, Alabama," Geneajournals. Word Press.

<https://geneajournalsbyapearl.wordpress.com/2021/11/13/the-1906-hurricane-in-mobile-alabama/>.

⁹⁴ *Letter from Governor William D. Jelks to Mayor A. Lyons*. October 1, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁹⁵ *Telegram from Mayor Patrick J. Lyons to Governor William D. Jelks*, Executive Department. October 2, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

⁹⁶ *Editorial from The Mobile Register*, October 2, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

Cola Bottling Company on Water Street began working as much as possible after a few days.⁹⁷ Pensacola led a public mass city clean-up effort, pushed by city managers to recover from the storm damage. Fort Pickens and Fort McRae are located near Pensacola and were damaged by the storm. This led the Secretary of War, William H. Taft, to call for a sea wall to protect the forts from environmental disasters, costing \$907,100, but it was never completed.⁹⁸

Officers of the Mobile Battalion and Company D., First Infantry, and Battery A., First Artillery, went to Coden for recovery assistance.⁹⁹ These men cared for the homeless, the sick, and the wounded, buried the dead, and helped improve sanitary conditions. The Commanding Battery "A" stated they believed the citizens of Coden were well enough to care for their own and left the city on October 9th.¹⁰⁰ Bay Commander of the Governor, William W. Brandon, Adjutant General, sent a congratulatory message to the group, commending them on their prompt response and efforts. He also notes that the officers conducted themselves in a respectful manner in all aspects.¹⁰¹ S. T. Westcott, Major, Commanding First Battalion Artillery, congratulated Captain Pringle on October 5th, reiterating what Adjutant General Brandon said.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Tom McGehee, "A Hurricane to Remember: The Tragic 1906 Storm that Struck Mobile," Bellingrath Gardens and Home, <https://bellingrath.org/a-hurricane-to-remember-the-tragic-1906-storm-that-struck-mobile/>.

⁹⁸ Diana Ritzie, "1906 Hurricane." *The University of West Florida Digital Humanities Lab*. Public History Projects. https://archives.uwf.edu/PublicDH/?page_id=1193.

⁹⁹ *General Orders from Command of the Governor from Adjutant General William W. Brandon*, October 5, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁰⁰ *Letter from Commanding Battery "A" to Major S.T. Westcott*, October 14, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁰¹ *General Orders from Command of the Governor from Adjutant General William W. Brandon*, October 5, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁰² *Letter from Major S.T. Westcott to Captain Y.W. Pringle*, October 5, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

President of the Coden-Bayou La Batre Relief Association, J. A. Joullian, reached out to Governor Jelks to discuss conditions in Coden a month after the storm on November 1st. His letter expressed how the city wishes to make the area more helpful to residents, even though it is swampy, unlivable land. He again asked for aid from the country's people to improve conditions after the storm, as many citizens were still homeless and hungry. Citizens were also getting sick because of unsanitary conditions in the tropical climate of the south coast. Mr. Joullian believed it would take about a year for Coden to fully recover from the trauma it faced. He said he contacted certain legislature members, like Senator Morgan and Senator Edmund.¹⁰³ Governor Jelks responded to J. A. Joullian on November 10th to prove his support for Coden. Jelks gave the people of Mobile County a large sum of money from a small contingency fund of his and hoped it would go to recovering the shore. He also visited Coden to check on its repairs. He stated in his letter that he was asking the people of Alabama for donations and did not want to appear indifferent to the struggling citizens of his state. Governor Jelks also advised Mr. Joullian to contact other state and federal legislatures for assistance, as he did all he could.¹⁰⁴

Six years after the storm, Maude M. Midgette, a part-time resident of Navy Cove, recalled her detailed experience of what happened during and after the hurricane of 1906 to a journalist. Her story starts as any others, with the storm wreaking havoc on Navy Cove and citizens going to high ground to survive the storm. After the worst of the storm passed, they began looking for food. The storm has blown some oranges off a tree, and

¹⁰³ *Letter from J.O. Joullian to Governor William D. Jelks*, Jelks Official Papers. November 1, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁰⁴ *Letter from Governor William D. Jelks to J.O. Joullian*, November 10, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

someone ventured to a half-destroyed house, finding 21 jars of food, a sack of potatoes, and an egg. She repeatedly mentioned how the most nutrient-rich food they found was given to the minor children. The group was stuck on Navy Cove for hours, soaking by the rain and frozen by the wind. Two boys were sent to Fort Morgan for provisions or help. While they were gone, other residents of Navy Cove who were assumed to be lost joined the group. Separated family members either rejoined or realized the devastating loss the storm had caused them. The original group welcomed newcomers and focused their provisions on them. Maude describes seeing members of the Johnson family stranded on the other side of the channel and the group's efforts to bring them to the side the rest of the group was on. Thursday night, the group was awoken by whistling from soldiers from Fort Morgan. Half the group boarded a "submarine boat" headed to the fort. The journey was long, especially fighting the continuing strong winds, and it took six hours for the soldiers to return for the second group. They left for Fort Morgan around daylight.¹⁰⁵

The soldiers did all they could to comfort the survivors, giving them any garments, including their own jackets, for warmth. They arrived at the fort on Friday and were greeted by the First Regiment of the 99th Company. The men offered the major's quarters, a decent-sized house, to the 40 survivors. They walked around Fort Morgan and nearby areas, seeing even more of the hurricane's destruction. The soldiers served them hearty biscuits, beef, coffee, and gravy. After dinner, they boarded another boat headed for Mobile. The wharf was gone when they reached it, and they had to row to a mail boat

¹⁰⁵ "Hurricane: The 1906 Blow Was a Major One," *Eastern Shore Courier*, December 2, 1976. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

that took them ashore. Many people gathered at the pier and tried to take pictures of the survivors, but they quickly got into carriages and left for their homes. Maude finishes her story by commenting that if people do not believe her, all they must do is visit Navy Cove.¹⁰⁶ The storm affected some forts, with Captain A. N. G. of the 1st Artillery noting they lost all power and flood waters reached inside. They also lost all gunpowder and ammunition due to the four-foot drop in the ammunition's room, making it easy for flood water to access.¹⁰⁷

Not much is noted in newspaper articles about the citizens who died during the storm. Knowing the complete death toll took weeks, especially in coastal areas. Many lost could never be found because they were swept out to sea. Soldiers and regular citizens found and buried the dead or returned them to their families. In the story of Navy Cove, several men stayed behind on the little island to secure Mr. Johnson's body.¹⁰⁸ The soldiers from Fort Morgan returned to bring the men and Mr. Johnson to Mobile with the rest of their families. The captain of the steamer Gussie that wrecked on Dauphin Island stated that his crew and passengers were burying the dead they found on the shore.¹⁰⁹ In Coden, it was reported that bodies lay in shallow holes, on the roadside, in fields, and on the beach, most without coffins.¹¹⁰ Magnolia Cemetery in downtown Mobile held the bodies of the

¹⁰⁶ "Hurricane: The 1906 Blow Was a Major One," *Eastern Shore Courier*, December 2, 1976. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁰⁷ *Letter from Colonel, 1st Infantry, Alabama National Guard to Unknown*. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁰⁸ "Hurricane: The 1906 Blow Was a Major One," *Eastern Shore Courier*, December 2, 1976. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁰⁹ "Stories of the Hurricane September 1906." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹¹⁰ "An Appeal to the State of Alabama, to the World at Large, and to the Press of the State." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

storm victims. Citizens could search for their family members and take them home to be buried. However, many bodies were left unidentified and remain buried in Magnolia Cemetery.¹¹¹

There was no evidence of telegraphs from Alabama officials or Mobile citizens reaching out to the Red Cross for assistance. The American Red Cross was established in 1881 by Clara Barton to help those in need during and after disasters. The American Red Cross had helped tremendously with previous disasters, like the Great Sea Island Storm. They are also noted as helping with the Mississippi Flood of 1927. The 1906 Hurricane is on the list of the top 30 most devastating hurricanes from the National Hurricane Center, but the Red Cross never assisted. Multiple letters and newspaper articles were published questioning why the state, Red Cross, and country were not helping citizens on the Gulf Coast when the Hurricane of 1906 was one of the worst natural disasters to hit Alabama to this day. It might have been because Mobile seemed to recover quickly from the storm. They reported that \$20,000 in relief funds had been paid out, and 5,000 people had been aided.¹¹² However, this does not reflect the recovery of the smaller coastal towns that faced more damage. On October 2nd, a newspaper article reported that Mobile was running again. However, the business district was still receiving relief from different organizations. *The Register* wanted people to send money to those poor and still in need

¹¹¹ "Stories of the Hurricane September 1906." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹¹² "Stories of the Hurricane September 1906." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

on the Gulf Coast. The article noted that the false information was damaging the business district, which was still closed.¹¹³

One of the first natural disasters to affect African Americans was the Great Sea Storm of 1893, which hit just north of Savannah, Georgia, and into the many islands of South Carolina's coast. One of the hardest hit islands was Kiawah Island, which had a large plantation owned by Elias Vanderhorst. The inhabitants were twelve African American families and Quash Stevens. Mr. Stevens was the black illegitimate son of Elias Vanderhorst, a member of a Dutch plantation family from the mainland. The area was meant to be a thriving sharecropping rice plantation led by Quash Stevens, but the 1893 storm caused damage to the homes and flooded the island, destroying the rice and plantation. The people who lived on the land were unsure of what to do but worked together to survive during this time. The American Red Cross helped by providing food and clothing to these people. However, the American Red Cross was not a charitable organization, and black people had to work to get food and clothing.¹¹⁴

The people of Kiawah Island worked long hours digging the plush mud out of the city of Charleston and returned home to their families with a slab of bacon and a loaf of bread. The women of the Sea Islands also had to work. The American Red Cross received tons of clothes from the North, but the clothing was unsuitable for hot weather. So, the American Red Cross found 90 sewing machines and put the women to work making suitable clothing for the poor. They worked long hours and were paid with food

¹¹³ "Editorial Column," *The Mobile Register*, October 2, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹¹⁴ Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 1.

items to bring home to their families. About a year after the storm, things were beginning to look hopeful for the sea islanders. They began growing rice again and looking forward to a bright future. Little did they know that the government had bought the land and begun building a levee system along the coastline. The levee system was built by black prisoners and sea islanders looking to make a few dollars for their families. It was supposed to make the island more suitable land for white people to buy and live on. The levee system did not work and destroyed all the rice fields, causing the sea islanders to move inland or north to find better jobs because they were left with nothing.¹¹⁵

The Mississippi River Flood of 1927, or the Great Flood of 1927, was an odd natural event that peaked almost a year after it started and took months to recover. Heavy rains in the Mississippi basin during the summer of 1926 continued into the following year.¹¹⁶ In April of 1927, the waters peaked in the lower valley, leading to 23,000 square miles of land submerged in its waters. The first levee to break from the pressure was in Illinois on April 16. It took five days for the levee in Mounds Landing, Mississippi, to break, and more levees along the river continued to break in the following weeks. The river grew eighty miles wide, and the impact of the flood left 16 million acres of land ruined from Illinois to

¹¹⁵ Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 97.

¹¹⁶ "Ain't Got No Place to Go," The Great Mississippi River Flood of 1927, National Museum of African American History & Culture, Accessed August 4, 2023, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/great-mississippi-river-flood-1927>.

Louisiana.¹¹⁷ Some residential areas were covered in 30 feet of water, and around 640,000 people were displaced.¹¹⁸

The people most affected by floods were sharecroppers and lower-income residents because of their proximity to the power line and limited housing. The Red Cross was a massive part of the recovery operation, setting up relief camps all over the affected areas. After the flood, all citizens devastated by the flood flocked to these camps for refuge. African Americans were hesitant, however, because the Red Cross was known for focusing its needs on white citizens. The flood caused citizens to fight to keep themselves and their families alive. There are numerous stories of men stealing boats or even murdering to achieve survival. African American men who entered Red Cross camps were sent to work on the levees or cleaning up debris from the flood. They also were expected to return to work on the plantations and railroads. The differences in treatment in Red Cross camps were obvious to African Americans, which caused the black population to take longer to recover from the flood.

¹¹⁷ "Ain't Got No Place to Go," The Great Mississippi River Flood of 1927, National Museum of African American History & Culture, Accessed August 4, 2023, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/great-mississippi-river-flood-1927>.

¹¹⁸ "Mississippi River flood of 1927," Britannica. Accessed August 4, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Mississippi-River-flood-of-1927>

CHAPTER III

RACIAL TENSIONS EXPLODE

“Mobile Jail Stormed by Mob in Search of Negro,” was a prominent headline in the state of Alabama just days after the Hurricane of 1906. City leaders claimed Mobile was recovering well after the devastating event, but racial tensions in the city had risen to the point of extreme violence. Two men were lynched days after the hurricane due to civil unrest and newspaper propaganda supporting a segregationist agenda. This chapter uses the Great Sea Island Storm of 1893 and the Mississippi Flood of 1927 to contextualize how African Americans were continually mistreated after natural disasters. While there is not a plethora of information regarding the mistreatment of African Americans post-natural disasters, the language and undertones used in Mobile newspaper articles and letters incidentally reveal the racial tensions and sentiments of white citizens following the Hurricane of 1906.

The newspaper articles discussing Mobile focus on degrading African Americans, accusing them of wrongdoings, and showing the animosity between the races after a natural phenomenon. Mobile became heavily militarized after the Hurricane of 1906, with officers patrolling the streets for looters and providing aid simultaneously. There were no African American newspapers being published in Mobile around the time of the 1906 Hurricane, and African Americans were barely talked about regarding receiving aid

or how they were affected by the storm. However, it is apparent tensions were high and ultimately exploded into violence on October 6th with the lynchings of Cornelius Robinson and William Thompson. There are numerous articles discussing the lynching and wrongdoings of African Americans, but few discuss the difficulties the African-American community faced at the time.

The relief efforts in Mobile focused on white individuals and areas like the downtown district. No sanctioned program or organization, like the Red Cross, came to Mobile's aid; only some National Guardsmen and the communities around the affected areas. *Hurricane Jim Crow* by Caroline Grego gives insight into the Jim Crow effect after the Great Sea Island Storm of 1893, which forced most of the African American population to move inland and lose their property investments. She discusses the early Red Cross and the forced labor African Americans were put through by racist political leaders trying to enslave them. *Backwater Blues* by Richard Mizelle Jr. uses stories written by African Americans during the Mississippi Flood of 1927 to show the African American experience and how they were treated during the flood's recovery. He makes it clear that the Red Cross did not help African Americans and aided political leaders in forcing black people to work on recovering the communities.

The federal government saw hurricanes, floods, and tornadoes as local problems. The Red Cross oversaw helping communities rebuild after disasters.¹¹⁹ They acted as a court of law, determining who deserved aid such as rations, water, work, and more after environmental disasters since the late eighteenth century. The relief came from localized

¹¹⁹ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 152.

bills specifically for individuals, not a mass effort to aid by the federal government.

Scholar Michele Landis discovered that direct payments from the federal government for specific sufferers had been occurring in the United States since 1790. Recipients had to prove they lost more than “incalculable loss” from a disaster and had no hand in their losses. These requirements included a loss of class status, meaning African Americans and those already poor could not qualify for individual aid.¹²⁰

Clara Barton, President of the Red Cross, a new civil organization, went to South Carolina to aid those affected by the 1893 Hurricane. She wrote of the Lowcountry despair, specifically of the Black Sea Islanders, and pleaded with citizens and the Federal and state governments for aid. She expressed that 150 to 200 African-American men were outside the Red Cross Headquarters daily, looking for work or supplies to repair their houses and farmlands. Her calls went unanswered by the South Carolina General Assembly and the United States Congress. Newspapers began blaming the Red Cross for the state of a poor white farming town of 600, Bluffton, South Carolina. Although the state had not sent aid to anyone, Clara Barton was at fault because she did not racially discriminate when distributing aid. White South Carolinians did not care about Barton’s views, only the fact that northerners were affecting the Jim Crow political structure in the South.¹²¹

The Red Cross was not present to help Mobile recover after the 1906 hurricane. The same militia groups that assisted in relief on the lower coast assisted in deterring crime

¹²⁰ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 151 – 152.

¹²¹ Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 121, 141.

after the hurricane. Dr. Oats joined the men led by Captain Maddox to the lower Gulf Coast, where Dr. Oats and several corps of the First Regiment were in command of the hospital and of the victims of the storm. Newspapers reported looting all along the coast, stating furniture and trunks were broken. Bodies were also reported mutilated in the streets by looters trying to find valuables. These reports, published just days after the storm, were blamed on African Americans, from looting on the beach to looting in neighborhoods affected by the storm. The militia under Captain Maddox searched African American homes, most likely without permission, and found valuables that were reported to have been looted from homes affected by the hurricane. Silverware was reported as found, and Captain Maddox's militia rounded up all the "idle" African Americans in the area. Several men were arrested, but most were sent to work. It is not noted where they were sent to work, but we can assume that they were sent to clean up the storm's damage and bodies that had not found their final resting place. The *Mobile Register* went as far as to say that black men had left the turpentine stills and sawmills along the Gulf Coast to loot in Coden and other affected areas.¹²²

The Red Cross began as a small organization created to help those in need but became a federally sanctioned disaster organization in 1900.¹²³ Before this, relief was in the hands of smaller organizations, like the Chicago Relief and Aid Society. They dictated who was worthy or unworthy of relief, and based on the late nineteenth-century ideas

¹²² "Negroes Looting Homes of Dead," *The Mobile Register*, October 1, 1906, The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹²³ "Our History," *American Red Cross*, last modified 2023. <https://www.redcross.org/about-us/who-we-are/history.html>.

around race, they tended to help white citizens over black citizens.¹²⁴ The Red Cross had federal oversight in 1927 under the Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover. White leaders also controlled charity resources and focused their efforts on white survivors instead of those most in need, often poor African Americans. During the relief stages of natural disasters, white leaders and National Guardsmen controlled the movements of African Americans. Black citizens were forced to live in certain places and restricted from “safe” areas because they were segregated. The Red Cross camps were also segregated during this time.¹²⁵ The camps were known to be full of poor health, peonage, and destitution. Often, African Americans had to get passes to leave the Red Cross camp, which had to be checked by a National Guardsman or a militia member. The Red Cross justified this treatment by stating they needed to keep track of the relief recipients to avoid duplicating but allowed white citizens to receive multiple aid packs and come and go as they pleased.¹²⁶

During these events, there were complaints about the recovery programs in place, meaning the Red Cross and smaller aid organizations. During the 1897 Sea Island Storm, white citizens were upset by the Red Cross’s relief system. They believed the Red Cross favored black citizens affected by the storm and ignored white citizens needing relief. Many messages expressed why whites felt they were not getting enough aid. One person stated white citizens felt like they had to rush to gain aid items and hoarded them, leaving

¹²⁴ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 81.

¹²⁵ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 72.

¹²⁶ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 79.

less or none for African Americans at the beginning of relief work. Others stated that African Americans were not working on their farmland because they were receiving aid and were not working in the eyes of white citizens. It is evident through Clara Barton's experience African Americans were focused on building up their own communities after the disaster instead of repairing white communities. Accusations from before the Red Cross became involved began to stir again, but new ones had also formed. Newspapers reported corruption in the organization because "carpetbaggers"¹²⁷ staffed it and were using the organization to create a second Reconstruction.¹²⁸

The Red Cross was not present in Mobile after the 1906 Hurricane, which raises questions, as the event was one of the worst hurricanes to hit the Gulf Coast. Newspapers and citizens complain of the lack of response from sanctions disaster organizations and federal aid. After the Mississippi Flood of 1927, newspapers like the *Chicago Defender*, *Washington Bee*, and the *Pittsburg Courier* covered the flood in detail and wrote stories white newspapers ignored. Mobile newspapers covered the events of the 1927 flood, but like the 1906 hurricane, articles focused on the damage caused and white citizens' recovery.¹²⁹ The flood affected Alabama but not to the extent of other states. The event was discussed in newspapers, and organizations raised money to help those who needed relief.¹³⁰ Herbert Hoover and the Red Cross produced literature stating that black

¹²⁷ A carpetbagger is a northern citizen who moves to exploit the local populace economically and politically in the Southern states after the Civil War.

¹²⁸ Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 126 – 127.

¹²⁹ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 77 – 78.

¹³⁰ "State Troops Mobilized to Force Evacuation of Mississippi Flood Region," *The Anniston Star*, April 25, 1927. Newspapers.com.

survivors of the flood were doing better than before, and the Red Cross did not discriminate. The newspapers above and some smaller weekly newspapers wrote of the reality, mistreatment, and brutality of the Red Cross workers, National Guardsmen, and white survivors. Smaller newspapers, like the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, mentioned white newspapers' avoidance of talking about accusations of racial mistreatment.¹³¹

The names mentioned in various newspaper articles after the 1906 hurricane list white individuals who were missing, dead, or affected by the hurricane by name. Listed with the partial list of white victims in Coden and San Souci beach was a “colored” servant, but he remained unnamed. The one victim in the city of Mobile was an African American infant. She was not named in the articles, but her father, Harry Warren, the janitor of the Bank of Mobile, was mentioned.¹³² The only report of both races working together during the hurricane was at the Kennedy Hotel. Mr. H. G. Turner saved Vernon Alfred, the son of Judge Jules E. Alfred, and two African American hotel workers. Mr. Turner was beneath the flood waters but pushed the three individuals to the surface where they could hang onto driftwood and debris. Mr. Turner did not survive, but his heroic and inclusive actions should be remembered.¹³³

After disastrous events, the federal government did not have a sanctioned aid practice and typically left recovery to state and local governments. Whites, especially those in power, believed federal aid would bring a second Reconstruction and an undermining of

¹³¹ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 77 – 78.

¹³² “Stories of the Hurricane. September 1906,” The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹³³ *The Mobile Press-Register*, August 8, 1971, The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

the white Democrats' political power. A South Carolina doctor wrote if African Americans were given state aid, they would no longer work and solely live off government support.¹³⁴ The donations and relief committees could not recover an entire community, predominantly black farmers, phosphate workers, and agricultural laborers, who were scrambling for jobs. White elites wanted to stop donations because they worried the lower classes were planning to live off donations and not return to the workforce. They completely ignored that African Americans were the most affected by the natural disaster of 1893 and needed the aid.¹³⁵

The 1893 hurricane shifted the solid African-American community to a small one, with their livelihoods taken by the storm. White citizens used this to push the belief that African Americans could not care for themselves and only function under white control, leading to their freedom being taken. Harry Hammond, a prominent white legislator, died before the hurricane occurred, but his message from previous hurricanes showed the animosity between white and black citizens. He is quoted saying, “One hundred [African Americans] perish in a catastrophe that destroys only three of their white neighbors! What promise is there that any outside help can enable them to build up their waste places[?].”¹³⁶ Hammond believed they could prevent damage from natural causes by moving the black islanders to white areas inland. Using racist logic, he thought African Americans should work on white people's farms for free and clear the island of black

¹³⁴ Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 79, 81.

¹³⁵ Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 94, 129.

¹³⁶ Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 64.

landowners and voters. If Hammond took African American landowners away from their property, they could no longer use their right to vote. His proposal did not pass but clarified white citizens' views of African Americans, as he was widely supported.¹³⁷

Benjamin Tillman, a Senator from South Carolina and former Governor, wrote that the best way to give aid after the hurricane was to force black citizens to work. If people were refused aid, meaning food and shelter, they would work to gain that support. Many African Americans were forced to clean roads and repair public and private buildings. White citizens did not have to pay black citizens for this work using money, but by using food rations. This was put into action during the Sea Island Storm of 1893. The Sea Island Relief Committee refused clothes and food to African Americans who did not meet labor requirements. After the hurricane, Tillman proposed a relief bill that suspended the collection on all property devastated by the storm. The bill also relieved citizens of taxes during this time. However, the bill did not aid in payments for labor, leaving African Americans unpaid forced relief workers.¹³⁸

The Atlanta Race Riot happened in Atlanta, Georgia, from September 22nd through the 24th, 1906. Multiple Atlanta newspapers reported four alleged assaults, which were not substantiated, on white women on September 22nd. For two days, mobs of white men attacked black neighborhoods, killing several African Americans. On September 24th, a group of armed African Americans met to discuss how to protect their community. The police learned of their location and raided the meeting, arresting 250 African American

¹³⁷ Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 56, 64, 65.

¹³⁸ Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 87 – 88, 120.

men while fighting continued in the streets. Only one white man was killed in the riot, but over 20 African Americans lost their lives. The Atlanta newspapers incited the riot by publishing false information to put African-American lives at risk. The state militia was called in on September 23rd but did not control the rioting or save African Americans from racist treatment.¹³⁹ These events spread to national news and eventually reached Mobile before the 1906 hurricane hit.

The editor of the *Mobile Weekly Times* wrote an article in the paper for the editor of *The Mobile Register* on September 27th, 1906. It stated that race relations were the best they had ever been in Mobile, with no segregation and mixed-race friendships. This is from a white individual's perspective, and there is no information on what African Americans of Mobile thought about the relations in the city. The article intended to promote safety in the town after a race riot. However, it was unlike other articles of the time. Mr. A. N. Johnson believed discrimination was unnecessary during these times. He states Mobile has been cordial between the races and, in turn, improving the city by growing together. Johnson said creating a more profound racial division in times of crisis is only going to hurt the future of Mobile. He suggests that if all citizens worked together, recovery efforts would benefit everyone in the town and strengthen community relationships.¹⁴⁰

Other articles paint African Americans as criminals, but *Mobile Weekly Times* stated, “the negro is just as anxious to stand with the white man in ridding this community of

¹³⁹ “The Massacre,” Atlanta Race Massacre of 1906, New Georgia Encyclopedia, last modified November 14, 2022, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/atlanta-race-massacre-of-1906/>.

¹⁴⁰ “Letter from A. N. Johnson.” *Mobile Weekly Times*, September 27, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

these criminals as he was the yellow fever.”¹⁴¹ The editor believed the militia should continue enforcing the law, not just on black citizens but all citizens. From A. N. Johnson’s point of view, women, in general, were being attacked at night and felt like prisoners in their own homes because they were not safe from anyone on the streets of Mobile. He went as far as to note an incident where a white woman was murdered in the street, with multiple witnesses. The criminal was allowed to walk away and was even protected by other citizens until he could escape the city.¹⁴² The fact that this man's race is not noted leads us to assume it was a white man. If a black man was written about in articles, it was clearly stated during the early twentieth century. It is clear that around the time of the 1906 Hurricane, white men were allowed to get away with murder, while black men could be lynched for just the accusation.

The Montgomery Journal wrote the black leaders in Alabama about crime continuously throughout the early twentieth century. They mainly focused on suppressing the crime rates, especially in the case of rape. Historians have often discussed how violent white supremacy was rooted in the idea of black men taking advantage of white women. The article specifically calls out Booker T. Washington for lecturing the white population on the importance of maintaining the law, but not black citizens for following the law. Washington sometimes referred to both races in his speeches, which many whites found offensive because of their preconceived notions of race. For example, Anglo-Saxon men are above the law, especially regarding the honor

¹⁴¹ “Letter from A. N. Johnson,” *Mobile Weekly Times*, September 27, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁴² “Letter from A. N. Johnson.” *Mobile Weekly Times*, September 27, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

of a white woman. Writers of *The Montgomery Journal* stated the crime of assault against a white woman is automatically coupled with lynching.¹⁴³

Mayor Patrick A. Lyons ordered all liquor saloons closed on the second day of the 1906 hurricane. *The Mobile Register* believed this was a good idea because when most citizens are stuck at home or there are significant events, good or bad, they drink to pass the time. Drinking leads to drunkenness and disorder, which could make already dangerous and difficult situations, like a hurricane, worse. *The Mobile Register* commended the mayor and police for stopping the spread of drunkenness, although they did not prevent everyone from drinking.¹⁴⁴ The prohibition of alcohol sales at this time appeared to make no difference to the tensions of the city. Looting was continually reported, and vigilante groups created unrest by harassing the damaged African-American communities. During the flooding, no one was permitted in the streets without a badge. *The Montgomery Journal* reported that the day the storm ended in Mobile, September 28, militiamen were guarding the streets of the business district. The article does not note what type of badge or who was allowed on the street, but there were fears of looting. However, the article mentions that African Americans caught looting were being beaten to death.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ "A Word to Negro Leaders," *The Montgomery Journal*, September 26, 1906, The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁴⁴ *The Mobile Register*, September 28, 1906, The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁴⁵ "Report from Unknown," *The Montgomery Journal*, September 28, 1906, Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

During the 1906 Hurricane, railroad lines, rivers, and roads were obstructed for three days, cutting Mobile off from any help or communication.¹⁴⁶ Many men were forced away from their homes and families to rebuild the damaged facilities. However, many still feared for the families' safety and rushed through obstacles like floodwater to return home and protect them.¹⁴⁷ After a natural disaster, African American men were forced to dig graves and clean up the streets. They also had to repair the city, often unable to focus on recovering their personal property. Mobile reportedly had graves dug for the dead, but who dug those graves was not explicitly noted. However, multiple articles state African Americans seen as vagrants were forced into hurricane recovery labor roles, such as digging graves, cleaning debris, and repairing trenches. After the 1927 Flood, black men were forced to dig graves for the dead under armed watch. Black and white deceased citizens were not to be buried together, and all white bodies were supposed to receive individual coffins. African American dead were thrown into a mass grave.¹⁴⁸

The creation of artificial levees began in the nineteenth century in an attempt to control the Mississippi River. Landowners were responsible for making these levees themselves and often used slave labor to create them. Levees represented wealth and power, so white areas typically had better-made systems. Poor areas typically had levee systems that were poorly built and had gaps through which the water could flow.¹⁴⁹ White convicts were also forced to do unpaid labor, but as whites, they saw free black

¹⁴⁶ Joey Bunch, "1906 Hurricane Among Deadliest in U.S. History," *The Mobile Register*, March 19, 2000. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁴⁷ "The Storm at Mobile." The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁴⁸ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 65.

¹⁴⁹ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 4.

labor as justified because of the racial stigma.¹⁵⁰ Many men died repairing levees during high flood season because they were forced to work in unsafe conditions. Employers saw the mass death of workers as business, but the system of racial hierarchy created divisions between races and left African Americans in more vulnerable areas.¹⁵¹

Harper's Weekly published a correspondence from the *St. Louis Republic* discussing emotions from other towns after the Atlanta Riot. The correspondent stated citizens in fifty southern towns felt that their cities would have a race riot in the coming weeks and did not feel safe in their cities. He believes the white race does nothing to incite violence from African Americans. He even blames African Americans, saying, "The negro has mistaken liberty for license."¹⁵² The correspondent speaks specifically of Alabama, including a state influential paper that reported the South would remain unrested until all African Americans were deported. He mentions that in the North, it is believed that the South would not support the deportation of the black race. However, the writer of the *Harper's Weekly* article makes it clear that white southerners are working to replace black labor and forcefully deport them.¹⁵³ This further shows that whites in Alabama were racist and wished to push African Americans out of America however they could.

The Mobile Public Library interviewed Mr. E. Herndon Smith to discuss the events after the 1906 hurricane. Mr. Smith was 82 years old at the time of the interview and

¹⁵⁰ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 71.

¹⁵¹ Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 49.

¹⁵² *Harper's Weekly*, Vol. L, October 6, 1906, The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁵³ *Harper's Weekly*, Vol. L, October 6, 1906, The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

around 16 during the hurricane. He was the son of a prominent Mobile attorney, Harry T. Smith, and attended his second to last year at UMS-Wright Preparatory School during the events. Although he did not witness any of the events firsthand, the school was buzzing with information. The feeling of the town was unordinary to him, and the people tried to contain information about the near-riot at the Mobile jail and the two lynchings that followed. He also remembered seeing 15 men returning to town on horseback riding along Government Street, which was not paved yet. His friends told him the men were returning from the lynching outside the city limits.¹⁵⁴

Mr. Smith discussed the relationships between African American and white citizens of Mobile. He stated that the city had a rigid color line, but there was no real animosity between the races. He used the example of the brothels in the downtown district. They are mainly segregated, but there was a good deal of intermixing between the people of Mobile. He attributes this to Mobile's long history of freedmen. Before the Civil War, the city had mixed property owners and free people of color.¹⁵⁵ However, this was the interpretation of a white high school student in Mobile. It is safe to assume Mr. Smith did not live in the lower-income areas of Mobile and did not see the treatment African Americans faced in the city. He also disregarded the limited nature African Americans were forced to live in by restrictive laws and did not know much of the hardship black Mobilians faced every day.

¹⁵⁴ E. Herndon Smith, Informal Interview with Historical Research Consultant, The Mobile Public Library, March 18, 1974, The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁵⁵ E. Herndon Smith, Informal Interview with Historical Research Consultant, The Mobile Public Library, March 18, 1974, The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

Two lynchings occurred on October 6, 1906, after the hurricane. The victims were William Thompson and Cornelious Robinson. William Thompson allegedly assaulted Edna May Fowler, an eight-year-old white girl, on August 28, 1906.¹⁵⁶ Lillian May Savell was another eight-year-old white alleged victim of Thompson.¹⁵⁷ Allegedly, he also attempted to assault Ruth Kinsley, a ten-year-old African-American girl.¹⁵⁸ She said Thompson had met her in the city's northern part and tried to induce her to follow him. Nothing else was recorded from her report. It took several days for officers of the Mobile police force to find Will Thompson.¹⁵⁹ His preliminary trial was on Wednesday, August 29, 1906.¹⁶⁰

William Thompson was held in record court with no legal representation. The doctors who examined the girls gave sufficient evidence to the court. They had found a disease that the victims had, that Thompson also had, at least that is what the newspapers reported. Thompson stated that the girls took him to the house and forced him to commit the assaults. With Thompson's statement amounting to an admission of guilt, the evidence presented by the state and doctors, and the testimonies of the victims, Thompson remained on the trail without bail and was immediately hurried to the county jail.¹⁶¹ Thompson was brought to the Jefferson County Jail four weeks before Robinson.¹⁶² *The Birmingham News* reported that Sheriff Powers and Will Thompson

¹⁵⁶ "Alabama News," *The Morning Mercury*, August 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁵⁷ "Governor is Asked to Call Special Term," *The Birmingham News*, August 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁵⁸ "Brought Here for Safe-Keeping," *The Birmingham News*, August 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁵⁹ "Negro Thompson Remanded to Jail," *The Mobile Register*, 1906. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁶⁰ "Governor is Asked to Call Special Term." *The Birmingham News*, August, 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁶¹ "Negro Thompson Remanded to Jail," *The Mobile Register*, 1906. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁶² "Brought Here for Safe-Keeping," *The Birmingham News*, October, 1906. Newspapers.com.

had not reached Birmingham by 2:30 in the afternoon. They were supposed to arrive much earlier.¹⁶³ It was reported that Thompson and his escorts were in Selma for several hours on August 30, but it was unknown what caused this delay.¹⁶⁴

While Thompson was in Jefferson County Jail, a mob of 500 formed on Bayou and Conti Streets and stormed the jail around 10:00 p.m. Although the policemen tried to tell the mob Thompson was absent, they insisted on searching the jail. The governor received a call asking for troops to help the officers fight off the mob. The captains of the local militias did not want troops there because Thompson was not present, and the other prisoners were not at risk. They did not want to endanger their troops for no reason. Mayor Lyons went to the jail and informed the people that Thompson was not in Mobile. The mob began to disperse, satisfied that Thompson was not there.¹⁶⁵

A second mob gathered at Conti and Royal Streets a few days after the first attempt. They advanced to the jail and were met by four companies, A, B, E, and M, of voluntary militia with magazine rifles loaded. The mob of 300 tried to gain access to the jail but was held back by troops that had been ordered to shoot to kill. Sheriff Powers told the crowd to select six men to search the jail. The men concluded that Will Thompson was not there, but the mob would not accept this and kept a safe distance from the jail.¹⁶⁶ Although Thompson was not in Mobile for these events, it was clear that if he returned, he would be lynched. A Mobile County Solicitor, James H. Webb, wrote a letter to

¹⁶³ "Will Thompson Not Brought in Yet," *The Birmingham News*, August 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁶⁴ "Spent Several Hours in Selma," *The Selma Morning Times*, August 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁶⁵ "Mob Storms County Jail in Effort to Lynch Negro," *The Mobile Register*, 1906. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁶⁶ "Mob Storms Mobile Jail in an Effort to Hang Negro Rapist, Wm Thompson," *The Mobile Register*, September 1906. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

Governor Jelks on September 5th about the situation with Thompson. Webb reported different events in the preliminary trial than in the newspapers. He stated Thompson continuously denied the allegations against him. The doctor claimed the girls did not have signs that they were sexually assaulted. However, one of the alleged victims had gonorrhea.¹⁶⁷ This was reported in the newspaper articles, but they claimed Thompson had the same disease.¹⁶⁸ The Mobile County Solicitor specifically states that Thompson did not have this sexually transmitted disease, and the newspapers “greatly exaggerated” the trial events. Due to the newspapers lying, the white citizens of Mobile were enraged, and James Webb feared for William Thompson if he returned to the city for trial.¹⁶⁹ Unfortunately, neither the second half of the letter nor Governor Jelks's response was recovered.

In September, before Thompson’s trial, but after the hurricane, another newspaper report spreads of an African American man assaulting a young white girl. Ruth Sossaman, daughter of J. Blount Sossaman, an eleven or twelve-year-old girl, was allegedly attacked on her way home from school.¹⁷⁰ The investigators searched for the alleged assailant near the girl’s home.¹⁷¹ It took the police three hours to locate Cornelius Robinson.¹⁷² He did not resist his arrest but professed his innocence. The police took

¹⁶⁷ *Letter from James H. Webb, Mobile County Solicitor to Governor William D. Jelks*, September 5, 1906, The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁶⁸ “Negro Thompson Remanded to Jail,” *The Mobile Register*, 1906. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁶⁹ *Letter from James H. Webb, Mobile County Solicitor to Governor William D. Jelks*, September 5, 1906, The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁷⁰ “Negro is in Magic City,” *The Anniston Star*, October 1906, Newspapers.com.

¹⁷¹ “Mob Storms County Jail,” *The Mobile Register*, October 1906, Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁷² “Negro is in Magic City,” *The Anniston Star*, October 1906, Newspapers.com.

him to the home of Ruth Sossaman, where she was confined to her bed.¹⁷³ The doctor who assessed Ruth's injuries was concerned about the girl's identification of Cornelius Robinson. The girl said, "It looks like the man – I think that's the man." The doctor examined Robinson and found a small spot on the boy's clothes that might have been blood but was faint. When the police questioned Robinson, he showed high anxiety and stated he passed the spot while going to get the cow but denied any knowledge of a crime.¹⁷⁴ Another source noted that Ruth screamed when she saw Robinson, claiming he was the man who choked her.¹⁷⁵

The police arrested Cornelius Robinson on October 2nd. They had just reached the City of Mobile when they turned around and went to Carey's station.¹⁷⁶ The sheriff called for a special train for the Louisville and Nashville railroad and directed three companies from Fort Deposit, Brewton, and Evergreen to be brought to Mobile. Robinson's train reached Birmingham at six o'clock in the morning. Men gathered on Dauphin and Royal streets at six in the evening to discuss and prepare. Half an hour later, five hundred men had formed to attack the jail.¹⁷⁷ The Sheriff met the mob leaders and informed them that Cornelius Robinson was not there, and he allowed anyone he knew to pass through the jail. Forty men searched the jail; some returned and informed the mob that Robinson was not there. A tall, raw-boned man, whose name is unknown, seized a telephone pole knocked down in the recent hurricane and dashed it against the

¹⁷³ "Brought Here for Safe-Keeping," *The Birmingham News*, October 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁷⁴ "Mob Storms County Jail," *The Mobile Register*, October 1906, Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁷⁵ "Brought Here for Safe-Keeping," *The Birmingham News*, October 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁷⁶ "Brought Here for Safe-Keeping," *The Birmingham News*, October 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁷⁷ "Two Men Shot as Mob Raids Jail," *The Elba Clipper*, October 1906. Newspapers.com.

closed, iron door. The sound of the door falling caused a man standing by the gate to shoot his revolver. The crowd sent out about a dozen shots before the firing ceased. Alderman Sidney Lyons, chairman of the city council, came out of the jail with his hands up and had received a bullet wound in the hand. He informed the crowd that Roy Hoyle had been shot while searching the jail. A physician from the crowd examined Hoyle and told the crowd he had been shot in the left lung and did not have long to live. The fact that Roy Hoyle had been shot while looking through the jail and was one of the most widely known and best-liked men in the area took the fight out of the crowd, and the majority dispersed.¹⁷⁸ The man who led the crowd with the telephone pole tried to urge the group to follow him to the color section of the city. The man claimed, "We will give them what they got in Atlanta." He walked away, followed by a few others, but they deserted him before he walked three square miles.¹⁷⁹

At ten o'clock that same evening, a second attack occurred on the jail. Knights' men entered the jail to check if Robinson was present. They returned and informed the crowd that the prisoner was not present. The mob did not believe this and demanded he be brought outside. Captain Frank Lumsden mounted a cart and addressed the crowd. He said he was a Confederate soldier and fought against the African race for four years. He said that Robinson was not inside the jail. He told Sheriff Powers that he had been doing all he could to relieve the people after the storm and was not anxious to cause more deaths. The speech caused the crowd to disperse, satisfied around midnight.¹⁸⁰ Sheriff

¹⁷⁸ "Attack Jail; Two Men Shot," *Our Southern Home*, October 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁷⁹ "Mobile Jail Stormed by Mob in Search of Negro," *The Birmingham News*, October 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁸⁰ "Mobile Jail Stormed by Mob in Search of Negro," *The Birmingham News*, October 1906. Newspapers.com.

Powers informed the media that no Africans were harmed during or after the attacks on the jail.¹⁸¹ Although these near riots happened before the hurricane, it shows that tensions toward African Americans were not positive and could boil over at any time. Tensions seemed to be low, but a group of men planned a coordinated attack.

A group of men left Mobile on the five o'clock train to Birmingham to intercept the train that Sheriff Powers would return on with the prisoners. Members of the lynching party were put on the same train from Birmingham as Sheriff Powers to act as watchers. They found Thompson and Robinson in the smoking compartment of the African section. After fourteen miles, at the Saraland station, the advanced guard was joined by forty additional members. While the event on the train was going on, barely a word was spoken, and no questions were asked. A passenger on the train had said it was the most orderly crowd he had ever seen and that they acted like they meant business.¹⁸²

Cornelius Robinson and William Thompson were taken off the train and walked to Holt Road in Prichard. The new mob from the train and train depot was made of 45 men, heavily armed. It was reported that the events transpired quietly, and only the mob leaders spoke.¹⁸³ Newspapers reported that Thompson admitted his guilt about assaulting Lilian Savell but denied the accusation against him involving Edna May Fowler. He said he was put up to it by a boy in Selma, where he was raised. Robinson stated he had never done anything and was going to heaven when he died.¹⁸⁴ They hung Cornelius Robinson

¹⁸¹ "Brought Here for Safe-Keeping," *The Birmingham News*, October 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁸² "Sheriff Overpowered and Two Negroes Lynched," *The Mobile Register*, October 1906. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁸³ "Two Negroes Lynched Near Mobile," *Franklin County Times*, October 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁸⁴ "Sheriff Overpowered and Two Negroes Lynched," *The Mobile Register*, October 1906. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

and then William Thompson, and the crowd dispersed.¹⁸⁵ However, this was not enough for some, and they returned to burn the bodies after “riddling them with bullets.”¹⁸⁶

November 12th, over a month after the hurricane and double lynching, Mary W. Omiglion wrote to Mr. Ray Stannard Baker about racial tensions in the South. The letter is meant to advise Mr. Baker on the cities he plans to visit to examine race relations. It appears that the parties involved are trying to get the truth of the cruelty African Americans faced in the South out to the public so some form of change can be made. She specifically mentioned two types of African Americans in the South: those who preach progress and hide the truth and those who are willing to expose the truth but fear the consequences. She also stated that the situation in Mobile is agitated and believes it will be the next city to have a race riot. The end of her letter discussed the court system and vagrancy laws. She explains that the vagrancy law was used to force African Americans to do forced, free manual labor, which the court system allowed. She closed by stating the legal system allowed Alabama to enforce legal slavery on African American citizens.¹⁸⁷

Writer Richard Wright was in Memphis, Tennessee, for the 1927 flood but published two stories based on family and friends' experiences. His writing shows the effects of the flood and its hardening of racism and environmentalism. He protested racism through his writing and offered others a glimpse into African Americans' experiences during the early twentieth century. “The Man Who Saw the Flood” came out in 1937 in the *New Masses*

¹⁸⁵ “Two Negroes Lynched Near Mobile,” *Franklin County Times*, October 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁸⁶ “Mobile Negroes Dragged from Train and Lynched by a Mob of Masked Men,” *The Birmingham News*, October 1906. Newspapers.com.

¹⁸⁷ *Letter from Mary W. Omiglion to Ray Stannard Baker*, November 12, 1906. The Jack Friend Research Library.

journal as Wright's way of expressing the struggle of a black family after the 1927 flood. The family's progress on their farm is lost as the ground is covered in silt. The neighbors' houses were gone, but this family's house remained standing. However, parts of the home were missing, and the inside was flooded. Every part of their home was damaged, from the clothes in the dresser to their most personal items. Wright wrote that there was no other human or animal life around the area. The family left their home to find help with only their cow in tow. Even if the flood does not displace a family, they still feel a sense of distortion. After a family has assessed the damages to their own property, there are questions about what to do next, how to go forward, and what help could be received.¹⁸⁸

Wright writes that the family had to rebuild themselves and face the threat of starvation to recover from the flood. He infers in his writing that the family cannot seek help from their state or local government or the Red Cross, as their efforts were focused on the business and white districts of the community. He states that the only sense of relief the family feels is the hope that debts of the previous year will be reduced, so they have more time to recover from the loss of crops. The family in "The Man Who Saw the Flood" is picked up by the white man, Burgess, to whom they are indebted. He discusses bringing Tom and his family to Burgess's store in town for food and supplies. But Burgess reminds Tom of his \$800 bill and how these supplies will add to that bill. Wright gives Tom, the head of the family, two choices: to go with Burgess and increase his never-ending debt, eventually dying, or to reject Burgess's offer, which would have led to

¹⁸⁸ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 59.

Tom being imprisoned for his unpaid debt. Tom does not want to leave his wife and child destitute, so he goes with Burgess to accumulate more generational debt.¹⁸⁹

“Down by the Riverside” is another of Wright’s stories about the flood and the multiple life-changing questions people faced. It discusses a father, Mann, his wife, Lula, their son, and his mother-in-law’s dependence on the levee system to protect them from further flood damage. However, it did not protect them from the threat of violence or lack of assistance for black citizens during the early twentieth century. While the family is trapped by the flood, Lula goes into labor, and they can only rely on the return of Mann’s brother, Bob. Gunshots were heard in the distance, and the family discussed the potential of African Americans being the victims due to the racial order. Bob returns after stealing a boat from a known white racist, and Mann decides to hide the boat and use it to save his family. He takes the boat with his mother-in-law, son, and wife, Lula, to the Red Cross hospital.¹⁹⁰

On their journey, Mann passed the house of Heartfield, the boat's original owner. Heartfield shoots at Mann and his family, and Mann shoots back, killing Heartfield in self-defense. Sadly, Lula passes away on the boat, and Mann’s son and mother-in-law are sent to the local Red Cross camp. Mann is sent to the levee for work, and Wright describes what he sees. Black men were carrying heavy bags of sand in massive lines on top and below the levee. The men appear exhausted and half alive from the excessive work. The levee breaks in just a few seconds, drowning most of the men working on it.

¹⁸⁹ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 60 - 62.

¹⁹⁰ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 65.

The next part of Wright's story discusses the widowed Heartfield and his children reaching the Red Cross camp. Mann knows his life will end soon due to the Jim Crow system in the South. The widowed Heartfield recognizes Mann, who is detained and hit over the head with a weapon. A lynch mob quickly forms, but the military involved in the rescue stops it. Mann knows he is going to die and chooses to flee, passing on his terms, not those of the white man.¹⁹¹

African Americans saw the Great Sea Island Storm as the beginning of the end. The economy and government of the Lowcountry never improved. People cannot respond fast enough to a hurricane that directly hit their homes and communities and eventually had to find better living conditions. By the 1920s, the Lowcountry went from a black majority to a white majority.¹⁹² The flood of 1927 hit during March and April, the middle of the typical planting season. Residents had little time to recover their crops to make a profit for the spring growing season. The flood also occurred during the Great Migration, when labor agents from the North were in the South searching for workers. White planters in the South were financially affected by the loss of black labor and tried to prevent their migration. They barred labor agents from relief camps in 1927 to prevent African-American laborers from receiving the needed assistance.¹⁹³

The fact that many African Americans did not have citizenship during early natural disasters limited their ability to get aid and be heard. White individuals wrote about the

¹⁹¹ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 67, 69 – 70.

¹⁹² Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 194 – 196.

¹⁹³ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 63.

events unifying a community and improving conditions. In reality, many African-American communities affected by natural disasters never fully recovered and had to move to find better opportunities.¹⁹⁴ The effects on the Mobile African American community were not recorded besides newspapers republishing the damages in the Down the Bay Area. The only black individual mentioned in losing their life was an infant child in Mobile, but no other black deaths were recorded. The 1906 Hurricane took 250 lives, but none of the areas affected discussed the black loss of life or standing. Mobile newspapers continued spurring discriminatory and accusatory information to the masses, increasing white anger and racism and eventually leading to the death of two African-American men who never received a fair trial.

¹⁹⁴ Richard M. Mizelle Jr., *Backwater Blues: The Mississippi Flood of 1927 in the African American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 53.

CHAPTER IV

HURRICANE FREDERIC, 1979

“That nightmare of six long hours duration is a vivid memory. The destruction, still so depressingly evident, is a haunting reminder of the fear and anxiety for safety; the trust and confidence in Divine Providence; the moments of nervous laughter at just about anything found an alternate place in our hearts that night.”¹⁹⁵ That is how the sisters of the Visitation of Mobile felt during Hurricane Frederic on September 12, 1979.

Hurricane Frederic was a Category Four storm that affected the Gulf Coast from Florida to Mississippi. The National Hurricane Center listed it as the most severe and costliest storm to hit the United States that century.¹⁹⁶ The total amount of damage was \$2.3 billion, and the insurance payout was \$752 million.¹⁹⁷ Thousands of people evacuated the affected area, but everyone who rode out the storm had a story to tell.

The Sisters of the Visitation of Mobile stayed in their retreat home during the storm and told the *Mobile Press-Register* about their experience and the aftermath. They said trucks drove around at 2:30 in the afternoon the day Frederic hit, warning residents to evacuate due to the risk of Three Mile Creek flooding. The retreat home was on higher

¹⁹⁵ “Monastery remembers Frederic’s visit,” *Mobile Press-Register*, November 25, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁹⁶ J. Mack Lofton Jr., “Hurricane Fred,” *Alabama Heritage*, (Winter 2000): 33. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁹⁷ “Hurricane Frederic,” July 13, 2005: 6.

ground, safe from flooding, and some men had even been refugeed from the incoming storm.¹⁹⁸ The next day, their chaplain, Reverend R. L. Anderson, had to walk over an hour from Spring Hill to the Monastery since no vehicle could pass the debris left behind by the hurricane. The hurricane damaged the monastery, leaving doors unlocked and many windows broken. The nuns felt vulnerable, and the police did not make them feel much safer, as they were on 24-hour duty and could not protect the individual groups; merchants had hired all available guards to prevent looting or help in cleanup efforts. After three weeks, the monastery was back to full power, but the sound of chainsaws clearing the streets and fallen trees continued for several more weeks.¹⁹⁹

Hurricane Frederic had gained power since the beginning of September, starting in the Lesser Antilles. It passed over the Caribbean and weakened to a tropical depression, but Frederic regained its strength off the tip of Cuba.²⁰⁰ Now a Category 4 Hurricane, it hit Mobile, Alabama, on the night of September 12, 1979. It landed at 10:00 p.m., with winds of 130 mph and a central pressure of 27.94 (946 mb).²⁰¹ However, due to Mobile's design, the funneling effect could have created winds much faster than recorded.²⁰² The weather bureau's rain gauge collected eight inches of water before it blew away in the

¹⁹⁸ "Monastery remembers Frederic's visit," *Mobile Press-Register*, November 25, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

¹⁹⁹ "Monastery remembers Frederic's visit," *Mobile Press-Register*, November 25, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁰⁰ A tropical cyclone with maximum sustained surface winds ranging from 39 – 73 mph.

²⁰¹ "Hurricane Frederic," July 13, 2005: 1, 2.

²⁰² David Underhill, "Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile," *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 16.

storm.²⁰³ Fortunately, by 7:00 a.m., as the storm was heading to Meridian, Mississippi, it was downgraded to a tropical storm.²⁰⁴

Several organizations recorded Hurricane Frederic's conditions as it hit the Gulf Coast. The Office of Civil Defense in Pascagoula, Mississippi, recorded a pressure of 27.94 inches (946 mb). The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Hurricane Hunter Aircraft reported it had sustained 130 mph winds with 150 mph gusts. The National Weather Service Office in Mobile recorded a barometric pressure of 18.23 inches (961 mb). The Mobile County Civil Defense office recorded peak gusts at 101 mph. Dauphin Island sustained the worst of Hurricane Frederic, with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab recording gusts of 137 mph before their equipment failed. A 145-mph gust over the Dauphin Island Bridge was also recorded during Frederic. After the Dauphin Island Sea Lab recovered, it reconstructed a microbarograph recording taken during the storm and found that the barometric pressure had dropped 27.84 inches (961 Mb). The average barometric pressure for Dauphin Island is 30 inches. The high-water mark was recorded at 8 to 13 feet above mean sea level in Mobile but mainly did damage along Highway 90 and 98.²⁰⁵ The Barry Steam plant, 13 miles north of Mobile, saw 5.5-foot tides, and Choctaw Point, just south of the Bankhead Tunnel, saw 12 feet. The highest reported tides during the hurricane were 10 feet in Dauphin Island, 12 feet in Gulf Shores, and 11 feet at Fort Morgan.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Diane Freeman and John Sellers, "Eye slowed storm winds, saved Mobile," *Mobile Register*, September 20, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁰⁴ "Hurricane Frederic," July 13, 2005: 2.

²⁰⁵ "Hurricane Frederic," July 13, 2005: 2 – 4.

²⁰⁶ Diane Freeman and John Sellers, "Eye slowed storm winds, saved Mobile," *Mobile Register*, September 20, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

Shoreline damage was reported over 80 miles of coastline, but the most damaged areas were around Fort Morgan and Gulf Shores, a popular tourist area. Gulf Shores was hit by the east side of the eyewall, where the maximum storm surges occurred, with tidal surges reaching 15 feet. The Gulf State Park Building measured the watermark at 15.79 feet above average sea level. Dauphin Island recorded the storm surge as 8 to 13 feet in height, making the western end almost disappear entirely.²⁰⁷ Frederic's eye was about forty miles in diameter, much larger than the typical twenty to twenty-five miles.²⁰⁸ Bill Tilson, a retired meteorologist at the NSW station, said Frederic's eye flattened when it hit land. This meant the storm was breaking down, but it was too late for Mobile.²⁰⁹ The winds brought by Frederic went east-west instead of north-south, completely draining the bay into the Gulf. By the time the bay had refilled and was ready to flood Mobile, Hurricane Frederic had moved on.²¹⁰ If the wind had flowed how most hurricanes do, north to south, the I-65 bridge across the bay and Mobile's ports would have been destroyed.²¹¹ Although the I-65 bridge made it through the storm, highway officials feared it was in danger of collapse.²¹²

²⁰⁷ "Hurricane Frederic," July 13, 2005: 3, 4.

²⁰⁸ "Two buildings 'near collapse,'" *The Birmingham News*, September 13, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile; David Underhill, "Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile," *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 22.

²⁰⁹ Diane Freeman and John Sellers, "Eye slowed storm winds, saved Mobile," *Mobile Register*, September 20, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²¹⁰ Diane Freeman and John Sellers, "Eye slowed storm winds, saved Mobile," *Mobile Register*, September 20, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile; David Underhill, "Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile," *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 22.

²¹¹ Diane Freeman and John Sellers, "Eye slowed storm winds, saved Mobile," *Mobile Register*, September 20, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²¹² "Two buildings 'near collapse,'" *The Birmingham News*, September 13, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

A World War II veteran said he had only seen two places worse, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and a Vietnam veteran said Mobile looked worse than Saigon after the Tet Offensive in 1968.²¹³ David Underhill, a longtime Mobile journalist known for writing stories from grassroots perspectives, discussed his experience of the hurricane. He stated, “Most ominous and indecipherable were the occasional tremors that jolted the foundation – the mark of something weighty falling on earth nearby.”²¹⁴ The Sisters of the Visitation of Mobile stayed in their retreat home during the storm and told the *Mobile Press-Register* about their experience and the aftermath. They said trucks drove around at 2:30 in the afternoon, warning residents to evacuate due to the risk of Three Mile Creek flooding. The retreat home was on higher ground and even housed some men from the incoming storm. The sisters housed 60 people from the Department of Pensions and Securities for three weeks while they helped Mobile recover. Frederic damaged the electrical grid so much that the electric company had to “rewire the whole city.”

Firefighters from the Theodore and Mobile fire departments battled a fire at the Cloverleaf Plaza Shopping Center right as Hurricane Frederic ramped up. The firefighters said the extinguishing of the fire was not too tricky, but the wind made cleaning up almost impossible. The men were fearful because they could hear objects flying on roofs but could not see them in the darkness that Frederic brought. After the storm passed, the fire departments received numerous false alarm calls and many legitimate calls, keeping them busy. The fire company also assisted the Civil Defense in

²¹³ David Underhill, “Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile,” *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 25.

²¹⁴ David Underhill, “Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile,” *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 20.

handing out ice and water to those in need.²¹⁵ As for the Cloverleaf Plaza, most of the stores had water damage, and the National Guard was posted outside to prevent looters.²¹⁶

Hurricane warnings had been issued from Panama City, Florida, to Grand Isle, Louisiana, by September 11th. The governor of Alabama, Fob James, issued evacuation orders for all towns below the “Hurricane Line,” meaning south of the intercoastal waterway bridge on Highway 59. The Gulf Shores Police took this seriously and used radios, loudspeakers, and anything they could to convince residents to evacuate. Volunteer firefighters went door to door advising residents to leave. My residents leaving their homes and businesses knew their belongings might not be there when they returned, even leaving pets behind in some cases. Boat owners moved their boats away from shore and anchored them in creeks and coves in hopes they could avoid most of the damage.²¹⁷ Thousands of people had evacuated, ensuring there would be a low death toll. It was the largest evacuation on the Gulf Coast at the time, with 500,000 people.²¹⁸ Hotels were booked all the way north past Birmingham, housing evacuated residents.²¹⁹

The day Frederic was supposed to hit, officials in Gulf Shores ordered blockades to be placed on roadways to the beaches. Those setting up the barricades had to turn away

²¹⁵ Renee Busby, “Theodore, Mobile Firemen fight blaze in hurricane,” *Mobile Press-Register*, September 19 – 20, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²¹⁶ Renee Busby, “Theodore, Tillman’s Corner got their share of Frederic’s wrath,” *Mobile Press-Register*, September 19 – 20, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²¹⁷ “Two buildings ‘near collapse,’” *The Birmingham News*, September 13, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile; J. Mack Lofton Jr., “Hurricane Fred,” *Alabama Heritage*, (Winter 2000): 26, 27. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²¹⁸ “Hurricane Frederic,” July 13, 2005: 5.

²¹⁹ “Two buildings ‘near collapse,’” *The Birmingham News*, September 13, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

residents who wanted to reenter the area to check on pets and property. By the time the service personnel evacuated, they were already being affected by rain and wind.²²⁰ Around noon on September 12th, most businesses and shops closed in Mobile.²²¹ Others who chose not to evacuate took other measures of preparation. Many people went to their local grocery stores to stock up on supplies. Others boarded up their windows and doors and tied down anything they could. Michael Hamade, his wife, parents-in-law, and eight children hunkered down in their home and rode out the storm. The fury of Hurricane Frederic's winds tore the roof off their house. The Hamades survived and contacted the police for assistance but were told to "just sit tight and not to worry." When Frederic finally ended, the family had come out alive but lost their home and business.²²²

Shelters were created at several locations off the coast, including in Mobile. The Azalea Middle School has now closed, but it was a refuge for Mary Collette, six years old at the time, and her family and others. She recalled her father having to pay \$20 for a small chunk of ice to preserve Mary's medication temperature due to the lack of electricity. She also remembered the month after the storm when they had to boil water to drink, did not have electricity, and meals were "hand to mouth."²²³ Tensions reached

²²⁰ J. Mack Lofton Jr., "Hurricane Fred," *Alabama Heritage*, (Winter 2000): 27. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²²¹ David Underhill, "Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile," *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 16.

²²² Kurt Franck, "Frederic's scars will take years to heal," *The Birmingham News*, December 28, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²²³ J. Mack Lofton Jr., "Hurricane Fred," *Alabama Heritage*, (Winter 2000): 26, 33. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

such heights during the storm that two fights broke out at a shelter in Mobile.²²⁴ The Azalea Middle School also housed 96 elderly residents from the Apollo Nursing Home nearby during Hurricane Frederic. However, in the middle of the storm, the middle school's roof was blown away, and officials had to find new lodging for the elderly residents.²²⁵

“Unbelievable devastation,” “incredible destruction,” and “battle zone” were common phrases found in newspaper headlines after Hurricane Frederic. Frederic's damages were more than 100,000 buildings, 10,000 homes and trailers, and hundreds of businesses. The estimated loss in timber and pulpwood alone was more than \$300 million. Houses were damaged in all kinds of ways, and many were demolished.²²⁶ Fires raged out all over cities, and fire trucks could not reach them because of the debris in the streets.²²⁷ Hurricane Frederic was not picky with his victims and affected hospitals, industrial buildings, government buildings, and any structure touched by its force.²²⁸ The entire transmission system for the electrical company was wiped out. The ferocity of the storm took out massive mental electrical structures from Chickasaw to Mississippi and Florida, and service was lost all the way in Tuscaloosa.²²⁹

²²⁴ Sandra Baxley Taylor, “Mobile this morning: Ancient trees gone, new babies arriving,” *The Birmingham News*, September 13, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²²⁵ “Two buildings ‘near collapse,’” *The Birmingham News*, September 13, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²²⁶ David Underhill, “Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile,” *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 17, 23.

²²⁷ J. Mack Lofton Jr., “Hurricane Fred,” *Alabama Heritage*, (Winter 2000): 30. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²²⁸ “Hurricane Frederic,” July 13, 2005: 4.

²²⁹ Herold Kennedy, Tom Scarritt, Sandra Baxley Taylor, “U.S. Official Disagrees ‘Haven’t shown up yet,’ says Mobile sheriff, criticizing disaster agency,” *The Birmingham News*, September 16, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile; Mark C. Winne, *The Birmingham News*, September 15, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

Residents of Gulf Shores wanted to return to their homes the same day the storm had ended. However, the area was so unsafe, from uprooted snakes to boards with nails in them, that emergency personnel had to turn residents away.²³⁰ In Gulf Shores, 80% of the structures were destroyed, and many small beach houses were blown away before being flooded. Most buildings on the barrier islands faced 50% or more roof damage after Hurricane Frederic landed.²³¹ Fort Gains on Dauphin Island had a fresh moat, and its center was flooded.²³² Trees toppled over and slightly bent in the direction of the wind were visible 80 miles north of Mobile.²³³ Oddly, some buildings had barely been affected, just cracked windows and missing shingles.²³⁴ A man owned one of the largest and nicest houses on West Beach and returned to nothing, but an unstable-looking cottage down the street was virtually untouched. The effects of Frederic were so odd in some places that a journalist recorded, “The front of a motorcycle shop beside I-10 was blown away, leaving a row of untouched cycles sitting neatly in the open.”²³⁵ A Douglas DC-3 airplane had been flung from its hanger and landed upside-down with its tail curled around its fuselage half a mile away.²³⁶

²³⁰ J. Mack Lofton Jr., “Hurricane Fred,” *Alabama Heritage*, (Winter 2000): 32. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²³¹ “Hurricane Frederic,” July 13, 2005: 4.

²³² Mark Childress, “Air view along coast: Incredible destruction,” *The Birmingham News*, September 14, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²³³ Phil Oramus, “For storm’s refugees, it’s a sad drive home to pick up the pieces,” *The Birmingham News*, September 14, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²³⁴ “Two buildings ‘near collapse,’” *The Birmingham News*, September 13, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile; David Underhill, “Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile,” *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 23.

²³⁵ Sandra Baxley Taylor, “Mobile this morning: Ancient trees gone, new babies arriving,” *The Birmingham News*, September 13, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²³⁶ J. Mack Lofton Jr., “Hurricane Fred,” *Alabama Heritage*, (Winter 2000): 30 – 32. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

There were no streets to be seen on Spring Hill, an old Mobile neighborhood covered with oaks and trees. Glass, trees, shingles, broken boards, power poles, and wires covered the streets. Houses were missing whole walls and roofs. Power poles and transformers were down all over the city, and most telephones were dead.²³⁷ Long sections of highways were covered with sand or stripped of their asphalt.²³⁸ The Mobile Bay Causeway was cleared of all buildings, and a 40-foot boat was laid on its side just off the highway.²³⁹ The downtown Mobile buildings all remained standing but were damaged.²⁴⁰ An insurance executive and once mayor of Foley, Tim Russell, said this about the damage left behind by Frederic. “There had never been an occasion that caused 756 million dollars of insurance damage in a single occurrence. And much of the property was not insured, like piers, wharves, farmers’ barns, crops, and boathouses. I would say the total loss was between three to five billion dollars, easily.”²⁴¹

Five people were killed during Hurricane Frederic,²⁴² but several people died of “storm-related” causes. The mad rush of residents fleeing the Hurricane zone caused traffic collisions and casualties. The areas left without electricity meant many tried to use candles or grills to heat their dwellings and cook, but these alternatives can be dangerous and lead to fires that cause more death and destruction. Hospitals were flooded with

²³⁷ “Monastery remembers Frederic’s visit,” *Mobile Press-Register*, November 25, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile; David Underhill, “Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile,” *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 23.

²³⁸ Mark Childress, “Air view along coast: Incredible destruction,” *The Birmingham News*, September 14, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²³⁹ Frank Bruer, “Carter takes back seat to big Frederic clean up,” *The Birmingham News*, September 15, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁴⁰ David Underhill, “Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile,” *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 21, 23.

²⁴¹ J. Mack Lofton Jr., “Hurricane Fred,” *Alabama Heritage*, (Winter 2000): 33. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁴² “Hurricane Frederic,” July 13, 2005: 5.

those who got injured using chainsaws and attempted controlled burns to clear the streets.²⁴³ On the brighter side, Multiple babies were born during Hurricane Frederic. Doctors have linked low pressure brought by hurricanes with early labor, explaining these births.²⁴⁴ Several babies born during the storm were given the first or middle name Frederic.²⁴⁵

It only took two days before power returned to the downtown area, but it would be weeks before poorer regions were given the assistance they needed.²⁴⁶ Four days after the hurricane, an Alabama Power spokesman said the company hoped to restore power to 80 percent of its customers.²⁴⁷ However, they could not definitively say when the electric grids for all affected areas would be entirely back up and running again. David Underhill drove around the city a few days after the hurricane and noted that West Mobile was generally lit. However, the smaller communities that were more densely packed with citizens waited over a week before they saw an Alabama Power truck in the neighborhoods. Many other areas of Mobile were also without electricity nine days after the storm, but articles reported that downtown Mobile was up and running again.²⁴⁸ Underhill also stated that Prichard, a generally low-income and African American town, still needed electricity two and a half weeks after the storm, which the mayor of Prichard

²⁴³ "Port City still waits U.S. aid," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁴⁴ Sandra Baxley Taylor, "Mobile this morning: Ancient trees gone, new babies arriving," *The Birmingham News*, September 13, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁴⁵ "Port City still waits U.S. aid," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁴⁶ David Underhill, "Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile," *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 30.

²⁴⁷ "Port City still waits U.S. aid," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁴⁸ David Pace, "James makes appeal to Alabamians to contribute food to storm area," *Mobile Register*, September 21, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

and the state senator for that section noted.²⁴⁹ This claim was supported by a *Mobile Beacon* article that was written by Prichard citizens and leaders complaining of being the last to receive said and recovery assistance.²⁵⁰ The power company estimated it would take two months for power to be restored to Dauphin Island.²⁵¹ Alabama Power Company and Southern Central Bell Telephone Company sent out notice that they would work with those who took financial losses during Hurricane Frederic. The companies stated they would be “extremely liberal” with storm survivors and help them work out a payment plan.²⁵²

Virtually all telephone services had been lost by Hurricane Frederic’s damage. Continental Telephone of South Alabama lost 70 percent of its facilities and worked on repairing the areas of Bayou La Batre, Dauphin Island, and more isolated cities. Their plan of action, with help, was to provide telephone services to emergency organizations, then the public pay stations, and finally residential areas. It took them a little over a week to reestablish local and long-distance calling to most cities, except Dauphin Island. The company did warn that calls may drop due to the number of people calling relatives to confirm they were okay. Continental’s district manager, John Hood, stated that a week after the storm, 60 percent of Continental customers were still without service. The company also sent out notice that if residents were not planning to reestablish their

²⁴⁹ David Underhill, “Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile,” *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 30.

²⁵⁰ “Hurricane Frederic & Politics,” *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 29, 1979, 4. Microfilm Collection, The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

²⁵¹ “The Nation’s Worst Hurricane Hits Mobile And The Gulf Coast,” *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 22, 1979, 1. Microfilm Collection. The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

²⁵² “2 Utility Firms to Aid Victims,” *Alabama Journal*, September 18, 1979.

residence, let the company know so they can focus on returning customers.²⁵³ The South Central Belle and Continental Telephone Company set up a portable microwave tower and were working to put several coin phones on the island. Residents were given telephone credit cards to charge their long-distance calls to their old telephone numbers.²⁵⁴

Many municipalities in Mobile and Baldwin County passed resolutions to allow the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to clean up debris left by Hurricane Frederic. The Mobile County Commissioners also voted to allow local contractors to bid on which waste management work sites to cover. Joe Ruffer, a county engineer, said the city would like to give the work to local contractors. However, due to it being the end of the fiscal year and cash moving slowly, Mobile asked for a federal grant. In the meantime, local contractors had to agree to specific rates and guidelines if they wanted to work for the county.²⁵⁵ National Guardsmen and some volunteer groups reached the southern Alabama counties four days after Hurricane Frederic was downgraded to a thunderstorm.²⁵⁶ The Army Corps of Engineers' first order of business was to clear debris so emergency personnel could get through.²⁵⁷ Relief crews and emergency

²⁵³ "Continental repairing telephones," *Mobile Press-Register*, September 19 – 20, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁵⁴ Lolo Pendergrast, "DI telephone communications installed," *Mobile Press-Register*, September 23, 1979. The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

²⁵⁵ "Cities approve Corps cleanup," *Mobile Register*, September 21, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁵⁶ "Port City still waits U.S. aid," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁵⁷ Brett Guge, *The Birmingham News*, September 14, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

services personnel worked twelve-hour days and had no time off for several weeks after the storm.²⁵⁸

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers established assistance centers through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and took applications from those who wanted debris cleaned up in their yards.²⁵⁹ Mobile County Sherriff Tom Purvis did not believe FEMA was doing enough. It took the group over four days for the organization to scout areas for their relief centers, and it took even longer for the affected counties to receive federal aid funding. A FEMA spokesman responded to the Sheriff's accusations and stated relief teams would be set up by September 17th, five days after the storm.²⁶⁰ The Sheriff was correct about FEMA taking almost a week to set up aid centers, and the FEMA spokesman only confirmed this. The Department of Corrections sent about 20 state prisoners to the Mobile area to work in the clean-up efforts alongside 70 prisoners from the Mobile County Work Release Center.²⁶¹ The workers in Gulf Shores focused on installing a new sewer system, cleaning debris, and restoring washed-out roads.²⁶² Relief workers could not even enter Bayou La Batre after the storm because it was still underwater. Luckily, most of the residents evacuated.²⁶³

²⁵⁸ J. Mack Lofton Jr., "Hurricane Fred," *Alabama Heritage*, (Winter 2000): 32. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁵⁹ "Cities approve Corps cleanup," *Mobile Register*, September 21, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁶⁰ "Port City still waits U.S. aid," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁶¹ Diane Freeman and Vivian Cannon, "New Guard unit stationed here," *Mobile Register*, September 21, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁶² Kurt Franck, "Frederic's scars will take years to heal," *The Birmingham News*, December 28, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁶³ Sandra Baxley Taylor, "Mobile this morning: Ancient trees gone, new babies arriving," *The Birmingham News*, September 13, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

The TV news station had portable generators that let them keep the cameras powered and use the sunlight outside for lights. The citizens relied on the media to inform them of the locations and hours of local aid offices, stores reopening, and curfew hours. The press also discussed how to expedite payment of homeowners' insurance claims to repair damages.²⁶⁴ The State Insurance Commissioner, H. H. Sumrall, said insurance adjusters settled claims while working under a special catastrophe plan. Still, for most of the devastated residents, insurance was the last thing on their minds.²⁶⁵ Although the TV stations were up and running, this was the second time in its history that the *Mobile Press-Register* did not publish. The first time was after a fire in the 1950s, but Hurricane Frederic's winds broke the windows in the *Mobile Press-Register's* office, leaving it unsafe for workers to return.²⁶⁶

Besides cleanup, the city's biggest issues were price gouging and looting. Sheriff Purvis blamed the FBI and Department of Commerce for the poor response time in getting necessities into the city.²⁶⁷ Multiple newspapers reported federal aid planning to start aid right after the hurricane on the 14th but were informed they would be delayed until the next day.²⁶⁸ *The Birmingham News* wrote an article that said federal aid promised to be in Mobile a week after the hurricane, and residents were unhappy with

²⁶⁴ David Underhill, "Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile," *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 22, 28.

²⁶⁵ "Port City still waits U.S. aid," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁶⁶ Sandra Baxley Taylor, "Mobile this morning: Ancient trees gone, new babies arriving," *The Birmingham News*, September 13, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁶⁷ "Port City still waits U.S. aid," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁶⁸ Jim Nesbitt, "Ice \$50, gas \$3: Mobilians again victims," *The Birmingham News*, September 15, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

their response time.²⁶⁹ The municipality confiscated ice shipments to prevent price gouging and gave it out free to anyone in need at 10 locations around the city.²⁷⁰ City officials passed a law that merchants could not price gouge and had to show evidence they were not. Some merchants had already been arrested for the act and faced revoked licenses, six months in jail, and a \$500 fine.²⁷¹ The city worked fast to prevent violence and express good publicity by offering free ice. A friend of mine, Charles Torrey, lived in Mobile all his life and survived Hurricane Frederic. He oversaw a truck delivering ice during the relief and recalled being robbed once during his relief work. While everyone was affected by the hurricane, the poor were even more limited in resources and were used to living in extreme situations with limited options. They had already felt pressure from these limited options, as everyone felt during Hurricane Frederic. However, those of lower economic class resort to reactive skills and often make irrational choices because of their lack of resources. The looting and robbery, particularly, are examples where classism and the culture of poverty resulted in crimes during the hurricane recovery. The lower-income residents who were used to fighting for the little they had found more areas to try to improve their economic placement using theft.²⁷² Gasoline shortages were another problem Mobile and the affected areas faced. Initially, the issue

²⁶⁹ Sandra Baxley Taylor, "Mobile story remains grim: State docks virtually KO'd," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁷⁰ "Monastery remembers Frederic's visit," *Mobile Press-Register*, November 25, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile; Herold Kennedy, Tom Scarritt, Sandra Baxley Taylor, "U.S. Official Disagrees 'Haven't shown up yet,' says Mobile sheriff, criticizing disaster agency," *The Birmingham News*, September 16, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁷¹ "The Nation's Worst Hurricane Hits Mobile And The Gulf Coast," *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 22, 1979, 1. Microfilm Collection. The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

²⁷² Deanna Jacobsen Koepke, "Race, Class, Poverty, and Capitalism," *Race, Gender & Class* 14, no. ¾ (2007): 193.

was from lack of electricity to work the pumps, but once electricity was restored, residents sucked gas stations dry. Since Mobile and other cities had no way of refilling their needs, Birmingham and other towns sent Mobile shipments of ice and gasoline.²⁷³ Due to the overwhelming amount of people getting gas, hospitals called for service stations to allow staff to jump long gas lines to reach the large number of hospital patients.

Neighbors and friends took care of each other in these times, bringing food and necessities. The Sisters of the Visitation of Mobile sent many of their donations to Little Sisters of the Poor and Providence Hospital, which had taken the patients from hospitals in more vulnerable areas.²⁷⁴ Governor James went on national television a week after the storm. He declared Mobile, Baldwin, Escambia, Washington, Geneva, Conecuh, Monroe, Clark, Marengo, Choctaw, and Covington Counties were under a civil defense emergency. He asked residents of Alabama to donate items like clothing, charcoal, and especially food, as residents had been living without refrigeration for over a week. He also asked trucking companies and truckers to donate their time and trucks to deliver the items to South Alabama communities.²⁷⁵ Louis Alleman, previously the Louisiana leader of a trucker's strike, rounded up volunteers to help citizens in Mississippi and Alabama. They collected more than 18,000 pounds of ice, 600 cartons of milk, 100 cases of sodas, old clothes, baby food, and canned goods to send to survivors of Hurricane Frederic's

²⁷³ "Port City still waits U.S. aid," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁷⁴ "Monastery remembers Frederic's visit," *Mobile Press-Register*, November 25, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁷⁵ David Pace, "James makes appeal to Alabamians to contribute food to storm area," *Mobile Register*, September 21, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

attack. Coca-Cola trucks drove around with large containers and gave water to those in need. Those in Dauphin Island started their hurricane recovery, divided by how long residents had been living on the island, but after a couple of weeks, everyone began to work together as a community. The Dauphin Island Country Club was used as a food hall for everyone, and some residents whose boats survived gave others lifts to the mainland.²⁷⁶

Slowly, different aid organizations like the Red Cross and Salvation Army entered the hurricane-battered cities.²⁷⁷ The Salvation Army set up mobile feeding stations around the county with newspapers, radio, and television stations giving the addresses. They also sent bulk shipments of various necessities to cities isolated by Hurricane Frederic.²⁷⁸ Grocery and food stores only sold essentials, and purchases were limited. Only one shopper at a time was allowed in, and there were long lines around some locations. As the day wore on and supplies were exposed to the heat, owners discounted prices or gave them away. Department stores like Sears and J.C. Penny opened to sell emergency supplies, but nothing was mentioned if prices were raised or discounted.²⁷⁹ Over a week after the storm, the Salvation Army was still increasing relief. They gave thousands of citizens food and drinks and donated clothes, furniture, cleaning supplies, counseling, and

²⁷⁶ Lolo Pendergrast, "DI telephone communications installed," *Mobile Press-Register*, September 23, 1979. Microfilm Collection, The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

²⁷⁷ "Port City still waits U.S. aid," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁷⁸ "Mobile food units run by the Salvation Army," *Mobile Press Register*, September 19 – 20, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁷⁹ Jim Nesbitt, "Ice \$50, gas \$3: Mobilians again victims," *The Birmingham News*, September 15, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

more. The Salvation Army also asked for donations of diapers, bedding, cleaning supplies, food, and volunteers to make sandwiches.²⁸⁰

Thousands of people were lining up at the various aid offices. Many of them were applying for food stamps, but the emergency food stamp program was a disaster. With the electricity down, there was no way to verify the applicants. Many people were given \$50 worth of food stamps on the spot to speed up the pace. Fraud became a huge issue, and Alabama's attorney general issued statements that said those caught would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, a 10,000 fine, and a possible jail sentence. Many people returned the food stamps to the aid offices, but in the end, most of them were verified after the review of their applications. Gary Cooper, State Pensions and Security Commissioner toured the area and saw over 2,000 people lined up to receive food stamps. State Pension and Security had around 125 additional employees helping in the Mobile area, and staff was still overwhelmed by the number of people who needed assistance. He also noted that "there are people from rural areas who have come in and stood in line for two days without being served."²⁸¹ The only benefit of the food stamp program was that stores were up and running again. The use of food stamps proves that poverty within classism has its uses in a capitalist society. In addition to waiting in lines at the grocery store, like all Mobilians were doing after Hurricane Frederic, lower-income residents also had to wait in line to receive their food stamps. Anyone who received food stamps was then forced to return many of them because they could have been falsely persecuted for

²⁸⁰ "Salvation Army is increasing its aid," *Mobile Register*, September 21, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁸¹ David Pace, "James makes appeal to Alabamians to contribute food to storm area," *Mobile Register*, September 21, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

their fraudulent behavior. Again, in the end, most of those who received and returned food stamps qualified for them as soon as verification systems were up and running again.

Unfortunately, Mobile was overwhelmed with the needed assistance, lacked power around the county, and could not give the aid they assumed they could. Private and public agencies moved into action to donate money or equipment. Local businesses also donated money and sent employees to help with recovery efforts. Various churches had disaster services and quickly created food pantries. Church members around the city cleared the streets with chainsaws and served hot meals to those in need. Some residents even fixed meals and did laundry for power workers from out of town who volunteered to aid in the recovery.²⁸² The communities around affected areas came together to assist in the ways federal and state aid could not. While assistance in the city was much needed, individuals residing there came together because they were all facing the same strains from the hurricane. In addition, political or uncontrollable factors delayed city, state, and federal efforts to aid, leaving lower-income residents to rely on those or community efforts to survive after the hurricane.²⁸³ Some of the business class, especially local business owners like grocers, returned to work to sell their perishable goods and anything else they could. However, lower-income residents also had to return to work sooner than other economic classes. For example, Edward Edend and his wife lived in Semmes with

²⁸² "Salvation Army is increasing its aid," *Mobile Register*, September 21, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile; "Hurricane Frederic: Post Disaster Report, 30 August – 14 September 1979," *United States Army Corps of Engineers* (February 1981); David Underhill, "Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile," *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 31, 33, 34.

²⁸³ Deanna Jacobsen Koepke, "Race, Class, Poverty, and Capitalism," *Race, Gender & Class* 14, no. ¾ (2007): 193, 140.

their two foster children. The Edends took their family and grandchildren to a Red Cross shelter during the storm. Their home was destroyed, and they did not have insurance, so the family had to move into another shelter. It was not stated what Mr. Edend did for work besides working for the county, but he said he would return to work two days after the hurricane hit, just try to support his family through this.²⁸⁴

As citizens left shelters, they walked around their cities and saw the damage Hurricane Frederic caused. City officials saw the large amount of residents exploring the damage and realized others who evacuated might also want to return home. Officials discouraged evacuated residents from returning home due to the needed repairs. The city was also working hard to feed and help the residents who stayed in Mobile during the storm. They knew they could not handle the amount of gas, water, and food returning residents would want and need.²⁸⁵ Officials could not say when residents would be able to return home, but most suspected it would be almost a week after the storm passed.²⁸⁶ Many Prichard residents, especially the elderly and disabled, did not evacuate. The Red Cross set up a second aid station specifically for the elderly and disabled citizens so they would not have to stand and wait in lines as long. The organization was also giving out cash grants to buy food or replace damaged items.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Brett Guge, "Storm was 'bad enough,' but its aftermath shatters family," *The Birmingham News*, September 14, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁸⁵ "Port City still waits U.S. aid," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁸⁶ "Two buildings 'near collapse,'" *The Birmingham News*, September 13, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁸⁷ "Red Cross Disaster Center Helps Hurricane Victims," *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 29, 1979, 5. Microfilm Collection, The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

Governor James immediately applied for disaster relief at the federal level.²⁸⁸ The Department of Pensions and Security started accepting Individual and Family Grant applications. This grant gave up to \$5,000 to those in serious need of assistance because of a natural disaster. The grant was only given to victims of a “presidentially declared disaster” and individuals or families whose needs are not being met by other federal and state aid programs. The department also provided welfare resources to groups that assist in the recovery process, but these groups are not federally funded, like churches.²⁸⁹ Most cities affected felt a surge of energy as federal disaster relief funds entered the town. Tim Russell believed Hurricane Frederic was the single event that propelled Baldwin County into an economically booming county. The damage was so vast that locals did not have to pay to repair it for the first time because outside contractors from Atlanta, Memphis, and New Orleans came in to assist. Many of the workers fell in love with the area's beauty and stayed. Residents said the cities affected got into the swing of clean-up and recovery, and new condominiums and restaurants popped up all over and quickly.²⁹⁰

Three months after the storm, much of the debris had been cleared, and the damage was estimated at around two million. However, Norm Davis, Director of the Mobile County Civil Defense, said, “I think it will be several years before the total tally sheet and bottom lines are in. It changes by the day.” He also noted that Mobile’s water and power were restored, and much of the debris was cleared three months after the storm. Gulf

²⁸⁸ J. Mack Lofton Jr., “Hurricane Fred,” *Alabama Heritage*, (Winter 2000): 33. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁸⁹ “Applications For Cash Assistance Being Taken,” *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 29, 1979, 20, Microfilm Collection, The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

²⁹⁰ J. Mack Lofton Jr., “Hurricane Fred,” *Alabama Heritage*, (Winter 2000): 33. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

Shores was a different story, as Hurricane Frederic annihilated the coast. The Baldwin County Civil Defense Director, Prentise Baughman, said the cleanup was going well, but it could be three years until the city was restored to its former glory.²⁹¹

After Frederic, there was looting, but the governor tried to quickly stop it by calling in the National Guard. The Civil Defense of Mobile created a curfew after ten people were arrested for looting, and two men were booked into jail two men who fired on officers trying to stop them from stealing other people's unprotected belongings.²⁹² All cities had different times, but Mobile's curfew was more lenient than other areas. It was seven a.m. to nine p.m. instead of seven p.m. *The Birmingham News* published a story that said around 110 people had been arrested for looting and hurricane violations four days after the storm.²⁹³ However, the *Mobile Register* said that only 74 people were arrested for curfew violations around a week after the storm.²⁹⁴ Some used the damage, confusion, and influx of people to their advantage. Many people were arrested for burglary, looting, and theft. Others went as far as pretending to be Red Cross workers and other service personnel to steal items.²⁹⁵ Prichard Mayor A. J. Cooper took their curfew so seriously that he arrested the Vigor High School football coach, Harold Clark, and band director, Clifton Thomas. The gentlemen were told to take their teams to a football game and had

²⁹¹ Kurt Franck, "Frederic's scars will take years to heal," *The Birmingham News*, December 28, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁹² Brett Guge, "Mobilians in good spirits, even with trees on houses," *The Birmingham News*, September 14, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁹³ "Port City still waits U.S. aid," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁹⁴ "33 curfew arrests made," *Mobile Register*, September 21, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁹⁵ "2 men charged with burglary," *The Mobile Register*, September 20, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

no issues discussing travel plans with the county school system. However, when they arrived back at school, Clark and Thomas were both arrested for violating curfew.²⁹⁶ The City Council of Prichard also passed an ordinance that put restrictions on water usage and halted the burning of trash to prevent fires.²⁹⁷

Governor James issued another warning to looters and told National Guardsmen and other authority groups to fire two warning shots and then protect other's property by "any means necessary." Due to the debris on the roads and emergency services personnel working on rescue efforts, many stores could not even be protected by their owners after the hurricane. Even after Governor James toured the area, he saw looting and said, "Looters will be dealt with in the most severe manner."²⁹⁸ There were about 1,272 National Guardsmen and a rotating group of military police companies from other areas of Alabama. Over a week after the storm, those groups remained to work in preparation, cleanup, crowd control, and more. The men who worked in cleanup crews left Mobile shortly after, leaving fewer guards in the city. The Mobile Police Commissioner Robert Doyle Jr. was unhappy about the reduced guards and told citizens, "We told the governor the need (for Guard assistance) is greater now than before." Mobile's number of crowd and traffic control officers remained the same for a few more weeks.²⁹⁹ However, some areas did not need to be protected from looters, as there was nothing left of Hurricane

²⁹⁶ Eddie Menton, "Mayor takes curfew seriously: Cooper defends arrest of coach, band director," *Mobile Press-Register*, September 23, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁹⁷ "The Nation's Worst Hurricane Hits Mobile And The Gulf Coast," *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 22, 1979, 13. Microfilm Collection, The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

²⁹⁸ "Two buildings 'near collapse,'" *The Birmingham News*, September 13, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

²⁹⁹ Diane Freeman and Vivian Cannon, "New Guard unit stationed here," *Mobile Register*, September 21, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

Frederic's destruction.³⁰⁰ Many people who evacuated Dauphin Island or had shops there were not allowed to return. Authorities worried people would take others' belongings because there was no way to tell what belonged to whom.³⁰¹

A strong letter was published in the *Mobile Register* about the federal, state, and local officials running the recovery effort from the storm. It stated the private sector was doing well in terms of clean-up and rebuilding efforts, but the public agencies were a disaster. The U.S. Corps of Engineers offered clean-up efforts to citizens who filled out a form. Obviously, most citizens could not get to the form; the *Mobile Press-Register* offered to publish the forms and distribute them to residents. The Corps rejected this offer, leaving residents with no way of obtaining or filling out their application. The Health Department took Hurricane Frederic's aftermath as an opportunity to inspect stores and restaurants and give out nit-picky violations. They shut down most restaurants' water and ice machines for testing and told others not to give water to patrons. The disorganized food assistance program did not work well because of a lack of flexibility in the department. So, many places had to go to neighboring states for supplies, breaking the law by paying taxes to other states. My personal favorite, the Alabama Alcoholic Beverage Control Board, took Frederic as a vacation, and it took seven days for a single retail or wholesale liquor outlet to open. However, this could have been an attempt to keep people away from drinking and being reckless after a natural disaster, like in 1906.

³⁰⁰ Diane Freeman and Vivian Cannon, "New Guard unit stationed here," *Mobile Register*, September 21, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

³⁰¹ "The Nation's Worst Hurricane Hits Mobile And The Gulf Coast," *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 22, 1979, 1. Microfilm Collection. The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

Finally, the City of Mobile's Inspection Services Department did not suspend payments even though thousands had lost their homes and livelihoods.³⁰²

Radio waves filled the air four days after the storm as factories and plants that historically employed low-income workers called employees to return.³⁰³ The strength of Hurricane Frederic destroyed many of these workers' homes and lives, but not the businesses they worked in. Unfortunately, these workers had no financial support to stay out of work longer, manage their families, or clean up and restore their homes. As noted, Edward Edend had to leave his wife with their foster children and grandchildren while he returned to work for the city of Mobile just two days after the storm.³⁰⁴ Many had to go to work to generate the money needed to pay for supplies, restoration, and insurance. The *Mobile Beacon* stated some representatives of Mobile County's poor areas quietly expressed concern for the lack of attention and relief their communities received. They believed the areas were last to receive provisions of food, ice, and the restoration of power. Prichard Mayor Jay Cooper spoke out against County Commissioner Bay Hass and City Commissioner Robert Doyle for this lack of attention. However, the article closed by suggesting there was not much proof of this discrimination.³⁰⁵ Another article in the same newspaper stated a hunger tour of poverty-ridden areas in Alabama started

³⁰² "Some agencies hurting Mobile recovery effort," *Mobile Register*, September 21, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

³⁰³ "Port City still waits U.S. aid," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile; Sandra Baxley Taylor, Mobile story remains grim: State docks virtually KO'd," *The Birmingham News*, September 17, 1979. The Jack Fiend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

³⁰⁴ Brett Guge, "Storm was 'bad enough,' but its aftermath shatters family," *The Birmingham News*, September 14, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

³⁰⁵ "Hurricane Frederic & Politics," *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 29, 1979, 4. Microfilm Collection, The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

two days before Hurricane Frederic hit, and members of the governor's staff and MACAC did not show up for the tour. The writer believed the absences showed a lack of sympathy and support for areas that needed more attention and were being discriminated against.³⁰⁶

There was so much profiteering on ice, generators, gas, and more that the city council immediately enacted an ordinance. There were two near riots over ice, and the city seized control of it, then used ice trucks with armed escorts to distribute around the city. Food stamps, equivalent to cash at the time, greatly benefited the thousands who were homeless and hungry.³⁰⁷ Grocery stores were able to operate as usual but had to work under the supervision of the National Guard to ensure no one was stealing.³⁰⁸ However, David Underhill stated there was no severe racial violence after the hurricane since it affected virtually everyone in its path. Some believe this was only the case because of the swift curfew and the influx of authority figures in the area.³⁰⁹

Hurricane Frederic had blown the Dauphin Island bridge away, leaving the local residents without power or access to emergency measures. Instead of helping the island and accessing it by boat, politicians obtained a \$30 million federal grant to rebuild the bridge. Much of the island was in private hands, and ownership of property there was a status symbol in Mobile. The general public believed the grant was for, as a permanent

³⁰⁶ "Hunger Tour Reveals Poverty," *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 29, 1979, 4. Microfilm Collection, The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

³⁰⁷ David Underhill, "Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile," *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 25 - 34.

³⁰⁸ Diane Freeman and Vivian Cannon, "New Guard unit stationed here," *Mobile Register*, September 21, 1979. The Jack Friend Research Library at the History Museum of Mobile.

³⁰⁹ David Underhill, "Hurricane Frederic vs. Mobile," *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 25 - 34.

resident stated, “fat cat doctors and lawyers.” Some of that money was used to pay for the ferry to and from Dauphin Island and Mobile.³¹⁰ However, the *Birmingham Post* stated the federal government was unsure about giving \$25 million or more to rebuild the bridge. Government bodies, such as the Army or FEMA, had transports to get necessary repair equipment to the island, and the state created a ferry system for those that had businesses on the island. Islanders were told to fill out a form for aid in Mobile, but due to there being no easy transportation to the mainland, FEMA established an aid center on the island. Some Bayou La Batre and Prichard residents complained that Dauphin Island was getting all the attention, stating only those who have summer homes were affected, and Bayou La Batre residents lost their real homes. However, that is not true, as around 400 permanent residents lived on the island, and Dauphin Island took the brunt of the storm.³¹¹ The federal government ended up approving a \$32 million grant to rebuild the Dauphin Island bridge, which took two years to complete.³¹²

Hurricane Frederic was one of the largest Hurricanes of the twentieth century and caused some of the worst damage the Gulf Coast has ever seen. It hit the Gulf Coast over two days and sent hundreds of thousands North to evacuate. Most areas affected by Frederic when it was still a hurricane had massive devastation, with Baldwin and Mobile Counties facing the brunt. Considerable relief efforts were sent by private, charitable, and federal organizations, giving affected residents the necessary food and supplies.

Governor James sent the National Guard to assist in emergency efforts like rescue, traffic,

³¹⁰ “Hurricane Frederic: Post Disaster Report, 30 August – 14 September 1979,” *United States Army Corps of Engineers* (February 1981): 221 – 22.

³¹¹ Ted Bryant, “Dauphin Island forecast is still stormy, overcast,” *Birmingham Post*, October 5, 1979.

³¹² Herbert B. Greene, “HURRICANE FREDERIC...PICKING UP THE PIECES,” directed by Herbert B. Greene, September 29, 1979, video, 24:10, <https://archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.6323>.

cleanup, and more. Although looting occurred in the storm, the governor sent the National Guard, and strict instructions were given to prevent the crime.

Hurricane Frederic occurred in 1979, over a decade after major civil rights legislation and a new era of African American legislators in the South. Jim Crow legislation and discrimination had been outlawed, and African Americans had to challenge other institutions to continue their fight for equality. Michael Figures, an African American lawyer from Mobile, won the seat of state senator for Mobile County in 1978 under an at-large vote.³¹³ In March of 1979, Wiley L. Bolden and other African American residents of Mobile, Alabama, brought a class action arguing the City Commissioner at-large voting system diluted the voting power of black residents.³¹⁴ This system made it hard for African Americans to get their elected officials into office, having an effect on the disaster response for African American areas of Mobile.

The City of Mobile was under a court order to create a form of government that equalized black representation. Originally, Bolden won the case, but it was later overturned. Although the at-large vote remained in place, other equalizing efforts took place. Newspapers no longer included the race of individuals when discussing the news. This makes assessing the racial climate difficult and shows that the country, even the deep South, was progressing. Although newspapers do not discuss race, they mention issues of class. For example, the town of Prichard was typically low-income African American, and they only received a loan to help rebuild after Frederic. Still, the Dauphin

³¹³ "Michael A. Figures," Alabama African American History, last modified 2024, <https://alafricanamerican.com/2012-honorees/michael-a-figures/>.

³¹⁴ "Facts of the case," *City of Mobile v. Bolden, Oyez*, Accessed March 22, 2024, <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1978/77-1844>.

Island bridge received a grant. Lower-class people were put to work sooner and received emergency services later than wealthier classes. Over the several decades between the Hurricane of 1906 and Hurricane Frederic, society acts as a swinging pendulum going back and forth from a classist view to a racist view. Sometimes, the pendulum stops in the middle, and it is hard to differentiate between classism and racism.

CONCLUSION

HURRICANE KATRINA, 2005

In August 2005, almost a century after the 1906 Hurricane in Mobile, Hurricane Katrina was churning in the Gulf of Mexico. The hurricane spent days in the Gulf, reaching a category five intensity. The National Weather Service predicted that this hurricane would devastate New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. The weather service also predicted that there would be death and destruction in its path. Hurricane Katrina was a catastrophic category-three storm that made landfall on the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005. Mobile was damaged badly, and the effects reached north of Saraland, but the lower-lying areas were affected the most. The aftermath of Katrina was the largest coordinated relief effort in American history, including federal, state, and local agencies, humanitarian organizations, and churches.³¹⁵ The areas of Mobile County did not receive as much media attention as New Orleans but faced many of the same struggles.

Mobile County was not as politicized as New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, but New Orleans faced the worst of the storm. This was due to the hurricane's already large impact, including damaging levees and the flooding of Lake Ponchartrain. New Orleans was discussed in Mobile newspapers and other affected areas in Mississippi. Newspaper

³¹⁵ "This Week In Washington With Congressman Jo Bonner," *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 7, 1979 – September 13, 1979, 2. Microfilm Collection, The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

articles criticized the president for his lack of presence during the disaster recovery. Michael Moore is a filmmaker and political activist known for producing series about political and social issues in the United States.³¹⁶ He wrote a sarcastic open letter that was published in the *Mobile Beacon*, showing how widespread the events of Katrina reached. He insulted Bush's choice to fly to San Diego instead of the city of New Orleans after the disaster. He also blamed Bush for the loss of life because there was not enough done to evacuate the lower-income residents. "C'mon they're black! I mean, it's not like this happened to Kennebunkport,³¹⁷" Mr. Moore sarcastically said.

In the Great Sea Island Storm of 1893, the Mobile Hurricane of 1906, and the Mississippi Flood of 1927, most residents did not evacuate. Although the Federal Weather Service was created in 1870, it took time for systems to develop. Developments to the Federal Weather Service came with every hurricane. After a hurricane in Texas in 1875, the Signal Corps created the Weather Bureau in 1890. A year later, the United States began receiving weather reports from the West Indies. These warning systems were reserved for coastal towns, but it is unclear when they were established in the Sea Islands and Mobile. The systems did not work well and were ineffective in warning areas before gale winds and storm surges hit.

Due to the radio communication between ships and stations on land, storms could be reported by newspaper or radio. However, hurricanes are unpredictable and can change strength and direction in a matter of seconds, leaving citizens of the Sea Island Storm and

³¹⁶ Britannica, "Michael Moore," Updated February 26, 2024.

³¹⁷ Kennebunkport, Maine is home to the Bush family summer home. It is ranked the #1 beach in Maine and is a popular summer vacation and tourist town.

the 1906 Hurricane to brace for the forces of nature unprepared.³¹⁸ Hurricane Frederic caused the largest evacuation of the Gulf Coast at the time, with 500,000 people fleeing and many lives saved.³¹⁹ Hundreds of thousands evacuated the Gulf Coast for Hurricane Katrina. However, Mobile County's emergency management plan was for everyone on the coastline to take refuge a few hours north or northeast to locations like Mobile and Saraland.³²⁰ Although so many evacuated, the devastation in Mobile County was worse than expected.

During the storm, people sheltered in solid, tall buildings like hospitals and hotels if they could not reach state or federal shelters. Flooding was all over the city and restricted many people to their homes. The debris left behind by Katrina's destruction was evident all over Mobile County. Most of the electric power to the Mobile area was knocked out and other communication methods were inoperable.³²¹ People understood the government did not cause the natural disaster but believed policies could have been made to prevent as much damage and loss. Hurricane Katrina caused \$75 billion in damages,

³¹⁸ Gordon E. Dunn, "A Brief History of the United States Hurricane Warning Service," *Miami Amateur Meteorological Society*.

https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/pdf/A_brief_history_of_the_United_States_Hurricane_Warning_Service-Dunn.pdf.

³¹⁹ "Hurricane Frederic: Post Disaster Report, 30 August – 14 September 1979," *United States Army Corps of Engineers*, February 1981: 5.

³²⁰ Robert McClendon, "After Katrina, emergency planners look to evacuate Mobile County during hurricane," August 31, 2010. Al.com.

³²¹ E. M. Cockrell, "Katrina The Worst Hurricane To Hit U.S. Mainland, Badly Damaged Four States," *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*. August 31, 2005 – September 6, 2005, 9. Microfilm Collection. The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

with 80 percent of the city being flooded.³²² Mobile's building materials, methods, and code enforcement have improved since Hurricane Katrina.³²³

African Americans were most affected by natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina. After facing the difficulties of generation poverty since emancipation, African Americans have less capital to recover and rebuild their communities.³²⁴ It was common for more densely populated poor areas to be in less desirable locations, especially regarding proximity to water. This is because corporations developed the areas, and the land was sold at a lower price because of its potential for flooding. The Sea Island was a poor African American community on the coast of South Carolina and much more susceptible to storm damage. Levees drained areas of Mobile, New Orleans, and along the Mississippi River that were once swamp lands to make them livable for residents. These areas had poor residents who could not afford solid and reliable homes.

Citizens of Mobile were living in tents and battling mosquitos ten days after Hurricane Katrina. Although power had been returned to most of the houses in the affected areas, their homes were unlivable. The hurricane filled more than 800 Bayou La Batre and Coden homes with four feet of water, and Mobiles had horrible water damage. One family had cleaned their house ten times and ripped out all the flooring, but they still

³²² Ismail K. White, Tasha S. Philpot, Kristin Wylie, and Ernest McGowen, "Feeling the Pain of My People: Hurricane Katrina, Racial Inequality, and the Psyche of Black America," *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 4 (March 2007): 524. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40034321>.

³²³ Jeff Amy, "Roofs still source of concern," *The Mobile Press-Register*, August 29, 2010. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

³²⁴ Pamela Denise Reed, "From the Freedmen's Bureau to FEMA: A Post-Katrina Historical, Journalistic, and Literacy Analysis." *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 4 (March 2007): 558. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40034323>.

could not escape the smell of mildew.³²⁵ Survivors from New Orleans traveled to the Mobile area for refuge. This increased population was a strain on relief organizations in Mobile that were already filled with residents. The 32 Red Cross shelters in Alabama could only house around 1,000 residents. A little over a week after the hurricane, 3,645 people were estimated to be being cared for in Red Cross shelters in Alabama. However, many people were living in private homes or churches, so the number of refugees living in lower Alabama was not confirmed.³²⁶

Gas shortages were everywhere due to several damaged wells, refineries, and platforms the gas and oil industry relied on were damaged. The Governor said he was working with the Department of Energy to get fuel to Mobile and asked citizens to buy only as much gas as they needed and use strategies like carpooling once it is restored.³²⁷ The community tried to come together during times of disaster, like in Hurricane Frederic. Bishop State was offering free educational services, GRE preparation and testing, and short-term job training for Katrina victims and evacuees.³²⁸ Two sororities at the University of South Alabama held a “Candle Light Vigil” for victims of Katrina.³²⁹

³²⁵ Russ Henderson, “Temporary housing,” *The Mobile Register*. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library,

³²⁶ Guy Busby, Sallie Owen, and Connie Baggett, “Katrina evacuees streaming into south Alabama shelters,” *The Mobile Register*, September 3, 2005. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

³²⁷ “This Week In Washington With Congressman Jo Bonner,” *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 7, 1979 – September 13, 1979, 5. Microfilm Collection, The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

³²⁸ “Bishop State Responds To Needs of Hurricane Evacuees,” *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 14, 2005 – September 20, 2005, 4. Microfilm Collection, The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

³²⁹ “Two USA Sororities To Hold Candle Light Vigil For Victims Of Hurricane Katrina,” *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 14, 2005 – September 20, 2005, 4. Microfilm Collection, The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

Many churches had been destroyed, as Katrina was not picky with her wrath. The *Mobile Beacon* commented that church attendance drops drastically after a hurricane, but many of the churches, even the damaged ones, worked to give aid to those in more need. Governor Bob Riley worked with FEMA to use closed government facilities in Alabama to house the large number of homeless residents left after Katrina. Residents from Mobile filled these facilities first, and refugees from other states could live there if there were room. State and federal officials opened five disaster recovery centers to help residents discuss their relief needs and applications.³³⁰ The Community Center's grocery and supply center was sending out 6,000 cars a day with supplies to hand out.³³¹ However, the center had to shut down temporarily about a week after the storm while hundreds of residents were still in need. The First United Methodist Church acted fast and had volunteers hand out donated supplies to 400 people a day. The volunteers even delivered groceries to homes because many vehicles were flooded and unusable after the storm.³³² Relief centers of all kinds had to turn away residents who were coming back for supplies a second, third, or more day. Whether these residents were reselling the supplies or stockpiling them was not stated.

The Red Cross and Federal Emergency Management Agency set up shelters and resource stations in community centers and locations all over Mobile and Baldwin County. Hundreds of residents had lined up outside the Community Center in Bayou La

³³⁰ E. M. Cockrell, "Katrina The Worst Hurricane To Hit U.S. Mainland, Badly Damaged Four States," *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*. August 31, 2005 – September 6, 2005, 9. Microfilm Collection. The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

³³¹ "Many in ravaged south Mobile County don't want to...," *The Mobile Register*, September 8, 2005. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

³³² Russ Henderson, "Temporary housing," *The Mobile Register*. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

Batre, but the staff had no idea what they were lining up for. After hours of phone calls, they found out a Red Cross Representative was supposed to be in at noon to meet with those needing relief. The workers worried an angry mob would form because of the delay and called eight police officers in for crowd control. Newspapers report that the representative was held up because of the demand, but they appeared three hours after her scheduled time to assist the growing line of 150 people. Unfortunately, most of those who waited in line did not have the proper paperwork to receive aid.³³³

Many did not want to stay in Red Cross shelters. April Adams, one of the residents of a Red Cross shelter, complained, "I'm tired of this. Of being told when to take a bath, when to go to bed, when to eat, when to take a smoke break. I'm 27 years old." Those who did not want to stay in shelters camped out in their yards to protect their belongings from looters.³³⁴ City housing inspectors and the County Emergency Management Agency started inspecting houses two weeks after Hurricane Katrina hit. Most of the houses were declared unfit for habitation, and many families had to move into community shelters. The Bayou La Batre Community Center was housing 60 residents, but after housing inspections, it homed around 400. However, city officials had noted that they knew many people would continue to camp in or around their houses to ensure their possessions were not stolen.

The Mobile city utility officials stated that 50 percent of water lines were cleared two weeks after Hurricane Katrina. They also increased the water and sewer capacity by 50

³³³ Russ Henderson, "Temporary housing," *The Mobile Register*. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

³³⁴ Russ Henderson, "Temporary housing," *The Mobile Register*. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

percent. Officials removed the “boil order” residents were under and claimed that tap water was safe to drink two weeks after the storm.³³⁵ Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, like many other federal leaders, visited the areas of destruction and spoke with recovering residents. An Alabama native herself, she worked with churches in Prichard and Bayou La Batre to pack and distribute aid. Secretary Rice stated the federal government needs to work on the preparation for a natural disaster of Karina’s magnitude. The efforts before the storm to evacuate citizens are much more important than relief because they shrink the number of those needing relief. All the locations Secretary Rice visited assured people that the federal government was doing everything it could to help areas recover after Hurricane Katrina.³³⁶

Officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency had sent 25 trailers to South Mobile for residents to live in while their homes were repaired. Another 500 trailers were being sent the next week. Walt Dickerson, director of Mobile County Emergency Management Agency, said the first goal was to get the trailers to people's homes. The campers were equipped with water, power, and septic units. Citizens needed to apply for trailers, meaning somehow getting to the city Community Center and filling out paperwork. If residents were granted a trailer, they had to sign documentation stating they would only live in it for 18 months. Johnny Harris, who was living in his yard with

³³⁵ “Many in ravaged south Mobile County don’t want to...,” *The Mobile Register*, September 8, 2005. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

³³⁶ Eddie Curran, “Secretary of state: Race was definitely no factor in response,” *The Mobile Register*, September 5, 2005. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

his family, waited all day for a home meeting with a Federal Emergency Management Agency official.³³⁷

The Internal Revenue Service announced special relief for Katrina victims. If they missed the October 31st deadline, they would not be subject to interest or late penalties. Mobile, Baldwin, Washington Counties, 15 Mississippi counties, and 31 Louisiana counties were on this list. Residents had a month or two to fill out these forms and receive the tax relief.³³⁸ Another article stated six counties in Alabama were on the list and had till the end of October to apply. Taxpayers could also call a toll-free number to get penalties removed. The due date to file and pay taxes was moved to January 3rd, 2006.³³⁹

Two months after Hurricane Katrina, Elm Place Middle School in Chicago partnered with Alba Middle School in Bayou La Batre to work on a temporary art exhibit. The exhibit was meant to showcase the effects of the hurricane from a child's perspective with photography and first-hand accounts. Elm Place students visited Bayou La Batre for this project and had a hard time processing the devastation they found, but stated the Alba students they met were processing the situation well. Most of the information that reached Chicago mainly focused on the city of New Orleans or other major towns, but not the destruction of the small towns. After the children visited Bayou La Batre, they

³³⁷ Russ Henderson, "Temporary housing," *The Mobile Register*. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

³³⁸ "How The Tax Law Helps Victims of Hurricane Katrina," *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 14, 2005 – September 20, 2005, 4. Microfilm Collection, The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

³³⁹ "Katrina Victims Will Have Until Jan. 3 to File and Pay Taxes," *Mobile Beacon & Alabama Citizen*, September 14, 2005 – September 20, 2005, 4. Microfilm Collection, The Marx Library at the University of South Alabama.

could not understand how residents felt and felt a bigger urge to raise money for donations and supplies. Students also raised money to replace the damaged books in Alba Middle School's flooded library.³⁴⁰

The areas of Coden and Bayou La Batre were decimated after Hurricane Katrina with massive flooding and damage. Even a year later, citizens spent much of their days cleaning up debris from their homes.³⁴¹ 125 homes in Coden had applied for county and federal funding but had seen nothing.³⁴² Most counties faced delays with federal funding delays and structural damage. The Mobile County Commissioner heard complaints of neglect by the citizens of Coden. They claimed Bayou La Batre received \$39 million in federal funding, but the lower-income town of Coden received nothing. Coden did receive \$8 million to rebuild homes, but that is just a fraction of what Bayou La Batre received. However, over a year later, residents complained the county was not focused enough on finding a solution to the sewer problems caused by flooding.

The disgusting debris from this damage prevented citizens from being able to travel to receive their portion of the federal funding. County officials said they had no control over the Mobile County Health Department and its sewer system requirements, which many citizens did not meet and were not eligible for federal aid. Commissioner Mike Dean tried to find a temporary solution with locals in Coden, but they refused to work with the Bayou La Batre sewer system. He was going to present a \$2.5 million plan to

³⁴⁰ Rena Havner, "Picturing Katrina," *The Mobile Register*, December 5, 2005. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

³⁴¹ Russ Henderson, "Temporary housing," *The Mobile Register*. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

³⁴² Russ Henderson, "Relief in sight," *The Mobile Press-Register*, August 22, 2007. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

connect the systems but withdrew when he learned of Coden's opposition. Officers responded to debris complaints but claimed the remaining debris was on private property where public crews were not allowed to enter. Many citizens insisted cleanup was the county's job, but others insisted using public funds on private lands was illegal.³⁴³

Two years later, relief seemed like it was in sight. Mobile County officials received funds in August to process more than 1,000 applications for rebuilding. These residents were still living in FEMA trailers or their damaged houses, but all their family members. For example, Tammy Collier lived in a FEMA trailer with her boyfriend and their four teenagers for over two years. Bayou La Batre had processed 34 of their 400 applications and poured foundations for five of the 120 planned home rebuilds. In Mobile County, the County Commission had just finalized rules, allowing a committee to start reviewing applications. The articles hoped work would begin within six weeks using the \$8.4 million federal grant.³⁴⁴ However, the consultant hired to manage the grants from Roth McHugh & Associates, Anette McGrady, said only 200 of the 1,166 applications would be covered by that grant. Mobile County officials were working on getting more grants, including \$7.4 million for Mobile County residents.³⁴⁵ A total of 136 applications came from Prichard, and more complaints were heard about the application process. A group of nonprofits heard there was hardly any notice of the applications, and residents only had eight days to complete them and return them. They also were not translated into

³⁴³ Russ Henderson, "Coden residents complain of neglect," *Mobile Press-Register*, November 10, 2006. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

³⁴⁴ Russ Henderson, "Relief in sight," *The Mobile Press-Register*, August 22, 2007. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

³⁴⁵ "County plans to start reviews," *The Mobile Press-Register*, August 22, 2007. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

different languages. Both the time constraint and inclusivity issues caused struggles for lower-income residents. The group said many citizens had not heard anything about funding, and most did not know how to apply.³⁴⁶

Residents in the small neighborhood of Gulf Manor off Navco Road were still dealing with the effects of Katrina and were complaining of seeing nothing from the county's relief programs or funding. Houses with their roofs missing, abandoned lots of whole neighborhoods and struggles with looting afflicted the area. Gulf Manor is located on the Dog River, and many properties have access to the water, making them a flood risk. All types of residents were having issues with government funding and cleanup, and 177 applications had come from the 36605 area. Earl McDonald planned on renovating his home after Katrina and then selling it. He was going to sell it to the city's federally funded buyout program, but the city has yet to give applicants their money. Mayor Sam Jones stated that the city was on track to buy fewer than 50 houses, but applications were most likely much greater.

Other residents, like Fritz Porter Jr. and his wife, Debbie Porter, felt loyal to the area. They had lived in their home for 26 years but were living in front of it in a FEMA trailer. Fritz had remodeling experience, but with a heart condition and other disabilities, he is not able to help much in home repair. Debbie was a retired school teacher but returned to work to help pay for renovations. They would also have to raise their entire home because of federal flood rules. The Porters mortgage company refused to give them the majority of their insurance money until most of the renovations were complete. This

³⁴⁶ Russ Henderson, "Relief in sight," *The Mobile Press-Register*, August 22, 2007. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

does not make sense because Katrina caused a large amount of destruction, and residents should be allowed to use their insurance money to pay for the repairs. The Porters also bought new furniture and put it in a storage locker, but the items were stolen. Rhonda McAdams lost her house when it was leveled by a boat in Katrina and lives in a FEMA trailer in her front yard. Her flood insurance was sent to her mortgage company, making her unable to use it. The mortgage company used the insurance money to pay off Rhonda's mortgage, which she still owes about \$10,000. She was refused a loan to rebuild and struggled to receive a county grant. The county's grant program had more applications than the money allotted and took quite a while to fill requests.³⁴⁷

African Americans have faced the worst during natural disasters and received little to no support afterward. During the Great Island Sea Storm of 1893, African Americans lost so much to the hurricane that they had to migrate to find work. The Red Cross, which was involved in hurricane recovery, focused its efforts on white citizens and only gave scraps to African Americans in need. The Mobile Hurricane of 1906, thirteen years after the Great Sea Island Storm, decimated the Gulf Coasts' small communities and left downtown Mobile flooded. The newspaper reports heavily discussed white neighborhoods and victims affected by the flood, and only one reprinted article discussed the damage in the downtown African American community. Most articles were consumed with accusations against African Americans for looting and racist rhetoric reiterating the discrimination African Americans faced in the South. Letters and editorials were written across the state, commenting that lynching was acceptable if white

³⁴⁷ Jeff Amy, "Gulf Manor still hurting from Katrina," *The Mobile Press-Register*, August 26, 2007. Local History and Genealogy, Mobile Public Library.

men defended white women's honor. These communications only increased during and after the hurricane, eventually leading to the lynching of two innocent men, Cornelius Robinson and William Thompson.

Twenty-one years later, the Mississippi Flood of 1927 affected seven states and hundreds of thousands of lives. The Red Cross and National Guard took control of aiding the survivors, but racial discrimination was present in most camps. Black men who survived the storm and made it to the camps were forced to work on levees, which often broke, killing hundreds of African American men. Hurricane Frederic decimated the Gulf Coast, and thousands were left needing relief. The recovery process in Mobile worked as fast as it could, but lower-income residents felt ignored by city management. There were complaints from small towns like Prichard that they were not restoring electricity and water fast enough when Mobile and wealthier ones were lit.

Finally, almost a century after the 1906 Hurricane, Hurricane Katrina destroyed the city of New Orleans and many small towns in Mobile County. The local, state, and federal governments still had no plan for hurricane recovery, and survivors struggled to keep themselves alive. Like the newspapers, the television and radio media ran wild with horrendous accusations against African Americans, and many men died for no reason. Over a hundred years after emancipation and less than fifty years after the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans are still being discriminated against. Improvements came after the Civil Rights Movement, with newspapers not mentioning an individual's race, and race relationships seemed to ease. However, the lower-income community, which can be made up of a majority of African Americans, felt ignored by city officials and management in the recovery process. Lower-income and African American families must

live where they can afford, which may not be the safest environment, and are often forced to fend for themselves during natural disasters. Federal and State governments must work harder to ensure the safety of all their residents before and after natural disasters.

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