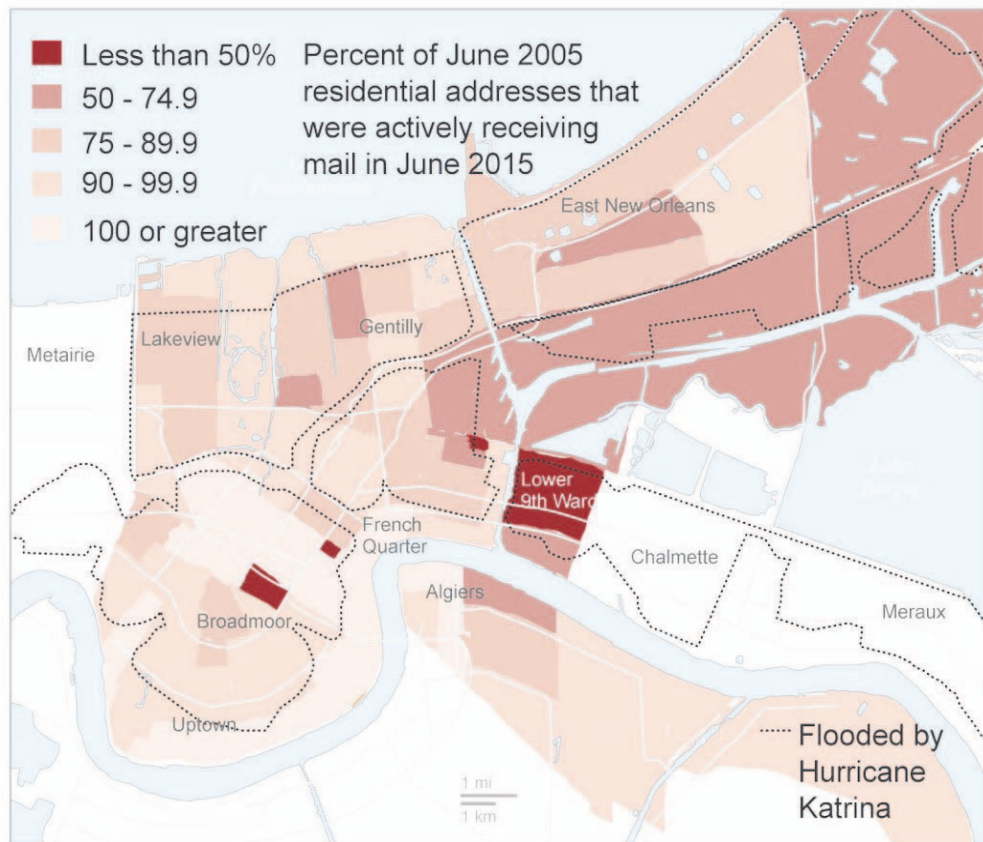


New Orleans ten years after Katrina

On August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina struck and the levees protecting the city of New Orleans failed. More than 40 of the city's 72 neighborhoods were flooded. Ten years later more than half have recovered over 90 percent of their population.



SOURCES: The Data Center; Valassis

AP

Scattered families rebuild separately and together

By ALLEN G. BREED
AP National Writer

HOUSTON — Bunk beds dominate the narrow living room of Chevelle Washington's modest three-bedroom brick townhouse apartment. A large box in the corner is piled high with kids' shoes. The 51-year-old is raising six of her grandchildren. Her home is a refuge, a haven.

It was that way back in her native New Orleans, too — never so much as on Aug. 29, 2005, when Hurricane Katrina struck.

"I had 21 people at my house," she says of that horrible night. "Because I had an up- and downstairs."

The water rushing through the city's breached floodwalls climbed all 17 of those front stairs, stopping just below the porch. It had receded to the 11th step by the following day, when a uniformed man appeared in a motorized flatboat.

As their anonymous savior steered the craft into the lake that the Upper Ninth Ward had become, Washington burst into tears.

"It ain't never going to be the same no more," she cried.

Her youngest son, Steven, remembers how the man at the helm tried to comfort his mother. "You're moving on to something better," he said.

An estimated 1.5 million Gulf Coast residents fled Katrina, scattering like wind-tossed seeds to all 50 states. Many thousands of them, like Chevelle Washington, have taken root where they landed.

But for son Steven, the pull of home, of New Orleans, was too strong.

A few months after Katrina, he returned to his ruined city, hoping to recapture that sense of belonging he couldn't find in Texas.

Standing on that 11th step recently, his mind wandered back to the day he and his family climbed into that boat. He was never really sure what the man meant by "something better." A short-term shelter? A bigger house? A safer city?

Like so many families splintered by the storm, the Washingtons are still searching.

The storm did not "drown" New Orleans. But there's no denying it is a changed city.

The black population has dropped from nearly 67 percent in 2000 to 59 percent today; whites, once about one-quarter of residents, now account for nearly a third.

"The people who have not returned have been disproportionately African-American, renters, low-income, single mothers and persons with disabilities," says Lori



AP Photo/Pat Sullivan

Chevelle Washington combs her sister Chelette Price's hair at a hospice hospital in Houston on Thursday, Aug. 13. A decade ago back in New Orleans, she recalled, "I had 21 people at my house" when Hurricane Katrina struck. "They came to my house for shelter, because I had an up- and downstairs."

Peek, an associate professor of sociology at Colorado State University and co-editor, with University of South Carolina psychologist Lynn Weber, of the book, "Displaced: Life in the Katrina Diaspora."

Since the storm, rents in the Crescent City have skyrocketed — up 33 percent for a one-bedroom apartment and 41 percent for a two-bedroom.

Following Katrina, officials demolished four of the city's notorious projects, vowing to replace them with modern, mixed-income developments. Despite much progress, there are still about 3,200 fewer low-income, public housing apartments than before the storm.

Most of the people living in those units were black. Like Linda Nellum. Revitalization had already pushed Nellum out of the murder-plagued Magnolia projects. Living in temporary Section 8 housing when Katrina hit, Nellum was evacuated to Houston.

From Texas, she applied for return and was put on a waiting list. She's still waiting.

"Every now and then, you think about going home," the 43-year-old says, a tear trickling down her cheek. She feels "trapped" in Houston.

Chevelle Washington chooses to see it differently.

Growing up, sisters Chevelle and Champernell Washington never saw any reason to fear the landscape around them. But there was something different about that mid-summer's day 10 years ago, says Champernell.

"You could just about smell it in the air," she says.

When the skies began to clear, Chevelle Washington thought all was well — until she opened the door to the garage below. A refrigerator and her grandson's bassinet swirled up toward her, "like trying to see who was going to get up the stairs first."

Steven, then 16, waded

down the front steps and stared as shrimp and crawfish skipped past.

When the rescue boat arrived the next day, Chevelle Washington was reluctant to get in, not wanting to split up the family.

The boatman dropped them on a nearby street where, hours later, a military truck took them to the Superdome.

The Washingtons managed to find space in the hometown Saints' end zone. Surely, this dangerous, leaky-roofed open latrine was not the "something better" they'd been promised.

After a few days, the refugee family escaped New Orleans.

Champernell had once lived in Houston. She'd loved the schools there, and there always seemed to be plenty of work.

And so, she, Chevelle and other family members resettled in Texas.

In southwest Houston, the Washington clan has created a little slice of New Orleans.

Chevelle lives just a couple of miles from Champernell and her two girls. About a 10-minute drive east, brother Rene's restaurant, Sleepy's Po Boys, offers fellow Katrina refugees a taste of home.

Each has been back to New Orleans numerous times. Despite obvious progress, "It's still that sense of death in the air," says Champernell, 45, night manager at a hotel.

Chevelle talked of a friend who moved her family back — only to have three of her boys killed in a drive-by shooting, victims of apparent mistaken identity.

"I'm not ready to bury none of my kids," says the former hotel maid, who now makes do largely on disability benefits for one of the children.

Much as she loves her hometown, it's not worth the risk. Besides, she says, "It would never be home again."

George W. Bush visits disaster zone, 10 years after Katrina

By CAIN BURDEAU
and JEFF AMY
Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Former President George W. Bush enjoyed sympathetic audiences in New Orleans and Mississippi on Friday as he returned to the region where Hurricane Katrina sank his popularity 10 years ago.

Bush avoided parts of New Orleans that have yet to recover from the devastating storm, such as the Lower 9th Ward, where President Barack Obama mingled with hundreds of residents the day before. Bush did not tour the federally managed levees whose failures flooded 80 percent of the city.

Instead, he visited a school rebuilt with support from former first lady Laura Bush's foundation, then flew to Gulfport, Mississippi, to honor police and firefighters who saved lives after Katrina's towering storm surge swamped the coast.

"The 10th anniversary is a good time to honor courage and resolve," Bush said in Gulfport. "It's also a good time to remember we live in a compassionate nation."

Bush took no questions at either event, and made no mention of his administration's lackluster initial response to Katrina, which historians consider a low point for his presidency. In New Orleans, he focused instead on promoting charter schools.

The comeback from Katrina has been uneven. While Mississippi's Gulf Coast recovered all its population and then some, Bush and his team have been so deeply resented in New Orleans that Carnival goers displayed them in effigy at annual Mardi Gras parades.

For days after the storm, bodies decomposed in the streets and thousands of people begged to be rescued from their rooftops in New Orleans. In Mississippi, relief came so slowly that Biloxi's *Sun Herald* newspaper published a front-page



AP Photo/Gerald Herbert

Former President George W. Bush dances with band director Asia Muhaimin as the band plays, during a visit to Warren Easton Charter High School in New Orleans, Friday. Behind are former first lady Laura Bush, partially visible, and New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu. Bush is in town to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, which is Saturday.

editorial, entitled "Help Us Now."

The storm set off a "confluence of blunders," and Bush's approval ratings never recovered, said Douglas Brinkley, a presidential historian at Rice University who wrote "The Great Deluge," a detailed account of the first days after Katrina.

Bush didn't help his image by initially flying over the flooded city in Air Force One without touching down, then saying "Heckuva job, Brownie" to praise his ill-prepared Federal Emergency Management Agency director, Michael Brown, who resigned shortly thereafter.

Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant said Bush isn't to blame for the disaster that ultimately killed more than 1,830 people. "I think he certainly did a tremendous amount of good. It was just a tremendous storm. No one was prepared," Bryant said.

Bush's administration eventually spent \$140 billion on the recovery. On Friday, he praised former Gov. Haley Barbour, former U.S. Sen. Trent Lott and current U.S. Sen. Thad Cochran, for making sure much of it landed in Mississippi.

"Haley and Lott and Thad, I kind of got tired of their phone calls. Every time, it was 'We need a little more money.' But the money

was well spent, and this part of the world is coming back stronger than it was before," Bush said.

In New Orleans, most city schools had been foundering before Katrina, suffering from pervasive corruption, broken buildings and failing grades. Only 56 percent of the students graduated high school on time.

Katrina served as a catalyst for a state takeover. Louisiana eventually turned all 57 schools under its control into independently run charters, publicly funded and accountable to education officials for results, but with autonomy in daily operations.

"Isn't it amazing? The storm nearly destroyed New Orleans and yet, now, New Orleans is the beacon for school reform," Bush said. Warren Easton Charter High School, the city's oldest, which was badly flooded and almost abandoned before it reopened a year later.

The city's four-year graduation rate has since climbed to 73 percent. Warren Easton graduates 100 percent of its seniors.

Many parents lament the loss of neighborhood schools, and question teacher qualifications at the charters. But Bush said they now can choose where to send their kids, and principals and teachers have more authority to cut through bureaucracy.

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