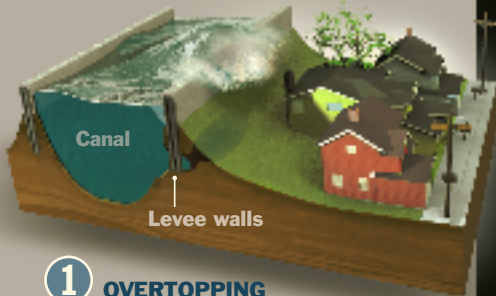


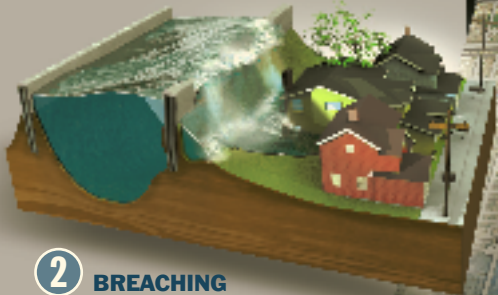
## WHEN THE LEVEE BREAKS

New Orleans is surrounded by a 350-mile (563 km) system of levees that hold back the waters of the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain. When three levees failed, the city filled like a bathtub



### 1 OVERTOPPING

Floodwaters may have risen past the tops of the levees. The city's pumping system, designed to handle smaller storms, lost power and failed



### 2 BREACHING

Because the flooding didn't begin until after the hurricane, some suspect the levees may have leaked from within. The water pressure would have turned tiny cracks into gaping holes



### 3 REPAIR

Crews have been trying to plug the collapsed levees with giant sandbags and concrete barriers. Once the levees are sealed, the challenge of draining the city begins. That job could take months

TIME Graphic by Ed Gabel and Lon Tweeten; text by Kristina Dell

Sources: Dean Gesch, U.S. Geological Survey; Army Corps of Engineers; Digital Globe; New Orleans Times-Picayune. Inset model of downtown New Orleans "Intelligent 3D Map" provided by ITspatial, imagery provided by Sanborn Mapping

## AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

# New Orleans Under

### 17th STREET CANAL

Helicopters dropped giant sandbags in an effort to seal the initial breach



TRAVIS HEYING—KFTABACA



### LOUISIANA SUPERDOME

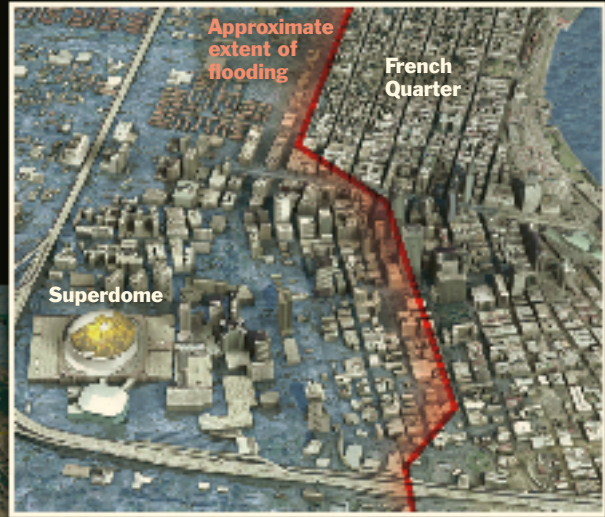
As aid began to trickle into the city, thousands waited for evacuation



JAMES NIELSEN—AP/GETTY IMAGES

# Water

The storm passed, and the city had survived. Then a levee broke. The worst-case scenario had arrived



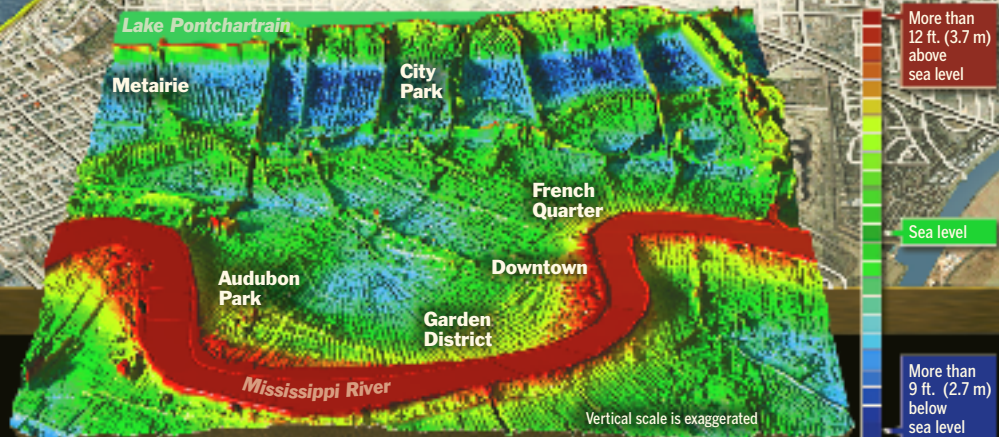
## DOWNTOWN MOSTLY DRY

Much of New Orleans' main business district is built on the highest ground in the city. The Superdome wasn't so lucky



## WHERE WATER IS HIGHER THAN LAND

New Orleans sits in a wide, shallow bowl, with the levees of the Mississippi as one rim and the levees of Lake Pontchartrain as the other. The bottom of the bowl is filled with small ridges, which created small islands when the city flooded



### CONVENTION CENTER

Lynn Jackson, 46, hugs her daughter after being rescued from her home



JOHN PENNINGTON/ST. PETERSBURG TIMES