117 years on, the storm which destroyed Galveston
8 September 2017

A couple walks along the shoreline as it is battered by wind and rain from Hurricane Harvey on August 26, 2017 in Galveston, Texas

As the United States braced for its second major hurricane in two weeks, Friday marked the 117th anniversary of the deadliest storm in US history, the "Great Galveston Hurricane."

The Texas city of Galveston, situated on a narrow strip of land on the Gulf of Mexico, was spared the worst from Hurricane Harvey, which devastated Houston last month.

But Galveston was virtually wiped off the map on September 8, 1900 by a storm which left between 6,000 and 12,000 people dead.

At the turn of the 20th century, Galveston, population 40,000, was prospering thanks to its port and the cotton industry.

But, like Harvey, the Galveston hurricane of 1900 was a Category Four storm.

Winds of over 135 miles per hour (220 kilometers per hour) demolished the entire city—situated less than 10 feet (three meters) above sea level.

Storm surge reached 13 feet (four meters) high and bridges connecting Galveston to the mainland were wiped out.

Given forecasting technology and communications at the time, it is unclear to what extent locals and tourists were aware of the danger approaching the city some 50 miles (80 kilometers) southeast of Houston.

According to the History Channel, the US meteorological service did warn people to seek higher ground—but few obeyed.

As a result, there were so many bodies that burying them proved an impossible task, according to an account of the disaster done by the Houston Chronicle in 2000 to mark the 100th anniversary.

Eventually, local politicians decided to bury the dead at sea, arranging for them to be thrown into waters 20 miles (30 kilometers) from the coast.

But the sea's strong current washed them up on Galveston's beaches, before they were eventually burned in fires which lasted weeks.

Following the devastation, investors took their business inland to Houston—which is now the fourth-largest city in the United States.

A seawall was built in Galveston shortly after—but it did not fully protect the city from two other major hurricanes in 1963 and 1981.

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