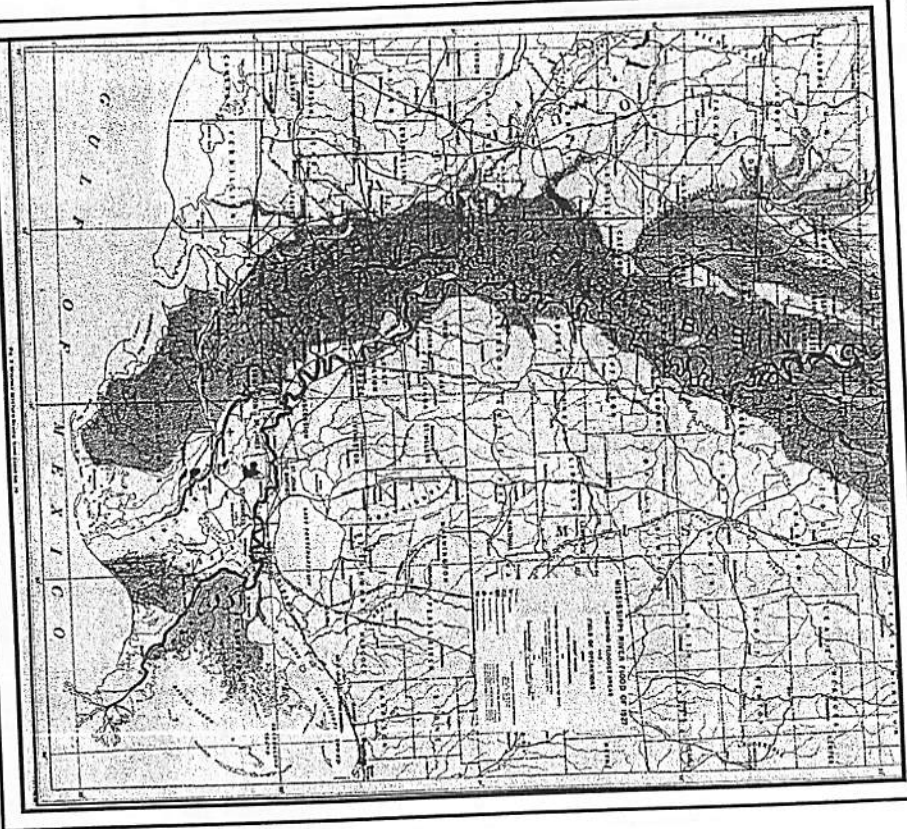


New Orleans and the Great Flood.

Directions:

Source 1



Source 2

Narrator: In years past, a man of Butler's position might have been alarmed by the downpour outside. To a city situated largely below sea level, heavy rain meant floods. Floods meant chaos, and chaos was never good for business. But for now anyway, Butler was not troubled by the storm. The Wood pump would take care of that.

Lawrence N. Powell, Historian: the Wood pump was invented by a Tulane engineer, A. Baldwin Wood, who worked for the Sewage and Water Board. And he came up with a pump, a screw pump that had enough power, enough, propulsive power to, to not only lift up the water but then to push it out over the levees. And once you had that hydrology in place so much becomes possible.

Narrator: The Wood pump had been the cornerstone of an ambitious, turn-of-the-century effort to shore up the city's economy, which had been faltering ever since the Civil War. Goods that once had floated to market along the Mississippi -- and through the port of New Orleans -- now increasingly went by rail, and anxious businessmen had pressed for large-scale civic improvements in hope of making their city more hospitable to commerce...

Pelrice Lewis, Geographer: It was known as the quarter of the damned. Because the consistency of the back swamp is something between oh, let's say over cooked pea soup and warm Jell-O. And in that climate, its mosquito ridden. There were yellow fever epidemics periodically but they could do something in New Orleans, thanks to the Wood pumps that they had never done before and that was to pump out the water in the back swamp.

Narrator: Now, on Good Friday 1927, all that would be jeopardized by a bolt of lightning that knocked out the central power station and cut off electricity to the Wood pumps. By the time James Butler woke that morning, New Orleans had already begun to fill with water. At sundown, more than four feet stood in the city's streets.

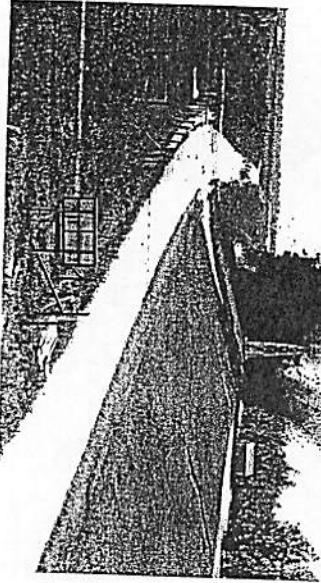
Arl Kelman, Historian: The interesting thing about that Good Friday flood is that there's a huge river flood slowly bearing down on the city; one of the biggest floods in the nation's history. The 1927 flood is, is moving slowly and inexorably toward New Orleans and so when the city fills with water, it has nothing to do with the Mississippi River at all, it's just a big rainstorm.

Narrator: Although the Mississippi posed no immediate threat to New Orleans, the mere prospect of a river flood had sent the city into a tailspin. Local wholesalers already had slashed their prices in a desperate effort to unload inventories. Anxious residents, meanwhile, were building boats, withdrawing huge sums from the banks, scrambling to get out of town.

The storm and the pump failure had served only to ratchet up the hysteria -- and now, the city's investors were getting jumpy. By the close of business on Good Friday, most of the bankers in town, including Butler, had received urgent wires from New York and elsewhere demanding assurances as to the city's safety.

Source 3

Looking back at the blasting of the Mississippi River levee at Caernarvon
By The Times-Picayune



For weeks that spring, panicked New Orleanians watched the water rise in the river... Concerned businessmen successfully lobbied for cutting through the Caernarvon levee, near the site of a natural levee break in 1922, to ease pressure on levees upriver in New Orleans, where water had begun seeping through in several spots.

An estimated 10,000 people living in St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes were evacuated before a series of explosions cut through the levee on April 29. Spectators from New Orleans whose connections allowed them to get passes were among those who witnessed the event, traveling to the spot by boat, car or airplane. One photographer stood atop the levee to get a shot of water carving away at the artificial crevasse.

The roar of the water could be heard a mile away, according to a story in the May 1, 1927, Times-Picayune.

The 1927 flood killed nearly 250 people, but a major disaster in New Orleans was averted. Few property owners from St. Bernard or Plaquemines were ever compensated.

Source 4

Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood Of 1927

The Plaquemines Parish and St Bernard Parish flooding in 1927 was manmade. A clique of bankers decided to protect New Orleans from flooding by breaking the levee south of New Orleans and inundate St. Bernard and Plaquemines parish, home to muskrat trappers and bootleggers. The city leaders promised to reimburse the people they flooded out, but they didn't. They manipulated the laws and courts so people reporting damages had no recourse.

1. What areas were flooded by the great flood of 1927?

2. What areas did not flood that lie on the Mississippi River as based on the map?

3. What did New Orleans have in place to protect themselves from such a flood?

4. Did this safety measure work? Explain why or why not

5. What measure did the people of New Orleans implement in order to stop New Orleans from flooding?

- Who wanted this measure to be implemented and why?

- Who was inevitably affected by protecting New Orleans?

6. What were the people downriver promised in compensation for protecting New Orleans and did they receive it?

Independent Practice

7. What was needed in order to keep New Orleans protected and what consequences are contributed to these changes?

