



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI®**

# DISASTER STORIES: USING THE STORIES OF THE PAST TO INFLUENCE THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

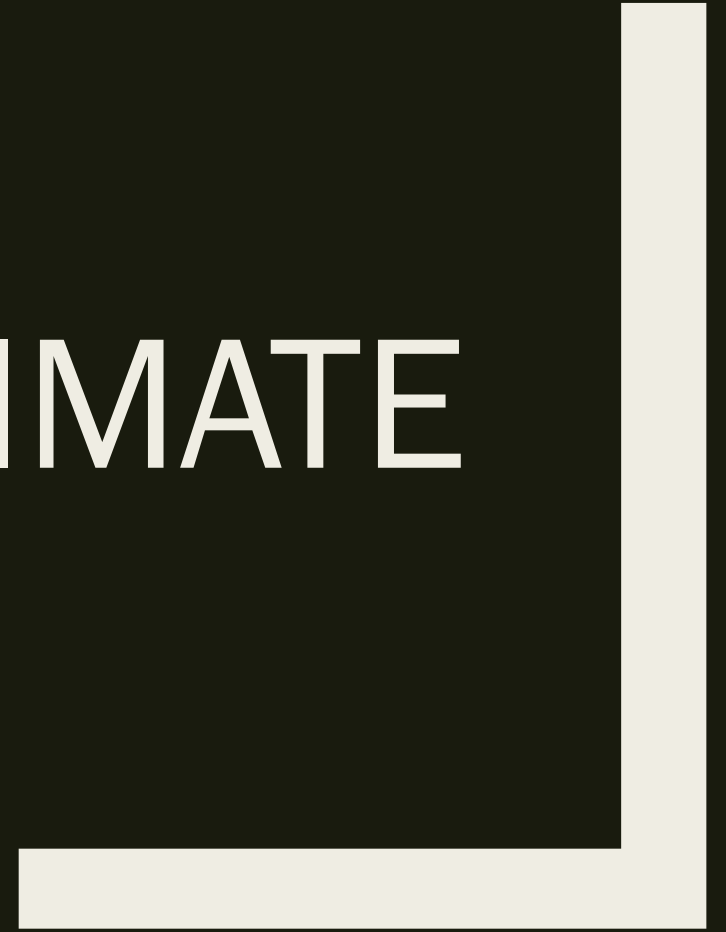
Dr. Jeff Hirschy

# Introduction

- Stories have lessons.
- Archives and Libraries have multiple stories in them. Some about disasters.
- Learning about some of those stories, especially the ones that revolve around disasters, can show us lessons that still need to be learned or in some situations relearned.
- This can be seen by looking at disasters surrounding Climate, Disease, and Racism.

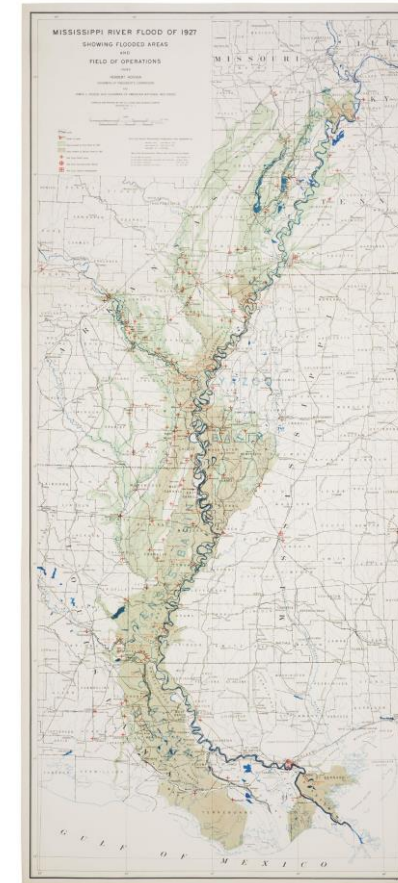
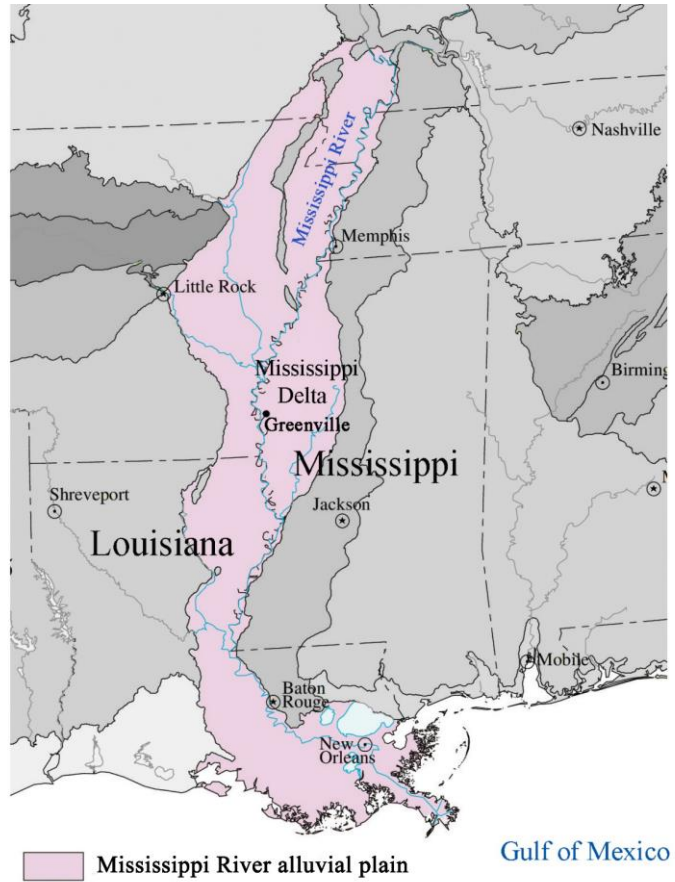


CLIMATE



# Great Mississippi Flood of 1927

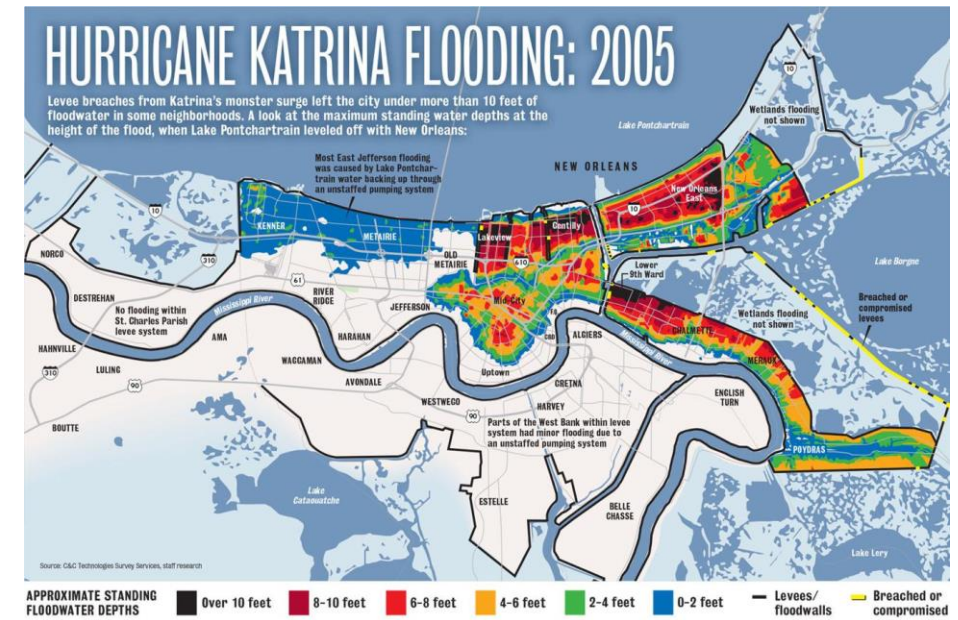
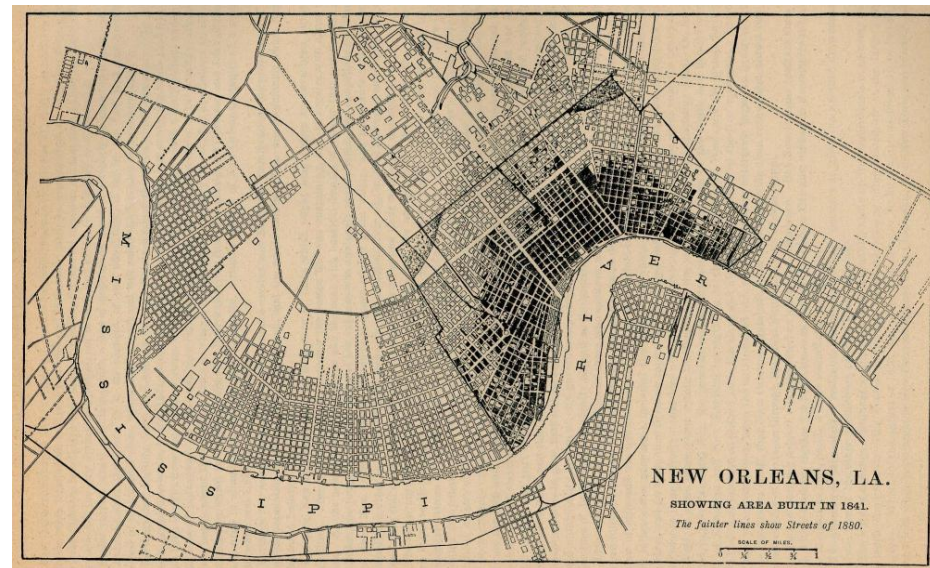
- For centuries, Americans and their governments knew that flooding occurred along the Mississippi.
  - *For example, the first levees were built in the New Orleans area in the aftermath of a Hurricane in the 18th century.*
- Even through this knowledge existed, only the most basic of efforts were put in.
- Eventually, this came back to haunt the people of the lower Mississippi valley when it rained and rained and rained in the summer of 1926.
- This rain would eventually lead to the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927.
  - *Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced.*
  - *For example, 13 thousand people were left on a levee near Greenville, Mississippi.*



# New Orleans and it's march to Hurricane Katrina

- When New Orleans was founded in 1718, it was founded on a small bluff overlooking the Mississippi River.
- This bluff gave this original part of the city a stronger level of protection against floods and storms than other areas in the area. (This did not mean this area was 100% safe.)
- This pattern of settlement existed until 1915 in the aftermath of a storm that year.
  - *Wetlands protected New Orleans. They then decided to destroy those wetlands.*







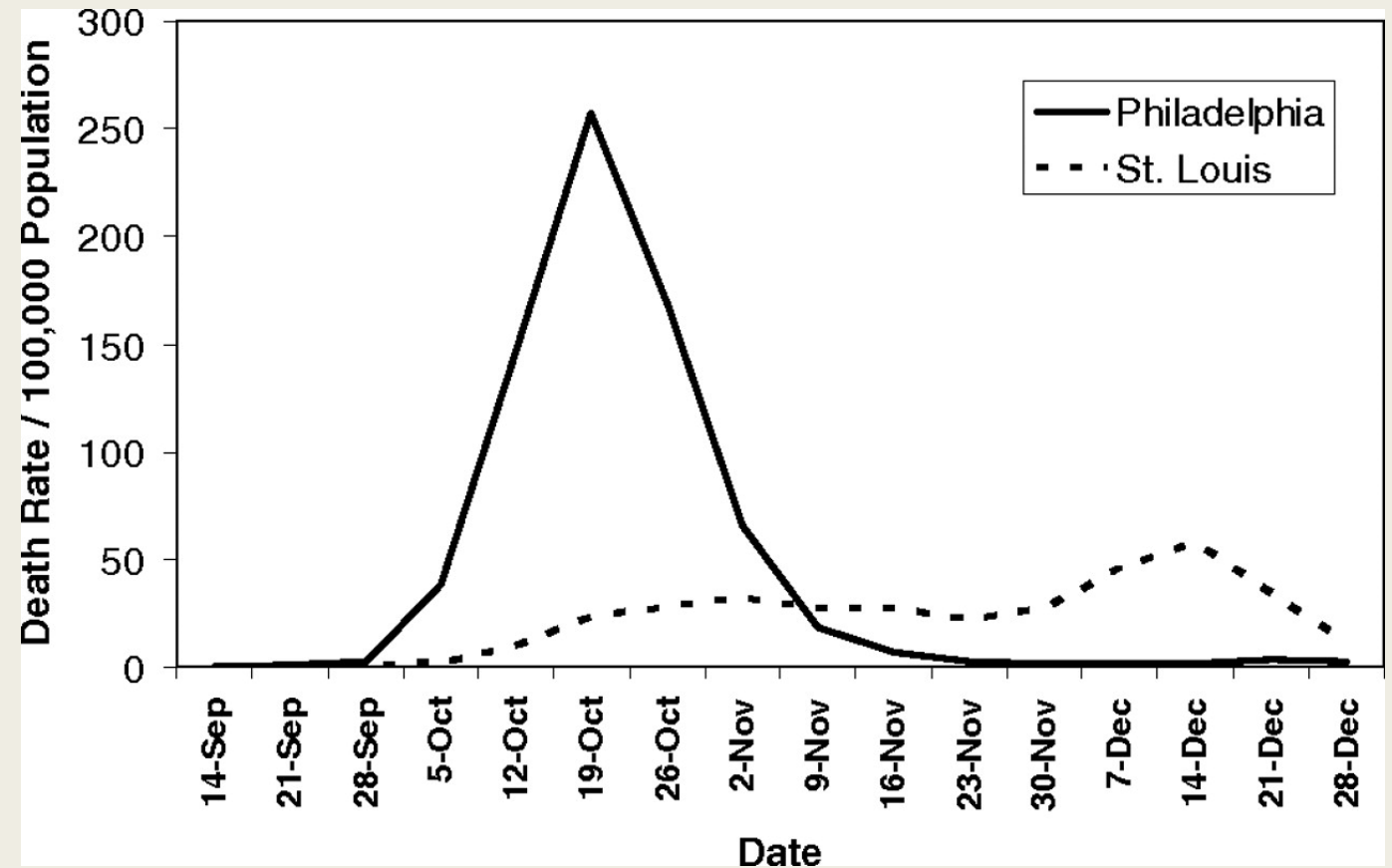


DISEASE



# The Spanish Flu (Actually the Kansas Flu)

- Between 1918-1920, the version of influenza known as the Spanish Flu swept across the world killing around 50,000,000 people.
- In the United States, various people argued for against measures that could protect Americans from the virus.
- Philadelphia vs. St. Louis.



# A FIGHT AGAINST INFLUENZA MASKS

San Francisco, Jan. 18.—Representatives of organizations of citizens opposed to the mask-wearing ordinance which was passed as a measure to check influenza, met last night and formed the Anti-Mask League. The announced purpose of the League is to "oppose by all lawful means" the compulsory wearing of masks.

# WEAR A MASK AND SAVE YOUR LIFE!

The Emergency That Now Confronts Our City  
Is Beyond the Facilities of the Health Department



The RED CROSS



has come to the assistance of the Board of Health. Doctors and nurses can not be obtained to take care of the afflicted. You must wear a mask, not only to protect yourself but your children and your neighbor from influenza, pneumonia and death.

**"FLIP" MASKS  
CAN EASILY BE  
MADE AT HOME.**  
The Oakland Chapter of the Red Cross is now making and distributing these masks. They are made of gauze and are held in place by a rubber band. They are easy to wear and are effective in protecting the wearer from influenza and pneumonia.

**A GAUZE MASK IS 99%  
PROOF AGAINST INFLUENZA**

Doctors wear them. Those who do not wear them get sick. The man or woman or child who will not wear a mask now is a dangerous slacker.

**DIRECTIONS  
FOR USING  
"FLIP" MASK**  
Mask should be worn with the nose and mouth covered. It should be held in place by the rubber band. It should be changed frequently and washed after each use. It should be worn at all times when in public places.

**WEAR MASKS** GOING TO WORK  
AT WORK  
GOING HOME  
AT HOME

This statement was authorized at a meeting of the undersigned, who are convinced that it is the only way to stamp out the epidemic. You must do your part

**Alameda County Relief Committee**

County of Alameda	Oakland Chapter American Red Cross	Associated Charities
City of Oakland	Oakland Clearing House Association	Retail Dry Goods Association
Board of Health of Oakland	Oakland Chamber of Commerce	





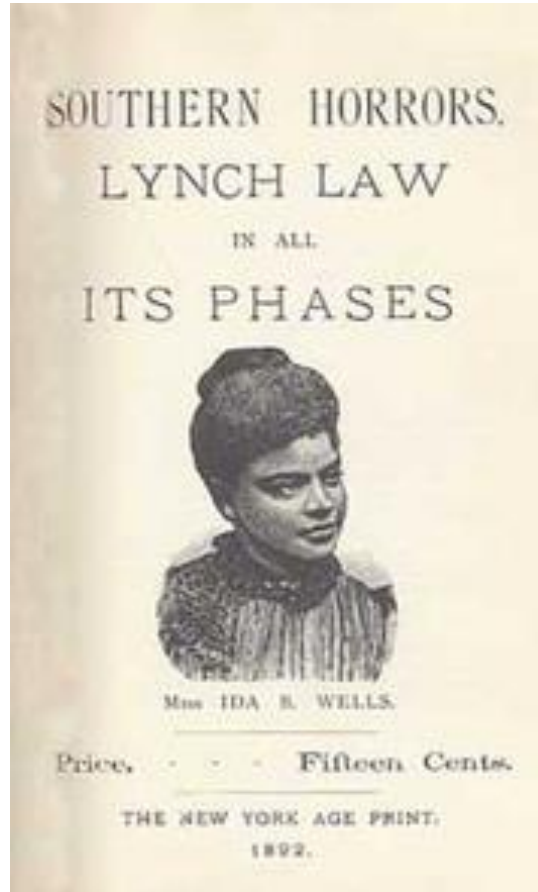


RACISM



# This has happened before.

- In 2020, we all witnessed the murder of George Floyd via a video taken by a witness on their cell phone.
- This video, and the crime it caught, sparked a worldwide reckoning against violence directed towards African-Americans by agents of the state and by individuals.
- But, this has happened before:
  - *In the 1890s, the crusading African-American journalist Ida B. Wells wrote Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases. This book chronicled and told the stories of lynchings across the American South.*





# Conclusions

- Stories have lessons.
- It's important we listen to those lessons
- Three lessons:
  - *Climate: Respect and Protect Nature.*
  - *Disease: We are still having the same fights.*
  - *Racism: 2020 has happened before.*
- We should take the time to listen as both people and archival professionals.





ANY  
QUESTIONS?