

Water, water every where: The legacy of the 1927 flood of the Mississippi River and Hurricane Katrina

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OFFICE HOURS: Posted on website
And by appointment (Really!)
READINGS: *Rising Tide* by John Barry
Lanterns on the Levee by Will Percy
Others on reserve

Overview

The spring of 1927 was exceptionally wet in the eastern United States, with one storm dropping six to fifteen inches of rain over several hundred thousand square miles in a single day. Six days later, the levee of the Mississippi River broke at Mounds Landing, releasing a wall of water three quarters of a mile wide and over 100 feet deep into the Mississippi Delta. This single crevasse eventually flooded an area over 50 miles wide and 100 miles long and covered houses 75 miles away. In total, over 27,000 square miles were flooded, an area roughly equal to Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont combined. Approximately 700,000 people were displaced throughout the lower Mississippi valley at tremendous human cost to those who could least afford it. Seventy-eight years later, southern Mississippi and Louisiana were ravaged by Hurricane Katrina, again with devastating consequences.

In this course, we will study the circumstances surrounding both of these catastrophes and examine how the events in 1927 foreshadowed the tragedies that unfolded three quarters of a century later when Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast. There are several questions we will focus on during the semester:

- What human decisions amplified the destructive power of these natural disasters?
- What societal and economic factors not only contributed to the calamities but also shaped the nation's response to the disasters?
- How did individuals respond during these disasters, and what was the context for their actions?
- What are our societal and individual responsibilities to similar events in the future?

I'm really looking forward to the semester, and I think we'll all learn a lot from each other this fall.

Course Goals and Expectations

This is an important year for you as you make the transition to Wheaton. We will not only focus on the specific content of the course, but also talk about some of the resources and attributes of Wheaton that will be very important to you during your four years here, such as the Library, the Honor Code, the curriculum, and the large number of academic and non-academic extracurricular opportunities.

Since this is a discussion based class, it is *extremely* important that you complete all of the readings before class. As a general rule, you should expect to spend at least two hours outside of class for every hour in class. This means that you should schedule at least six hours per week outside of class on for work on this class. Some weeks may have heavier workload (e.g. if a paper is due), but you should plan on this amount of work at a minimum.

I have posted a tentative syllabus on the course webpage. I am intentionally leaving some flexibility in the latter part of the semester so that we can pursue additional topics or directions that you find interesting during the semester.

Evaluation

Your final grade will be determined by

Paper #1	10%
Paper #2	15%
Paper #3	20%
Documentary	25%
Reading responses	14%
Class participation	10%
Wheaton Culture points	6%

The Honor Code

Remember that we are operating under the Honor Code for all of your academic work while you are at Wheaton. I take this quite seriously. This carries freedoms and responsibilities for both you as students and me as the professor. The best approach is to avoid any situation where there is a temptation to violate the Honor Code. Or if you find yourself in such a position, you should remove yourself from it. We will also discuss what is meant by plagiarism and acceptable ways to cite references on papers.

Remember that you should write out, and sign, the following statement on all course work:

“I have abided by the Wheaton College Honor Code in this work.”

Papers and Documentary

I will hand out specific directions for each of the papers and the documentary. For each of the larger projects (Papers #2 and #3 and the Documentary), I will give you the directions at least a month before the due date, and we will review preliminary versions of your projects before the final assignment is due. In very general terms, the assignments are:

Paper #1	What you currently know about Hurricane Katrina
Paper #2	A social, political, economic, or policy-related aspect of the 1927 flood that you choose to explore in more depth than is covered in the assigned readings
Paper #3	Your analysis of the similarities between the 1927 flood and Katrina, and what you believe we can learn from the events
Documentary	This project will be completed by groups of three students. Each group will create a documentary using iMovie that explores the effects of Hurricane Katrina on a specific community along the Gulf Coast.

Reading and viewing responses

One of the most important skills you will develop during your years at Wheaton is the ability to critically analyze what you read and see and to reflect on the connections with other materials. The most important aspect of your class preparation is that you complete the reading and/or viewing assignments and consider what you want to explore during the class discussions.

To help encourage this, you will fill out a short questionnaire on the reading through Wheaton onCourse (<https://oncourse.wheatoncollege.edu/>) before (almost) every class meeting. The guidelines are:

- Do **not** try to summarize the reading.
- Identify two or three points that you found particularly interesting and would like to discuss during class. Give a sentence or two explaining why you found these points interesting.
- Identify any thought-provoking ideas that you found which are related to other topics we have read or discussed.
- Your responses to each question should be fairly short, probably in the one to two paragraph range.
- Your responses are due **at 7:30 on the day of the class meeting**. This will give me an opportunity to review your responses before class, and you can view the responses of other students after you have completed your submission.

These responses should not be viewed as a burden, but instead should be viewed as a mechanism to help you focus your energies in preparing for class. Plus, this will make the class discussions much more relevant for you.

Class participation

Since the vast majority of the class will consist of discussions, I expect everyone to participate in the class discussions. Your participation will make the course richer for both you and your fellow students.

Wheaton Culture Points

Wheaton is a very vibrant, rich community with a tremendous number of extracurricular events, both academic and non-academic. To encourage you to take advantage of the various opportunities on campus, 6% of your grade consists of attending 6 extracurricular events during the semester. You must attend at least:

- 2+ Public lectures
- 1+ Performing arts event
- 1 Athletic event
- 2 Other lectures, performances, or activities

Within a week of attending the event, you need to fill out a questionnaire in onCourse with the title of the event, what you enjoyed about the event, what you think could have been improved, and whether or not you think you will attend similar events in the future.

If you are not certain whether or not a particular event is appropriate for a WCP, just ask.

Getting Help

Please come see me during my office hours! This is why I have them scheduled!

If you have a conflict and cannot make my office hours, please call or email me and we can set up an appointment for another time.

Also, please use the Preceptors (Tracey Lally, Rachel Hacunda, and Tanya Aritao) and our Administrative Mentor (Lora Sharpe) for advice on all things Wheaton as well. Their experiences at Wheaton are another wonderful resource for you. Plus, they're really nice people.