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ON THE INSIDE:

Campus News Page 2

World News Page 3

Campus Features Page 4

Meredith Sports Page 5

Meredith Opinions Page 7

Advertisements Page 8

Meredith's Weekly Weather

THURSDAY
Mostly Sunny
High 88/ Low 64

FRIDAY
Sunny
High 91/ Low 64

SATURDAY
Sunny
High 91/ Low 65

SUNDAY
Mostly Sunny
High 87/ Low 64

MONDAY
Sunny
High 90/ Low 66

TUESDAY
Mostly Sunny
High 89/ Low 67

WEDNESDAY
Mostly Cloudy
High 89/ Low 67

Hurricane Katrina: The Worst Natural Disaster the U.S. has Ever Faced

RACHEL McELWAIN
Staff Writer

When hurricane Katrina made landfall in Florida as a category one storm last week, no one could have predicted the disaster to come. After spending the weekend strengthening in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, Hurricane Katrina reached category five status on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale by Sunday evening, as it moved steadily towards the coast of Louisiana. Making landfall on Monday around 6 a.m., Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast as a category four hurricane with sustained winds of 145 mph and 20-foot storm surges. The storm devastated the Mississippi cities of Biloxi and Gulfport, causing the highest death toll in Harrison County's history. Katrina's initial effect on New Orleans, while catastrophic, was not nearly as devastating as the damage could have been had the city

suffered a direct hit. Nevertheless, by 11:00 a.m. Monday, the raging waters of Lake Ponchartrain, a lake that neighbors the city, breached two of the city's most important levees, submerging 80% of the city with water 20 feet deep in some areas. Integral parts of the city's hurricane protection system, the levees were only designed to withstand the effects of a category three storm.

Although New Orleans did issue an evacuation order, thousands of residents did not have the means to leave the city. Those who did not seek refuge in shelters were left waiting in their homes for help, in many cases unaided. Over 20,000 people sought refuge at the Superdome and upwards of 25,000 at the city's Convention Center. Yet the two structures suffered great damage, and conditions quickly deteriorated for those hoping to escape the storm. Food and water have been scarce, and



Photo Courtesy of www.CNN.com

Hurricane victim searches for food and shelter through the flooded city of New Orleans.

with no electricity or water pressure, combined with the late summer heat, conditions for refugees have been unbearable.

Thousands of troops have slowly been making their way into the flooded city, helping to speed up the evacuation process while also protecting the citizens from the bands of looters that appeared in the city almost immediately following Katrina's departure. By Saturday evening, all of the refugees at the Superdome and Convention Center had been evacuated by bus and air, and the last 200 patients at Charity Hospital were taken by the truckload to seek medical care outside of the city. As the main refuge centers in New Orleans emptied, the focus shifted towards rescuing those still stranded across the city and claiming the bodies of the dead. Houston's Astrodome is now the home of some 15,000 New Orleans evacuees, and two other shelters were set up nearby to house

up to 26,000 people. Shelters have been set up all over the surrounding area in efforts to find housing for the refugees, most of whom have lost everything. FEMA has chartered three Carnival cruise ships to be docked in Galveston, Texas, to house as many as 7,000 refugees over a six-month period.

President Bush visited storm struck areas of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana on Friday and began efforts to increase the security of New Orleans and speed up the evacuation of the city so that the rebuilding process can begin. The US Army Corps of Engineers has estimated that it will take over a month to pump water out of the flooded city, and could take up to 3 months to completely dry. All told, the death toll from Hurricane Katrina will undoubtedly reach into the thousands, with an exact figure taking weeks to calculate as the search and recovery mission continues.



Photo Courtesy of www.CNN.com
Building collapses onto stranded vehicles during Hurricane Katrina in downtown New Orleans.