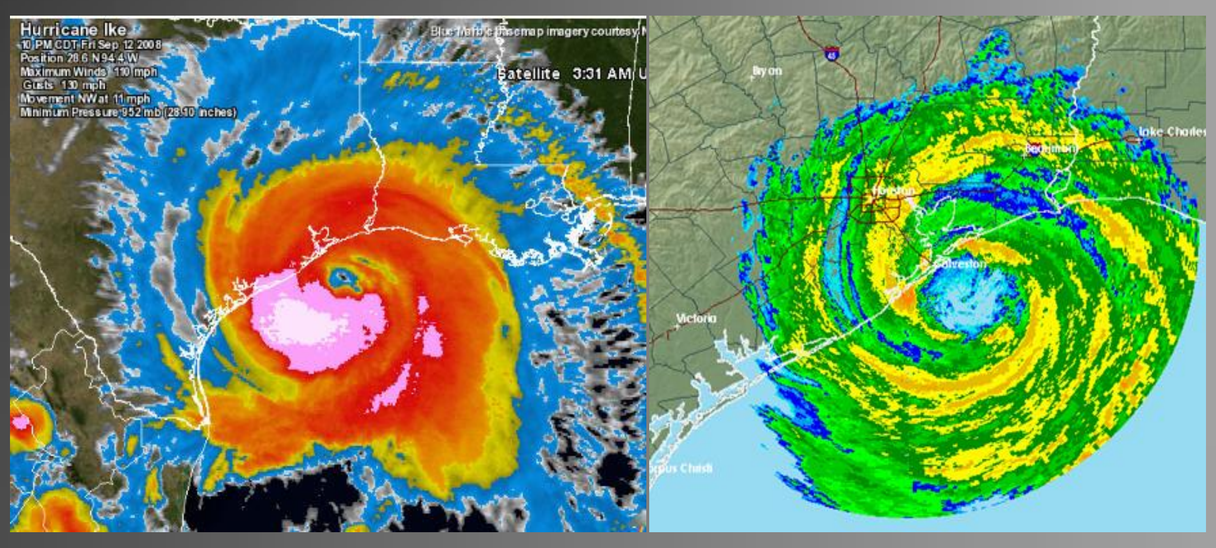
HURRICANE IKE

"It was like an atomic bomb going off. Right after the eye passed, whole houses came by us at 30 miles an hour — WHOLE HOUSES! — just floating right past. It was unreal. Unreal."
–Willis Turner, Galveston, Texas Survivor



Colorized infrared satellite image (left) and NWS Doppler radar reflectivity image (right) of Hurricane Ike as it made landfall near Galveston, TX.

Development and Path

Hurricane Ike developed off the western coast of Sudan on August 19, 2008. Because of its origin along the western African coast, Ike was classified as a Cape Verde-type hurricane. It tracked across the Atlantic Ocean until it became a tropical storm on September 1 and was given the name Ike. By that time, it was only 1,400 miles east of the Leeward Islands, traveling at 16 mph with sustained winds of 50 mph. Deep convection continued to intensify the storm, and by September 3 Ike had sustained winds of 135 mph. As such, it was officially classified as a major Category 4 Hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson hurricane intensity scale, the scale's second highest rating.

Ike would reach its peak intensity at 145 mph on September 4, proceeding to lower and rise in intensity as it made landfall twice in Cuba before entering the Gulf of Mexico on September 9. Ike made landfall in Galveston, Texas on September 13 as a high Category 2 hurricane with winds of 110 mph. From Texas, it made a slow turn towards the northeast, passing over Louisiana and Arkansas before merging with a cold front in the central U.S. on September 14.

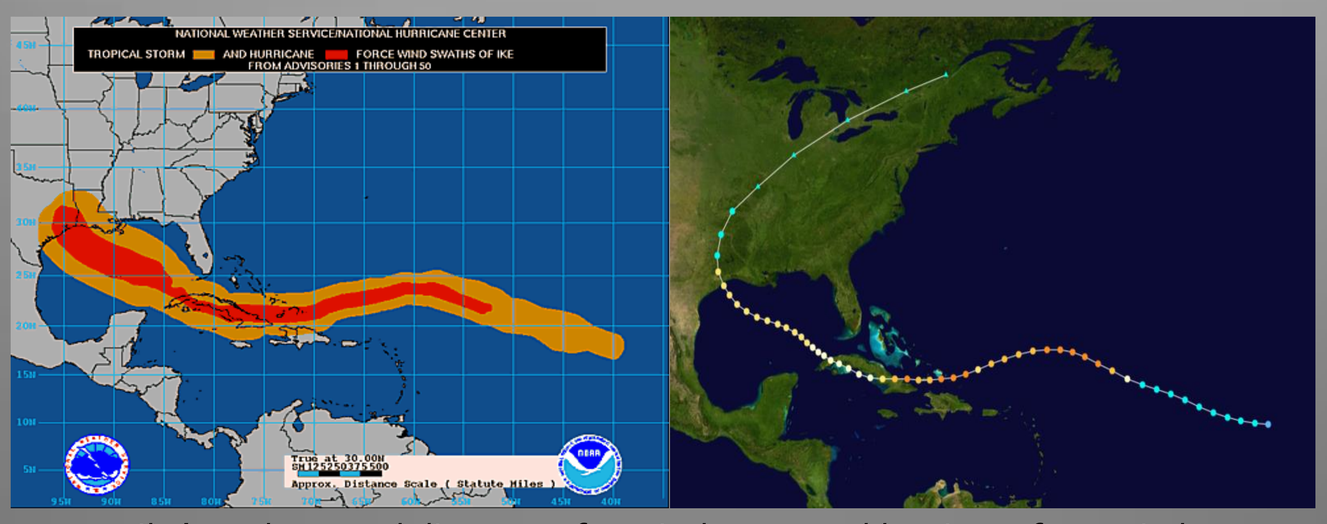
Damages & Aftermath

Despite being issued an evacuation warning, many of the citizens of Galveston chose not to evacuate, as the town had been through many such hurricanes before. Unfortunately, by the time they realized the danger, Ike had cut off escape routes to the mainland. Ike's true danger was not its Category rating but its unusually large wind field, with tropical storm force winds extending 275 miles out from the center, and hurricane force winds extending out 120 miles. This caused a storm surge comparable to a more intense Category 4 hurricane. It brought torrential rainfall (18.9"), flooding, wind damage, and even some tornadoes. Even after the eye of the storm passed, Galveston was pelted by rainfall and strong winds two days after. Though slightly less dramatic, the damage extended to much of Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas.

The aftermath of Ike showed the true devastation of the storm, as 2.6 million homes were without power. Beaches, harbors, houses, and roads were destroyed. And several oil refineries were wrecked causing an increase in gas prices.

Facts, Figures, & Impact

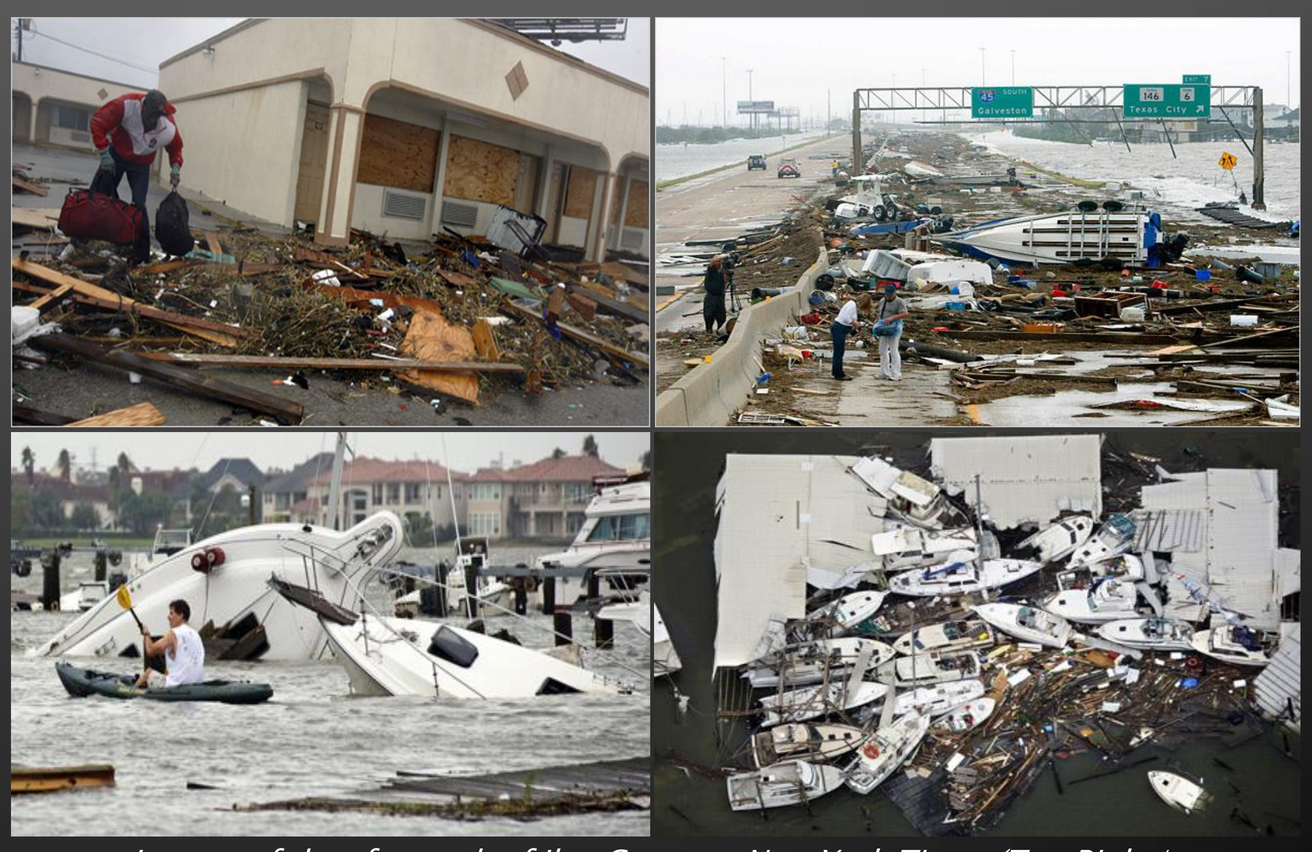
- Third costliest storm in Western Hemisphere ($37.5 billion) (as of Spring 2013)
- Pressure and sustained wind at Texas landfall: 953 mb and 110 mph (Max sustained winds 145 mph over open water)
- Maximum storm surge height: Approximately 15-20 feet in Bolivar Peninsula, TX
- Largest Search and Rescue operation in United States history
- Caused damage from Louisiana to Texas, but fell hardest on Cuba and Galveston, Texas.
- Resulted in 112 U.S. deaths (192 total), with 23 people still missing (as of December 2012)



Ike's pathway and diameter of tropical storm and hurricane force winds. Courtesy of New York Times and NOAA

"The unfortunate truth is we're going to have to go in ... and put our people in the tough situation to save people who did not choose wisely. We'll probably do the largest search-and-rescue operation that's ever been conducted in the state of Texas."
–Andrew Barlow, spokesman for Gov. Rick Perry.

"Every storm's unique, but this one certainly will be remembered for its size."
– Benton McGee, supervisory hydrologist at the U.S. Geological Survey in Ruston, Louisiana.



Images of the aftermath of Ike: Courtesy New York Times (Top Right/ Bottom Left) and National Geographic (Top Left/Bottom Right)

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