

America's Challenge: Two Hundred Years of River Management

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The Mississippi River has witnessed the full range of river management strategies and serves as the focus for this review of efforts to provide flood protection and potable water to communities along the lower river. Initial flood protection efforts rested with individuals who employed architecture and safe building locations. As population along the lower river increased, a "levees only" policy that relied on structures replaced the more resilient techniques. Following the massive flood of 1927, the Corps of Engineers added a redundant flood protection system of floodways. Efforts to control hurricane driven flooding followed a similar shift from resilient land use and architectural devices to rigid levees. After the hurricane of 1965, levee enlargements replaced any resilient methods. These levees, still incomplete in 2005, failed. After a century of using the Mississippi River as a giant sink for municipal and industrial wastes, various strategies to reduce biological wastes, chemical wastes, and most recently agricultural runoff have lessened pollution, but not restored the river to the targets of the 1972 Clean Water Act.