

Student Reading:
Tragedy in Puerto Rico

On September 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria struck the island of Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States whose residents are American citizens. The hurricane caused massive destruction across the island, creating a crisis for millions of people. According to [Scientific American](#):

Hurricane Maria's destruction on Puerto Rico could spawn one of the largest mass migration events in the United States' recent history, experts say, as tens of thousands of storm victims flee the island territory to rebuild their lives on the U.S. mainland. "Whether that migration will be permanent or temporary is still anyone's guess," Garcia added. "Much depends on the relief package that Congress negotiates."

[Public Radio International](#) reported on the many Puerto Rican college students who have moved to the mainland to continue their education.

Puerto Rico was already losing population because of its economic challenges before Hurricane Maria. ... The devastation wrought by Maria is expected to accelerate that exodus. And the wave of new arrivals to the mainland could be considered environmental migrants because of the role of climate change in making hurricanes more intense. This environmental migration is likely to only make Puerto Rico's economic problems worse.

It's been known for a long time that Puerto Rico was vulnerable to the violent storms that are becoming more and more frequent as the climate warms. [Slate](#) reports:

"These storms are big, islands are small; if they get a direct hit it can overcome the entire place," said John Mutter, a professor of earth and environmental sciences and of international and public affairs at Columbia University. "If all the first responders are unable to respond because the whole place is trashed, it creates a whole new level of disaster."

Poor communities are always hit the hardest in events like this, Mutter said. In the case of Puerto Rico—where nearly half the population is below the poverty level, the territory has no vote in Congress, and Texas and Florida are [competing] ... with the territory for limited federal disaster resources—inequity in recovery could be [made worse]

"This is not a one-off event," Georges Benjamin of the American Public Health Association, said. "We are going to see more of these. We ought to contribute to their recovery much more than we have done in the past, just as we plan to do in Texas and Florida."