

Closing the U.S.'s Premier Port

This map of tonnage handled in U.S. ocean and inland ports, shows the large volume of freight shipped through the various Gulf of Mexico seaports in Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama. By weight, most of this is bulk commodities, including grains and chemicals, as well as petroleum products. For example, some 60% of U.S. grain exports go through Gulf ports, now disabled. More than 18% of the nation's oil imports come through one port alone—Louisiana's Port Fourchon, not expected to be fully operational for well into September. And Gulfport, Miss. is a specialized entrepot for fruit imports.

Of the top 15 ports in the nation, in order of tonnage

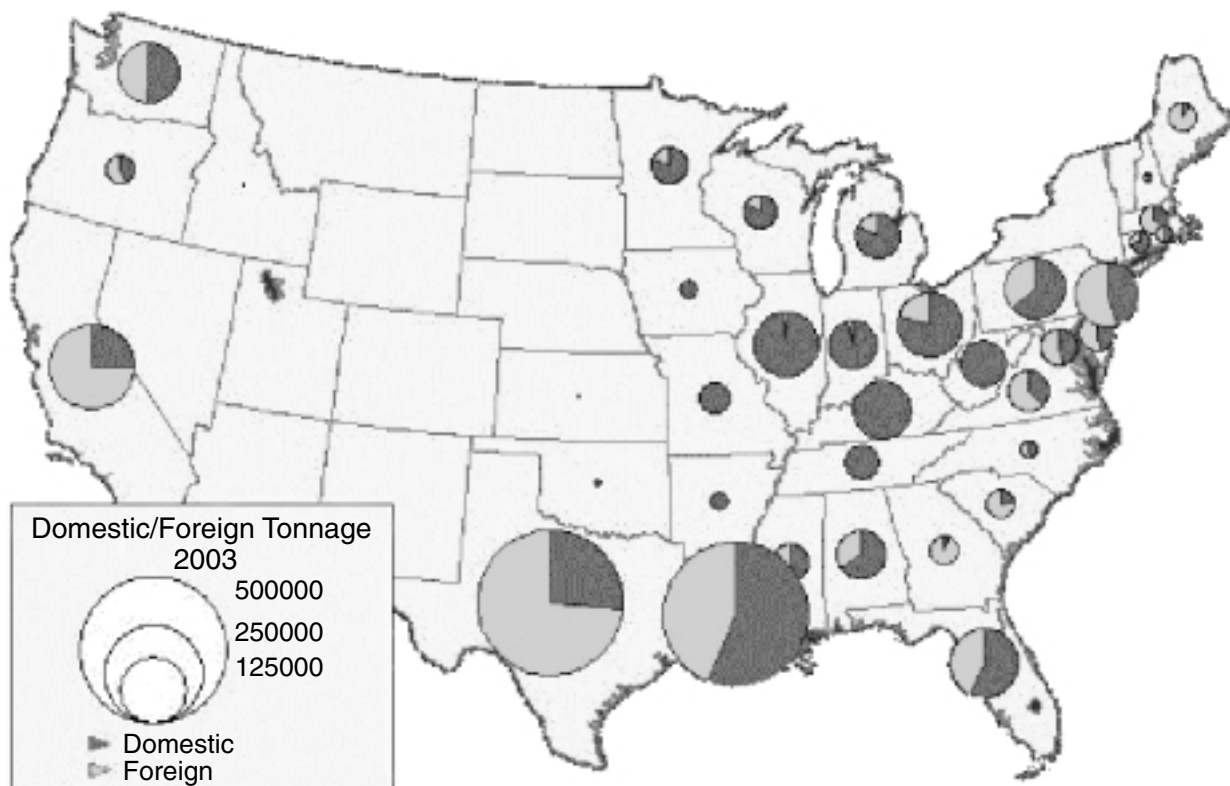
handled, 5 are in this region as follows (with rank noted): Port of South Louisiana (1), New Orleans (5), Baton Rouge (10), and Plaquemines (11)—all in Louisiana—and Mobile, Ala. (14). Pascagoula, Miss. ranks 22. These six ports were all shut down by Hurricane Katrina. Only Mobile was able to open relatively soon after the hurricane.

This high concentration of shipping through Gulf ports serves the great natural inland waterway system of the Mississippi, Ohio, Missouri, and Tennessee River basins, connecting with the Gulf of Mexico, and thence ocean-bound. It also reflects the recent decades of concentration of shipping, refining, and processing in a relatively few geographic areas that are chosen by commodity cartels and financial backers.

The role of formerly important secondary ports, serving regional hinterlands, such as Baltimore, on the Chesapeake Bay, has been accordingly reduced. Therefore, the nation's commodity flows have been rendered more vulnerable to disruption—which was exactly what happened with Hurricane Katrina.

The Gulf Ports of Louisiana and Texas Rank Highest in Tonnage Shipped, of all U.S. Ports

Domestic and Foreign Waterborne Tonnage (short tons)



Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Institute of Water Resources, EIR