

## STORMS AND RECOVERY

## Landscape of Shredded Trees, Blown-Out Windows and Murky Floodwater

## In Assessing Damage, Plenty of Questions

By LUIS FERRÉ-SADURNÍ

SAN JUAN, P.R. — Power was knocked out across Puerto Rico on Wednesday and communications were scarce, but all residents had to do to witness the state of their island was step outside and survey their homes, barrios and towns.

From San Juan to Humacao to Cayey, residents emerged from their battered homes and hurricane shelters to find an island paradise left a wreck by Hurricane Maria.

The Condado area of San Juan, a coastal tourist district which has had an economic boom in recent years, resembled a beachside battlefield.

Ashford Avenue was littered with fallen trees and power lines, the sidewalks blanketed with sand swept inland.

Maria's gusts had blasted out many windows of the condominiums along the promenade, leaving apartments exposed to the elements. The glass lobby of the Mirador del Condado apartment building had shattered. The orange tiles of the new Vanderbilt Hotel littered the streets. The roof of Buns, a popular burger joint, was mostly crumpled.

"It's total destruction," said Angie Mok, a resident whose apartment was flooded with ankle-high water.

People tuned into the only radio station broadcasting on the entire island, desperate for information. On the street, a woman inquired about the curfew, confused about the exact hours.

"Is it safe to venture out of San Juan?" she asked.

In Old San Juan, the colonial section of the city, people trickled outside to sit on benches and stoops at the Plaza de Armas, one of the main squares.

Some uprooted trees had blocked the narrow cobblestone streets at Plaza de la Catedral. Colorful red and orange plaster had peeled from some buildings, leaving brick exposed. The abandoned building on the corner in front of the San Cristobal Castle had come down.

"Was it a Category 4 or 5 that hit

us?" Cristina Cardalda asked from a stoop.

Ms. Cardalda had just hung up the phone, the first time she had gotten any sort of signal. It was a worried cousin from Florida. Ms. Cardalda, 55, had taken refuge at her sister's apartment in Old San Juan. She didn't know the state of her own apartment in Ocean Park. Nor did she know that her neighborhood had severely flooded and that people were traveling its streets in kayaks.

"I haven't heard anything from anyone," she said. "I don't even want to call my neighbors to ask."

People knew only of the damages they could see firsthand. Little did they know of the inundated coastal towns, the flooded highways, the mudslides in the interior or the entire swaths of the island that nobody had heard from since Maria hit.

The once-lush landscape on Route 187 on the way to the beach town of Loíza was now barren. Low pasture lands along the road were drowning in murky waters.

Hundreds of cars lined the streets leading to gas stations. They were mostly seeking diesel to fill red containers they would use to fuel their generators back home.

In Loíza, one of the poorest towns in the island, many people live — or lived — in wooden homes with zinc roofs. Last week, Hurricane Irma left about 80 families without a roof.

But Maria left entire neighborhoods under waist-deep waters. The hurricane's downpour overflowed the Espiritu Santo River, transforming the streets of the Medianía Alto barrio into canals accessible only with watercraft or military-grade trucks.

Many in two-story, concrete homes took refuge on their upper floors. But several hundred residents were evacuated on Thursday as the contaminated waters submerged homes.

Four residents scouted the flooded streets on a white rowboat. A truck called the Pink Panther plowed through the inundated roads to evacuate about a dozen people. Residents said that overnight, they had evacuated



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIKA P. RODRIGUEZ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Damage from the hurricane was widespread across Puerto Rico, including a collapsed building, above, in Old San Juan, and a flooded home in Loíza, at right. As one woman put it, "It's total destruction."

children and bedridden people on Jet Skis and kayaks as the water continued to rise in the dark. Still, many refused to leave.

An old man stood on the roof of his two-story home and swept rubble into the waters around him. Families peered from balconies as rescuers toured the flooded neighborhood for stragglers.

Even when told about flash floods that could still be coming their way, residents insisted on staying. A man standing on the roof of another house shook his head and said:

"Why? The worst has already passed."



## Ex-Patriots Player Jailed for Murder Had Severe Case of a Brain Disease

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Gifford. Mr. Seau — along with Dave Duerson, Andre Waters and Ray Easterling, among others — killed himself.

For years, Mr. Hernandez was held up as a particularly egregious example of N.F.L. players running amok off the field.

Just 10 months after he signed a \$40 million contract with the Patriots in 2013, with the promise of becoming a superstar, the body of a friend who had been shot multiple times was discovered. Mr. Hernandez was convicted of the friend's murder, and later accused in two other killings from 2012. Just days after an acquittal in that case, he hanged himself with a bedsheet in his prison cell.

The researchers did not make a direct link between Mr. Hernandez's violence and his disease.

But C.T.E. is often marked by problems with controlling aggression and impulses, and some degree of dementia, as well as mood swings, lapses in judgment and a disorganized manner.

Mr. Hernandez's estate filed a federal lawsuit on Thursday against the N.F.L. and the Patriots seeking damages to compensate his 4-year-old daughter for the loss of her father. The suit alleges that the league and the team knew that repeated head hits could lead to brain disease, yet did not do enough to protect Mr. Hernandez from those hits.

The lawyer, Jose Baez, said the family was also contemplating suing the N.C.A.A. and the University of Florida, where Mr. Hernandez played before playing for the Patriots.

The N.F.L. did not comment on the medical finding, and it declined to comment on the suit. The Patriots declined to comment. Soon after his arrest in 2013, the team distanced itself from him, buying back more than 1,200 Hernandez jerseys from fans.

The trauma to Mr. Hernandez's brain raises fresh questions about the dangers of playing tackle football. This week, other researchers at Boston University published research that found that adults who began playing tackle football before they were 12 years old developed more cognitive and behavioral problems later in life than those players who started tackle football after they reached that age.

Mr. Hernandez played football



POOL PHOTO BY STEVEN SENNE

Aaron Hernandez during his 2015 murder trial. He was serving a life sentence when he hanged himself in his cell in April.

as a teenager, and in 2013 was given the Inspiration to Youth Award by Pop Warner, the best-known youth football organization in the country.

The fact that Mr. Hernandez also led a troubled life off the field will complicate the N.F.L.'s efforts to calm jitters about the sport because it will probably make some people wonder whether football had a role in his violence away from the game.

Mr. Baez said that in hindsight,

## A new turn in the meteoric rise and fall of a 27-year-old star.

Mr. Hernandez's family had witnessed him act in ways that were consistent with a person found to have C.T.E., "but you don't know."

The slides of Mr. Hernandez's brain samples were unambiguous and graphic.

Dr. Ann McKee, chief of neuropathology at the VA Boston Healthcare System and director of the CTE Center at Boston University, examined his brain and said in a statement that Mr. Hernandez had "early brain atrophy" and "large perforations in the septum pellucidum, a central membrane" of the brain. The slides also showed what she called "classic features of C.T.E. in the brain," in-

cluding deposits of tau protein in the front lobes of the brain in nerve cells around small blood vessels.

The discovery of C.T.E. adds another turn in Mr. Hernandez's meteoric rise and fall. After a standout career at Florida, he was signed by the Patriots in 2010. Just years before, he had been working menial jobs in Bristol, Conn., his hardscrabble hometown, where he drove a \$300 used car he bought with money borrowed from friends.

At Florida, he helped the Gators win the national title in the 2008 season. But he fell to the fourth round of the N.F.L. draft because of off-field issues including involvement in a bar fight.

Less than a year after he signed the contract with the Patriots that might have provided a stable future, his friend was found murdered. His conviction in the case became a stark example of N.F.L. players who exhibit violence off the field.

Even his demise was filled with turmoil. After Mr. Hernandez died, Mr. Baez called a news conference in front of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and accused the state of illegally withholding Mr. Hernandez's brain. Mr. Hernandez's body had been discovered the day before, tied with a bedsheet to the window of his prison cell in Shirley, Mass. His death was later ruled a suicide.

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