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THE BIG UNEASY: LEADERSHIP FAILURES IN NEW ORLEANS BEFORE AND
AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL STUDIES

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Abstract

Individuals in positions of leadership should possess certain qualities that allow them to situations of great stress and crisis. These qualities are especially important in extraordinary and overwhelming circumstances such as natural disasters. Hurricane Katrina, a devastating storm which hit the United States Gulf Region back in 2005, certainly fits into that category. This project examines the leadership and disaster management efforts of prominent government officials in response to Hurricane Katrina; special focus is given to Ray Nagin, mayor of New Orleans at the time. New Orleans was especially impacted by Katrina, and the efforts of officials at all levels of government would significantly influence his ability to manage the crisis brought on by Katrina's devastation. Available investigative and academic sources are utilized to discuss desirable leadership disaster management characteristics, the empirical numbers behind Katrina's damage, actions performed by officials in Katrina's aftermath and how those actions affected the local efforts of Nagin and his administration.

Keywords: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, Ray Nagin, Disaster Management, Leadership

Introduction

August 2015 marked the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. The words by themselves are enough to elicit vivid recollections, both from those who lived through it and those who witnessed it unfold in real-time through the eyes of the media in a non-stop news cycle broadcasting heartbreaking images of desperate citizens struggling to survive for weeks on end. The statistics reporting the destruction in terms of human suffering and in property damages are staggering: at least 1,800 deaths, another 1.2 million people displaced and approximately \$110 billion in physical property damages (Barbier, 2015, p. 285). As jarring as those figures are, they only tell part of the story when it comes to Katrina's impact. The entire city of New Orleans and much of the country's Gulf region are still recovering from the storm's aftermath a decade later. As the areas hardest hit still continue to rebuild and recover financially as well as psychologically, it is appropriate to scrutinize the roles government agencies played in managing the immediate relief efforts that took place as a result of this hurricane.

In the years since Katrina, many commentators have criticized the government officials and agencies involved in Katrina response efforts; many have gone so far as to make the case that the response operations carried out by these officials and agencies exacerbated an already tragic situation. It has been cited numerous times as an example of failed government initiative, with one analysis saying it "revealed a national emergency management system in disarray, one that was incapable of responding effectively to the immediate needs of communities along the Gulf Coast and unprepared to coordinate the massive relief effort required to support recovery" (Waugh, p. 131). Such a statement suggests a pattern of inefficiency or inaction existed during the relief

stages, perhaps resulting from incompetence or indifference or a combination of factors. Is such a statement true? If so, can it be supported by reliable sources? Those questions inevitably lead to mind another important question that has surely been posed by many others: could any of the death and property destruction stemming from Hurricane Katrina have been prevented?

This project set out to examine the coordinated relief efforts from all levels of government—especially by the leadership in New Orleans where the situation was most dire—and determine whether or not those efforts were effective. Through firsthand accounts, scholarly sources and official records, this project will seek to adequately answer the following question: **Did failures at all levels of government—particularly at the local level—exacerbate the damage wrought by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans?**

The intent of this project is not to focus on the tangible damage caused by Hurricane Katrina, but to discover any relevant and specific examples of government inaction or ineptitude which may have impacted the ensuing response process. In addition to assessing the numbers behind the storm's physical damage, several of the sources referenced for this project will discuss the human side of Katrina's aftermath.

Prologue

Hurricanes are nothing new to the Gulf region. Before Katrina, storms like Andrew and Hugo powered their way through the southeast United States and left their own substantial paths of destruction. The Atlantic Ocean, especially that part which borders the east coast and the Caribbean region, is fertile territory for hurricane activity due to the temperature range and atmospheric conditions necessary of them to emerge. In 2005, there were a record 27 individually identified tropical storms; fifteen of those storms, another record, eventually developed into hurricanes (Van Heerden, 2006, p. 13). For the sake of clarification, a tropical storm sustains wind speeds from 39 to 73 miles per hour while a hurricane is classified as any system with sustained winds of 74 miles per hour or greater (National Hurricane Center, n.d.). The twelfth of those tropical storms, later to be named Katrina, was first detected over the eastern Bahamas by the National Hurricane Center, the country's preeminent authority on storm data and observation, on August 23, 2005 (p. 16). Although Katrina started out like virtually every tropical system before or since, it would not stay ordinary for long.

As shocking as the raw numbers of Katrina's unprecedented destruction are to imagine, they only tell a party of the story behind its aftermath. It is impossible to overstate the psychological trauma that afflicts survivors of life-altering events like natural disasters. In the case of Katrina, that trauma was amplified through both personal loss and prolonged exposure to deplorable conditions. The experiences recalled by survivors sound like they could be scenes out of a horror movie; there are firsthand accounts from residents who "reported watching corpses float by as they waited to escape their flooded homes" while others claimed to see police "wielding

guns at newly homeless people” as they herded scores of evacuees into crowded relief centers (Reardon, 2015, p. 395). The impact of these and other events had serious and far reaching implications, Reardon also highlighted one study conducted approximately one year post-Katrina found that its emotional and psychological scars had far from receded. This study concluded that twenty-one percent of participants in the region had experienced symptoms consistent with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (more commonly known as PTSD) while more than six percent had dealt with thoughts of suicide at least once (p. 396). Another study, this one conducted in 2008, showed a pessimistic outlook for many of those involved in its research; more than half (59.2 percent) of those surveyed said they believed the rebuilding efforts from Katrina would take more than five years to complete while eight percent believed that their community would never fully recover (Nicholls & Picou, 2012, p. 356).

And what became of all those New Orleans residents who relocated to escape their ravaged city? In many instances, they never returned. It is estimated that a quarter of a million evacuees were taken to Houston in neighboring Texas due to overcrowded conditions in Louisiana. One article written close to Katrina’s decade anniversary estimated that 100,000 of those people—nearly half—stayed there permanently and have affectively created a city within a city by virtue of not going back to their original homes; one of those displaced residents who remained in Houston jokingly refers to the city as “New Orleans West” (Dart, 2015). The Census Bureau recorded an overall decline of more than 140,000 people in the Big Easy’s population between 2000 and 2010 (Mildenberg, 2011). Such a tremendous loss is sure to leave a huge void in communities throughout the Big Easy and significantly alter social, cultural and

economic dynamics. A 2007 study found that predominantly African-American neighborhoods were 71 percent less likely to have access to multiple food grocer locations than the citywide average, a decline of more than thirty points from pre-Katrina approximations (Rose, 2011, p. 484). The case could certainly be made that this change is attributable to decreased populations in those neighborhoods as a result of mass relocations like that in Houston. Whatever the reason, it is just one of many adverse impacts on the city that is still being felt to this day.

There should be no room for doubt that the desolation of Katrina necessitated a monumental, well orchestrated response and recovery effort. The particularly devastating impact to New Orleans placed a substantial burden on the shoulders of Ray Nagin to lead his city through the worst crisis in its history, all the while being subjected to constant media and ideological scrutiny. Such a task would be difficult for the most seasoned career politician, let alone one of Nagin's relatively novice status. Time would soon tell whether or not he was up to the challenge.

Literature Review

Every level of government—and more specifically, their key players—has the responsibility to act in times of crisis. According to available literature on disaster response management, proper live-saving and disaster mitigation procedures for events like Katrina can be effectively broken down into three stages: pre-disaster, response and post-disaster. Some of the pertinent tasks within those stages include:

Pre-disaster:

- Risk awareness and assessment of all possible hazards and vulnerabilities

- Research and training systems in place to educate first responders
- Reliable early warning systems

Response:

- Providing basic amenities such as food, clothing and shelter
- Providing medical treatment as necessary

Post-disaster:

- Restoring basic services lost or interrupted during the disaster itself
- Rebuilding lost or damaged infrastructure
- Recovery assistance programs (Todd & Todd, 2011, pp. 3-5).

In a separate piece on disaster management, the authors summarize their assessment of effective emergency management in four distinct steps: hazard mitigation (such as levees), disaster preparedness (emergency planning), disaster response activities (aid relief, search and rescue missions) and disaster recovery (restoration of basic and essential services) (Waugh & Streib, 2006, p. 131). Thanks to the similarities to steps detailed by the previous source, some basic guidelines have been established.

What are the responsibilities of individual leaders during a crisis? There are many important roles that can help answer this question; in fact, one source lists at least twelve desirable leadership characteristics in times of emergency or disaster. It is no easy task to prioritize them, but for the sake of expediency and better analysis we will focus on three: *decisiveness*, *informing* and *problem solving*; any lack of these and other valuable leader traits in times like Katrina can “exacerbate the impact of crises and eventually cause undesirable consequences” (Demiroz & Kapucu, 2012, p. 98). The

latter of those mentioned traits is especially important, with decision making considered to be “the key distinctive activity” for leaders during a crisis (Cosgrave, 1996, p. 28) among many scholars on the subject.

The research phase of this project found many published sources pertaining to the important aspects of disaster leadership as well as Katrina and its aftermath. The research phase found several sources on the subject of leader crisis management (Demiroz and Kapucu 2012; Cosgrave 1996; Waugh and Streib 2006; Todd and Todd; 2011). Several books examine the subject with in-depth accounts of the performances from officials at all levels of government before, during and after the storm (Brinkley 2006; Cooper and Block 2006; Dyson 2006; Horne 2006; Southern 2007). Research also found that the handling of the post-Katrina response efforts led to significant political and personal repercussions for the key players involved (Rivlin 2015; Koven 2010; Adams 2005; Waugh 2007; Lay 2009). Eventually, a bipartisan congressional investigation weighed in on the overall impact of the Katrina response and assessed the performances of all involved levels of government (Ink 2006; Morris 2007).

Each level of government—and more specifically, their key players—will be discussed by examining facets of their respective performances in terms of proper life saving and disaster management procedures identified in the literature review. Those identified procedures and important leadership traits will be crucial in discussing specific responses in the aftermath of Katrina and whether or not those responses were effective in mitigating the disaster. It is important to look at the response from each level of government because the decisions and actions of those higher on the proverbial totem pole affect those below them. The actions, or lack thereof, of officials on the

state and federal levels directly affect the abilities of mayors and other local officials to fulfill their own responsibilities. While discussing each level response to Katrina, the following sub-questions will be addressed in order to ensure proper attention to the stated research question in the introduction:

- Who were the key players and what were their roles?
- What are some specific examples found during the research phase of leadership failures that can be attributed to the key players or their representatives?
- How did these specific examples of leadership failure impact the management of Katrina's response at the local level?

The various investigative and scholarly sources utilized during the research phase of this project assess and criticize officials in numerous agencies throughout the bureaucratic spectrum, from local politicians all the way to individuals directly associated with the Bush administration. These literary sources do not put the blame for leadership failures squarely on the shoulders of one person or entity, but rather indicate that several parties are culpable in those failures and their effects.

Research Design

The city of New Orleans serves as the major focus and case study for this project, as it was the area most notably impacted by Hurricane Katrina and its extensive damage. According to recent data, it has a city population of approximately 350,000 people and a greater metro area population of 1.2 million people. African Americans account for 60 percent of that population, with Caucasians making up 33 percent and various minority groups rounding out the demographic breakdown (United States

Census Bureau, n.d.). The residents of New Orleans were significantly hindered by a number of economic maladies at the time of Katrina's arrival, another factor in dealing with its aftermath. The citywide median household income came in at more than \$13,000 below the national average; additionally, nine percent of those households did not own and had no ready access to a family vehicle (Dyson, p. 5). These factors, combined with the extensive damage brought on by a natural disaster, would eventually create a much different city than what existed prior to Katrina's arrival.

The structure of this project is intended to provide a detailed logical flow of information that ultimately helps answer the primary research question stated in the introduction. The first section examines a timeline of Hurricane Katrina, covering approximately two weeks, that tracks the storm and the response to it. That timeline is followed by a discussion of the Katrina response from the local, state and federal governments and how their actions affected the necessary relief efforts. Because of the scope of the disaster and the impact of the decisions made by the key players, it was deemed necessary to include discussion on the significant repercussions and political fallout resulting from those key player actions. The project will then analyze the pertinent findings of the research by connecting them back to the relevant research literature before presenting a final conclusion on that research and why it is important.

The central focus of this research falls on Ray Nagin, mayor of New Orleans in 2005 when Hurricane Katrina hit. As the city's highest elected leader, he bore the primary responsibility of overseeing the coordination and execution of its most critical disaster response procedures from start to finish. Furthermore, he bore the responsibility of ensuring adequate resources for his personnel and procuring additional

ones as needed while delegating tasks to subordinate officials or committees for the sake of efficiency. Did he successfully fulfill his role as the city's chief executive, or did he fall short in carrying out his duties? If he did in fact fail in all or some of those duties, was it the result of his actions alone or a combination of factors?

In the days following Katrina's rampage, Nagin quickly went from unknown head of a mid-sized American city to an international household name. Elected to New Orleans' city hall in 2002, he won favor with voters despite his lack of political experience because they viewed him as a "fresh alternative" to the rampant corruption and cronyism which plagued previous administrations (Wilkie, 2007, p. 107). He developed a reputation as a no-nonsense maverick who failed to show due deference to the large minority population instrumental in his electoral victory (Cooper & Block, 2006, pp. 107-108).

In addition to Nagin, additional key figures prominently involved in the Katrina response have been included in the analysis as well; their actions or those of their representatives are discussed for the purpose of relating the consequences of those actions to the local management of the Katrina response. Again, it is not the intent of this project to definitely assign blame to these individuals, but to analyze how their performances impacted the management efforts of Nagin and other officials in New Orleans. The additional key figures are as follows:

Kathleen Blanco – Governor of Louisiana. The first woman elected to her state's highest office, Blanco was sworn in as Louisiana's 54th governor in 2004. She immediately sought to make strides in education reform, especially regarding teacher

quality and accountability (National Governor's Association, 2011), but that initiative would quickly take a back seat to more pressing matters.

George W. Bush – President of the United States. Even before Katrina, he was no stranger to disasters on the national stage as he also presided over the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Michael Brown – Director of FEMA. The **F**ederal **E**mergency **M**anagement **A**gency was founded in 1979 under President Jimmy Carter to consolidate the nation's "fragmented" emergency response apparatus (Dyson, 2006, p. 43). Originally an attorney by trade, he made his way into government service as an assistant city manager in Oklahoma before making the move to Washington and accepting the position which would later make him infamous (Cooper, p. 77). A "complicated and divisive figure" (p. 78), he quickly established a reputation as enthusiastic but unprepared for the demands of his job; that latter descriptor would eventually come into play in a big way.

The Storm

A disaster of Katrina's magnitude would be overwhelming no matter where it hit, but that ferocity was especially felt in the areas it hit the hardest. The residents of Louisiana were certainly no strangers to hard living and daily struggles, and that struggle was about to get worse. The following section highlights some major events leading up to, during, and proceeding Katrina; a special emphasis has been placed on the plight of citizens stuck in New Orleans and the immediate responses by key officials to manage the storm's fallout.

What precautions or warning systems existed prior to Katrina's arrival? The levees surrounding the city would be the most obvious answer. Designed to "curb periodic and destructive floods" by helping to regulate water levels, Army engineered levee systems along the Mississippi River date back to the early 19th century (Handwerk, 2005). Concerns on the stability of the aging levee system around New Orleans continued into the 21st century, when the \$750 million Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Project was proposed in 2004. The project aimed to rebuild and stabilize deteriorating levee and floodwater pumping station systems around New Orleans and neighboring parishes. Unfortunately, it never fully came to fruition as it became the victim of budget cuts due to the costly war in Iraq (Dyson, p. 81).

That same year, FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) officials conducted a simulated hurricane strike on New Orleans; the exercise became known as "Hurricane Pam" (Horne, p. 51). The simulated study envisioned a Category 3 hurricane hitting The Big Easy and overtaking its levees in order to produce a "worst case scenario" for official review. The results of the scenario were bleak; the simulated

hurricane caused as much as twelve feet of water to flood the city and killed more than 60,000 people (McQuaid, 2005). Despite the ominous and alarming nature of those statistics, it is unclear if any definitive strategies were implemented as a result of the exercise.

It was no secret before Katrina's arrival that New Orleans was highly vulnerable to the type of calamitous damage resulting from a storm like the one simulated in the Hurricane Pam exercise. Circumstances like weakened levee systems and federal budget considerations are well beyond the control of city executives like Nagin; it would be very unfair to hold them solely responsible for these factors. What they can be held responsible for is how they react to the results of these circumstances, and Nagin would soon be put to the ultimate test in that regard.

A Timeline of Destruction

Tuesday, August 23rd

The tropical system that will eventually become Katrina is first reported by the National Hurricane Center as it begins to form over The Bahamas. It is the 12th such system of the year's storm season (Drye, 2005).

Thursday, August 25th

Katrina is categorized as a Category 1 hurricane with winds exceeding 80 miles per hour and projected landfall in Florida. Governor Jeb Bush, brother of the president, declares a state of emergency as a result (Rushton, 2015).

Friday, August 26th

Katrina intensifies as it clears Florida and reaches the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Governor Blanco declares a state of emergency for Louisiana, as does Governor Haley Barbour of Mississippi, while the U.S. Coast Guard activates 400 reservists to help combat the imminent threat (Gajanan & Brait, 2015).

Saturday, August 27th

Katrina has now strengthened into a Category 3 storm with sustained winds of 115 miles per hour. By the end of the day, it is only 300 miles from the mouth of the Mississippi River (PBS, 2005). Nagin and Blanco hold a joint press conference to warn residents of the impending storm and declare a state of emergency, stopping short of ordering a full evacuation (Brinkley, 2006, pp. 625-626).

Sunday, August 28th

Katrina reaches Category 4 strength a little more than 24 hours before its eventual arrival on the Gulf Coast. Less than 24 hours from Katrina making landfall in New Orleans, Nagin holds a press conference to issue a mandatory evacuation of the city and stress the storm's imminent danger, calling it "the storm that most of us have feared" (Roberts, 2005). By day's end, approximately eighty percent of New Orleans has been evacuated, still leaving some 100,000 people stranded with no means of escape. The Superdome begins to take in some of those left behind, providing much needed shelter from the high winds and heavy rainfall already assaulting the city (Brinkley, pp. 626-627).

Monday, August 29th

Katrina makes landfall in the continental United States at approximately 6:10 AM eastern time, completely wiping out the small Louisiana fishing hamlet of Buras and making short work of the makeshift levees built there (Horne, 2006, p. 41). Almost instantly, the extent of the storm's impact is underestimated; several local news outlet in New Orleans describe the damage as "much lighter than expected" due to the focus on the city's more affluent neighborhoods such as the French Quarter and Garden District (Knauer, p. 39).

Tuesday, August 30th

In response to mounting political and media pressure, Blanco personally visits the Superdome and is "shocked" by the conditions she finds there (Knauer, p. 41). Hastily executed evacuation initiatives have already relocated more than 10,000 displaced residents there with scarce provisions and security; that number will soon triple (Southern, 2007, p. 51).

Wednesday, August 31st

Conditions around the city continue to deteriorate as Nagin directs nearly all of the city's 1,500 police officers to help combat the widespread looting taking place (Knauer, p. 43). Meanwhile, Blanco orders a full and immediate evacuation of all remaining residents in New Orleans (Drye, 2005).

Thursday, September 1st

Nagin uses a live interview on CNN to implore the rest of the country for assistance; later in the day he would use a local radio show to chastise the federal response up to that point, including direct attacks on President Bush (Brinkley, pp. 634-

635). Feeling the pressure from the unsettling images on nationwide news broadcasts, government officials work to play damage control with the media. FEMA Director Michael Brown orders FEMA to temporarily suspend rescue operations as escalating violence threatens worker safety (Rushton, 2015).

Friday, September 2nd

Neighboring states taking in Katrina evacuees are reaching their own capacities; Houston announces that it can no longer fill the Astrodome past the 11,000 people already being housed there (Brinkley, p. 636). President Bush signs a congressional bill authorizing \$150 billion in relief aid for the Gulf Coast as National Guard troops deliver much needed supplies to the throngs of people still stranded in New Orleans (Drye, 2005).

Saturday, September 3rd

Growing outrage in the nation's capital pushes Bush to order more than 7,000 additional active duty troops into the Gulf region to assist with ongoing recovery efforts. FEMA officials begrudgingly admit that the agency was "overwhelmed" by the scope of the storm and was not totally prepared to manage the aftermath (Gajanan, 2015). City emergency dispatchers are receiving more than 1,000 calls daily from stranded residents requesting assistance (PBS, 2005).

Monday, September 5th

One week removed from the storm, fewer than 10,000 residents are left in the city. Despite the potential for abuse, FEMA pledges debit cards to victims for essential spending. Federal executive and legislative officials demand bi-partisan investigations into the botched Katrina handling (Gajanan, 2015).

The literary resources featured in this section effectively give a harrowing account of both Katrina's power and its destructive impact on New Orleans and the rest of the Gulf Region. This research proved critical in outlining some of the preliminary and reactive actions taken by Nagin and other officials in areas impacted by Katrina, and it also lays the groundwork for some significant problems in disaster management that those officials would have to address in the immediate aftermath of Katrina.

The Response

The Local Level

In the days immediately following the storm's arrival, Nagin kept a high profile as the eyes of the world turned to New Orleans. He held daily, seemingly hourly, press conferences to provide status updates and effectively utilized the news outlets swarming the city to his advantage. Perhaps the most potent use of that presence was taking to the TV and radio airways to criticize the sluggish emergency response as well as demand more resources necessary for a more efficient recovery. Considering what followed, this can be viewed as a highpoint for Nagin in his handling of the crisis; it has been said that his critiques "not only helped to frame Katrina as a failed response effort by the federal government, but it also created outrage among the public and in the media" (Griffin-Padgett & Allison, 2010, p. 389). Nagin's aggressive use of the media strengthened his ability to inform a wider audience on the numerous issues facing his city in the days immediately following the storm. Calling attention to those issues, especially slow dispersal of aid resources and inadequate assistance from higher level governments, also strengthened his position to call for better resources to solve problems under his purview as mayor. The steps of disaster response outlined in the literature review require substantial coordination and cooperation between multiple entities; Nagin airing his frustrations, as uncouth as his approach might have been, showed an initiative and desire to make those steps more effective. Unfortunately, things would go downhill from there.

After a strong showing in the early stages of the disaster management, evidence points to instances of New Orleans' mayor becoming increasingly erratic and derelict in

his duties. The criticism has started even before that, especially as a result of his waiting until the day before Katrina's eventual landfall to finally issue a city-wide mandatory evacuation order as previously stated. One city councilman would later recount his own growing frustrations after several unproductive meetings with Nagin intended to discuss pertinent relief matters, saying "there was this lack of engagement, this lack of urgency" and that he simply "walked away more angry" after each subsequent encounter due to a lack of sufficient progress. Cause for concern was more than abundant, not the least of which being displaced citizens and widespread lack of essential utilities such as electricity and running water (Rivlin, p. 185).

The decision making, communication and problem solving initiatives shown by Nagin via his earlier press interviews were lacking in the referenced account by one of his council members. Whether this described attitude was the result of indifference or fatigue, it did not help to address the necessary steps of disaster management. While he should have been overseeing the initial rebuilding process and restoration of vital services interrupted by the storm, he was disengaged at a time when his guidance was greatly needed. It would not be long before the "undesirable consequences" of absent leadership alluded to in the literature review would become a reality.

The city's overwhelmed and undermanned police department also began to crack under the strain of the events around them. Questions began to arise concerning the department's ability to perform its duties, indicating a gaping lack of oversight and accountability from its senior officials (Adams, 2005, p. 27). Several news sources reported a mass exodus of officers simply walking off the job due to fatigue and stress. Eddie Compass, superintendent of the New Orleans police department and the city's

highest ranking law enforcement official, was reportedly spotted leaving the city himself to get medical attention for his pregnant wife and leaving a leadership void in the process. (Horne, pp. 108-109). Many others who did stay were witnessed ignoring store looters or even taking part in the looting themselves; in one instance, officers and paramedics forcibly removed citizens from a Wal-Mart and began stealing items by the truck load (Horne, p. 123). In a separate and even more disturbing incident several weeks after Katrina's landfall, a news cameraman captured footage of three white city police officers viciously attacking a handcuffed elderly black man; when his presence was finally noticed, the cameraman himself was assaulted by one of the officers and told to "go home" (Southern, p. 109).

Could—or should—Nagin and his officials have foreseen the traumatizing impact of Katrina's aftermath on the city's law enforcement personnel? It is a pretty telling sign of a bad situation when the city's senior police officer leaves his post, even if it was for the very natural reason of helping his family. According to at least one journal, the breakdown in order and discipline amongst NOPD officers was predictable, perhaps even inevitable. The journal frames the actions of these officers within the "Chaos Theory", a sociological concept that comes from "observing chaotic and unpredictable patterns" over a period of time (Adams & Stewart, 2014, p. 416). It essentially holds that exposure to traumatic events like Katrina can lead to bifurcations, or changes within a system of order that lead to changes in behavior; those bifurcations can be subtle or cataclysmic (pp. 416-417). In this case, the bifurcation was the breakdown in police conduct and the change was extremely consequential. The journal article concludes that the aftermath of Katrina was an especially dangerous and hectic

situation, one that perfectly lent itself to the Chaos Theory. In part, it states “society demands that the police function even in unexpected and dynamic situations...however, the damaged infrastructure of the NOPD severely hampered the functions of this first responder agency during the Katrina disaster...the chaotic nature of the situation came to a critical point where it was nearly impossible to make sense out of the current flow of events” (p. 428).

The first-hand exposure to death, destruction and unrest that follows a disaster like Katrina puts incalculable stress on individuals whose occupations already expose them to imminent danger; combine that stress of worrying about their own family members, and it certainly stands to reason that some exodus of police and other emergency responders can happen in such situations. However, instances of abuse and blatant illegal activity are never acceptable under any circumstances or conditions. When Nagin relegated virtually the entire city’s remaining police force to protect businesses from looting, he not only took attention away from citizens in need but exposed his officers to even more unrest and disorder at the hands of desperate citizens. It was a very questionable problem solving decision, one that attempted to address one issue at the expense of another equally vexing issue.

If Nagin had not done enough to stir up controversy prior to January 16, 2006, he certainly succeeded in doing so after it. On that fateful day, the politically bruised mayor gave an address in recognition of Martin Luther King Day that brought him further condemnation and scrutiny. After starting his remarks on a high note by urging his citizens to reach a more united front in the wake of Katrina, Nagin began to incorporate the slain civil rights icon into the mix by wondering aloud what he would

think of the situation. He then began wading into dangerous waters with statements about how Katrina and the other hurricanes before it were signs that “God is angry at America”, a contention that clearly did not sit well with those in attendance. From there, he uttered two words which would come back to haunt him in a big way: “we ask black people: it’s time. It’s time for us to come together. It’s time for us to rebuild a New Orleans, the one that should be a chocolate New Orleans. And I don’t care what people are saying uptown or wherever they are. This city will be chocolate at the end of the day” (Rivlin, p. 242). *Chocolate city*. Those two words drowned out every other utterance in the address, not to mention any well-intentioned efforts behind it.

A national Gallup poll found that nearly half of white respondents and seventeen percent of African-American respondents were offended by Nagin’s “chocolate city” remark (Lay, 2009, pp. 652-653). Inside New Orleans, the numbers were much more forgiving; eighty percent of residents who responded to a local poll said they were not offended by his remarks, while fifty-nine percent of the black respondents had a favorable opinion of him (Rivlin, p. 244). Some pundits coined the phrase “Ray Speak” to describe Nagin’s acerbic oratory style, one that alienated many outside of New Orleans but actually managed to solidify support among a significant portion of the city’s minority community (Koven, 2010, p. 354). Another notable incident of “Ray Speak” came just two days after Katrina landfall during a call to a local radio station; during the subsequent interview, he implored Blanco and Bush to “get off their asses” and “fix the biggest goddamn crisis in the history of the country” (p. 346). It was the epitome of a “shoot first, ask questions later” mentality that showed both his growing personal frustrations and his penchant for being needlessly provocative.

The “chocolate city” remark can charitably be described as a poor choice of words at a time when such a mistake could hardly be afforded. It was an unforced error in decision making that made for perfect fodder for an overzealous news media with a penchant for sensationalism. Nagin spent much of the following days responding to complaints and requests for clarification on his use of the phrase, eventually leading him to admit that the remark was “totally inappropriate” (Roig-Franzia, 2006). The incident detracted from his ability to inform and impart vital information because it forced him to dwell on a trivial subject when his attention should have been focused elsewhere. While Nagin clearly suffered a lapse in judgment, the ensuing media attention kept him from fully executing his crisis management responsibilities; the harsh criticism that ensued unduly impacted his ability to carry out those responsibilities and unduly impacted a city still reeling from the worst disaster in its history.

The State Level

Aside from her actions in declaring a state of emergency, Governor Blanco dropped the ball in other areas under her purview and found herself on the receiving end of considerable scrutiny as a result. It later came to light that her request to the White House for National Guard troops to assist with relief efforts lacked in necessary specificity; she acknowledged that she did not adequately indicate what type of soldiers were needed. "Nobody told me that I had to request that," she explained when responding to the issue, "I thought that I had requested everything they had. We were living in a war zone by then" (Lipton, Schmitt & Shanker, 2005). In a separate incident, the director of the National Hurricane Center contacted Blanco to apprise her of

Katrina's pending assault on the state, specifically New Orleans and the region directly bordering the Gulf of Mexico; she responded by bluntly telling him to reach Nagin and deal with him instead (Brinkley, p. 58).

The Federal Level

FEMA bore a significant amount of the load for allocating essential emergency supplies and making sure they arrived at their intended destinations. The same day Katrina visited her wrath upon New Orleans, Governor Blanco personally contacted President Bush asking for that very assistance. She emphasized the urgency of the situation simply but unequivocally: "we need everything you've got". Her office received assurance from FEMA that it had 500 buses ready to shuttle residents out of New Orleans; almost two full days after storm landfall, those buses still had not been made available. The transportation situation became dire enough that Blanco's chief of staff emailed junior staffers personally asking them to "find buses that can go to NO (New Orleans) ASAP (Warrick, Hull & Hsu, 2005). It was not until days later that any meaningful deployment of buses materialized.

Louisiana National Guard troops asked for supply shipments to begin dispersing food and other necessities to the Superdome and elsewhere throughout the city, but there was one slight problem: FEMA had staged the cargo of goods at Camp Beauregard, a three hour one-way drive from New Orleans. And as if that were not bad enough, there were only enough provisions to last a single day. An Army Corps of Engineers official found that also requested supplies were also lacking as requested. FEMA had promised to procure one hundred portable generators for installation in

critical areas to combat the inevitable loss of electrical power once the storm hit; when the official arrived at Beauregard to retrieve them, the agency had provided only fifty. Previous hurricane scenario drills estimated that two hundred trucks of food, water and tarps would be needed to address bare minimum needs throughout the state; on Sunday the 28th, the day before Katrina hit, FEMA had only fifty-eight such trucks in place and fully equipped (Cooper, pp. 119-120). These various failures to provide even the most basic of relief aid, despite advanced warnings and plans in place, showed just how unprepared Brown and his entire agency were to adequately respond to Katrina.

The chaotic and bungled management of Katrina's aftermath brought Brown into the national spotlight for all the wrong reasons. Like Nagin and Blanco, he was all but unknown to the public before Katrina's aftermath thrust him into the international media spotlight. And like Nagin and Blanco, he also had little previous experience equal to the monumental task brought on by Katrina's aftermath. On the day of Katrina's arrival, he met with Blanco and told her "don't worry about costs" while appropriating the necessary aid; along with the hundreds of buses he promised, he also pledged more than \$20,000 in subsidies for each house destroyed by storm damage, much of which was never delivered (Horne, p. 95).

Other aspects of Brown's performance became cause for concern, aside from him being "unaware of the immediate needs" of those suffering in New Orleans (Martinko, Breaux, Martinez, Summers, & Harvey, 2009, p. 52). He had developed a reputation as "bureaucratically adept" while also possessing a tendency to be "smug and arrogant" (Rivlin, p. 38), traits that do not always make a productive combination. News outlets obtained copies of emails he sent to various FEMA officials that seemed

to trivialize the situation. After a staffer in the ground in New Orleans advised him that essential commodities were in short supply and deaths were imminent without immediate intervention, Brown flippantly replied “thanks for the update” (Koven, p. 352). Actions like these caused even his allies within the federal government to acknowledge his “weak-kneed” approach to command (Brinkley, p. 269), and one analysis concluded “it is apparent that Brown was not qualified for that post” (Ink, 2006, p. 803) in its review of the response efforts.

These incidents did not stop President Bush from giving some infamous praise to Brown during a press conference that became one of the defining moments of the Katrina aftermath. His off-the-cuff and informal remark—“Brownie, you’re doing a heckuva job” (Brinkley, pp. 546-548)—quickly gathered criticism and scrutiny similar to that of Nagin’s “chocolate city” quip several months later. The president clearly had honorable intentions of wanting to boost the beleaguered FEMA head’s spirits in the midst of a very stressful period, but the remark became a lightning rod of controversy in an already tense situation. The comment was described as “surreal” and leading to “very negative perceptions of government performance” (Nicholls, p. 352). The timing of the compliment was especially bad when considering the predicaments facing thousands of citizens in New Orleans, and it hinted at a serious disconnect with the reality of the situation at hand.

How did these actions impact Nagin’s ability to manage the disaster at the local level? First, let us analyze the performance of Blanco and the state level. Her failure to properly request National Guard troops during a state of emergency dealt a significant blow to the restoration of law and order within New Orleans, not to mention the tension

it undoubtedly created between Nagin and her office. The relationship between the two administrations would not have been helped much by her insistence that he bear the responsibility of communicating with the National Hurricane Center director instead of jointly cooperating with his correspondences. Such actions took away from his ability to properly address the significant problems facing his city and his people.

The missteps of Brown and other officials at the federal level would have placed even greater strains on Nagin's post-Katrina management efficiency. Misplacement and shortage of vital aid resources, failure to deliver on promised provisions and poor attitudes regarding their own responsibilities all contributed to a lackluster performance on behalf of the United States government. President Bush's well intended but ill-advised "Brownie" remark only added rhetorical fuel to the fire in that its contribution to the aforementioned "negative perceptions of government performance" would have affected the trust between Nagin and his citizens. Any deterioration in perception of government performance is deterioration in trust, which leads to deterioration in effective communication. The mismanagement of resources provided by FEMA would have burdened Nagin's decisions on how to most effectively use them, especially when they were lacking in the necessary quantities as indicated in the research literature. Such shortages would have only created more problems rather than solving them in a timely and efficient manner.

The Aftermath

The “Blame Game”

While the key players conveyed images of optimism in front of the media, the mood behind the scenes was anything but cheery; to say tensions were high in the days and weeks following Katrina would be a huge understatement. Nagin accused It did not take long to hear claims that what happened was entirely foreseeable. As one writer put it, “the vulnerability of New Orleans and its residents to major hurricanes was well understood within the research community and among many journalists and media organizations, and disaster management practitioners at all levels of government” (Tierney, 2008, p. 180).

It seemed that there was more than enough evidence to justify the sharp criticisms being leveled against everyone involved, even if those criticisms were politically motivated in nature. GOP leaders at the federal level sought to portray Democrats Nagin and Blanco as incompetent and feckless in their respective roles, allegations which have already been noted in previous sections. The Republicans in Washington specifically targeted Nagin for failing to fully and expediently deploy his own convoy of school buses for evacuation and emergency transportation purposes (Horne, p. 94). Blanco by stating that she never properly requested the FEMA assistance needed to deal with the crisis in her state. In response, local leaders in Louisiana accused Washington and the White House of playing party politics with their assistance allocations. Some asserted that neighboring Mississippi, equally beset by damages from Katrina, experienced faster and more organized efforts from federal emergency assistance mechanisms because Governor Barbour happened to be a

Republican (Maestas, Atkeson, Croom & Bryant, 2008, p. 615). During one of Bush's visits there, Governor Barbour went so far as to say "the federal government has been great" in fulfilling its promised aid to the state (Koven, p. 347). Whether these reported discrepancies in performance results were by design or influenced other factors, they are hard to ignore.

In his book *Come Hell or High Water*, Michael Eric Dyson described a particularly emotional meeting between the three leaders aboard Air Force One approximately one week into the aftermath stage. According to Dyson, Nagin took the opportunity to both apologize to Bush for some harsh comments he had made about the commander-in-chief in media interviews several days prior and confront him about his plans to handle the immense crisis before them. Bush admitted fault from the federal level and pledged to him that "we're gonna fix it". The discussion would eventually take a dramatic turn, one that included a visibly frustrated Nagin pounding his fist on a table and exclaiming "we just need to cut through this and do what it takes to have a more-controlled command structure. If that means federalizing it, let's do it". This obviously undermined Blanco's authority in overseeing the relief efforts taking place in her own state. After she requested to talk to the president privately on the issue, Nagin again lost his composure and said "why don't you do that now?" before the meeting abruptly ended. A Bush aide present at the meeting later quipped that it was "as blunt as you can get without the Secret Service getting involved" (pp. 102-103).

In true bureaucratic fashion, Congress had its own say in the conversation. Less than one month after the storm, the House of Representatives approved the formation of a bi-partisan committee to investigate response measures and actions performed at all

involved levels of government. The committee's report, released approximately six months after the storm, reached devastating conclusions. The administrations of Nagin, Blanco and Bush all received excoriating performance reviews from the committee; one of the most damning conclusions referred to the overall management of Katrina as "a litany of mistakes, misjudgments, lapses, and absurdities all cascading together, blinding us to what was coming and hobbling any collective effort to respond" (Ink, p. 800).

The thorough and detailed nature of the report left the impression that "too many leaders failed to lead" as one analysis put it, adding that "critical time was wasted on issues of no importance to disaster response, such as winning the blame game, waging a public relations battle or debating the advantage of wardrobe choices" (Morris, 2007, p. 43). The committee's report specifically cited Nagin and Blanco for waiting until Katrina was only 19 hours from landfall to order a mandatory evacuation of New Orleans, even though advisory warnings had been in place for two days. The two leaders were also singled out for poorly executed evacuation plans to accommodate citizens with no private means of transportation or those unable to evacuate themselves (Ink, p. 801). It is estimated that late or inefficient evacuation of nursing homes led to the deaths of 75 senior citizens in New Orleans and throughout the state (Horne, p. 91).

The levees around New Orleans became a battleground of considerable scrutiny in the weeks that followed. The storm's ferocity overtook them almost immediately and the proceeding floods worsened the already cataclysmic conditions as well as hopes for prompt rescue efforts. The levee system was constructed to endure Category 3 storm surges similar to ones simulated in the Hurricane Pam exercise; however, downtown

areas near the system's western edges encountered breaches from storms consistent with only a Category 1 strength. Two different teams of experts independently presented concurring evidence which indicated the city's western levees gave way long before storm waters reached their tops, a devastating conclusion given the damages that transpired as a result. Acknowledged hurricane expert and author Ivor van Heerden encapsulated the levee situation in succinct fashion: "this was a preventable disaster" (Kintisch, 2005, p. 953).

There is much information to consider from the literary sources included in this section, but it essentially be condensed down to one thing: there is more than one person at fault for what happened during the Katrina response, and Congress went on record to proclaim as such. Partisan political views are likely to play a significant role in how one parses out the majority of blame, but there should be little room for doubt that officials on both sides of the political aisle failed to fully execute their roles. Sadly, it should be expected that finger-pointing and excuse making will inevitably arise from such a grossly mishandled situation which created so much controversy. That does not make the behavior of the key players any more acceptable, nor does it make the findings of the research any more palatable.

Where does all of this leave Nagin in the blame department? The performances of others notwithstanding, it appears clear that he could have done more to influence and control activities under his direct control. The overall management of city resources, from law enforcement to transportation, and his own conduct are direct reflections of how ill-prepared he was to deal with the situation, both personally and professionally. Poor decisions were made, communication was lacking or unproductive

in some instances and serious problems were not fully addressed. Squabbling with Bush and Blanco aboard Air Force One might have helped him vent some long penned-up anger, but it did little to alleviate the present situation beyond that. At least one post-Katrina analysis gave a slight reprieve to FEMA in one aspect of its considerable failures, implying that distribution of basic essentials such as fresh water should fall under the purview of state and local authorities rather than Washington (Landy, 2008, p. 155). There certainly should have been some reserve of resources in place within the city with a clear dissemination plan of how those resources would be used and who would receive them; no one should have expected federal assistance to be immediate or fully adequate to fulfill each individual need at the local level, especially considering bureaucratic roadblocks that often surface when the federal government is involved. While it would be grossly unfair—not to mention factually wrong—to blame Nagin for everything that went wrong during the post-Katrina debacle, he is not without some level of culpability for shortcomings in his own actions.

The Political Fallout

The professional consequences for the key players involved in Katrina's aftermath were considerable, an indication of how poorly the situation was managed and how negative the public reaction came to be as a result. For Blanco, Katrina became a political albatross that she would never completely vanquish. By October, less than two months removed from the crisis, her statewide approval rating had plummeted 17 points from where it registered just prior to August 29th (Rivlin, 2015, p. 165). Plagued by a tarnished public image and bipartisan scapegoating, Blanco

announced that she would not seek a second term in the following year's election (Waugh, p. 112). The hard feelings towards Blanco resurfaced even after she gave up the fight for re-election. Republican Bobby Jindal, whom she defeated in the 2003 gubernatorial election, won his follow-up bid for the governor's mansion in 2007; polls later indicated that lingering disappointment with Blanco's performance two years earlier played a significant role in his victory (Cowan & McGuire, 2008, p. 288).

Like Blanco, Brown's career would not recover from his administration's missteps. On September 12, 2005, he announced his official resignation as FEMA director; this came three days after he had been relieved of his primary relief oversight duties. The announcement came in the midst of mounting pressure for him to step down, and he obliged as a way of helping the already embattled agency avoid further distractions. The move was widely met with derision for his efforts; among others, The New York Times panned his ineptitude and disparaged his lack of proper experience in its analysis of his performance (Stevenson, 2005).

While Brown served as the immediate casualty of the federal government's impotent handling of Katrina, Bush's stock suffered greatly as well. It was not until two weeks after the storm that he delivered his first major statement on Katrina to the nation, a delay that some interpreted as a transparent lack of concern (Benoit & Henson, 2009, p. 41). Ultimately weakened by criticisms stemming from Katrina and dwindling public support for the costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, he left the White House less than four years later with a paltry thirty-four percent approval rating (Saad, 2009).

Nagin's Katrina antics helped him go from a shoo-in for re-election to an extremely vulnerable incumbent; by the time his party primary came around in April of

the following year, there were twenty-two challengers to his nomination (Lay, 2009, p. 650). Even though he managed to survive an uphill battle and secure a second term as mayor, he did so with far less support than when he first came into office. His popularity would steadily decline throughout his second term, punctuated by public frustration with his frequent out-of-town trips for business not pertinent to his mayoral duties. He made national headlines again in 2014, this time for criminal conviction on twenty different charges stemming from official misconduct during his time in office. The charges ranged from fraud to bribe receiving to conspiracy as a result of improper favors to city contractors carried out over several years. He is currently serving a 10 year prison sentence in a Texas state prison; his attorneys filed an appeal last year which is still pending (Pao, 2015).

Nagin's fall from grace is a stunning and sad epilogue to what once appeared to be a promising political career. While the other key players did see their careers adversely affected by Katrina's fallout, they at least managed to avoid punitive consequences as a result of their actions. The nature of the charges successfully brought against Nagin certainly adds another level of intrigue and scrutiny to his actions in the midst of the crisis. His illegal dealings bring his leadership and decision making record during Katrina into question; furthermore, his current dilemma begs the obvious question of whether he always engaged in such practices or if he came into them later in his career as a way of protecting his political capital. Did Nagin wake up one day and just decide to exploit the power of his office for his own advantage, or did he do so from the very beginning, even during a period of tremendous destruction and suffering? At this point, only he knows the answer to that question.

New Orleans and lessons learned a decade later

Ten years later, New Orleans is still a city on the mend. While the remnants of Katrina can still be seen in many areas, the people of the Big Easy have made great strides in bringing it back from the brink of elimination. That process has not been without its challenges. Three years to the day after Katrina's deadliest landfall, citizens of the Gulf region experienced an unfriendly case of déjà vu when Hurricane Gustav hit; fortunately, the damage was far less severe this time around and evacuation procedures were much better organized (Taylor, 2010, p. 496). Setbacks are to be expected when dealing with disaster recovery on a city-wide scale; changing weather climates, political malfeasance and destabilized populations are just a few such setbacks facing the people of New Orleans in their own rebuilding efforts (p. 501). Census data indicated that the city's population expanded by 40,000 people between 2010 and 2014, a total increase of almost twelve percent (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). It is not where it once was, but it is getting there slowly and surely.

In the end, Katrina and its resulting devastation "exposed various shortcomings in the existing planning and strategies to cope with large-scale disaster" (Banipal, 2006, p. 493) in the United States. The highly controversial nature of the response led to some meaningful changes in the form of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006. FEMA, the source of much derision for its role in the bungled response, was especially impacted by the reforms; one of the most significant changes made it so that future directors of the agency must be specifically qualified professionals rather than political appointees (Miller, 2012, p. 135). The desire to avoid another Michael Brown situation could not be much more obvious

Analysis

Now that the relevant researched information has been presented, it is time to provide some analysis within the framework of the posed research questions. The primary research question at the center of this project focused on how government failures during the relief efforts of Hurricane Katrina impacted Ray Nagin and his ability to adequately manage the aftermath. The research stage included sources that dealt with emergency management and leadership responsibility roles, namely some of the basic duties that officials should perform in times of disaster. There were systems in place that identified Katrina well in advance of it making landfall in the United States, but the levees of New Orleans were not able to withstand its force. Food, water, shelter and other essential items that should have been provided in the response phase were delayed or altogether lacking in some instances. Research showed that the restoration to normal of utilities and other essential services was also a slow process in some areas, and the rebuilding of New Orleans continues to be a work in progress.

The introduction posed three grouped sub-questions to further assess the performances of government officials in response to Katrina. To recap, those questions are:

- Who were the key players and what were their roles?
- What are some specific examples found during the research phase of leadership failures that can be attributed to the key players or their representatives?
- How did these specific examples of leadership failure impact the management of the Katrina response?

The key players were chosen on the basis of the positions they held within their respective levels of government, their authority to make critical policy decisions and their level of visibility with the general public. A city mayor, state governor, director of a major federal agency and the President of the United States are certainly offices which wield significant power when it comes to the safety of citizens. The literary sources researched for this project devoted much, or virtually all in some cases, of their focus to scrutinizing the actions of these individuals. That attention was justified by the quantity and relevance of the information gathered from these sources. Any analysis of the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts should include those four individuals at an absolute minimum and scrutinize their actions above all others.

Several examples of poor emergency management execution, many brought on by deficiencies in preparation and communication, have been brought forth and discussed at length for each government hierarchy represented in the Katrina response. From New Orleans all the way to the White House, the research literature enumerated mistakes and lapses in judgment attributable to each of the featured key players. Based on the extensive research conducted for this project, the conclusion can be made that these mistakes had a severely detrimental impact on the overall effectiveness of Katrina relief efforts and the citizens of New Orleans. The ineptitude and poor planning of FEMA managed to deprive Katrina survivors of precious commodities while wasting much needed government resources. The hurried evacuation initiative which packed tens of thousands of people into the Superdome created deplorable conditions that exposed residents to even more hardships. Leaders were often quick to “pass the buck” and let others take responsibility for decisions that were theirs to make. Rhetoric from

elected and appointed government officials angered constituents and distracted from recovery efforts at hand. These unfortunate occurrences are consequences of the failed leadership abilities exhibited by the key players and their offices.

The key government players were identified, specific examples of leadership failures within each level of government were provided and some of the significant consequences of these leadership failures were also identified. From those provided examples, the mistakes made by prominent government officials and agencies should be evident; the repercussions of those mistakes should also be evident. All of the key players experienced professional and personal setbacks as a result

Finally, it is necessary to analyze how the research and cited sources addressed the primary research question. Through a combination of many factors and circumstances, it should be clear that there were indeed many significant leadership failures in the response to Hurricane Katrina. Services were denied, resources were misused, policies were ignored and lives were ultimately lost when they could—and should—have been saved. These failures created equally significant consequences for the people of New Orleans. Some of those failures—a belated mandatory evacuation order and lack of control in curbing urban unrest chief among them—originated at the local level with Mayor Nagin and his administration, while others were the fault of higher ranking entities at the state and federal levels.

While his response and performance was far from perfect, Nagin's efforts to serve his city were considerably hampered by performances from his superiors. His abilities to make critical decisions, communicate and solve problems were severely impacted by external factors beyond his control before, during and after the storm.

Even a flawlessly executed local response could not have minimized the damage to New Orleans under such circumstances. It should be clear that there were indeed made by the involved key players, and there should also be no doubt that these mistakes had a negative impact on the Katrina relief efforts and those who experienced them firsthand.

Conclusion

The overall intent of this thesis has been to shed light on a very dark time in our history's history by gathering information from reliable sources and applying an impartial analysis to what it all meant. The question posed in the introduction—**did failures at all levels of government, in both its prelude and aftermath, contribute to the damage of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans?**—guided the research process throughout. There are, understandably, strong emotions and opinions attached to the events that unfolded during that fateful week in the Gulf Region and the impact is still evident more than a decade later. It is this author's contention that the research discussed here has provided an informative and unbiased look at the culpability owned by the various government administrations involved in the post-Katrina relief efforts. There is room for debate as to who is most liable in their actions or lack thereof, but it should be very evident that more could have been done by the key players involved to ease the suffering of those most affected by the storm's wrath. Mayor Nagin, Governor Blanco, President Bush and Director Brown fell short of their duties—in some cases, drastically short—in managing the agencies and emergency management procedures under their respective purviews; numerous publications and reflections from the parties involved, not to mention Congress, bear out this inconvenient truth.

This thesis has shown that the people responsible for providing help to those in need made a bad situation worse through both incompetence and hubris. Its findings are relevant to the study of leadership because they provide a blueprint of what not to do in the midst of a crisis. Good leaders do not run from a problem; they embrace it and learn from it. Good leaders do not look to shift blame and avoid the scrutiny they are

due; they accept responsibility and face criticism when it is valid. Good leaders do not put ambition or reputation first; they place the needs and welfare of those whom they lead above their own. These are not insignificant talking points, but principles that mean the difference between success and failure. And in the case of Katrina, they were the difference between life and death for many. The mistakes detailed throughout this thesis are numerous, but if there is one silver lining in them it is the possibility that they can serve as lessons for leaders in addressing future tragedies. These errors cannot and must not be repeated; the potential consequences of doing so are too dire to permit otherwise.

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