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HURRICANE KATRINA AND THE TELEVISION NEWS INDUSTRY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Film, Theater, and Communication Arts

by

Hilda Anita Koonce

B.A. University of Southern, MS, 2003

May 2006

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This thesis is dedicated to my first loves, Breonna and Amiyah Brewer.

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I want to start by thanking God for giving me the strength and patience to write this thesis; my father, Franklin Koonce, for always believing in me even when I don't believe in myself, my mother, Martha Koonce, grandparents, Castella and John Taylor, and my brother, Dewayne Koonce for being my own personal cheering squad, my entire family, for their love and support, my girlfriends, Jessica, Katrina, Cerise, and Kelisha for their encouragement, my boyfriend, Cedrick for being the most incredible boyfriend in the world, without you I probably would have pulled my hair out. I want to give a very special thank you to everyone who took time out of their busy schedules to let me interview them: Aaron Broussard, John Young, Joey Diffata, Johnny Adrianni, Bobby Jindal, David Vitter, Sandy Breland, Sally Ann Roberts, Eric Paulsen, Val Amedee, Shauna Sanford, Bill Capo, Melvin Santos, and Danielle Dugue. And last but not least I have to thank my committee members, Debra Daniels, David Jones, and Ken Wyatt; as well as my major professor, Wendy Jean Hajjar for their time and assistance in writing this thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about the relationship between Hurricane Katrina and the television news industry. My goal was to record the experiences of my fellow co-workers at WWL-TV, which was the only local television station to remain on the air throughout the hurricane. I also wanted to perform a review of the news industry up until the point of the storm, in order to analyze any affects the hurricane may have had on news coverage in general.

INTRODUCTION

I selected the thesis topic Hurricane Katrina and the Television News Industry, because the news industry in general is a topic that's close to my heart, because it's the field in which I work. A study of the news industry is important, because it is a prestigious industry that is believed to be an objective source of news for the public. Many people also believe erroneously that the goal of the news industry is to fulfill a public service function by providing information to the public about the world around them. In fact, the actual goal of news organizations is to deliver an audience to advertisers. I have studied the news industry for two years now in preparation for this thesis, educating myself about issues that hamper quality journalism, such as bias and media conglomeration. I wanted to incorporate Hurricane Katrina into my topic, because it's a topic that everyone in New Orleans has been dealing with on a daily basis since the end of August 2005. Also, the subjects of the hurricane and the news industry were by nature so tightly interwoven that a study of that relationship seemed only natural. In gathering research for this thesis, a phrase that I often repeated to research participants was, "Tell me your Hurricane Katrina story." I will start now by telling you mine.

On August 26, 2005, my biggest dilemma was trying to decide what to wear to the New Orleans Saints preseason football game that night. Ordinarily deciding what to wear is not a major problem for me, but that night was different. That night I knew that there was a strong possibility I would run into my on-again, off-again boyfriend (at that point we were off-again), and it was imperative that I look just right when I pointedly ignored him at the game.

"I know you're not wearing those shoes?" That was my neighbor, Kelisha Barney.

"What's wrong with these shoes? I want to be comfortable." I replied.

“I wouldn’t even wear those shoes to run to the store.” She answered. For my shop-a-holic friend not even being able to wear shoes for a trip to Wal-Mart was the ultimate rejection. Instead of pointing out to her that she wore make-up, jewelry, and curled her hair in order to run to the store, I simply admitted defeat and went to change into the shoes that I’d originally planned to wear the entire time. I had so much fun horrifying my fashion conscious friend!

Although the Saints lost that night, I had a great time, especially after my on-again, off-again boyfriend called and we were back on again. No one talked about the storm barreling towards New Orleans that night. Maybe they were all like me and simply didn’t know about it. That would soon change. By the end of that weekend there wouldn’t be a Gulf Coast resident alive who didn’t know about the hurricane.

It was the next day, on a Saturday, when I found out about the approaching storm. My on-again (soon to be off-again, permanently) boyfriend sent me several text messages asking if I was leaving (exclamation point), because there was a major hurricane headed our way, (exclamation point times three). At this point, I finally turned on my television and began watching coverage of the approaching storm. I was scared. I was really scared, but I also knew that due to my financial situation I would probably be staying in the city in order to continue my work as a camera operator at WWL-TV.

I woke up early that Sunday, August 28, morning and immediately turned on my television to watch the storm coverage. Overnight Katrina had turned into a Category 5 hurricane. That information shook me to the core. At this point I decided that I would evacuate only after I’d finished working my regular shift which began that morning at 11:35 and ended at 10:30 that night. I called my boss to tell him about my decision and request that I be relieved after my shift ended by a camera operator who was not planning to evacuate. I didn’t think the

request would be a problem since my boss had called just the day before to ask me whether or not I would be evacuating at all. At this point my boss informed me that, according to our new general manager, anyone who did not report to work would be suspended indefinitely. I didn't know what to do. What if I left and the storm turned, the same as Hurricane Ivan, and caused no damaged to our area? I would be suspended indefinitely during a time when I really needed to work.

“But this is kind of a life or death situation.” I pleaded with my boss.

“Well, all I can say is, do what you have to do.” He responded.

So, I did what I always do when I'm torn over a major decision; I called my dad.

Unfortunately, he wasn't home. Next, I tried to call several other New Orleans residents to see what they were going to do, but at this point cell phone services were already disintegrating. Then I remembered two conversations that I had the night before. One friend had informed me that instead of evacuating with his children and girlfriend; that they had booked a hotel room in the city. I thought about his two small children and begged him to evacuate. He responded, “We'll be alright, we'll just ride out the storm at the hotel.” I informed him that after the storm passed their may not be certain basic services such as water or electricity in the city for days afterward. Exasperated with my warnings he changed the subject, and when I wouldn't stop encouraging him to leave the city, he ended the conversation. That was the last time that I was able to talk to him. As of right now, I don't know where he is or if his children made it through the storm unharmed.

That previous Saturday night I had also talked to another friend who also decided to ride out the storm. When I began to encourage him as well to evacuate he only chuckled, “My mother made it through Betsy and Camille just fine, we're going to be fine; we're staying.” I informed

him that Hurricane Katrina would be like no other storm before it, “People will die, and even if you survive the storm there will be no water, electricity, or sewage for days to come.” At which point he promptly pointed out that I was staying. I answered him that I worked at a television station and if I could stay, I should.

He did survive the storm, however. After spending several days in the aforementioned conditions, and with his food supply running low, he waited until his flooded vehicle dried and then evacuated to Baton Rouge. After living out of his car for several days, he next went to Dallas where he and his mother were able to find housing.

I was thinking about all of this and still weighing my decision, whether or not to leave. I returned to the television coverage of the storm, to see my co-workers, Sally Ann Roberts and Eric Paulsen anchoring. At this point I remember feeling as if one of them literally reached through my television set, grabbed me by my shirt, and practically yelled at me to, “Get the hell out of town!” My decision was made between my part-time job and possibly, my life. I was leaving. It took about 13 hours to evacuate home to West Point, Mississippi (a trip that normally takes 4 ½ hours).

On Monday, August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina roared ashore (we now know as a Category 3 hurricane) passing just east of New Orleans. Although there was damage to the area, many believed that the city had survived the worst of Katrina; unfortunately the Mississippi coastline and parts of Alabama were devastated. However, before the victory celebration could begin in New Orleans, on Tuesday, August 30, the levee at the 17th Street Canal breached which gave way to massive flooding. Residents who remained in the city were forced to flee to their roofs as the water rose. New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin reported on WWL-TV, “We have 80 percent of our city under water, basically everything north of I-10” (Dallas Morning News 17).

The people left trapped in the city had no water, electricity, or sewerage. Undoubtedly food was in short supply, and in New Orleans in August and September the heat is unbearable. Many residents were trapped on their rooftops and in their homes for days waiting for help either by boat or helicopter. Hunger, restlessness, and hopelessness grew. Some people began to loot abandoned stores. Some people also began to try to break into abandoned homes. Martial law was declared in some areas before Katrina even came ashore. More than 1,000 people died in New Orleans either during the storm, or its aftermath waiting for help. I remember watching news reports of the storm, at home in West Point, that week in complete astonishment. The beautiful city that I had just left looked like a third world country. News reports focused on the many people trapped in the Superdome or at the Convention Center, starving and waiting for help. There were also many reports of looting, rapes, murders, gang takeovers, and citizens shooting at rescue helicopters. It was absolutely unbelievable, I was stunned. I was also incredibly frustrated because at that point, my parents were in a transitional stage between digital cable and satellite, so I had to rely on the one or two major broadcast stations, from which we received adequate reception, for information. I would wake up in the morning to coverage of NBC's The Today Show, which stopped its continuous coverage of the hurricane after a program or two. I would then have to wait to catch the Noon, 5 o'clock, 6 o'clock, and 10 o'clock local broadcasts whose coverage of the storm was limited to their two minute top story. The news program that I looked forward to daily was the 5:30 evening news with Brian Williams on NBC, because they covered the city of New Orleans, as well as other devastated areas throughout their broadcast. However, I was disappointed with the national coverage that I saw on the broadcast networks, and also on 24 hr. cable networks, such as CNN (which I was able to view whenever I visited friends and relatives). All of the coverage was centered on the Superdome and

Convention Center, and other areas such as Kenner, where I lived, were almost completely ignored. I was also annoyed by the mispronunciation of the names of towns, such as Pas Christian, MS, by some national reporters. I was ecstatic when I discovered that I could view streaming video of WWL-TV's 24hr. news coverage from my laptop. "With New Orleans' evacuees scattered around the country, Belo (WWL's parent company) makes the WWL signal available to stations in other markets. More than 30 outlets pick up the feed. Sister Belo stations, including KHOU and WFAA in Texas and PBS stations in Louisiana and Mississippi, simulcast WWL. Yahoo streams the coverage online" (Romano 13). I was glued to any source of Katrina information that I could find, I couldn't get enough. I moved back into my apartment on September 24, 2005. I remember looking around at all of my possessions that I had worried about for a month. I was happy that I still had my apartment, but all of my stuff, all of a sudden, just looked like stuff. Worrying about those things was so small in comparison to what happened in this city.

For about a month after the storm every greeting was the same, "How'd you make out?" No one was a stranger, everyone wanted to hear everyone else's story, and everyone wanted to tell their own story. "How'd you make it through?" that's a question I wanted to have answered in my interviews for this thesis, many of the respondents having remained in the city, "How on earth did you make it through?"

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The name Katrina will always be synonymous with a force of nature that changed the lives of everyone she touched. And the date August 29, 2005 is printed in indelible ink in the minds of every New Orleans and Mississippi Gulf Coast resident who was affected by the hurricane. Although the storm caused massive amounts of damage to land, property, and human lives, everything that Katrina left in her wake was not bad. Before, during, and after the storm people opened their homes and cities to evacuees, donated large amounts of money to the relief effort, and donated their time to the rebuilding effort. During this catastrophic storm we saw the face of the American spirit and it was a kind face, a caring face, and a compassionate one as well. The hurricane also brought out the best in the television news industry. News delivery was more emotional, and issues such as racism, poverty, and governmental failures were highlighted and given a national audience. Unfortunately, Hurricane Katrina also brought forth the worst in the television news industry. However, in order to fully analyze the triumphs and flaws of the industry during this disaster coverage, we must first take a backwards look and review the state of the industry before that fateful day, when Katrina became a name that America would never forget.

BACKGROUND

In his book Bad News: The Decline of Reporting, The Business of News, and the Danger To Us All, Tom Fenton deals with the current state of the television news industry. He provides a comprehensive overview of American broadcast journalism, and a brief analysis of how it came into its current condition. Fenton believes that the current condition of the news industry is that it is broken almost beyond repair. According to Fenton, there are seven factors that led to the

industry's decline: the status of news as a profit earner, the deregulation of broadcasting, the decline of the industry's code of standards, the obsession with ratings, the expense of maintaining foreign bureaus, the growth of packaging rather than gathering news, and the corporate ownership of the news media (54). Firstly, the Federal Communications Committee mandated that in exchange for the use of public airwaves that television stations would air programs that provided a public service. The original goal of news divisions was to provide this public service by keeping their viewers informed about what was happening in the world around them. "The networks expected their news divisions to bring prestige rather than profits to the owners"(Fenton 54). However, this changed with the popularity of the news program 60 Minutes, which showed networks that they could earn a real profit from the news. Secondly, during the 1980s, the Federal Communications Commission deregulated broadcasting by increasing the number of stations the networks could own and dropping the requirement for public service broadcasting. "Network news shows were now free to cut corners and chase ratings to their heart's content"(Fenton 57). A third source that led to the decline of television news was the decline of the industry's code of standards. During the 1980s we saw the emergence of news consultant firms who went from station to station with advice on the way that anchors and reporters should present themselves and what stories the people wanted to hear. Former CBS evening news executive producer, Sanford Socolow, comments on the Father of news consulting, Frank Magid. "He used to tell them (news stations) not to bother covering city hall because it was boring...out of his philosophy came a new maxim, 'If it bleeds, it leads' "(Fenton 59).The obsession with ratings is Fenton's fourth factor that has contributed greatly to the decline of television news. The goal of the industry is no longer to perform a public service to its viewers, but rather to deliver an audience to advertisers. The importance of ratings lies in

the fact that the higher a news station's ratings, the more money that station can command from advertisers in order to air their commercials during that station's news programs. It's also not only important that stations provide an audience to advertisers; they must now provide the right audience to advertisers. In an interview with Fenton, Dan Rather talks about the audience demographics game, "We're at the point now where even if you do well in the ratings-that is, how many homes tune in at a given time-it doesn't end the pressure. Because what now they sell on are the demographics. The preferred demographic is eighteen to forty-nine, and within the platinum demographic is males eighteen-to-twenty-four, because it's hard to get them to try television" (60). Today the measure of a good broadcast is the number of ratings the show produced. The average newscast airs as follows: urgent music, hard news, commercials, not as hard news and possibly weather, commercials, sports, commercials, super fluffy non-news, final weather, a little chatting, end of the show, then commercials. During any given news cast you may receive about 12 minutes of actual news. And since news programs are now expected to compete with entertainment programming, the definition of hard news has definitely softened. The expense of maintaining foreign bureaus, which led to many news organizations getting rid of their foreign bureaus is a fifth reason for the dumbing down of American news. Foreign bureaus have been replaced by parachuting journalism. Walter Cronkite, the dean of American broadcast journalism, openly disapproves of this type of journalism, "This whole idea of parachuting correspondents and camera crews into a place where there is a crisis, that's too late. When you parachute people in, the fire is already burning"(Fenton 66). Cronkite also speaks against the growth of packaging rather than gathering news, Fenton's sixth factor. "The problem is that you-that is the organization that is accepting the service or the report-have lost control. You are only circulating something that is readily available, not checking those facts against your own expert

reporters. If Reuters or AP is the only one to get the story, that's a single source, and we should be double checking it"(Fenton 69). A perfect example occurs one day when I was at work at WWL-TV, and a new producer included incorrect information in a story. When the director informed her that the information was incorrect she responded, "But I got that from the AP." He answered, "That doesn't make it true." Lastly Fenton lists the corporate ownership of the news media as a reason for the decline of the television news industry. Corporate ownership creates cost cutting measures and bias. The major goal of any corporate owner is to turn a profit. Any aspect of journalism that is believed to cost more money than it makes for example, foreign bureaus, are cut, and any news content that doesn't deliver the 18-49 demographic to advertisers is cut. Also any news stories that may negatively affect those advertisers or other businesses that are owned by the conglomerate are cut. In an issue of The Nation, Mark Miller speaks against the fact that corporate conglomerates own the four major broadcast stations, and details how this fact explains "Why Tom Brokaw might find it difficult to introduce stories critical of nuclear power. Or why it is unlikely ABC News will ever again do an expose of Disney practices; or indeed why CNN-or any of the others- does not touch on the biggest story of them all, i.e., the media monopoly itself"(Mercier 256). Miller goes on to say, "With the mergers came some hints of how the new proprietors would henceforth use their journalists: Disney's ABC News apologizing to Phillip Morris-a major television advertiser through Kraft Foods- for having told the truth on a broadcast of Day One about Philip Morris's manipulation of nicotine levels in its cigarettes; and CBS's in-house counsel ordering the old newshounds at 60 Minutes to bury an explosive interview with whistleblower Jeffrey Wigand about the addictive practices of Brown & Williamson. Such moves portend the death of broadcast journalism"(Mercier 257). Fenton also discusses spin; he believes that one major reason why spin is so pervasive in our society is

because politicians as well as the news industry do not believe that Americans are capable of or care to handle complex truths. Fenton writes, "We live in a time when, suddenly it seems almost impossible to know the real facts about the most pivotal life-altering public events of our day"(Fenton 81). He points out that our coverage of the Iraqi war never shows Iraqi victims being killed by American troops; while on Al Jazeera and various European channels it's shown regularly. In fact, Iraqi citizens are defined as insurgents whenever information is provided concerning their deaths. What exactly is an insurgent? Besides, that is, a word that evokes no sympathy, no emotion, and no sense of connectedness to the deceased. The Iraqi media has often been accused of spouting political propaganda, and providing its citizens with an insular, biased view, that is often inaccurate. However is our own media very different? Fenton writes, "So spin has triumphed in the worst possible way, by confusing the public's very ability or even inclination to recognize the truth...and while we argue among ourselves, our enemies continue to proliferate abroad"(86). One excuse that the television news industry gives for not truly covering foreign news is that the American public is bored by the news, and doesn't want to know the truth. While there may be some truth to the claim, is it not also true that the public has been trained to feel that way by politicians and the news industry itself. What if the public was actually given a little bit of credit and allowed to see and hear the truth? Although it has been said that ignorance is bliss, ignorance is also just plain ignorance. And by continuing to aid us in burying our heads in the ground our media also aids us in losing sight of the inevitable; that what we don't know could kill us.

So, why is spin so pervasive in our society? One cause is the fact that spin is allowed to run freely, unchecked. For example, a politician has a marked interest in ensuring that themselves and the people around them or aired in the most favorable light possible. So if any

issue arises that might taint their image, the goal is to put a spin on that issue to turn it back into that politicians favor. A perfect example occurred during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when the president, George Bush, visited devastated states and held press conferences. The Bush administration was receiving a lot of heat during this time due to the slow response in aiding the many people who were trapped in the city of New Orleans. In order to ensure that his administration was shown in a more favorable light, the president assured Americans that help was on the way to hurricane victims in the forms of food, water, and military trucks. Afterwards, everyone in attendance smiled in relief because help was on the way. However, we later discovered that help was still precious days away. Once again spin was allowed to run amuck, unchecked. But who checks spin? Quite plainly, the only other people in attendance at such press conferences, reporters; they represent the voice of the people after all. So, when did reporters become afraid to ask the hard questions?

According to Tom Fenton, the tough questions stopped being asked during the Reagan administration. Ronald Reagan was the first president to personally select the news correspondents that he allowed into White House briefings, and refused to call upon the journalists who asked the hard questions once they were there. The news companies went along with Reagan's program in order to keep their seat at White House briefings. Fenton writes, "It was this era that saw the birth of the 'exclusive' interview- the Barbara Walters-style therapeutic talkathon in which the interviewee (often a politician) agonized over one soft, fuzzy, cozy question after another. Interviews of this kind signaled the triumph of chat shows over news values and, more insidiously, the subliminal moment when star network interviewers began to undermine their news colleagues by turning politicians into icons" (86). In his book The Arizona Republic, Rich Robertson writes that while news organizations formerly covered county courts,

city halls, and police departments, they are now replaced by government paid information officers. "News organizations simply publish or air what they're told by the agencies"(Mercier 155). I remember being so excited the first time I was able to tag along for a news "live shot." A "live shot" is quite simply when a reporter is sent out to cover an event from the scene of that event. The "live shot" that I attended involved a murder. En route to the location of the murder I remember feeling a lot of nervous energy in anticipation for what was about to happen. What happened was absolutely nothing. We arrive at the location; the press is kept at a distance that hampers serious view, after all of the reporters from the major local stations arrive, a paid information officer appears, gives everyone a statement simultaneously, and we all left. My disappointment was unbounded.

One issue that hampers quality journalism and also a first cousin to spin is news censorship. When reporters are fed spin and regurgitate that spin to the audience, then what the audience does not receive is the real story underneath the layers of spin. What's the truth? What aren't you telling us? What is it that you don't want us to know? If spin is accepted, we will never know, and that is a form of censorship. A government entity is censoring information from the public, and the news media is aiding that entity in their endeavor. Oftentimes, a news insider is aware of the censored information, but proceeds in withholding that information from the public in alignment with government officials. And that is news censorship.

Peter Phillips, et al. deals with television news censorship in Censored 2006: The Top 25 Censored Stories. One of the top censored stories is the failure of the media coverage in Iraq. The story appears as follows: Over the past two years, the United States has conducted two major sieges against Fallujah, a city in Iraq. The first attempted siege of Fallujah (a city of 300,000 people) resulted in a defeat for Coalition forces. As a result, the United States gave the

citizens of Fallujah two choices prior to the second siege: leave the city or risk dying as enemy insurgents. Faced with this ultimatum, approximately 250,000 citizens, or 83% of the population of Fallujah, fled the city. The people had nowhere to flee and ended up as refugees. Many families were forced to survive in fields, vacant lots, and abandoned buildings without access to shelter, water, electricity, food, or medical care. The 50,000 citizens who either chose to remain in the city or who were unable to leave were trapped by Coalition forces and were cut off from food, water, and medical supplies. The United States military claimed that there were a few thousand enemy insurgents remaining among those who stayed in the city and conducted the invasions as if all the people remaining were enemy combatants. Burhan Fasa'a, an Iraqi journalist, said Americans grew easily frustrated with Iraqis who could not speak English. "Americans did not have interpreters with them, so they entered houses and killed people because they didn't speak English. They entered the house where I was with 26 people, and shot people because [the people] didn't obey [the soldiers'] orders, even just because the people couldn't understand a word of English." Abu Hammad, a resident of Fallujah, told the Inter Press Service that he saw people attempt to swim across the Euphrates to escape the siege. "The Americans shot them with rifles from the shore. Even if some of them were holding a white flag or white clothes over their head to show they are not fighters, they were all shot." Furthermore, "even the wound[ed] people were killed. The Americans made announcements for people to come to one mosque if they wanted to leave Fallujah, and even the people who went there carrying white flags were killed." Former residents of Fallujah recall other tragic methods of killing the wounded. "I watched them [U.S. Forces] roll over wounded people in the street with tanks...This happened so many times." Preliminary estimates as of December of 2004 revealed that at least 6,000 Iraqi citizens in Fallujah had been killed, and one-third of the city had been

destroyed. Journalists Mary Trotochaud and Rick McDowell assert that the continuous slaughter in Fallujah is greatly contributing to escalating violence in other regions of the country such as Mosul, Baquba, Hilla, and Baghdad. The violence prompted by the U.S. invasion has resulted in the assassinations of at least 338 Iraqi's who were associated with Iraq's new government. The U.S. invasion of Iraq, and more specifically Fallujah, is causing an incredible humanitarian disaster among those who have no specific involvement with the war. The International Committee for the Red Cross reported on December 23, 2004 that three of the city's water purification plants had been destroyed and the fourth badly damaged. Civilians were running short on food and are unable to receive help from those who are willing to make a positive difference. Aid organizations have been repeatedly denied access to the city, hospitals, and refugee population in the surrounding areas...Marjorie Cohn, executive vice president of the National Lawyers Guild, and the U.S. representative to the executive committee of the American Association of Jurists, has noted that the U.S. invasion of Fallujah is a violation of international law that the U.S. had specifically ratified: "They [U.S. Forces] stormed and occupied the Fallujah General Hospital, and have not agreed to allow doctors and ambulances to go inside the main part of the city to help the wounded, in direct violation of the Geneva Conventions." According to David Walsh, the American media also seems to contribute to the subversion of truth in Fallujah. Although in many cases, journalists are prevented from entering the city and are denied access to the wounded, corporate media showed little concern regarding their denied access. There has been little or no mention of the immorality or legality of the attacks the United States have waged against Iraq. With few independent journalists reporting on the carnage, the international humanitarian community in exile, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent prevented from entering the besieged city, the world is forced to rely on reporting from journalists

embedded with U.S. forces. In the U.S. press, we see casualties reported for Fallujah as follows: number of U.S. soldiers dead, number of Iraqi soldiers dead, number of "guerillas" or "insurgents" dead. Nowhere were the civilian casualties reported in the first weeks of invasion. An accurate count of civilian casualties to date has yet to be published in the mainstream media. However, a survey conducted by Dr. Les Roberts of John Hopkins University, indicates that the death toll associated with the invasion and occupation of Iraq is about 100,000 people or higher (Philips, et al. 42-43).

Another top censored story of 2004 and 2005 according to Peter Philips and Project Uncensored was, "Child Wards of the State Used in AIDS Experiments." At New York's Incarnation Children's Center more than 100 orphans, some as young as three months, were used as test subjects in AIDS drug trials (Philips, et al. 101). "U.S. Uses Tsunami to Military Advantage in Southeast Asia," was another top censored story. "At the same time that U.S. aid was widely publicized domestically, our coinciding military motives were virtually ignored by the press. While supplying our aid (which when compared proportionally to that of other, less wealthy countries, was an insulting pittance). We simultaneously bolstered military alliances with regional powers in, and began expanding our bases throughout, the Indian Ocean region" (Philips, et al. 58). Authors of Censored 2006 also discuss what they refer to as "Junk Food News," empty calorie, inconsequential gossip. Although celebrity gossip has many media outlets it also manages to find its way into the nightly newscast. In Pulling Back the Curtain: The Best of PR Watch, Laura Miller writes about another entity that tries to pass itself off as real news, video news releases or VNRs. A VNR is a simulated television news story that is paid for by corporations, government agencies, etc and ran on television newscasts as if they are legitimate news packages. "VNRs are designed to be indistinguishable from traditional TV news and are

often aired without the original producers and sponsors being identified, and sometimes without any local editing"(Philips,et al 281). One VNR that promoted the controversial Medicare reform law that aired on 40 stations between January 22 and February 12, 2004, which ended with "In Washington, I'm Karen Ryan reporting," was paid for by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. An investigation by the U.S. General Accounting Office found that a production company contracted by a public relations firm employed Karen Ryan. The Accounting Office concluded that the VNR violated a ban on government funded "publicity and propaganda"(Philips, et al 282). VNRs have become pervasive in the television news industry due to the laziness of producers. Here is a story all wrapped up and presented in the proper packaging, just ripe for airing that lands squarely in your lap, and you think, "Great, that's a minute and a half of time filled that involved absolutely no work on my end!" But who wrote it? Who produced it? And what does that person or company have to gain from airing this story in a certain light? It is unfair to news consumer to subject them to stories that pass themselves off as objective reporting when they are in actuality free advertising for major companies and government agencies. At least in commercial forms the viewer is able to accept or reject the messages for what they are.

Alexandria Kitty also talks about the fraud of VNRs in her book Don't Believe It: How Lies Become News. According to Kitty one problem with news content that makes it especially vulnerable to this fraud is the fact that stations rely on too few news gathering services for their information. The wire service is a news gathering organization, such as the *Associated Press*, that sells stories to a variety of media outlets, including television stations. "Even though hundreds of media outlets cover the same stories, most of the same outlets rely on the same wire service and not on in-house reporters. The implications are obvious: a single, misleading,

exaggerated, biased, inaccurate or fraudulent news story can spread to hundreds of media outlets without opposition within seconds"(Kitty 17). Another factor that Kitty believes denigrates news content is the process of gate keeping. News editors, producers, and writers decide what is or is not newsworthy. These behind the scenes workers are responsible for the information that the news consumers receive in any given newscast. That is a major responsibility. Imagine a person who receives all of their news, for example, from NBC or their local affiliates. That means that practically everything this individual knows about the outside world comes from this one source. Everything this person knows of the world they live in comes from this one producer or editor who sits in the background and decides what that individual will discover today. So, what is the measuring stick for determining newsworthiness? The news is not a reflection of the world we live in, rather a reflection of the extremities of the world we live in. Murder, fatal car accidents, disease, and war are all outside the daily realm of the average American. What's deemed newsworthy is anything visually stimulating, tragic, or extraordinary. "Because producers and editors have to make choices as to what will make news, some potential news items have to be excluded. The game of inclusion and exclusion is known as gate keeping. Certain people, issues, and events get more coverage than others, but access comes with an expiration date: once a story is deemed "resolved" or "passé" by the press, the gate can abruptly close to those who once were considered newsworthy. It's the elite nature of the gatekeepers that has them being accused of bias and discrimination. Sometimes the charge is warranted- but other times, it's just the nature of the media beast" (Kitty 25). The book, Don't Believe It also covers rumors, hoaxes, and misinformation in the news industry. A few examples of media professionals having the wool pulled over their eyes include: several large media outlets reporting that blondes were in evolutionary peril, a well-respected paper publishing embarrassing and intimate information in

an obituary that turned out to be false, a child of average intelligence being touted as a genius, several newspapers reporting that a tombstone was equipped with an ATM machine, a decadent cult receiving prominent media coverage after it claimed it cloned a human baby, and a security guard who helped victims during a bombing later being portrayed as possibly the bomber himself (Kitty 15). One factor that causes news personnel to fall for rumors and hoaxes is their thirst for all things extraordinary. Another is time constraints, if a producer is looking for stories to fill a hole in a newscast that airs in less than 30 minutes then there isn't a tremendous amount of time to verify information. "Investigative journalism costs money and may take months to complete" (Kitty 52). For producers it's simply much easier to go with a story as it comes than to expend the energy, time, and money that is involved in checking out every single fact. The author also talks specifically about hoaxes based on stereotypes. In a stereotype hoax, the rumor is started based on certain prejudices members of a society might hold about others based on their race, age, gender, etc. However, the spread of the rumor is not necessarily contingent upon a person believing the stereotype, only that a vast majority of the population has knowledge that said stereotype exists. One example is the stereotype that black men are violent criminals predisposed to causing harm to others particularly white women. However, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigations, in 2000 almost 94% of black murder victims were killed by a black offender and 86% of white murder victims were killed by a white offender. "Getting attacked by someone outside your own race is rare" (Kitty 138). Kitty provides several methods of identifying stereotype hoaxes: if the story is based on racial, ethnic, or gender clichés; though there are reports of "mass" attacks, there are no specific accounts- despite efforts to track down specific instances; the sourcing of the story is difficult to pin down; though most crime statistics show that perpetrators prey on victims who are same race as they are, the story implies the opposite;

there is no forensic evidence to corroborate the victim's story, no witnesses are found or even if there are witnesses, their accounts are too similar, even though they claim to have been at different places; there are chronology problems or the crimes could not have logically taken place as described; or there are allegations of a vast conspiracy to keep information quiet although no evidence is found to support these claims (Kitty 139). In the book Don't Believe It: How Lies Become News, author, Alexandria Kitty, goes a step beyond vividly describing media hoaxes and rumors and their origins, to empowering the television news viewer with helpful hints and clues in order to spot misinformation. After reading the book, anyone can become a savvy media consumer.

Racial stereotyping is another element that hampers quality broadcast journalism. In the essay, Images that Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media, Paul Martin writes that there has been a history of stereotyping African-Americans in the news media (1996). Likewise, in an essay for the Museum of Broadcast Communications entitled Racism, Ethnicity, and Television, John Downing writes, "The few minority roles in dramatic TV have frequently been of criminals and drug addicts. This pattern has intensively reinforced, and seemingly been reinforced by, the similar racial stereotyping in "reality TV" police shows and local TV news programs." In her article "Judgment Calls," Jacqueline Sharkey refers to a series of studies conducted by Professor Robert Entman, (Northwestern University) that show that the television medium perpetuates stereotypes that African American men are violent and in some cases are portrayed as "more dangerous than whites, even when whites are accused of similar crimes" (Mercier 166). Paul Martin also reports in his essay that news images of African American criminals often depict them in handcuffs being escorted by police while images of Caucasian criminals often displayed them wearing suits and walking with their lawyers (4). Evidence to support this

conclusion can be found by watching practically any given television program, news included. While growing up in my hometown of West Point, Mississippi, there was an ongoing (and sadly true) joke in our family that whenever we watched a television news program and they did not display a photograph or footage of a criminal then that person must have been Caucasian. One solution for combating racial stereotyping in the news industry would be for every news company to implement sensitivity training programs for their news personnel. The same as many police stations have implemented for their officers. Television news stations have a responsibility to their public to report the news in a manner that is devoid of racial stereotyping, and as a viewer I have a right to watch their programs without having to endure insensitive and inaccurate, racially motivated messages about my race as well as others.

In order to fully analyze the relationship between Hurricane Katrina and the television news industry it was first necessary to develop an understanding of the industry pre-Katrina. Due to the status of news as a profit earner, the deregulation of broadcast, and the growth of packaging rather than gathering news, among others, the broadcast journalism industry has been steadily declining. This decline has been marked by the emergence of spin, the proliferation of censorship, and ubiquitousness of misinformation in the news industry. So, how will this industry react to its meeting with the worst natural disaster in United States history, Hurricane Katrina?

HURRICANE KATRINA

Alexandria Kitty's lesson in becoming a savvy media consumer would have served us all well while viewing the Hurricane Katrina disaster coverage. Unfortunately the rumors that Kitty speaks against ran amuck during this time. Apparently murders and rapes were the norm, and the entire city was looting. And Fenton would not be surprised by the fact that sensationalism

reached its peak during the coverage. After all, sensationalism is driven by the need for ratings and the belief that Americans are bored by news that isn't exciting. And the media was intent upon keeping Katrina news exciting; especially with reports claiming that tens of thousands would die. Although there were too many Katrina related deaths, a little over a 1,000, there was no where near the tens of thousands predicted. In addition, racial stereotyping, which is nothing new to the news industry, was alive and present during the news coverage of this storm.

Along with the worst in broadcast journalism that shined so brightly during this tragedy, Katrina also highlighted the industry's best. For the first time in my own 25 years of living I saw the wall between television news personalities and their cameras crumble and fall. Tears raw emotion, and passionate pleas replaced dispassionate, unemotional, and detached monologues. In an article that appeared in the Times Picayune, Dave Walker writes, "Reporters and anchors openly demonstrated passion and expressed outrage over the post-Katrina New Orleans-Geraldo-style, you might say" (D2). In this quote Walker is referring to news journalist, Geraldo Rivera whom he interviewed for his article that appeared in the Times Picayune on November 7, 2005. Rivera is probably best known for his outrageous 1980s talk show "Geraldo," however he currently works as a news correspondent for cable news networks. Rivera is also known for his biased, nonobjective, tell-it-like-it-is style of reporting. He speaks with Walker about the recent Katrina- spawned activist journalism, "They're (news anchors and reporters) all outside that line, the line represents mainstream, objective journalism conveying the data from point A to point B. I've always been in the alternative tradition, and (Katrina's aftermath) was so profoundly upsetting, so undeniably emotional- in the failing of the various (governmental) entities- that it brought out the best in people. That's my kind of reporting. Old school. My school"(D2). Rivera continues to comment on NBC Nightly News coverage of the storm, referring specifically to

anchor, Brian Williams, "Look at Brian Williams, Mr. Gravitas Jr., how he was affected. I like the guy very much. His reporting was much stronger and had a much bigger impact than if he had set up at that anchor elevation and looked down and said, 'This is what happened' "(Walker D2). The emotion, astonishment, and outrage expressed by Brian Williams as well as other reporters and anchors during this time was understandable to the American public, although it veered from what we were accustomed to viewing on television news programs. What happened, in New Orleans especially, during the aftermath of the storm was amazingly unlike anything that we'd ever witnessed in the United States of America. How could *anyone* witness what happened here and not be moved from stoic objectivity into emotional subjectivity the same as the rest of us?

The news coverage of Hurricane Katrina also brought attention to several social ills that still plague our country today, racism and class division. In his Times Picayune interview, Geraldo Rivera added, "That glaring exposure of the race and class divisions in this country was never, in my very long experience, more clear, more graphic, more hurtful to me than it was in New Orleans. And anyone who says otherwise is either full of shit or has a political agenda. They either weren't there, didn't see it with their own eyes or they have as an agenda blame-shifting...No one dares says to me that it wasn't the most horrible natural disaster ever to befall not only the United States, but the whole first world. Period." (Walker D2). News coverage of the storm had no choice other than to expose New Orleans, as well as other cities across the United States, issues with race and class division. It was blatantly; unavoidably obvious that the vast majority of people trapped at the Superdome and Convention Center were black and poor. Shortly after the storm, Brown University sociologist, John Logan led a study of the demographic analysis of the Hurricane Katrina strike zone. He found that, "The suffering from

the storm certainly cut across racial and class lines, but the odds of living in a damaged area were clearly much greater for blacks, residents who rented their homes, and poor people. In these respects, the most socially vulnerable residents also turned out to be most exposed to Katrina" (2005). In explanation for the disparity Jarvis Deberry of the Times Picayune writes, "Neighborhoods that grew during the last half of the 20th Century reflect the racial climates in which they were forged. It didn't always matter where a black family wanted to buy a house. They bought where they were allowed. The land wasn't always desirable" (B7).

Racial stereotyping was also evident in the media coverage of this storm. During the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, African-Americans who broke into stores to obtain supplies for themselves and their families were dubbed by reporters as "looters" while Caucasians were displayed as "finders." National networks constantly aired the same footage of the same two to three African Americans stealing unnecessary items such as toys from Wal-Mart and a plasma television set to illustrate their reports of the ubiquitous looting that was taking over the city. The socially conscious rapper, Kanye West, sparked controversy when explaining, in his opinion, the slow response to rescue hurricane victims from the city. He publicly accused the Bush administration, as well as the media, of racism in their dealings with the victims. "I hate the way they portray us in the media. You see a black family, it says, 'They're looting.' You see a white family, it says, 'They're looking for food.' And, you know, it's been five days [waiting for federal help] because most of the people are black...America is set up to help the poor, the black people, the less well-off, as slow as possible...George Bush doesn't care about black people" (Moraes)! Rivera also believed that racism was a factor in the mistreatment of the storm survivors by certain government entities. He comments to Walker about the fact that he himself witnessed law enforcement blocking escape routes out of the city, "There is no way on God's

green Earth if that was South Beach, that those people would not be able to walk over that bridge" (D1-D2). Rivera is referring to the fact that during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Gretna city police blocked the entrance from New Orleans into the West Bank, so that storm victims could not evacuate to their city. The police feared that the storm victims would bring looting and lawlessness into the city of Gretna. It is believed that news accounts that rescue helicopters were being shot at by gang members who wanted to gain control of the city were false, and that the source of these shots were actually Gretna city police attempting to keep New Orleans storm survivors out of Gretna. These actions taken by the Gretna city police were viewed as blatant racial stereotyping by Rivera as well as others. There is even a website devoted to the matter entitled Gretnasucks.com.

Along with racial stereotyping, the situation in New Orleans after the storm was also the perfect breeding ground for misinformation and sensationalism in the news industry. Urgency was a contributing factor in the misinformation process due to the importance placed on breaking news and a station's ability to get information to the public before their competitors. In a Washington Post article, Robert Pierre and Ann Gerhart write that false reports and rumors passed on by uninformed officials to uncritical journalists may have slowed aid to storm victims. The reports of rape, homicides, and violence against rescue workers portrayed the people trapped in the city as violent and ungrateful, evoking less sympathy for their plight. For example, on September 1, 2005, at a briefing Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu said that her people had received reports that some of their deputies and sheriffs had either been injured or killed. However, only one law enforcement official had received a self-inflicted gunshot wound during a struggle. Also, a Times Picayune article quoted a member of the Arkansas National Guard in saying that 30 to 40 decomposing bodies were found in a Convention Center freezer, including a

girl whose throat was slashed. A spokesman for the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, contradicted the statement saying that four bodies were found, one was a gunshot victim, and there was no record of a dead girl with a slashed throat. Of course it was the above-mentioned uncorroborated Times Picayune account that was repeated by other news organizations. Lt. Gen. Russel L. Honore, who served as the commander of the Katrina Joint Task Force, remarked that reporters became so overwhelmed with trying to inform the public how bad the situation was rather than "gathering facts and corroborating that information" (Gerhart and Pierre). However, rumor control and corroborating information became somewhat difficult when local and federal officials are also misinformed and passing along false information to news entities.

Karen Slattery and Erik Ugland of The Digital Journalist magazine also write about the sensational news coverage of Hurricane Katrina in their article *The Truth and Nothing But the Truth*. In the September 2005 issue of the magazine they write, "We believe there is a distinction between sensationalism as sensationalism; and news that contains elements of sensationalism but that, taken as a whole, provides essential information that citizens need to confront if they are to engage in thoughtful moral decision-making" (2005). Slattery and Ugland point out that in the early 1900s when reporting on stories about tenements, child labor, and mental institutions, muckrakers used grim details. However, their method of reporting brought attention to social problems of the time and called the community into action. "This type of storytelling is critical to the culture because it compels us to negotiate and renegotiate moral standards and boundaries...it is a mistake to simply write off graphic stories or distasteful story details as unworthy of our attention. Sometimes telling a story in all of its horrible detail is appropriate, particularly if it forces us to confront issues related to social justice"(Slattery and Ugland). The writers conclude

the article by saying, "Sensationalism for its own sake is manipulative and destructive. It is deceptive because it leads us to see our fellow humans as meaner, colder and less caring than they really are...Properly covered, elements or images that are normally associated with sensationalism but are central to the story can stimulate debate and lead to better social and political practices." Slattery and Ugland do provide a measuring stick for judging whether or not a story is sensational. Unfortunately their measuring stick applies only in the heads of journalists. According to the writers, journalists should ask themselves why they cover individual stories, and why they cover those stories in a particular manner. This is true, however, how does that help viewers determine whether or not a story is sensationalism for sensationalism's sake or if it's a legitimate story with details that only appear to be sensational? According to Slattery and Ugland only the journalists themselves can answer these questions. In my opinion, that's equivalent to the Federal Emergency Management Agency placing themselves on trial, answering to themselves, and being judged by themselves. Who holds them accountable when they find themselves to be guilty? It is not enough for journalists to question themselves; the general public must also question them. Viewers must become savvy television consumers in order to recognize sensationalistic reporting in all its flaming glory. For example, reporting on acts of looting, homicides, and rapes aren't sensationalistic when the reports are proven to be true (preferably before they air). However, replaying the same footage and harping on negative stories over and over again is sensationalistic, whether the reports are true or not. Yes, it was shameful to witness that one male looting a plasma TV, however do we need to see that story re-aired and that image replayed every five minutes? Especially when the real story that every reporter worth his or her grain in salt should have been reporting on and working diligently to uncover was the story of why these people were still in the city almost a week after the storm hit.

Why are we, ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox News, etc, still here to report on these storm survivors stranded in this city on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday? Finally, it appeared that journalists did gain a firm grasp on that real story. And when they gained that grasp the best in American broadcast journalism came shining through.

Almost a week into the storm coverage many journalists began to openly question and criticize the government forcing officials to be accountable for their action, or rather in this case, inaction. Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication professor, Barbie Zelizer remarks in an article that appeared in The Daily Pennsylvania, "It was a 'Gee we've discovered ourself moment' for the media. I commend them for recovering their independent voice and gravitating toward a more confrontational stance vis a vis the government instead of standing in lock step with officials as so often happens in an emergency" (Reiss). This shift from passive to active journalism came at a much-needed time when many Americans were glued to their television sets. According to Nielsen, on Tuesday, August 30, one day after Katrina came ashore, in comparison to a normal Tuesday; Fox News' audience increased 112%, CNN's 336%, and MSNBC's 379% (Reiss). Apparently Americans couldn't get enough of the twenty-four hour coverage. According to Leonard Downie Jr. and Robert Kaiser, authors of The News About The News: American Journalism in Peril, "When disaster strikes, the news media give readers and viewers something to hold on to- facts, but also explanation and discussion that can help people deal with the unexpected"(4). In their book, Downie and Kaiser commend the news media for their coverage of the September 11 terrorist attacks. They believe that the coverage served to educate the public about Islamic extremists, and also allowed them to participate indirectly in the investigation of terrorists, as well as the government's plans for retaliation. During this time in the nation's history as well, people were watching the news, visiting online news sites, and

buying newspapers in record numbers. The coverage provided a way for people to process and cope with the tragedy. "Good journalism holds communities together in times of crisis, providing the information and the images that constitute shared experience" (Downie and Kaiser 4). Good journalism can also make a difference in people's everyday lives in other ways. Here are several examples cited in The News About The News:

In 1999 the Chicago Tribune documented the experiences of scores of men sentenced to death in Illinois who had been beaten by police into confessing crimes, had been represented at trial by incompetent attorneys or had been convicted on questionable evidence. Soon after the newspaper published its findings, the governor of Illinois suspended all executions.

Houston television station KHOU began reporting in February 2000 that Ford Explorers equipped with certain kinds of Firestone tires had been involved in dozens of fatal highway accidents. Its reports led to nationwide news coverage, federal investigations and the recall of millions of tires, undoubtedly saving many lives.

The Star-Ledger in Newark, investigating the 1998 shootings of four men by New Jersey state police, used the newspaper's lawyers to force the state to disclose records that showed state police had targeted black motorists by using racial profiling. The paper's stories drew national attention to the police practice of drawing up the profiles of "typical" criminals based on race and stopping random suspects based on such profiles. This reporting helped create a national political issue and led to action by both the state and federal governments to reduce the use of profiling.

Salt Lake City television station KIVX and the city's two daily newspapers, the Salt Lake Tribune and the Deseret News, uncovered corruption in the bidding process that had won the 2002 winter Olympic games for Salt Lake City. The city's Olympics promoters had showered gifts and financial favors on members of the International Olympic Committee and their

relatives. This news mushroomed into the biggest scandal in the history of the Olympics and led to changes in bidding for future games. It also shook the pillars of the Salt Lake City community.

The Oregonian newspaper in Portland found that many of the 140,954 holders of disabled parking permits in Oregon were not disabled at all but had obtained their permits fraudulently. By using a computer to compare the state's permit records with Social Security Administration data, the newspaper discovered that holders of 13,412 disabled parking permits were dead; able-bodied relatives were renewing and using the dead people's permits to park free at meters. State officials promised a crackdown on abusers and changes in procedures for issuing and renewing permits.

The Miami Herald exposed pervasive voter fraud in the 1997 Miami mayoral election. Campaign workers for the mayor and other candidates registered nonresidents at phony addresses in the city, validated absentee ballots for people living outside Miami, punched other voters' absentee ballots without permission and paid ten dollars each to poor and homeless people to persuade them to vote. The election results were subsequently overturned in court.

The Philadelphia Inquirer revealed in 1998 that police had manipulated their crime records to make the city appear safer than it was in widely publicized FBI statistics. The police erased some crimes from their records entirely, and downgraded robberies, burglaries, car break-ins, stabbings and assaults to minor offenses like "threats," "lost property," "vandalism," "hospital cases" and disturbances," which are not included in the FBI's accounting of serious crimes. The Inquirer reported later that Philadelphia police had also failed to investigate thousands of sexual assault complaints, rejecting many of them as "unfounded" and hiding others in file drawers. Official investigations and reforms of police procedures followed.

Little Rock's Arkansas Democrat-Gazette brought to light beatings, sexual assaults, and

other mistreatment of delinquent children in a state detention center and wilderness camp in 1998. A year later, the Baltimore Sun reported that guards were brutally beating teenagers in Maryland's state boot camps for delinquents. Investigations, resignations, and camp closings followed in both states (5-6).

Good journalism can definitely make a difference in affecting the lives of news subjects and viewers. By giving a voice to victims, uncovering stories that will improve the lives of many, and shining a spotlight on illegal or unfair state or national governmental practices, they provide the means by which to affect change. John Downing writes, "The generalized absence (of a minority presence in the media)...was first really punctured by TV news coverage of the savage handling of Civil Rights demonstrations in the latter 1950s and early 1960s. Watching police dogs, fire-hoses and billy-clubs unleashed against unarmed and peaceful demonstrators in Montgomery, Alabama, and seeing white parents--with their own children standing by their sides--spewing obscenities and racially charged curses at Dr. King's march through Cicero, Illinois, and hurling rocks at the marchers: these TV news images and narratives may still have portrayed African Americans as largely voiceless victims, but they were nonetheless able to communicate their dignity under fire, whereas their white persecutors communicated their own monstrous inhumanity. The same story repeated itself in the school desegregation riots in New Orleans in 1964 and Boston in 1974." Similarities can be drawn between the news coverage of the Civil Rights Movement and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in that the storm coverage also largely portrayed African-Americans, starving and in need of help only in this situation their persecutors would have been the government, by way of inaction.

Good journalism can have a positive effect on people's lives and affect change in our society. However, bad journalism can also affect the lives of its subjects and viewers in a

negative way. Take for instance Downie and Kaiser's commendation of the news industry for their September 11 coverage. While it's true that the tragedy highlighted the best in American journalism (much the same as Hurricane Katrina), the news industry could also be blamed for the fact that Americans were completely blindsided and unprepared for the attack. With so little news coverage being given to foreign news, the industry could rightly be accused of dereliction of duties in when it came to keeping Americans properly informed about the world around us. After the attacks the media began to cover stories about Muslim extremists and Afghanistan, but why weren't these stories covered previously? It took a tragedy such as the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon for the media to finally open its eyes and realize that foreign news is also "need to know" news. Unfortunately, that realization, much the same as yesterdays top story, was short-lived.

A study of the news industry is important, because it is an industry that represents itself as a fair, balanced, and unbiased source for valuable information and many Americans believe that representation to be true. An analysis of the industry is also important because, as was pointed out on "Signal to Noise," an episode of the Louisiana Public Broadcasting's program Media Chef, television news sets the political and economic agenda for what gets attention and what gets ignored. In terms of content, you don't see mass daily coverage of white-collar crimes. However, nearly every newscast will feature violent crimes, such as murder. Is this because white-collar crimes are less important? Do they affect less people? The truth is that white-collar crimes are simply less visually stimulating than violent crimes. In fact violent crimes are given so much attention that many Americans believe that crime is increasing by the second (therefore the nation is on its way to hell in a hand basket), when in actuality crime has been decreasing for years. Sensationalism and misinformation are hallmarks of the television news industry, and they

did not go on vacation during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Fortunately, many journalists
apparent fear of rocking the boat and questioning our government did take a much-needed
vacation during the storm's aftermath. Whether or not the vacation will be an overnight (a
passing moment in American journalism) or an extended stay (the new precedent) remains to be
seen.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to study the relationship between Hurricane Katrina and the television news industry, I chose an interview approach employing a convenience sample with people who have expertise in the field. My interview sample was not determined randomly or stratified because those methods did not suit my particular purpose. The interview approach was the best research method for this study because my purpose was to gain knowledge of the insights, thoughts, and experiences of my interview sample. The interview was also the best method of gaining the essential details that I needed to complete my research. I wanted for my sample to be able to talk freely and candidly, and the chosen approach accomplished this goal. In order to best gauge the relationship between Katrina and the television news industry, for my extended interviews, I chose news industry insiders as interview subjects. WWL-TV, a CBS affiliate and local New Orleans television station, was the only station able to remain broadcasting throughout the storm. The station's employees accomplished a major feat not only by their ability to stay on the air, but also by continuing to provide coverage of the hurricane and its aftermath, when they themselves were also victims of the storm. In an article that appeared in the September 2005 issue of Broadcasting & Cable magazine, Allison Romano writes, "More than three-quarters of the station's employees lost their homes, and most have been too busy reporting on the disaster to file insurance claims or register for disaster relief. But the staff stayed on the job, providing a much needed lifeline for anyone in the wrecked city with a battery-powered TV or a radio that picked up local stations carrying WWL's audio feed" (12). Many evacuees were able to also access WWL through the streaming video of their twenty-four hour broadcasts offered through their website. At one point the system actually crashed because so many people were viewing the

broadcasts at the same time. According to WWL reporter Bill Capo, evacuees were not the only people logging on for live streaming coverage, national news organizations such as CNN were also keeping an eye on the station's continuous coverage. For their efforts the station was awarded the 2005 Peabody Award, broadcast journalism's highest honor for their excellent coverage in a crisis situation.

I also chose to interview the employees of WWL-TV because they are my co-workers. This fact contributed to a smoother interviewing process because my interviewees were easily accessible and there was a previously established rapport with each one. Because they are co-workers, I also had a special interest in hearing and recording their stories. The news industry insiders that I chose to interview were: Sandy Breland- News Director, Sally Ann Roberts- Anchor, Eric Paulsen- Anchor, Val Amedee- Producer, Shauna Sanford- Anchor/Reporter, and Bill Capo- Meteorologist/Reporter. I chose each of these news industry insiders because they were working during the storm serving essential functions in the news gathering and disseminating process.

I selected two other WWL employees to interview who were not working during the storm, Melvin Santos- Engineer and Danielle Dugue- Camera Operator. Melvin Santos, an employee at WWL-TV for ten years, chose to evacuate the city before the hurricane made landfall and returned to work when the station returned to their French Quarter location in October of 2005. Although many people evacuated for the storm, I chose to record observations from a single evacuee because it would be impossible to record everyone's story. I wanted an analysis of the news coverage from the perspective of a hurricane evacuee. I selected Melvin as an interview subject because he continues my theme of interviewing WWL employees, and also because I believed that while his story in many ways would be typical of other evacuees; it

would be sufficiently unique as well.

Danielle Dugue was hired at WWL-TV in 2005 shortly after the station returned to its home in the French Quarter. I chose Danielle, again, to continue my theme of interviewing WWL employees, but also because Danielle remained in the city during the time Katrina made landfall. Her story differs from that of the news industry insiders who had to remain in the city to fulfill an obligation to the public. I wanted to gain knowledge of her insights, observations, and experiences from the perspective of a person who was not able to access media coverage of the event until later than the rest of us. As with Melvin, I believed that Danielle's story would be typical of other residents who remained in the city, while unique as well.

The interviews were conducted from April 6 - April 14, 2006, eight months after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, and six months after employees returned to the WWL French Quarter station. I employed two different interview techniques for this study. My interview with WWL employees was extensive and in-depth. My second interview technique involved asking one question of elected officials that I met at work. I limited my interview to one question because the politicians, as well as I, were very busy. I chose to interview elected officials because of the special relationship that they have with the television news industry. Politicians use the medium to gain public recognition and positive press, however that press can just as easily turn negative and in worst case scenarios ruin a politician's career. I find that most elected officials make it a part of their job description to remain current on television and print news coverage. The elected officials that I interviewed were: Aaron Broussard, David Vitter, Bobby Jindal, John Young, Joey Diffata and Johnny Adrianni. I chose to interview Aaron Broussard because as the president of Jefferson Parish, he received a great deal of media attention during the disaster coverage. I chose David Vitter, United States Senator, and Bobby Jindal, Louisiana

Congressman, because they held essential government offices during the time of the storm. John Young, Jefferson Parish Council Chairman, and Joey Diffata, St. Bernard Parish Councilman, were chosen because they also held key positions during the storm. I chose to interview Johnny Adrianni, 2006 New Orleans Mayoral Candidate because he has a website dedicated to the news coverage of the storm.

I prefaced each interview with elected officials by saying, "My name is Hilda Koonce, and I'm a graduate student at the University of New Orleans working on my thesis. My topic is Hurricane Katrina and the Television Industry, and I would like to request your assistance by asking you one question and recorded your answer in my thesis." Every official verbally agreed to being included in this thesis. The interview question that I asked them was, "What were your thoughts on the television news coverage of Hurricane Katrina?"

Likewise, before each extended interview I approached potential interviewees and asked for their permission to interview them for my graduate thesis. Each participant verbally agreed to the interview and we scheduled an interview date and time. I met with each interviewee, WWL employees and politicians, in an informal setting at the station. I used a mini-cassette recorder (which was visible throughout each interview) to record the respondents answers to my pre-written interview questions. I divided my interview questions into three categories depending upon the interviewee: news industry insiders, person who evacuated the city before Katrina made landfall, and person who remained in the city while Katrina made landfall.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interview questions for news industry insiders were as follows:

1. Tell me about your Hurricane Katrina story from your unique perspective as a news industry insider.

2. What were your thoughts on the national coverage of the hurricane? (I only requested their thoughts on the national coverage, because I did not expect to receive an unbiased account of local coverage. In addition, the national media is not a direct competitor for local stations, only other local stations; therefore, I felt responses would be fair and unbiased.)
3. What were some of the problems or challenges that you as well as the news industry in general faced while covering the storm? How did you deal with those challenges? (I didn't have to explicitly state this question for many respondents, because they answered it in interview question 1.)
4. Do you feel that the news coverage had any affect on what happened in New Orleans before, during, or after the storm? (Many respondents asked for clarification of this question. I clarified by saying, "I have read that some people feel that news reports of murder and looting, slowed aid to hurricane victims. Others may believe that had it not been for the news industry people trapped in this city would have suffered for much longer. Whether positive or negative how do you feel the news coverage impacted this event? What would it have been like had there been no news industry to cover this disaster?")
5. How has the hurricane affected you, and the way that you perform your job? (This question relates to differences in news coverage during and after Katrina.)
6. What's the future of broadcast post Katrina? (This question relates to the lasting effects of Katrina on the industry.)
7. As a member of the news media what is your responsibility to the public now as you see it? (This question also relates to the lasting effects of Katrina on the industry).

An additional question that I asked of producer Valerie Amedee was, "Is it possible to provide the audience with all pertinent news information in thirty minutes, minus commercials,

sports, and weather? What's your measure for determining what's important?"

The interview questions that I asked of Melvin as a hurricane evacuee were:

1. After evacuating where did you turn primarily for information about what was happening in New Orleans? (This question served to ensure that he did in fact view news coverage.)
2. What were your thoughts on the national coverage of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath? (This question relates to the interviewee's assessment of the quality of national coverage.)
3. Did you have access to local coverage, and if so what were your thoughts on the local coverage? (A comparison can then be drawn between the respondent's views of the national coverage versus local coverage.)
4. How was the local coverage of the storm in the city to which you evacuated?
5. On average would you say that your media consumption of Hurricane Katrina was minimal, average, or above average and how? (This question relates to quality of coverage assessment, a person whose consumption was above average may be able to provide a better assessment than someone whose consumption was minimal.)
6. As far as the news coverage of Katrina is concerned what was done wrong in your opinion? What was done correctly? (This question relates to the assessment of the quality of coverage.)
7. Do you think that you received an accurate, fair, and full account from the news media concerning what was happening in New Orleans? Why or why not? (This question relates to the quality of coverage.)
8. How do you feel the media coverage affected what happened in New Orleans before, during, and after the storm? Or do you feel the coverage had any affect at all? What are your feelings concerning current coverage of the aftermath? (This question relates to the lasting affects of the hurricane on broadcast journalism as evident eight months after Katrina.)

10. Start from the moment you first learned of the approaching storm, and tell me your story.

The interview questions posed to Danielle as a person who did not evacuate were as follows:

1. If the news coverage of the approaching storm affected your decision to stay, how?
2. Were you able to access news coverage of the storm, if so how?
3. If you were able to receive coverage; what were your thoughts on the coverage during the storm? (This relates to the assessment of the quality of the coverage.)
4. After you were finally able to evacuate, do you find the news coverage of what was happening in the city to be true to your own experience?
5. Do you think the news coverage affected what happened in New Orleans before, during, or after the storm?
6. What are your feelings concerning the current coverage of the aftermath? (This question relates to the lasting affects of the hurricane on broadcast journalism as evident eight months after Katrina.)
7. Start from the moment you first knew of the approaching storm and tell me your story. (This question was not included in the interview, because it was answered along with interview question 1.)

I hypothesized that the interviewees will find that all news coverage was flawed; however their reviews of the local coverage will be more positive than those of the national coverage. I also believe respondents will conclude that the news coverage affected hurricane relief and recovery positively rather than negatively. Lastly, I hypothesize that respondents will believe that the hurricane's affect on local broadcast journalism is positive and long-lasting. My research questions are: How will interviewees cite the differences between national and local coverage?

Relatedly, how will interviewees describe the quality of coverage? Also, how do respondents believe news coverage affected relief and recovery? And lastly, how do interviewees feel the Hurricane Katrina disaster coverage changed broadcast journalism?

In my interviews, I attempted to answer my first research question by determining the views of my participants concerning the television news coverage of the storm and to note whether or not differences were drawn between the national and local coverage. I divided the responses into nine categories: all coverage was positive, local coverage was positive, local coverage was negative, national coverage was positive, national coverage was negative, national coverage was both positive and negative, local coverage was both positive and negative, all coverage was negative, and I also noted whether or not the interviewee differentiated between local and national coverage. The terms positive and negative pertain not solely to positive or negative content, but to the overall handling of the news stories in terms of how the stories were covered.

The interview is the best method to use in answering all research questions, but especially the second and third, because it allows me to ask these questions of respondents directly. Therefore, the interview method is the best tool in gaining knowledge of the insights, beliefs, and experiences of interviewees. It also serves to accomplish the latent function of providing the best method of recording each respondent's Hurricane Katrina story. After all, every resident of New Orleans as of last August now has one.

CHAPTER 3: INTERVIEWS

This chapter is a transcript of the interviews that I conducted. Each politician was a guest on a WWL news program, while I was working at the station, who agreed to be interviewed. As I stated previously a date and time was appointed for each interview held with WWL employees. All interviews were conducted at the WWL television station. My interviewing technique was loose and informal. As aforementioned, I had a pre-written list of questions; however I altered and deferred from several questions during the interviews depending upon whom I was interviewing, relevancy, and time constraints.

POLITICIANS

We will start with the brief interviews by reciting the responses to the question, “What were your thoughts on the television news coverage of Hurricane Katrina?”

Aaron Broussard- Jefferson Parish President- “I thought it (news coverage) was excellent. I thought that it really gave comprehensive looks at everything that was going on. I think it made it very, very convenient for the local officials that were trapped in our emergency operations to really get eye witness reports on so many different aspects of what was going on in and around the greater New Orleans area. So I thought it was very helpful in our emergency operations. I thought it was very, very productive to see so much of what was going on simultaneous to what we were trying to do. I don’t think we could have had as effective emergency operations without the T.V. coverage that we were able to witness. I thought it was a critical element of our emergency operations and I commend the brave reporters who were out there in the midst of all of that making sure that we had coverage that was available to us. Because at the time most of the city was evacuated so that coverage was not only being sent out

to people around the country, but it was very, very helpful to us that were staying, trying to make a difference in recovering as fast as possible.”

David Vitter- United States Senator- “Well, I would put the local and national coverage into two very different categories. Local, of course there were enormous hurdles, challenges because of lack of utilities and electricity and so people really scrambled often very effectively to provide good local coverage using websites and other things and I think the local stations really found every means they could to get around the challenges and provide good local coverage including to evacuees who were all around the state and country. Nationally, I think a lot of the coverage really got caught up in certain images and clichés and missed other parts of the story. I think the national media became fixated on showing image after image, for instance of poor African Americans stuck in the city and didn’t really give the full picture that St. Bernard which was primarily white was devastated or Lakeview which was affluent white was devastated. And they sort of began perpetuating a certain story that they wanted to tell which was there, but which wasn’t the whole story. So I was frustrated by the national media just focusing on sort of a stereotype that they wanted to tell.”

Bobby Jindal- Louisiana Congressman- “I think that the television news media especially the New Orleans based channels did an incredible job and you go back to the hours after the storm literally even though their studios in many cases were inaccessible and damaged they stayed on the air. I know, for example, many of the stations moved to Baton Rouge, worked out of the LSU campus, worked out of sister stations, and there were two things that were pretty impressive in this unprecedented storm. One, you saw stations working with each other despite different ownership structures, despite being potential competitors for viewers, you saw stations willing to share resources, to share cameras, to share stories to get the information out. The

second thing that was impressive was at a time when people were desperate for timely and accurate information; I think the stations did a very good job of getting local officials, federal officials and others on the air to disseminate very important information, for example, how to evacuate and how to get critical supplies. I know at times one of the only ways to communicate with local officials was through the media. So you had local police chiefs going on the air to ask for supplies, you had local physicians going on the air to ask for medicine, to ask for patients to be evacuated. It was especially critical when so much of the communications infrastructure had been knocked down. I guess for a third point it was impressive that many of the local stations fed into the national stations and so you saw a lot of the national coverage driven by the local stations. They already had the assets on the ground before the national stations could get down their and set up bureaus, the local stations were able to feed them that information. It was great to make sure the country knew what was happening down here so we could get their help and sustain their interests.

John Young- Jefferson Parish Council Chairman- “I thought the local coverage was good, thorough, and presented all sides. However, the national news was sensationalistic and didn’t provide a balanced account of what was happening here. . . .Local news is continuing to keep everyone updated which is what we need entering the 2006 Hurricane Season.”

Joey Diffata- St. Bernard Parish Councilman - “Actually I thought the news coverage was extremely well done, it was adequate. I think that there are a lot more people who know about it because of the news coverage. And I think without that we would have been left out alone. It made stories, but the news media kept it going for the recovery and that's the most important thing right now. The national coverage I found had some flaws in it, because it didn't show the true picture of what was going on here; it also sort of laxed as time went on, whereas

the local coverage in the midst of ground zero kept it going. And I think the national needs to catch up with that and see that this area is not ready yet, it's not back. We still have people who are suffering, we still have lots of debris to be removed, and there are a lot of issues we have to resolve before we can recover.”

Johnny Adrianni- Mayoral Candidate- “More people focused on the bad news however what was there positive to talk about? Sensationalism (as a key element of coverage) was evident. The national spotlight was really focused on reports of people shooting at helicopters, when in actuality there were few people shooting at helicopters. But watching the news coverage you’d think everyone was shooting. Speculation of bits and pieces of information that was received, helped to spread rumors....People from New Orleans have more of an idea of what was happening. I wrote a lot to dispel rumors because of inconclusive media coverage.”

NEWS INDUSTRY INSIDERS

Sandy Breland- WWL News Director

Q. From the unique perspective of being a news director at the only local television station that stayed on the air throughout the Hurricane, tell me your Hurricane Katrina story.

A. I think one of the things that allowed us to remain on the air is all of the pre-planning that went into covering this storm. Obviously we’re in a hurricane vulnerable area, being a native New Orleanian I’ve grown up knowing that my whole life. We knew that in a worst case scenario that we potentially might not be able to stay in our building, for example. We had a relationship with LSU that had been in place for sometime. We made arrangements for alternate broadcast sites and I think that’s one of the things that really worked well for us. And we wanted those alternate broadcast sites to be in Baton Rouge because we knew that’s where the flow of information would be. We knew that’s where the governor would be, that’s where FEMA would be

headquartered, and that's where the president would come in. So having that alternate broadcast site was a big plus. We split the staff before the storm came in we knew that with all of the evacuees on the road getting from New Orleans to Baton Rouge would be difficult. So, we split the staff before the storm came in with half of the staff in Baton Rouge and the rest of us stayed here. Also (another reason we were able to stay on the air) all of the work that went into our transmitter facility, the fact that it was fifteen feet off the ground, there was a lot of planning that went into that building. Rick Barber, our chief engineer, did a great job in designing a building that would sustain a strong hurricane. We were fortunate, because of the way that the hurricane came in, that the building survived and our transmitter kept us on the air. So it's two-fold, we had a place to go, then we had the technology to keep us on the air. For those of us who stayed in the city we had pre-arranged to hunker down where we knew the city administration was going to be. We were at the Hyatt hotel, which of course ended up being sort of that iconic shot with all of the windows blown out at the back. But we didn't randomly select the Hyatt. We chose that hotel because we knew that city administration would be there; the mayor was there, the police chief was there, the head of Entergy was there, and that was our flow of information. So, our thought going into this was that we wanted to place crews in the flow of information. And we felt very strongly that we could not cover the story unless we had a significant presence here. We've covered hurricanes for many years, and so many times we've had near misses, Hurricane George in 1998 and Hurricane Ivan. We always seem to get lucky and they jog at the last minute, this time that didn't happen this time we were covering ourselves as victims. It was interesting because the group of us who stayed in the city evacuated several times. We went on the air Saturday morning with non-stop coverage. At the point the interest and the focus was on getting information out to people, evacuation routes, that kind of a thing, and carrying emergency

official's press releases to get information out to people. We were on the air all Saturday. We slept here in the newsroom Saturday night in sleeping bags. And we were here Sunday until about 11:00 then we threw it to our crew in Baton Rouge. Because at that point our chief meteorologist said the winds were going to start picking up and we wanted to be able to relocate to the hunker-down site before it got to dangerous to drive. So we all left the building, went to the Hyatt. Interestingly, Monday morning after the storm had passed. I sent a scout back to the station. They were able to get from the CBD (Central Business District) to our facility in the French Quarter with no problems, no water. So we really still didn't have a good grasp of just how bad things were. We just didn't have a good grasp of that because the city officials didn't either. So, that Monday as information started trickling in, I remember we had the mayor on the set here that afternoon, that's when he talked about, for example, the twin spans being gone essentially. We said, "what do you mean gone?" And they had been shredded. We began to become aware, as well, of all of the flooding in the Ninth Ward and the flooding in Lakeview. We probably heard about the flooding in the Ninth Ward first, we sent crews down there, but they could only get so far because of the water. When we came back here Monday morning we broadcast from our station in Rampart all day, and that night we slept here in the newsroom. Then Tuesday morning we had a crew that was headed to City Hall at about 6:30am, they called in and said, "I don't know where it's coming from, but the water is coming up on Canal Street." And we knew at that point, we had to get out because we didn't want to get trapped here. So, we evacuated again, to our transmitter facility on the Westbank which was high and dry. And it was quite an event, when we got to the transmitter we started broadcasting in a makeshift room, from that site. So it was one of those things that you plan for years, but until you're actually going through it.....it's just overwhelming. At the same time everyone was very focused, it was a

team environment, I think because of what was going on in the city. Then there began to be civil unrest Tuesday while we were at the transmitter. That was certainly something that was unforeseen. So there are things that you can plan for in great detail, but you can't plan for everything. We stayed at the transmitter Tuesday and Wednesday, and then because of the civil unrest, there was a shopping center just a couple of blocks away that had been burned, there were people from the area that were getting closer to our transmitter facility. Keep in mind that we had water, which was a commodity. At that point in consultation with the general manager and corporate, we felt that obviously this was a huge story for us to cover, but employee safety was first. So we relocated to Baton Rouge.

Q. At that point were you able to access national news coverage?

A. That's an interesting question because initially we were so isolated in those first few days when we were the only ones in the city. And for us this was an incredible local story, it was our city, our homes; I lost my home as well. So for us it was just an incredible local story, but we had no idea how it was being played out in the national media. It wasn't until I got to Baton Rouge that I got a good grasp of just how this was being played out on the national level.

Q. And what were your thoughts on the national coverage?

A. I think the city deserved the attention it got; it was the largest natural disaster in this country's history. I think it deserved the attention. I think there was a little bit of a difference sometimes in local and national coverage. And I think one of the things is that because we are a local station and we know the community, we know the people, and we know the sources; one of the things that I cautioned the crews about and that we were very careful about was not becoming susceptible to rumors. And I think that in some of the national coverage that I saw, certainly not all of it, because there was some excellent coverage, there were some rumors

reported. People were talking about 10,000 people being dead. Now in defense of the media that reported that, I will tell you that was because some of the officials in the city did not have good information. So you were going with what would normally be credible sources of information, but frankly they didn't have the information either. So it was difficult. We really took every step possible to make sure we were checking, and double checking, and triple checking. And really trying to use our reporters and photographers as eyewitnesses to what we were reporting.

Q. Do you think the news coverage affected, either negatively or positively, what happened here during that time?

A. I think the rest of the country got angry that what was going on here could happen in a major American city. We were in the city the entire time, and there was no help essentially. And that was just incredibly frustrating. So if the coverage helped in any way in that regard, then that's a good thing. I think people across this country were really appalled by what was going on, and what I mean by that is the lack of help. The fact that people were still stuck on rooftops, we didn't have the necessary means to get them out. I think the frustration level was directed at the lack of response.

Q. As a news director has Katrina changed you in terms of how you do your job? Has the station changed as well, in terms of how we cover news, how we do things now? And if so, do you think the storm has had a lasting impact in both areas?

A. You know what; I think Katrina changed all of us. I think that we all see things a little bit differently. And for me, keep in mind the fact that I grew up here, so this was more than covering a story. It was a couple of weeks before I got back to my house which had three or four feet of water, and muck and sludge. I think it changed all of us, and it kind of refocuses your priorities. I had family, friends, and colleagues that were affected. It was interesting because it

became a story about perspective. You get to the point where you can say, “I lost my house, but that’s okay because everybody’s alright.” So, it really refocuses your priorities. I think as a station, as a news department going through this together it was an incredible bonding experience, because we only had each other. All of our families had been evacuated, and we had each other. There were ups and downs, and it was an emotional rollercoaster at times. And it was just an amazing bonding experience to see the way that this team came together in support of each other. People talked about things that they would never talk about with co-workers! And it was okay because everyone was there for each other. So, I kind of feel like we’ve been through a war together and if, God forbid, we ever have to go through something like that again that this would certainly be the team that I would be ready to do that with, because everybody was just amazing in their support for each other. People were really focused and worried about their co-workers. They really were. So yeah, I think it changed all of us a little bit.

Q. So, what is the future of local broadcast journalism post Katrina?

A. Locally, it obviously continues to be a huge story for us. We’re just entering a new phase. We have entered a new phase. We talk a lot of times in newsroom meetings and we say, “When will we ever have a newscast that doesn’t contain the word Katrina?” I don’t know how long that will be, there are so many stories. And I think it is our job as we go through this new phase, and we have done tough stories on levee investigations, housing, all of those quality of life issues that are important to people, and I think it’s our job to keep asking tough questions, really tough questions. We have to be the voice for people here. People here who are trying to rebuild, and people who want to come home. We have to push hard for those people. They deserve that, we owe that to them, that’s our job. And I think we have to keep up the tough questions and ask for accountability, and focus on issues that are really important to people. Who

knows how long that's going to go on, but as broadcasters we can't get Katrina fatigue. It's too important.

Sally Ann Roberts- WWL Anchor

Q. As a news anchor, tell me about your Hurricane Katrina experience.

A. I was dealing with this on a number of levels. First of all, I had a mother on the Gulf Coast who refused to evacuate and my sister Dorothy, who had agreed to stay with my mother with her two daughters, so all of them would have been at risk. So, I had that concern. I had a daughter in Hattiesburg, MS and a son who was evacuating to Georgia with a friend. So I had a lot of concerns there. But my primary concern, the day, that weekend, that fateful weekend, when we knew that Katrina was coming our way and we knew that this storm was going to be like nothing anyone had ever seen before, "By Golly, we have got to scare the dickens out of people to get them out of here." Because on Saturday after we finished our broadcast and I went home, I saw people acting like it was a normal day. Kids and families just sitting on the stoop talking, and I felt the overwhelming pressure to express the dire situation that was at hand. That this was going to be something in which well-built houses would be destroyed. This was going to be something that would be bigger than anything that they'd ever dealt with, even if they'd dealt with Camille and Betsy (former hurricanes) before and their house had stood. That this was going to be something that could be very different for them. And I always remember the conversation that we had with William Maestri (Jefferson Parish Office of Emergency Preparedness) and he said, "If people are going to be diehards and stay in their homes then they are going to die hard." Unfortunately, that came to pass for too many people. And my primary concern at the very beginning was to do my job and to express the concerns and to express the real threat, the real danger that existed. And I remember as we were going on the air that Sunday

morning, we both (Sally along with her co-anchor, Eric Paulsen) walked into the studio determined that we were going to scare people to reality because this was not causing panic this was causing real concern. "You need to make your plans to get out." And I said to people, "You may look at us and say, 'we'll you guys are still there.'" I said, "But look around, you don't see our children here. Our children are out of here; our families are out of here." And it was horrendous, it was unlike anything. But I remember writing in my diary on that Sunday night, (We were in Baton Rouge at that time we'd been on the air through the night) or it may have been in the wee hours on Monday morning, and I said, "I don't know where my mother is, I've lost all cell communication, I don't know where my children are and all kinds of things." And it was just a very difficult time. But then it was also for us almost a blessing because we had something to do. And so we didn't have time to sit around and think about what might be or what might be the case. After evacuating to Baton Rouge, when we got to Baton Rouge it was time to get ready to go on the air. We were on the air for thirteen hours; I didn't have any time to sleep before then. And I didn't have any sleep between the times we went on the air. I haven't seen the videotape of that first night. Bill Capo (WWL reporter and meteorologist) said that he'd seen it, and he said that we looked really rough. So it was a difficult time. And our mission at one point then changed. After the evacuation when it was clear that we were talking now to people who had not evacuated, who were hunkered down at home. Then we started talking about, "Now if you have to get up to your attic, make sure that you have an ax to get through the roof of your house." Because many people lost their lives during Betsy because they got stuck in their attics and they suffocated or drowned in their attics. So it was just trying to make sense of it all, trying to pass on the very latest information.

I've since talked to people in my neighborhood those who did stay. And they said that the

storm passed through and there was no water in the streets so they thought, "Oh we've made it through here." And then suddenly the water started rushing down the street and people barely had enough time to get to their second floor. One of my neighbors unfortunately died in the attic of heat exhaustion, just a horrendous situation. But the happiest moment for me was maybe it was Tuesday, the days just seemed to run together, when Lucy Bustamante (WWL anchor) sat down and she said, "Oh I'm so glad that your mom's fine." And I said, "My mom's fine!" And she said Robin (Robin Roberts of ABC's Good Morning America and Sally's sister) was on the air and she said that your mom and your sisters and nieces were fine. There was just that blackout for a time, when you couldn't get any messages out and we're on the air. And I didn't realize that my own children were hearing crazy things. My daughter in Hattiesburg had heard that I was stuck in the house with Jeremiah (Sally's youngest son) waiting to be rescued. Someone else said that they heard that my child was killed in the storm. Rumors were just flying everywhere. So if we had anything to do with providing reliable information that's what we wanted to do. We really had to pick and choose, because realize at that time all kinds of things were being said, all of the things that were going on at the Superdome.

And another thing that I was very aware of was the fact that we had to take care of one another; those of us who were working. There were times when each one of us broke down and cried and we had to be there for one another. And it was very moving to see how this group of reporters and technicians and managers all seemed to become this family. And we all had our own issues, all things that we were dealing with. My time came off the air fortunately, when I went into the area where people were watching the scenes, and we'd been on the air for quite some time, and I sat down and I just started watching the scenes. And I saw the children... the children... and one little boy looked like he could have been Jeremiah and he was playing. And I

saw a little girl and she was chanting with the crowd, "We need help!" And then she looked over at her mother, as I had seen my children look at me, for approval; and I lost it. I just started to weep uncontrollably. And that's another thing, I realized that we were also reaching out to people all over the world on the web, and as those scenes of people looting were being shown, I wanted to personalize it. I wanted to make sure that no one thought that these people were somehow different from them. I wanted them to realize these are people who yesterday were going to work and going to school and now they have nothing. And if you were without anything to eat and your children were without diapers, you would go into a store and get diapers and food and something to drink. People were fighting for survival. Yes you had those looters who were trying to make hay out of it. I'll never forget this scene of this huge screen T.V. being carried off in a cart. And I'm thinking what in the world is this guy going to do with this huge screen T.V.!

There's no electricity, the place is flooded, what in the world is he doing with this? So you had this kind of craziness going on as well, but for the most part I said to the people, "There but by the grace of God, any one of us." So it was a situation where I wanted to let people know about the tremendous tragedy that was going on and whether you lived in Debuke, Canada, or Paris or wherever, you should be concerned if you were a human being to see this much suffering going on. That's what I tried to convey in our times when we were talking on the air. I didn't like the idea of them talking about the hooligans and the looters. When you start putting everyone under that looter label, people think criminal. But I was thinking mother trying to feed her child, because you would see grocery carts. And you realize that the person was collecting all of this stuff, was taking it back to somewhere else to feed perhaps an entire neighborhood that had been left behind. We realize also that there were many people who did not have the means to escape. There were people like my mother who said, "I don't want to go, I'm not going to go, and that's

it." My mother now has survived this, but she had a best friend who didn't leave. They were on the phone that day talking about how they're not leaving, despite what their children wanted. Unfortunately there will be no next time for my mother's friend and her husband. My mother won't ever make that mistake again. And to think that so many people lost their lives, more than 1,000 people we may never know how many.

Q. Elaborate on what you were saying before about watching the coverage. What were your thoughts on the national news coverage at that time?

A. I thank God for the national media, I thank God that they were here, that they covered the story, that they took it to the world and that they're continuing to take it. And we've got to hope and pray that the national media will stay on this story, because we need to move the conscious of this nation and of this world if we are to rebuild. We cannot rebuild by ourselves, we're going to need a whole lot of help. One thing that I believe happened to these reporters, who came down here, and I saw it from the earliest; a reporter covering for either CBS or CNN, who was out on a boat late at night, it must have been that Monday night, and she heard the cries for help and they couldn't reach all the people. As she was telling the story of the people she heard she just began to sob. Seasoned journalists, who had seen it all, were moved to tears. And I think that was conveyed to the world. I must also commend the National Guard and other rescuers, they rescued thousands of people and they were working around the clock to get people to safety, but then what's safety. People were rescued from their roof only to be taken to some area where there was no food or water, for them to sit out on the highway and just wait for somebody for hours or maybe days on end. It was insane, and I think that every reporter who covered the story had to see it. If you had a pulse you had to say, "What in the world is going on?" The frustration of it all; I remember seeing the scenes of people sitting outside of the convention center. Just

sitting there and I remember commenting, "Look at these people, they're not rioting, they're not acting out in any way, they're waiting on their government to help them." They were waiting on somebody, I mean such patience. And as a mother I would find it very difficult to be so patient with my children in such need. I can't imagine what it must have been like for those who were trying to feed children. To have children crying and saying, "I'm hungry, I'm thirsty, I'm tired, how long are we going to stay here, why can't we go home?" , the questions those parents much have had to deal with.

Q. Do you believe that the news coverage had an affect on what happened here before, during, and after the storm? What if there was no media here to cover this?

A. Well, thank God for the news media for many things. Look at the Civil Rights Movement, what would have happened if there had not been the cameras to catch the video of peaceful protesters being sprayed with hose, and being set upon by police dogs. It was the outrage of the nation, through the media seeing these pictures; the only way that the world will know about anything that's going on is if they read about it, see it on television, or hear about it on the radio. But primarily television is the way to get the news and see it with your own two eyes as well.

Q. What's the future of broadcast post Katrina?

A. As members of the broadcast community, for the first time we have picked up a cause as journalists and that cause was for floodgates. And Eric (Paulsen) was very clear about it. People were talking about how terrible it was, and working out plans to rebuild the city ten years from now. And we said wait a minute; we have a hurricane season coming up. We need protection, what's being done? And it's very clear that there was a design flaw in the levee design, and that finally was admitted to by the Army Corp of Engineers. So we need to protect

our levees from being pressured too much, and it's a problem that hit us in Orleans Parish, it could just as well hit Jefferson (Parish) at Seventeen Street Canal. And so getting those floodgates up in time for the Hurricane season, we believe was really critical. And another thing they're going to have to do something about the MS River Gulf Outlet, that's our next crusade, and it doesn't look like they're going to do anything about that before the next hurricane season. But if we can get through this next hurricane season, the city will rebuild we may become even bigger than we were before, because we will have people coming in to take high paying jobs. People will have to buy furniture for their houses. There will just be a lot of construction related work going on that will cause our economy to increase if we get through this next hurricane season. And if that happens then you will see our television stations and other television stations continue to thrive in this city. We will continue to be a 43 or larger market, but if we don't get through this hurricane season, and we have a crisis again, I shudder to think what will happen. I think you'll have television stations that will not stay, that will not continue to broadcast news. Realize that you have to be a certain size market to get the national advertising. National advertisers are not interested in very small markets. So, I just think that everything really hinges on the next nine months....Secondly, if there is something that would be a distraction to this area (if a major hurricane devastated another area of the country), then the federal attention will go there and we won't get the added money and attention that we need to restore our community.

Q. As of right now, what is your personal responsibility to the public as a news anchor?

A. I think we've got to stay up on all the issues. As journalists we have got to be current on what's happening. We have to ask the tough questions. We have to point out what's being done or what's not being done. That's our job right now. And we also have a job of sharing the good stuff too as we're doing that, because people can become discouraged. And I look at our

medium as being a very powerful tool that can encourage as well as illuminate. That's what I want to do. I want to enlighten and I want to encourage. My prayer everyday is, "Lord, please just show me what to do to be a part of your plan." Because I just know God has a plan. So, in my job as a reporter, I want to be a part of his plan. It is overwhelming at times and I fight depression. People say, "Oh, you're always so cheerful," but I fight depression and everyone else is. But what I have to do is I have to go back not to my newspaper for encouragement or a textbook, I've had more prayer time. We all no matter what our job in this community we have to do our job to the best of our ability if we want to be a part of this pioneering force that will bring this city back.

Eric Paulsen- WWL Anchor

Q. From the perspective of being a television news anchor, tell me your Hurricane Katrina story.

A. We were afraid. I remember on that Saturday I came in and started broadcasting at noon. And Sally (Sally Ann Roberts) came in later on that day. And it looked terrible. The mandatory evacuation was issued that next Sunday morning. You're trying to deal with your own personal life which you know is going to be impacted by this as everybody's is. We normally don't evacuate, because we're told to stay here, because we have a job to do. I remember going home that night and seeing a friend of mine walking down the street on Saturday night. And I said, "What are y'all doing here in town?" And he said, "We're going to ride this one out." At that time I said, "Let me tell you something John, there are two types of people who ride out a storm like this; those who have to stay and stupid people." And I told Sally about that when I came in (to work) and I said, "You know what; I'm going to start saying that on the air." Sally said, "Maybe, you shouldn't be so harsh." And I said, "Maybe we should." So then Sally was telling

me about her mom and between commercials, (we ran commercials that day and live reports with people that were in the field) I'd be warning people on the air, then on my cell phone calling everybody I knew trying to get them out of town, including Sally's mom. I'd never cursed at Sally's mom before, I love Sally's mom. But she just wouldn't go, she was being too stubborn. And you just try to let people know that it's a grave situation. On that Sunday I remember looking straight into that camera and I said on the air, "Get the hell out of here." And I remember Sally looking at me like, "What did you just say?" But she agreed, we had to do it. We reiterated on the air, "You may survive the storm, but you're going to hate the aftermath." And people found out, they hated the aftermath.

And you have to think about what a day that was for us, because Sally and I started our broadcast on Sunday morning at 5 a.m. So we were on from 5 until noon. Then, I got a little time to go home and take care of things. I went home and tried to do as much as I could. But the plan that we had was that they would evacuate Sally, myself, and a number of the crew members to Baton Rouge. So that when the station went down, and inevitably it would. We'd become Channel 4 in Baton Rouge. So I went home and tried to take care of as much as I could, then we came back here and we caravanned to Baton Rouge. I got no sleep once I got to Baton Rouge. Then at 9 p.m. that night after being up since 3 or 4 in the morning, we finally came on (air), the station went down here (French Quarter), and all of a sudden from the studios of the LSU (Louisiana State University) campus, Sally and I became Channel 4 up there. And we stayed on (air) for thirteen hours with very few reporters reporting to us. Our two meteorologists were in New Orleans; Bill Capo was with us and some of our reporters. But we were flying blind much of the time trying to get as much information as we could, so we were on the phone talking to people. And the studio in Baton Rouge, as wonderful as the folks at LSU were, was extremely

rudimentary for our needs. I described it oftentimes as trying to run a restaurant using an Easy Bake Oven. You do the best you can with what you got, and we were grateful to have it. The students were wonderful, they stayed up with us, and LSU was great to us. But that first night was the most trying night that I've ever had in broadcast. In all reality, we're filling thirteen hours with nothing. No wire copy, nothing. And so they're bringing us as much information as they can. We were trying to talk to our reporters who were hunkered down in the Hyatt. We talked to weather people. We finally got Dr. Maestri (Jefferson Parish Office of Emergency Preparedness) on the phone, and I recall at about three or four in the morning when it (the hurricane) started to make landfall and it started to make that turn toward the east away from New Orleans, because we knew that we were headed for the worst case scenario. I remember asking Dr. Maestri that morning, "It's turning a little, could this be the best of the worst case scenario." And he goes, "That's probably the best way to put it." Now had the levees not failed it probably would have been. For awhile, most people thought it was the best of the worst case scenario. I mean not for those poor folks in Mississippi or those who were brunted by it. But for the city of New Orleans and the metropolitan area for most of us, it looked like we may have been dodging a bullet again. But we found out the next day that we didn't dodge a bullet.

And we were getting emotional at that time. At times it would just well up in you, because we have the unknown, we didn't know what's happening in our own homes, in our families and it was just kind of tough. I'm always kind of looked at as the hard guy on the show, the jerk or whatever. But I got emotional, and Sally always is the rock. I mean she always is. And as miserable as we thought we were in Baton Rouge in our conditions we were looking at those folks down there (people trapped in the city), and we were going, "Oh my God." But at the same time we've got to stay on the air. We've heard from a number of people that we became that

voice of comfort that people knew that they could hear that night. And we had people that stayed up with us all night, either on the web, or on little portable televisions. It was great.

Q. What were your thoughts on the national news coverage of the hurricane?

A. Some of it was wonderful; other parts of it were just horrendous. And what happens is when out of town broadcasters come in they see things in kind of a tunnel. We look at the broad picture, because we know this city, we know this area. And the national media is twenty-four seven now in many instances they have to have things that feed on that viewership. So the looting became just a story that they played over and over again. It took a few days, maybe almost a week, when I think the national media finally got it. And they understood the story of the human tragedy not the human ugliness that was being shown. Because this became not just a local tragedy, this became a national tragedy. So I think when the media finally got it we saw the coverage turn around from their being appalled by the actions of a few people to being appalled at how this could happen in the greatest country in the world. And I think they were so shocked and took it so personally, that that's why the entire nation was able to see and force the president to come down here and say, "Boy did we screw up." And as hard as it is to see in a third world country, it sounds almost callous, but we expect to see it there, you don't expect to see that in a great American city. To this day it still in many ways looks like a third world country. You look around parts of the Ninth Ward, Lakeview, Gentilly, and New Orleans East and you go, "Oh my God." It's hard to believe. It's hard to believe it happened. And I think when the media was down here it was such a surreal time anyway. And we were away from it, we were in Baton Rouge. Until we came back here to live you really don't understand the full magnitude of it. I remember that Tuesday (the day after Katrina) I flew over, looking at all this, and just appalled at all the water and how flooded it was. And you'd see people on their roofs and they're thinking maybe

you're a rescue helicopter, and we're a news helicopter, and we can't do a damn thing to help them. Except go back and call, and you'd run into bureaucracy because they say look, "We've already got a hundred people ahead of them." It was depressing.

Q. Do you feel that the news coverage had an affect on what happened here during this time? How would things have been different had there been no media coverage?

A. Well, you saw in the Vietnam War, you see it in this war (Iraqi War), and we saw it during Katrina, the national attention was riveted towards that. And I said it on stage (taping a forum with evacuees) when Sally and I were in Houston, "There are three ways to make politicians move, you force them through public opinion, you shame them, or you vote them out of office." In all reality even politicians were ashamed of their actions. The Homeland Security Department was shamed, FEMA was shamed, the Bush Administration, the Nagin (New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin), and the Blanco administrations were all shamed at what they had done, or rather the lack of what they had done.

Q. What's the future of local broadcast post Katrina? Do you think the storm had a lasting affect?

A. I think it had to. It changed us right after Katrina. During Katrina we got emotional, after Katrina we got somewhat emotional. And then there was one point where Sally and I just got mad, and we decided that we were going to put that anger out on the show. And take a more proactive role which is something that she and I as journalists had never done before. We had never expressed opinion on air before. But this was a point of life or death for this city, and we thought it was incumbent upon us to go ahead and lead a charge and we did. Floodgates were our charge. The mayor and Mitch Landrieu (Louisiana Lt. Governor) both said that the area between the Seventeen Street Canal and the Industrial Canal was safe. That it's safe to rebuild there. And

it's safe to rebuild because of those floodgates. Without those floodgates you could not have that guarantee.

Q. As of right now, what do you feel your personal responsibility is to this community post Katrina?

A. To make sure that the politicians are held accountable. To make sure that the truth gets out. You hear all of the talk about how things are gonna get better, I want the truth. Give me my actual odds of this happening as opposed to this happening. I don't want to hear that we have plans for a light rail system, blah, blah, blah. Tell me that we can actually go ahead and repave some of the bad roads. Get our people back in here; get affordable housing, get business back in, that's what I want to hear. That's what we need to come across with, asking the tough questions, because the politicians will try to smooth things over every time. They will try to tell you what they think the public wants to hear. Until we ask them, "Well what about this in specifics." But, as cynical as it may sound, the politician's main goal is getting re-elected. We've watched it over the years. And Sally has said recently on this program, "We don't need politicians; we need leaders." So, it's up to us to put their back to the walls and make sure what they said is the truth and not some line they've spun. Just like when some of the candidates (for mayor) say they'll make a tax free zone. Well, in all reality the odds of that are that you'd probably have a better chance of winning the lottery. Also when the mayor says we're in for the biggest windfall in the history of this country, well yeah, a lot of money is going to be poured this way, but does it mean that any of it will trickle down and business will start flourishing, people will start moving back, and we'll be safe again? No, it does not. That's why we have to be informed enough, and ask the questions so that the public will be better informed of all that's happening. Because if it's done right we really do have a chance of making this a great city and it's up to us at least to force them

(politicians) to come up with the honest answers.

Bill Capo- WWL Action Reporter and Meteorologist

Q. Tell me about Hurricane Katrina as you experienced it being a meteorologist during that time.

A. I am a little bit unusual because I am both a reporter and a weatherman. At the time of Katrina I was wearing both hats. I was helping in the weather department, because they were short handed, and I was kept in the news department, because of the action reports. But the thing about Katrina is that for years we've been reporting that the city was in danger of flooding. And Katrina scared us badly from the moment it became a threat. In fact, we spent days hoping it would not be a threat to this area, because we could see the potential it had to grow and become a major and devastating hurricane. Katrina did not follow the path that she was projected to follow. And that Friday afternoon before (the storm made landfall) when the National Weather Service shifted the path to New Orleans, we were already very nervous. We were telling the management here to be prepared for this to be a truly devastating hurricane. We could see the potential for the flooding that we had been warning about for many years. I had done story after story as a reporter talking with city and state leaders about what could happen. At one point when I was taking meteorology classes they had a list of the ten worst storms or hurricanes, and I had either been in or reported on seven of them. So, I knew how bad this would get, what we never realized was just how bad it would be. What we were afraid of was that this massive storm surge would form at the center of the storm, and Katrina's (storm surge) ended up being huge, the biggest ever. And the fear was that another major hurricane such as Camille would bring this massive storm surge over the marshes, which were flat, through the Ringleys, the Chef Pass, right over to Lake Pontchartrain where it would slam against the levees. As of last summer the levees ranged

from thirteen to eighteen feet tall in Orleans and Jefferson parishes and a little less than that in St. Bernard. So if you have a twenty, twenty-five feet storm surge, what it does is it just pours over the top of the levees and fills up the city. Then you have the problems of draining the city. So, that was the fear all of these years; a fear that tens of thousands would drown because they were unable to evacuate, a fear that it would take months to drain the city, a fear that the water itself would be so contaminated from all of the chemicals from fast food fryers in restaurants to underground gasoline and chemical stores to sewage systems. The fear was that you would have a toxic soup that would make the area almost uninhabitable almost like a nuclear bomb was going off and spraying radiation all over the area. So this was an awful scenario that we had been warning people of, saying basically, "You don't want to ride out a big storm here which means you don't really want to ride out any storm here, because they can change so fast; they can grow, they can shrink very quickly and change directions and movements." Hurricanes can do things that still defy prediction, even though the National Weather Center is so much better than before. So you had a situation here where we knew that this was going to get really bad. And we're telling people starting that Friday evening all the way through Saturday and Sunday to, "get your evacuation plans in order." We were waiting for the mayor and all of the other parishes to start calling for evacuation, but we were telling them right away, "You got to be ready. Be ready to go. Don't fool around with this storm. This has the potential to be really bad." Now, what no one could have foreseen, what we didn't know about was that the levees would fail; which presented a whole new set of facts. But a couple of things did happen that saved thousands of lives. Evacuation orders were called and people really did see that this could be a potentially bad storm. This was pretty good considering the fact that the word didn't go out until late that Fridayafternoon. There was a Saints game that Friday night, and literally I was at the Saints

game telling the people that we were sitting around to pack their bags and get out of town. And they were looking at me like, "What hurricane? Well that ones going to Florida." But still by Sunday night a large portion of the people had gotten out, which was almost miraculous. That was great and I feel like because the city flooded, if there is a next time, they will not fool around next time, they will leave again, because it could happen again. So that's the one thing, we didn't have the sixty to seventy thousand deaths or whatever that they were afraid would happen. The other thing was that they were able to drain the city, the Corps of Engineers who received a lot of blame for design flaws, did a wonderful job of draining the city. They filled in the gaps in the levees and pumped the city dry. So within a month it (the water) was gone. And the death toll, even though thirteen, fifteen hundred people is an awful figure, it wasn't anywhere near what they thought it would be. So, those were the good things. The bad thing is what happened; the way the city flooded was unexpected. I just remember the shock when I saw the flooding. But that whole period was the worst time and almost the only time since I got into this business that I did not enjoy it. I have a great opportunity to come to work everyday and give people information that they need. Their quality of life depends on almost every day that I do a story, at times their very lives depend on it when I'm covering a hurricane. But because this was such a serious situation, it was just an awful time to report. Literally lives hung in the balance for our very word. People were listening to everything that we said. We were giving them information that lead them to making decisions that could end up saving their lives or cause them to die. And I know several people who died in the storm. So, it was the worst night while you're on the air and trying to stay calm, but you're thinking about your own house, you're thinking about the people you know, did they get out? What's going to happen here? And of course the storm was so intense. We had 175mph winds that Sunday afternoon, that's just like a large tornado. At that

point I was in Baton Rouge as the back-up weather person there. And as I'm driving out of town, I'm just thinking, "What am I going to find when I come back?" I was passing people on the street and thinking, "Are they going to die tonight?" The water was coming up; it was just an awful night. There was just this awful sense of doom that literally our way of life could be coming to an end in just a few hours due to this storm. And I remember at about 1 o'clock am, I began to see the storm shift a little bit towards the east, and within the hour I realize it wasn't a jog, the eye of the storm kind of wobbles a lot as it moves, so you sort of average the path as the hours go by to get the actual track. So as you're watching each individual movement, as you're watching the storm head right towards you, you can take the wobbles and give them too much credence, you think, "Oh we're free," or "No, now we're dead in the eye." It's very easy to read too much into them, but I saw by early in the morning that there was a definite track change. And I'm thinking, "Maybe, just maybe we were spared the worst of it." We were still going to have a serious blow, particularly Plaquemines parish, and I felt so bad for those people who lived on the Gulf Coast which would feel it again the same as it did in Camille. However, the Gulf Coast is a smaller area, less densely populated than New Orleans. I thought that we may have missed the worst of it. And then at one point I took a break at about 8 o'clock that Monday morning and received a bulletin saying that the levee at the Seventeen Street Canal had been breached, and serious flooding was occurring right there. And when I finally flew over it a week or so later, I was stunned. There was just nothing left out there, but I knew that people were in those homes, and I knew that water was headed towards St. Bernard and quickly. I also knew that people were still watching (WWL coverage), so I turned right back around and went back there (to Baton Rouge) and they were doing an interview with the LSU chancellor at that point, and I went right on set and interrupted them and got that on the air what I saw, that people were dying. And every

time I go into the lower Ninth Ward it's just shocking, it was like a tidal wave, I mean, that levee failed. The water was going over it, the flooding had started beforehand, but when that levee failed it just gave away suddenly and you had all of that water in that Canal that just roared into the lower Ninth Ward and just swept the houses away. I talked to a couple of people who were there, and it was just an awful nightmare. There are literally houses sitting on top of other houses, where you can't tell there's a house underneath. The neighbor's house across the street is sitting atop the other neighbor's house, and you don't know if that neighbor was there at the time. Your neighbor's body may still be in that house. It's just awful. But it was just simply so much worse than what we had imagined, to have it really happen. And I've talked to Walter Maestri and other emergency officials and we all just keep shaking our heads and saying, "My God." None of us were ready for what it would actually be like, to see everybody lose their homes, their businesses.

Q. I know that you were busy, but did you have an opportunity to watch any of the national news coverage during this time?

A. No, we went to Baton Rouge and we basically were the back up crew: myself, Sally-Ann, Eric, a couple of engineers, and photographers. Actually, when I got to Baton Rouge I was thinking that I wasn't going to have anything to do. I was looking for a photographer in order to go out and cover some of this, because I'm nervous about what's happening in New Orleans. Well, at 10 o'clock we received a call from New Orleans, the crew there called and said, "We have to get out of here, it's yours." And at 11 o'clock we went on the air. The first time they had to stop broadcasting and evacuate the station, I think in the station's history. It was a surreal moment when they threw it to us. We just sat there and the three of us looked at each other for a few seconds, we couldn't believe it. Now we were still on the air the transmitter was still

functioning, but they left the station because they didn't know if the city would flood, and there was a possibility that the French Quarter would flood also. They couldn't have everybody trapped in the station, which is why they sent the crew to Baton Rouge. So we were there at the LSU campus, the students were operating cameras and it was basically a classroom setting, so the engineers were in there rewiring it to make it ready for broadcast in about three or four hours. But it really was 1960s T.V., I had commandeered one of the teacher's computers to get weather information off of, and we were shooting the radar literally a camera was focused on the computer; which was the way they use to do it when they first introduced radar. It was tough to read, I could hardly see the picture, information was disappearing from the Weather Service because the stations were going down, and the wind was blowing down the equipment. The weather service office in Slidell was having difficulties communicating. It was just this awful, awful night, and we're pretty much isolated there. And when I wasn't on the air, I was on the computer trying to get more information. So, I didn't have time to watch anyone else's coverage, although I heard much later that it seemed like the whole world was watching us. Brian William's of NBC told our news director that he was glued to us for days, CBS folks were watching us, we were being carried at times on CBS and CNN in something like 30 cities. We actually crashed the entire corporate Internet system, because so many people at one time tried to log onto our website, because we were doing streaming video. So we had this huge audience, and of course we are broadcasting for the people of New Orleans, that's who's depending on us. So our focus is totally on that. We were totally oblivious to all the other stuff that was going on around us. So we were watching the storm, thinking about the people who were directly in the path of the storm talking to them. Not sure how many of them were still getting this, whether they were still getting this on the Internet or battery operated T.V. But our transmitter was still

functioning, everyone else's was blown down, and we didn't know that at the time. We were just doing the job, but like I said earlier, it was the worst night ever. I have fun doing this job, most days it's an incredible privilege to do what I do. But that night I never wanted a night like that, dreaded it when it was coming hated the entire thing. And since, because of what happened it's been so awful, because for me there is a great attachment to the members of the audience. I guess I'm in a bit of a special position because they call me for help. And the calls that we've been getting are just devastating, heart wrenching because so many people are so devastated and really not sure what to do to recover. The scope and scale and extent of the disaster is just beyond most people's ability to deal with. I find people who even if they know what to do, aren't sure that the federal government is going to let them do it. For most people they're just trying to find the money, they've suddenly had everything they owned wiped out and are having to start over. They're faced with poverty; they have to replace everything starting from underwear to furniture and entire houses. They're trying to live in an apartment, but hoping for a FEMA trailer because they're having to pay rent at an apartment, they're hoping FEMA will pay the rent because they're still trying to pay their mortgage so that they can keep their house, so maybe they can rebuild the house. How do they do it? What do they do about mold? How high will they have to remove the sheetrock? There are just so many questions. Will their neighbors come back? Will businesses come back? Will the corner grocery store come back? I was talking to a guy who doesn't have a car and he's walking three miles everyday to the grocery store, he doesn't have power, he's living in his gutted out house. So he takes a bat with him, because if he makes it back after dark he says there are packs of dogs in the area now that once were pets and that have now become wild, and they smell the food and go after him. It's just things that we could never have dreamed of back in August.

Q. As of right now post Katrina what do you think your responsibility is to the community?

A. Primarily, I'm the people helper reporter, I wear a lot of hats part-time meteorologist, part-time reporter, I do lots of different things. But primarily I'm the people helper reporter, and I have never been needed so much. We've set records in the number of calls I get, I got 175 calls in twenty-five hours, and I'm averaging a hundred calls a day now. It's not, "Oh, can you come fix the pothole," or "I'm mad at the sewerage and water board, my buildings too hot." Although I am getting some of those, it's not the mundane or routine, "There's an abandoned house on the corner", "They haven't picked up the garbage this week." It's, "I'm living in my car with my children," "I'm living in my gutted out house," "My FEMA trailer is there and they won't unlock it for me, they won't give me power, it's been there for six months." It's just this cascade of awful events. "Can you help my eighteen workers who came back from Texas because they told us that I could open our business, but I can't get power for the business. Now, I can't pay them, they have no place to live, what will we all do?" It's overwhelming the number of really serious events. And I'm working with FEMA, I'm working with other agencies and we're trying to handle things as fast as we can, but for every one I handle I've got five new ones. So the stress has not gone away one day since Katrina. It has lessened in that I'm no longer wondering what is going to happen to the city and to my own house, but it is now this daily sense of dread in driving around town and seeing how hurt the city still is, and listening to the calls of people who so urgently need lots of help. They need help to replace everything they've lost, and in many cases they're waiting for the federal government and they're not getting help. It's just awful. I remember the first couple of days that we were in Baton Rouge, and Tuesday night we were back in New Orleans doing a story and I was able to get back and check on my house. Half of the roof

was still gone but the house was still there and it was a livable structure. But going in it was pitch black, tree limbs all over the place, there were helicopters landing on the Interstate out at Causeway, they had just begun the evacuations there and they were escorting us through. And they were landing at night, so I had so much admiration for those pilots because it was dangerous because they can't see the wires. So they were going in and rescuing people from neighborhoods were they couldn't see, the helicopters could snag and crash, but they went anyway in the dark to rescue these people. It was just the most amazing time. Everywhere we would go you would see damage that would take your breath away. I saw bridges that were shifted or knocked down from Grand Isle to Ocean Springs which is a sixty, seventy mile span. That's a huge area for the wind and the waves to be powerful enough to knock down bridges. And I remember that Friday night before the storm, my wife and I were trying to decide whether or not to go to the Saints game or start getting the house ready, and I looked at her and I said, "You know what; we might as well go and have some fun." And it was almost the last fun thing that we did. Every since then we have been living in this miasma of Hurricane devastation. I was planning a vacation the other night, and it dawned on me that I might actually get to go to a place that has restaurants, gas stations, and grocery stores that operate at normal hours. And I won't find debris piles on every corner, I haven't seen that every since. It's been awful.

Val Amedee- WWL Producer

Q. Val, everyone has a Hurricane Katrina story, as a news producer during that time, tell me yours.

A. I evacuated early Sunday morning, so I wasn't here when Katrina actually hit. My family and I evacuated for the first time, we went to San Antonio. It was strange being on the other end where I'm watching the coverage on T.V. and I'm glued. The only coverage that I

could see was national news, CNN, CBS or Fox, and I'm thinking, "Oh my God, I wish I was there," just because you get all of the inside information as a producer. Everything comes firsthand to you rather than it being filtered. And then it's filtered even more so because I'm watching the news on the national level, so there showing parts of the city and they're calling it Metairie and I'm thinking, "No, that's the lakefront or that's the Seventh Ward," or something like that. So that was very strange for me. So everyday I could not get enough of what was on television, what kind of coverage was going on. So I missed it from that aspect. Then when I came back, it was really scary because you don't know what's going to happen; it was just the uncertainty of everything. The city was still flooded at this time and even though we were in Baton Rouge and everything was safe you're always worried about what was going on at your home. So, even with being back producing at this time I was still wondering about what was going on in my neighborhood, in my area. But producing after the hurricane was an experience like none other. I've experienced a lot over the years and have even been through 9/11. But when you have something that devastates your city, because it's always somewhere else, previous hurricane seasons it was Florida, or we might have something here but it's not major, but when you see an entire city underwater and people being rescued by helicopter or by boat, it just seems surreal. So you're producing it but at the same time it doesn't even feel like it's real. That's the only way I can describe it. Maybe it was because we were in another area, Baton Rouge and not actually in New Orleans, but sometimes it was just a hard concept to grasp that this is really happening. However, maybe that's the good part because when you take yourself out of a situation you're able to handle it better, rather than being totally into it and becoming so emotional about it. I remember there was some little production done here, and there was a clip with Sandy Breland, our news director, and she was saying, "We come here and we do our work, and report

and put on the best information as possible and then we stop and we go and tend to what our problems are." And I think for those who have lost, because I've lost a little, not that much, I really can't complain, that really was a feat for them, to do your job knowing you're in the same situation as so many other people, but you put your job first rather than what you're going through right now.

Q. So what were some of the challenges that you faced producing that were abnormal because of the times? For example, I know that we were on air twenty-four hours daily.

A. Yeah, that was a challenge, but during 9/11 we had two days of no commercials, so I kind of got a little preview back then. However, this go around, I was so into it because I wanted to get out as much information as possible, but at the same time, at times it was hard to get information or get the correct information or in a producer's case getting it as quick as you need it. You're always working off of someone else's time, you know, I need these numbers now, but maybe you can't get them to me until another ten or fifteen minutes. So, it's the idea of trying to get information in a timely manner, and at the same time keeping your anchors updated. And then making sure that the information is accurate, who are you getting it from? I remember a few times there were discrepancies on which roads were open, which roads were closed and it came down to a point where if it wasn't totally official, from state police or from NOPD (New Orleans Police Department) then we couldn't go with just a phone call from somebody. It had to be written or a phone call from an official person, because it was just too much back and forth, back and forth. And the thing is when you have so many people working at one time you're hoping that some of the information isn't transposed because it may be filtered down through two or three people before it gets to you. Or maybe something is switched, you never really know. And there were some corrections here and there, but I think overall, it wasn't bad. It could have been a

whole lot worse, but when you're working with people who have been in the industry for a long time that makes it easier for you. So by me working with Sally-Ann and Eric they've done continuous coverage before, they're very knowledgeable about this city, about how it all operates, so that helps you out a whole lot as a producer, too, especially when you don't have that much information to start with.

Q. Do you think the news coverage had an affect on what was happening here? For example, I read that reports of looting, murders, rapes, and shooting at helicopters may have slowed aid to the people trapped in the city. So do you think the coverage had an affect either positive or negative?

A. Well, that goes back to some of the inaccuracies, because I've heard both sides, that there was a lot of looting, or rapes and shootings in the dome. I've also heard that none of that happened. What's unfortunate is if none of it happened, if I remember correctly most of that didn't happen, it put a black eye on New Orleans because a lot of the national media went with it. I don't know who they got the information from, but it seemed like as it came in, it went out. So, you're wondering what filtering system they had. So, that was one of the challenges for us. I don't know if any of what happened hampered efforts here. For one, I think that it was just really poor planning, because officials never dreamed that anything like this would happen, so you really can't be prepared until you've experienced it almost. I don't know if the coverage affected how relief was handled here, but like I said, the nation was able to come with a lot of different opinions about New Orleans. I don't know if it was in a good or bad light, but either way you look at it the situation was horrible here.

Q. Has Hurricane Katrina had a lasting affect on you as a producer? Has it changed the way you perform your job?

A. I'll tell you one thing when I first started college, I always thought that being in the news business as a reporter or as a producer that you were there to get the information and relay a story to people. That is what it is, but I've learned that there's so much of a business aspect to television, that's when your ratings come in and competition with other stations, and how that's always more important, to see who has the big story. So sometimes I always felt like, "Am I really writing this for the people or am I writing this for the ratings? What's the real meaning behind it all?" Well once Katrina happened, it was all for the people. So it went back to what my original concept of news is or was or is going to be. Because right now people are so hungry for information because you're really changing and shaping people's lives right now. You're helping people make decisions. People are so needy for what we have to say, because they don't know, it's almost like they need someone to tell them what to do, and I feel like this is what we're doing right now. Not as a dictatorship, but to give them as much information as possible so they can make the best decision for themselves and their families. So that is the one good thing that I have seen come out of this, that I feel like what I felt television was all about has really been fulfilled. Despite some of the things that have happened over the years, nothing in a bad way, but just the perception of what the media is.

Q. I want to ask you a question about the news industry in general. As a producer, you have a very limited amount of time to tell the news when you subtract commercials, sports, and the weather so what's the measuring stick for deciding the pertinent information that viewers need to know for the day?

A. I like to consider myself as the average viewer, I mean, I'm not one of these rocket scientist type people. I would like to think that I'm average and I'm real. So that's the kind of news that I look for, something that's real, something that pertains to you today. Anything that

can help you move forward in life, like if its medical news, everyone wants to know about their health. If it's anything in business news that can help you with your finances, how to balance a checkbook, your taxes, because news should be anything you can use to help better yourself. Plus, I also like to find stories, I don't like to say shock value, but that will make you think. Like can you believe this mother drowned her three kids in the lake? What was the mentality or the purpose behind that? And just to know that there are people out here who can do that, but what is the deeper story. She needed help, was it a mental issue for her? Is it something that's just been swept under the rug? For example, going back to Hurricane Katrina, all the people who were at the Superdome and the Convention Center, we had a huge population of poverty here that has never ever been exposed, and Katrina brought that out. So, it made the nation see that New Orleans has a problem. So, I'm hoping that these types of issues public housing or the welfare system can be resolved to help some of these people get off of the welfare roles and move on into better lives. So, going back to how I select the news, that's pretty much what I do. I think of what the average viewer will want to know. What can I teach you today? How can I help you better your life? Or make you think? Or maybe challenge some of your beliefs?

Q. And what are some of the problems or challenges that you face on a daily basis as a producer?

A. My biggest problem which I think the whole entire crew knows, is trying to get scripts out on time. Because depending on the story, like today I got very involved in the story about the Louisiana Recovery Authority's meeting today to discuss their plan. Well, what is the plan? So, I took my time to read the plan and then to do a short version of it in my story, so that people not only know that there is a meeting going on today, but also what they're going to talk about. So this is the issue, this is what it means for you, and you can also come out and talk about it. So,

that plays back into how I select my news. So sometimes, some of the stories, I can get very involved in, I lose track of time, because I'm trying to make this masterpiece. But I think it's more because I really do care and I want to make sure the information is accurate as much as possible. And I do make mistakes but I try to be as accurate as possible. So you're double checking, or you're going on the Internet trying to find backup information or information that supports this so that you know you're correct. That's a challenge of mine, and also some of the people I work with, some of the associate producers. And that's only because they're young and they're coming up. So, you're not only looking at your work and making sure it's correct, but you're also double checking their work. And you can catch a lot of mistakes, but all of them you don't catch. And I can remember being an associate producer years ago, and I used to write for Eric Paulsen and he told me, "People don't see you when a mistake is made, they see me, so you have to make me look good." And that's true. People at home don't know who I am, or know that Val writes this or Val made a mistake, and Eric read it so he's not the dumb one. Rather, they look at Eric and say, "Well how can he make a mistake like that, that's just dumb." So, when he told me that it made so much more sense. And the thing is making sure the people coming behind you understand the importance of being accurate.

Q. Is there anything you'd like to add?

A. Well, it's a great career a lot of times I get frustrated and I say, "I don't even know why I do this. I'm going to quit tomorrow." But you can't let the day to day screw ups get you down. You have to look at the big picture as a whole, of what you're doing right now. And it is a service to the community, so I like that part of it. I like the production value of news especially with the morning show, because there's so much going on at one time. So, I think going back to challenges just trying to keep an even keel. That when all hell is breaking loose that you don't go

with it, that you keep your composure and try to keep the crew composed. I'm working on that now, not blowing up at the crew because I'm mad about something. So, like today was a good day, I liked the stories and I just felt good about everything that was done today. So, I know I won't call in sick tomorrow, I'll be here tomorrow.

Shauna Sanford- WWL Anchor/Reporter

Q. Shauna, we're going to start with you telling us about your Hurricane Katrina experience.

A. I can remember very vividly when we made the decision to leave the station. I was actually coming back; I had been off for a couple of days and was headed back to Louisiana, from Atlanta. I had been tracking the storm while I was in Atlanta, and I could see that, "Oh my gosh, we were going to be in big trouble." So I was on my way home, got stuck in the contra flow traffic, called the station, and they said, "You know what, get here as soon as you can." So I made it home, it was 7 o'clock at night, I'll never forget it, I got back on the rode, turned myself around decided to take Airline Highway, because you couldn't get back to New Orleans from Baton Rouge. I got back to the station at 2 o'clock that morning, and it was just busy. People were running from here to there to everywhere trying to figure out what to do. So, they had made arrangements for us to stay at the Hilton. So, I went to the Hilton and they told me to come back at 10 o'clock in the morning. When I got back at 10 o'clock in the morning, they said, "Guys, you know this does not look good. We are going to have to make plans to evacuate." And it took them a couple of hours to figure out and sort exactly how they were going to do it, but they divided us up into two camps; a little bit more than half went to Baton Rouge, and the rest stayed here. That was that Sunday. I thought it was so interesting because they wanted us to write down our cell phone numbers, they wanted to make physical contact with every person before they left

the news station. And we all plugged each others cell phone numbers into our phones, so if anything happened we could make contact with someone, and we left in a caravan. So, it took us seven hours to get from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. We thought we were taking a short cut, but little did we know that about a zillion people thought that it was going to be a short cut as well. So we were on the road for seven hours. But I was just so pleased that they handled it the way that they did, in making it so that we were able to maintain contact and stay in touch with everybody. So that there was not this big question of, "Oh my God were is so and so, if someone had trouble on the road." We got to LSU that night at 8 o'clock and turn around at 9 o'clock and we were on the air from LSU. And that was just incredible. I think that there was so much adrenaline going at that time, that we didn't even know what we were doing, or how we were going to do it. We just knew that we had a job to do. Everybody just jumped in and did exactly what they needed to do.

Q. So, when you got there where were you staying?

A. Well, fortunately my mother lives in Baton Rouge. So I was so blessed in so many ways, because when we got to LSU they thought that they had adequate rooms for everybody, but they really didn't. They didn't have enough preparation, I'm talking about the University, they did what they could, given the short notice, but several people were staying in one room. They just did what they had to do. Fortunately, I was able to go home, however I wasn't able to stay at home because they needed me. So, when we got to Baton Rouge, they said " Okay now, a group of you go and get some rest, and then the rest of you be ready to roll." So I was a part of the first group scheduled to go on air. So I was able to make it home, and just breathe for a little bit, and then I got back to the station. Then I immediately went out to the Office of Emergency Preparedness in Baton Rouge, which was really the hub of all the action at that point. That's were

all of the state emergency officials were, the Department of Transportation and Development, the Governor's Office, everybody affiliated with the National Guard. Everybody was there because that is were they were getting information on the storm and trying to figure out what they needed to do. So it was pretty intense. And you know what? It seems like it was intense for days, because we were just constantly going. We would get to work and we didn't know when we were going to leave. It was kind of like we were on standby in case they needed us to go here, and then when we finished here, then they needed us to go there. And we were going wall to wall twenty- four hours. Whenever the group at the transmitter on the West Bank was not on the air, then we were on the air. We were gathering information, of course, because we had to fill all that time. And we weren't just reporting, we were at the desk (anchoring), and when we got on the desk, we were on that desk for hours. That was an amazing experience, because if you've never done that sort of thing before then your wondering," Oh my God what are we going to do, how on Earth are we going to fill all this time!?" But it's amazing. You do it. People are bringing all of this information in, they're getting guests, and you bring people on and you just talk. The same concerns as you have, those are the same concerns that the viewers have. The information that you want to know, that's what the viewers want to know. Because nobody knew anything, so we were trying to gather as much information as we possibly could from anybody and everybody who would come on (the news program) and talk with us. And when the reporters who were out in the field gathered interviews or video we were hungry for it, because we were just as eager to see it as the public.

Q. When you were in Baton Rouge I'm sure that you had access to the national news coverage. What were your thoughts on the national coverage?

A. Well, that's just the thing. It took a little while before I was ever in a position to just sit and

watch the national coverage. Because we were out working, then when we finally got a break, we were trying to catch some sleep. But I think once I was able to actually watch the national coverage for a period of time, I was a little bit disappointed in what I saw. In the way that they were reporting, there were things that they were saying that weren't true. They were sort of misrepresenting the situation. I had a lot of questions when it came to the looting and really a lot of things that were being reported just because we weren't getting that same kind of information. So there were some concerns there. It's tough, because when you're in the middle of all of that and you're trying to get information and you've got deadlines, and you got people saying, "We need information, give it to us." So, I'm not trying to insinuate or say that anything was done maliciously or done on purpose, but when you're in the middle of such a chaotic situation, it's easy to kind of not see everything as it is. You're kind of focused in on that particular thing that's happening at that point in time, and so maybe you don't really see what the larger picture is. Or if you're not from this particular area then you're bringing your experience to it, and maybe you don't really understand how things are, how people express themselves, or that kind of thing. But then again, you know, we had officials whom they were getting some erroneous information from as well. So that just sort of lead to the disappointment with a lot of the national coverage. But, they were working just like we were, in some instances side by side. But, on some things they got it right, too. I'm not trying to say that they got everything wrong, because I don't believe that. I just think that even now I look at the national coverage with a different eye because of this whole experience. I really do. It really opened my eyes a lot. And I think that it's made me try just that much harder to be responsible when I report and make sure that I tell the story as it is and not how I think. Because I don't ever want to bring my personal biases or my feelings into the story, because I don't think that's my job. I think my job is to show

you what the story is, and then you can decide for yourself. But I want to make sure I include all the facts or all of the sides that are relevant to that story. And after going through this experience I'm even more committed to doing that than I was before. I mean, it's always been important to me, but I just realize how important a job it is that we have. And how, it's just so important that when we do it, we do it right and not misrepresent anything, or anyone, or any group, because I think that, ultimately, does an injustice to that group and it does an injustice to our business.

Q. What do you think of the activist journalism that we saw during the storm's aftermath?

A. I thought it was great. I really did, because you know what, we're human too. And that situation was so palpable, you could feel it. And I think even if you weren't from here, to be in that situation and see that kind of suffering, and you just wonder why it was going on. That's just a human reaction and I didn't think there was anything wrong with that. Not with expressing that kind of anger in some cases, that kind of disappointment. I didn't think there was anything wrong with it. I think that just makes the viewers who think that we are just these beings sometimes, just sitting here, and we don't have any emotions or feelings, because typically we're not going to do that. We don't want to interject ourselves into the story, but when you're part of the story and in some cases those journalists were helping to save lives. And I know that was one thing that really got to me when I was in Baton Rouge that first day that I went out to the River Center, where thousands of the residents were brought, one thing that they all would do would be to come up to me and the camera and say, "Can I just please give you my name and a number so that so and so can know that I am okay, or in case they need to get in touch with me?" Or, "Have you heard?" Or, "Do you know?" I don't even know how long we were there, but I was working with a photographer from Portland, Oregon and when we left, he looked at me and he said, "Are you okay?" And I said, "Oh yeah, I'm fine." But I was very quiet, because I couldn't do anything

to help them. There was nothing that I could do and I so wish that I had something to give them. And I saw babies running around, and the clothes that they had on their back was all that they had with them there at the River Center. You saw kids just running around, people walking and not looking as if they know where they were going, just kind of in a daze and understandably so. But it got to me, because I had never been in a situation like that before and never felt as hopeless as I did. And I really did, I felt hopeless. I wanted to do something. So, for those reporters and anchors and journalists who were able to help people; they're emotionally involved at that point and time. How could that not come across? I thought that was a good thing, I really did.

Q. Do you think the coverage affected what happened here?

A. I think it (the coverage) helped. The reason why I think it helped is because if you hadn't seen that, I don't think it would have been real. You would have heard it and said, "Oh yeah, wow, that sounds incredible, but to actually see all of those people on the bridge, all of those people at the Superdome, crying out for help; children, older people. To see that kind of suffering and desperation, how could anybody ignore that? And if that's constantly on the air how could people not respond to that? And I know that's been sort of a big criticism that some people have had, especially in some of the other Gulf States that were hit as hard, they feel like they've been left out. Especially in Mississippi where the damage was just as incredible as it was here in Louisiana, but we didn't have the pictures there in Mississippi like we had in New Orleans. And I think, because of the sheer number of people who were left without, that adds to the desperation and the kind of response that was needed at the time. I think that we should have done that. I think it should have been aired, and I think it was the right thing to do. How could anybody ignore that? I think it helped, ultimately right or wrong, I think it all helped. When you

shed light on something how can people ignore it?

Q. What is the future of broadcast post Katrina, do you think the storm had a lasting affect?

A. Well, I know that it's had an affect on me. And I think that it has certainly had an affect on the way that we report. The sensitivity that we bring to the stories and just wanting to make sure that we do put out the most accurate information as possible. I just think that were probably a little bit more attuned to bringing the human element to stories. I think that's always been a big part of telling a story, but maybe even more so now, to putting a real human face on the stories that we tell, because the stories that we tell impact lives. And we need to see who is being affected; we can't just put this information out there cut and dry, black and white, because it's not. These are stories that impact people's lives now, and will in the future. And so I think even more importantly we have to make sure that we have a human element there, and that is something that we do. In as far as how we cover the news, I think there's a lot more focus and attention given to making sure that we're not excluding any particular group. Regardless, of how small a community is, that's the thing we realize, is that it doesn't matter the size of a community the suffering is just as great. How can we ignore that kind of thing? And if there's a need there then it's our responsibility to put that need out and to tell that story. So, I think that it's forever changed (broadcast), and in a good way.

Melvin Santos- WWL Engineer

Q. We know that you evacuated New Orleans before the storm arrived, so after evacuating where did you turn primarily for news information about what was happening here?

A. Basically during transit we had the radio on, and we were getting most of our information from the radio. We were trying to find stations that were broadcasting information,

because you would lose the signal from the local WWL channel, so we'd have to try and find another channel. Well, the evacuation actually took us eighteen hours, so we were in the car for eighteen hours, at that point basically getting all of our information from radio sources along the way to where we first evacuated which was Nacadish, Louisiana. As soon as we got there we turned on the television, and we were watching television coverage twenty-four hours a day, flipping between Fox, CNN, and whatever other networks had any information on Katrina.

Q. What were your thoughts on the national coverage of Katrina?

A. Personally, I thought that they did a good job on it. I think they covered the information that we wanted to know as evacuees. It pretty much let us know a lot of what generally was going on. But as far as the finite details, we always felt that we were missing something that we could have gotten from a local news source, which we didn't get until two weeks after the storm. Channel Four had been broadcasting from Baton Rouge, and we were able to pick that information up in Nacadish, Louisiana.

Q. So, at that point what were your thoughts on the local coverage?

A. Again, I thought they covered the story; they covered incidents that were occurring in the city. They showed both the ugly side and the good side. And they gave a lot of information that as evacuees, we needed to know, like, what was going on, when was there electricity, when were we going to be able to come back, what was FEMA doing, what was the government doing. We felt that we got 90% of what we wanted to know, the other 10% we got from calling friends who were still in the area, who kind of filled in the gaps.

Q. Were you in Nacadish the entire time that you were away?

A. No, we went there first, and then we left there and went to Dallas.

Q. So, tell me about the local coverage of the storm in Dallas and Nacadish?

A. The local stations in those cities did cover the storm, but it wasn't on the grand scale that it was in Louisiana. On CNN and Fox in Dallas, yes, they still continued with twenty-four hour coverage, but the local stories were different. It would be the top story, but it would be the only story (dedicated to the storm) for that newscast. So, we really did lose a lot of information when we were in Dallas, but the only thing that saved us was that my sister (in Dallas) had a computer, and I was able to access the Channel 4 website, and that's where I received most of my information, from the Channel 4 website, and Nola.com.

Q. During that time would you say that your media consumption was minimal, average, or above average?

A. Maximum, there basically wasn't too much else that you could do, and everything that came on kept us updated. It didn't become stale until probably around the fourth or fifth week when they started showing a lot of redundancy and it got to be overkill.

Q. When it comes to the news coverage of the storm, in your opinion, what was done wrong?

A. Well, I think they did try to sensationalize a lot of the stories; for instance, when they show Shepard, from Fox news, standing next to a dead body on the interstate. I thought they could have said that without having to show the body or the bodies. There were a few pictures that got out on CNN of actual dead bodies floating in the streets. Now that could have been somebody's family member and I think that was overkill, that was sensationalism to try to get the audience to watch. I think at certain points in the coverage, they did go overboard.

Q. What do you think was done correctly in the coverage?

A. I think what was right was exposing some of the government's flaws, FEMA's flaws,

things that they were trying to cover up, or the Bush administration was trying to cover up and hide. The news exposed that what they were trying to say wasn't true. They were trying to lie and say that they, that FEMA had everything together, but they didn't have everything together. The proof is in the deaths and the people that were stranded without food and water for two weeks.

Q. As someone who lived in the area and had to evacuate, do you think you received an accurate, fair, and full account from the news media of what was happening here in New Orleans?

A. Yes, as I said before, I would say they were about 90% accurate.

Q. As someone who is from the area, who's familiar with the people, do you think that the way that the people trapped in the city were portrayed on the news was accurate?

A. I think the looting kind of conveyed that a lot of the population, and I'm going to say it, black population are like that here. It conveyed that that's the kind of people that we had here. But there were also stories that showed innocent people, black people or whatever, on their roofs, and they just needed help. And I think what they did in that story, they did kind of sensationalize it all, "Oh that's typically New Orleans, with their high crime rate, look what they're doing." And where we were everyone was kind of like, "Whoa, look at this. Why are they showing this?" But that's what they showed, that's what happens. But that didn't convey the whole population of the city.

Q. So, do you think the media coverage affected what happened in New Orleans before, during, or after the storm?

A. I think without a doubt it had an affect with international donations coming in. I think without them showing the true devastation that occurred here people would have thought that it

was just another hurricane and you wouldn't have had a lot of the contributions that came in from various organizations without the media coverage.

Q. What are your feelings concerning the current coverage of the aftermath?

A. I think it's dwindled quite a bit. I think people have lost interest in it, people are getting, I would almost say, kind of burnt out on it. And then stories are creeping in about corruption and people misusing the money, and it kind of taints what's really going on down here. Things are still the same, there are still people who need help, and there is still mass devastation. The thing that upsets me most is that a lot of these people in Congress will not even come look at it, to make a judgment whether to deny or approve funding for the monies to come here. You have to see it firsthand to understand.

Q. From the moment that you first heard about the approaching storm up until the evacuation, tell me your story. What was your thought process? Did the news coverage have an impact on your decision to evacuate?

A. We'll when it (the hurricane) was coming we were watching it for a couple of days, and the first storm track was completely wrong they had it going through Florida. I was stuck between my job, coming to work, or evacuating, because I didn't want to lose my job. But I also had another factor to consider, my wife had terminal lung cancer at the time, which made my decision a lot easier. If I didn't get out of here, then possibly she wouldn't have been able to have chemotherapy for days or weeks after the storm, and then once the storm reached up to almost 160mph, that's what basically swayed me to go. It was time to leave. By that time it was already 1:30 p.m. on a Sunday, so I had waited too long to begin with at that time. I'd say that the news coverage definitely helped make my decision when I saw what that storm was doing, without that I probably would have just stayed. I guess I wouldn't have been, I guess scared is the word to

use, into leaving. You know fear when you see something like that headed towards you, and you've heard all the worst case scenarios that could happen to New Orleans. And I knew that if I got stranded here with my sick wife, it would be bad. So all of those factors, but I would say that the news played a role in me leaving without a doubt.

Q. Is there anything that you would like to add?

A. Its just that I do think that the coverage was accurate. They had some stories in there that I think they sensationalized. But all in all I think without that people who evacuated wouldn't have had means to have access to all of the information. Without T.V., radio, or streaming Internet sites that were on at the time. I was glad that they had it, when I was in Dallas and I was able to access Channel 4, the streaming audios that they had, and Nola.com, and the Times Picayune.com, because even though the local papers ran stories, they didn't pertain to a lot of the things that were going on here (in New Orleans) that we needed to know about. Like, when can we come back? Is the water safe? When are they going to open up grocery stores? Information that we needed to know as locals.

Danielle Dugue- WWL Camera Operator

Q. Where were you living when the Hurricane hit?

A. I was living in Gretna which is in Jefferson Parish.

Q. Did the news coverage of the storm affect your decision to stay and ride out the storm, or was it not your decision to make, whether or not to stay?

A. I remember it was Saturday when they issued the mandatory evacuation, and I'm use to living in New Orleans, you always have hurricanes. So, I hate leaving out, because I don't like to ride in traffic, so it really didn't scare me. But I think by the time I woke up that Sunday and I saw Mayor Nagin, as well as the governor really urging the citizens to leave the city, I knew that

it was serious. It was suppose to be a direct hit, a Category 5 they were saying, I believe. That's when I was anxious to get out of the city, and I started telling my parents, because they were kind of nonchalant. We really didn't take it seriously, bottom line. But my parents were staying abreast of the news as well, and my dad told us we were going to evacuate, because I have a great grandmother, grandmother, and a great aunt here and my dad's an only child so they kind of depend on him. So, we were going to pick them up and all leave the city. Actually, despite all that was going on, we were planning to go to church that Sunday, and we rode over to the church but nobody was there. So we came back (to the West Bank) and I remember going over to my grandmother's house and knocking on the door trying to get them. Come to find out, they had already left. The church my aunt attends helped them to evacuate, so we didn't even know where they were. So we were like, "Okay, cool," then we get in the car and drive home. I'm thinking we're about to evacuate, and all of a sudden my dad is like, "We're not going anywhere." So, I'm blowing up, and I started talking to my mom, and she was really trying to get my dad to leave, but my dad is like, "We're not leaving." And we really didn't have anywhere to go, we had in-laws outside the state, traffic was heavy, we honestly didn't have anyplace we could think of to go. So, it started getting late, and you can imagine as the pressure intensified, there was a lot of fighting. My parents were going at it, we were fighting, and we didn't know what we were going to do. It went on from 3 o'clock to 6 o'clock, and its getting late. You turn on the TV and on the news they're telling you, "It's gonna hit, you better leave or you're going to die!" So, I'm getting real scared I'm like, "Oh Lord, Jesus, help me! Let me get myself together!" Just in case I don't make it out of here. So, at that point when it turned 6 o'clock I realized that we were not going anywhere, and I got so desperate. My boyfriend kept calling me because he was in Lafayette and he was like, "Look, you need to get out of there." And he was scaring me even more because I'm

like, "Are you serious, a hurricane is really going to come?" He responded, "Yes, you need to evacuate." So, I kept going to my dad and saying, "Dad we can go here." And we started calling hotels all around Lafayette, Baton Rouge, and everybody was going to Baton Rouge, of course, and everybody was going to Houston, everything was booked. All around Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, we had nowhere to go. So, when it came down to it my parents were going at it, my dad was frustrated because honestly he really did not have a plan. And I don't know, men, they don't want to be told what to do, they can be stubborn at times and that's definitely what happened. He really didn't have control of the situation, and he was combative. I'm still a little mad at him for that, I felt like he really put us in jeopardy. And being the spiritual man that he is he claims, "Oh God is going to protect us. The Lord told me in a dream." I said, "You sure? Are you sure the Lord told you?" He claimed that was his fate, it wasn't necessarily mine. So, it got later and later. As I looked at the time I knew for a fact that we were not going anywhere. We were in this thing for the long run. Late that Sunday night all of a sudden the wind started rushing in; boom, boom, boom, boom, boom on the windows, because the Hurricane was supposed to hit that Monday; So it woke me up, I couldn't sleep through it, because I try to sleep through things rather than deal with it. And my mom woke us all up and called us in, and things started getting just really out of hand. It was 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning and trees started falling, and the house started shaking. So we were all upstairs, and my Mom, being the spiritual woman that she is, started praying. It was a very scary time. I didn't know if the roof was going to pop off, I just didn't know what to expect. And I'm like, "Lord, what do we do? I'm here and I'm stuck in this situation, I didn't get a chance to evacuate." And I was really angry with my father at this time, because like I said, I feel like he put us in jeopardy. I'm sure a lot of people would agree, maybe some would disagree, but it was just a real rough time. The lights went out. So, we go to sleep, it's hot as hell in the house.

It was a real rough time, dealing with that Monday, not knowing what to expect. Thank God we weren't in New Orleans or the Superdome. But once the storm hits it calms down, so once the storm calmed down and the house stopped shaking, I was like, "Oh thank you Jesus," you know. I know it was hot as I don't know what in that house though, and we didn't have any water. But there were neighbors who stayed in our neighborhood and that made you feel a little bit better, because you had some support. Everybody was helping each other out; one man next door didn't want to leave because he had his dogs, a bunch of dogs. So Monday, we thought the storm was over. The street was messed up but we didn't get any water. Which was fortunate, no water in our homes. So, we saw our neighbors, everybody was coming out and starting to clean up. So we felt like, "Okay we got through this", but little did we know that the worst was yet to come. But everyone was getting together and helping each other, even having a couple of barbeques. We didn't have any water in the house, we were using bottled water just to kind of take basically wash offs. We were there Monday, and then we were there Tuesday, my dad had a little electric stove that we were using. We had some MRE's or MRI's one of those, some canned foods, but you know our supplies starting getting a little low. The hardest thing was, I remember in order to go to the bathroom and flush the toilet, we were literally taking buckets and using dirty water out of the streets to flush the toilet. It was like living in a third world country, it was only a couple of days, but I was like, "Man this is crazy!" Girl, all of us looked jacked up! You couldn't do your hair or anything like that. And I was sick, I had a little virus even before that so I was really under the weather and the pressure was getting to me. So, every time my mom would bring up something about leaving (my mom was still trying to evacuate because we had no idea when the lights were coming on, everything was out, no water, no power, you couldn't go to the store, so your supplies were going down, so the pressure was going up), there would be a big argument

and fighting would burst out. So after awhile she was like, "You know what, I'm going to leave it alone." Then we stayed Tuesday, then we stayed there Wednesday, and I was like, "Lord, how long are we going to have to stay in this house?" because I couldn't deal with the heat. All of a sudden Wednesday, we heard about a house down the street getting broken into and the police caught the guy and actually killed him, because he was trying to break in and JP (Jefferson Parish Police Department) don't play. Then we heard about a guy around the corner who was actually putting some gas in his car and a guy put a gun up to his head and told him, "Go in the house," and he stole his gas at gunpoint. So crime starting picking up around the house, and they had some folks who were trying to take advantage of those who had evacuated. And we started getting looters so that's when we started realizing that things were getting bad. And it was dark around the neighborhood, keep in mind, you had no lights; you had no power, so you basically had to be on alert at all times. And I think they had declared martial law at the time. So, it basically became too dangerous to stay. It's one thing to go through the storm, but when you're literally in your house with a gun next to you, staying up, hoping no one tries to break in your house, that's when you're going too far. You don't have communication, phones were down. The only time my dad moved and decided that we needed to leave was when he realized that other people in the neighborhood were saying, "Look I'm not dealing with this crap, y'all can stay." That's when he got serious, because they had a couple who were military folks who were in it originally for the long haul, "We're staying, oh yeah, we can get through this." When he saw that they were leaving, he said "Uh uh, we got to go." That's what compelled him to leave. And while we were leaving we saw people riding around on bikes trying to break into houses. So, that's when he got sort of to the point where it was time to go. It's a shame it had to come to that, but that's how we ended up in Baton Rouge. Then we ended up on LSU campus, and LSU was

generous enough to open up their campus to evacuees. A lot of families were staying, actually with their sons and daughters. Luckily, my brother was on an internship at LSU, although he attended UNO, and that was the only place we could go. And I had a friend there, and we stayed in the dorm with them for a couple of days. Also, LSU had this program where a lot of the professors were opening up their homes to the families (New Orleans evacuees), and we stayed with a family, this math professor, for about a good month. It was an experience I'll never forget. It was nothing like being at home, but it was better than sleeping on the floor in the dorms. So everything turned out well. Basically we stayed there until the lights came back on, until the people returned home. But they were kind enough to do that. One of the hardest experiences was that my dad couldn't find my great aunt and my grandmother, who were originally, suppose to come with us, and he was freaking out. All of our family was displaced; we didn't know where they were. So, we were calling up the Red Cross trying to locate them. It was just a real hard time, I'm glad it's over.

Q. When you were at LSU did you have access to news coverage?

A. Yeah that was the first time we had witnessed what was actually going on in New Orleans because without electricity we didn't know what was happening. I didn't know that the levees were breached, and about the looting. When I turned on the T.V. in Baton Rouge all I saw was rapes, looting, the city was in disarray. And everything was under control, but then I found out what was going on in the Superdome. The gangstas were taking over the Superdome! I was like, "Man, this is crazy." So, the city went into chaos, pure pandemonium. So, I had no clue all of that was going on.

Q. So what were your thoughts on the coverage of what was happening there?

A. It scared the living day lights out of me! I mean I wonder if all that was true, because

there were a lot of rumors going around. Like this little girl got raped in the Superdome, and they killed this soldier or policeman who was in the Superdome. All I know is the coverage put a lot of fear in you. It was nothing good about the situation. I wonder if it (all of the information) was legit or not.

Q. As someone who had just left the city, do you think the coverage was true to your own personal experiences? Were they talking about Gretna and the West Bank or was it all just New Orleans?

A. It was really New Orleans. Folks from Mississippi complain all the time that they didn't get any national coverage. That New Orleans basically overshadowed them, but if you look at what was happening in New Orleans you can understand why. It was good TV, murders, rapes, the levees breaching, people dying. And the images that you saw, these little babies, man it looked like you were almost in Africa or something, people were literally starving. It was horrific. But they didn't cover Gretna, we heard about some incidents of crime but that was it.

Q. How was the local coverage in Baton Rouge? Did they cover what was happening in New Orleans? If so, how much time was devoted to it?

A. I remember watching the local news actually. I remember specifically when they were turning on the lights in the different parishes and the different zip codes. I was sitting in Baton Rouge and watching T.V. I remember watching the news there and they kept us abreast of what was going on.

Q. Do you think that the news coverage affected what happened here before, during or after the storm?

A. If there was no news coverage of the situation we definitely couldn't have gotten federal help. I mean, Nagin was literally pleading with the government and FEMA to send help,

and that was on national television, but it still wasn't enough obviously. But it could have been far worse, I would imagine. The help came late, but it did come. It was about a week late. I can't believe those people were suffering for that long!

Q. What are your feelings about the current coverage of the aftermath?

A. To tell you the truth, I get tired of hearing about Katrina. Right now, its election time so that gets a majority of the coverage and the crimes that happen day to day. But I like what happened with Mardi Gras. I can see that the city is doing things to keep New Orleans in the forefront and to constantly remind the citizens all over the country that we need help, so people won't forget what happened. So, the media I think is doing a good job of that.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The interview process was very helpful in answering my research questions. Each interviewee was very careful to answer each question as thoughtfully, thoroughly, and honestly as possible. Here are the results:

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

My first research question was two-part; how will interviewees cite the differences between national and local coverage, and how will interviewees describe the quality of coverage. Several adjectives that interviewees used to describe positive coverage were: the coverage was good, the information provided was thorough, the information provided was accurate, or the information provided was balanced. Several adjectives that respondents employed in their description of negative coverage were: the information provided was unbalanced, the stories were sensationalistic, the reports were inaccurate, or the focus of the stories was narrow (as opposed to being all-encompassing). In the recording of responses, it was possible for the comments of a single interviewee to fall into multiple categories. For example, if a respondent felt that the local coverage was bad, but the national coverage at points was both good and bad, their response would have been given a check in the local negative category, in the national positive and negative category, also one check in the national positive category, and one check in the national negative category. However, a respondent who commented that the coverage was all positive or all negative only received a check in that one category rather than three categories.

According to the results of the first part of the research question, three respondents, Aaron Broussard, Bobby Jindal, and Melvin Santos found all of the coverage to have been

positive. Aaron Broussard and Bobby Jindal are both politicians who had only positive things to say about all of the coverage. Broussard described the coverage as being excellent, and stated that it gave comprehensive looks at everything that was going on at the time, and was very helpful to emergency operations. According to Bobby Jindal, the television news media, especially New Orleans based channels, did an incredible job. One possible explanation for the fact that two out of the three respondents who felt that all coverage was positive were politicians, could possibly be that because they are politicians, they felt that any coverage that New Orleans received was positive (As the saying goes about press, "Whether good or bad, just make sure you spell my name right"). Melvin Santos also found the coverage to have been good and about 90% accurate. Although, when asked to cite anything that the media did incorrectly, Santos did say that the national media tended to be sensationalistic. However, this fact did not tarnish Santos's opinion that all of the coverage was good. One possible reason why Santos may have been more willing to overlook the sensationalism that he claims was evident in the national media and say that the coverage was 90% accurate, may be found within his response to another interview question. When asked whether or not he found the coverage to have been accurate and true to his personal knowledge as a New Orleanian, Santos response was yes, that it indeed had been. Santos stated, "I think the looting kind of conveyed that a lot of the population, and I'm going to say it, black population, are like that here." Santos did not conclude reports of crimes, such as looting, to have presented a false picture of New Orleanians trapped in the city, because he himself found the assertions to have been accurate.

Three respondents, David Vitter, John Young, and Joey Diffata, explicitly indicated that a difference existed between national and local coverage. This is significant because all three are politicians. Therefore all three were only asked one question which involved stating their

thoughts on all of the news coverage. Vitter responded by saying, "Well, I would put the local and national coverage into two very different categories...I think the local stations really found every means to get around the challenges (of broadcasting from a devastated area) and provide good local coverage...I was frustrated by the national media just focusing on sort of a stereotype that they wanted to tell." John Young stated that the local coverage was good, thorough, and presented all sides, while the national coverage was sensationalistic and unbalanced. And Joey Diffata believed that the national coverage didn't show the true picture of what was happening in New Orleans, and had moved away from covering the area too quickly, while the local coverage has continued coverage of the hurricane's aftermath. I did not weigh the opinions of news industry insiders in this particular category for the same reason that I didn't ask that they comment on local coverage, I believed that they would differentiate between national and local coverage in a way that may have unfairly tipped the scale in the favor of local broadcast.

Four respondents (besides the three who found all coverage to have been positive), David Vitter, Joey Diffata, John Young, and Johnny Adrianni found local coverage to have been positive. Vitter, Diffata, and Young all used positive adjectives in describing local coverage. However, Adrianni indirectly stated that local coverage was positive when he stated that people who lived in New Orleans had a better idea of what was happening here. Once again I did not weigh the views of news industry insiders in this category, because the scale may have been unfairly tipped in their favor thereby skewing results.

Zero respondents found that local coverage was negative. Danielle Dugue described the coverage of the storm that she viewed as scary. She believed that the coverage highlighted all of the bad things happening in the city such as rapes and looting, and openly wondered if all of the information was true. Danielle stated, "When I turned on the TV in Baton Rouge all I saw was

rapes, looting, the city was in disarray. And everything was under control, but then I found out what was going on in the Superdome. Gangstas were taking over the Superdome! I was like, 'Man, this is crazy.' So, the city went into chaos, pure pandemonium...All I know is the coverage put a lot of fear in you. It was nothing good about the situation." Dugue, however, could not be included in this category, because upon review of her interview it was unclear as to whether or not she viewed any local, New Orleans, coverage. She did, however, mention that the local news stations in Baton Rouge kept evacuees abreast of what was going on, such as the returning of electricity to different parishes.

Two respondents, Sandy Breland and Eric Paulsen found national coverage to have been positive. However, these are the same two respondents who were placed in the category of respondents who found that local coverage was both positive and negative. No respondent found all of the national coverage to have been positive. (Remember, that respondents who fell in the 'all coverage was positive' or 'all coverage was negative' categories received credit for those categories solely.) Breland stated, "I think there was a little bit of a difference sometimes in local and national coverage...I think that in some of the national coverage that I saw, certainly not all of it because there was some excellent coverage, there were some rumors reported. People were talking about 10,000 people being dead. Now in defense of the media that reported that, I will tell you that was because some of the local officials in the city did not have good information. So, you were going with what would normally be credible sources of information, but frankly they didn't have the information either. So it was difficult." Eric Paulsen stated, "Some of it (the national coverage) was wonderful; other parts of it were just horrendous. And what happens is when out of town broadcasters come in they see things in kind of a tunnel...And the national media is twenty-four seven now in many instances, they have to have things that feed on that

viewership. So the looting became just a story that they played over and over again. It took a few days, maybe almost a week, when I think the national media finally got it. And they understood the story of the human tragedy not the human ugliness that was being shown. Because this became not just a local tragedy, this became a national tragedy." Sally Ann Roberts also made the comment, "I thank God for the national media, I thank God that they were here, that they covered the story, that they took it to the world and that they're continuing to take it." However, Sally's responses about the national media were not considered in this category, because the fact that she was happy that the national media was here is a separate issue from an analysis of the quality of their coverage. All of the respondents in this category are news industry outsiders who have been in the industry for many years. This is important because they are better able to ascertain and distinguish positive news coverage from negative. For example, a news entity only reporting on negative events is a separate issue from the question of the quality of that coverage. A station can report on a string of negative events in a way that is positive and demonstrates quality journalism.

Nine respondents found that national coverage was negative. The responses of both politicians and news industry insiders were included in this category. The comments of news industry insiders were included because national news stations are not competition to local news organizations. Competitors of local news organizations are other local news organizations that share the same viewing area. Therefore, the comments presented by local industry insiders concerning national coverage appeared to have been thoughtful and fair. According to Val Amedee, "I've heard both sides, that there was a lot of looting, or rapes and shootings in the dome. I've also heard that none of that happened. What's unfortunate is if none of it happened, if I remember correctly most of that didn't happen, it put a black eye on New Orleans because a lot

of the national media went with it. I don't know who they got the information from, but it seemed like as it came in, it went out. So you're wondering what filtering system they had." Shauna Sanford stated, "Once I was able to actually watch the national coverage for a period of time, I was a little bit disappointed in what I saw. In the way that they were reporting, there were things that they were saying that weren't true. They were sort of misrepresenting the situation. I had a lot of questions when it came to the looting and really a lot of things that were being reported just because we weren't getting that same kind of information. So there were concerns there...Even now I look at the national coverage with a different eye because of this whole experience. I really do. It really opened my eyes a lot."

Zero respondents found all of the coverage (both local and national) to have been negative. A possible explanation for this fact is many of the respondents were industry insiders. Therefore, even if it's on a subconscious level, news industry insiders do not want to believe that all coverage, especially their own, was negative. Also, local and national news organizations possess inherent differences. So when they are both placed in the same category, because one is not the identical twin of the other, it is difficult to say that all of the coverage was negative or that all of the coverage was positive. Those questions are answered much easier when both mediums are assessed separately.

One extraneous variable that undoubtedly affected results was the fact that WWL news employees were asked to comment on national news coverage, while not commenting on local coverage. However, the responses are balanced by the fact that they were not able to comment on local coverage which may have unfairly increased the overall number of respondents in the local positive category. The responses given by local politicians and two employees outside of the news departments also helped to balance the discrepancy. The major discovery in response to the

first research question is that the majority of respondents, 9 out of 13, found that the national coverage was negative while 0 out of 13 respondents felt that the local coverage was negative. Although there were a total of 14 interviewees, one, Bill Capo, reported being too busy to watch the news coverage. This study largely confirms my hypothesis that participants would view local coverage more positively than national coverage. My hypothesis is also partly disproved by the fact that no one had any negative comments about the local news coverage.

The question of why respondents ascertained local coverage to have been superior to national coverage was answered inadvertently in every interview with members of the WWL news team. The news team avoided falling prey to several pitfalls such as sensationalism, rumors, and misinformation that the national media fell into headfirst. According to the interviewees they were careful to check and double check their information for accuracy. News director, Sandy Breland reported that they used their own reporters and photographers as eyewitness for rumor control. While producer Val Amedee, reported that at one point they only started airing official information and were very careful to check their sources. Sally Ann Roberts and Shauna Sanford also stated that they were careful not to label or misrepresent any person or group of people. Sally Ann Roberts stated, "I realized that we were also reaching out to people all over the world on the web, and as those scenes of people looting were being shown, I wanted to personalize it. I wanted to make sure that no one thought that these people were somehow different from them. I wanted them to realize these are people who yesterday were going to work and going to school and now they have nothing. And if you were without anything to eat and your children were without diapers, you would go into a store and get diapers and food and something to drink. People were fighting for survival."

The major factor causing the distinction between local and national news is the fact that

local news teams are familiar with the area in which they are covering because they live and work in these areas daily. As several respondents mentioned they know the community, they know the people, and they know the sources so that in their reporting they are able to see the broader picture. This greatly reduces the risk of becoming susceptible to focusing on one aspect of what was happening in the city, such as the looting. However, even the subject of looting was viewed and reported upon differently within the two media. The national media reported the looting as examples of mass lawlessness, while the local coverage kept the looting within the perspective that these were starving people trying to get something to eat to sustain themselves and their families. Although neither picture was completely accurate; everyone was not looting and every person who was looting was not a criminal, by the same token all of the looters were not looting for life sustaining goods; there were some who were taking unnecessary items, such as plasma television sets. However, the local media was better able to grasp the totality of the situation and provide their audience with a broader, more balanced account of what was happening in the city at the time.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

My second research question was; how do interviewees believe the news coverage affected Hurricane relief and recovery? A Washington Post article written by Pierre and Gerhart mentioned that reports of ubiquitous criminal behavior may have slowed aid to those trapped in the city. Others believed that the media coverage helped the people trapped in the city in that it gave them a face and a voice, which inevitably led to their rescue. I hypothesized that participants would believe that the news coverage affected the relief and recovery efforts in positively rather than negatively. The results of the study shows that all of the 7 respondents, WWL employees, who were asked this question except for one believed that the news coverage

did have an affect on what was happening in this city in terms of relief and recovery. Val Amedee answered that she did not know if the media coverage helped or hampered recovery. However she added that no one could see what happened in New Orleans and not think it was horrible. The other 6 interviewees responded as follows:

Sandy Breland said, "I think the rest of the country got angry that what was going on here could happen in a major American city. We were in the city the entire time, and there was no help essentially. And that was incredibly frustrating. So if the coverage helped in any way in that regard, then that's a good thing. I think people across this country were really appalled by what was going on, and what I mean by that is the lack of help. The fact that people were still stuck on rooftops, we didn't have the necessary means to get them out. I think the frustration level was directed at the lack of response."

Roberts responded from a historical perspective, "Well, thank God for the news media for many things. Look at the Civil Rights Movement, what would have happened if there had not been the cameras to catch the video of peaceful protesters being sprayed with hose, and being set upon by police dogs. It was the outrage of the nation, through the media seeing these pictures; the only way that the world will know about anything that's going on is if they read about it, see it on television, or hear about it on the radio. But primarily television is the way to get the news and see it with your own two eyes as well."

Paulsen stated, "Well you saw in the Vietnam War, you see it in this war (Iraqi War), and we saw it during Katrina, the national attention was riveted towards that. And I said it on stage (during a forum with hurricane evacuees) when Sally and I were in Houston, 'There are three ways to make politicians move, you force them through public opinion, you shame them, or you vote them out of office.' In all reality even politicians were ashamed of their actions. The

Homeland Security Department was shamed, FEMA was shamed, the Bush Administration, the Nagin and the Blanco administrations were all shamed at what they had done, or rather the lack of what they had done."

Shauna Sanford responded, "I think it (the coverage) helped. The reason why I think it helped is because if you hadn't seen that, I don't think it would have been real. You would have heard it and said, "Oh yea, wow, that sounds incredible, but to actually see all of those people on the bridge, all of those people at the Superdome, crying out for help; children, older people. To see that kind of suffering and desperation, how could anybody ignore that? And if that's constantly on the air how could people not respond to that? And I know that's been sort of a big criticism that some people have had, especially in some of the other Gulf States that were hit as hard, they feel like they've been left out. Especially in Mississippi where the damage was just as incredible as it was here in Louisiana, but we didn't have the pictures there in Mississippi like we had in New Orleans. And I think, because of the sheer number of people who were left without, that adds to the desperation and the kind of response that was needed at the time. I think that we should have done that. I think it should have been aired, and I think it was the right thing to do. How could anybody ignore that? I think it helped, ultimately right or wrong, I think it all helped. When you shed light on something how can people ignore it?"

Melvin Santos answered, "I think without a doubt it had an affect with international donations coming in. I think without them showing the true devastation that occurred here people would have thought that it was just another hurricane and you wouldn't have had a lot of the contributions that came in from various organizations without the media coverage."

Finally, Danielle Dugue commented, "If there was no news coverage of the situation we definitely couldn't have gotten federal help. I mean, Nagin was literally pleading with the

government and FEMA to send help, and that was on national television, but it still wasn't enough obviously. But it could have been far worse, I would imagine. The help came late, but it did come. It was about a week late. I can't believe those people were suffering for that long."

No respondents reported that they believed the coverage hampered relief efforts. However, one extraneous variable that may have influenced results is the fact that all of the respondents work in the television news industry. Therefore, they may have subconscious, or possibly even conscious, reasons for not wanting to believe that any news coverage could have negatively affected the people trapped in this city.

However respondents did agree that the media played a positive role in the recovery and relief effort. What would have happened to the people trapped in the city of New Orleans if there was no news industry? Although the national coverage contained some flaws, what would have become of those people without the national attention that the national coverage brought along with it? Instead of thousands of people in the area being able to become updated and watch this story unfold, millions were able to witness the shocking scenes, millions became outraged by the government's slow response in helping this city, and millions of dollars were also donated by shocked citizens to the Hurricane relief effort. What would have happened in New Orleans if reporters were not here to tell this story? Photographers were not here to capture these images on video? Anchors were not here to dictate the circumstances in the city with such emotion? And lastly what would have happened here if journalists were not present to demand accountability from government officials? I shudder to think how long those people might have remained trapped in this city with no food, water, electricity, or help from the federal government, had the news industry not been there to provide them a voice and a face. This was not treated as a news story with an anchor reading a story in a monotone voice with a graphic of New Orleans in

turmoil over his or her shoulder. This was a story that was presented in a way so as to say, “Viewers you are standing here with me, you are here as I am here, now look at that hungry little boy or girl, look at the dying elderly person, look at these starving people yelling for help, and I dare you not to feel something as I feel, standing beside them and telling their story.” It was broadcast journalism at its height.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

My third research question was; how will interviewees believe the Hurricane Katrina disaster coverage changed local broadcast journalism. I hypothesized that they would believe that Katrina's affect on local broadcast journalism was positive and long-lasting. All of the news industry insiders said yes, that the storm altered the way that they performed their jobs in a lasting way. They responded as follows:

Sandy Breland reported, "Locally, it obviously continues to be a huge story for us. We're just entering a new phase. We have entered a new phase. We talk a lot of times in newsroom meetings and we say, 'When will we ever have a newscast that doesn't contain the word Katrina?' I don't know how long that will be, there are so many stories. And I think it is our job as we go through this new phase, and we have done tough stories on levee investigations, housing, all of those quality of life issues that are important to people, and I think it's our job to keep asking tough questions, really tough questions. We have to be the voice for people here. People here who are trying to rebuild, and people who want to come home. We have to push hard for those people. They deserve that, we owe that to them, that's our job. And I think we have to keep up the tough questions and ask for accountability, and focus on issues that are really important to people. Who knows how long that's going to go on, but as broadcasters we can't get Katrina fatigue. It's too important."

Sally Ann Roberts stated, "As members of the broadcast community, for the first time we have picked up a cause as journalists and that cause was for floodgates. And Eric was very clear about it. People were talking about how terrible it was, and working out plans to rebuild the city ten years from now. And we said wait a minute; we have a hurricane season coming up. We need protection, what's being done? As journalists we have got to be current on what's happening. We have to ask the tough questions. We have to point out what's being done or what's not being done. That's our job right now. And we also have a job of sharing the good stuff too as we're doing that, because people can become discouraged. And I look at our medium as being a very powerful tool that can encourage as well as illuminate. That's what I want to do. I want to enlighten and I want to encourage."

Eric Paulsen said, "I think it had to (the storm had to have a lasting affect).It changed us right after Katrina. During Katrina we got emotional, after Katrina we got somewhat emotional. And then there was one point where Sally and I just got mad, and we decided that we were going to put that anger out on the show. And take a more proactive role which is something that she and I as journalists had never done before. We had never expressed opinion on air before. But this was a point of life or death for this city, and we thought it was incumbent upon us to go ahead and lead a charge and we did. Floodgates were our charge. The mayor and Mitch Landrieu (Louisiana Lt. Governor) both said that the area between the Seventeen Street Canal and the Industrial Canal was safe. That it's safe to rebuild there. And that is because of those floodgates. Without those floodgates you could not have that guarantee. (Our responsibility now is :) to make sure that the politicians are held accountable. To make sure that the truth gets out. You hear all of the talk about how things are gonna get better, I want the truth. Give me my actual odds of this happening as opposed to this happening. I don't want to hear that we have

plans for a light rail system, blah, blah, blah. Tell me that we can actually go ahead and repave some of the bad roads. Get our people back in here; get affordable housing, get business back in, that's what I want to hear. That's what we need to come across with, asking the tough questions, because the politicians will try to smooth things over every time. They will try to tell you what they think the public wants to hear. Until we ask them, "Well what about this in specifics." But, as cynical as it may sound, the politician's main goal is getting re-elected. We've watched it over the years. And Sally has said recently on this program, "We don't need politicians; we need leaders." So, it's up to us to put their back to the walls and make sure what they said is the truth and not some line they've spun. Just like when some of the candidates (for mayor) say they'll make a tax free zone. Well, in all reality the odds of that are that you'd probably have a better chance of winning the lottery. Also when the mayor says we're in for the biggest windfall in the history of this country, well yeah, a lot of money is going to be poured this way, but does it mean that any of it will trickle down and business will start flourishing, people will start moving back, and we'll be safe again? No, it does not. That's why we have to be informed enough, and ask the questions so that the public will be better informed of all that's happening. Because if it's done right we really do have a chance of making this a great city and it's up with us at least to force them (politicians) to come up with the honest answers.

Bill Capo responded, "Primarily, I'm the people helper reporter, and I have never been needed so much. We've set records in the number of calls I get, I got 175 calls in twenty-five hours, and I'm averaging a hundred calls a day now...It's just this cascade of awful events. It's overwhelming the number of serious events. And I'm working with FEMA, I'm working with other agencies and we're trying to handle things as fast as we can, but for every one I handle I've got five new ones. So the stress has not gone away one day since Katrina. It has lessened in that

I'm no longer wondering what is going to happen to the city and to my own house, but it is now this daily sense of dread in driving around town and seeing how hurt the city still is, and listening to the calls of people who so urgently need lots of help. They need help to replace everything they've lost, and in many cases they're waiting for the federal government and they're not getting help."

Val Amedee reported," I'll tell you one thing when I first started college, I always thought that being in the news business as a reporter or as a producer that you were there to get the information and relay a story to people. That is what it is, but I've learned that there's so much of a business aspect to television, that's when your ratings come in and competition with other stations, and how that's always more important to see who has the big story. So sometimes I always felt like, 'Am I really writing this for the people or am I writing this for the ratings? What's the real meaning behind it all?' Well once Katrina happened, it was all for the people. So it went back to what my original concept of what news is or was or is going to be. Because right now people are so hungry for information because you're really changing and shaping people's lives right now. You're helping people make decisions. People are so needy for what we have to say, because they don't know, it's almost like they need someone to tell them what to do, and I feel like this is what we're doing right now. Not as a dictatorship, but to give them as much information as possible so they can make the best decision for themselves and their families. So that is the one good thing that I have seen come out of this that I feel like what I felt television was all about has really been fulfilled. Despite some of the things that have happened over the years, nothing in a bad way, but just the perception of what the media is."

Finally, Shauna Sanford stated," Well, I know that it's had an affect on me. And I think that it has certainly had an affect on the way that we report. The sensitivity that we bring to the

stories and just wanting to make sure that we do put out the most accurate information as possible. I just think that were probably a little bit more attuned to bringing the human element to stories. I think that's always been a big part of telling a story, but maybe even more so now, to putting a real human face on the stories that we tell, because the stories that we tell impact lives. And we need to see who is being affected; we can't just put this information out there cut and dry, black and white, because it's not. These are stories that impact people's lives now, and will in the future. And so I think even more importantly we have to make sure that we have a human element there, and that is something that we do. In as far as how we cover the news, I think there's a lot more focus and attention giving to making sure that we're not excluding any particular group. Regardless, of how small a community is, that's the thing we realize, is that it doesn't matter the size of a community the suffering is just as great. How can we ignore that kind of thing? And if there's a need there then it's our responsibility to put that need out and to tell that story. So, I think that it's forever changed (broadcast), and in a good way."

Several recurring themes were evident in the news industry insider's responses. Making sure that the information that was placed on air was accurate was one major theme for respondents. Also asking the tough questions and asking for accountability were two other common themes in. Lastly several respondents also noted that the hurricane caused a refocusing of their career; and that refocusing was towards the people, the television audience.

Two respondents who were not news industry insiders, Melvin Santos and Danielle Dugue reported that while they were both getting tired of the Katrina coverage, now eight months later, however, that there was a continued need in telling the story either so it wouldn't be forgotten or so that people could know that continued aid is needed. Their responses were important because it shows that the local media are still careful to continue coverage of Katrina's

aftermath, therefore representing a change in local journalism. In an industry where today's top story is tomorrow's old news, this is a story that has remained a headline in local newscasts eight months after the storm and counting. As respondents stated earlier it is important to make sure Katrina remains a top story, because New Orleans is not back; it is merely just beginning a very long, very uncertain recovery process.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Although each respondent dealt with the question of the future of broadcast on a local level, changes are evident on the national level as well. According to Communications professor, Barbie Zelizer, “It’s important to note that [during such emergencies] the press comes under a magnifying glass. Emergency journalism becomes a standard for journalism in general” (Reiss A2). Dave Walker of the Times Picayune also writes, “The storm’s tragic after effects are viewed by many observers as a game-changing moment for the mainstream broadcast media” (D2). The most notable far reaching affect of Katrina is the fact that during the storm the media regained its voice and once again began to stand up to our government in a what that they hadn’t in our post September 11 society. The attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 stunned the nation. This was another tragedy captured on television that left viewers staring in amazement. It was absolutely surreal. After Americans overcame their shock they became angry and many wanted retaliation. On the heels of this tragic event, the Bush administration was able to link what happened in New York on September 11 with a need to declare war on Iraq. After the invasion on Iraq the mood towards the government altered in this country. The land of the free gave way to become the land of the people who had better not say anything negative about the war or the president for fear of being labeled unpatriotic. When members of the popular country music group, the Dixie Chicks, spoke out at a concert proclaiming to be embarrassed of the president as fellow Texans, their sparkling careers almost immediately came to an end during its height. It was an atmosphere in which freedom of speech was thoroughly stifled, and the silence was deafening. Entertainers did not speak out against the Bush administration, citizens did not speak out against the administration in a very

public forum, and members of the news industry definitely did not speak negatively against the administration.

Hurricane Katrina broke the silence in that it provided a forum in which most Americans could agree that local, state, and federal government agencies were flawed. Many people were stunned at the way that American citizens were treated in their own country, and felt betrayed by their government. It appeared that other countries could rely on our government for aid while a fellow state in the United States of America could not. Katrina ushered in a change in journalism as well in that journalists were no longer afraid to question the government and hold it accountable for its actions. Since Katrina, the president's approval ratings have been steadily dropping and are now at an all time low, and one contributing factor is undoubtedly the fact that news outlets are now once again willing to shine a spotlight on governmental flaw in order to bring them to the attention of the nation.

If I was to perform this study again, one change that I would make would be to enlist help so that I could interview a larger sample of people. I would enlist help in conducting the interviews and also in transcribing them, both tasks being incredibly time consuming for one researcher. Due to the fact that the number of interviewees was small and the sample was not highly stratified, any generalizing of these results to the overall public should be minimal. However, I feel that the study was an important tool in gaining the experiences, thoughts, and opinions of experts concerning Hurricane Katrina and the television news industry.

FUTURE OF BROADCAST

Although the hurricane has brought about a change in the news industry in positive ways, some sources believe that it may all be too little too late and that the decline of broadcast journalism as we know it is inevitable. In his article that appeared in the Museum of Broadcast

Communications archives, John Downing wrote that most news bulletins, especially locally, have been steadily deteriorating into info-tainment, with lengthy weather and sports reports incorporated into the half hour, “Perhaps television news over the long term will be increasingly vacated of its traditional significance in the United States, and will become more a reaffirmation of community and localism.” Is the television news industry at risk of losing its position of prominence in our society in the near future? The future might be nearer than we think. The television news audience is severely fragmented by cable, satellite, and the Internet. The days when massive numbers of Americans viewed the same programming at the same time are over. With the fragmenting of the news audience also comes the fragmenting of advertising revenue. Whereas, before many companies may have been pouring their advertising dollars into the broadcast television news outlets; cable, satellite, and Internet news outlets are now competing for advertising dollars. With the diversification of news sources also comes an increased emphasis on being the first to come on the air with breaking news; this attempt to be first compromises news accuracy. In addition, news content is steadily being taken over by fluff; celebrity news and gossip. Serious news has taken a backseat to Jessica Simpson and Nick Lachey’s (two divorced pop singers) love lives.

According to Leonard Downie and Robert Kaiser, “digital and satellite technology will allow an explosion in the number of television and radio signals that consumers can receive through the air. The expansion of the country’s network of fiber-optic cable will bring nearly infinite capacity to transmit sound, pictures and words by landlines into America’s homes. Soon millions of consumers will combine television, Internet and telephone service in a single box. Advances in wireless communications are putting cordless Internet-connected computers into briefcases, handbags, pockets, and mobile phones. Already, the Internet mixes print, photo, audio

and video news coverage into multimedia packages on many Web news sites” (11). Downie and Kaiser believe that all of these advancements spell big trouble for the broadcast news industry. Historically every new invention has allegedly portended death for its predecessor. For example, television was supposed to replace radio. However, when predecessors learn to adapt to new technologies while still maintaining their own inherent uniqueness then they are able to survive and sustain themselves. WWL-TV simulcasts their newscasts on the Internet website and also through their radio station. They have a broadcast channel, a cable channel, and a satellite channel. No new technology has to supplant the one before it. However, the old media has to welcome and incorporate newer technology in order to retain viability.

FUTURE OF NEW ORLEANS

While the challenges facing local news stations in New Orleans are the same as the challenges facing other stations, such as the diversification of news sources, because of Hurricane Katrina the news industry in New Orleans has a special challenge that is all its own. The vast majority of the city’s population is displaced. As Sally Ann Roberts pointed out in her interview, a city has to be a certain size in order to be of interest to national advertisers who are not interested in small markets. According to FEMA, more that a third of the region’s 1.7 million residents lived in areas that suffered either flooding or moderate to catastrophic storm damage; with the majority, over 350, 000, of those people living in the city of New Orleans. In surrounding areas, 175,000 of Jefferson Parish and 53,000 of St. Bernard Parish residents suffered Katrina related damages (Logan). Former residents of New Orleans are scattered all over the country, with a majority of evacuees in Baton Rouge, Houston, and Atlanta. According to the Total Community Action Committee (TCA) other cities with large populations of former New Orleans residents are: Mobile- AL, Jackson-MS, Dallas-TX, Shreveport-LA, Memphis-TN,

and Los Angeles, CA, among others (Dangerfield, et al 2). Although many residents have started over in other cities and decided to remain in these various locations, there are still many others who would like to return home, according to TCA. The community action group surveyed 700 displaced New Orleans citizens in 20 cities. The survey found that the need for housing is the number one factor that has kept those who want to return from doing so. Of those who plan to return home the most influential factors in their decision were: the feeling that New Orleans was home, the desire to be close to family and friends, and the want to return to a job, business, or career that is still in New Orleans. Other factors that influenced respondents' decision as to whether or not to return home besides housing were: flood protection, health care, and education.

A study conducted by RAND Corporation, a nonprofit research organization, also found that the availability of housing was the number one factor in determining how quickly the city could be rebuilt. According to RAND the city's current population is about 155,000, in comparison to 485, 000 pre Katrina. However, the organization projects that the city's population will reach 198,000 by September, in comparison to a few 1,000 last September, immediately following the hurricane. Their report also estimates that by September of 2008 the city's population will likely reach around 272,000, which is 56% of New Orleans's population before Katrina. According to RAND, repopulation could be accelerated if the local government were to rebuild parts of the city that were most severely devastated. And also if government officials were to provide clear, comprehensive information about the progress and ultimate goals for restoring essential city services and systems, such as levees, public transportation, public education and hospitals. Narayan Sasty, a RAND researcher, writes, "If officials give clear and complete information to the residents and businesses of New Orleans, people can start to make solid plans, and this will encourage reconstruction and rebuilding process"(McCarthy, et al).

RAND relied on data from government officials, research organizations, local and national news reports, telephone interviews with insurance, planning, building, and employment professionals, and a local planning and consulting firm to reach their conclusions. However, the writers of the report caution that many unknown factors could influence the growth of the city's population.

If the city continues to grow and repopulate then the problem of local television stations continuing to receive revenue from national advertisers will not be an issue. A bigger issue as of right now that could have a larger affect on the local broadcast industry as well as all New Orleanians is whether or not the city could survive another hurricane such as Katrina. As Sally Ann Roberts mentioned earlier, if the city was to endure another devastating hurricane, then there is a very strong possibility that several local stations will choose not to remain in the city. The upcoming 2006 Hurricane Season promises to be a very active one as well. I can't help but wonder if the city could survive another Katrina. Would residents and businesses want to return and continue to rebuild the devastated city? Would government officials decide that the city is not worth rebuilding, and deny much needed funds? Although we all hope that we will not have to endure another storm of this magnitude, hope alone is not enough to maintain a levee from breaching under the pressure of crashing waves.

Craig E. Colten authored a book entitled An Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature, which involves an in depth discussion of levee protection in New Orleans. The book traces the city from its conception to the year 2000. Colten details the fact that the city was built on an impossible site, and the efforts of man to protect the city from floods and diseases. He also describes the adverse consequences of the actions taken to make this city safer. He begins by explaining how French colonial leaders recognized the hazards of building a city between a river and a swamp, but reluctantly decided to plant there anyway. Initially, New

Orleans was built on the landscape's high ground. Although the area was not set back far from the Mississippi River and stood only 12 feet above sea level, it was the last area to become submerged under flood water and the first to emerge. During the 1700s the French decided to erect levees by piling soil atop the natural high ground. Laws passed in 1728 and 1743 turned responsibility for building levees over to private landowners and away from the Company of the Indies. Private landowners were given grants and expected to erect and maintain levees, under threat of confiscation of land for failure to comply. However, erecting levees was an expensive endeavor that in most instances only the wealthy could afford through the use of slave labor. Long term management was also an issue. Floods continued to be a hazard because private structures were inconsistent in design and effectiveness. "Erosion due to waves and current, slumping and subsidence of poorly built sections, and damage by wildlife made the chore of maintaining levees perpetual for both public and private builders" (Colten 8). However, during this time the city tolerated weaknesses in the levees that were erected in rural areas, because when those levees breached, pressure was removed from the New Orleans levees. According to Colten, it was apparent by the early 1800s that levees did not eliminate the flood hazard for two reasons; first, the levees displaced high water into unprotected areas, and secondly, the waters confined by the levee only increased in height, so that there was a constant need to rebuild the levees higher and higher. In essence levees increase the problem of flooding by raising the flood level. This undoubtedly has helped in leading to massive flooding; from the floods of 1785 and 1816 (which inundated the city) to the floods of 1927, 1947, 1965, and 2005 and the many that occurred in between.

Another adverse consequence of the city's efforts to protect New Orleans was the changes caused to the city's social geography. Even as early as the 1800s it was evident that it

was the city's poor who were most affected by flooding. The flood of 1816 drove many poor families from their homes causing them to become victims of famine and pestilence. During the 1900s new levee systems made it possible for African Americans to move into previously unoccupied low-lying areas. According to a Brown University study conducted by John R. Logan, in an analysis of the impact of Hurricane Katrina 189 years later, the odds of living in a damaged area were greater for African-Americans, the poor, the unemployed, and people who rented their homes. The analysis also shows that many areas were damaged by the storm, regardless of race or economic status; there were affluent white neighborhoods that were hit very hard, and poor minority neighborhoods that received no damage. However, according to this study, 45.8% of damaged areas were black, compared to 26.4% in undamaged areas, 45.7% of homes in damaged areas were occupied by renters, compared to 30.9% in undamaged communities, 20.9% of households had incomes below the poverty line in damaged areas, compared to 15.3% in undamaged areas. And 7.6% of persons in the work force were unemployed in damaged areas, compared to 6.0% in undamaged areas. Professor Logan used information from the 2000 Census to reach his findings.

As of right now the future of this city along with the future of local broadcasting is uncertain. According to Microsoft Network's Encarta, today, more than 80% of New Orleans is below sea level with the lowest parts of the city about 10 ft. below sea level. The city has been shrinking at a rate of 3 ft. every 100 years. The city was constructed on sediments deposited by the Mississippi River over centuries of flooding. However, levees along the river were raised and lined with concrete to prevent flooding after the devastating flood of 1927. Therefore, the sediments underlying the city are no longer being replenished by the river's floodwaters and have compacted. Whoever coined the phrase "for every action there is an equal and opposite

reaction,” must have lived in New Orleans at some point in time. Although the city’s future seems indefinite, there are many who refuse to stand still and are moving forward wholeheartedly with rebuilding efforts. However, there remain several questions for the local broadcast networks to consider; what will be the audience demographics of the rebuilt New Orleans? How will this affect advertising? Will the local stations (as well as the city itself) be able to survive another major hurricane? While questions about the future must be asked and processed, local broadcast stations are also moving forward in serving the community in a way that they never have before. In the article What Kind of Journalism is Needed When...Your City is Gone, Gregory Favre says it best, “There is so much left to be done. There are more sacrifices needed, more waves of fear left to be calmed, more bridges of agreement to be built across the many gulfs of different opinions about what needs to be done. And we cannot allow anyone, especially the men and women in Washington, to forget what you (broadcast journalists) have witnessed. If Mississippi (and New Orleans) is forgotten, then the land, filled with the remains of what was everyday life, will be soaked again and again with our tears.” Katrina has handed the local broadcast journalists a destiny that must be fulfilled. That destiny involves never letting people forget the faces of the victims of Hurricane Katrina, the child who went hungry for days, the man who died in his attic, and the community that will never be the same.

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