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A Gateway for Everyone to Believe: Identity, Disaster, and Football in New Orleans

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A Gateway for Everyone to Believe
Identity, Disaster, and Football in New Orleans

A Dissertation

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

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Urban Studies

by

Brandon D. Haynes

B.A. Louisiana State University, 2001
M.P.A. University of Missouri, 2004
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August 2013

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Acknowledgments

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of other. . . . One ever feels his twoness, --an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts two unrecoiled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

-W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks*, 1903

“Defining myself, as opposed to being defined by others, is one of the most difficult challenges I face.”

-Carol Moseley-Braun, 1993

“I am America. I am the part you won't recognize. But get used to me. Black, confident, cocky; my name, not yours; my religion, not yours; my goals, my own; get used to me.”

-Muhammad Ali, *The Greatest*, 1975

These three quotes represent the same premise that has guided my academic journey. Throughout my four years at the University of New Orleans, I have struggled with the idea of defining myself, while still adhering to the scholarly ideals, principles, and image of the academy. For a time, I have tried to reconcile my inner being as a smart, gregarious, expressive, and sometimes surly, black male, with the numerous white faces of academia that have at times overwhelmed me. For a time, I wondered if I could achieve my lifelong goal of becoming a doctor. For a time, I did not know if I was smart enough, or sounded the part. Although I could make sense of just about everything academia has thrown at me, I still did not sound like my colleagues. To be frank, I did not want to sound like my colleagues. I wanted my thoughts, my ideas, and my voice to shine through in my work. I doubted I could have the best of both worlds, which was to use my voice to communicate scholarly concepts to broader audiences. My doubts were misplaced as this work, in my humble opinion, does both. I found my voice in the context of the research and created a product which four years prior I could not have ever imagined conceiving. All I can say to this fact is “God is good.”

To think that a project of this size was completed only with the help of a higher power would trivialize the special people around me. This is the moment I have most been looking

forward to for the last four years. So many people have aided me in my journey to completion, and this is my chance to say thank you. First, I want to acknowledge my cohorts, those who have completed their doctoral degree and those soon to follow. There is nothing like going through a process with others and coming out of it as friends. A special thanks to Drs. Casey Schreiber, Carrie Beth Lasley, Kelly Owens, and Jerry Graves. We have talked at length about the program and the doctoral process. Having you all cross-over showed me an end was attainable and provided the extra motivation to complete this degree. I also want to thank both Nada Toueir and Chandra Teddleton who will be completing their respective degrees soon after. We have talked to each other until we are blue in the face and now it is time for your lights to shine.

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professor at UNO. She was the chair of my dissertation committee. She was one of my favorite people at UNO. More importantly, what she is to me will stand the test of time. She is one of my favorite people I have ever met. Michelle is my doctoral mom, my big sister, and, most important, my friend. With a vigor and zeal I had not yet encountered in life, she drove me to the depths of frustration from which I thought I would never return. What she did was stretch my mind and capabilities such that when it came time for “game day,” I was as smooth as Drew Brees in a hurry-up offense. Well, coach, it worked, and I have you to thank for it. I wish you nothing but the best in your future endeavors.

Now comes the time to thank my friends and family. First, to my extended family and friends, thank you for the encouragement. You have always congratulated me in meeting my milestones and shown me so much love through this process. I will never forget it. I want to thank my church family at St. John Missionary Baptist Church. Your prayers have been answered, I am a doctor now. To my friend Jesse Herman, we met in the lunchroom of the UNO cafeteria and have been close ever since. You have been with me through some tough times and I want to express my sincerest gratitude for it. My friends Cesar Rico, Brian Mims, Mark Abshire, and Albert Ardon, I’ve known you guys for almost half of my life now. Thank you for your support, and the countless nights we spent together over beers, barbeque, and football. Those times are dwindling, but they are not forgotten. To Michael and Elisa Reeves, it’s been fun getting to know you guys since graduate school. I appreciate each time we met for lunch or dinner, and the encouragement you shared with each Gmail message. To Melissa Saddler Ingram, my sister from the Midwest, thank you for the years of friendship, solace, and comfort. We do not talk as much as we used to, but I know you’re there, still the same, as am I for you. And, Adam Hamilton, my brother from another mother, we always seem to go through life changes about a year or so apart. This time, we’ve both changed careers. I cannot wait to see where we go from here.

I have yet to mention two of my best friends. I will start with Adrian Grubb, my childhood friends and father of my God-children. We have been friends since the womb it seems like and there is no one I would consider more a brother than my own brother. From Paul B. Habans to Edna Karr Magnet, our friendship has only strengthened. I cannot begin to tell you what an honor it has been to be your friend. It will be more the honor to one day call you doctor as well. I've leaned on you through this process, as you've leaned on me through yours. It is almost over my friend, and pretty soon the world will have Dr. Grubb and Dr. Haynes to contend with. They shall rule the day! Much love, man.

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After five pages, I hope I have not left anyone out. If I did, it was not by design, but by sheer exhaustion. If you know me, and you are my friend, then you know I care, no matter if it is written on paper or not. Thank you all for the love and support. And a hearty thank you to my fearless, feline companions Penny and Gumbeaux Haynes. In lieu of reading this, I will pet you both a little longer and give y'all some extra treats.

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyze the dynamic processes of collective identity by examining the relationship between New Orleans and its professional football team, the Saints, after Hurricane Katrina. Much of the discourse written on American professional sports focuses on economic transactions between player and franchise or franchise and city. This study explores sports from a cultural perspective to understand the perceived social values provided to the host community. This case study spans the years from 2006 to 2013 and discusses several major events, including the Hurricane Katrina disaster, the reopening of the Superdome, the Saints winning a league championship and subsequent cheating scandal, and the city's hosting of Super Bowl XLVII. Using a mixed-method approach of content analysis, in-person interviews, and participant observation, this research demonstrates how post-Hurricane Katrina events altered the collective identity in New Orleans. Additionally, it explores how the interaction of sports, identity, and ritual served to create a civic religion in New Orleans. Finally, the research examines the impact of this religious devotion on New Orleans' tourist economy.

Keywords: Collective Identity, Sports, Civic Religion, New Orleans, New Orleans Saints, National Football League, Sports Economy, Super Bowl, Hurricane Katrina, Media

Chapter I: Introduction

New Orleans caught fire, engulfed by a black and gold flame that burned hot and bright. The New Orleans Saints, the city's professional football team started the 2009 National Football League (NFL) season winning its first thirteen games. Each victory stoked the growing flames, the source of which is difficult to explain. The energy from sports is generally transferred from the fans to athletes who are on-the-field; yet, it was the Saints who fanned the fires of recovery in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Residents were not the ones playing the games, experiencing the human body's manipulation of its physiological state when encountered with physical stress. The mental investment for some, however, produced similar physical reactions, such as an increased heart rate, shakes, and anxiety. The Saints' winning streak engendered a wave of emotion shown throughout the city not only in fans wearing paraphernalia, but in residents and business owners adorning their homes and shops with Saints-related ornaments. Residents gravitated to the team similar to no other season, exalting the team's status as a cultural and civic icon.

Though New Orleans is a city that faced the distinct circumstances of Hurricane Katrina, it is not unique in its passion for sports. Considered by definition a leisure activity meant as a diversion, sports pervasive influence in American society suggests a broader significance in modern culture. Sports, especially football, have become a focal point for community identity. The ubiquity of sports in America stems in part from the explosion of sports media coverage, including outlets dedicated to the twenty-four hour broadcast of sports news (Wann, Melnick, et al. 2001). America's four major broadcast networks (CBS, NBC, Fox, and ABC) spend billions of dollars televising national and international sporting events. The development and increased use of technological content, such as sports-related

Internet sites and video games, further extends sport's omnipresence. Media connects users to their favorite team or sports at all times.

Sports are a part of the everyday experience of many Americans. That a municipality would spend millions in public resources for professional sports venues to set itself apart from another suggests that sports has a significant grasp on American culture. Sports' reach goes further, altering fans' mental state with each victory or defeat. The growing impact of sports creates a need to understand the widening effects on U.S. culture. This study focuses on the integrative discourses that construct and enact collective identity through sports in an urban environment. Professional sports teams, such as the New Orleans Saints, are central to this. Through various processes, sports teams can be transformed into civic institutions, entrenching themselves into the culture of the city. Identification with these institutions can deepen to the level of a 'civic religion' at the core of collective meaning (and the cultural economy) in the urban context. This research is an analysis of shared meaning in urban culture evidenced by media discourse that presents a "prevailing viewpoint" of the community. It seeks to understand the discursive processes through which collective identity was created, strengthened, and eroded within this particular context.

During the 2009 NFL season, much of life in New Orleans revolved around the Saints. Residents built a collective identity around the Saints, using the team as an outward expression of the city's history of pride and frustration, which was aggravated by Hurricane Katrina. It is believed that nearly all residents of the city, regardless of age, race, gender, or tenure, coalesced around the Saints, one of the few institutions on which a majority of New Orleanians agreed. The team held special meaning to New Orleans because of its efforts in 2006 to help the city recover from Hurricane Katrina in 2005. This is not an atypical narrative as the media commonly presents stories on communities who use their sports teams as public

representatives in the face of disaster. The Parkersburg, Iowa community united around rebuilding its high school football field in 2008 after a tornado destroyed one-third of the town. Members of the football team, along with coaches, staff, and volunteers rebuilt the stadium and played a game only three months after the tornado (*The New York Times*, 10 June 2008). Similarly, after a tornado tore through its town, Tuscaloosa turned to its University of Alabama Crimson Tide football team for a positive release, and a return to normalcy (*The Times-Picayune*, 3, November, 2011). Japan's Women's World Cup victory over the United States "energized" the nation which was in recovery after a massive earthquake and subsequent tsunami destroyed parts of the country (*The USA Today*, 18, July, 2011).

Typically, sports are seen as a diversion, but at times they present a more social and/or political voice through which a player, fan, or city can speak. The outbreak of what this study calls *Saintsmania*, the intense focus on the Saints that developed in 2009, and the residents' exaltation of the team as the voice of New Orleans were the impetus for this study. Sports' importance in New Orleans provides an opportunity to discuss the broader effects of sports on urban culture, especially in the context of disaster recovery.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the development of collective identity centered on the New Orleans Saints after Hurricane Katrina. The research uses the city of New Orleans as a case study to understand the broader implications that professional sports has on urban culture and its role in identity formation. It also seeks to discern the dynamic processes contributing to the fluidity of identity. This study seeks to contribute to the body of literature emerging on sports and urban culture. Currently, the economics of sports make up the prevailing literature on American sports and urban culture, most of which refutes the

celebration of professional sports' revenue generating ability. There is limited scholarship discussing the social or cultural ramifications of American professional sports. Therefore, this study will contribute to a growing body of scholarship on the cultural effects of American sports in several ways. First, it provides a foundation through which to understand the various processes in which identity is created, sustained, and becomes part of civic culture. The work uses a variety of scholarly writings on topics such as identity and religion that will discuss how the Saints came to represent a post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans identity and why that was reflected as a religion as it strengthened. A second contribution of this study stems from an analysis of the intersection of sports, economics, and culture. Professional sports, as this analysis will show, are businesses capable of producing cultural implications. Sports, as do all businesses, generate tax revenues for the hosting municipality and state; however, many scholars question the true economic impact of these revenues. This analysis does not enter into this argument explicitly; rather, it holds that the intersection of sports, economics, and culture is what generates revenues for a city and contributes to its cultural economy. It focuses on how intangible concepts such as identity and religion create tangible objects within urban environments, such as new civic structures. One can also use this case study to evaluate the implications of collective identity in disaster and non-disaster scenarios, a third contribution of this analysis. Although New Orleanians banded together in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, a disaster is not necessarily a component of collective identity. As the literature review will illustrate, collective identity is created through various channels, some of which include family, country, and/or employment.

Research Questions

This work seeks to answer this broader question: “What is the role of professional sports in urban environments?” The research answers this question by addressing several sub-questions:

1. *What was the collective identity in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina and how did the Saints fit into the community?*

Although the Saints franchise has only been located in New Orleans since 1967, this work considers the team as situated in New Orleans’ already distinctive culture... Identity literature focuses on the concept of *status problem*, or external attributions placed on a group that marks them as different. This study argues that New Orleans experienced *status problems* related to Hurricane Katrina. How New Orleans has been viewed historically is part of what has given the city its status as a tourist destination. Thus, it is important to examine the city’s pre-existing culture and the Saints’ place in the community prior to the storm in order to ascertain what changes, if any, developed through sports.

2. *What were the ramifications of Hurricane Katrina on collective identity in New Orleans and how did the Saints affect this change?*

Hurricane Katrina affected New Orleans in multiple ways. Along with the physical and psychic damage to its residents and infrastructure, the storm also hurt the city’s image as a tourist destination. The literature on identity offers a concept known as *identity work* where people begin to understand themselves in relation to others and through processes that galvanize them into a tangible group. This research query seeks to understand how the *status problems* presented by Hurricane Katrina affected the city and its identity. Based upon the research done, the author acknowledges both the increasing impact of sports in an urban context and the role that the Saints played in the city’s healing after Katrina. The mechanisms

in identity formation that led New Orleans residents to turn to the Saints in the recovery process will be explored in depth.

3. *How did collective identity deepen into a civic religion in New Orleans that centered on the Saints?*

This research makes the supposition that collective identity was strengthened in New Orleans in 2006, and then deepened in 2009 into a civic religion where those living in the city acquired a devotion to the Saints comparable to conventional religious institutions.

Mainstream sports literature is filled with allusions to religion, and athletes and fans both have superstitions and charms thought to bring positive results. This question will analyze the components of religion manifested in 2009 that allowed New Orleans to view its professional sports team through a religious lens.

4. *What were the effects of the devotion centered on the civic religion of sports in New Orleans?*

Scholarly literature pertaining to religion and ritual discusses religion as a call to action for its worshipers, meaning the rituals and belief system embedded in religion lead parishioners to conduct acts which reflect those beliefs. Some of these acts are considered advantageous or detrimental. Actions performed under the guise of religion range from those of generosity such as donating time or resources to a charity to those as despicable as genocide. The manner in which fans interact with sports can be considered a religion in much the same way. One can develop a penchant for sportsmanship or a “win at all costs” mentality in the name of sports. As such, this study analyzes the outcomes of an intensified devotion to the Saints in New Orleans particularly in its fan base or ‘worshippers.’

This dissertation surmises that after Hurricane Katrina there was a strengthening of New Orleans pre-existing identity. The New Orleans Saints, as another implement in the

city's already rich cultural toolbox, was used to mentally and spiritually recover from the storm. The dynamics and fluidity of this post-storm identity as well as the intersections and parallels of the city and team from 2006-2013 will be explored. The research investigates *Saintsmania*, and its seminal events, such as the Saints' return to New Orleans, the Super Bowl victory, and subsequent bounty scandal, which serve as procedural markers for identity change in the city. Whereas New Orleans experienced the exemplary and traumatic circumstances of Hurricane Katrina, this work discusses the broader implications of sports and its effects on urban culture and the cultural economy.

The dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter II discusses the theoretical framework guiding this research. As an attempt to understand the underpinnings of sports' importance to society, it first introduces the primary argument that involves civic boosters: in other words, professional sports teams generate financial gains for the hosting municipality. Scholarly research, however, holds that economics alone provide a limited understanding of sports' role in the United States. Next, various dimensions of collective identity and their manifestations will be discussed. This covers rituals, collective effervescence, and symbolism through totems, positing that through religion iconography and ceremony, collective identity is deepened. Chapter III describes the research design including an overview of the strengths and limitations of the primary methods used: content analysis, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation.

Chapter IV provides a limited and framed overview of New Orleans' history, specifically analyzing how its culture has set the tone for a unique cultural identity to emerge prior to Hurricane Katrina. The chapter also introduces the Saints and how the team fits into New Orleans' culture. Chapter V analyzes New Orleans from 2005-2006, discussing the effects that Hurricane Katrina had on residents as well as on the city's image as a tourist

destination. By presenting a dual narrative about how the storm damaged both the city and Saints, this chapter shows how the Saints, through their own renewal as a team, became a catalyst for civic rebirth throughout the city and beyond.

Chapter VI begins with the hope generated by the events of the 2006 season that were dashed by two years of setbacks. The Saints, however, start the 2009 NFL season undefeated for their first thirteen games, invigorating a weakened New Orleans identity. This chapter covers the 2009 football season, analyzing events where religious ritual served to deepen *Saintsmania* into a civic religion that culminated with a Saints' Super Bowl victory and a symbolic funeral for New Orleans' negative past that included the disaster brought on by Hurricane Katrina. Chapter VII describes the accusations by the NFL of the Saints' intentional injuring of opposing players during the 2009 championship season. The allegations and subsequent penalties not only hurt the team on-the-field, but also the image the team had worked to build. The collective identity established during the 2009 season transformed from a vehicle of hope to one of retribution. The chapter also discusses New Orleans' attempts to become a progressive city, which parallel the bounty scandal. It closes by moving beyond the city's post-Hurricane Katrina image as a city in recovery to a tourist destination that is thriving, illustrated best by New Orleans playing host to Super Bowl XLVII, the country's premiere cultural event. However, in what was shaping up to be a perfect week of NFL activities, the Superdome lost power delaying the game for nearly forty minutes. This chapter discusses the impact of the Superdome blackout on the city's image of moving forward. Chapter VIII revisits the research questions and addresses the impact of professional sports in the urban environment. In Chapter IX, the dissertation ends with a discussion of the implications of this study on future research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The objective of this research is to use New Orleans as a case study to understand the role of sports in the urban environment. This chapter examines several bodies of scholarly literature, providing a context in which to understand how urban changes increased the economic prominence of sports and entertainment. It also frames the rise of sports in context of the rise of the Sun Belt cities. Next, it considers the opposing viewpoints of civic boosters and scholarly analysts on the economic impact of the professional sports industry on municipalities. The analysis of scholarly literature then shifts to the view of sports as a cultural enterprise, using reviews and writings about sports and culture, and ends with an analysis of the processes through which culture is created and transmitted through sports using identity formation. The assessment closes with a discourse on religion as a deepened form of collective identity that strengthens the cultural and economic effects of sports on the urban environment. Prior to addressing these individual components which connect collective identity and its manifestation in sports, an anthropological view of sports' role in culture will be addressed.

Sports and Culture

This research at its core is about sports and culture: an analysis of sports' ability to catalyze collective identity amongst an urban citizenry. Dependent on academic discipline, the term 'culture' has several interpretations; however, broadly speaking, culture is "that which is transmitted through learning—behavior patterns and modes of thought acquired by humans as members of society" (Tosuner-Fikes 1982, 10). The study of culture happens at two distinct levels, the universal and particular. Tosuner-Fikes (1982) provides the example of the family unit to describe this point. She calls the family a universal concept across cultures,

which manifests itself in diverse ways dependent on the context. A traditional family in one culture may be composed of a husband, wife and children, while in another setting it may include extended family and friends. This proposition takes on a cultural relativist bent where one views society's customs in the context of that particular society's culture and environment (Ibid.). The analysis of sports takes a similar position. Sands describes sports as a

. . . cultural universal having the following features: [1] a human activity that is a formal and rule-directed contest ranging from a game-like activity to a highly institutionalized structure; [2] competition between individuals or teams or can result in internal competition within an individual; [3] a basis in physical skills, and strategy, chance or a combination of all three; [4] and potential tangible rewards for the participants, monetary, material, or status (Sands 1999, 3).

Sports are a part of culture, but emit their own culture which in turn transmits signals and signs about ideology and behavior to its participants. Sports are ubiquitous among cultures throughout the world, but like definitions of family, they are manifested differently in subtle and not so subtle ways based on the particular culture. Price, for example, links the violence and pageantry of North American football to the origins of the country, citing the United States' history of violence invading other regions of the world as a primary example (1992). Researchers note other ways in which football mimics North American society. Football celebrates the "modern business world—specialization, division of labor, and efficiency—along with many other values deemed crucial to the 'American way of life'" (Hoffman 1992, 7).

The literature on North American football reflects on these particular values when noting the change from baseball to football as America's new pastime. Baseball represented individual responsibility and luck, but as the modern industry began to specialize and focus on teams working together like gears in a clock, football, with its specialized positions and

primary focus on the time clock, surpassed baseball as the sport of choice in the U.S. (Diez 1982). North American social structure is one that values order, rules, and specialization, and accordingly the country's most popular sports are governed by these values. Thus, theorists posit the notion that the popularity of sports stems from sports as a reflection of the wider culture and its systems. In other words, sports are cultural institutions reflecting values the dominant culture deems most important. Typically, North Americans associate positive traits with sports, including teamwork, discipline, fair play, hard work, and perseverance. Thus, sports reinforce the American ideal that anyone can be successful if the time and effort is given.

The importance of winning and losing also fit into the cultural values and ideals of sports. Sports are a form of competition, whether it is against another or one's self. There are several adages describing the importance of winning in sports which include, "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing;" or "few remember who comes in second" (Ibid, 264). One can view sports as a cultural manifestation of the saying "to the victor go the spoils" as winning brings adulation, glory, and monetary gains. Thus, winning is an important ideal associated with the culture of sports. Still, sports culture has created a place for those who have found limited success in competition. Subgroups of those participating in sports culture support notions of the 'underdog,' which are those players or teams with little chance of winning. This obvious contradiction is explained by Diez (1982) who claims that not everyone can be a winner, and thus, sometimes we are all losers, and that opens up a space for identifying with losing teams.

As cultural institutions with its own set of rules, values, and norms, sports around the world share many of the same characteristics, one being that it is an activity that incites competition within one's self or against another. Its expression, however, can take on

differing forms based on the contexts of the culture. Sports in the United States are derived from and instrumental to supporting the values of American culture. Sports provide both an emphasis on winning and also losing. These are important aspects of American sports culture that become important as this analysis continues. Yet, these are concepts that are intangible to a certain extent. These abstract ideas became tactile in the built environment of sports as their popularity grew in the country. The next section discusses how the growth of urban cities fostered an expansion of professional sports.

Changes in Urban Cities Lead to the Growth of Sports

While theorists consider sports a “cultural universal” (Sands 1999), its emergence and popularity is based on the context of the culture it inhabits. The ascension of sports, especially professional football, into mainstream North American culture coincided with the explosion of the Sun Belt cities in the southern United States. Several NFL franchises began playing in Sun Belt cities after 1960, including San Diego, Dallas, New Orleans, and Atlanta, which corresponded with increases in population and employment opportunities within the region after World War II. Sun Belt cities emphasized capital projects such as constructing freeways, office complexes, convention centers, and sports stadiums (Abbott 1987). This activity highlights policy processes leading cities to place an emphasis on locale and place image. Re-imaging cities allows municipalities to compete in both tourist and global economies. According to Judd and Fainstein (1999), stadiums lure sports teams to cities, who in turn promote the team as an attraction that draws visitors to newly built entertainment facilities. This process thereby transforms the city into a tourist destination.

Image of locale and place are important in the age of globalization (Sassen 2006), especially because sports teams cater to this notion of image by conferring status on cities

with teams relative to their competitors in the global economic market. Cities use professional sports teams to differentiate themselves from one another when attempting to land economically viable companies, but at the same time they seek a simultaneous patterning based on successful cities with sports franchises. Municipalities view sports teams and enterprises such as entertainment districts associated with stadiums as methods of generating revenue. Instead of finding a creative solution to economic problems, civic boosters argue for revenue generation through ‘bread and circuses’, which leads to fewer differences among cities in competition.

Civic Boosters and Public Financing of Professional Sports

Professional sports franchise owners tend to be either wealthy business moguls or made up of a conglomerate of investors. Only one professional franchise, the NFL’s Green Bay Packers, is publically owned and operated. The private nature of ownership makes sports franchises a for-profit business. Sports leagues infrequently add new franchises, thus, creating a marketplace of high demand for a franchise nearing the end of its lease agreement. Demand for a limited number of franchises also provides team owners’ leverage when negotiating new contracts with their home municipalities. Coupled with the mainstream popularity of professional sports, state and local governments are forced to provide owners with the best incentive package possible, or risk losing the team to another city.

Governments use multi-million dollar incentive packages laden with public funds to compete with other markets vying for professional sports franchises. Incentives may include revenue guarantees or infrastructure, including renovating or erecting a new facility for the team. Civic boosters “*sell* prospective businesses and residents on the advantages of locating [or staying] in their town rather than somewhere else” (Whitson and Macintosh 1993, 223) as a

justification for using public funds to support private teams. Boosters use imagery to convey their message, saying professional sports make a city *big league* or *world class*, which plays upon the notion that a city with a professional team is somehow better than a city without one.

Boosters further justify this level of public investment on “tangible economic grounds” (Baade and Dye 1990, 13), with city officials stating professional sports provide added economic support to the city. Some literature supports this claim. Davis and End found “an increase in the winning percentage of the local NFL franchise increases the real per capita personal income of the city, [as well as] the growth rate of real per capita personal income” (2010, 49). Additionally, post-season performances, including winning a league championship, can account for an increase in real per capita income and is linked to higher productivity in the workforce (Ibid.). Increased productivity is likely based on a “morale boost from succeeding on the national, even global, stage in a do-or-die situation that the [championship game] provides, [which] may be the production equivalent of a large boost in consumer confidence” (Coates and Humphreys 2002, 298). Some of the literature shows professional sports to be economic engines that lead revenues and increase productivity. Not all of the literature, however, comes to this same conclusion.

The Economic Promise of Professional Sports Not Realized

In a neoliberal economy, where government funding to municipalities is reduced, cities rely on the private sector to provide resources for its citizenry (Hackworth 2007). Sports teams, from the perspective of a civic booster, are an investment in the local economy, which is why many municipalities compete to entice a team when the opportunity arises. Although professional sports have revenue generating potential for cities, much of the literature runs

counter to this argument. Austrian and Rosentraub (2002) argue that while professional sports teams help retain some downtown businesses, there is little proof that teams specifically add to the economy. Furthermore, professional sports are as likely to reduce taxable sales as to increase them (Baade, Baumann and Matheson 2008). Sports franchises, unlike a fully staffed manufacturing facility, accrue no critical mass of jobs to add substantially to a region's economy (Rosentraub 1996). What's more, the municipality does not realize the revenue from team activities as teams generally use the publicly built facility for minimal or no rent. When the current franchise relocates, municipalities have difficulty selling the facility without a major tenant (Wilmath 2003). Sports have even become an economic burden for media outlets which cannot afford to broadcast the games but turn to sports for reasons of prestige (Diez 1982).

One of the larger negotiations between franchises and government involves publicly financed stadiums. Acquiring a new or refurbished stadium, in many cases, is a requirement to lure or retain a professional sports team. In the NFL, thirty-eight percent of stadiums have been built since 2000, with a number of others renovated. Government entities across the country, using the advice of civic boosters, use public funds to finance stadiums hoping to spur economic development for the region (Wilmath 2003). Again, the literature does not substantiate these claims.

Generally, the home municipality sees little revenue from team-related activities in the stadium. Facility managers allow the team to use the facilities for free and make minimal income from team activities inside the building (Siegfried and Zimbalist 2000). Franchise officials negotiate incentive packages that include revenues from ticket sales, parking, and concessions. Furthermore, if the team does relocate, there are few buyers for a facility the size of a stadium, unless another team comes with it (Wilmath 2003). The NFL's Houston Oilers

and Major League Baseball's Houston Astros, for example, both vacated the Houston Astrodome, leaving the stadium vacant since 2000. The city has not yet found another use for the Astrodome, which has since been cited for numerous code violations (WFAA-TV, Inc 2011). Houston, however, has built two new stadiums, one for the Astros and another for the city's new football team, the Houston Texans.

Going further, Baade and Dye argue that the economic impact of stadiums on local and state economics are uncertain at best and can have a "negative impact on local development relative to the region" (1990, 13). Those involved in stadium commerce, including team owners, players, entertainers, etc., spend much of their individual earnings outside of the stadium neighborhood (Baade 1996). Furthermore, even those stadiums that are used frequently remain vacant for a majority of the year. As an example, the NFL schedule guarantees a team ten home games a year, with a maximum of twelve if the team makes the playoffs. Thus, a stadium's major football tenant uses the building three percent of the entire year. Facility operators must locate other events to generate revenue for the building, but there is no assurance that revenues will leave the stadium and circulate throughout the community.

Boosters cite positive results found in economic impact studies as further justification for public subsidies of private sports businesses. The literature, however, questions the methodology of impact analyses. Critics charge that economic impact studies fail to capture all the significant inflows and outflows that would create a meaningful impact analysis. Studies use prospective revenues generated in the first few years as the basis for long-term projections, even when researchers acknowledge teams attract a larger audience during its first few years in a city (Baade 1996). Studies performed on the same team by multiple organizations yield vastly different results depending on the particular methodology (Hudson

2001). In a re-analysis of various impact analyses of professional sports teams, “many of the studies violated what . . . has [been] identified as acceptable practices in conducting these studies” (Ibid., 37).

The literature also notes that the economics of professional sports make it difficult for those in lower income brackets to attend live events. “All four professional sports leagues have increased prices of their goods and services . . . considerably since 1991” (Fountain and Finley 2010, 1). As prices have increased, consumer purchasing power has decreased. More specifically, the cost to take a family to a NFL game, which includes four average priced tickets, two draft beers, four soft drinks, four hot dogs, two ball caps, two programs, and parking for one vehicle, has increased from \$236 in 1991 to \$412 in 2009. This represents a seventy-five percent price increase beyond inflation (Fountain and Finley 2010). The effect of pricing out fans with lower incomes could have detrimental effects on franchises themselves. If more fans choose to watch on television rather than attend live games, revenues from game day operations would decrease.

Although civic boosters promote the economic benefits of professional sports teams, the literature does not support this rationale. Boosters’ logic infers that sports franchises can act as large scale “game changers” for cities. The municipalities bet that revenues generated by professional sports exceed the capital outlays and inducements provided to them. They gamble that a sports team can be the linchpin or anchor in downtown redevelopment and spark private sector investments in retail and housing. Based on current literature, conclusive evidence denotes that boosters over-promote or over-sell professional sports in order to convince tax payers that sports create a positive economic climate for a community. Little evidence, though, confirms boosters’ claims that professional sports by themselves generate immense economic outcomes.

Within the economic literature of sports and urban environments, disagreements exist about the financial impacts of sports. A large segment of the literature claims that the financial impact of professional sports is minimal, and at best shifts tax revenues from one sector of a city to another. One can draw a conclusion from this that the economics of professional sports provides a limited understanding of sports' role in urban environs. This research posits that although the economics of sports does play a role in the urban environment, as will be discussed in Chapter VII, sports' importance lies in its contribution to a city's civic identity rather than its economy. Communities across the country rally around sports in different ways based on the context of their particular culture. However, before discussing the effects of sports on civic identity, a general understanding of what collective identity is and how it has developed must be undertaken. The next section will review the literature on collective identity, focusing specifically on its manifestation in sports.

Collective Identity and Sports

At least three theories of identity predominate in literature: identity theory (personal), social identity theory (group), and collective identity theory. Personal identity theories argue that "individuals base their actions on how they like to see themselves and how they like to be seen by others" (Jacobson 2003, 2). Personal identity is one's affirmation of his or her authenticity. Social identity theory notes the processes "by which we define ourselves in terms and categories that we share with other people," in an effort to position oneself in the social realm (Deaux 2001). In lay terms, personal identity relates to how the individual sees him or herself, while social identity is the understanding of one's role within a group context.

Though personal and social identities differ, they overlap and interact with one another along with collective identities. Theorists describe collective identity as people's

“sense of who they are, their ‘we-feeling’ or ‘belonging’” (Ogbu 2004, 3); residing “in a shared and interactive sense of ‘we-ness’ and ‘collective agency’” (Snow 2001, 1). This ‘one-ness,’ as Snow further describes, is weighted to the shared or imagined attributes and experiences of those who comprise the specific collective and against any real or imagined sets of “others” (Ibid., 2).

Collective identity theory is “grounded in a variety of traditional sociological concepts, ranging from Emile Durkheim’s *collective conscience* to Karl Marx’s *class consciousnesses*” (Hardy, Lawrence and Grant 2005, 61). Durkheim’s use of the term *collective conscious* puts forward “the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own” (Allen 2005). The norms, beliefs, and values of the collective society override singular human egos, resulting in social integration. Marx’s *class consciousness* describes the self-awareness, or lack thereof, of a particular economic class and their abilities to act in their own self-interests. Both *collective conscious* and *class consciousness* stress the importance of a group becoming aware of itself as an entity. Often motivated by a ‘need to belong’ that is an instinctive feature of human nature, individuals are defined in terms of their relationship with others and the larger collective and derive much of their self-evaluation from their social identities (Brewer and Gardner 1996).

If individuals define and evaluate themselves based on social identities, then how does collective identity differ from social and personal identity? Snow (2001) provides five factors differentiating collective identity from social and personal identity theories. First, collective identities may or may not be embedded in existing social identities. Thus, one’s role, actions, or belief structure within a social setting can be separate from that of a particular collective identity. Second, the collective ‘sense of we’ is animating and mobilizing cognitively, emotionally, and even morally. Individuals become aware of the collective as a unit and

activate based on shared views of the collective. Third, the emergence of a collective identity supersedes other social identities. The individual, consciously or otherwise, allows his or her own identity to be usurped by the beliefs and actions of the collective, further becoming part of it. Fourth, individuals embrace the collective identity as a “highly salient part of their own personal identity and sense of self” (Ibid., 3). Individuals take pleasure in being part of the collective incorporating it into their own self-identity. Finally, collective identities “tend to be more, fluid, tentative, and transient” (Ibid., 3) than either personal or social identities. As the collective identity is incorporated into the self-identity, it can be conjured when the moment necessitates, as seen in sporting or religious events.

Personal relationships among the group are not necessary to establish a collective identity, as “it can operate either at the level of bounded subcultures, or at the level of widely shared cultural structures of ‘hidden codes that make individuals and groups predictable and dependable social actors” (Lamont and Molnar 2001, 33). Collective identity requires a “depersonalized sense of self” (Brewer and Gardner 1996, 83) where one is not unique, but acts as an interchangeable part within the framework of the group based on some social category. When these requirements are achieved, there are still particular procedures needed to actualize collective identity. The next section explores collective identity and its generation through specific processes.

The Process of Creating Collective Identity

At its core, collective identity is the processes through which social actors recognize themselves as a collectivity (Snow 2001). These processes can occur in collectives of varying sizes, ranging from specific groups such as gangs, sports fans, or occupational groups to broader coalitions like religions, ethnic groups, and nations. Collective identities are

“invented, created, reconstituted, or cobbled together . . . drawing from threads of past and current cultural materials and traditions” (Snow 2001, 5). To describe the process that creates collective identities, this section focuses on *identity work* and *status problems*.

“[Collective identity] is the generation, invocation, and maintenance of symbolic resources used to bound and distinguish the collectivity both internally and externally by accenting commonalities and differences” (Snow 2001, 6). Within this framework, *identity work* encapsulates the individual and group activities people engage in to articulate who they are and what they stand for in relation to another group. These can take the form of identity talk, such as *atrocious tales* or *war stories*, repeatedly told to current group members, potential members, and the media. Examples of identity talk include politically or socially motivated songs, such as *We Shall Overcome*, or systems of symbols or gestures, like the Black Power movement’s raised clenched fist personified by Olympians Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico (British Broadcasting Corporation n.d.). These markers distinguish members of the collective from those outside of the group, and heighten awareness of in-group commonalities and connections and out-group differences.

Within the construct of *identity work*, further processes refer to the manner in which potential group members come to accept the collective identity: *identity convergence* and *identity construction*. *Identity convergence* denotes the harmony of personal and collective identities, where the collective becomes an outlet for the individual to act in accordance with his or her personal identity (Snow 2001). The concept of *identity convergence* suggests that the individual finds a group where he or she can blend without distinct changes to his or her existing personality.

Absent *identity convergence*, the psyche must perform *identity work* to construct identity. Snow (2001, 8) discovered four “construction processes” that align personal and

collective identities: *identity amplification*, *consolidation*, *extension*, and *transformation*. *Identity amplification* changes the individual's identity hierarchy, or the priority of identities, "such that a lower-ordered identity rises to the surface guaranteeing engagement in the collective action" (Snow 2001, 8). The process of identity amplification was evident during the Civil Rights Movement when black identity was exalted to act in concert for equality. Through *identity consolidation*, "two seemingly incompatible personalities blend into one" (Snow 2001, 8) as is seen within the group *Jews for Jesus*. The Jewish and Christian faiths have separate belief structures, yet this group combines both into a functioning common existence. *Identity extension* occurs when one inflates the intensity of his or her own persona to reach a unity with the collective, "as when individuals come to see themselves as representatives for a specific cause that transcends other role obligations and identities" (Snow 2001, 8). Finally, during *identity transformation*, a person completely changes facades to one wholly different than the previous, such as high school students moving away to college and changing their identity based on a new peer group.

Alternately, Ogbu (2004) offers another theory on the formation of collective identity: that the combination of *status problems* and collective experience create collective identity. *Status problems* are "external forces that mark a group of people as a distinct segment from the rest of the population" (4). The existing power relationships in society make it difficult for those in a subordinate group to solve their status problems (Ibid.). Those with *status problems* include oppressed groups, those conquered by warfare, and even people affected by natural disasters. Related to the group's collective identity is the manner in which they interpret their differences with other groups. Ogbu uses the term "cultural frame of reference" to refer to the correct way of behaving and language or dialect frame of reference to refer to the correct way of talking from the point of view" of the minority group (Ibid., 5). Cultural

and language frames are the cultural and language identity of the status group. They also determine the difficulty that individuals have within a group having a status problem in crossing the cultural and language boundaries of the dominant group in addition to the strategies needed to overcome these barriers.

Cultural theorist Manuel Castells (1997) writes that in the last quarter of the twentieth century there has been a “widespread surge of powerful expressions of collective identity. . . [which are] multiple, highly diversified, following the contours of each culture and, of historical sources of formation of each identity” (2). While collective identities have stemmed from “proactive movements aimed at transforming human relationships”, they have also been “reactive movements . . . on behalf of God, nation, ethnicity, family, [and] locality” (Ibid, 2). Collective identities appear in various social settings, including sports fans; ethnic and racial groups; religious groups; and citizens in various nations. Specific to this research is how the intersection of nationalism and sports provide an opportunity to further understand collective identity.

Nationalism and Collective Identity through Sports

Nationalism is defined as a “loyalty and devotion to a nation,” or “a sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others” (Dictionary.com). Nationalism creates a system of ideas, values, and norms or an image of the world and society . . . that integrates the group and demarcates its environment (Alter 1985). Additionally, “nationalist discourse derives its force by positing a ‘national community’ that comes to replace local community” (Papadakis 1998, 150). Individuality is put aside with respect for a common purpose and mutual goals that derive from shared chronicles, beliefs, and values. “All nations . . . indulge in degrees of imagination, which requires of its subjects a willingness to believe the stories

passed down to them or at least a degree of complicity even if they are not believed” (Armstrong and Hognestad 2003, 451).

Nationalists are those living in a particular country that devote their actions towards the interest of one nation over another that engenders a primary attachment to a nation. This attachment supersedes all other loyalties and attachments. They communicate through a common language, meanings, and memories, based on what Alter (1985) calls a “cultural community.” “Solidarity, common culture, and national identity” activate the “hopes and emotions” of nationalists leading to action in accordance with a particular goal or outcome such as global dominance.

Armstrong and Hognestad (2003) analyzed national identities through the lens of sports and culture, stating, “[s]port. . . is a useful arena to examine local and national identities because sport epitomizes power relations and the politics of difference and exclusion” (452). A national team’s performance sometimes reflects the country’s political and economic standing in the world and as is often the case, the sports programs of larger, more affluent nations tend to excel in competition. Of this, Amin states,

Identification with other compatriots and the nation-state represented by the team one supports is an essential component of this modern sporting experience. The creation and development of this collective identity, manifested by united and contemporaneous experience of the same event, serves to augment and intensify feelings of wider national consciousness and unity (Amin 2006, 1).

For dominated or developing countries, collective identity manifests itself in the creation of purpose, Morgan argues:

. . . one of the chief narrative roles sports play in the contemporary age . . . is to show how the unfolding stories of the lives of individual people are woven into the unfolding stories of the different nations

and cultures to which they claim allegiance, thereby imparting to those lives a social and moral sense of purpose and meaning they might otherwise not have (Morgan 2000, 60-61).

Two of the world's largest sporting events are the Olympic Games and the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup. Nationalism is expressed in at least two ways in the Olympics. First, it provides the world's superpowers a chance to compete with one another, not just on the field of play, but culturally as well. As Amin notes, "Some regard the competition between nation-states...as a safer arena in which global rivalries can be thrashed out and peacefully discharged, quelling popular feelings which can otherwise lead peoples to pressurize their leaders to go to war against others" (2006, 2). During the Cold War, competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was seen as a battle between two global ideologies: capitalism and communism. Medals won by either nation, especially when in direct competition with the other, were moral victories for that country's way of life.

Second, the Olympics affords smaller nations the opportunity to showcase its country and athletes, giving "dominated nations a voice denied to them practically anywhere" (Morgan 2000, 71). While larger, more affluent nations, like the U.S., Germany, or China, earn the majority of Olympic medals, smaller nations can compete for a chance at world acclaim. For a moment in time, little-known countries such as Belarus, Guyana, or Turkmenistan along with their stories are broadcast to the world. For smaller nations, defeating a world superpower such as the U.S. is cause for a celebration of national pride. For example, at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece, Puerto Rico defeated the United States in men's basketball for the first time in Olympic history. At the time, this was considered a huge upset (where a lesser team defeats a favored team), as the U.S. team was laden with National Basketball Association (NBA) professionals whereas many of Puerto Rico's players were considered to be inferior by NBA standards. At the end of the game, one of the Puerto Rican

players tugged at the front of his jersey, emphasizing the words “Puerto Rico” as a tribute to his homeland, as seen in Figure 1¹.

Figure 1: Puerto Rico defeats United States



Carlos Arroyo celebrates as Puerto Rico defeats the U.S. basketball team in the 2004 summer Olympics.

(Photograph courtesy Draftexpress.com)

Similar to the Olympics, the FIFA World Cup competition brings together national teams to compete for global supremacy in soccer (with the exception of the U.S., it is called *football* around the world). “The world over the game of football generates loyalty and sentiments that vary in their consequences from mild amusement to acts of violence.

Nationalistic displays abound around the game and analysts of the human condition realise that much of what we

value most is embedded in the game itself and the epiphenomena around it” (Armstrong and Hognestad 2003, 451). The value comes in the pride exhibited when athletes dress in national colors or spectators sing anthems and other regional songs in addition to the pride in oneself when connected to the team’s success.

While sports function as tools for large nations to compete and small nations to have a voice, they also contain nation-building properties that bring citizens together. In a “post-apartheid South Africa, sport is seen . . . as a means to surmount race and class barriers and to

¹ “Carlos Arroyo.” Photo. Draftexpress.com 2004. 11 May 2013.
<<http://www.draftexpress.com/article/FIBA-World-Championship-Preview-Group-D,-Part-One-1438/>>

forge nationhood” (Padayachee, Desai and Vahed 2004, 253). The Springboks, South Africa’s national rugby team, were celebrated by South African whites but reviled by blacks in the country. Although blacks went to rugby matches, they generally supported the opposing team, viewing the Springboks as symbolic of the oppression of apartheid, a government imposed system of segregation and discrimination (Carlin 2007). With the ending of apartheid, the International Rugby Board awarded South Africa the 1995 Rugby World Cup. South African President Nelson Mandela used the World Cup as an opportunity to unite his once fractured country and show the world that South Africa was one nation (Freeman and Damon 2009). Mandela used the success of the Springboks to combat the history of apartheid. Through symbols, songs and gestures, the team’s improbable run to a 1995 Rugby World Cup championship helped galvanize South African whites, blacks, and coloreds, into a unified nation (Carlin 2008). The win symbolized a “positive image of national strength” and “provided shared memories and ideas of a common destiny. It appropriated sport as a part of its nationalizing project” (Padayachee, Desai and Vahed 2004, 254).

Events such as the Olympics or the World Cup provide an international stage, yet, participants fight for the most provincial of causes: their home. The term *home* may denote many concepts, but here it describes a location’s particular cultural cache. American sports leagues share similarities with these large-scale sports mega-events except they are more localized within the nation-state.

Like different countries, localities have distinct identities. New Orleans is different from San Francisco, which is dissimilar from Chicago. People interact most in the local environment where they build social networks and develop identities. Castells (1997) argues that while “local environments, per se, do not induce a specific pattern of behavior, or, for that matter, a distinctive identity. . . people resist individualization and social atomization and tend

to cluster in community organizations that, over time, generate a feeling of belonging, and ultimately. . . a communal, cultural identity” (60). Castells hypothesizes that this cultural identity happens through the process of social mobilization. He notes these are not revolutionary in nature, but aid in the development of common interests and the production of meaning “not only for the movement’s participants but for the community at large” (Castells 1997, 61). Castells views these meanings stored in the collective memory of the locality as being an essential aspect of cities throughout history.

In his discussion of local identities, Castells notes that one of the goals of urban movements is to affirm their local cultural identity. Absent personal mechanisms to counteract global political and economic exploitation, “people . . . react on the basis of the most immediate source of self-recognition and autonomous organization: their locality” (Ibid, 61). This affinity for the local was his rationale for why in an increasingly global world, the politics of place, which include the production of meaning within these localities, are so important. The meanings associated with “my neighborhood, my community, my city, my school” (Ibid, 61) become a part of a defensible identity, where in the face of global disorder and uncontrollable, fast-paced change, “people [stick] to themselves: whatever they had, and whatever they were, became their identity” (Ibid, 61).

The home team is a much broader concept than just a particular locale where team members play a sport. As the literature describes, *home* encompasses the culture, identity, and values of a people, whether it is a city, state, or nation. Through sports, cultural values, such as success, hard work, and integrity are put on display for public consumption. The collective identity produced by sports creates a sense of “one-ness” for those playing the games, regardless of race, creed, or class. Spectators, too, have an opportunity to rally around a specific team that they feel represents them and their culture. Without the cultural

interpretation of sports by fans, professional sports would not have the same meaning as it does today. The next section discusses how collective identity is presented in the context of sports. It reviews the concept of fandom to understand how sports enthusiasts come to identify with a particular team and what the psychological effects that occur within individuals and groups are.

Fans and Fandom

The literature on fandom distinguishes between sports fans and spectators. Unlike being a spectator, identifying oneself as a fan can indicate both personal and group identity. Derived from the word 'fanatic' (Jacobson 2003), Reysen and Branscombe (2010) define a fan as "any individual who is an enthusiastic, ardent, and loyal admirer of an interest" (177). Therefore, a sports fan is "defined as an ardent devotee of sport, or as an individual possessed frequently by an excessive enthusiasm for sport" (Jacobson 2003, 6). Wann, Melnick, Rusell, and Page (2001) describe spectators as those who vigorously watch sporting events in person or through some type of media. Other researchers suggest, however, that the levels of emotional attachment between spectators and fans are different, leading to dissimilar group behaviors. For example, "spectators will observe a sport and then forget about it" while a fan

. . .thinks, talks about and is oriented towards sports even when [he or she] is not actually observing, or reading, or listening to an account of a specific sports event [Furthermore], Pooley (1978) suggests the need to differentiate between a fan and a spectator, claiming that the difference is a matter of degree of engrossment and passion (Jacobson 2003, 6).

Therefore, fans are not passive observers of sports, but highly passionate individuals who view sports with a "great deal of emotional and value significance" (Ibid., 6).

Similar to social identity theory in which people consort with various social groups, fans may support multiple teams, but identify with only a few. Wann (2006) found three general causes of team identification: psychological, environmental, and team related. Psychological factors include “a need for belonging . . . the desire to establish and maintain membership in a distinctive group” (Ibid., 275). Environmental factors involved “socialization agents, such as parents and family . . . and peers and friends” (Ibid., 275). Wann attributes team-related identification to organizational (history and tradition), team performance (success), and player attributes (relatability to the fan). Wann also notes that “direct contact with players, teams with unique arenas, and stress” (Ibid., 275) contribute to team identification.

Sports fan literature tends to view fans not as individuals, but as a group. Reysen and Branscombe believe this is an incorrect view and link fan behavior to personal and group identity theory. They term “an individual’s sense of connection to a sport team as ‘fanship,’” and “the individual’s connection to other team supporters as ‘fandom’” (2010, 177). Fanship describes the extent to which a fan feels psychologically connected to a team, and fandom describes the part of one’s identity that appreciates the emotional significance attached with other fans (Ibid.).

Fandom is a type of *imagined community* where individuals do not always interact synchronously with each other, and who presuppose the existence of a collection of individuals who share common ground (Reysen and Branscombe 2010). As Benedict Anderson (1991) describes when speaking on nationalism, “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of the, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community” (6). Anderson recognizes these nations are “limited because even the largest of them . . . has a finite [boundaries] beyond which lie

other nations” (Ibid, 7). He goes on to say certain communities are imagined “because, regardless of actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived in a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Ibid, 7).

Although fandom is *imagined*, it does have tangible group dynamics. The psychological benefits of fandom include a high sense of bonding (Wann 2006), shared values, emotional connectedness, and an overall sense of community (Reysen and Branscombe 2010). Fanship leads to a sense of belonging to, and camaraderie with, others, including strangers.

This is especially true in the public realm as seen through tailgating as shown in figure 2².

Football fans gather outside the stadium before the game to cook, drink, and revel with one another. Parking lots and sidewalks, typically used for traffic to and from places of employment during the work week are, change into gathering spaces. Due to the

city’s well-known propensity for outdoor civic celebrations, the tailgate culture of New Orleans is more pronounced than in other places, further reinforcing the city’s identity. The sports tailgate, however, also speaks to Duneier’s view that from a cultural standpoint,

Figure 2: Pre-game tailgate



Prior to the start of the 2010 NFL season, the team’s first as defending league champions, fans tailgate in a parking lot near the Superdome.

(Photograph by author)

² “Saints fans tailgate prior to game against Minnesota Vikings,” September 10, 2010. Photograph courtesy of Brandon Haynes.

sidewalks are more than just facilitator of travel; they are a commons of sorts for all types of activity (1999). Whyte (1988) views streets as rivers of life that facilitates human congress. The tailgate party is indicative of both these views where football fans may bolster identity and replicate the pre-existing culture, co-opt existing infrastructure, and reassign it for the purposes of the culture, which, in this case, is to gather and celebrate.

The benefits of fandom are advanced when the team is successful, allowing fans to “bask in the reflected glory” of their team’s victories. Fans are more likely to “use the pronoun *we* when describing a victory and *they* when describing a defeat” (Falk 2005, 137), which suggests that there is a bonding experience between and among fans (Wann and Branscombe 1993). Sports fans experience a wide range of emotions, each intensifying with the importance of the specific game (Partridge, Wann and Elison 2010). Strong team identification provides a mechanism to manage negative feelings. Moreover, fandom has a positive impact on personal development by helping individuals cope with their emotions. Through participating in and following sports, individuals learn adaptive responses to feelings such as self-loathing and shame (Partridge, Wann and Elison 2010). Sports help people manage and relieve the tensions of everyday life by giving fans a reason for excitement and enthusiasm. Fan participation provides a momentary escape from the mundane aspects of the real world (Branscombe and Wann 1991). While fans with low identification to a particular team can still feel the connections created by fandom, a lack of face-to-face social contact limits its potential psychological benefits (Reysen and Branscombe 2010). The advantages of social support result from an active participation in fandom, and not simply from interest in sports (Wann 2006).

Some scholars criticize the use of the term *identification* “because the vast majority of spectators are perfectly aware of the difference between themselves and the athletes” (Guttman 2006, 131). The psychological dynamics of sport, however, make it *representational*,

where there is “an almost irresistible impulse for sports spectators to feel that the athletes on the field represent them” (Ibid, 131). Spectators believe that their particular race, religion, ethnic group, school, hometown, or nation is represented in competition against a similar rival. Still, sports play an important role in the “identification of individuals with the collectivities to which they belong” (Dunning 1999, 6). Through team affiliation, people express their identification with the city, or a particular subgroup within the locale, that it represents. The literature describes sports as providing a sense of belonging to those who may otherwise live an isolated existence. Its rules allow for predictability in an unpredictable world, yet at the same time allows for spontaneous expression of emotions in an increasingly mundane society.

Identity formation through collective identity provides a broader explanation of the importance of sports in urban society. Like personal identities, sports fans can use atrocity tales and status issues to develop a unique identity within the context of sports. If there are enough commonalities among individuals, a collective identity can form through sports fandom. In other words, fandom becomes an imagined group in the sense that not everyone will know one another, yet it produces tangible group benefits, drawing members closer to one another regardless of background. Collective identity theory, however, cannot fully explain the fervor of sports in America. This research maintains that the deepening of collective identity can transform sports into a type of civic religion. The final section continues the discussion of collective identity, utilizing the framework of religion.

Defining Religion

In looking at the literature in religious studies, one can observe that theorists propose different definitions of religion. Spencer views religion as “the belief in the omnipresence of something that goes beyond the intellect. Miller saw all religions as an ‘effort to conceive of the inconceivable and express the inexpressible’” (Durkheim 2001, 26). Albert Reville brought the human collective experience into his definition, noting “religion . . . is the determination of human life by the feeling of a bond uniting the human mind to the mysterious mind it recognizes as ruling the world and itself” (Ibid, 26). Although many conceptions of religion describe human’s interaction with the supernatural, French sociologist Emile Durkheim’s view of religion is that it does not define the extraordinary, but rather the ordinary. He notes, “. . . what is constant and regular. . . Gods serve the usual course of the universe . . . rhythm of the season . . . the annual growth of vegetation [and] the perpetuation of the species” (Ibid, 30). Durkheim understands spiritual beings as “conscious subjects with capacities superior to those of ordinary men. . . and since the purpose of religion is to regulate our relations with these special beings, religion would be present only where there are prayers, sacrifices, propitiatory rites, and so on” (Ibid, 32). In his work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim navigates separate understandings of religion to arrive at his own definition: “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things . . . things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions—beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church” (Ibid, 46).

Durkheim states that the ideas purported by the church and its role in religion are inseparable (Ibid, 42). He describes the church as “a society whose members are united because they share a common conception of the sacred [or special] world and its relation to the profane [or mundane] world, and who translate this common conception into

identification into identical practices” (Ibid, 42-43). This view of the church posits that wherever there is an expression of religion, there will be a collective supporting said expression. This view of religion follows suit with Durkheim’s own expression of the *collective conscious*, which is one of the underpinnings of collective identity theory. The *collective conscience* is defined as “the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own” (Allen 2005). In this specific context, the “system” is a common perception of the sacred and profane and its governing rules, or in other words, religion. In this respect, religion can be viewed as a form of collective identity that produces strong connections within a particular group. As a collective identity, religion is transmitted and reinforced through the use of rituals and totems.

Rituals

Along with concepts of religious practices, rituals aid in the deepening of collective identity. They are “rule-governed activit[ies] of a symbolic character that draw the attention of participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance” (Carlton-Ford 1992, 367). Rituals are “a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentary shared reality” (Kidder 2006, 349). Durkheim, along with noted anthropologist Victor Turner, agrees that “ritual has the function of making and remaking society,” by periodically re-stating the “terms in which men of a particular culture must interact if there is to be any kind of coherent social life” (Olaveson 2001, 93). They “become vehicles for social organization and transformation by contributing to the formation of strong emotional bonds between group members. [Rituals] foster social assimilation . . . and reinforce social solidarity and group cohesion” (Konvalinka, et al. 2011, 8514). Through

ritual, society receives, reaffirms, and sometimes re-creates its “values, norms, and deep knowledge of itself” (Olaveson 2001, 93).

The collective experience of intangible emotions produced through ritual becomes tangible substance through totems, Durkheim’s term for what Kidder (2006) referred to as “[t]he objects and ideas used in rituals [that] become consecrated symbols” (351-52). A totem “refers to a category of things—animals, plants, celestial bodies, ancestral mythical beings—associated with a social group The totem is the name and emblem of the clan and is incorporated into the liturgy of religious practices. . . . Its sacredness is imparted to those things associated with it; its loss is the greatest imaginable disaster” (Moore 2009, 56). The totem “operates as a mnemonic device that serves to recall the collective sentiments that form the glue of society” (Arya 2009, 174), taking the “place of the thing, and the emotions aroused are transferred to the symbol” (Kidder 2006, 352).

Viewing the totem spontaneously stimulates feelings in the worshiper, occurring because “the idea of the thing and the idea of the symbol are closely connected in our minds: as a result, the emotions provoked by one are contagiously extended to the other” (Durkheim 2001, 165). What stems from this concrete, tangible symbol of a group’s unity are identity formation, social membership, and a distinction between insiders and outsiders. “The universe can now be divided between that which belongs to the [totem] and that which does not . . . the totem [becomes] a symbolic, religious representation of the community” (Ibid, xix).

Almost any object can be imbued with power to become a totem. In religion, the Crucifix or the Star of David both act as totems for their respective faiths. In speaking of national identity, Durkheim notes, “the flag itself is treated as if it was that reality [i.e. the nation itself]” (Kidder 2006, 352). For bicycle messengers, “bicycles, messenger bags, and

other objects become sacred symbols within [a] ritualization process” (Kidder 2006, 350). Moreover, even articles purchased through shopping become totemic, as they embody particular status and emotions shared throughout members of society, creating a sense of belonging within the individual.

Within the context of sports, a team’s logo acts as a totem. The logo transcends and broadcasts the history, rituals, and passion created through active participation. It is a warehouse for deeper meanings created through sports, including connections to one’s hometown; emotions felt during a particular game; and/or social connections created through the team. The logo represents the team in addition to one’s collective physical and emotional history with the team. Research on fan reactions to their hometown team relocating to another city found that some fans still expressed allegiance to the logo and would continue to support the team in its new location (Lewis 2001).

Rituals and totems provide a structure through which collective identity develops. Shared rituals create an enduring bond between participants and signify one particular way of life from another. They also spawn a type of energy that only its participants comprehend called *collective effervescence*.

Collective Effervescence: A Social Electricity

Within the context of the rituals of collective gatherings, the group may experience a “sort of social electricity generated by their collective” (xix), or what Durkheim (2001) called *collective effervescence*. “Collective effervescence temporarily transforms the mindsets of individuals who feel transformed from their individual identities to a group mentality” (Arya 2009, 174). At this point, “central standards of social groups overwhelm the minds of [individuals]” (Mariot 2011, 192). When this takes place, an individual within the collective

loses self-control. Good news is met with extreme enthusiasm, while negative actions are met with “crying, shouting, throwing fistfuls of dust . . . and so on” (Durkheim 2001, 162). With an intense effervescence, behavior becomes unpredictable. The fervor released is so sudden that it is difficult, if not impossible, to control. It is almost as if the individual has been possessed; he is no longer himself, controlled by some external force. The assembled individuals become its own conduit to sustaining an unusual level of excitement. “Collective effervescence is also likened to a type of delirium, and to ecstatic states, especially as seen in prophets and great religious figures” (Olaveson 2001, 100).

Collective effervescence can be an effective mechanism for socialization. It is “valuable as it captures the idea of social ‘force’ at its birth; when embodied humans feel themselves and are transformed through an emotional structuring of their sensory and sensual being . . . the decisive formation moments in social development” (Shilling and Mellor 1998, 196). Collective effervescence increases the “intimacy of human relationships, and makes them more human, as opposed to the partisan, self-interested nature of material existence that can develop in social structure” (Olaveson 2001, 110). The public ecstasy and jubilation created by collective effervescence socialize those who take part in them; they are the mold in which common values are created and strengthened (Mariot 2011). Collective effervescence “stimulates various collective representations of social life, including various symbols, myths and ideas, through which individuals imagine the society of which they are members and the obscure yet intimate relations they have with it” (Shilling and Mellor 1998, 203). While collective effervescence binds people together, it is temporary and “must be recharged if [it is] to have enduring social significance” (Ibid, 197), or else the bonds will weaken, resulting in the disintegration of the social (Arya 2009).

In sports, rituals serve to unify a fan base for the common cause of supporting the team. Particular chants, such as the Saints “Who dat say dey gonna beat them Saints?” or the New York Jets’ “J-E-T-S Jets! Jets! Jets!” bind individuals together, distinguishing believers from non-believers. Even particular spellings, such as Louisiana State University’s (LSU) “Geaux Tigers” (as opposed to “Go,” LSU fans draw from the state’s French heritage appending “eaux” onto the word) distinguishes one team from another, and subsequently one fan from another. Furthermore, the collective effervescence found in the commons serves to socially energize the spectators into speaking with one voice. Similar to what Durkheim attributed to collective effervescence through religion, in sports environments, strangers inside and outside the stadium meet successful plays with celebratory hi-fives, hugs, and cheers, while unproductive plays are met with a chorus of boos united in disappointment. In the commons, collective effervescence means that no one, except those wearing opponent colors, is truly a stranger.

Once the game ends, the collective effervescence found in the stadium on game day generally dissipates as spectators disperse to their various destinations. However, after important games, such as league championships, the effervescence spills into the streets, as it did near the Superdome and the French Quarter when the Saints advanced to and won the Super Bowl. The energy also spills over into post-game conversations between fans, or during the following day as in office banter or fodder for radio talk-shows. In some cases, the excitement generated through sports leads to a social mobilization spawning auxiliary groups with their own missions and purposes tangential to the team.

This research posits that collective identity is not static in nature, but a dynamic process that can be strengthened and weakened. It is through the atrocities and status issues needed to create collective identity to the rituals and energy used to strengthen that the

collective develops a sense of *entitativity*, defined as the “degree of having the nature of an entity, of having real existence” (Castano, Yzerbyt and Bourguignon 2003, 735). This sense of existence has a direct application to sport: while it is impossible for an individual to interact with every fan, a connection can be made to others through supporting a common team. This sense of group existence is enhanced by “factors like common fate, similarity, salience, and boundedness” (Ibid., 735). Greatly intensifying each fan’s sense of personal identity is the “awareness that thousands of others, all around him, are experiencing the same sense of identification” (Guttman 2006, 131). As the various processes of creating and strengthening collective identity as well as developing entitativity come together, collective identity deepens. It is this deepened collective identity that provides a symbolic power that can materialize within the cultural economy.

Chapter Discussion

This literature review provides a foundation for shifting the discussion of the importance of sports from one driven purely by economics to one that perceives sports as an embodiment of culture. With its emphasis on collective identity and the role of fandom in everyday life, the literature shows an economic framework cannot fully explain sports’ importance to society. A cultural understanding of sports, one that sees it as foundational to constructing an urban collective identity can provide a broader comprehension of sports’ role in urban environments. This research holds that a strengthening and deepening of a collective identity around sports leads to its incorporation within a city’s cultural economy. As a case study, this research investigates the relationship between the city of New Orleans and the Saints professional football team to test this premise. It argues that after Hurricane Katrina, residents of New Orleans deepened their already existing collective identity around

the Saints into one that resembled a civic religion. This *religion* was incorporated into the city's already well-known cultural economy and used as a mechanism to bolster tourism in the city.

Chapter III: Methodology

Overview

This chapter describes the methodology used to analyze the New Orleans Saints' role in strengthening collective identity in New Orleans during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The chapter first provides a broad blueprint of the research design. It then describes the principle methods used and their application in this research, including their definitions, advantages, and/or limitations. The ensuing section explains the rationale for content analysis and its selection as the primary method for this research. The chapter closes with a discussion of the particular procedures used to analyze collective identity in New Orleans, followed by the assumptions and limitations of the analysis.

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach to answer research questions. Qualitative studies typically focus on “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, [and] what meaning they attribute to their experiences. . . . [They seek to understand] how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process . . . of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam 2009, 14). Significant to this methodology is the ability to grasp the context of the experience from the participant’s perspective, also called the *emic* perspective, versus that of the observer, or *etic* perspective (Moore 2009, 208). Additionally, an important characteristic of qualitative research “is that the process is *inductive*. [Inductive research is a process in which] researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses as in positivist research” (Merriam 2009, 15).

The analysis in this study specifically uses a *grounded theory* research design. Within grounded theory, “the researcher attempts to derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study” (Creswell 2003, 14). This type of study results in “a theory that emerges from, or is ‘grounded’ in, the data. . . . The type of theory developed is usually ‘substantive,’ [which] has as its referent specific, everyday-world situations such as the coping mechanisms . . . or dealing with grief in the aftermath of natural disaster” (Merriam 2009, 29-30). Data used in grounded theory studies stem from varied sources, including interviews, observations, and documentary materials. Researchers collect, code, and analyze data, grouping them together on comparable components in order to identify patterns in the data, leading to the creation of a core category. “The core category is the main conceptual element through which all other categories and properties are connected. . . . [it] must be central, that is, related to as many other categories and their properties . . . must develop the theory” (Ibid., 31).

Relying on the city of New Orleans as a case study, this study seeks to understand the broader implications of professional sports on urban societies and its role in creating or restoring collective identity. “A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Ibid., 43). Yin (2003) notes a case study is the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on “a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (13). Furthermore, John W. Creswell (2003) states that within a case study, “the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process . . . bounded by time and activity, [where] researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures” (15).

Significant literature holds that “case studies have limitations that revolve around issues of ‘reliability, validity, and generalizability . . . The case study has basically been faulted

for its lack of representativeness . . . and its lack of rigor in the collection, construction, and analysis of the empirical materials that give rise to [a] study” (Merriam 2009, 52). According to Marriam, however, this view of case studies misses the point of conducting the research, as the research method’s strengths are in its attempt at not “eliminat[ing] what cannot be discounted . . . simplify[ing] what cannot be simplified. . . and acknowledg[ing] that there are no simple answers” (Ibid., 52-53). The case study method can be generalizable when it is designed to make evaluations based on controlled observations and deductions that are based on replicable methods and evidence. The defining and empirical evaluation and measurement of constructs can lead to a literal and theoretical replication and provide for generalizability of case study research findings (Darke, Shanks and Broadbent 1998). While this study makes broader inferences on the role of sports in America, the author recognizes that factors contributing to this case study, including civic culture, Hurricane Katrina, and the Saints’ history of failure cannot be generalized to the United States at-large. However, what can be generalized are the methodological procedures and empirical evidence used to analyze collective identity. The author also believes that many of the sentiments aroused by specific circumstances can be generalized to a broader public, and therefore generalize the role of sports in addressing these feelings.

This research analyzes the phenomenon of the New Orleans Saints post-Katrina from 2006-2013. During this period, the Saints were used as a rallying point in the recovery process. The study examines this episode of the city’s history to scrutinize the Saints as an expression of civic identity during this time, to explore its various roles as an agent of recovery, and to understand how collective identity was strengthened or weakened.

Yin (2003) lists six sources of evidence commonly used in case studies: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts.

While this research relies, to some extent, on each of these types of evidence, it primarily focuses on direct and participant observation, interviews, and analysis of documentation. The remainder of this chapter further discusses these sources of evidence, including definitions, advantages, limitations, and its usage in this research. It also describes the content analysis used to document and analyze public discourse related to the Saints. The research will also identify characteristics of the city of New Orleans and Saints fans to assess aspects of identity formation and its role in the city's recovery.

Direct and Participant Observation

Observation is a methodology in which the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site (Creswell 2003). Direct observations allow researchers to cover events in their particular contexts in real time (Yin 2003). The observer does not “get involved in the activities of the group but remain[s] passive, watching and listening to its activities and drawing conclusions from this” (Kumar 1999). Participant observation allows the researcher to actively participate in the situations under study, and sometimes requires the researcher to live or work in an area. As a participant, the researcher hopes to become an accepted member of the community, speak casually with informants, and share their experiences, giving the researcher insight into the interpersonal behaviors and motives of informants (Singleton and Straits 2005). Observations, however, are time-consuming and may require a high cost in human hours. Additionally, participant knowledge of being observed may change the nature or outcomes of events (Yin 2003). Furthermore, participant observers must guard against “going native,” where a researcher “ceases to be conscious of the observer role” (Singleton and Straits 2005, 318).

This research uses both direct and participant observation to examine Saints' fans, their interactions with one another and the team, and their cultural artifacts, including neologisms (newly invented words or phrases), artwork, clothing, charms, and chants. The author made direct observations at the jazz funeral for the *Aints paper bag* after the Saints won Super Bowl XLIV, covered in Chapter VI, and the opening game of the 2010 regular season, their first as defending league champion. During these observations, the author joined the crowd to chronicle the actions of Saints fans as well as the artifacts they created or wore. Interaction with the participants was limited to asking to take pictures of specific scenes or costumes worn by those present. The remaining observations—the majority of which were conducted on Saints' game days—use the participant observation method. From 2010 through 2012, (covering three NFL seasons), the researcher attended fourteen football games, including twelve regular season home games, one regular season road game, and one playoff home game. The 2009 season provided the first opportunity for participant observation. Before and after each home game, the researcher frequented and observed local tailgate parties, participating in the social interactions of Saints fans amongst themselves and with opposing fans; the intermingling of Saints and local culture; and the social energy's effect on fans amassed before, during, and after football games. Those whom the researcher interacted with at length, including tailgate hosts, had prior knowledge of the goals of this study; however, not all the observed could be formally informed of the research. However, as researchers note “in a big crowd of people gathering for an event, it is not realistic or necessary to warn everyone that they are being observed by a social scientist” (Knoettgen 2012, 50).

Semi-Structured Interviews

The conducting of interviews is typically featured as integral to the case study topic (Yin 2003). Through interviews, informants can provide historical information and the researcher can control the line of questioning (Creswell 2003). Researchers use three types of interviews: *structured*, *unstructured*, and *semi-structured*. A structured interview has specific objectives where all questions are written beforehand and asked in the same order for all respondents. An unstructured interview includes discussions of a wide range of topics, and the interviewer can develop questions spontaneously. A semi-structured interview draws from the planning of structured interviews and the spontaneity of unstructured interviews. The interviewer is permitted some freedom in meeting study objectives by asking unplanned questions based on responses. “When the research purpose is not to derive facts or precise quantitative descriptions, but to understand the meaning of respondents’ experiences, unstructured interviews often are adopted” (Singleton and Straits 2005, 222). Because an aim of this research is to understand how New Orleanians view the role of the Saints in the particular context of a post-Hurricane Katrina environment, the researcher selected semi-structured interviews as a method to uncover data. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher the flexibility to craft open-ended questions based on a post-disaster context, and also gave the interviewees the latitude to discuss other issues that may arise during a conversation.

Interviews provide insights into perceived causal inferences; however, they can introduce bias when the interviewee reports what the interviewer wants to hear (Yin 2003). Information obtained through interviews is also limited by the specific interpretation of the interviewee. Furthermore, the information provided by interviewees is taken out of its “natural field setting” and placed into “designated” surroundings (Creswell 2003, 186).

As the first element of a two-prong approach, this research used semi-structured interviews in a pilot study to build a framework in which to understand the Saints' relationship with New Orleans. Between September 2010 and March 2011, the author interviewed the following:

- *Media*: Members of the local media who work amid the organization and the fans. The media has a working knowledge of the thoughts of both the city and team. Specifically, long-term media members have historical knowledge of the Saints before and after Hurricane Katrina.
- *Residents/Fans*: Saints fans express their own meanings of the team's capabilities as a cultural artifact. The author categorized responses from this pilot into groups pertaining to the various meanings and uses that residents constructed of the Saints since 2006. These groups form the basis of the literature review and content analysis of various media sources (discussed later in this chapter) to determine how residents of New Orleans interpreted the Saints after Hurricane Katrina.

Interview responses, as well as an initial content analysis completed during the pilot, was used to formulate a narrative about the Saints' role in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans: that the team contributes to the distinct identity of this city, expressed in fans' rituals surrounding the team. The fact that people believe that "everybody" was on board with the Saints spoke to a power invoked by the collective identity of the city. The pilot provided reasonable amounts of data to begin reviewing the scholarly literature on personal and collective identity, religion and ritual, and the economics of sport. The author decided to analyze literature on the economics of sports because even though the role of economics, including player salaries and league incomes, is fore-grounded in sports' coverage in the mainstream media, none of the

fans interviewed discussed it as significant. Thus, an analysis of sports economics literature was necessary to understand why it may not be important to the fans. More information on the pilot study can be found in Appendices B-D.

The researcher interviewed a sample of individuals to generate supplemental data in conjunction to the discourse driven content.

The analyst employed both a purposive and snowball sampling methods to interview a total of twenty-seven interview subjects.

Figure 3: Interview Demographics

Race			Gender		
Black	10	37%	Male	15	56%
Caucasian	14	52%	Female	12	44%
Bi-Racial	3	11%			
Total	27	100%		27	100%

In purposive sampling, a researcher selects “cases that represent relevant dimensions of the population” (Singleton and Straits 2005, 569). First, the author conducted interviews with subjects already known to the interviewer as having some experience with the Saints. The researcher purposefully selected an African American male and female, a Caucasian male and female, and one person of mixed race, with the hopes of reaching interviewees in a range of races that included gender differentiation. During the interviews, the researcher asked for recommendations of possible interviewees, a method known as snowball sampling. This method “use a process of chain referral, whereby each contact is asked to identify additional members of the target population” (Singleton and Straits 2005, 571). Figure 3 above provides a breakdown of the twenty-seven interviewees by race and gender. The researcher ended the interview segment of the study when statements from interviewees became repetitive.

The primary focus of the purposive sample was on race, specifically African Americans and Caucasians. This was important when tying together New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina,

and the Saints. Many observers viewed the storm through a race-colored lens as those disproportionately affected by the levee breaches were poor and black. Several predominantly black neighborhoods, including the Lower Ninth Ward, have yet to fully recover from Hurricane Katrina. Thus, if there is any evidence that the Saints have contributed to the recovery of New Orleans and the creation of a collective identity, there may be subtle nuances among different racial communities. This is not to say other racial minorities such as Asians or Latinos in New Orleans would not provide an alternative perspective; however, they are not the focus of this particular study.

The author conducted the majority of interviews at various businesses throughout the city, including bars, restaurants, and coffee houses. One of the interviewed was not locally-based so the interview was held via the Internet using the Google Chat software. The researcher intentionally conducted these interviews during the 2011 off-season, a period that falls between February and July of the following year. This was done to create distance from any triumphs or disappointments of the 2011 NFL season, yet still allow for a discussion about the Saints' bounty scandal, which came to light in 2012. These interviews provided additional content and aided in validating the results gleaned from the media content that was analyzed.

Documentation

Documents used in this research include both public documents such as meeting minutes, newspapers, and private documents such as journals, diaries, letters, and email discussions. Documents are an unobtrusive form of evidence that can be obtained in a time convenient to the researcher, and reviewed repeatedly (Creswell 2003). The use of documentation affords the researcher evidence that allow for a "broad coverage [of a] long span of time, many events, and many settings" (Yin 2003, 102). Documentation, however,

does have some constraints, as access to information may be limited by protections that make the information unattainable by the public. Moreover, there is also a risk that documents are incomplete or inaccurate (Creswell 2003). The author attempted to gain access to documents through the New Orleans Saints organization, such as impact studies, ticket data, and revenue projects, but unfortunately was not able to retrieve these documents. This meant relying on data derived through private sources willing to provide data, or through public documentation retrieved in interviews and content analysis.

Content Analysis

This research uses content analysis to document and analyze public discourse about the Saints from 2006-2013. Content analysis “is a method of data collection in which some form of communication (speeches, TV programs, newspaper articles . . .) is studied systematically” (Adler and Clark 2003, 358). Content analysis attempts to organize data “through classification, tabulation, and evaluation of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect” (Krippendorff 2004, xvii). This method allows for the study of particular social eras and of a region’s or people’s past, something that surveys, experiments, and interviews cannot. A content analysis is “an empirically grounded method, exploratory in process, and predictive or inferential in intent” (Ibid., xvii). Unlike interviews or participant observations, content analysis is an unobtrusive method where the researcher’s presence does not affect the content of the message, even though his or her interpretations can affect the data’s meaning.

Content analyses can implement both a quantitative and qualitative approach. A quantitative approach focuses on the number of times a theme or symbol is mentioned within a document. Qualitative approaches to content analyses include discourse and social

constructivist analyses. A discourse analysis focuses on how a phenomenon is characterized, such as how minority groups are portrayed in the media, or the portrayal of 'age' in certain television shows. Social constructivist analyses attempt to understand "how reality comes to be constituted in human interactions and in language," (Ibid., 16) such as changing notions of the self, a concept that forms the theoretical underpinning of this research. Through a content analysis, this research will show how interactions between fans and the team constructed a post-Hurricane Katrina reality where the Saints played a major role in strengthening the city's collective identity and residents' sense of self.

Why Use Media Content?

Communication researchers view messages as stimulus-response mechanisms that affect attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Exposure to specific content "may range from attitude change. . . [to] the cognitive images they learn from it" (Riffe, Lacy and Fico 1998, 7). Through the national and global dissemination of attitudes and images via media, "people living continents apart know and experience the same cultural products" (Real 1996, xiv), such as pop culture artifacts, political change, and sporting events. In certain situations, communications can "undermine national goals" (Riffe, Lacy and Fico 1998, 4), as evidenced by the 2011 political uprisings in the Middle East known as the Arab Spring, a widespread social protest movement started by communications through social media.

Media content reflects prevailing messages within the context of a particular time. "Many of the symbols that show up in media messages at particular points in time (e.g., allusions to freedom, nationalism, or solidarity during a war effort) are consequences of the dominant culture" (Riffe, Lacy and Fico 1998, 8). The particular themes and images communicated via media as well as frequency of coverage, length, and placement reflect the

values of the culture and/or its leaders and political ideology. Linking these ideas to research, McCombs and Shaw “found a strong, positive correlation between the media agenda and the public agenda” (Ibid, 11), that may suggest messages communicated via media channels become public perceptions.

Scholars use content analysis to understand how public discourse is generated on a particular subject. In *Voices of Decline*, author Robert Beauregard analyzes media content to discuss the national discourse on urban decline. Beauregard (1993) states, in discussing his methodology, that he “started by confining [him]self to ‘public’ knowledge,” which included print media and national periodicals. Beauregard used the *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature* to review citations of “mass marketed magazine articles written on a particular topic” (331), and searched for articles on the general topic of urban decline. He amassed approximately eight hundred citations, which led to a review of nearly six hundred articles, books, editorials, and speeches. Beauregard’s observation that there is a “great deal of discursive overlap exist[ing] from one commentator to the next” (Ibid, 332), justified not analyzing every article in his sample and granted the content of his analysis as being no less representational.

Other researchers have analyzed newspapers in conjunction with understanding civic and national identity. When analyzing national identity in the United Kingdom, Michael Rosie et al. noted “newspapers, which have more than a local or regional remit, are essentially national institutions which encourage their readers to see the world in general in specifically national terms” (Rosie, et al. 2004, 437). Rosie further argues that this point is assumed to be self-evident such that it did not require much investigation. In thinking about how content analysis applies to the current research, the researcher supports the notion that if supra-regional newspapers are essentially national institutions, then the same can be said for local

newspapers. For example, the *Times Picayune*, New Orleans' regional newspaper, can easily be situated as a local institution that has national and international impact, thus assuming its credibility as a legitimate source for covering issues related to New Orleans. The paper has been in print since 1837 and won a Pulitzer Prize, a prestigious U.S. award for print and online journalism, in 2006 for its coverage of Hurricane Katrina.

Content analysis can be used to understand media depictions of particular groups. Atmel, Seyranian, and Crano used a sample of headlines and articles from four newspapers in California and North and South Dakota to discuss media representations of majority/minority groups. They coded the articles by headlines, characterizing each group based on the "adjectives immediately preceding the terms minority or majority" (Atuel, Seyranian and Crano 2007, 564). Minority headlines were more frequent in California and linked to ethnic and social issues, while majority articles characterized the group based on political and identity adjectives. In a similar vein, Voorhees, Vick, and Perkins used content analysis to discuss the portrayal of minority groups in the media during and after Hurricane Katrina. The authors coded data from the first thirty days of news media broadcasts of the hurricane to determine the nature of minority representation (Voorhees, Vick and Perkins 2007). They also interviewed twenty-three Hurricane Katrina survivors located in Louisiana and Tennessee. The authors surmised that while there were positive aspects to the media coverage, such as reuniting families, minority groups were portrayed as victims most of the time and rarely portrayed in roles of expertise. These two examples show how content analysis can be used to analyze and characterize groups of people.

Content analysis can develop an understanding of the link between sports and identity issues. While at The College of William and Mary, Michael Lewis used fan websites for four relocating sports franchises to analyze eight hundred sixty reader comments regarding

professional sports franchise relocation and fan allegiance. Lewis “focused exclusively on more lengthy remarks that demonstrated the fans’ feelings about the team [which left] a total of one hundred forty-one responses available for the analysis” (Lewis 2001, 9). Lewis discerned two types of fans: those who expressed allegiance to the city, and those that expressed allegiance to the franchise logo. Similarly, researchers in Scotland used narratives from print media to understand how those with an Irish identity turned to the Celtic Football Club “as a means to express and sustain their Irishness in perceived contested circumstances” (Bradley 2006, 1191). These examples illustrate that previous analyses of collective identity relied on methodology similar to that used in this study. Researchers used segments of media, including headlines and reader comments, to understand and discuss group identity and other characteristics. The next section presents the procedures used in this study.

Procedures

The author conducted a content analysis of various print and online media resources from across the country and in New Orleans. Saints-related news articles from two media databases available in the University of New Orleans library database collection: *Newspaper Source* and *Newsbank*, were extracted. According to the university’s library catalogue, “*Newspaper Source* provides selected full text for nearly 30 national (U.S.) and international newspapers . . . selected full text for more than 200 regional (U.S.) newspapers . . . [and] TV & radio transcripts from CBS News, FOX News, NPR, etc.” *Newsbank* houses archived editions of *The Times-Picayune* and is not affiliated with *Newspaper Source*.

A total of nine hundred articles were extracted and analyzed for this research. Figure 4 shows the number of articles analyzed by year and by subject. The “Saints” column corresponds to articles that describe the relationship between the team and city. The “Bounty” column references all articles relating to the Saints bounty scandal in 2012. The

Figure 4: Content Analysis Article Count

Year	Saints		Bounty		Super Fans	Total
	Local	National	Local	National		
2006-07	175	68	—	—	—	243
2009-10	308	104	—	—	—	412
2012	—	—	112	129	4	245
Total	483	172	112	129	4	900

column marked “Super Fans” focus on articles that feature fans going to extraordinary lengths in their fandom such as dressing in costume or painting their bodies to show support for the Saints. (More on super fans will be discussed in Chapter VI.) The “Local” sub-column represents articles from *The Times-Picayune*, while the “National” sub-column accounts for articles extracted from national and international sources.

Articles were examined primarily from three time periods: August 1, 2006-March 1, 2007, August 1, 2009-March 1, 2010, and March 1, 2012-April 30, 2012. These dates correspond with the 2006 and 2009 NFL football seasons and the 2011 off-season in 2012. The 2006 season was the Saints first appearance in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and included playing their first game against the Atlanta Falcons in the refurbished Superdome. The 2009 season marked the fourth season after Hurricane Katrina and found the Saints winning their first thirteen games and the Super Bowl. The narratives associated with both of these seasons were of hope and restoration and provided an opportunity to research collective identity issues in

New Orleans. In the 2011 off-season, the Saints were embroiled in a bounty scandal that threatened the team’s revitalized post-Katrina image. Furthermore, the Saints risked the loss of its star quarterback and local icon Drew Brees to another team. A review of articles from this period provides the chance to analyze the depth and sustainability of collective identity during a period of misfortune for the team.

The *Newspaper Source* and *Newsbank* media databases were searched using keywords that included but were not limited to the following: *New Orleans Saints*, *homecoming*, and *collective identity*. Figure 5 shows a full list of search terms used to retrieve articles for examination.

Figure 5: Search Terms for Content Retrieval from Databases

<i>Aug. 2006-Feb. 2007</i>	<i>Aug. 2009-Feb. 2010</i>	<i>April-May 2012</i>
Collective Identity	Collective Identity	New Orleans Saints
Sports	Sports	Bounty
Domecoming	New Orleans Saints	Bountygate
Homecoming	New Orleans Saints Fans	Scandal
New Orleans Saints	New Orleans Saints and New England Patriots	Drew Brees
New Orleans Saints Fans	New Orleans Saints and Minnesota Vikings	—
New Orleans Saints and Atlanta Falcons	New Orleans Saints and Indianapolis Colts	—
New Orleans Saints and Chicago Bears	NFC Championship	—
—	Super Bowl	—

Because *Newsbank* allows for searching by section of the local newspaper, this study focuses specifically on articles in the “National”, “Metro”, and “Living” sections of *The Times-Picayune*. Articles from the “Sports” section were downloaded, but a majority of these articles detailed the in-game action and were discarded. The in-game action found in the Sports section includes details of particular plays and game statistics. Although this study features

in-game action from particular games, the “Sports” section did not produce articles related to the relationship between the Saints and New Orleans, thus, any articles retrieved were discarded. *Newspaper Source* articles originated from national or international sources; thus, the prevalence of articles on the Saints was fewer than the number in the local paper, lessening the need to search by specific sections of the newspapers. Headlines were used to discern whether the content of the articles discussed the social response or the in-game action to a particular game.

Selected articles were printed and analyzed for their content and prevailing themes as dictated by those methods gleaned from the literature review. While reading each article, the author highlighted phrases or quotes that could be linked to the literature review or information associated with the pilot study. Each highlighted portion was then transferred into an Excel spreadsheet, which can be viewed in its entirety in Appendix D. The text was compared and grouped using a constant comparative method of data analysis. “The constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences, with data then grouped on similar dimensions. The dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category” (Merriam 2009, 30). Categories were then combined under broader themes and used to create the narrative of this research. Figure 6 on page 59 provides a full list of the categories used to group media content. For a definition of each category, see Appendix E.

Figure 6: Group Categories for Content Analysis

Local and National	Bounty (National)	Bounty (Local)
Cultural Importance/Collective Identity	Rogue Team	Saints vs. NFL
Civic Importance	Unjust/Hypocrisy	Cultural Importance
Race/Difference	Snitch	Economic Importance
Regional Pride	Feel Good /Story Over	Drew Brees
Distraction from Hurricane Katrina	—	Saints' Embarrassment
Lifting Spirits/Hope	—	—
Superdome	—	—
Inconsistencies	—	—
Long Suffering/Emotions	—	—
New Orleans vs. the World/Imagery	—	—
Who Dat Phrase	—	—
Religion/Totem/Effervescence	—	—
Economic Affects	—	—
Family	—	—

Limitations and Assumptions

The existence of over one hundred professional franchises in the four major American sports leagues, and many more when minor leagues and collegiate sports are included, provides an opportunity to select alternative cities for examination or comparison to New Orleans. This study is limited to New Orleans mainly because, at the time of this study, there had been few opportunities to examine sports in the context of disaster recovery. While the author found it prudent to investigate collective identity in this particular context before making comparisons to other cities, the lack of cities in comparable circumstances limits the wider reach of the study. This speaks to the broader limitations of using a case study methodology.

One aspect of the case study that this research does not attempt to address is the effect of supporting a successful franchise. Even without a disaster occurring on the level of Hurricane Katrina, the city may still have reacted in the same manner around a championship season. Moreover, locals still may have gravitated towards the team even if they had not been successful because the Saints are an institution in New Orleans. This study does not attempt to judge the effects of wins and losses on the community rather it analyzes the Saints success in the context of a post-Katrina urban environment. A final assumption of this research is that the city of New Orleans has a well-documented and established public culture; therefore, this research study will not try to prove this point. Instead, the research posits that New Orleans' existing public culture is an actor in this particular version of the process of identity formation.

CHAPTER IV: The Prelude; Collective Identity in New Orleans and the Arrival of the Saints

Introduction

As one of several monikers for New Orleans, *The City That Care Forgot* is a double entendre that is well suited to the city. The nickname describes both the city's free-spirited attitude of celebration and revelry which draws in millions of visitors each year while pointing to a city in decline, one that struggles with crumbling infrastructure, underperforming schools, and high crime. New Orleans is a city of contradictions; yet these same contradictions shape the city's mercurial identity and culture. This chapter intends to describe the basis for collective identity in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina. It discusses the city's foundation as being an amalgamation of nations and cultures, its history of race relations, especially the Jim Crow era, and how the city's history of disaster and resilience factored into New Orleans' identity prior to Hurricane Katrina. The work also introduces the New Orleans Saints and its integration into the city's culture. Even though the team struggled to win games throughout much of its history, it also endeared itself to the community, even assuming some of New Orleans more mercurial qualities and fitting in with the city's established collective identity.

New Orleans, Louisiana

Located within the crescent-shaped bend of the Mississippi River, New Orleans' distinct cultural flare stems from its multi-national, multi-racial roots. The French were the first to settle New Orleans and its surrounding lands in 1718. In 1763, France ceded governance of New Orleans to the Spanish empire, which remained in the city until 1801. Control of the city then reverted back to France, which two years later sold the territory to the United States, known as the *Louisiana Purchase* (Louisiana State Museum 2009). The

vacillating rule of New Orleans by the French, Spanish, and Americans, along with Native Americans indigenous to the region and the addition of African slaves provided a foundation for the city's distinct cross-cultural heritage. Of this, Hirsch and Logsdon (2013) held:

New Orleans is a place where Africans, both slave and free, and American Indians shared their cultures and intermingled with European settlers. Encouraged by the French government, this strategy for producing a durable culture in a difficult place marked New Orleans as different and special from its inception and continues to distinguish New Orleans today (1).

The city also hosts numerous immigrant populations, including Germans, Hondurans, Irish, and was the first American city “to host a significant settlement of Italians, Greeks, Croatians and Filipinos” (Ibid., 1). New Orleans roots in multi-culturalism is shown through its varied festivals and celebrations held throughout the year that include the Greek Festival, Asian Heritage Festival, and the Louisiana Cajun Zydeco Festival, etc.

This mixing of cultures has led to New Orleans' distinctly recognizable culinary flavor. Tourists travel to the city to eat the local cuisine such as beignets, gumbo, jambalaya, and pralines. Restaurants span a wide spectrum from fine dining at Emeril's or Brennan's in the French Quarter, to the Danny and Clyde's gas station for an overstuffed *po-boy*. The rights to family recipes passed from generation to generation must be earned through time spent in the kitchen and diligent practice. Fierce arguments arise over the best ingredients to bring out the flavor of red beans and rice. Food is more than a meal in New Orleans; instead, it is a way of life.

Music is another central feature of New Orleans' public culture. Jazz—an amalgamation of musical forms native to New Orleans, such as ragtime, blues, and gospel— is one of the city's main tourist attractions. One can find live music on the streets of many local neighborhoods. Celebrations such as the Jazz and Heritage Festival, known locally as Jazz

Fest, bring the music of the city and national artists to locals and visiting tourists. Music is also one of New Orleans' main exports. Local artists past and present, such as Louis Armstrong, the Marsalis Brothers, and Harry Connick Jr., have performed to audiences around the world. New Orleans can also claim celebrated artists in the rhythm and blues and hip-hop genres, including the Neville Brothers and Lil' Wayne, respectively.

The *Louisiana Purchase* connected French Louisiana to the rest of the country, however, "New Orleans jealously guarded its own way of life . . . its deeply rooted Creole or native population and their peculiar traditions" (Ibid., 1). This could be the impetus for New Orleanians coming together to celebrate all facets of their culture and heritage. Celebrations range from impromptu *second lines* through city streets, to scheduled Mardi Gras parades with official routes; from street musicians playing for tips on the sidewalks, to the annual French Quarter Festival held on the banks of the Mississippi River. New Orleans uses festivals to display its varied cultures, including its various ethnicities, sexual orientations, foods, music, and more. Its annual ten kilometer road race, *The Crescent City Classic*, is a community festival where local participants sometimes wear elaborate costumes and play music while spectators hand them water or *Jell-O-shots* (fruit flavored gelatin containing alcohol), all of this culminating in a party in City Park with food, bands, and beer. A visitor does not need to look far to find the celebration since the bars and clubs on Bourbon Street are open 24 hours a day.

Hirsch and Logsdon (2013) provide an interesting view on the outward appearance of New Orleans, noting that the city

. . . has a unique ability to absorb new influences and fashion a public culture that transcends all of its varied people . . . they are more than a mosaic of identities, instead, they have to share a new cultural identity. Neither race nor nationality excludes any group from this common ground (1).

This is true of the free-spirited external presentation of New Orleans, yet this view does little to explain the internal contradictions of race occurring within the city. In other words, the city's outward appearance projects a place where people of all races blend into a social gumbo. Yet, internally, people of different racial backgrounds act as a salad whose component parts, while close in proximity, can be easily separated. New Orleans' racial relationships are as much a part of the city's identity as its jazz music, and are the subject of the next section of this study.

A History of Racial Mixing

New Orleans' demographic is often described as a gumbo, or a mixture of different ingredients that when placed together make a unique dish. The city benefits from the influence of French, Spanish, African, and American cultures blending into the distinct city that it is today. These influences are due in part to differences in the French and Spanish slavery model versus that of the English. During French rule, New Orleans was heavily influenced by African culture, especially during the 1700s when black slaves out-numbered whites in the city (Juma 2005). Under Spanish rule, slaves could "purchase their freedom, which had an enormous impact on the development of black culture and race relations" (Rodriguez 2009, 1). Both French and Spanish slave owners "admitted to sexual liaisons with slaves, often taking financial responsibility for their mistresses and offspring . . .and making them legal heirs" (Juma 2005, 1). This created a third racial category as the offspring of these bi-racial trysts known as Creoles.

During American rule of New Orleans, blacks lost many of the freedoms granted to them by the French and Spanish. In the 1857 *Dred Scott Decision*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Blacks had no constitutional rights under the law. After slavery's end, local officials

continued to support government enacted Jim Crow laws that sanctioned the unequal treatment of blacks in America, including segregation. Despite these laws, “New Orleanians [still] lived in mixed neighborhoods since black domestic servants and workers often live[d] in the blocks between the grand avenues of the wealth[ier] whites” (Fussell 2007, 849). Despite codified discrimination, “the city’s tradition of racial and ethnic borrowing kept integrated working-class neighborhoods alive into the mid-20th century” (Rodriguez 2009, 1).

Although New Orleans has a unique history of racial mixing, the city was not immune to the distrust created by a lopsided power structure fostered by Jim Crow laws. Whites, especially the elite, created social rules that segregated every aspect of public life, including sporting events. These rules, however, could be changed when politics or economics necessitated. The next section provides a vignette that sheds light on the triggers for social equality in the context of New Orleans’ selection as an NFL city. It makes the case that blacks were used as pawns in the quest for racial equality because it neatly intersected with the interests of whites in procuring a football franchise. While relating to sports, this example shows a historic rationale for a level of mistrust between blacks and whites that continues to be an aspect of New Orleans’ identity.

Racial Pawns in an Economic Chess Match

New Orleans’ history of race, sports and its eventual courting of the New Orleans Saints provides an example of Derrick Bell’s theory of ‘interest convergence’. The premise behind this argument is that the struggle for social equality only progresses when it is in the interest of the dominant class. This process began with a shift in the landscape of American racial politics away from the Jim Crow era. “Northerners began to question Jim Crow practices . . . [and] as black civil rights moved to center stage . . . it became essential to drop Jim

Crow practices [for cities] to maintain a progressive image” (Souther 2003, 695). Cities that accepted integration and the equal treatment of all of its citizens were able to take advantage of the increased economic mobility of the tourist economy. Those clinging to Jim Crow practices were considered less progressive, and thus became less competitive in landing tourist attractions that would enhance the local economy. New Orleans was one of those cities.

New Orleans factored prominently in the strengthening of Jim Crow applications in America. It is the city where in 1892 police arrested Homer Plessy for attempting to board a whites-only railroad car. This led to the landmark Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which upheld “separate but equal” (Reid 2009). In New Orleans, “Jim Crow customs—mostly unwritten but widely understood—and the city’s long-standing effort to attract white visitors dictated strict racial separation in tourist facilities and attractions” (Ibid., 696). All blacks, from visiting dignitaries to famous locals such as Louis Armstrong, were subject to discrimination in areas like the French Quarter. Even as the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of school desegregation in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Louisiana legislature countered the decision by legislating a 1956 statute “forbidding race mixing in social and sporting events” (Ibid., 698). This affected spectators of sporting events and athletes since the ban on race-mixing extended to the playing field. The ruling placed in jeopardy the future of sports as mega-events in New Orleans. It put the Sugar Bowl in stark contrast to the 1956 Rose Bowl, played in Los Angeles, California which hosted two teams, the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and Michigan State University, that when combined fielded a total of thirteen black players (Smith 2007). New Orleans’ unwillingness to embrace more progressive social ideals also affected its overall status as a tourist destination.

After World War II, growth of the tourist economy made it essential for New Orleans to maintain its “carefully cultivated image as a permissive, tolerant, fun-loving, European-minded city” (Souther 2003, 701). In 1960, racial violence jeopardized this image when Ruby Bridges became the first black child to be integrated at the William Frantz School in New Orleans. When Bridges attempted to walk into the school, angry white women yelled obscenities and threw rotten eggs at her. New Orleans received increased scrutiny by the national media for this and other racial incidents, all of them negatively impacting the city’s image. Prior to these events, the mere mention of New Orleans was enough to draw tourists, but media coverage of these racially charged incidents led visitors to rethink their visits to the Crescent City. Hotel rooms lay vacant and restaurant tables went unreserved. Organizations pulled their conventions out of New Orleans. Even sporting event organizers chose to relocate rather than have players face discrimination. This was the case in 1965 when officials moved the American Football League All-Star game, slated for play in Tulane Stadium because black football players threatened to boycott the event if it was held in New Orleans. League officials moved the game to Houston, a far more accommodating city for blacks.

The negative economic impact of these incidents coupled with damaging publicity hurt the city’s image and created urgency among city officials that the decade’s old practice of Jim Crow must change. This became more apparent during the city’s efforts to lure an NFL expansion team because the NFL required the city to “demonstrate that it could handle players, press, staff, and spectators without regard to race” (Ibid., 706). City officials and boosters still navigating laws aimed at segregation at public events managed to hold a racially integrated football game featuring NFL teams. After proving New Orleans could successfully hold these events and realizing the potential economic benefits derived from the NFL, the New Orleans city council passed a public accommodations ordinance in 1969 which

integrated public activity in the city, thirteen years after reinforcing the mandate in opposition to federal laws.

This vignette of New Orleans history provides an example of why a level of distrust between whites and blacks still remains in New Orleans even though there were many who believed integration was the right and just thing to do. Interestingly, although home to a racist legal system brought on by the legal case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) was established in New Orleans. The group, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, played an integral role in the Civil Rights Movement. Still, those staunchly against equal rights for blacks did not consider changing outdated laws until New Orleans' status as a tourist destination was affected because of its racial caste system. City officials understood that the economic interests of New Orleans weighed more heavily than the need to continue segregationist policies. This sentiment was echoed by at least one black leader at the time who "expressed disbelief that tourism could be the primary consideration in passing an ordinance that any progressive city would have done anyway for the benefit of its own citizens" (Ibid., 718).

On the surface, New Orleans portrays itself as a free-spirited hub of fun and culture; underneath, however, are several contradictions that feed into one another creating an alternate identity for those residing in the Crescent City. While proximity led to a certain level of tolerance between blacks and whites, it has not necessarily created trust. Jim Crow laws fostered a legacy of discontent and cynicism, which extends to the management of disaster and recovery where blacks have been and continue to be disproportionately affected by severe weather events. The next section covers the city's history of disaster and resiliency and its continued effect on racial schisms in New Orleans.

Disaster as a Part of Life in Southeast Louisiana

During the annual Atlantic hurricane season, which spans June to November, the Gulf Coast acts as an expressway for severe weather systems. Potential landfall for storms entering the Gulf of Mexico is anywhere from Miami, Florida west to parts of western Mexico and Central America. Hurricane management is a part of the civic identity of any coastal community. While Hurricane Katrina may be the most recognized hurricane to hit New Orleans, it was not the first. Of the two hundred seventy-three hurricanes that made landfall on the U.S. Atlantic Coast between 1851 and 2004, forty-nine struck Louisiana (McCarragher 2010). “On average, one major storm crosses within 100 nautical miles of New Orleans every decade” (Ibid., 1). One of the more notable storms was Hurricane Betsy. In September 1965, Hurricane Betsy flooded 164,000 homes across New Orleans, killing seventy-six people (Graves Jr. 2012). Breaches in the levees protecting Lake Pontchartrain caused flooding in several neighborhoods, including Gentilly and the Ninth Ward. Nicknamed *Billion Dollar Betsy*, the storm was at the time the costliest in American history (Ibid., 95). It was more than a week before families could return to their homes, and even longer before many residents’ homes were habitable.

The construction and subsidy of suburban homes after World War II helped foster the phenomenon of *white flight*, a social phenomenon in which whites en masse fled from urban centers to suburban locales across the nation. Those remaining in cities, mostly blacks, were left in neighborhoods to face high concentrations of poverty and diminishing infrastructure and resources. In New Orleans, the social inequities among blacks and whites presented themselves spatially with many whites occupying areas of higher elevation, while predominantly poor and black residents lived in low-lying areas, such as the now infamous Lower Ninth Ward (NACCHO 2011, 3). The *Lower Nine*, as it is called by locals, is described as

“crouch[ing] behind a pile of dirt, separated by a big bend in America’s biggest river and [the thick Industrial Canal] and eons of tradition from the ‘high-class people’ up on the high ground over in the French Quarter” (Dyson 2006, 10). While residents of the Lower Nine rebuilt their destroyed neighborhood after Hurricane Betsy and other weather events, “the subsequent sluggish recovery further exacerbated the disinvestment and white flight from the Lower Ninth Ward. Between 1960 and 1970, over 77% of the white population had left the Lower Ninth Ward, and by 1970 23% of remaining residents were living in poverty” (Graves Jr. 2012, 96). By 2000, five years prior to Hurricane Katrina, blacks accounted for 98.3% of all households in the *Lower Nine* with 36.4% living below the U.S. poverty level (GNOCDC 2006).

Severe tropical storms crossing New Orleans like Hurricane Betsy fueled an already growing schism between blacks and whites. The storms that missed the city, however, had even greater effects on the psyche of New Orleans’ residents. In 1969, Hurricane Camille crossed into Louisiana from the Gulf of Mexico causing over \$350 million in damages. The costs would have been greater if the hurricane had hit New Orleans (McCarragher 2010). In 1992, the city missed the full force of Hurricane Andrew, which still caused five deaths and over a billion dollars in damage state-wide. In 2004, Hurricane Ivan threatened a direct hit to New Orleans. Mayor Ray Nagin called for a full evacuation of the city, only to have the storm, like others before it, turn east of the region. Residents bristled at the money and time spent evacuating for what turned out to be a false alarm. One could argue that Hurricane Ivan “begat the complacency seen the next August, when some residents ignored the approach of Katrina” (*The Times-Picayune*, 27, September, 2008).

For residents with means, those with economic stability and transportation, the near misses of hurricanes like Ivan subsequently blunted the sense of urgency needed as storms approach. Many residents choose to ‘ride out’ dangerous storms at home, either not fearing

the destructive powers of hurricanes, or unwilling to relocate. Some residents held 'hurricane parties' in preparation for the pending storm, noting that having beer and liquor on hand when the electricity fails is just as important as canned goods and water. Moreover, when damage does occur, residents want to repair their homes at the first opportunity in order to return to normalcy.

Those without means, especially the poor and black, have little opportunity to choose whether to stay or evacuate. The only choice is to stay at home or seek out a government sanctioned shelter. New Orleans is a city entrenched in concentrated poverty. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans had a poverty rate of twenty-three percent, nearly double the national average of thirteen percent (Dyson 2006). The city's poor are disproportionately comprised of elderly people, many with disabilities, and children. Aggravating the issues related to evacuation is the lack of access to viable transportation in many poor black households. "The poor and the near-poor. . . . account[ed] for 80 percent of the city's car-less population" (Ibid., 6). Thus, even if a family could afford to evacuate, which many could not, it did not have the means to leave. As New Orleans has a very large percentage of nativism, it is likely that family members who could receive evacuees were city residents themselves. Still, despite the problems relating to evacuation, prior to Hurricane Katrina, residents found a way to repair their homes after severe weather events.

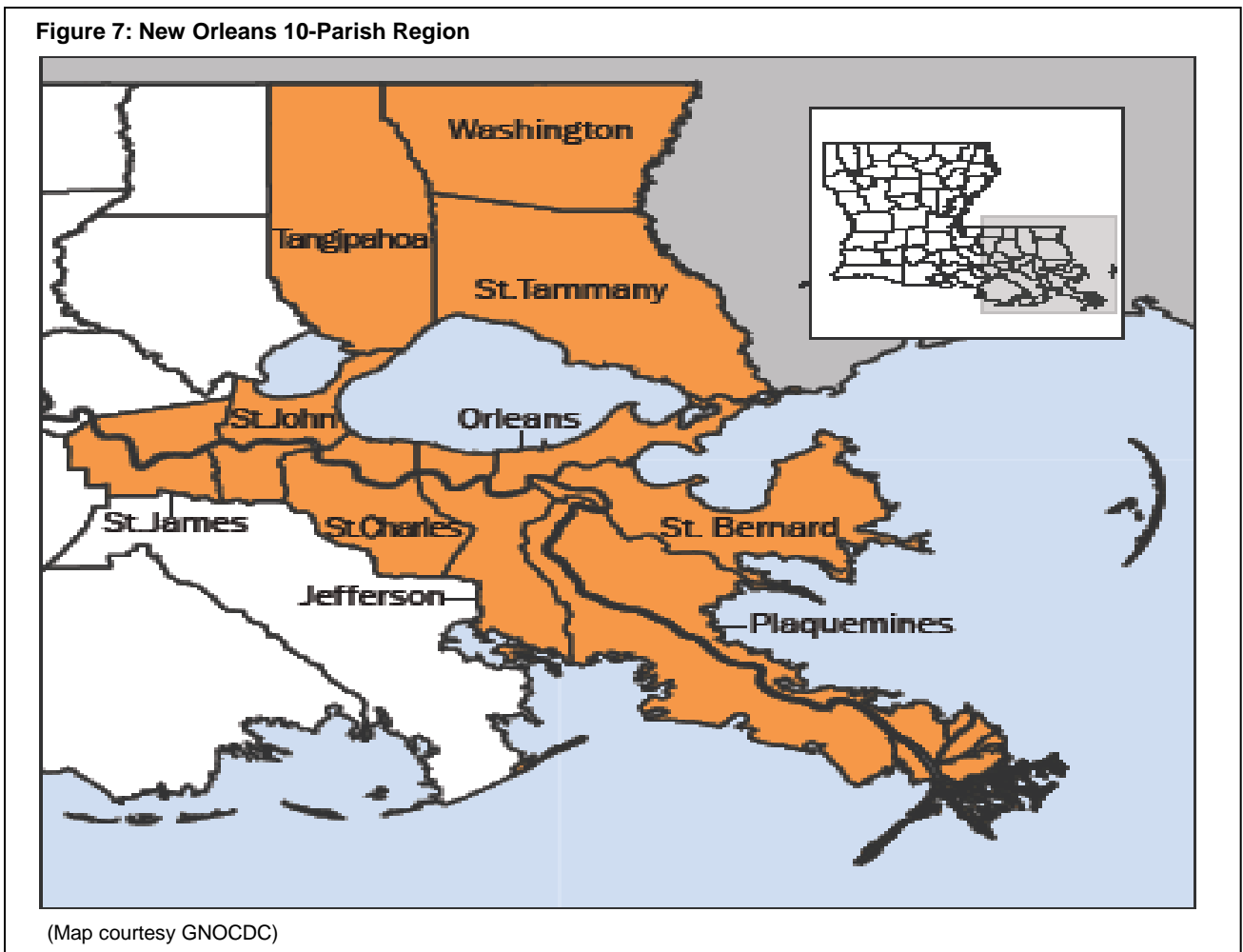
Because the Gulf Coast region including New Orleans has always been a focal point of summer storm activity, resiliency is a major factor to consider as the effects of hurricanes are a "when" proposition rather than an "if." Yet, this resilient identity manifests itself in different ways. For example, resilience has turned into complacency for some, where a choice is made on whether evacuating is worth the effort, time or money especially, given that the storm will probably veer away from the city. Economics dictates resiliency when 'riding out the storm' or

repairing damage to one's property in some cases can be the only asset one has if poor and black. This distinction, however, further exacerbates racial schisms in New Orleans. In its outward façade, New Orleans takes pride in attesting to its resiliency; however, internally, the level of resiliency is dictated by the economics of the city often cast in black and white terms. The next section provides an overview of the city's economic plight and will show why an over-reliance on one economic driver limits opportunity for some residents.

Economic Transformations

Economically, New Orleans is highly dependent on its cultural economy— its cuisine, music, festivals, and revelry that draws millions of tourists annually. This, however, was not always the case; the city's economic transformation from industrial to cultural was decades in the making. As late as 1860, New Orleans was the fifth largest city in the United States, and its port made it an economic engine for the region. Yet, national trends overtook New Orleans: first its population was trumped by Midwestern cities spurred by the growth of the railroad which lessened the dependence on shipping via waterways; next by West Coast expansion; and lastly, by growing cities in the Sunbelt region in the 1950s, such as Houston and Atlanta, that further siphoned both businesses and residents from New Orleans. Although the port was at the time still one of the largest in the nation, an expanding use of automated technology meant the loss of jobs. Further exacerbating revenue shortfalls was the loss of financial sector businesses to other growing cities in the region; the loss of commercial jobs; and a shift in tax base from the city to the outlying suburbs.

With the loss of economic diversity by the 1980s, tourism’s status ascended as New Orleans’ most important economic driver. The regional economy is now highly dependent on the “production and sale of goods and services . . . sold to the local population or ‘exported’ for sale to customers outside of the region” (GNOCDC 2011, 16). *Export* industries create revenues extraneous to those generated by a region’s internal consumption, and thus support the entire national economy. An economic analysis conducted by the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center (GNOCDC) describes the drivers of the New Orleans metropolitan region (inclusive of a 10-parish region shown in Figure 7³) *export* industry primarily as the tourist, oil



³ “Map of New Orleans 10-Parish Region.” 2011. Picture courtesy of GNOCDC.

and gas, shipping, and higher education industries. The analysis, however, describes these as declining drivers that have shed “1.1 percent of total jobs from 1980 to 2010 during a time when the nation grew jobs by 43 percent” (Ibid., 16). While the decline of several indicators intensified due to the economic and social costs of Hurricane Katrina, the descent of these industries started with the oil bust of the 1980s through several recessions, including the *Great Recession*, which started in 2007. Since the 1980s, as surrounding parishes expanded, Orleans Parish, which houses New Orleans, experienced job shrinkage. Jobs in the parish declined from fifty-six percent of the regions jobs in 1980 to only thirty-four percent in 2009. During the same period, jobs in surrounding Jefferson and St. Tammany Parishes grew from twenty-nine to thirty-nine percent and four to fifteen percent respectively (Ibid., 22).

Tourism is important to the city’s economy, but also accounts for the lowest average wage of all New Orleans’ economic sectors, which also include oil and gas, shipping, higher education, heavy construction, and others (Ibid.). In other words, New Orleans’ top industry is also its lowest paid. The over-reliance on an economic sector that pays minimal wages provides limited economic opportunity for city residents. Historically, limited economic prospects are associated with decreased levels of educational attainment and public health, and increasing levels of poverty and crime, all characteristics of New Orleans.

New Orleans Identity Spreads to its Football Team

As noted earlier, the long-standing city’s moniker *The City that Care Forgot* (History Channel 2013) succinctly describes the contradictory nature of New Orleans. The city was built on the marshes of the Mississippi River for its strategic location, yet its location annually renders it susceptible to flooding and natural disaster. It is a city that attained its well-known culture through its multi-national, multi-racial heritage, but has participated in racial

segregation, discriminating against one of the city's chief cultural architects, African Americans. New Orleanians, an annual target of hurricanes, have developed a resiliency to storms that can present itself as an ambivalence or hubris, as residents elect to face the weather in the comfort of their homes as opposed to evacuating. Finally, the city relies on an economic driver in tourism that pays nominal wages to its employees. These are a few of the contradictions that fuel New Orleans' mercurial identity. The inconsistencies plaguing the Crescent City also provide its charm. Civic boosters focus attention on New Orleans' identity as a spirited city, open and available for all to visit, rather than a city that forgot to care about its residents, and no matter how much it tries, cannot rise to prominence. The latter description aptly suits the city's professional football team, the New Orleans Saints. The Saints reflect the same dynamic as New Orleans; its racial power dynamic steeped in white ownership of mostly black players; its resilience to return after each unsuccessful year, and its incorporation of New Orleans' culture into its team ethos. This next section analyzes the Saints and their contribution to the collective identity of New Orleans.

The Saints: New Orleans' Team

Sports teams have a way of mimicking the identity of their particular home cities. The tough-minded running and immovable defenses of iconic Pittsburgh Steelers and Green Bay Packers teams embody the steel mill and packing communities in which they are set. Conversely, the high-flying aerial assaults of the New York Jets, with "Broadway" Joe Namath or the San Francisco 49ers and its *West Coast Offense* resemble the glamorous East and West coast cities they represent. In New Orleans, however, the Saints reflect this particular locale, epitomizing the collective identity of the Crescent City and all its contradictions.

Born in a back room deal between the NFL and city officials, the NFL awarded New Orleans a professional football franchise on November 1, 1966, which coincided with the Roman Catholic Church's religious holiday *All Saints Day* (Dixon 2008). The franchise's first owner John Mecom named the team the Saints, a name derived from the jazz standard, *When the Saints Go Marchin' In*, made famous by New Orleans legend Louis Armstrong (Duncan 2010). Until that point, baseball, college football, and boxing were the city's main sports attractions, with "the 1892 world heavyweight title fight between Jim Corbett and John L. Sullivan [being] the biggest sports event the city had ever hosted" (Ibid., 24-25). With the franchise deal, the Saints changed the city's sports landscape forever. The headline of the afternoon newspaper read, "N.O. GOES PRO!" with the article's lead sentence underscoring the believed effect of procuring a professional team; "New Orleans became a big-league city today with the acquisition of a franchise in the National Football League" (Varney 2012). The national esteem of one of America's most important and strategic cities had been diminished over time, but with the Saints based in the city, New Orleans joined the ranks of major cities such as New York and Chicago (Donnes 2007), and could compete with rising cities in the Sunbelt like Dallas and Atlanta.

On the field, the Saints franchise was known more for stumbles, bumbles, and fumbles than for quality football. However, in what appeared as an excellent start for the franchise, wide receiver John Gilliam ran back the opening kickoff of the team's inaugural regular season game for a touchdown (*The Times-Picayune*, 12, February, 2010). The enjoyment was fleeting as the Saints lost that game and many more. Similar to its host city, the Saints could best be described as: "what [they] lacked in talent, they made up for in color" (Duncan 2010, 29). The foundation of the team was a collection of troubled cast-offs, broken-down veterans, overmatched rookies, those who had no intention of playing in New Orleans, and even some

who were incarcerated (Ibid.). They had nicknames such as *Captain Weirdo*, *Flea*, *Chico*, and *Furnace Face*, and would win “more bar fights and mid-field brawls than football games” (Ibid., 30). The Saints’ follies extended past the football field and into pre-game and half-time activities as well. For example, the team was to celebrate its first game with a hot air balloon takeoff accompanied by a jazz rendition of *Up, Up and Away* by jazz legend Al Hirt. The balloon never inflated as an attendant pulled the wrong cord creating a tear in the balloon. In another moment of ineptitude, during a halftime re-enactment of the Battle of New Orleans, cannon backfired blowing off three fingers of one of the actors. The Saints appeared snake-bitten from the team’s inception.

The Saints played twenty-one years before celebrating their first winning season, and thirty-five years before winning their first playoff game (*The Times-Picayune*, 25, January, 2010). They showed signs of life in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when they fielded one of the best defenses in the NFL, including a line-backing core known as the *Dome Patrol*, the team still could not muster the will to win a playoff game. The franchise waited until 2000 for its first playoff win, and even then it was in typical Saints fashion: after a 31-7 lead over the St. Louis Rams dwindled to 31-28, a Rams punt returner dropped the punt which was then recovered by the Saints, thus, preserving a three point win. It was six years before the Saints returned to the post-season.

Until 2006, the New Orleans Saints franchise experienced limited success and an inordinate amount of losing. In 1980, to protest their disgust at the team’s futility, Saints fans, at the behest of local broadcaster Bernard “Buddy D” Diliberto, wore brown paper bags over their heads to conceal their identities while at the game. Written on the bags was the Saints’ logo with the moniker, the *Aints* (Duncan 2010). The popularity of the *bagheads* grew from just a few fans to 200 and culminating in over 5,000 fans, some drawing creative designs on

the bags. The *baghead* era marked one of the low points in Saints history, yet, fans continued supporting their team. Furthermore, the Saints found a way to ingratiate itself to the community by the use of a local chant *Who Dat*.

The origin of *Who Dat* dates back to early jazz songs. The phrase is also rooted in black entertainment history, first used in minstrel shows, and next moving into vaudeville, appearing in the song called *Who Dat Say Chicken in dis Crowd* with lyrics by the pioneering black poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar. One popular reference to the “Who Dat?” routine is where “one character says “Who dat?” and another responds, “Who dat says who dat?” (*The Times-Picayune*, 13, January, 2010). As a local chant, *Who Dat* is linked to several sources including the Southern University and St. Augustine High School marching bands, among others. The chant of “Who dat say dey gonna beat dem Saints?” became so popular in the 1980s that it was included in a remake of *When the Saints Go Marching In*, much to the delight of fans. Since then, Saints fans have become known as *Who Dats* and since 2006, as part of the *Who Dat Nation*.

New Orleans’ Domed Stadium

The Saints’ home stadium has played and continues to play an important role in the identity of New Orleans. The Mercedes-Benz Superdome (formerly known as the Louisiana Superdome) is a civic monument to New Orleans as Fenway Park is to Boston or Wrigley Field in Chicago. It is a part of the civic psyche that has a life of its own (Landrieu 2006).

Construction on the Superdome began in 1971 on a downtown site that once housed a railroad yard and the Girod Street cemetery. As crews prepared to build on the site, they unearthed numerous skeletons, caskets, and coffins of unidentified and unclaimed victims of a 1850s yellow fever epidemic and a 1930s cholera outbreak (Gola 2010). In a nod to New Orleans’

religious culture, civic lore states the Superdome was cursed as punishment for desecrating this particular “City of the Dead” (J. Donley 2005, 1). The Saints’ limited success in the Superdome only strengthened the imagery and narrative surrounding this lore. Four years later in 1975, the Superdome opened to the public.

At the time of its inception, civic boosters viewed, *The Dome*, as it is called colloquially, as an investment that would “mark the beginning of an era of increased national prestige for Louisiana” (Dixon 2008, 89). It was also a structure intended to outcompete one of its chief rivals, the Astrodome in Houston, considered at the time as a state of the art domed facility; however, to Superdome boosters it was “basically a baseball stadium with a roof over it” (Ibid., 90). The Superdome would be a multi-purpose facility not only used for sports, but also conventions, trade shows, and meeting spaces. Many envisioned the facility as “the beginning of a huge new hospitality [and] convention industry for [the] state” (Ibid., 90), a prophetic statement as changes to New Orleans’ economy appeared on the horizon. To that effect, in a message of support for the Superdome former Louisiana governor John J. McKeithen added:

“The domed stadium is an investment that will benefit the state by over \$150 million in the first year and will mark the beginning of an era of increased national prestige for Louisiana. . . . Making the dome stadium a reality was the greatest thing that’s happened to the State since the Louisiana Purchase. . . . Having seen the Astrodome in Houston makes me all the more certain we’re right in building such a facility in New Orleans. . . which can outdraw Houston any day. . . . The domed stadium will be two generations beyond anything in existence in the world today” (Ibid., 89).

The design of the Superdome, which some believe, resembles a “spaceship” (L. Jenkins 2006) landed in the middle of urbanity, departed from classic styles found throughout New Orleans. More importantly, “it [was] a fundamental change in New Orleans psychology from the old days when the city was run by a handful of old-timers The old, closed, conservative city was open for business” (Hsu 2013, 1). The Superdome plays hosts to a multitude of local and national events. Annual sporting events such as the Bayou Classic and the Sugar Bowl, as well as championship games in basketball and football, most recently Super Bowl XLVII in February 2013, make up the Superdome schedule. *The Dome* hosts non-sporting events including the annual Essence Music Festival and many trade shows and conventions. The stadium has welcomed Pope John Paul II in 1987 and the Republican National Convention one year later. Civic boosters built the Superdome with the Saints in mind, but the stadium was the lynchpin of a greater future for New Orleans as a tourist destination. It gave the franchise an advantage against other NFL teams, and the city an advantage in its competition with rising Sunbelt cities. *The Dome*, which on page 81 in Figure 8⁴ shows as taking its place in the New Orleans skyline, was the promise of a future Saints team, one whose on-field success places it in annual contention for championships; and a future New Orleans, one of growth and prosperity. “No built structure has shaped New Orleans over the past decades quite so much as the Superdome” (Ibid., 1).

⁴ “Superdome-circa 1975.” February 3, 2013. Photograph courtesy of 89.9 WWNO.

Figure 8: Superdome the Centerpiece of Downtown New Orleans



The Superdome takes its place as a center piece in downtown New Orleans

(Photograph courtesy WWNO)

A familial bond between city and team

Sports' popularity in New Orleans is in part a function of family processes and environment, which in turn contributes to a strong identification with a particular team (Schwartz & Pantin, 2005). To say that the Saints are akin to family is not conjecture, but a belief. The identification of sports and teams, for many fans, starts during youth as a bi-product of parental relationships. Parents play a dominant role in subjecting their children to their behaviors and thinking, which most youth replicate as they move forward in life. The selection of particular sports or teams also falls into this pattern. When asked how long they have been fans of a particular team, most consider themselves *lifelong fans* or being fans *for as long as they can remember*. This may actually hold true as part of an unconscious pattern of

behavior used to recreate social structures, which then become habitual (Bourdieu 1990). That one New Orleanian said she “was born and raised to be a Saints fan. . . [and that she’s] never had a desire to root for someone else. . . [because] it’s in the blood” (*Northwest Florida Daily News*, 4, February, 2010), speaks to sports as a learned cultural institution.

The Saints are part of a larger New Orleans family, with kinship ties that stretch past the biological into a communal or ethereal relationship. This is evidenced in the discourse around the team. Columnist and resident Chris Rose said, “The Saints are family around here and you’re stuck with that just like you’re stuck with, well. . . family” (*The Times-Picayune*, 27, September 2006). Similar to the adage, “You can pick your friends, but you can’t pick your family,” for many fans, the Saints are family, like it or not. Bonnie Villarreal, a Saints fan living in Alabama, adds to this by saying, “They are our boys, and like a good mother, you love all your children all the times; you just don’t like them sometimes. But you don’t desert them” (*The Decatur Daily*, 2, February, 2010). This connection of a sports’ team to family also relates to Allen Guttman’s (2006) view of sports as representational: meaning fans believe the athletes are symbolic of the larger community. Thus, the pride exhibited by fans when the Saints win, or the chastisement voiced when losing originates from the team being an outward representative, or “a child” of the city.

One reason for this familial attachment is the Saints’ status as the sole team in a small market with an unusually large native-born population. “In the 2000 census. . . seventy-seven percent of New Orleanians were considered natives, defined as those born anywhere in Louisiana” (Devlin 2009). Locals “grow up watching the Saints for generations. Places like Atlanta have a low native population and more competition for the dollar. The Saints are the core of interest in New Orleans,” (Henderson 2011). From 1979, when the NBA’s New Orleans Jazz moved to Utah, until 2002 when the NBA’s Charlotte Hornets moved to New Orleans, the

Saints were the only major professional sports team in the state. Media coverage of other sports was limited to the weekly nationally televised events, or teams playing on cable television “Superstations” like the Atlanta Braves or Chicago Cubs. New Orleans was a small television market, by professional sports standards, with limited options in the way of professional sports. In similar ways to “not picking one’s family,” in a small market like New Orleans where sports options are limited, fans develop a devotion to the Saints that spans generations.

Another reason for this attachment is the familial relationship established through sports that also harkens to the nostalgia of family. On January 29, 2010, one week before the Saints played in the Super Bowl, *NOLA.com*, the online presence of *The Times-Picayune* newspaper, asked Saints fans to reflect on their loved-ones who did not live to see the Saints play in the championship game. The request elicited two hundred eighty-eight unique posts from Saints fans, who recalled watching the games either at the stadium or at home with loved ones. Many wrote memories of their childhood that involved watching games with parents or grandparents, reflecting on days’ past, and underscoring the ability of sports to produce *lifelong fans*. One post from *tricia4saints* highlights this point:

When they won the [NFC Championship] game Sunday, all I could think about was memories of my father watching the games every season when I was little, he always had the radio on listening to Buddy D while he had the TV volume off, he would get upset and want to throw things at the TV, but he still believed and remained a Saints fan until his last days. My dad loved the Saints and even though he has gone to heaven he is still a part of the ‘Who Dat Nation,’ he is just watching from above and blessing our boys (*The Times-Picayune*, 29, January, 2010).

Another poster, *jude7654*, reflected on a promise he made to his godfather to share a beer with him if the Saints went to the “big game.” He said, “after forty-plus years I will celebrate

at St. Louis #3 Cemetery, The only problem is he drank Schlitz beer. . . anyone know where I could find one?" (*The Times-Picayune*, 29, January, 2010). The Saints are ingrained in the New Orleans community not only because of the prestige the team has brought to the city, but also because of the memories they helped create within the community. The Saints games themselves construct memories through what happens during games and particular plays on the field, but of greater value are the memories that connect followers to the team through familial and generation bonds. These social memories are part of the established bonds between the team and its fan base that that serve to deepen devotion to the team and ingratiate the Saints further into New Orleans identity.

Chapter Discussion

New Orleans' collective identity prior to Hurricane Katrina was one of contradictions. The spirited, fun-loving, tourist city presented by civic boosters has a history of racial injustice, poverty, and hubris as it pertains to hurricanes. The contradictions of New Orleans culture and economy found its way into the New Orleans Saints franchise. Both city and team are known for their character and charm, but neither was taken seriously as a competitor. As other Southern cities, such as Dallas, Houston, and Atlanta, rose to economic and cultural prominence, New Orleans conversely was in slow decline, losing its revenue-generating potential one business at a time. Meanwhile, NFL teams overrode the Saints who continued their trend as the league's perennial loser. Even as the construction of the Superdome was a testament to New Orleans' future, it could not bring the city or the team the strength it needed to get over the proverbial hump and reach new heights. Both, however, showed a resolve to push forward year after year, and season after season. Although there are negative aspects that underlie New Orleans' fickle nature, including racism, poverty, and ambivalence

toward disaster; and there was little hope that the Saints would ever be successful, residents remained supportive of both the city and its team. Similar to the fierceness in which locals historically clung to their past cultures, they did the same with the Saints because it was their team. No matter the accretion of losing seasons, New Orleanians appeared to love their Saints. Managing the losing was akin to understanding that to live in New Orleans and to be a Saints fan required resilience.

Although the team found some success in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it also managed to reinforce constant failure, continually raising and dashing the hopes of its die-hard fans. The Saints were a hapless team in a city that was rapidly losing ground to its Sunbelt neighbors to the east and west. Still, there was always hope that next year would be 'the year' for the Saints and for New Orleans to overcome adversity. This was how collective identity was defined in New Orleans before the storm; a never-ending hope in the face of history and a fierce resilience which fuelled the city's identity and its team. Residents and fans alike relished the hope that things were going to get better, allowing many to look past the contradictions of city and team and appreciate both for what they were. On Friday, August 26, 2005, however, the hope that grounded both city and team was severely tested.

Chapter V: The New Orleans Saints as Phoenix, Disaster and Rejuvenation, 2005-2006

Introduction

As most weather experts now agree, the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season was one of the most active since storm tracking began. Hurricane Katrina “was the eleventh named tropical storm, the third major hurricane (out of four), and the first Category 5 hurricane of 2005” (Dyson 2006, 55). When it made landfall in Florida on Thursday, August 25, Katrina was only a Category 1 hurricane, the lowest on the Saffir-Simpson scale. Its eighty-mile-per-hour winds caused nine deaths and left one million without power (Ibid., 55). A day later the storm had moved into the Gulf of Mexico and rapidly expanded reaching Category 3 intensity, and still growing as it headed toward Louisiana. As the storm became more menacing, appearing to head straight for the state, then-Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco, along with other officials along the Gulf Coast, declared states of emergency and “requested the presence of National Guard troops from the Pentagon” (Ibid., 56). At this point, high-ranking government officials realized Hurricane Katrina could become a major problem; New Orleans’ residents, conversely, paid “little more than casual attention” (Donnes 2007, 43) to the storm. There was a football game to be played.

As Hurricane Katrina made its path across the Gulf of Mexico, the Saints prepared to play the Baltimore Ravens in the third preseason game of the 2005 season. Less than three days before the life-altering storm reached New Orleans, “reporters covering the Ravens-Saints exhibition game seemed oblivious to its potential threat” (Duncan 2010, 43). Neither the television broadcast announcers nor game day reporters mentioned the impending storm in their game coverage. Saints fans, too, were equally ambivalent as storms were typical of a late summer in Louisiana. Kenny Wilkerson, sideline reporter for *WWL Radio*, remarked on

this sentiment saying, “It wasn’t that nobody was watching [the storm], but at the time it was a category one, and it was supposed to hit Florida. If you live in New Orleans or anywhere along the coast, you see a couple of these every year. I mean, nobody had any idea it would become what it became” (Donnes 2007, 2).

The jovial mood of the Crescent City changed as the storm crept west of its original trajectory, and set a course for the Louisiana-Mississippi border. The local weathermen cut into the Saints’ broadcast to relay the news, setting off a chain reaction of cell phone calls and text messages in the Superdome from family and friends to their loved ones watching the game. Superdome officials made an announcement in the stadium, and as the Saints were losing twenty-one to six in a preseason game, the Superdome emptied out quickly (Ibid.).

The Saturday, August 27th headline of *The Times-Picayune* read, “Katrina puts end to lull; Storm’s westward path puts N.O. on edge” (Campanella 2008, 330). The time had come to decide on evacuation plans. President Bush declared a state of emergency that authorized federal disaster aid for Louisiana. Governor Blanco, as well as Governor Haley Barbour of Mississippi, “ordered contra-flow—the reversal of traffic on inbound interstates that turns superhighways one-way out of the coastal areas to speed evacuation” (Dyson 2006, 57). New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin issued a voluntary evacuation order Saturday evening, followed by an unprecedented mandatory evacuation on Sunday morning, saying, “We’re facing the storm most of us have feared” (Ibid., 59).

Residents with the resources heeded the warning to leave the city; some found refuge with relatives, while others searched for hotel vacancies. The storm also forced Saints players and staff to make evacuation plans. The Saints’ general manager Mickey Loomis told his players to “spend all of Saturday and Sunday morning getting [their] families out of harm’s way” (Donnes 2007, 4). The team flew to San Jose to wait out the storm and play their last

preseason game in Oakland. Most evacuated their families without trouble although some families had combined themselves to flee the city. On this particular weekend, Saints' players and staff asked the same questions as other New Orleans residents, "How do we leave?" and "What would be left to return to?"

Not all residents, however, were fortunate enough to escape the city. Many New Orleanians are entrenched in poverty and have no vehicular means of evacuating the city. Mayor Nagin "suggested that the 134,000 citizens who didn't own cars should hitch rides with friends, family, neighbors, and church members. For those who couldn't, the mayor suggested they make it to the Superdome as quickly as possible" (Dyson 2006, 59). The Superdome was the city's *shelter of last resort*. Over twenty-five thousand residents made their way to the Superdome. "The elderly, feeble, sick, and desperately poor" (Ibid., 60), however, could not reach the stadium. The Louisiana National Guard delivered enough food to the Superdome to feed fifteen thousand people for three days, or feed the twenty-five thousand at the location for a day and a half.

By landfall on Monday, August 29, everyone was where they were going to be, waiting for the storm to pass. Some residents traveled out of the city and state to stay with family and friends. Others managed to find hotel rooms or other locations to camp. Those who stayed in the city either hunkered down in their homes waiting for the storm to arrive, or huddled with the predominantly black masses at the Superdome. The Saints fled to California to prepare for their next game and eagerly await news from home. Hurricane Katrina, by then a Category 3 storm with Category 5 level storm surge, made landfall at 6:30 AM. (Ibid.).

This chapter discusses the effects of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans and the Saints, and their existing identities. The storm challenged the identity of both city and team. It brought a dual narrative of pain and suffering for both New Orleans and the Saints and its

aftermath offers an opportunity to view the dynamic processes of collective identity at work. The storm provided a status issue that prompted New Orleanians to galvanize around its local culture after the city's subsequent return from the storm. The chapter recalls specific moments that manifested symbolic restoration and re-creation of collective identity in the city in particular its identification with the Saints. Finally, it shows how the newly re-formed collective identity began to catalyze in special ways, strengthening into what ultimately became a *Saintsmania*.

Hurricane Katrina and the Dual Narratives of City and Team

Hurricanes have come and gone for years through the New Orleans' metropolitan area. These hurricanes featured both wind damage and street flooding, which would typically be pumped out of the city and into Lake Pontchartrain. One can mentally prepare for the average hurricane; however, the effects of Hurricane Katrina brought the unexpected. Quint Davis, producer and founder of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, discussed a nightmare scenario no one was prepared for:

I was lying in bed in New York watching CNN and they had a nurse from Charity Hospital on. She was saying that there was flooding around there. At first I figured the streets must be flooding from the rain, but then she said that the water was really high. I thought, that much water? By Charity? That's downtown. That's by the Superdome. How can that be? Then it sunk in: Oh my God, the levees have broken. Oh my God, oh my God (Donnes 2007, 10).

The specter of levee breakages was a constant fear in New Orleans. The city is in effect shaped like a bowl. Levees protected water from entering the city, but when it did, it would stay for a while, moving through and settling at the center of the city until

pumps would push it out. After the levees breached, the city's greatest fear was realized and bringing unprecedented and unimaginable amounts of damage.

Structural damage

New Orleans survived the initial blast of the storm, but numerous levee breaches devastated the city. Both the 17th Street Canal levee, which follows the boundary of Orleans and East Jefferson parishes, and an Industrial Canal floodwall damaged by a runaway barge, were compromised allowing the water in Lake Pontchartrain easy access to the bowl-shaped city (Dyson 2006). By Wednesday, August 31st, water had flooded at least eighty percent of the city, some parts under more than twenty feet of water (NOAA 2005). The estimated damages from the storm were in excess of \$200 billion dollars, much of which occurred in New Orleans (Dolfman, Wasser and Bergman 2007). There was significant damage to the city's transportation and construction infrastructure. Both of the city's airports, that included Louis Armstrong International, closed for some time after the storm. Multiple spans of Interstate 10 failed east of New Orleans, its structures falling into Lake Pontchartrain. New Orleans hotel infrastructure also suffered millions of dollars in losses. The most striking example was the Hyatt Regency near the Superdome,

Figure 9: Hyatt Regency Hotel



Windows blown out Hyatt Regency Hotel after Hurricane Katrina

(Photograph courtesy *The Times-Picayune*)

shown on page 90 in Figure 9⁵, where winds blew out numerous windows, strewing furniture onto the streets below. The Superdome suffered heavy damages, with the most visible done to the *lamella* roof skin, the winds from the storm peeling back from the structure.

Emotional Damage

Along with the billions of dollars of structural storm damage, there was also a human element to Hurricane Katrina's wrath. New Orleans' storm casualties included over fifteen hundred dead, and thousands of families separated and scattered across the country. First responders and volunteers with boats and helicopters rescued many survivors who 'rode out' the storm. Saints players and staff could only view the destruction from afar. Former Saints wide receiver Joe Horn said, "My first reaction was shock and awe. . . the devastation wasn't just the flooding of the buildings and the houses. It was the people. . . see[ing] people on the roofs of their houses, with babies and stuff, people just trying to survive" (Donnes 2007, 12).

As flood waters rose, those that could do so made their way to the Superdome to join the thousands that previously sought shelter in the stadium. The Superdome was previously used to house evacuees in 1998, 2004, and earlier in 2005 for hurricanes Georges, Ivan, and Dennis respectively (*The Times-Picayune*, 27, August, 2005). Evacuees herded into the facility with little available food, water, or supplies. They contended with poor sanitary conditions inside the Superdome as trash piled up in the halls reaching a foot high in places (*The USA Today*, 3, September, 2005). Moreover, electrical and sewerage failures exacerbated the unsanitary conditions for those already in peril. Government officials waited more than two days before bringing more food and water to the Superdome, which further aggravated an

⁵ "Hyatt Regency Hotel after Hurricane Katrina." August 29, 2005. Photograph courtesy of John McCusker, *The Times-Picayune* <
http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2011/05/hyatt_regency_reopening_in_oct.html>

already untenable situation. One interviewee who aided with the evacuation efforts at the stadium summed up the events:

[The Superdome] wasn't intended for people to be there that long. We had rations for a two to three day stay but not enough. Initially people were staged on the floor and when [the roof] started to peel away we had to move people to the stands and the concourses. The concourses weren't wide and we had people in the tunnels as well. . . . To compound that we had a total loss of power and sewerage. There was no food and water for some time. You felt a sense of hopelessness. You couldn't help yourself let alone people. (Williams 2012)

Once the waters receded, officials transported evacuees from both the Superdome and the Morial Convention Center to locations in Louisiana, Texas, and as far away as Michigan and Utah. Horn, then in San Antonio with the team, traveled to Houston to visit evacuees. He described the condition of the people by saying, "My perception was that they were being treated like animals in a kennel. 'Here's something to eat and a place to sleep. Stay there and we'll catch you when we catch you'. . . . It was so upsetting" (Donnes 2007, 15). Residents who returned to New Orleans found a city both soaked and teeming with mold from the standing water and humid conditions. Some came back to an empty slab where their homes once stood. Either way, all faced a daunting task of restoring a city nearly swept away by water and neglect.

The Economics of Imagery

Whereas the immediate after-effects of Hurricane Katrina included loss of property and life, in the long-term, the storm damaged the New Orleans' economy, and caused extensive harm to the city's labor market. During the first ten months after the storm, "the over-the-year loss to the city economy averaged 95,000 jobs," with a high of 105,300 in

November 2005 (Dolfman, Wasser and Bergman 2007, 3). This accounts for \$2.9 billion in lost wages during this time period, of which \$2.2 billion is associated with the private sector (Ibid., 3). New Orleans also lost jobs and wages within port operations and professional, educational, and healthcare services (Ibid., 7-9, 11).

However, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans' tourist economy the hardest. The city's chief economic driver lost nearly twenty-three thousand jobs, accounting for three hundred eighty-three million dollars in lost wages. The loss of key tourist infrastructure, including hotel space, the Superdome, and the Morial Convention Center (when combined hold over one million square feet of floor space for concerts, conferences, and tradeshow), further exacerbated the problem. The loss of hotel and floor space made New Orleans a less attractive option for larger events, continuing the damage done by Hurricane Katrina. A more pressing issue, however, was whether anyone would want to visit New Orleans again after the horrors witnessed on a national stage.

The statement "image is everything" (Agassi 1990) is as true about New Orleans as any other American city. Its image as a free-spirited cultural melting pot filled with food and fun lures many tourists and conventioners to the Crescent City. Media footage trained on the flooded city threatened this image as they documented the hurricane and all of its outcomes for an attentive world. News media covered Hurricane Katrina in depth although it was how they covered the storm that affected the city's image. Already a historic disaster, the media continually displayed images of levee breaches, flooded neighborhoods, and residents rescued from rooftops. They covered the horrifying scenes at the Superdome, and reported numerous murders, rapes and gang violence in the stadium. Even Mayor Nagin, in an interview with Oprah Winfrey, "spoke of 'hundreds of armed gangs killing and raping people' inside the Dome" and said people were in an almost animalistic state (*The Seattle Times*, 26, September,

2005). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), prepared to retrieve over two-hundred bodies from the Superdome. The actual total was six; four died of natural causes, one overdose, and one suicide (Ibid.). With little investigation, journalists reported on events, situations, and occurrences that in most cases turned out to be myth, however, these prevailing myths damaged the credibility of the people of New Orleans as witnessed in the photojournalism below:

Figure 10: Looting vs. Finding

Media presented scenes depicting blacks as looting from stores, while whites found supplies during the storm.
 (Image courtesy *Now Public*)

The media continually and obsessively hammered away at New Orleans' identity, primarily its black residents. They captured the widespread problem of looting during the storm; however, they also racialized the issue which further enhanced age old racial schisms

in the city between blacks and whites. Figure 10⁶ on page 94 shows two photos released after the storm that emphasized this point. The first photo is of a black male wading in chest deep water with a caption that read: “A young man walks through chest deep flood water after *looting* a grocery store” (Dyson 2006, 164). A second image shows a white couple with food where the caption read: “Two residents wade through chest-deep water after *finding* bread and soda from a local grocery store” (Ibid., 164). These statements and deepened the portrayal of New Orleans’ black residents as criminals through nuanced uses of language.

Public personalities and officials advanced this idea about black residents of New Orleans. While touring the Houston Astrodome, the temporary home for some evacuees, former First-Lady Barbara Bush declared Hurricane Katrina a success because the evacuees “were underprivileged anyway” and that the living conditions were “working well for them” (*The New York Times*, 7, September, 2005). Nationally, some members of Congress questioned aloud the use of federal funding to reconstruct parts of New Orleans. Former House speaker Dennis Hastert mentioned that “a lot of [New Orleans] could be bulldozed” (*The Seattle Times*, 2, September, 2005). Senator Rick Santorum floated the idea of “punishing people who had ignored pre-evacuation orders” (*The Washington Post*, 10, September, 2005). Even Louisiana legislators echoed disdain for New Orleans. Richard Baker, former state representative from Baton Rouge was overheard saying, “We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn’t do it, but God did” (Ibid.).

Snow (2001) describes collective identity as “invented, created, reconstituted, or cobbled together” (5). In the case of New Orleans, media narratives of Hurricane Katrina reconstituted or reconstructed the city’s image but in a negative light. It is true that New

⁶ “Finding vs. Looting.” Taken August 30, 2005. Uploaded September 1, 2005. Photograph courtesy *Now Public* via the *Associated Press* < http://www.nowpublic.com/finding_vs_looting>

Orleans has always been a contradictory city, not just a free-spirited carnival for tourists, but also one where crime and poverty has its place, however, Hurricane Katrina's impact, especially the media coverage of the city, changed the discourse used to imagine New Orleans. Media narratives illustrate the city using words like "grim," "overwhelming," and "depressing" (*The San Jose Mercury News*, 3, December, 2006). Longer narratives vividly describe not a city that is alive, but one that was near death more than a year after the storm:

The devastation stretches out in all directions. Houses crumpled like old newspaper. Boats tossed in a heap like used toys. Mounds of fetid garbage in empty lots. In mile upon mile of abandoned neighborhoods, the empty, rotted buildings still show the Katrina cross_ the X marking the date inspected and the number of dead inside (San Jose Mercury News, 3, December 2006).

The imagery of Hurricane Katrina also affected perceptions of the Superdome, one of New Orleans' most important symbolic resources. The Superdome primarily functioned as the home stadium for the Saints while also projecting a symbol of New Orleans' future as a tourist epicenter. Civic boosters believed *The Dome* would usher New Orleans past neighboring Houston, with its smaller Astrodome, and into competition with other "big league" cities such as New York or Chicago.

Since 1975, the Superdome, located in the heart of downtown, has been a fixture in the New Orleans skyline. Prior to the storm the stadium was well-established as one of the city's most important symbolic resources. Hurricane Katrina, however, effectively undermined the entrenched identity of the Superdome, changing it to reflect the symbolism produced by the storm. Whereas before the storm, civic boosters viewed the Superdome as a totem to the city's cultural and economic future as a major league city and world class tourist destination, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina the stadium became a mirror reflecting all that had gone wrong with the storm. Destruction, death, the city's blackness, as well as its perceived

incivility, all were now inscribed into the identity of the Superdome. As the winds peeled away *The Dome's* roof, so too did it peel away the stadium's former majestic identity, and left in its wake, a beleaguered symbol of pain and sorrow that epitomized the failure of government to protect its people.

The Superdome was a shell of its former self and evacuees who had weathered such reprehensible conditions were relocated from the stadium and dispersed throughout the nation. The subsequent cleanup consisted of "extracting 3.8 million gallons of water, replacing 22,000 seats, removing 4,000 tons of trash and debris, and 1.6 million square feet of carpet" (*Contra Costa Times*, 25, September, 2006), at a cost in excess of one hundred million dollars. Some wondered whether the building would ever be habitable again, considering both the damage and the new perception of the Superdome as "a symbol of chaos, despair and massive government failure" (Rose, et al. 2006). The storm had transformed the identity of the Superdome, one that had taken years to develop, into a "national symbol of despair" in only three days; a symbol broadcast regularly on national news, further re-imprinting this new negative image of New Orleans onto the minds of the world.

The storm affected the city's residents as well as its business community. Local owners were forced to decide whether to rebuild or relocate their businesses. Many national corporations, especially those in the energy industry, relocated to Houston after Hurricane Katrina. Companies such as Murphy Oil, McDermott International, and W&T Offshore either elected to stay in Houston, or returned to New Orleans with a minimal workforce (*The Times-Picayune*, 4, August, 2007). Chevron returned to Louisiana after the storm, but moved its headquarters and its five hundred fifty employees to Covington, a suburb of New Orleans on the northern shore of Lake Pontchartrain (*The Times-Picayune*, 7, May, 2008). The city was also in jeopardy of losing another business to Texas, the New Orleans Saints.

The Saints Fall on Hard Times

Similar to what happened to most local residents, Hurricane Katrina forced the Saints to evacuate New Orleans. The franchise relocated its base of operation to San Antonio, Texas, and played most of its 'home' games in the Alamodome, while others were held in New York City and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, shown in Figure 11⁷. Loomis characterized the season as “a

Figure 11: Saints relocate to Tiger Stadium



During the 2005 season, the New Orleans Saints played four “home” games in Tiger Stadium on the campus of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

(Photograph courtesy Wikipedia Commons)

grind for everyone involved. You’re trying to do your job to the best of your ability, and yet, at the same time, you’ve got all of these personal issues . . . there was tremendous uncertainty” (Donnes 2007, 37). Horn remarked about the team’s play, “I don’t think any team could have

⁷ “New Orleans Saints at Tiger Stadium.” 2005. Photograph courtesy Mrbrown at en.Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:New_Orleans_Saints_at_Tiger_Stadium.jpg>

done any better under those circumstances. . . it was just not the kind of environment where we could really get things together like we needed to, from a team point of view” (Ibid., 36). The Saints held practices in a parking lot and were once denied use of the Alamodome because of a previously scheduled high school volleyball tournament. Despite winning its first game after the storm, the team managed just two more victories against thirteen defeats, which made the 2005 season one of the Saints’ worst.

Just as people wondered whether New Orleans would return, media speculated whether the Saints had played their last game in the city. Team owner Tom Benson, to the dismay of many New Orleanians, was said to be in serious negotiations with Texas officials to make San Antonio the Saints’ permanent home. Saints officials believed New Orleans was not a viable option after the storm (Ibid.). During an operational meeting, Arnold Fielkow, who was at the time a Saints’ executive, heard Benson remark, “[The Saints are] a Texas team now” (Duncan 2010, 54). While loyal to Benson, Fielkow informed Louisiana state legislators that Benson would attempt to subvert the Superdome lease agreement and its multi-million dollar exit penalty. Local residents considered this act akin to “pouring salt into an open wound” (Ibid., 55). The Saints leaving would further damage the spirit of New Orleans and its people because “if the Saints had left, it would be a symbol to the nation that New Orleans was gone” (Henderson 2011). There was fear and anger that, similar to the government during the storm, the Saints, too, would fail New Orleans in its greatest time of need.

Publically, Duncan writes, Benson and the Saints organization supported a return to New Orleans; however, privately, the team wanted to stay in San Antonio. Benson received a wave of support from the San Antonio business community, where the prevailing sentiment was “the Saints were acting like New Orleans wasn’t even an option. In their minds, New Orleans wasn’t coming back” (Duncan 2010, 60). When Benson’s actions became public,

Saints fans expressed their displeasure in various ways. Upon the Saints return to Baton Rouge for the team's first 'home game' inside the state, fans raised hostile signs aimed at the owner. One fan openly confronted Benson, leading to a shouting match under the stadium. Those unable to attend games spray-painted anti-Benson remarks on refrigerators discarded on the street (*The Times-Picayune*, 25, September, 2006) which conveyed that Benson was similar to the spoiled foods inside.

Until a week before the 2005 season ended, the players believed they would not return to New Orleans. Horn said about relocation talks, "It was real. I'm sure that was the plan (to not go back to New Orleans). But for us to be talking about leaving (New Orleans), there was no way I was going to be a part of that. I can't go someplace and know that everybody else in Louisiana is suffering" (Donnes 2007, 73). Realizing the potential for the league to aid the city in its recovery, NFL officials decided that the Saints would return to the city (M. Freeman 2013). Former NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue pledged that "the Saints are Louisiana's team and have been since the late 1960s. . . . We're dealing with a rebuilding here, and we're going to make every effort to keep the New Orleans Saints as Louisiana's team" (Duncan 2010, 65). Tagliabue recognized the tenuous relationship between Saints' officials and the city had begun prior to Hurricane Katrina. The storm, however, did hit New Orleans, and he "wanted to make sure the team wasn't going anywhere" (M. Freeman 2013, 1). Just as bringing New Orleans back to life would be accomplished by its citizens and through the sheer willpower of its people, Saints fans now had to prove they could support a team in a post-disaster environment.

The narratives of New Orleans and the Saints during and after Hurricane Katrina parallel one another in striking ways. The storm not only brought wind and rain, but it also brought into focus the city's status problems. While New Orleans' culture marks it as a

distinct place, Hurricane Katrina and subsequent media coverage marked the city as something different. The discourse focused on the city's entrenched poverty, the false savagery occurring at the Superdome, and civil unrest in the storm's aftermath. It was a city that, as the former first-lady said, "Evacuees would be better never to return." Author Chris Rose put it best,

When I am introduced as someone from New Orleans, people sometimes say: 'I'm so sorry.' New Orleans. I'm so sorry. That's not the way it was before, not the way it's supposed to be. When people find out you're from New Orleans, they're supposed to tell you about how they got drunk there once, or fell in love there, or first heard the music there that changed their lives. At worst people would say: 'I've always wanted to go there.' But now, it's just: 'I'm sorry.' Man, that kills me (Rose 2007).

Hurricane Katrina transformed New Orleans, once one of the most charming cities in the South, into a place that was pitied by outsiders. Prior to the hurricane, the Saints franchise was known across the NFL for its perennial losing seasons. The year after the storm, it became the team with an excuse for losing. They were the team from the flooded city forced to endure hardships like no other NFL team. They also were the team that considered fleeing New Orleans at the time of the city's greatest need. Hurricane Katrina severely compromised the New Orleans' brand, which was an indictment of its people as well as its culture. The brand, however, was not broken beyond repair. The spirit of the city was still present; it just needed rejuvenation. In 2006, New Orleans began its reanimation process which centered symbolically on restoring the Superdome. What was not known at the time, however, was that the team playing inside the stadium would play a major role in the city's recovery.

Fighting for Home

At the onset of this analysis, the author hypothesized that Hurricane Katrina destroyed New Orleans' collective identity, and that through the Saints' ability to overcome obstacles due to the city's destruction and its own inability to be a winning team, it was restored. This seemed a reasonable presumption as it seems understandable that a city facing this level of destruction could very well disappear into the history books. Yet, what this premature conclusion did not take into account is the fervor shown by New Orleanians for their hometown to return to its former status as a great American city. Thousands fought to survive the storm in flooded homes or in a crowded Superdome. Many displaced residents fought for the right to return and rebuild their homes, even as city officials fostered plans to make residents wait for as long as four months before returning to New Orleans (Randall 2006), or to turn neighborhoods like the Lower Nine into green space (Krupa 2010). Furthermore, after returning to the city, citizens fought to protect and preserve New Orleans' culture and identity.

The city faced the difficult task of rebuilding itself, including both its image and infrastructure. New Orleans' culture, its customs, and its celebrations, once taken for granted, grew in importance to New Orleanians during this time due to fears that they would never get to experience them again (Duncan 2011). City officials made it a priority to rebuild the city's cultural institutions starting with Mardi Gras. Despite the fact that residents were still displaced and infrastructure still damaged, New Orleans went forth with its annual Mardi Gras parades in 2006. Mardi Gras "represented a new step in the individual and collective recovery for New Orleans, as it served as a vehicle for the reaffirmation of life and the unique cultural traditions of the city" (Guenin-Lelle 2007, 75).

The 2006 Mardi Gras season allowed New Orleanians the opportunity to ‘speak’ directly to the government that failed them during the storm. President Bush, Governor Blanco, Mayor Nagin, FEMA, in addition to themes associated with rebuilding after the storm were all satirized in multiple parades. Local revelers also used the parades to marvel at the resilience of the city, conveying messages such as, “Come hell or high water, keep on smiling” (*The Times-Picayune*, 20, February, 2012). Through individual expression and collective rituals which articulated the tragedy and pain of Hurricane Katrina, Mardi Gras aided New Orleanians in processing the aftermath of the storm (Guenin-Lelle 2007). A number of residents felt it was wrong to hold Mardi Gras when thousands were still without homes and power. Others believed not having Mardi Gras “would be like not having Christmas” (Patterson 2006, 1). One reveler had this to say about the city’s abbreviated Mardi Gras, “This is my therapy. . . . I think I made the right decision. There’s nothing happening in the city now, other than contractors, and building and repair work going on and there’s nothing to remove you from that. We need this” (Ibid., 1). The 2006 Mardi Gras season began the process of changing the status problems brought on by Katrina. It generated a shift in the narrative of New Orleans, focusing on the city’s resilience and civic pride as opposed to its flooding. “Mardi Gras [was] an opportunity to send a message to the world about the city, to show its ability to celebrate even in adversity and its ongoing struggles since the storm. . . to tell the world we’re alive and well” (Guenin-Lelle 2007, 77).

The benefits of holding the 2006 Mardi Gras were not all symbolic in nature, however. New Orleans needed to be lifted psychically and economically. “The decision to have Mardi Gras was done ostensibly for economic reasons, to demonstrate to the world that New Orleans was once more a tourist destination” (Ibid., 75) Tourism was still the lifeblood of New Orleans and the city’s best recourse in efficiently re-establishing its economy and

creating jobs (*The New York Times*, 12 February, 2006). Thus, city officials made the controversial decision to continue its Mardi Gras tradition to benefit the psyche and coffers of New Orleans. Holding Mardi Gras was not the only divisive decision made by public officials in the city's road to recovery. Many residents wanted to use the limited resources available to repair neighborhoods and bring home the thousands of still displaced residents; however, local and state executives authorized the repair of the city's most symbolic piece of infrastructure, the Superdome. The decision to repair the Superdome initially created discontent as schools and hospitals sat in disrepair (*The Guardian*, 22, September, 2006). Yet repairing the Dome served the New Orleans' community in a manner similar to the city holding the 2006 Mardi Gras season. Psychologically, its restoration furthered the narrative of renewal over destruction as a dominant theme of New Orleans. Economically, a restored Superdome showed New Orleans was again "open for business."

Re-imagining the Superdome

Over its thirty-seven years, the Superdome housed millions of guests for a multitude of mega-events, signifying its importance in the New Orleans skyline. It is an iconic landmark: When you think of New Orleans, you think of the Superdome. It was built "as a catalyst for downtown redevelopment [and] epitomizes the entertainment and tourism mecca that is New Orleans" (Konigsmark 2005). Hurricane Katrina, however, would transform the Superdome, a symbol of New Orleans' "big league" stature, into a physical representation, or totem, to the storm.

City and state officials made its renovation one of their first priorities after the storm. Figure 12⁸ shows a Superdome weakened by Hurricane Katrina, but not destroyed. In less than a year, the Superdome was repaired and improved. “Officials [hailed] the restoration as a pivotal moment in the city’s post-Katrina recovery” (*The Times-Picayune*, 24, September,

Figure 12: Superdome after Hurricane Katrina



Hurricane Katrina and evacuees caused over one hundred million dollars in damages to the Superdome.
(Photograph courtesy AOL News)

2006). Local culture is a significant driver of the city’s economy, and repair of the Dome is essential to the city’s future. The Superdome’s return meant a much needed boost to New Orleans’ cultural economy, or the “range of economic activity . . . concerned with producing and marketing goods and services that are infused in one way or another with broadly

⁸ “Superdome after Hurricane Katrina.” Taken in 2005. Uploaded January 24, 2010. Photograph courtesy AOL News via Bill Haber of the Associated Press. < <http://www.aolnews.com/2010/01/24/superdome-is-super-again-for-the-saints/>>

aesthetic or semiotic attributes” (Scott 1997, 323). The city now had one of its largest event spaces back, making it competitive again in attracting mega-events and the spinoff revenues they generate throughout the city. More importantly, repairing the Dome was a symbolic gesture which affirmed the city’s recovery and return. Doug Thornton, executive vice-president of SMG, the company that operates the stadium, said, “If the dome is laying there in a state of disrepair, what would that tell the rest of the world about the city. . . [that] our teams had left, our events had left” (Hart 2012). The Superdome’s repair was a “much needed morale boost to flood weary residents who can now do the types of things taken for granted in other communities” (*USA Today*, 26, September, 2006). It symbolized the resuscitation of New Orleans.

Re-Imagining the New Orleans Saints

The stage was set for the Saints to come back to New Orleans for the 2006 football season: the Superdome had undergone its post-Katrina transformation and the NFL commissioner prodded the team to return home. League officials put the Saints’ fate “squarely on the storm-weary shoulders of Louisianians,” (Duncan 2010, 74) and their capacity to support professional football. Saints fans responded by procuring season tickets, some purchased with FEMA recovery funds, giving the team its first season sellout in franchise history. Saints officials raised a banner in the stadium, presented on page 107 in Figure 13⁹, to pay tribute to the fans for the season sellout. Banner rising is a process usually reserved for

⁹ 2006 Season Sellout Banner.” Taken 2006. Uploaded May 17, 2011. Photograph courtesy of Chris Greythen, *Getty Images*. <<http://bleacherreport.com/articles/702004-the-top-10-cinderella-seasons-in-nfl-history/page/5>>

the retirement of highly decorated players; however, the Saints chose to honor this signature moment in its team history with a memento that continues to fly in the Superdome.

Journalists called the rush for tickets as either about fans wanting to “stick it” to the owner by setting attendance records (DeShazier 2011, 1), or “fans [being] civic minded in buying season tickets after Katrina because they did not want the team to leave” (Duncan 2011, 1). No matter the reason, fans wanted to watch their Saints in the Superdome. The passion exhibited by fans for the Saints, whether it was expressed by the vitriol directed against the owner who wanted to take the team from New Orleans, or by a season sell-out in a city where money was scarce, demonstrates the importance of the team to residents and their collective identity as New Orleanians. As a cultural institution,

the Saints had risen to similar heights as the Mardi Gras where residents fought with vigor to preserve both civic traditions. Residents and fans alike exhibited an enhanced appreciation for New Orleans (Henderson 2011). Similar to their response to Mardi Gras, New Orleanians were taking renewed pride in local institutions that had almost been lost to the storm (Tatum

Figure 13: 2006 Season Sellout Banner



The Saints celebrate team's first ever season ticket sellout.

(Photograph courtesy Getty Images)

2011). This renewed pride also included local businesses. Residents celebrated any business that returned to the city after Hurricane Katrina. The “Saints were like a corner store that had reopened, but on a macro level” (Duncan 2011, 2). They were a civic institution that became important to the quality of life of New Orleans and signified the city was not going to die. The hurricane brought about a realization in New Orleanians that they had long taken for granted the permanency of their institutions. After the hurricane, residents “asked themselves, ‘What am I waiting for?’ when deciding to purchase season tickets or go out to festivals” (Henderson 2011, 2). Similar to other institutions, fans clung to the Saints, with the hopes of never letting the team go again.

With the question of the Saints returning to New Orleans now answered, the next unknown factor was: in what shape would the team be? What occurred during the 2005 NFL off-season came to symbolize the recovery efforts of the city. Finishing the 2005 season with a three and thirteen record, the Saints earned the second pick in the upcoming 2006 NFL Draft. The team made radical changes to its coaching and player personnel staffs, firing head coach Jim Haslett, cutting starting quarterback Aaron Brooks, and releasing a host of other players from the roster. In Haslett’s place, the Saints hired Sean Payton, formerly the offensive coordinator of the Dallas Cowboys, to coach the team. Next, the team signed free agent quarterback Drew Brees, who had been the starting quarterback for the San Diego Chargers until the last game of the 2005 season when he damaged his throwing shoulder. Some experts called this a career threatening injury, positioning Brees as expendable. At the press conference announcing his signing “Brees didn’t tell anyone. . . how much he struggled just to hold up the black No. 9 Saints jersey. . . . His right shoulder, only two months after surgery, was so weak he could barely raise his arm above his chest” (Duncan 2010, 83). In Brees, New Orleans had another reclamation project.

The Saints continued the process of rebuilding its franchise through the NFL Draft. They selected Reggie Bush, the Heisman Trophy winning running back from the University of Southern California with the second pick of the draft. Analysts believed Bush was the top player in what was considered at the time one of the best draft classes in NFL history. Bush, one of the most decorated college football players in history, gave the Saints star-power the likes of which the franchise had never seen. The Saints rounded out its 2006 draft class by selecting Jahri Evans from Bloomsburg University, and Marques Colston from Hofstra University, two under-appreciated unknowns from small universities.

The core of the 2006 New Orleans Saints was made up of one hopeful rookie superstar, several castoffs from other teams, and two players from schools that did not register on the mainstream football radar. The Saints, like New Orleans, were rebuilding from the ground up. As Brees (2010) remarks,

In a way, our team is a microcosm of New Orleans as a whole. As is the case for the city, we all hail from a variety of backgrounds, but we have melded together into a unified and distinct culture. And like New Orleans, most of our players have had their share of adversity along the way (183).

Fans gravitated towards the Saints, compelled by how they were rebuilt after Hurricane Katrina. Both city and team were comprised of reclamation projects fighting to survive and retain their ways of life. This is indicative of Guttman's (2006) point about psychological dynamics of sports where fans believe that the athletes they cherish represent them. This initial link between athlete and fan was the start of deeper connections between city and team.

There were limited expectations that this team, with a rookie head coach and a group of second-hand players would find any more success than previous Saints teams and not

surprisingly fans found it difficult to shed the Saints' past shortcomings. Abbe Garfinkel, a Saints fan, said about the team,

I had given up on the Saints two years before. I'd just written them off. I was like, that's it. I'm not buying into it ever again. Every year they would convince me that this was a new team and that they were really going to do it, and they would break your heart. Every year (Donnes 2007, 96).

These same shortcomings parallel those of the Crescent City. When asked if he shared this sentiment, Fred Neal Jr., New Orleans area urban planner, said,

That type of statement, in a sports context, is melodramatic because no matter how bad it gets you are still going to keep an eye on the team. It's more apt to describe New Orleans. The city has had so many 'new directions' over the years in terms of new mayors, council, police chiefs, and school superintendents. But there have been very few changes, and a lot of those were negative. You're not going to leave your team for a better quality of football, but you may leave the city for a better quality of life (Neal 2012, 1).

Regardless of past failures, fans still purchased every available seat in the Superdome to welcome home the Saints. This is indicative of the contradictions of New Orleans discussed in the previous chapter. Fans, some with limited monetary resources, gave a team with limited historical success its first season sell-out one year after the worst natural disaster in history. The resiliency exhibited by New Orleanians afforded the city and team fresh starts, and as Neal stated "new directions," without much success. Pushing through decades of a perceived identity of failure, however, proved tough for fans and residents alike. This *new* Saints team preparing to make its home debut continued to affect, influence, and at some points even drive the narrative of New Orleans and its return to normalcy after the storm. The debut itself further enhanced the city's image, and continued the process of removing

status problems that stemmed from the storm. It also helped galvanize the New Orleans community around the Saints and the city's recovery.

Domecoming

The 2006 season was one of the most anticipated in Saints history. This Saints team was wholly different than the one that played in 2005. This team fielded a new head coach and quarterback, a “special” running back, and a new purpose. They were not just playing for

Figure 14: *Domecoming* celebration



Fans celebrate outside a repaired and refurbished Superdome prior to the Monday Night Football event against the Atlanta Falcons.

(Photograph courtesy *The Times-Picayune*)

wins; they were playing for a city. The Saints played their first two games of the season on the road, winning both only heightened the sense of expectation in New Orleans. The Saints finished the 2005 season with only three wins, but nearly matched that in the first two weeks of the 2006 season. The team was winning and it was coming home.

The *Domecoming* game, the Saints first in the Superdome since Hurricane Katrina, gave New Orleanians a chance for collective expression, catharsis, and an effervescent moment. The restored Superdome symbolized the impending return of the city from the storm. Construction crews returned the outer shell of the stadium to its normal state; now, the focus shifted to the crowds gathering inside and around *The Dome* on Monday, September 25, 2006, seen in Figure 14¹⁰ on page 111. The Superdome re-opened its doors to New Orleans and the world on this night with a nationally televised celebration that culminated in the Saints facing their arch-rival, the Atlanta Falcons, on ESPN's *Monday Night Football*. Considered "the most symbolically important public event in New Orleans history" (*The Times-Picayune*, 30, September, 2006), locals hoped the Saints' return would usher in a new narrative in this post-Katrina landscape. There was extra meaning to this football game because for locals, the destruction of the Superdome was equivalent to the demise of New York's World Trade Center, and its rehabilitation symbolized the city's resurgence (*The Times-Picayune*, 24, September, 2006). *Domecoming* provided an opportunity for the country to move past the national embarrassment of neglect and failure seen at the Superdome and Morial Convention Center during Hurricane Katrina. This significance was not lost on the players. Brees (2010) said,

What made that night so memorable . . . was not the rivalry. It was what the game symbolized. Over the past year the city had put up with rumors, snide remarks, put-downs, and conjecture that New Orleans was dead. With a city that's below sea-level and a levee system in need of being completely revamped, there was the very real threat of hurricanes coming through the Gulf each year and wreaking damage. Some said, 'Just let it go. There are too many bad memories. The cause is hopeless.' The people of New Orleans

¹⁰ "Domecoming celebration." September 25, 2006. Photo courtesy of Matt Rose, *The Times-Picayune*. <http://www.nola.com/saints/index.ssf/2010/01/new_orleans_saints_return_to_s.html>

didn't buy that, and neither did the team. This was our home. With this game we were going to show everyone the passion and emotion that New Orleans possessed. The team was rising, the people were rising, and the city was rising. On Monday night, we would show the world that New Orleans was not only coming back, we were coming back stronger (151).

The status issues Brees brings up in this quote are the very perceptions that city officials hoped to change with this game. It was a statement about the return of New Orleans as a great American city.

Fans considered the *Domecoming* game “a night that will be remembered for years to come, not only for the spectacle but also for the emotion and spirit, which at times made the gathering feel more like a church recital” (*The Times-Picayune*, 26, September, 2006). Throngs of fans set up tailgate parties nearly fourteen hours prior to the scheduled kickoff (Duncan 2010). National recording artists, the *Goo Goo Dolls* and *Cowboy Mouth* performed free concerts outside the stadium, while inside celebrated bands *Green Day* and *U2* played a pre-game show for ticket holders and the national television audience. Both bands joined together to perform “The Saints Are Coming,” an anthem of return written by the British rock band *The Skids*. The song uses a metaphor of impending bad weather to describe a man's personal trials and fears. U2 and Green Day keyed in on the weather-related lyrics that included, “A drowning sorrow floods the deepest grief, How long now? Until the weather change condemns belief, How long now?” and “The Saints are coming, the Saints are coming. I say no matter how I try, I realize there's no reply” (U2 and GreenDay 2006), using them as an allegory of the plight of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. “The Saints are Coming” entered the city's music and recovery lore, important to the cultural identity of the city.

Saints players said there was an electric environment in the Superdome that night, fueled by an extra boost of energy provided by fans and the city. This electric energy erupted

Figure 15: Gleason's blocked punt



Steve Gleason blocks a punt leading to a Saints' touchdown and an explosion of emotion from the crowd.

(Photograph courtesy *The Times-Picayune*)

into a "Big Bang-like climax" (Ibid., 127) when after stopping the Atlanta Falcons offense early in the first quarter, Saints special teams' player Steve Gleason blocked a punt that was recovered for a touchdown, shown in Figure 15¹¹. The ESPN broadcasters fell silent, but later stated, "There was nothing that could capture the jubilation in the crowd better than the crowd itself" (*The Times-Picayune*, 21, September, 2011). Some fans screamed and jumped, while others held their chest and cried. The blocked punt was a catalyst for thousands in the stadium and throughout the nation to release a landslide of emotions wrought from the pain created by Hurricane Katrina. Gleason remarked,

When I looked up and saw the celebration in the end-zone, I just ran over there and got down on the turf. The roar was just like nothing I have ever

¹¹ "Gleason's Blocked Punt." September 25, 2006. Photograph courtesy of Michael DeMocker, *The Times-Picayune*.
<http://www.nola.com/saints/index.ssf/2011/09/new_orleans_saints_cult_hero_s.html>

heard before. In that moment, I really, honestly felt like I was up in the stands. It was like I was running through the stadium with the fans. I remember looking up at their faces, really looking at them. You don't know those people. You don't know who they are. But I looked them in the face at that moment and thought, I know, brother. I know. I said to myself, 'Well, this is it. This is that moment. This is the rebirth of this team and this city.' (Donnes 2007, 127-128).

What Gleason makes reference to when he says "You don't know those people," and then "I know, brother. I know" is the point where collective identity turns into entitativity, a moment of collective effervescence. The literature likens fandom to an imagined community where one does not necessarily know everyone in a group but everyone understands that they are there, they are real, and they have experienced and been through a lot; "I know, brother. I know." At that moment, the social electricity created through collective effervescence ensnared Gleason and many others in the stadium and those watching the game on television in a frenzy that inspired a realization that a city and its people were unified not just by Hurricane Katrina, but by recovering from Hurricane Katrina. "I know, brother. I know" was a way of saying I know you and what you've been through and I'm here to help, to represent.

The final score of the game read Saints-23, Falcons-3. Fans did not want to leave the *Dome* as they chanted "Who Dat!" and wildly danced in their seats long after the game ended (Donnes 2007). This is not atypical in a game against the Falcons. The Saints and Falcons have a highly contested rivalry that transcends football. Atlanta is one of the rising Sunbelt cities that surpassed New Orleans to become an economic engine for the region. The two cities compete for businesses, citizens, and football supremacy. Each team's fan base revels in the other's losses. Beating the Falcons in "blowout fashion" (winning by a large margin) was cause enough for celebration. More importantly, the game gave New Orleans the punt block,

a powerful metaphor for New Orleans' return to America. The Saints commemorated the moment in 2012 with a statue named "Revival," which depicts Gleason, who has become a local folk hero since developing Lou Gehrig's disease, blocking the punt.

Statues are usually reserved for transcendent players, those who reach historic accomplishments within their respective sports. Former Saints players Rickey Jackson and Willie Roaf received busts in Canton, OH signifying their election into the NFL Hall of Fame. LSU erected a statue honoring former NBA and LSU basketball legend Shaquille O'Neal for his accomplishments. Sports statues signify a player has reached legendary status and is an "all-time great." Gleason was a back-up linebacker mostly used in special teams situations. He was a marginal football player who had one of the most legendary and all-time great moments in the team's and city's history. The statue represents the importance of the moment, and forever captures one of the seminal moments of collective effervescence after the storm.

The Saints made a statement on-the-field, but the city made one off-the-field. New Orleans showed its resilience in the face of tragedy. This moment of revival and rejuvenation further strengthened collective identity in New Orleans.

An unexpected season

The momentum from the *Domecoming* game, coupled with the energy of a fervently supportive city carried the Saints to a 10-6 regular seasons record, good enough to win the National Football Conference (NFC) South Division and reach the post-season playoff tournament. The Saints won their first playoff game at home against the Philadelphia Eagles. The Saints trailed the Eagles early in the game, but in another seminal moment, running back "Duece" McAllister carried two defenders into the end zone for the game winning score.

McAllister's refusal to be tackled short of the goal symbolized the "grit of the team and the city" (*The Times-Picayune*, 2, December, 2010).

The win meant the Saints would face the Chicago Bears in the NFC Championship, the closest the team had been in its history to the Super Bowl. This put both the city and team in a position each had struggled to reach for years. New Orleans procured a professional football team and erected the Superdome to place itself in the "big leagues" with iconic cities like Chicago. The Saints struggled for years with the hopes of one day attaining success on the level of historic NFL teams like the Chicago Bears. The NFC Championship matched *The Windy City* against *The Crescent City*; a team with a storied history against another team that hoped for a story-book ending. The match-up would be reminiscent of the parable of David versus Goliath. This time, though, Goliath won as the Saints lost to Chicago thirty-nine to fourteen.

At the game, taunting Bears fans resurrected the status issues that New Orleanians had fought against since the hurricane. "The taunts . . . went beyond statements of physical superiority or on-field dominance. These taunts reflected the extent to which many Americans resent the people of post-Katrina New Orleans" (*The Times-Picayune*, 24, January, 2007). Bears fans displayed signs that said, "What Katrina didn't finish, we will tonight," or told Saints fans that they should have drowned in the storm's waters (*The Times-Picayune*, 24, January, 2007). The Chicago fans mocking of New Orleans was so intense that it drove one of their own to contact to *The Times-Picayune*:

I enjoyed listening to New Orleans talk radio after the Bears game, hearing truly appreciative Saints fans calling in to express their happiness for the Saints' wonderful season. What a breath of fresh air! Had the Bears lost the game, the vitriol would have flowed like Niagara Falls. In Chicago, we feel like we are owed a winner in every major sport, and a disappointingly large

percentage of fans live vicariously through teams like the Bears. This also helps explain the lousy treatment that some Saints fans received when they visited, which is embarrassing to those of us who want to show visitors the positive side of the town. Thank you, New Orleans, for putting this all into perspective and congratulations on the season (27, January, 2007).

The taunts reflect the contrast in collective identity between Chicago and New Orleans. As the contributor wrote, Chicago expects to win in anything it does. Taken to its extreme, this particular *imagined community* would do anything to protect its collective identity of success, including levying personal attacks on visiting fans based on a natural disaster that decimated their home. Saints fans, alternatively, helped establish a renewed collective identity reflective of the home that was almost lost to the storm. Their collective identity at this time was based on hope and resilience, where playing the game was as important as the game's outcome.

Saints players and fans were disappointed by the loss to the Bears, but New Orleans had more pressing needs. Coach Payton reflected on this point: "The hurt we have right now as an organization eventually will go away, but there's a lot of pain and a lot of things that are disappointing for a lot of other people back in that city that aren't going away real quickly" (*USA Today*, 22, January, 2007). Saints fans were grateful for a surprising 2006 season and showed their appreciation by holding an impromptu rally at the airport as the team plane returned from Chicago. Five hundred Saints fans united at the airport in the rain to welcome back their returning heroes and thank them for what was an incredible and unexpected season, illustrating through their thoughts and presence what it meant to the city (*The Times-Picayune*, 22, January, 2007). The Saints' run was over, but there was still much work to be done.

The Beginning of a Civic Religion

Gleason's punt block was the catalyst for a sense of unity within New Orleans, where one wakes up "in a community that is thinking the same thing, that is feeling—if for a moment—like we all just accomplished something together" (*The Times-Picayune*, 27, September, 2006). New Orleans already had a well-defined identity which residents fought to preserve after the hurricane. What residents discovered was a shared reality, a deeper sense of belonging, or a collective identity. This is not to say that collective identity did not exist in New Orleans prior to the storm. The city has always understood itself to be different than any city in America and has reveled in this fact. Yet, Hurricane Katrina brought about a shared experience which linked the city and its residents in a new way. Chris Rose touched upon this,

This talk of 'we'. . . . If you live and breathe the pungent, sticky-sweet air of south Louisiana, then you must believe . . . that there is something to all this hoopla, this Saints-crazed reverie, this talk of "we" this and "we" that and everyone on the same page of the program, as (like it or not) our football team looms as the symbol of the city's pride and rebirth (*The Times-Picayune*, 19, January, 2007).

Agreement about anything besides celebrations is difficult in New Orleans. The historic racial schisms, the notorious political problems, and even the Saints at times were divisive issues within the Crescent City. Yet, the 2006 season brought about a unifying force that symbolized what New Orleans endured in the past and its challenges for the future. The Saints embodied all the individual atrocity tales experienced by locals during the storm, as well as the status problems of the city at-large, and thus helped to create deeper connections between people and the city. The Saints served simultaneously as a release from an identity attributed to the storm and as the spirit of New Orleans in tangible form.

The media discourse presented the Saints as a beacon of hope for the cultural revival of New Orleans. However, it also alluded to the religious nature of its fans' attachment to the team. The Saints lifted the spirits of the city; much like that of religion's effects on an individual or group. Some locals did not want to overstate the religious effects as it was odd to consider a football team as a blessing from God when so many lives were devastated by the storm. Yet, the punt block, a rarity in football, appeared like a gift from above. Fans responded to the Saints in a manner which this research describes as *Saintsmania*. For the purpose of this research, *Saintsmania* is the all-encompassing obsession with everything related to the Saints, including the team's on-the-field play, its off-the-field happenings, related cultural artifacts (e.g., clothing, music, etc.), and the way this mania permeated New Orleans. This research illustrates the *Saintsmania* that began in 2006, strengthened during the 2009 championship season, and transformed into a type of civic religion with similarities to traditional religion. This civic religion was strengthened during the 2009 championship season, a theme discussed at length in Chapter VI.

Chapter Discussion

The initial supposition that Hurricane Katrina *destroyed* New Orleans' collective identity was incorrect. Typically known as a tourist destination, when people imagined New Orleans, they pictured French Quarter balconies, Bourbon Street revelry, music, and various types of culinary decadence. The city conjured images of Mardi Gras, Jazz Fest, and the spaceship by the interstate, the Superdome. The storm changed the city's identity as a place to visit and lose oneself in the culture and festivities. Imagery of the effects of the storm created status problems constructed by those outside of the city that marked New Orleanians as different. The face of New Orleans changed from the French Quarter to the Superdome,

with its peeling roof, its flooded base, and its hordes of poor and black residents scattered throughout the stadium waiting for aid. The very government entrusted with providing aid to those in need of rescue and help showed a disdain for its people. Politicians pondering penalties for those who remained in their homes during the storm expressed a sentiment that New Orleanians were wrong for staying in their homes. Furthermore, other politicians and public officials mocked the city by saying the storm was a benefit because it cleaned-up the city's public housing issues, providing them with better circumstances in cities where they often unexpectedly landed. New Orleanians were even blamed by religious extremists for collectively causing the storm, as Hurricane Katrina was God's punishment for the city's hedonism.

Much of the U.S., however, supported the city in its efforts to "dry-out" from the storm. Numerous private donors and non-profit groups donated money, time, and other resources to help the people of New Orleans. Still, from an outsider's perspective, New Orleans was a place to pity, a complete reversal of the joy and excitement the city annually brought to thousands of visitors. The author believed this held true for New Orleanians as well—that the city's identity was forever changed after the storm. The discourse, however, presented a different story. The hurricane destroyed homes and infrastructure, scattered families across the country, and took thousands of lives but Hurricane Katrina did not *destroy* the collective identity of New Orleans.

The identity of New Orleans had been weakened, but residents' resolve and resilience, part of its historic identity, was extremely high. This was shown by the discourse and actions of displaced residents who attempted to return home as soon as possible, often to destroyed homes. Yes, some decided to remain in the cities in which they had moved, but the majority just wanted to return to New Orleans. They wanted to return home, even when the

government had no plan for them to do so. Residents wanted to come back to their culture, as evidenced by the increased importance of returning local businesses and events. The restoration of cultural events after the storm like Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest contributed to both the local economy, by showing the nation New Orleans could still host tourists and benefited the local psyche. These events are indicators of what Alter (1985) calls a cultural community, and mark the common culture and identity of the city and activate its hopes and emotions. These events provided New Orleanians an outlet to express residual emotions from the storm, as well as celebrate the life that was almost lost. The New Orleans Saints had a similar effect on the city.

The Saints' influence was enmeshed in the fabric of the narrative of return. Residents gravitated to the Saints as they did with other businesses that returned and reopened in New Orleans. The return of the Saints and the re-opening of the Superdome marked a change in imagery related to Katrina, and changed the status problems placed upon New Orleans by outsiders and showed the resilience of the city and signified its imminent return. What happened inside the Dome was a surprise to many, the Saints started winning. The city rallied further around the team with each win. The Saints acted as a physical manifestation of the collective identity of New Orleans. They were resilience and hope personified in the battle against a nation that judged New Orleans culture and that was represented by Saints' opponents. This is similar to what Castells calls a *defensible identity*, where in the face of disaster or change, whatever people had or whoever they were became their identity (Castells 1997). The disaster of Hurricane Katrina accentuated the New Orleans identity, by reclaiming who New Orleanians were prior to the storm. New Orleans nativism became a *defensible identity* in which the Saints were a tangible weapon used to defend as well as advance New

Orleans' culture throughout the nation. This relationship between the Saints and New Orleans' identity became known as *Saintsmania*.

One of the outcomes of *Saintsmania* in 2006 is it provided optimism for the city's economic revival. It is essential for a tourist economy such as New Orleans to "be open for business." Hurricane Katrina, in effect, closed the city physically and psychically. New Orleans is dependent on its cultural economy, drawing on its history, architecture, music, food, versatility, and the perseverance of its residents. The storm drastically reduced the city's population and limited access to tourist attractions. The storm's wrath spared the French Quarter; even though media depictions led would-be visitors to believe the entirety of the city was consumed by the waters of Lake Pontchartrain.

The re-opening of the Superdome drew the attention of the world and showed New Orleans was "back." Being "back" meant New Orleans was *open for business* from tourists. The Saints' success not only lifted the spirits of fans, but it also brought an uplifting narrative of resilience to New Orleans. Each win increased the relevance of the team and city throughout the nation. Each nationally televised game brought vignettes of hurricane damage, as well as status reports of a resurrected city. Now media images of a flooded city coincided with and were eventually replaced by images of cultural amenities like the French Quarter open for public consumption. *Saintsmania* helped halt the exodus of mega-events like the *Bayou Classic*, *Sugar Bowl*, and *Essence Fest*, that relocated from the city after Hurricane Katrina. It even put New Orleans back in consideration to host the Super Bowl, perhaps the country's largest cultural mega-event. The city received aid from the federal government and from charitable organizations, but the Saints played a considerable role in reversing lingering perceptions created by the storm and jumpstarting the city's cultural economy.

The Saints' return to New Orleans was an unexpected success. The team played an integral role in re-establishing the city's collective identity, and started a change in its own identity. The team had always been central to this community, but their role now was different. They were no longer a team playing in New Orleans; they were a New Orleans' team and became a monument to the city's dark past as well as its hopeful future.

Saintsmania created through the effervescent fan base set the stage for the combination of sports and religion which placed the team in line with other facets of the city's cultural economy, like Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest. Following the team's return in 2006, the Saints strengthened its position as being perceived as a civic religion. This culminated in 2009 when the team appeared in its first Super Bowl.

Chapter VI: The Triumph; *Saintsmania*, Super Bowl, and the Road to Recovery

Introduction

Just over a year after the devastation produced by Hurricane Katrina and the ensuing exodus of its population, the New Orleans held scaled-down versions of two of its annual mega-events, Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest. The city also repaired two important elements of its tourist infrastructure, the Superdome and the Morial Convention Center. 2006 brought the promise of hope to New Orleans. The city was open; utilities were largely restored and citizens worked all over the city to restore their homes to a livable state. The city's population was growing, with the greater New Orleans region reaching eighty-three percent of its pre-Katrina population. Sales tax revenues also rose to eighty-four percent of pre-storm levels (Duncan 2010). Both the airport and cruise ship terminal saw increases in flights and cruise passengers respectively. Neighborhoods rebounded as thousands of voluntourists, those who integrate voluntary service at a destination with traditional elements of service, traveled to New Orleans to repair homes (Voluntourism 2013). The city prepared to break ground on two major projects, "a \$60 million residential conversion at the American Bank Building in downtown New Orleans and a \$200 million overhaul of the Jackson Barracks military base in the Lower Ninth Ward" (*The Times-Picayune*, 26, August, 2007).

The Saints prepared to build on its most successful season to date. Sports pundits considered the Saints the chic selection to play in Super Bowl XLII, with *Sports Illustrated* picking them to win. The team returned with its most important offensive players and restructured its defense, thought to be the team's primary weakness. Both city and team expected a bright future. Every discernible sign of progress in New Orleans, however, was met with dispiriting signs of despair. The storm left a shortage of health care facilities as those open struggled to meet a growing demand of ailments caused by the stresses of recovery

(Rhodes, et al. 2010). The loss of affordable housing stock contributed to New Orleans being a more expensive place to reside. The median cost of renting in 2004 was five hundred sixty-six dollars; in 2006, it increased forty-eight percent to eight hundred thirty-eight dollars (Vigdor 2008, 147). Concurrently, the New Orleans city council voted to raze forty-five hundred units in the city's four largest public housing complexes, further contributing to the city's lack of affordable housing (*The New York Times*, 21, December, 2007). FEMA funds allocated to Louisiana's *Road Home* program for rebuilding and repair were slow to reach their anticipated users, burdened by mounds of bureaucratic red tape. As of January 2007, roughly sixteen months after the storm, the *Road Home* program had received nearly one-hundred thousand applications, but had distributed only one hundred seventy-seven grants (Plyer 2008). Crime was becoming a major problem for the Crescent City. After two hundred eleven murders by the end 2007, New Orleans reclaimed the dubious distinction of "Murder Capital of America" with the highest per capita murder rate in the nation (Winston 2007). Moreover, the Army Corps of Engineers had not yet completed the city's new flood-protection system, again leaving New Orleans at the mercy of the elements.

New Orleans needed strong stewardship to navigate these pitfalls of the recovery process. Unfortunately for the city, its leader, Mayor Ray Nagin, did not provide the direction the city required. Mayor Nagin was known for his racially divisive comments about keeping New Orleans a "Chocolate City," alluding to the displacement of the city's black population, and for his frequent out-of-town trips, than for vision and leadership. Hurricane Katrina provided city officials and stakeholders an unprecedented opportunity to reinvent New Orleans. Mayor Nagin established the Bring Back New Orleans Commission which was charged with developing a plan to guide recovery efforts. What the commission created was a plan that would shrink the city's footprint by turning some New Orleans neighborhoods into

parks. Residents of these neighborhoods quickly protested their homes being turned into green space resulting in the failure of the plan and the commission (Krupa 2010). Mayor Nagin's tenure as New Orleans' top official deteriorated further, plagued by irreverent comments and scandal. When asked about New Orleans' growing crime problem, the mayor responded, "It's not good for us, but it also keeps the New Orleans' brand out there, and it keeps people thinking about our needs" (*The Times-Picayune*, 25, April, 2010), showing an ambivalence bordering on dismissiveness to the city's needs. Late in his second term, several of Nagin's cronies, including his chief technology officer Greg Meffert, were indicted or convicted on federal corruption charges. Years later during this period it would emerge that Nagin himself allegedly accepted bribes and gifts from contractors, acts for which he was indicted for in 2013 (*The Times-Picayune*, 18, January, 2013).

Crime, corruption, and bureaucratic lethargy still plagued New Orleans as it did pre-Katrina. The forward momentum created in 2006 was threatened by the same historic demons the city had battled in the past. Residents, however, still looked forward to cheering on the Saints. As a cultural institution in New Orleans, the team brought solace and comfort to the people (Duncan 2010). Fans' expectations rose after the team's surprising trek to the NFC Championship Game in 2006. The next step was the Super Bowl. The Saints opened the 2007 season on national television against the defending Super Bowl champion Indianapolis Colts. The expectation was a competitive, high-scoring game; the outcome was an embarrassing start to the season with the Saints losing 41-10. The team started the season 0-4 and managed to finish the season with only a 7-9 record. The 2008 season was marginally better, as the team finished with an 8-8 record. Furthermore, acclaimed running back Reggie Bush, the superstar New Orleans longed for, was proving to be a disappointment. Bush's inability to stay healthy was a major cause for concern. He played a full sixteen game season

only once in his five years with the Saints. However, an even bigger issue was his penchant for making ill-timed mistakes. Bush's fumbles, dropped passes, and other mental errors often placed the Saints in poor situations and even cost the team games (Whitten 2011). The Saints selected Bush to elevate the team to new heights, just as the Superdome was built to do the same for New Orleans. Bush, however, was not living up to the stature of the second player selected from the 2006 draft class, let alone becoming a civic icon (*The HoumaToday.com*, 2, February, 2010).

Football experts labeled the team as "one-hit wonders," intimating the Saints of 2006 were merely artifacts of effervescence stimulated briefly by Hurricane Katrina (Payton 2010). Fans viewed the Saints as a microcosm of the city's lack of progress (Duncan 2010). Three seasons after the storm, the team made little progress in rectifying its problems, mainly a poor defense and lack of running game, while the city lacked substantial progress towards its recovery, battling crime, a sluggish economy, and dishonesty from its public officials. Quarterback Drew Brees was one of the bright spots of the Saints. Under his stewardship, the Saints became an offensive juggernaut, with Brees receiving individual accolades including multiple Pro-Bowl selections and a selection as the 2008 NFL Offensive Player of the Year. Despite Brees and a prolific offense, the Saints were once again a mediocre team.

Hurricane Katrina provided New Orleans and the Saints with a symbolic blank canvas on which to paint the city and team's rebirth. The brush strokes, for a time, were new and exciting; however, both reverted quickly to matching the previous canvas stroke for stroke. This regression to old habits was the backdrop of the city and team going into the 2009 NFL season. The proximity to success and lapsing back to mediocrity frustrated residents and served to drain the collective identity and energy created in 2006. It also provided a stage to once again view the effects of sports on collective identity and its deepening into a civic

religion through ritual. The remainder of the chapter will discuss the Saints' improbable trek to the Super Bowl and its transformation to a civic religion in New Orleans.

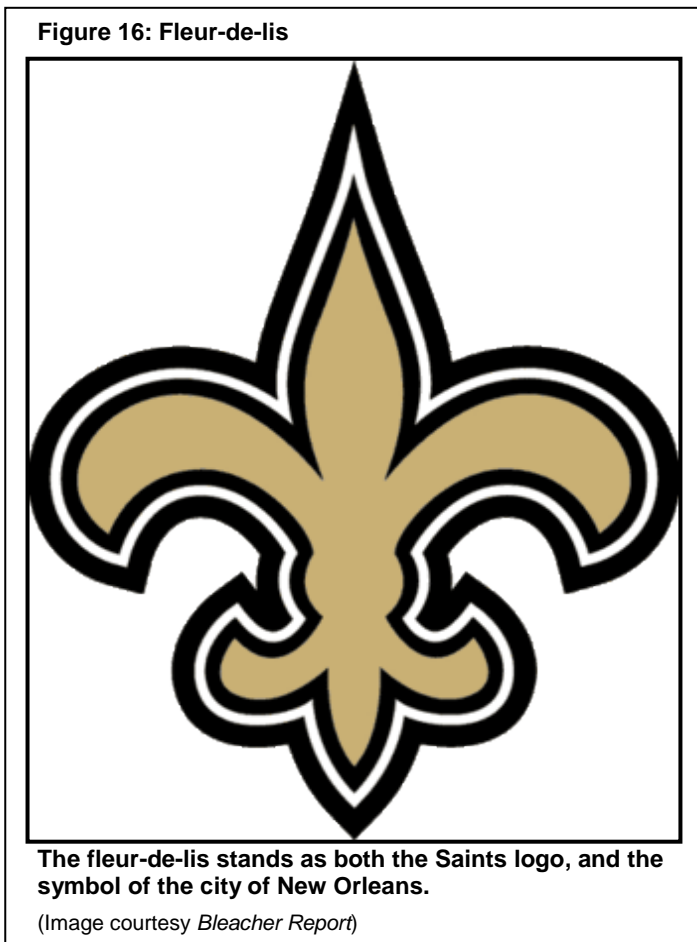
***Saintsmania* and a Super Bowl**

This study argues that *Saintsmania*, entailing the collective identity created around the New Orleans Saints, strengthened into a type of civic religion that started during the 2006 season and reached its peak during the 2009 championship season. This is not to make light of the mainstream idea of religion, but to underscore that sports can produce characteristics resembling religion in the secular sphere. *Saintsmania*, like traditional religion, did not emerge out of thin air, but was built through processes such as identity work, rituals and other religious machinations.

The next section registers the strengthening of *Saintsmania* in 2009 and its transformation into a civic religion. The study posits the 2009 NFL season, in which the Saints won their first Super Bowl, played an overarching role in *Saintsmania*. Winning a league championship is the ultimate goal for any team and its fan base. This study claims that a championship is a major contributor to collective identity, even without indicators of religion. Yet, within the season, there were specific events that transformed this identity into a type of religion. This section takes a chronological approach to understanding the civic religion of *Saintsmania*. It will present several important games within the season, concurrently with particular rituals and totems that contributed to deepening *Saintsmania* into a religion. The first inclination of this started with an icon that both transcends and represents *Saintsmania*, the French symbol the fleur-de-lis.

Saintsmania and the Fleur-de-lis

Durkheim notes that through totems, the collective experience of the intangible emotions produced through rituals becomes tangible substance. In sports, totems are imbued with the power, memory, and emotions of a team and community. The totem most closely associated with New Orleans is the iconic fleur-de-lis seen in Figure 16¹². The fleur-de-lis is the civic symbol of the city and is emblazoned on Saints' helmets and apparel. After



Hurricane Katrina, a local jeweler noted that “items with the fleur-de-lis on them accounted for exactly fifty percent of the retail and online sales” (*The Times-Picayune*, 29, August, 2009). Similarly, the Saints logo, and other variations of the symbol accounted for a large portion of tattoo sales after the storm. The fleur-de-lis presents itself as a way for people to “express their feelings and their love—in this case—their love for this city” (*The Times-Picayune*, 29, August, 2009). The

symbol crossed all socio-economic boundaries, and found its way onto clothing and other items worn by those in all walks of life. One fan showed his devotion for the team by

¹² “Saints Fleur-de-lis Logo.” Uploaded on September 10, 2010. Picture courtesy Alex Barrett, *Bleacher Report* via the New Orleans Saints. <<http://bleacherreport.com/articles/458356-ranking-the-nfl-team-logos/page/5>>

purchasing “candlestick holders, [an] afghan, hats, [and] bookends” all emblazoned with the Saints logo (*The Times-Picayune*, 18, January, 2007). Other fans and businesses boasted the symbol on yard signs or on banners attached to buildings. In extreme cases, some fans pay homage to the team by painting Saints related artwork on their vehicles like the one shown below in Figure 17¹³.

Figure 17: Saints Truck



Fan expresses devotion for the Saints by placing graphics on his truck.

(Photograph courtesy WDSU)

While the fleur-de-lis as a totem is important for the values it represents, it is also important as a communication tool. “In Biblical times, Christians used to identify each other by drawing half of a fish in the sand. A fellow follower would complete the fish design, the two feeling stronger in the community” (*The Times-Picayune*, 6, February, 2010). Using the fleur-de-lis as a common identifier, people are able to connect with one another. Those connections include shared memories and devotion to the team and locale, which explains

¹³ “Saints Truck.” 2010. Photograph courtesy of Darlene123.
< http://ulocal.wdsu.com/_Saints-Truck/photo/7773642/63267.html>

why customers make purchases during the off-season, especially when traveling out-of-town on business or vacation (Randazza 2012). Totems are not only about supporting the team; they also allow connections with others in the imagined community of sport fandom.

Another way that Saints fans communicate with one another is through the use of the call *Who Dat?*. Fans yell “Who dat? Who dat?, Who dat say dey donna beat dem Saints?” as a call to arms when preparing for or during key moments during a game. Even when not related to football games, the refrain *Who Dat?* communicates to others that one is a Saints fan, a New Orleanian, or both. For example, walking in a Washington D.C. shopping center the weekend of the 57th *Presidential Inauguration*, the author saw a lady wearing a fleur-de-lis. He yelled, “Who Dat?” to which the lady responded “Who Dat?” and entered into a conversation about New Orleans. “Who Dat” acted as a verbal totem denoting not only residency, but also membership in an imagined community of the *Who Dat Nation*. *Who Dat?*, and similar social indicators transcend difference. Discussing the effervescence in the community prior to the Saints Super Bowl appearance, Sister Mary Rose Bingham said:

In the French Quarter, you’re walking down the street and someone will yell “Who dat?” and you just turn around and it doesn’t matter who it is and you answer “Who dat.” That’s from the street people to the people dressed out in name-brand clothing. That’s what I love. . . . We’re able to move beyond that and work toward what we have in common.

Both the fleur-de-lis and the *Who Dat?* call expresses the essence of the Saints, acting as the backbone of the *Saintsmania* generated after the storm. They are two of the oldest Saints’ totems that stand as symbols of the movement. Still, the collective energy of the 2009 season consecrated new totems and rituals throughout the season, one of which is discussed in the next section.

Winning Starts with a Ritual

Sacred experiences often take the form of rituals, which imbue totems with power. Rituals are “rule-governed activit[ies] of a symbolic character which draws the attention of participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance” (Carlton-Ford 1992, 367); or “mechanisms of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentary shared reality” (Kidder 2006, 349). Rituals “foster social assimilation . . . and reinforce social solidarity and group cohesion” (Konvalinka, et al. 2011, 8514). The Saints 2009 season started with such a ritual.

Prior to the start of the 2009 season, Brees visited U.S. Marines stationed at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Afterwards, Brees returned to New Orleans with a military-styled chant which he and the team recited prior to each game:

*“One, two! Win, for you!
Three, four! Win, some more!
Five, six! Win, for kicks!
Seven, eight! Win, it’s great!
Nine, ten! Win, again!
Win, again! Win, again!”*

Brees believed the chant brought the team and community together:

[It] is a reminder that as we play, we’re striving to win not just for ourselves but for each other. And we’re not just winning for the team; we’re winning for the city and for our fans too. . . . There was a feeling of ownership and unity with the chant. . . . The cadence became popular, even though most people didn’t understand what we were saying. It gave us an ‘us-against-the-world’ mentality: if you’re part of our team, you’re part of a brotherhood that plays together and trusts each other and will fight to the end (Brees 2010, 252).

Media cameras focused on Brees and the team as they performed this chant during the pregame of the Saints’ first game of the season against the Detroit Lions. Each subsequent

week, cameras televised the chant, marveling at the energy shown by the normally stoic Brees. Saints fans grew accustomed to the chant, although many had no idea what he or the rest of the team were saying. As late as November 2009, the question, “What are the words to the Saints 2009 chant?” appeared on various Internet sites. Absent understanding the words, the chant invigorated both the players on the field and the fans watching in the stands (YouTube 2010). This particular ritual not only reinforced solidarity between players, but also connected the imagined community of Saints fandom to the team.

A Championship Year

The Saints 2009 season was unlike any in the team’s history. The team won its first thirteen games in route to a 16-3 regular season and a league championship. It was not just the wins, however, but how they occurred that strengthened the football fervor around the Saints. Like any championship team, the Saints had various margins of victory; they were dominant in some games, experienced close victories in others, needed a few lucky breaks, and had a few disappointing losses. This is the normal course of sports. What is more important is that the outcome of Saints’ games affects the mood of New Orleans. Mondays are always happier after a victory on Sunday (DeShazier 2011). Patty Stohlman expressed this when describing her husband, a die-hard Saints fan:

When the Saints are winning, he is such a different man. He tells me jokes, he sends me e-mails, mostly about Saints players. . . . He wakes up with a song in his heart and even impersonates [a local car dealer who on commercials sings] ‘Oh, When the Saints Go Marching In,’ complete with the pulling of his pants leg like some kind of young rapper on ‘Who Dat, Who Dat, Who Dat Say They Gonna Beat Dem Saints?’ (Duncan 2010, 185).

The Saints overall dominance that year catapulted New Orleans into football frenzy.

However, there were certain games that stoked collective identity and demonstrated a connection between the team and its fans.

Miami Dolphins, October 25, 2009

Entering the game against the Miami Dolphins, the Saints were 5-0 and had not yet trailed in a game. However, the team found itself down twenty-four to three to the Miami Dolphins before Brees scored a late touchdown before halftime. This was the spark the team needed, as it made a frantic comeback, outscoring Miami 43-10 to win the game. Later, Brees made a comment that the connection to the fans helped the team, saying,

We probably had about ten thousand Saints fans there, all of them decked out in black and gold and Mardi Gras beads. Once again they proved to be the difference in shifting momentum to our favor. We greeted them after the game along the inner bowl of the stadium with high fives and appreciation. It was an awesome sensation (261).

An athlete evoking the support of the fans in victories is common in sports. The collective effervescence in the crowd works its way into the players' psyches giving them an extra boost of energy. That coupled with familiarity of the home stadium leads to a *home-field advantage*. In this instance, the Saints, however, were the road team, and Dolphin fans outnumbered Saints fans. Still, the "awesome sensation" Brees mentions are reflective of effervescence usually found during home games. This speaks to a strong relationship between the team and fans, connected by the temporal proximity of Hurricane Katrina, only four years past. Brees alludes to feeding off the energy provided by the traveling Saints fans. He put this energy into action during the game as he slam-dunked the football over the goalposts after scoring a touchdown that was for him an uncharacteristic display of emotion.

The root of this chapter discusses the importance of rituals in the deepening of the Saints into a civic religion. This still holds true as rituals galvanize subjects around particular interests. Yet, in the context of sports, athletes and spectators alike use rituals to produce favorable outcomes, and gain some control over situations where they have none. If successful, the ritual goes unchanged; if unsuccessful, the ritual is slightly adjusted. Baseball players make specific hand gestures during every at-bat. Basketball players bounce a ball a certain number of times before shooting a free throw. Football players may wear a lucky shirt or not wash socks when having a productive stretch of games. Fans too have their own rituals. Some wear a particular jersey or eat at a specific restaurant, with any detracting behavior possible having deleterious effects on the team. Rituals in these examples serve to garner predictable outcomes in an unpredictable world. Saints fans are no different than other fans in this respect. The dunk, however, affected this particular reality of rituals in New Orleans.

On-the-field, the slam-dunk served as a statement that the Saints were not giving up. Off-the-field, the dunk symbolized a change in the way people thought about the Saints. It served as a seminal moment when fans realized the team could make the improbable, probable. It marked a new reality where the Saints did not only need divine intervention or football magic to affect the outcome of games; they could win on their own. Posters on *Nola.com* after the comeback victory against the Dolphins reflected this sentiment. One poster, darshiva420, wrote,

There [are] thousands of us that think the little rituals we do help our team win and if we change it up our team would lose. What's real weird here is that we all decided to do something different and at the time where thinking (what have I done) and we still win. The only thing we need to win now is our team

what we wear or do or think (or predict) means nothing. The only good luck charm we need is this team (*Nola.com*, 26, October, 2009).

Another, rcanfield, echoed this remark writing,

I did something totally uncharacteristic of myself. First of all, [I] left the house without any of my Saints attire. Secondly, I went to a different location than I normally watch the game. Suddenly, the score is 24-3 and we are losing. My girlfriend said it was because I did not wear my Saints jersey, hat, jacket, Saints Reeboks or bring my Saints football. At one point I started to believe her and damn near left at half time to gear up. Then it registered this is not [the] Saints team of the past. We will finish this game with a victory. I told her to relax and get ready for a comeback. Some Colts fan was in my ear screaming wildcat and talking bad about the Saints. I got so agitated I told him shut the hell up talking to me or I would slap the hell out of him. Then it dawned on me [to] just chill. This is a complete Saints team. So I told the guy hey sit down and enjoy a show in the second half. I guess what I am getting at is this. I have been a Saints fan my entire life and for once I actually have FAITH in our team on both sides of the ball that they will finish games. When I looked at the Saints bench not one player had their head hung down. None was pointing fingers. This was a great sign and suddenly Brees scores before halftime. New ball game. Saints go on to win. So come on Saints nation let's stop being fair weather fans. I know we have been let down in the past, but I think this team is destined to finish in the Super Bowl.

Changing a twenty-one point deficit into a twelve-point victory stoked the talk of destiny: the Saints were going to the Super Bowl. It changed the culture of a team in addition to how fans perceived the team. The Saints were known for finding ways to lose games. Now, they found ways to win games. The Saints gave their fans confidence that winning games was within their hands and not controlled by fate.

“Stand Up and Get Crunk!”

The Saints started another ritual during the course of the 2009 season. Each time the special teams unit lines up after a Saints’ touchdown, the hip hop song “Halftime” by the Ying Yang Twins plays throughout the Superdome. Even though hard rock is the typical genre broadcast at NFL games, of which the Saints use at other points in the game, “Halftime” became the de-facto team anthem. The song features the lyrics “Stand up and get crunk” which the crowds chants in unison while some dance in the stands. “Halftime” was already in the Superdome’s rotation of pre-game music prior to 2009, but surfaced as one of the team’s primary songs when Saints owner/Executive Vice-President Rita Benson LeBlanc noticed the “square types’ in the owner’s suite moved to it, [getting] everyone . . . riled up and excited and wiggling” (*The Times-Picayune*, 23, January, 2010). The song invigorated fans as well; giving some goosebumps upon hearing the first three notes (Hoss 2009). Through the fans, “Halftime” made its way out of the Superdome and onto music playlists around the city. “Halftime” was one of the most popular songs played on local radio stations of all genres or performed by school marching bands. Through *Saintsmania*, the Superdome ritual of playing “Halftime,” like “The Saints are Coming” before it, became part of the cultural lore of New Orleans.

New England Patriots, November 30, 2009

The Saints reached ten wins and zero losses; the city’s simmering enthusiasm reached a boiling point. The city took a cultural back seat to the Saints as several Mardi Gras krewes either rescheduled or canceled parades to avoid a potential conflict with the Super Bowl (*The Times-Picayune*, 11, November, 2009). Commander’s Palace restaurant, another New Orleans institution, announced that for the first time ever it would close on Sunday if the Saints were

in the Super Bowl (*The New York Times*, 28 January, 2010). There was a sense of destiny in the air, as all of New Orleans plotted and planned ahead for the Super Bowl. The Saints, though, prepared for its most significant on-field test so far: facing the New England Patriots.

To understand the importance of the game against the New England is to understand the Patriots' stature in the NFL. The Patriots are the standard-bearer for the league. Just two years earlier, its record was 18-1, falling short of a perfect season with a Super Bowl loss to the New York Giants. Head coach Bill Belichick is considered by many aficionados as a football genius, while Patriots quarterback Tom Brady is regarded as the best in the NFL, if not all-time. Together, the duo won three Super Bowls between 2001 and 2004. The contest between the Saints and Patriots was televised nationally on *Monday Night Football*, and gave a chance for both the Saints and the city to make a statement. A win would not only further solidify the team's place in the NFL, but it would also make the league take notice that the Saints were contenders for the championship. "Even with the Saints being undefeated, there were still people picking the Patriots to win this game. This was about respect" (Neal 2012, 1). The game against the Patriots was similar to the 2006 NFC Championship game against Chicago; the Saints could measure themselves against another one of the NFL's top teams, while the city symbolically competed with a top American city, Boston. A win meant the Patriots and the league had to respect the Saints, and that Boston and the nation had to respect New Orleans. *Monday Night Football* provided another opportunity for the city to showcase itself to a national audience, of which Duncan (2010) writes:

A Carnival-like anticipation filled the air on the day of the game. Tailgaters gathered outside the Superdome as early as 4 a.m. By early afternoon, hundreds congregated in parking lots and on neutral grounds outside the building in anticipation of a game that didn't begin until 7:30 p.m. A local television station aired a three-hour pregame show. Businesses throughout the

city shut down early, as did City Hall and all other city offices. Tulane moved up the tipoff of its men's basketball game against Alabama State from 7 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. (200).

What was expected to be an offensive shootout turned out to be another one-sided victory as the Saints defeated the Patriots 38-17. The Patriots were so thoroughly dominated that with five minutes left in the game, Coach Belichick removed Brady and the rest of the team's key players from the game. The victory raised the team's national profile, as former Saints safety Darren Sharper noted after the game,

It does (validate the Saints) in the public's eye. . .because everyone still believes in the Patriots, and they are one of the best teams in the NFL and everyone and maybe all you [media] guys in here thought they were going to come in here and knock us off. And we took that as a challenge and motivation (*The Times-Picayune*, 1, December, 2009).

Saints fans recognized the magnitude of this victory as well. dstndan posted,

When the so called best team of the times gives up and quits with still five minutes to play there's no question they have been completely beaten and dominated. It doesn't matter who gives the Saints the respect they earned, they're our team, and we, and all of America watched it happen. No questionable calls or referee mistakes, no excuses, it was a definite beating that can't be denied. Belicheck admitted it when he pulled his team out. Beaten. Dominated (*Nola.com*, 2, December 2009).

The win also propelled the Saints into prime position for home-field advantage throughout the playoffs, which meant the road to the Super Bowl would travel through the Superdome.

Typically, the home team has an advantage in winning football games, thus the term home-field advantage. A statistical analysis found that from 2002 to 2012 home teams posted

a .572 winning percentage. The Saints won forty-five home games during this period for a .562 winning percentage (*ESPN.com* 6, September, 2012). With New Orleans hosting the NFC Championship game, the event would have extra meaning given what had transpired in the Superdome four years earlier. Television ratings for the Patriots game showed a strong collective support of the Saints from most of New Orleans. It garnered a 66.7 local television rating, with each point representing 6,340 homes. Local media considered it the largest ratings number the market could ever attain, and noted that sixty-six percent of the whole market being awake, let alone doing one thing at the same time, was hard to imagine (*The Times-Picayune*, 2, December, 2009). The Saints' previous *Monday Night Football* game against the rival Atlanta Falcons drew a 64.4 rating (*The Times-Picayune*, 9 November, 2009). The Saints playing a home game for the right to play in the Super Bowl would take the collective to new heights. Still, the team had more games to play.

"Breesus Christ"

One component of religion is a charismatic spiritual figure. These individuals reflect characteristics indicative of the particular religion, and their leadership skills attract followers. In New Orleans Saints lore, quarterback Drew Brees was and still is that spiritual icon. Brees is known for his abilities both on and off-the-field. The Patriots game garnered national respect for the team, but also placed Brees in an elite class of NFL quarterbacks. Brees earned a perfect quarterback rating in his nearly flawless performance against New England, which further endeared himself to the Crescent City. Fans consider Brees to be "every bit the Saints as the fleur-de-lis" (*Boston Herald*, 4, February, 2010). There is a unique love affair between Brees and the city, due to his embrace of the city's recovery efforts (*Buffalo News*, 7, February, 2010). A career-threatening injury led him to New Orleans, where he sought an opportunity

to sign with the Saints. After Brees and his wife Brittany visited the city, not even one year removed from Hurricane Katrina, he realized New Orleans was where he needed to be, and said the move was a calling from God (Brees 2010). Brees' work in the New Orleans community garnered him the 2006 NFL Walter Payton Man of the Year Award, which honors a player's charity work as well as his abilities on the field.

The importance of Brees to New Orleans was easy to understand from the beginning. Because he was an injured quarterback coming to save a beleaguered franchise in a severely damaged city, fans believed Brees and other players signed after Katrina were a "godsend for the community;" they were people in which the city could invest (*Houston Chronicle*, 16, January, 2010). He is described as an inspirational and a dynamic leader and considered the team's and city's pulse (*Boston Herald*, 4, February, 2010). Brees has reached a revered status in New Orleans, and could be considered the Saints' version of Jesus Christ incarnate. Fans give him credit for resurrecting the franchise and the city by bestowing on him the moniker *Breesus*, shown in Figure 18¹⁴ on page 143. One interviewee describes him as leading the team out of darkness. Moreover, fans linked Brees to Christ by creating apparel with the slogan *Breesus walks on water*. Fan art also depicts him walking on the Mississippi River in front of the St. Louis Cathedral. As a spiritual icon, Brees contributed to the deepening of *Saintsmania* into a civic religion.

¹⁴ "Breesus Christ." December 15, 2009. Photograph courtesy of Joel Hebert. <<http://joelhebert.com/?tag=breesus>>

Fans called Brees and the Saints saviors for how their on-field prowess lifted the spirits of the recovering city and for their good works within the community. Coach Payton and his

Figure 18: *Breesus Christ*



Saints quarterback Drew Brees is considered one of the saviors of New Orleans, likening him to the biblical figure Jesus Christ.

(Image courtesy Joel Hebert)

wife Beth started the *Play It Forward Foundation* to raise money and awareness for the health, education, and welfare issues in disadvantaged communities. Brees and his family created the *Brees Dream Foundation* whose seminal work was raising money to fund repairs of the gym and football field at Lusher High School. Lusher High students expressed excitement for the new facilities saying, “It’s amazing. . . . A few years ago, this field was a cow pasture. . . . [Now our opponents] associate our school and our team with Drew Brees” (*USA Today*, 22, January, 2010). During his rookie year, Reggie Bush donated fifty thousand dollars to aid 250 special needs schools. He also contributed to the renovation of Tad Gormley Stadium, a multi-use

stadium in New Orleans' City Park used for high school football games. Brees and the Saints were the official missionaries of *Saintsmania*. In religion, missions are organized to propagate the faith. The *good works* of Saints players did cast the team in a positive light, yet residents believed it to be more than self-promotion. Patty Glaser, an administrator at Lusher, said, "The Saints are on a mission bigger than going to the Super Bowl. . . . It's a mission of helping rebuild this city" (*USA Today*, 22, January, 2010).

Washington Redskins, December 6, 2009

The deepening of the Saints into a civic religion continued into the final month of the NFL's regular season. The talk of destiny grew with a come-from-behind victory against the Miami Dolphins. The drumbeat toward the Super Bowl was furthered with a convincing victory against the perennial Super Bowl contender New England Patriots. These games showed the Saints were on par with the NFL's elite teams. What followed the Patriots was a match-up against the 3-8 Washington Redskins, a team having a poor season and whose coach eventually was fired. What appeared 'on-paper' to be an easy win for the Saints, then 11-0, was anything but that. The talk of destiny is a part of football conjecture; however, this particular game further aided fans in their belief in the concept.

The Redskins out-performed the Saints for a majority of the game. They were poised to extend their lead going into halftime after Brees threw an interception to a Redskins defender. With the defender en route to the end zone, Saints receiver Robert Meachem chased down the ball carrier, stripped the ball, and scored a game changing touchdown for the Saints. In football terms this is considered a *fluke play*, one that almost never happens, often based more on luck than skill. The Saints still found themselves on the verge of losing when Redskins kicker Sean Suisham missed a short field goal that would have preserved the

team's victory. In the next series of plays, the Saints tied the game with a long touchdown and subsequently won the game in overtime with a short field goal of its own. After the game, Brees said, "I definitely believe in destiny. . . . We've been on the other side of this deal, probably too many times, and maybe it's our time, that we start catching some of the breaks" (Duncan 2010, 204).

The *Monday Night Football* game against the Patriots, just six days prior, had captivated all of New Orleans with its star-power and significance. The Redskins game consumed the city because of the growing collective sense of destiny among fans and residents. Brees touched on something when he said the team had been "on the other side of this deal." Much like its football team, the city seemed to continually experience bad luck, whether it was with public officials, contractors, the federal government, etc. Now, the team experienced a spate of good luck, the most in its franchise history. At first glance, this concept of destiny seems contradictory to the reactions after the game against the Miami Dolphins. Fans said the team did not need luck or rituals; the Saints were good enough to win on their own. The Redskins game brought back with it an old sports cliché; sometimes it is better to be lucky than good. Fans, however, believed the Saints were both. One fan remarked, "Luck is as good as talent. How many times in the past 40 years have games like this one gone against the Saints? It's our turn" (*Nola.com*, 6, December, 2009). Another, dSaintsfan, made a comment that alluded to the team's ability to win even in the direst of odds, saying,

Yep, we had a little luck. But guess what, the Skins should not have let us strip the ball or score the way we did. So, with that being said, we took the game away from them and won. The Skins should not have allowed our Saints to keep it that close. So . . . Who Dat!!! We

took the game away and undefeated the Saints will stay. Hooray!!!

(*Nola.com*, 6, December, 2009)

As *Saintsmania* deepened into a civic religion, what emerges among its participants is recognition of both the profane and the divine. Comments like “I really believe the Lord is on our side this year” (*Nola.com*, 6, December, 2009) speak to this feeling. In some church circles, parishioners believe God bestows blessings. Those who are blessed, however, must fulfill their role in the process by conducting good works, and using the blessings for positive purposes. The fan reactions articulate this point. dSaintsfan’s comment about the team being lucky, but “taking the game away” reflects the thought that the football gods “blessed” the Saints with opportunities to stage a come-back against Washington. Just as parishioners are asked by religious leaders to make the most of their blessings, the Saints made the most of their opportunities by ‘taking’ the win away from Washington. When discussing luck, talent, and the combination of the two, Saints fans are tapping into religious connotations connected to sports.

“New Dats and Who Dats”

The Redskins game leached its way into all parts of New Orleans; servers at local restaurants delivered score updates with each food order, while grocery stores announced the score to shoppers over their sound systems. Fans picked up on its significance, especially those new to the city. *Saintsmania* was at its peak as well; no matter what corner of the city, the Saints performance on game days mattered. One resident stated, “You couldn’t go anywhere . . . without experiencing some form of black and gold sensory overload” (*The Times-Picayune*, 24, January, 2010), referring to multiple kinds of yard signs and banners showing support for the team. The black and gold fleur-de-lis moved from tattoos, hats, and

other paraphernalia to places where football was a considered a diversion like FEMA trailers, semi-abandoned neighborhoods or spray painted on vacant properties. *Saintsmania* also made its way into the workplace, where black and gold was the new uniform. Local hospitals held Saints-themed pep rallies where staff sang *When the Saints Go Marching In* while marching patients in wheelchairs in an impromptu second line parade (*The Times-Picayune*, 6, February, 2010). Doctors wore Saints jerseys when treating patients. School teachers, who viewed the team as a symbol of determination and conviction, created lesson plans based on the team's success. Everyone cared about the same thing, the possibility of a Saints Super Bowl.

Though the premise that all of New Orleans was gripped with *Saintsmania* appears at first glance hyperbole, *Saintsmania* in New Orleans was palpable and omnipresent. One reporter noted the difficulty in reporting on the Saints saying, "Covering the team's success as a news story in a place where civic mood is so tied to its performance—while meeting the fan's enthusiasm level without going over the top, if that's possible—is tricky" (*The Times-Picayune*, 2, November, 2009). The team was less a distraction from the hurricane, and more a way of life, larger than that of any individual. Saints fans raised their fandom to a different level. Snow's conception of identity extension helps explain this phenomenon. Identity extension occurs when an individual escalates the strength of his or her own identity to achieve harmony with the collective. Extension ensues when an individual views himself or herself as a representative for a particular cause that transcends other obligations or identities. Similar to the 2006 season, the Saints again transcended the sport of football. Fans saw the team as a movement of hope and unity for the city, as shown by a sense of "we-ness" in the city that had been invoked in 2006. Through identity extension New Orleanians

inflated their individual fandom of the Saints to a level where *Saintsmania* reached secular religious proportions.

Deep-rooted residents of New Orleans were not the only ones transfixed by *Saintsmania*. The civic fascination with the Saints also created new football fans. “People who do not know a touchdown from a home run have learned how to say *Who Dat*” (*The Times-Picayune*, 14, February, 2010). The local media playfully characterized these freshmen to Saints fandom as *New Dats*. *New Dats* are “people who couldn’t have cared less about football before the Saints’ amazing 2009 season led them to Super Bowl XLIV” (*The Times-Picayune*, 2, February, 2010). These are people who in the past had a disdain for football and for those who enjoy the sport. They did not understand the game or its terminology. One *New Dat* said she used to call the quarters (football game periods) innings (baseball game periods). They saw football and sports in general as a pervasive part of society they could do without. *Saintsmania* engendered strong feelings in long-term Saints fans, and recruited *New Dats*. The city’s reaction to the team is what drew them into the fold. They found “the unified joy, even among people who had been apathetic toward football, as part of a continuing process that began nearly five years ago” of which they had to be a part of to be a New Orleanian (*The Times-Picayune*, 2, February, 2010). One interviewee, Tony Wilson, is originally from Minnesota but considers himself a *New Dat*. Wilson (2012) said,

The moment that I really started to have that Saints fever was the moment I really realized that I was going to be able to make it. . . . I think I realized I made it in the city when I found that I had that connection with the football team and with the rite of passage of, you know, tailgating and hanging out, having fun, getting your jersey It was a sense of I have arrived, essentially, like, this is, this is where I’m supposed to be and it just was like it, it gave me everything I said.

When I first found New Orleans, I said ‘New Orleans’ is me”. . . New Orleans fits me (2012, 2).

Wilson’s comment puts into perspective pieces of the literature discussed in this research. His use of the term, “Saints fever,” which likens the Saints to a type of sickness that can spread from person to person relates to Durkheim’s analysis of collective effervescence. The effervescence produced by the team and its more devoted fans had swelled beyond the walls of the Superdome and reached those previously unaffiliated with the team. Wilson continues by calling his relation to the Saints a “rite of passage” that signified his “arrival” into New Orleans. This is similar to the discussion in Chapter IV on the Saints as a figurative extension of family. Acceptance into a broader New Orleans’ family means showing an allegiance with the city’s team. One of the identity work processes that allowed Wilson’s conversion from Minnesotan to self-proclaimed New Orleanian is called identity amplification.

As a process of identity work, identity amplification can explain this particular *New Dat* sub-phenomenon of *Saintsmania*. Amplification changes one’s identity hierarchy such that a latent identity emerges to assure a connection with the collective (Snow 2001). Some *New-Dats* were apathetic towards the sport of football, but embraced the importance of the Saints and joined the rest of the city in the revelry in order to become a part of the phenomenon taking place. Wilson remarked on the ability of the Saints to draw fans, saying, “the people here embody the Saints and I feel like the Saints embody them and they feel connected to that and. . . even I feel connected to that” (2012, 4). *Saintsmania* attracted a diverse audience not limited by race, gender, sexual orientation, or other demographic markers. One resident noticed the number of jersey-clad Saints fans in a Bourbon Street gay bar and joked, “I’ve never seen so many jersey-wearing football fans there. . . . Usually, you

can't have gay men wearing the same things in the same place at the same time without having an uproar" (*The Times-Picayune*, 2, February, 2010). No matter the person's background or penchant for sports, supporting the Saints became a priority in the city and thus a *Who Dat?* identity was amplified above others.

The Super Fans

Many participants boosted their individual identities through *Saintsmania* to match the fervor found in New Orleans post-Katrina. A few, though, created new Saints-related identities, transforming into *super fans*. Snow's processes of identity work that best explains the super fan phenomenon is what he calls identity transformation. *The Urban Dictionary*, a website carrying whimsical definitions of slang terminology, describes a super fan as "a hardcore fan seen at sporting events, most often football games. . . possibly covered head to toe in body paint, with their favorite players/friends number painted all over them." Body painting, over time, morphed into costumes based on pop-cultural references making the super fan without equal at football games. Every team has its super fans; Saints super fans were born out of the team's "losing ways, [which] forced many Saints fans to seek creative outlets for in-game entertainment" (*The Times-Picayune*, 5, September, 2012). The local newspaper credits Lionel Alphonso with starting the super fan trend in New Orleans "in 1987 when he dressed in a fleur-de-lis-emblazoned pope outfit and blessed the team before each kickoff" (Ibid.). Since then, numerous super fans have appeared, such as Master Chief from the video game series *Halo*, storm troopers from the *Star Wars* movies, and even Optimus Prime from the *Transformers* franchise.

On game days, Saints super fans, shown in Figure 19¹⁵, leave their everyday personas at home and transform into their Saints alter-ego. Snow might call this a form of identity transformation where a person conducts an absolute identity change. Saints super fans strive to exceed the fandom of a

typical fan. Super fan Maximilian Ortiz, who during the week runs a local restaurant but on Sundays is transformed into Darth Saint, believes his role is to energize other fans. Ortiz spends three hours each game day turning into Darth Saint, a black and gold tribute to *Stars Wars* villain Darth Maul, because

Figure 19: Saints Super Fans



Saints fans transformed into super fans as part of Saintsmania.

(Photograph courtesy of *The Times-Picayune*)

he does not “want to go to the game wearing a T-shirt. [He wants] to be the guy in the front row in costume, standing up and yelling” (Ibid.). He attributes this transformation to a love of the Saints, but also to the city he calls home. He said, “It takes a certain breed of person to live in this city. . . . We just want to be different” (Ibid.).

¹⁵ “Saints Super Fans.” December 13, 2009. Picture courtesy *The Times-Picayune*. <http://www.nola.com/living/index.ssf/2009/12/post_19.html>

NFC Championship vs. Minnesota Vikings, January, 24, 2010

The Saints earned a playoff berth by winning their first thirteen games of the season; however, the team lost its final three games and now faced questions of whether or not it would be a Super Bowl contender. Historically, no team that had lost its last three regular season games had advanced to the Super Bowl, a dubious honor the national media repeated regularly. “Visions of past seasonal meltdowns churned in the guts of fans. [Coach] Payton told the players. . . that a lot of fans would jump off the bandwagon at this point” (Duncan 2010, 212). The local newspaper realized the potential effects of the late season lethargy, and asked readers to post a “pep talk” for the Saints to the newspaper’s website (*The Times-Picayune*, 4, January, 2010).

A playoff loss would have been difficult for New Orleans. “New Orleanians know all about devastating losses and the irreparable harm it can inflict on a city’s collective psyche and self-esteem” (*The Times-Picayune*, 21, January, 2010). The Saints’ three game losing streak caused alarm in the *Who Dat Nation*, but did not break Saints fans’ resolve. After a 23-10 loss to the Carolina Panthers in which the team’s starting players did not play, shabba posted,

I think they did the right thing today with all the starters resting. Our momentum will come from the return of the injured guys. We're capable of beating anyone in the league with all hands on deck. Looking forward to the team's march to Miami! (*Nola.com*, 3, January, 2010).

cablefuryguy, echoed shabba’s sentiments writing,

Saints played 3rd stringers in some cases. No reason to lose heart. Although not the only problem, injuries are one of the biggest ones. Get em healthy! That's much more important than winning today's game. #1 seed already secured. New season starts next week (*Nola.com*, 3, January, 2010).

Fans continued to be optimistic in the face of the losing streak because of the Saints' performance over the course of the season. The team suffered through a losing streak, but fans could hang their hat on the fact that bad teams do not win thirteen games in the NFL. Bad teams do not win thirteen games. They were excited at a chance to compete in the playoffs, but still reflective of where the team and city had been and where they were going. Coach Payton said of the fans, "They were thrilled we'd gotten this far. As I walked around downtown, there was almost giddiness in the air. Despite the late-season falloff, people were still coming up and saying, 'You're doing us proud!'" (Payton 2010, 215). Those that did post a "pep talk" made references to the storm; that the Saints have inspired the city; and that this season is destiny. Comments by one Saints fan tapped into a defiant New Orleans when he wrote,

Katrina could not stop us; we fought to come home. Corruption could not stop us; we fought to expose it. Dallas did not really stop us; we fought back valiantly. Any other team that comes to the Dome will see a city and a team that refuses to be defined by others. The naysayers may have forgotten who we are, because they did not know us to begin with. We will define who we are. We are New Orleans. When others count us out, we Finish Strong (*Nola.com*, 16, January, 2010).

BodegaBaySaint, provided a pep talk reflective of the Saints' history of failure and how as a fan (s)he internalized this even in the face of a 13-0 winning streak.

By the time we won eight or nine games this year, I started to feel uncomfortable, strange. So much pressure to keep winning. The "path to perfection" stories on TV started to aggravate me. I had grown accustomed to a long history of the Saints struggling to get more wins than losses, or maybe even make the play-offs and then lose in the first round. This old mentality shaped me as a Saints fan. Deep in my soul, the paper bag is never far away. We are fortunate that the Saints players on the field this year weren't around

decades ago, when this mentality took root in the fans. It's a new day. It's a new team. It's our time. All we need to do is BELIEVE. (*Nola.com, 16, January, 2010*).

A more jovial post by Doug showed confidence of the team's ability while harkening back to superstitious rituals previously discussed in this chapter,

Saints, don't worry. You got this in the BAG. I lived in Japan and watched almost all the games this season in Japan via Internet. Then, I came back in town on Dec. 17 (two days before the Dallas game). Since my return to New Orleans for Christmas and New Year's, the Saints have stumbled a bit. So, it seems that in order for the Saints to win, I need to be in Japan. Don't fret. I left on an 8:40 a.m. flight back to Japan this morning (no lies). When you boys make it to the Super Bowl, don't worry; I promise to watch from Japan and not fly in!
(*Nola.com, 16, January, 2010*)

Despite the team's history, *Saintsmania*, while being challenged, also showed through in the continued optimism of Saints fans. New Orleanians' resilience strengthened by the city's return from Hurricane Katrina and a resolve developed by the team in its numerous come from behind performances made fans optimistic about the pending playoff games. Visions of past failures imbued in the thoughts of the Saints brown paper bag may have loomed in the backs of some fans' mind, but the majority of fans saw this team as different. The Saints and the fans had a will to win, even if for one person it meant flying to Japan to make it happen. Their reinforced determination since Hurricane Katrina and the faith gathered from the team's performance during that season made fans confident that the Saints would successfully march to the Super Bowl.

The Saints rewarded optimistic fans with a 45-14 victory against the Arizona Cardinals in the NFC Divisional Round of the playoffs. The victory meant the Saints would host the

NFC Championship; and the road to the Super Bowl would garner a stop at the Superdome. Only the Minnesota Vikings stood in the Saints and New Orleans' way of reaching the football *Promised Land*. The 2010 NFC Championship was a clash of the two best teams in the conference. The Vikings arrived at the Superdome with Brett Favre, who was considered an all-time great quarterback, Adrian Peterson, one of the best running backs in the NFL, and a defense well-equipped to stop the Saints high-powered offense. Still, Vikings fans were as worried about their team's success as Saints fans, but for very different reasons. This was only the second time in its history the Saints reached the NFC Championship. This was the Vikings' ninth appearance in the conference championship. They had reached the Super Bowl four times, but had yet to win the big game. Moreover, they manufactured ways to lose the big games; the Vikings lost in blowout fashion, by allowing miraculous receptions, by dropping touchdowns in the end-zone, and by missed field-goals. Minnesota resident Jack Healey said, "[The Vikings] have done such a good job of breaking Minnesotans' hearts. They've lost so many (big games), you feel like it's no big deal if they lose another. You've dealt with it before" (*The Times-Picayune*, 21, January, 2010).

Eerily, both the Saints and the Vikings fandom shared a common identity of supporting losing teams. This identity, however, was from two different perspectives. The Saints had little history of success, and thus manufactured methods to enjoy themselves while the team continued to lose. However, in its manifestation as *Saintsmania* the revelry around the Saints continues, but has extended to perceiving the Saints as a winning team. The Vikings' failures, on the other hand, "are of such magnitude that its followers have been left virtually incapable of enjoying success" (Ibid.). Similar to the discourse on the Chicago Bears and their identity of winning which led to poor sportsmanship in some of their fans, tales of the many traumas of the Minnesota Vikings further Wann's (2006) argument that collective

identity through sports fandom is created and altered based on changes to *psychological* and *team related* factors such as history and tradition, and also success. The Bears' past successes have shaped their fans' view of winning as a birthright. Minnesota's past proximity to success but ultimate failures have created a pessimistic identity among a segment of Vikings fans. This same pessimism was found in the Saints fandom, but a change in the psychology of New Orleans (Hurricane Katrina and a strengthening in a New Orleans identity) and a change in the Saints' success (the team reached the NFC Championship game in two of the past four years) led to a change collective identity.

Game Day

The excitement of the Saints' dominant performance against the Cardinals was quickly tempered by the upcoming test against the Vikings. The week of the NFC Championship game was a difficult week for productivity. Neal said,

All I could think about was the game. No matter how much work I tried to accomplish, I'd flip through the Internet looking for Saints highlights and stories on the game. I was proud of the Saints and how they had played, but I really wanted them to win. We were so close to somewhere we'd never been before. To say I wanted it so bad I could taste it, is an overused cliché to say the least, but it's still true. I wanted it so bad that I was nervous the whole week (Neal 2012, 3).

Neal's nervousness matched that of the city, especially on game day. The day started off overcast with a damp chill in the air. Saints' themed music, such as "I Believe," "When the Saints Go Marching In," and of course "Halftime" filled the airwaves of New Orleans' radio stations. A mid-morning stop at a local grocer found Saints fans stocking up on goods for the game. Most people in the stores, whether they were an attendant or a patron, were wearing

black and gold. Saints fans purchased copious amounts of liquor and food for their respective tailgates near the Superdome or parties at home. There was energy in the air that is difficult to describe. One could tell Saints fans were excited for the day. Fans had a proverbial pep-in-their-step and a smile on their faces. The *Who Dat* call could be heard in stores, on sidewalks, and just about anywhere where there were people. There was a jubilant air of happiness on this day in New Orleans. The Saints were one of two dominant teams in the NFL that year (only the Indianapolis Colts finished with a better record at fourteen and two). They had just beaten their first playoff opponent by thirty-one points. They were playing in their home stadium for a trip to the Super Bowl, and had a very good chance of winning. The excitement was understandable, but as Neal alluded there was also pensiveness in the air, which extended to the tailgating sites around the Superdome.

A party atmosphere around the Superdome is standard to Saints games. The NFC Championship game, however, brought tailgaters out to party as early as Friday night when the first RV lots began to fill with “Who Dats” ready for the game (*Nola.com*, 25, January, 2010). In typical fashion, by noon on game day every parking lot near the Superdome was filled with revelers cooking, dancing, and having a good time. The American Football Conference (AFC) Championship game, which featured New Orleans native Peyton Manning and his Indianapolis Colts, was on TV, but it served as background noise for Saints fans. As the day progressed, sunlight broke through the cloud cover which led to a beautiful seventy degree winter’s day in New Orleans. It was an almost perfect day, you could not ask for one better. Still, the tension was palpable, drenching fans like a humid Louisiana summer’s day. In the way collective effervescence of positive energy moves through crowds, so too did the anxiety. In all the pre-game festivities and excitement was also a hint of the unknown. It was the distraction of wanting the team to win, but having the outcome as of yet undecided.

“Before the game, there was excitement like we had rarely seen or felt before,” said season ticket holder Alan Staub, “but there was also apprehension, can we do this?” (2013, 1). This was not a game the Saints could win by thirty-one. The Vikings were as good as, if not better, than the Saints. The pensiveness in the jubilant crowd was the seed of doubt. There were no guarantees. The Saints could lose to the Vikings and the magical season that was would end. What would the Saints have if that happened, a 14-4 record, a division title, and that was all? The team had gotten this far three years prior and had lost to the Chicago Bears. No one, neither fans nor Saints players, wanted to experience that feeling again. It was a reminder of BodegaBaySaint’s comment that “the paper bag is never far away” (*Nola.com, 16, January, 2010*). Regardless of the fun aspects of the day, the game created a tension that would only be diminished when the clock flashed 0:00 at the end of the fourth quarter.

The game against the Vikings was a microcosm of the Saints’ season. There were moments when they resembled the team that started a winning streak of thirteen games strong, scoring with great efficiency, and at other times, the Saints’ stalling offense and porous defense reminded fans why they finished the season with three straight losses. There were also moments when they needed “blessings from the football Gods” and times when they had the talent to capitalize on those blessings. The Saints and Vikings traded touchdowns throughout a highly contested game. The score was tied at twenty-eight late in the fourth quarter with Minnesota moving the ball. The Vikings did not need to score a touchdown; a field goal would win them the game and they were within their kicker’s range. All appeared lost for the Saints. The Vikings called a time out to set up their next few plays. When the offense readied for play, however, they broke the huddle with twelve men and were penalized five yards. This was the turning point of the game for two reasons. First, it broke Minnesota’s momentum. They were moving the ball freely on the Saints’ defense. Second, and more

importantly, it pushed the Vikings out of field goal range, meaning they would need to throw the ball again to move back into field goal range. What may have seemed like an innocuous play at the time was important because of Minnesota's quarterback Brett Favre.

Favre is what football pundits call a *gunslinger*, or a quarterback that believes he can throw a football to any receiver no matter how closely he is guarded. This mentality has led to numerous touchdowns for Favre's teams, but the downside of this style of play is plenty of interceptions to opposing players (*ESPN.com*, 4, March, 2008). His five hundred eight career touchdowns were juxtaposed with three hundred thirty-six interceptions, almost sixty more than the next closest player (*NFL.com*, 13, April, 2013). The penalty forced Favre into a scenario where he had to throw the ball. Favre received the snap, scrambled to his right, but threw the ball across his body to the left where Saints defensive back Tracey Porter intercepted the ball, preserving the tie and setting up overtime. In overtime, the Saints won the coin toss and elected to receive the opening kick. NFL overtimes meant *sudden death*, where the first team to score wins the game—the rule was subsequently changed after this game so that both teams have a chance to score. The Saints moved the ball down the field and into field goal range. Kicker Garrett Hartley, who missed a game winning field goal against Tampa Bay four games earlier, was set to make this kick, but the Vikings called timeout in an attempt to distract him. Saints fan Chris Vergona reflected on that moment saying,

That kick wasn't about the game. That kick was about this season. That kick was about this city recovering from Katrina. That kick was about 40+ years of history of this team just never being able to finish. Teams that looked promising at times only to blow it in the end. This kick was going to finish it all. I looked at Hartley and he wasn't doing the typical kicker motions after an "ice" timeout that consist of staring at the ground or the sky and just pacing. He was going crazy. He was jumping up and down taking in the atmosphere

and just having a generally good time. And all I could think was “He’s going to make this kick. The Saints are going to the Super Bowl (Vergona 2010).

Hartley made the kick sending the Saints to the Super Bowl. In a victory speech, Coach Payton referenced the hole that was once in the Superdome and how important it was to win this game in this stadium. The kick set in motion one of the largest and most important celebrations in New Orleans history. Its significance was not lost on Vergona (2010), who said,

It’s like 40 years of just accepting mediocrity and frustration all came out at once. People were cheering like crazy – and didn’t stop. About 10 or 15 minutes after the game was over, the stadium was still almost full. And people were laughing, cheering, crying, hugging, and everything in between. It was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. I couldn’t do anything but cry and cheer. Simply amazing. And sharing it with some of my best friends made it that much better. All those years of talking about how “we were SO close” were finally ending. As so many bumper stickers before me said “This is ‘next year’.” We made it, and the Saints are going to the Super Bowl. It still hasn’t set in, and no matter how many times we say it, it’s not getting old (1).

Vergona’s comments touch on an important point that will be discussed again in Chapter VII. His statement that, “It’s like 40 years of just accepting mediocrity and frustration all came out at once,” reflects on the New Orleans’ contradictions discussed in Chapter IV, illustrating how residents have come to accept mediocrity as a given, whether it is related to city services or its football team. This is a part of the New Orleans identity that Vergona referenced as “[coming] out all at once.” The mediocrity of statements like “we were so close” and “wait until next year” could no longer be accepted because “This is ‘next year’.” New Orleanians would no longer have to accept mediocrity because the Saints proved New Orleans could do better.

Vergona's response to Hartley's kick was much like that of many Saints fans across the city. In a sign of extreme effervescence, he and thousands around the city "caught the Holy Ghost."

"Catching the Holy Ghost"

There is a term used in particular church denominations called "Catching the Holy Ghost" (Woodard 2011). During a church service, usually in the midst of a song, prayer, or the pastor's message, one or several members of the congregation unexpectedly burst into fits of emotion, such as uncontrollable sobbing, boisterous yells, or dancing around the church sanctuary. Outside observers may find these actions surprising; however, those who have experienced it say they can feel a spirit slowly growing inside of them until it bursts out. Parishioners say the root of a particular "Holy Ghost" experience generally stems from some form of strife in their lives they had not yet resolved.

Durkheim's idea of collective effervescence best describes "catching the Holy Ghost," and this is also an apt description of Saints fans after the NFC Championship game. Fans at the game and across the city held hands in silent prayer in hopes that Hartley's game winning field goal would hold true through the uprights. When it did, fans released an outburst of emotion throughout the city. Those watching on television took to the streets near the Superdome and in the French Quarter and cheered together. Hysterical fans hugged, high-fived, and yelled "Who Dat" until their voices went hoarse. Some even jumped up and down on the tops of cars. A singular yell of "Who Dat?" was met with a chorus of "Who Dats?" Many fans walked around in disbelief, in awe that their favorite team was finally going to the Super Bowl. The emotion was as intense inside the Superdome. Staub (2013) said, "I have NEVER seen so much excitement, happiness, and crying before. Pure elation best describes

the Dome” (1). The Saints’ victory brought the partying in New Orleans to a different level. A staff writer for *The Times-Picayune* wrote,

The magnitude of the ensuing celebration was so great, with the dome thundering, fireworks exploding in the streets, horns honking and Bourbon Street instantly filling with dancers, screaming revelers, that the only comparison [one] could think of was to the celebrations that erupted when World War II ended (31, January, 2010).

The collective identity that for years had manifested around the Saints in New Orleans represented that of the underdog (*The Times-Picayune*, 10, December, 2006). New Orleanians experienced so much suffering, first as devoted Saints fan, and then as victims of Hurricane Katrina. The victories were now something everyone shared together. The atrocity tales of past failures gave way to new stories of success and shifted the focus, within the identity work framework, to that of a positive identity. The Saints NFC Championship victory did not solve all of New Orleans’ problems. It did, however, provide residents with another seminal moment in the restoration of the city. The positivity from the victories gave a “special feeling [that] went from your head to your toes and straight to the heart” (*Houston Chronicle*, 6, February, 2010). Similar to the blocked punt three season’s earlier, fans inside the Superdome expressed their ecstasy in personal ways. Some sat in silent awe, others were in tears finding it difficult to “keep it together” because of what they had experienced in Katrina. A number even ran through the aisles, unable to control the energy within, feeding off the power of those surrounding them. It was an unprecedented night of celebration where despite the huge and rowdy crowds there were no reports of violence or property damage and only minor crowd related incidents (*The Times-Picayune*, 26, January, 2010). This night was not a night for destruction and fighting. It was a time for a communal catharsis in which *Times Picayune* columnist Jarvis DeBerry wrote,

Almost five years after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, many New Orleanians continue to hurt. . . . Because they do, Sunday's contest was more than 'just a game.' It was . . . an opportunity for the people of this city to gather together and to yell ourselves back into some semblance of wholeness. . . . A football game probably shouldn't mean as much as Sunday night's game meant to Saints fans, but it did, and fortunately for us it ended with the biggest victory in the history of the franchise (Duncan 2010, 246).

The game acted an affirmation of and for New Orleans identity. The Saints showed that New Orleans, which for years toiled in mediocrity while other cities and teams gained prominence, could produce a winner. The win also confirmed what residents had already known, that they were right to pick up the water-soaked pieces of their lives and move forward after Hurricane Katrina. New Orleans is like a puzzle where the pieces of different shapes and sizes interlock to make a scenic picture. The storm washed away key pieces from this puzzle, and threatened the integrity of the picture. New Orleanians, however, searched for the pieces, finding them in the return of its citizens and its cultural traditions, including Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest. The Saints return to the city provided additional pieces, but their NFC Championship victory provided the impetus for fans to complete the puzzle by, as DeBerry wrote, "yell[ing] ourselves back into some semblance of wholeness." The victory, for some, completed the difficult journey back from Hurricane Katrina.

The "Buddy D" Parade, January 30, 2010

Celebration of the Saints was not limited to the streets of New Orleans. It also appeared in the hearts and minds of some Saints fans. A subset of the media discourse focused on die-hard fans who had passed away before seeing their Saints in the Super Bowl. Saints games are as much a family affair as a sporting event. Relatives recalled the game day

rituals of their loved ones, some dating as far back as the Saints' first game in Tulane Stadium. Several fans paid homage to family and friends by marking graves with Saints' paraphernalia such as flags, umbrellas, balloons, and beads brazened with the fleur-de-lis (*The Times-Picayune*, 5, February, 2010). Others paid their respects to lost loved ones by making the trek to Miami for the Super Bowl. Former Saints quarterback and local sports radio host Bobby Hebert paid respect to a local icon by parading through the French Quarter in a dress.

A week prior to Super Bowl XLIV, Hebert and thousands of men walked through the French Quarter in dresses in honor of local legend Bernard "Buddy D." Diliberto. Diliberto was a New Orleans sportscaster and radio talk show host known for "calling it as he saw it." Diliberto's off the cuff remarks, mostly critical of the then foundering Saints, made him revered by some, hated by others, but respected by all. Many consider him to be the "official media representative of what [is] now called the Who Dat Nation" (*The Times-Picayune*, 2, February, 2010). After starting the 1993 season 5-0, Diliberto predicted the Saints would not make the playoffs, even going as far as saying that if the team did, he would parade down Bourbon Street in a dress. Diliberto passed away from a heart attack in 2005 and could not see his Saints in the big game. The Who Dats marched in his honor one week before the Saints played in the Super Bowl, citing Diliberto's years of laboring in "the ongoing exercise of futility and frustration that was New Orleans Saints football" (*The Times-Picayune*, 13, January, 2007). The sentiment of New Orleans was that Buddy D was leading the spirits in cheering the Saints to unprecedented success. The honoring of "Buddy D" shows the further deepening of *Saintsmania* into a civic religion. Diliberto was the fallen apostle of the *Who Dat Nation* and was honored as such.

Super Bowl vs. Indianapolis Colts, February 7, 2010

The mood in New Orleans changed after the NFC Championship. The tension of the game had lifted as the Saints were now in the Super Bowl. The atmosphere during Super Bowl week was more relaxed than the previous one. “We had accomplished our goal and were happy to be in the moment. Winning the Super Bowl would be a great finish, but losing would have taken nothing away from the season” (Neal 2012). Super Bowl Sunday was another mild, sunlit New Orleans day. Fans unable to travel to Miami for the game, made the pilgrimage to Bourbon Street, the “Wailing Wall” of *Saintsmania*, for pre-game food and spirits. *Who Dats* sauntered through New Orleans without a care in the world, relishing in the team’s first championship game. The streets emptied as game time approached. Fans either sought a stool at a local bar or made their way to Super Bowl parties across the city. When the game finally kicked-off, the streets were quiet.

Super Bowl XLIV matched the top teams in the NFL: the New Orleans Saints and the Indianapolis Colts. The narrative of this game featured New Orleans’ ‘favorite son’ and Colts quarterback Peyton Manning against his hometown team. The Saints started slowly, falling behind 10-0. Their high-powered offense managed only two field goals and trailed 10-6 at halftime. Coach Payton decided to run a play he called *Ambush* to start the second half. *Ambush* was an onside kick, a short kick that can be recovered by the kicking team after traveling ten yards. Onside kicks are typically reserved for end of game situations when a trailing team seeks to gain possession of the football in a last ditch effort to score. Onside kicks are a rarity after halftime and no team had ever attempted one in the heightened atmosphere of the Super Bowl (Payton 2010). If the kick failed, the Colts would take possession of the football deep in Saints territory, again adding pressure to the team’s defense to stop the Colts’ potent offense.

The Saints launched *Ambush* to the surprise of the Colts. After a struggle, Saints safety Chris Reis came away with the ball and gave the Saints an unexpected possession. The Saints again had needed some luck to recover the ball, but now were in the proper position to do so. *Ambush* provided the Saints with the momentum needed to eventually take a touchdown lead over the Colts. The teams traded touchdowns throughout the second half, until the Saints gained a seven point lead late in the fourth quarter. Manning, poised to score a game-tying touchdown, drove the Colts down the field, but an interception return for a touchdown by Saints cornerback Tracey Porter doubled the Saints' lead. The Saints stopped the Colts on its final drive to preserve a thirty-one to seventeen Super Bowl XLIV victory.

Who Dat Nation united

In a scene reminiscent of the post-NFC Championship celebration two weeks earlier, New Orleans exploded with joy after the Saints' historic win. French Quarter revelers spilled onto the streets cheering and hugging, some even crying. Similar scenes occurred in neighborhoods across the city; residents fled their homes into the streets to celebrate with the Saints fandom. The race, creed, or orientation of nearby persons did not matter; all that mattered was if the person was wearing black and gold. Any factor of social difference, especially race, was lost in the festive atmosphere created by *Saintsmania*.

Hurricane Katrina had uncovered racial stereotypes and racist sentiments entrenched in New Orleans. Blacks had been positioned as the 'face' of the storm's victims based on their lack of resources that would have helped escape rising floodwaters; their so-called "looting" for food while their white counterparts "found" food, and the sea of black faces that had taken refuge in the Superdome. Many social issues related to race and class in New Orleans and the nation that had yet to be resolved surfaced after the hurricane. Still, even as U.S. society finds

more ways to divide itself into smaller factions, football and sports in general, act as a uniting force, if only during particular sporting events like championship games.

Football created a different type of bond in New Orleans. The Saints were “a tremendous unifying factor for [the] community. On any given Sunday afternoon, the Superdome reflects the special gumbo of people, of races, culture that makes New Orleans special” (*The Times-Picayune*, 19, December, 2009). Blacks and whites are neighbors at tailgates, sharing food, drink, music, and space. The Saints represent the best of what New Orleanians want to and could be. The team united “white and black, rich and poor, [and] conservative and liberals under one cause” (*The Times-Picayune*, 3, February, 2010). The Saints, during this improbable run, diverted attention away from that which divided residents, and focused attention instead on what bound them together, the struggle to recover from the storm. Though Hurricane Katrina did disproportionately affect blacks, “it affected everyone in very profound ways,” and the Saints helped rally people around this fact (Williams 2012).

Given New Orleans’ well documented racial history, a narrative of racial unity appeared unlikely. Interviewees in this study, however, make the case that racial issues are not as pronounced as they may appear, and some portrayed race in the city as more of a socio-economic problem (Alexander 2012). Interviewees generally portrayed race relations in New Orleans as complex, but not untenable. Native New Orleanian Danielle Jenkins (2012) said,

We exist on multiple levels here together. On that man to man interaction, when it comes time to have a civic festival, you’re not going to have a racial problem. When you deal with the day-to-day interactions and have legally authoritative bodies, you see the institutional racism. So I think it’s the institutional racism, I’m not so sure it’s on a personal level these days. I think we’ve worked through that on a large scale (3).

Others describe New Orleans as different than other parts of the country because the various races coexist without an abundance of problems. This is in part because of the layout of city's neighborhoods where blacks and whites live within close proximity to one another. Yet,

Figure 20: Saintsmania transcends race



Saints fans of different backgrounds embraced one another after victories in the NFL Championship and Super Bowl.

(Photograph by *The Times-Picayune*)

blacks also discussed a lack of meaningful interaction with whites. Clarifying this point, local resident Jules Goins (2012) said, “You can be invited to a barbecue on the weekends, but how are you interacting on Monday and Tuesday?” (3). New Orleans is by

no means a racial utopia, yet residents of different racial backgrounds have found a way to live together peacefully, ironically in one of the most “dangerous” cities in America if not the world.

The Saints provide another mechanism to temper individual identity when it pertains to racial and class difference in the city as shown above in Figure 20¹⁶. Revelers coexist during Mardi Gras, but crowds are largely segregated based on how parade routes dissect neighborhoods. Jazz Fest draws a very diverse crowd, which is still segregated in part by

¹⁶ “Saintsmania Transcends Race.” February, 1, 2010. Photograph courtesy of Susan Poag, *The Times-Picayune*. <http://www.nola.com/saints/index.ssf/2010/02/new_orleans_saints_fans_build.html>

genre, with blacks concentrated at stages in Congo Square and the Gospel Tent that feature African American recording artists. The Saints allowed the city the opportunity to coalesce around one source that gives residents a rare chance to speak the same vernacular. The joy of *Saintsmania* rose above differences of social and economic standing as everyone cheered for the same cause on game days. The Saints did not solve systemic racial issues found in New Orleans, but it did provide residents an opportunity to see something other than black and white, and that was black and gold.

Lombardi Gras, February 9, 2010

On their own accord, New Orleans civic officials decided to hold a victory parade for the Saints regardless of the outcome of the Super Bowl. “Win or lose” victory parades are a rarity as losing teams typically decline the offer. City officials in Phoenix and Glendale offered to hold a parade for the Arizona Cardinals after its Super Bowl XLIII loss to the Pittsburgh Steelers in 2009, but the team opted instead for a smaller pep rally at the airport. Likewise, the Chicago Bears declined a parade after their loss to the Indianapolis Colts in Super Bowl XLI (*The Times-Picayune*, 28, January 2010). The Saints did not have to decline the offer since they won Super Bowl XLIV in 2007. Organizers dubbed the parade *Lombardi Gras*, combining the name of the championship trophy, *The Vince Lombardi Trophy*, with that of the annual civic celebration of Mardi Gras. *Lombardi Gras* marked the first of eight straight days of Mardi Gras parades, however, it was the region’s most important. The city wanted to show that no other city could hold a Super Bowl parade like New Orleans, because “that’s what the people of New Orleans do. Once you’ve been to a Mardi Gras Parade, you are ruined for parades anywhere else” (Payton 2010, 286).

The night of Tuesday, February 9, 2010, more than eight hundred thousand fans—more than double the city’s population—lined the streets of downtown New Orleans to welcome their Super Bowl Champions: the New Orleans Saints. Victory parades are commonly held in the daytime, however, New Orleans officials scheduled the parade in the evening to ensure as many people as possible had a chance to attend. Despite the frigid weather—that caused the city to enact its freeze plan—city officials said they noticed “more cars than usual with plates from Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas and other states. Everybody wanted to participate in this celebration” (*The Times-Picayune*, 11, February, 2010).

Despite the biting cold, New Orleans was once again afforded beautiful weather with a sun-drenched blue sky. The parade did not start until the evening, but people made their way to the route early. Gordon Russell of *The Times-Picayune* explains the magnitude of the crowd writing,

The parade made Tuesday a quasi-holiday in and around the city – the second in a row. After celebrating late into the night Sunday, many residents in the metro area took Monday off. Some schools reported attendance was down by nearly half. . . . In fact, it was so crowded that outlying areas were empty. As the parade rolled at 5 p.m., parts of Metairie were as empty as they’d normally be on a Sunday morning. Supermarkets were nearly empty (*10, February, 2010*).

The makeup of the crowd seemed like every man, woman, and child from New Orleans and the surrounding region that could fit onto the parade route was present. The parade route was altered from a normally longer six to seven mile route that starts in the Uptown neighborhoods of New Orleans to a condensed 3.7 mile route which started at the Superdome. Thus, the eight hundred thousand in attendance stood fifteen deep along the

route. Occasionally during Mardi Gras, close physical proximities breed emotional flare-ups, especially on more crowded portions of parade routes, although on this night, no one seemed to mind. The crowd was electric; the effervescence flowed through the horde of revelers like the flu bug at an elementary school. *Saintsmania* was infectious, bringing about smiles, cheers, and strangely peace. There was peacefulness in the crowd, the likes the author has only seen in Washington D.C. during the first inauguration of President Barack Obama. The upcoming parade engendered the feeling that “We had just done something special.” It may be a bit of hyperbole to say, but all of New Orleans was happy, if that could be imagined.

Most fans wore their black and gold apparel underneath their winter attire, however, some super fans made appearances in their alter-egos. Present also were men in dresses, paying further homage to “Buddy D.” Revelers were abuzz waiting for the parade to roll. The crowd roared when the first police sirens wailed signifying the parade was nearing. The first person to appear was not a Saints player, but a public official. Mayor-elect Mitch Landrieu rolled down the route to the applause of the crowd. New Orleanians elected Landrieu on the Saturday before the Super Bowl. His election, like the Saints championship, signified the hope of a new direction for New Orleans, which will be discussed in the next chapter. After the Mayor-elect were the first responders from what seemed to be every parish in the state and some from nearby Mississippi. Lombardi Gras was held in New Orleans, but was significant throughout the Gulf South region. *Saintsmania* helped the nation “understand what a big deal the Saints are to not only New Orleans but also Louisiana and the Gulf region especially with Hurricane Katrina a recent and disturbing memory” (*USA Today*, 11, February, 2010).

The sight of the first float brought generated an intense energy from the crowd that could only be matched by the outburst seen after the game-winning field goal that sent the Saints to the Super Bowl. Fans closer to the street reached out, with hopes of procuring

Figure 21: Lombardi Gras Parade



Saints players and jubilant fans celebrate the team's victory in the 2010 NFL Super Bowl.

(Photograph courtesy *Bumpkin on a Swing*)

beads, cups, or other Mardi Gras-styled throws the players were giving out. Fans further away just shouted and yelled, “Thank you,” showing “a humble appreciation for their beloved team” (*Christian Science Monitor*, 9, February 2010), as seen in Figure 21¹⁷. The parade continued through the Central Business District (CBD) with players, coaches and staff also enjoying the moment. Brees, at one point, looked as if he wanted to jump off the float and join the fans.

¹⁷ “Lombardi Gras Parade.” February 9, 2010. Photograph courtesy of *Bumpkin on a Swing*. <<http://bumpkinonaswing.blogspot.com/2010/02/dat-tuesday-lombardi-gras.html>>

For many of the players, this was the first time aboard a Mardi Gras float, which in themselves played a significant role in the celebration. City officials borrowed the floats from well-known Carnival krewes, such as Endymion, Bacchus, Zulu, and Rex, who were scheduled to parade a few weeks later. This was special because “these organizations would never put their floats out, certainly not for other parades, but they’re doing it for the Saints and for the city of New Orleans” (*The Times-Picayune*, 9, February, 2010). This was the first and maybe last time in New Orleans history that these floats would come together at the same time.

Lombardi Gras, via *Saintsmania*, also embraced racial difference by using parade floats of both historically white and black organizations. Less than twenty years earlier, the discriminatory practices of Mardi Gras krewes were the subject of a heated public debate in New Orleans. In 1991, then Councilwoman Dorothy Mae Taylor “moved to pass a law demanding that the private krewes that populated Carnival open their doors to all, without regard to race, gender or several other identity traits, as a condition of receiving a city parade permit” (*The Times-Picayune*, 12, February, 2012). The law stemmed from the perception that elite Mardi Gras krewes, such as Rex and Proteus, held economic opportunities only made available to their all-white membership. Two krewes, Comus and Momus, showed their anger over the proposed law by cancelling their parades. Comus never paraded again. The city and krewes reached a compromise where the krewes would sign an affidavit stating they would make a good faith effort not to discriminate on the basis of race (*Ibid.*). *Lombardi Gras* allowed krewes to parade together, just as *Saintsmania* allowed for a suspension of race, if only on game days. One Saints fan remarked, “Not since 9/11 have I felt anything like this. . . . All the divisions feel like they’re gone. It’s like for once we’re all on the same page right?” (Duncan 2010, 286).

The parade rolled along the streets of New Orleans as bands from local high schools and colleges marched the 3.7 mile parade route from the Superdome to the Morial Convention Center performing *Halftime*, the team's anthem. The convention center, or near it, marks the end of the parades that follow the Uptown route. This night, however, the route indicated more than just the ending of a parade. The Superdome and the Morial Convention Center were two of the three epicenters of Hurricane Katrina (the Lower Ninth Ward being the third). On August 29, 2005, these sites represented the rocky start of the voyage on which both the Saints and the city of New Orleans had embarked. More than four years later, on February 9, 2010, they marked a symbolic end to the storm. The Saints had revealed there were paths out of the storm, ones that were built on hard work, perseverance and a shared sense of "we-ness" that defines collective identity. *Saintsmania* had shown New Orleans that there were better days ahead, a concept found in many religions.

Lombardi Gras received national and international coverage from media outlets including ESPN, NFL Network, and a live CNN broadcast from the parade route. Reporters from the New York Times and the British Broadcasting Channel (BBC) also covered the parade. The same cameras that had focused on the devastation in New Orleans four years prior now filmed its celebrated resurrection.

The Saints represented the spirit and pride of a battered region and the *Lombardi Gras* parade represented the symbolic culmination of one of the worst disasters, both natural and man-made, in American history. *Lombardi Gras* should also be viewed within the context of collective identity formation. The parade, like *Domecoming* and the two previous championship games acted as another moment of entitativity for this particular imagined community. The *Saintsmania* that unified people from different backgrounds and locales had its own civic ceremony, which signified its existence to the community and the viewing

audience. *Lombardi Gras* was another instance of New Orleans fiercely holding onto its traditions and celebrating the “local” almost lost to Hurricane Katrina. This is consistent with Castells’ notion where people form a collective identity to protect the locality. Protecting the local, in this case, was intertwined with the recovery of New Orleans.

Winning Starts with a Ritual (Revisited)

At the conclusion of *Lombardi Gras*, Brees and the Saints’ offensive line made a surprise appearance at *Lucy’s*, a local pub near the end of the parade route. Brees took the stage and taught the crowd the actual words to the pre-game chant that started the season. Resembling a pastor in church, the crowd repeated every word Brees as if participating in a responsive reading of a scripture. The realization of the words Brees had emphatically yelled for nineteen games buzzed through the crowd until the final two words, “Win, Again! Win, Again!” caused a jubilant uproar (Piliepr 2010). This ritual could have bookended a remarkable season where the exaltation of *Saintsmania* into a civic religion captured the hearts and minds of so many in New Orleans. However, one more ritual was necessary and needed for the Saints to symbolically rid itself of its past.

Jazz funeral for the *Aints Paper Bag*, February 20, 2010

The Saints reached the apex of NFL mountaintop by winning the Super Bowl. New Orleans now could retire one of the most negative symbols in franchise history, the *Aints* paper bag head. The Saints gained national attention for their bag headed fans who, though still devoted, found watching the Saints difficult. The bag head represented one of the worst periods in Saints’ history. Saints fans held a uniquely New Orleans styled jazz funeral for the

“New Orleans Aints Paper Bag”, shown in Figure 22¹⁸, to figuratively and literally bury the past. An organizer of the funeral wrote the obituary as, “New Orleans Aints Paper Bag, born 1980, died February 7, 2010, was a resident of New Orleans for a short time. Survived by no immediate family, but a host of devoted fans” (*The Times-Picayune*, 19, February, 2010).

Figure 22: Aints Paper Bag Funeral



After winning the Super Bowl, Saints fans held a traditional New Orleans jazz funeral for the Aints paper bag worn by fans during the 1980s.

(Photograph by author)

¹⁸ “Aints Paper Bag Funeral.” February 20, 2010. Photograph courtesy of Brandon Haynes.

Chapter Discussion

This chapter has taken a chronological approach in showing how building effervescence around the Saints' on-field actions, dubbed *Saintsmania*, when combined with various off-field rituals deepened the collective identity around the team, turning it into a civic religion. Yet, another question that could be asked in this case is: why was New Orleans susceptible to "religion" in the first place? The simple answer would include the destruction brought by Hurricane Katrina, a fact discussed at length throughout this research. There are, however, factors that predate the hurricane that made New Orleans amenable to *Saintsmania* as a civic religion. *Saintsmania* manifested itself as civic religion in part because of the city's own religious heritage.

New Orleans is a city steeped in religion traditions. Although free to practice any religion, Catholicism is the dominant religious denomination in the city. Many of the city's cultural traditions, including its parochial schools, street names, and festivals, including Mardi Gras, are aspects of New Orleans' Catholic traditions. The public persona of Mardi Gras may appear as a festival of debaucheries, but the holiday originated in the Catholic Church as the last day before the start of Lent, a period during which parishioners fast and repent until Easter. The importance of religion in New Orleans even crossed into the realm of sports. State officials visited with former New Orleans Archbishop Phillip Hannan to receive the church's blessings before making Saints the football club's nickname. They wanted to ensure they were not offending the church by using the name (*The Times-Picayune*, 23, May, 2010). Furthermore, Father Tony Ricard published prayers throughout the season for the football team's success, recognizing their importance to the community (*The Times-Picayune*, 12, January, 2010). New Orleans' religious culture is also linked to the use of an African-Afro Caribbean-Roman Catholic hybrid form of Voodoo, made famous by Marie Laveau. Voodoo is

practiced, however, with the frequency portrayed by the tourism and entertainment industries. Still, with various other denominations represented in the city, several of the city's customs are linked to religion, and with the football team named as such, these facts demonstrate New Orleans' propensity for religion prior to Hurricane Katrina.

New Orleans' predilection for religion made it more susceptible to seeing religion in the occurrences of everyday life and in a symbolic search for answers to unexplainable questions. "Why did Hurricane Katrina strike New Orleans?" There are scientific ways to answer this question. These do not satisfy a religious curiosity based on a belief system that there are mysterious, unseen forces that guide our actions, reflected in Miller's thoughts on religion as an "effort to conceive of the inconceivable and express the inexpressible" (Durkheim 2001, 26). No one truly knows why Hurricane Katrina veered toward New Orleans and not away like many storms before it, nor can the scientific happenings that went into creating a hurricane and turning it towards the city be explained. Absent of satisfying answers, people choose religion to "search for meaning, particularly during times of uncertainty" (Azar 2010). People are already "primed to see signs and patterns in the world around them" (Ibid.) Linked with religion, signs and patterns are suggestive of a higher power or a God.

One can explain the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as a systemic governmental malaise, but why the storm's path crossed into New Orleans was not as easily understood. Some people of faith would look at the storm as a type of trial or a test of faith from God. "Why" bad things happen is not easily understood, but faith would lead believers to something better in the future, or in the Christian sense, to Heaven. Those affected by the storm needed a sign to suggest that better days were in fact ahead. For many, the Saints' successes were this sign. The championship had culminated in not just civic pride but also

gave New Orleanians something to believe in, the hope for a better tomorrow. The Super Bowl for some fans could be equated to a type of Heaven, especially coming on the heels of tragedy (*The Times-Picayune*, 12, January, 2010). New Orleans was susceptible to religion because religion was an already important part of the city's cultural cache. It acts as a lens in which to view the world. *Saintsmania*, at this particular time, showed that faith, perseverance, and good works could lead one to the *Promised Land*.

Still, it is important to reiterate that a team winning a league championship, whether in a youth league or the professional ranks of any sport, has an effect on the deepened identity of a community. *Saintsmania* may not have been as pervasive if the team returned to New Orleans, and also its mediocre ways. Thus, the narrative of the Saints and the strengthening and deepening of collective identity around the team may ultimately not exist without the team's success. Winning, though is not the sole reason to classify a sports team as a civic religion, but in the case of New Orleans, the classification seems appropriate based on the context of the literature presented.

A collective identity around the Saints based on status issues, including the franchise's "home team" status, its history of futility, and the contradictions of its home city, preceded Hurricane Katrina. This identity strengthened when the physical impact, mental anguish, and media discourse of Hurricane Katrina created the need for a unifying presence within the city. The Saints in 2006 unexpectedly helped to satisfy this need as residents galvanized around the return of the team. There again was a need for a unifying presence in New Orleans in 2009 as the city and team faced struggles. Again, the Saints provided a source of harmony in New Orleans, but in a manner different than in 2006. Winning its first thirteen games effectively built a frenzied excitement, or a *Saintsmania*, within the city that was similar to playing the lottery and watching the announcer draw the first four numbers on one's ticket; the

anticipation is bound to swell. What helped strengthen *Saintsmania* into a civic religion, at least for the 2009 season, was the city's own propensity and need to imagine that better days were ahead. Instead of the saints, devils, and deities of spiritual religions, the city saw the Saints, Falcons, and the deities of a football religion. Rituals, totems, and iconography that developed provided a framework through which this collective identity existed, and created a bond within its participants. Rituals such as attempting to understand Brees' pre-game chant, or celebrating a touchdown by "getting crunk" provided depth to *Saintsmania*. The effervescence, or social energy, created by *Saintsmania* was enough to attract "non-believers" or *New Dats* which further enhanced the spiritual bond. Spectacles, such as the *Buddy D* and *Lombardi Gras* parades, were not just held in honor of the Saints, but were treated as civic celebrations. The community even figuratively buried its past at the *Aints paper bag* funeral, a nod to another religious tradition in New Orleans: the second line jazz funeral. Each Saints victory strengthened *Saintsmania*, while each ritual deepened the craze into a civic religion.

Chapter VII: The Fall; Bountygate and Civic Religion Tested in a Transformed City

Overview

Football is engrained in the history and culture of the South. With the majority of professional sports leagues located in the North, Southerners turned to football as a unifying element in the 1920s when the region faced economic struggles. College football at that time was dominated by Northern schools. As Southern schools became more proficient in sports, their “ability to compete in college football made Southerners ‘feel like they were a part of the American mainstream’” (Everson 2008, 1). Historians believe the University of Alabama’s win over the University of Washington in 1926 sparked a regional obsession with the sport. The football craze made its way to Louisiana when Governor Huey P. Long approached the state congress in 1931 to request funds to expand Louisiana State University’s (LSU) Tiger Stadium. When state officials denied the request, Long returned with a plan to construct a stadium-shaped dormitory that would house both students and add seating capacity to the stadium (Laney 2012).

Football is a part of Louisiana culture, with an extended history in New Orleans that preceded professional football. Friday nights during the fall finds thousands of high school boys across the state battling for the right to play in the Superdome for a state football championship. New Orleans also has a college football tradition. Tulane University once boasted one of the top collegiate football programs in the nation, playing to audiences in both Tulane Stadium and now the Superdome. Two non-local schools symbolized football in New Orleans for the black community. “Before Katrina, you might have said the *Bayou Classic* gave the Dome more of a cultural significance” (Neal 2012). The *Bayou Classic* features football teams from two of Louisiana’s historically black colleges, Grambling State University and Southern University. While the series dates back to 1936, the games moved to the

Superdome in 1978. The *Bayou Classic*, is played annually on Thanksgiving weekend and is a cultural tradition in the black community that draws tens of thousands to the city and stadium for the game, with additional learning opportunities such as empowerment and job seminars. The Superdome also hosts other annual games such as the *New Orleans Bowl* and the *Sugar Bowl*. The *Sugar Bowl*, played annually in New Orleans since 1935, is one of the nation's oldest college football games and typically showcases two of the top college football teams in the country. The ubiquity of football in New Orleans is no different than its Southern counterparts, especially as it pertains to the Superdome. Hurricane Katrina, however, changed the dynamic of which football team holds the most importance to the city's cultural identity.

The Saints have been a constant presence in New Orleans since the NFL granted the city a team in 1966. The team, though, has 'placed its stamp' on the Superdome and throughout the city since returning from the storm. This chapter discusses the effects of *Saintsmania* and how it promotes the cultural economy of New Orleans and its physical manifestations in the city's downtown district. Civic boosters suggest that simply having a professional sports team creates economic opportunities for a city. This study, however, proposes that the strengthening of collective identity and its deepening into a civic religion produces cultural effects which, in turn, produce economic benefits.

The research, up until this point, has spoken primarily to the positive discourse and manifestations of *Saintsmania*. The Saints helped the city's restoration efforts by adding the narrative of recovery and hope to the desolate images from Hurricane Katrina shown throughout the world. *Saintsmania* shows how hard work, perseverance, hope, and faith lifted the city. *Saintsmania*, however, was tested when in 2012, the NFL accused the Saints of cheating during its Super Bowl season of 2009. Therefore, this chapter also reviews the *Saints*

Bounty Scandal, and its effects on *Saintsmania*. Through the bounty scandal, both the Saints and the NFL attempted to preserve cultures of their own creation; the Saints' culture of resilience which supported a city, and the NFL's culture of profit, threatened by the violence used to build the NFL into a cultural icon.

Saintsmania not only ignored the contradictions of the NFL and the violence inherent in football, it cloaked the many problems the city faced. New Orleans presents itself with a façade of a free-spirited city, but behind the curtain it still grapples with its own historical problems. This chapter closes with a discussion of the parallels of *Saintsmania* and the city of New Orleans.

***Saintsmania* aids New Orleans cultural economy**

Civic boosters tout that professional sports franchises bring an economic stimulus to a municipality. This is a simplistic view of sports' effect on local economies. Municipalities with professional sports do find the means to financially support their franchise(s) and the various requests made by owners for new infrastructure and revenue streams. This is shown by the proliferation of stadium erections and expansions in the first decade of the 21st century. Twelve of the thirty-one NFL stadiums, nearly thirty-nine percent, were erected within this period, with four more scheduled for the next decade. This does not include the cities that have used public funds to renovate or upgrade their NFL stadiums, of which New Orleans is one as the city renovated the Superdome in 2011.

Though rare, teams do relocate when the host city cannot or chooses not to match the financial incentive package of a competing city. The NBA's Seattle SuperSonics moved to Oklahoma City when Seattle's city officials refused to build the franchise a new arena (*Seattletimes.com*, 14, November, 2006). The city of Sacramento faced a similar threat as its

basketball franchise, the Kings, is threatening a move to Seattle (*ESPN.com*, 13, April 2013). NFL cities, such as Minnesota and St. Louis, once balked at the idea of building a new stadium for their teams. Now, with Los Angeles building a stadium and the NFL's discussion of a franchise in the Los Angeles television market, these cities are backed into a corner and must decide on the importance of football in their communities. Furthermore, throughout his tenure as owner, Tom Benson threatened a move of the New Orleans Saints, with state officials halting the departure with financial packages that guaranteed revenues to the team. Thus, the realities of professional sports, when discussed in the context of scholarly literature on the subject, show that hosting a team alone does not guarantee a positive financial impact on the municipality. The costs of new infrastructure, upkeep, and revenue guarantees could mitigate any positive financial impact to locales, especially if the team is not generating revenues through their sports activities. What this analysis holds is the financial impact of professional sports stems from the deepening of collective identity around the team. In this case, *Saintsmania* provided the impetus for the economic enhancements in New Orleans centered on sports.

The development of *Saintsmania* as a civic religion aided the New Orleans' economy. *Saintsmania* provided economic benefits to the city's cultural economy, along with social effects that sustained a collective identity and mental effects that restored hope to residents. The term *cultural economy* denotes an intertwining and interarticulation of economic and symbolic processes (Du Gay and Pryke 2002). The cultural economy includes "those goods and services that serve as instruments of entertainment, communication, self-cultivation, ornamentation, social positionality, and so on [that] exist in both 'pure' distillations, as exemplified by film or music, or in combination with more utilitarian functions, as exemplified by furniture or clothing" (Gibson and Kong 2005). New Orleans' cultural

economy includes its history, music, and cuisine which are presented to a broader audience through world-renown recording artists and chefs. More importantly, its cultural economy is inextricably intermingled with its image as a tourist destination. New Orleans' relaxed culture of celebration and revelry is one of the chief attractions that draws tourists to the city and is foundational in the stability of the city's economy.

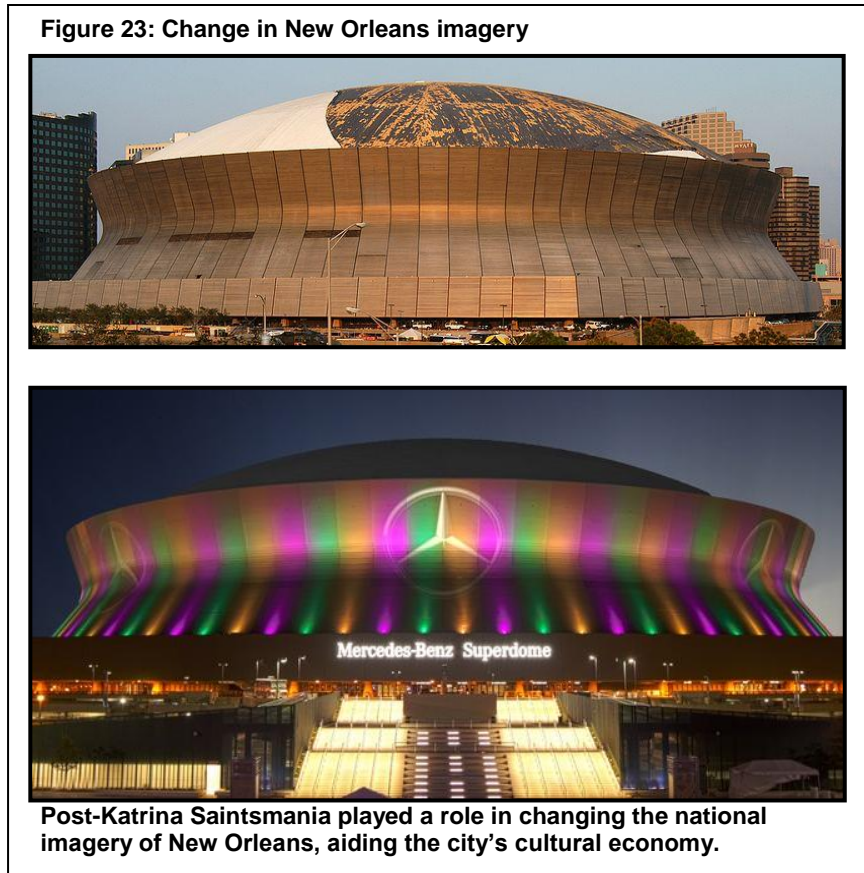
New Orleans relied on tourism and entertainment to sustain its economy while recovering from Hurricane Katrina. The storm caused a decline in the tourist industry as key pieces of infrastructure, such as the Superdome and the Morial Convention Center lay in disrepair. Thus, restoring this infrastructure, as well as the city's hotel stock, was essential in reviving tourism. These repairs allowed the city to regain its niche as an attractive setting for mega-events. A study by the University of New Orleans found that since its restoration, the Superdome has contributed \$4.1 billion to Louisiana's state economy and played a role in the \$5.5 billion impact of tourism on the local economy (Hart 2012). These macroeconomic effects spawned spin-off effects which contributed to the built environment of New Orleans.

The cultural expression of *Saintsmania* presented itself physically in the creation of a downtown sports and entertainment district with the Superdome as its focal point. The Superdome has received nearly seven hundred fifty million dollars in improvements since being damaged by Hurricane Katrina as shown in Figure 23¹⁹ on page 186. Saints owner Tom Benson, in an agreement with the state, purchased vacant buildings around the Superdome, and created the space for what became *Champions Square*, a one hundred twenty-one thousand square foot outdoor festival space. *Champions Square* adds to the overall square

¹⁹ "Superdome Roof Damage." September 5, 2005. Photograph courtesy of Win Henderson, FEMA. <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Superdome_Roof_Damage.jpg>
"Upgraded Mercedes-Benz Superdome." Uploaded February 2, 2013. Photograph courtesy of Mark V, Architism.com. <<http://architism.com/the-mercedes-benz-superdome-in-new-orleans-louisiana/>>

footage that the city promotes when it competes for large-scale conferences and conventions. German automobile manufacturer Mercedes-Benz purchased the naming rights to the

Superdome, now officially named the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, in 2011. The ten year agreement gives Mercedes-Benz advertising at every mega-event hosted in the Superdome, including the 2013 Super Bowl. Although the Saints franchise receives all proceeds from the naming rights, as well as



returns from Superdome improvements, the deal eliminated the state's responsibility to guarantee the Saints an additional revenue stream, which in 2010 cost nearly fourteen million dollars (Associated Press 2011).

New Orleans has also capitalized on the image of the Superdome as it has been broadcast to the nation after the storm. The 2006 *Domecoming* game against the Atlanta Falcons did not only symbolize that New Orleans was still standing, it also showed the nation that the Superdome was open for business. This meant the events that relocated from New Orleans, including the high school football championships, the *Bayou Classic*, college

football's national bowl games, and the tourist revenues they generate could return to *The Dome*, along with the tourist dollars that follow. The repair and reopening of the Superdome, the ensuing *Saintsmania*, as well as additional improvements to the stadium, allowed New Orleans to re-assert and re-insert itself into the sports mega-event scene. In a fifteen month span, starting from November 2011 through February 2013, saw New Orleans host several national sporting events. The Superdome was home to the *Bayou Classic*, the *New Orleans Bowl*, a nationally televised Saints' playoff game against the Detroit Lions, the *Sugar Bowl*, the *BCS Championship* (college football's championship game), the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) *Final Four* (the culmination of college basketball's national championship tournament), and Super Bowl XLVII.

The NFL Super Bowl is one of the country's most significant cultural events. It is also the country's most watched event. Since Super Bowl XIV in 2010, each game that followed was the most watched television event in U.S. history. Considered "the most popular event in modern American culture," fans petitioned the President of the United States to declare the day after the Super Bowl a national holiday (Katzowitz 2013). The game's importance is not lost on NFL cities, as many enter into an annual competition for the rights to host future Super Bowls and gain the financial windfall and national recognition that follows the game. Texas officials cited the impact of hosting a Super Bowl when discussing the possibility of adding an NFL expansion team in Houston (Ryan 2002). Analysts credited the Super Bowl for generating over two hundred million dollars in the local economy of Dallas, Texas (*Dallasnews.com*, 7, February, 2011). Officials in Indianapolis, Indiana credited the game for one hundred fifty-two million dollars in direct spending (*IndyStar.com*, 18, July, 2012). Super Bowl XLVII, New Orleans' tenth NFL championship game, generated thirty-five million

dollars in state and local tax revenues and accounted for four hundred eighty million dollars in direct spending (*The Advocate*, 22, April, 2013).

The cultural effects of the Super Bowl, like *Saintsmania*, manifested themselves physically throughout New Orleans. Public and private investors spent more than \$1.2 billion on improvements to city infrastructure. The city spent three hundred million dollars to renovate the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport. The city also laid a new streetcar line near the Superdome and repaired streets and sidewalks throughout the French Quarter and CBD (*The Times-Picayune*, 13, January, 2013). The Super Bowl prompted its own transformative effects in the city's built environment. If the Saints had relocated after Hurricane Katrina, and *Saintsmania* not taken place, New Orleans may have lost the opportunity to host the game and the benefits from the subsequent spinoff effects.

The macroeconomic effects of *Saintsmania* present themselves in the forms of positive publicity, an increased presence on national television, the creation and repair of physical infrastructure near the Superdome, and the return of mega-events to New Orleans. Along with macroeconomic revenue generation, local businesses realize the microeconomic effects of *Saintsmania*. Small business owners said their operations were significantly enhanced throughout the Saints' resurgence, especially during the Super Bowl season. Stores struggled to keep Saints paraphernalia in stock due to higher than normal demand. "The amount of new Saints-related t-shirts and apparel flying off store shelves and out of art market stalls [was] in direct proportion to the team's [score]" (*The Times-Picayune*, 30, November, 2009). During the Super Bowl season, some t-shirt stores "sold as many as 50-100 Saints related shirts a day. Even on really slow days [they were] selling 5 to 10 [shirts]" (*Ibid.*).

Pam Randazza, owner of *The Black and Gold Shop*, remembered a time when Saints' apparel was not always in such high demand. She discussed her first few years of operating when contending for a Super Bowl was only a faraway dream:

I opened in 1992 [during] the lean years. LSU was in the tank and the Saints were always in the tank. The only thing that kept me was the people. They always had hope until that first kick-off of the season. We'd never want the season to start because they were all excited during training camp but then were deflated when the games started. The way [the Saints] ran their organization. . . . [they did] really strange things. They were always changing coaches so there would always be hope and that helped me (Randazza 2012, 3).

Randazza references the collective identity around the team that toiled in football mediocrity for years prior to the hurricane. The Saints were "loveable losers" who were fun to support but frustrating to watch (*HoumaToday.com*, 31, January, 2013). Still, this identity that put hope in front of evidence provided financial support to Randazza's business. *Saintsmania* was a welcome respite from the many unsuccessful Saints' seasons as fans now had a reason to purchase paraphernalia throughout the year, and not just the beginning of the season. Randazza believes she is fortunate because not all businesses in New Orleans withstood the impact of Hurricane Katrina. The apparel industry, however, rallied:

Some businesses like mine, [Hurricane Katrina] made us very strong. The fleur-de-lis was a symbol of awareness, and I had more fleur-de-lis than anybody. My business did really well. . . . A lot [of residents] came back and got their insurance money and they needed something to lift them. You got the money in your pocket and you know you have enough to rebuild your house and you got a little extra, you need to feel happy and you buy something for yourself (Ibid., 3).

Melissa Richier, owner of *Geaux for the Gold*, said she shipped a lot of their Saints inventory internationally. "We ship to Japan, Afghanistan; every day we send stuff to people

who've been displaced by Katrina or adopted the team. There's a guy based in Hawaii and when he comes home he stocks up" (Richier 2012, 3). She said revenues generated through *Saintsmania* allowed her to open a second store, and support more people in the community. The Saints made people happy, and "if people are happy, they go out and spend," which is good for the economy (Randazza 2012, 4).

Along with apparel and paraphernalia shops, restaurants and bars saw patronage increase during football season. Many fans watch Saints games at local pubs, choosing a more personal, neighborhood atmosphere over the tens of thousands in and around the Superdome. Fiona Delargy, owner of *Bayou Beer Garden*, believes *Saintsmania* is the reason her bar and grill is still open. "They helped us get on our feet. That was part of the reason I became a Saints fan. When there is a Saints game at this bar the atmosphere is amazing. . . . It gets busier and busier every Saints game" (Delargy 2012). Management at *Allegra Bistro*, a restaurant near the Superdome, also credits *Saintsmania* with supporting its business. "Before [the Saints] were doing well, the place would empty out during the game. The past couple years people stay and watch the game" (Mayberry and Condon 2012, 1), spending more money in the restaurant.

Saintsmania not only helped promote certain types of small businesses, but it also enhanced charitable giving (Ferchaud 2012). Charities invited Saints players, who were highly popular in the New Orleans community, to their events to attract potential donors. Many local organizations leveraged the *Saintsmania* phenomenon as a fundraising opportunity and sold or raffled Saints related gift baskets and other team paraphernalia. When compared to the tax base at large, revenues generated by small businesses and charitable organizations through sports are minute. Nonetheless, these micro-level transactions provide an economic benefit to the city. Entrepreneurs grow their businesses, employees earn wages which they

put back into the local economy, and charities raise additional funds to support their missions. The revenues to individuals benefitting from these transactions are of greater consequence, even though they are smaller in amount.

The conclusion that the Saints alone carried New Orleans back from Hurricane Katrina is obvious hyperbole. *Saintsmania* was part of an array of aides that included federal disaster relief funds, an outpouring of charitable giving from the nation, and a migration of young professionals to the devastated city. The Saints, however, were the most visible part of New Orleans' recovery. The team acted as an outward projection of New Orleans that promoted the city's culture and its people to a national audience through its connection to the NFL. The national media provided visibility to the team, and through the team the city received positive publicity. The NFL provided free advertising which showed New Orleans had not drowned in the hurricane, but was "open for business, and thus aided the tourist economy. The refurbished Superdome showed New Orleans was in recovery, but still available for public consumption. Furthermore, small businesses also benefit from the ancillary revenues produced by *Saintsmania*.

Saintsmania re-focused the narrative on the more encouraging aspects of recovery, rerouting attention from the city's flooding and subsequent trauma. The media discourse turned positive as the Saints compiled wins. The team's Super Bowl victory symbolized the hope, faith and resilience of the region. The Saints followed the championship season with two more winning seasons, although each ended with devastating road playoff losses. *Saintsmania* continued in New Orleans, but primarily within a football context. Winning one championship breeds further expectations of winning more, and thus the Saints lost the underdog status which helped foster *Saintsmania* in its infancy in 2006. Quarterback Drew Brees started a new Superdome ritual where fans opened each home game chanting in unison,

“Who Dat?, Who Dat?, Who dat say dey gonna beat dem Saints?”

“Who Dat?, Who Dat?, Who dat say dey gonna beat dem Saints?”

“Who Dat?, Who Dat?, Who dat say dey gonna beat dem Saints?”

There were no status issues to fight, no atrocity tales to draw fans together. The Saints were winners. This changed during the 2011 NFL off-season, when *Saintsmania* was threatened by its own namesake, the Saints.

A Culture Built on Fallacy

Saintsmania created a culture of positive images surrounding the Saints and New Orleans. It mentally and economically supported the idea that a formerly devastated, now recovering city could through hard work, conviction and determination overcome life's sometimes terrible circumstances. Yet, during the 2011 off-season, the NFL removed the veil of *Saintsmania*, casting it in the same contradictory light as New Orleans and its free-spirited image. Accusations of cheating revealed cracks in the image the Saints had worked so hard to create, jeopardizing all of *Saintsmania*.

The Saints Bounty Scandal

On March 2, 2012, the NFL accused the Saints of organizing and operating a bounty program which paid players to injure members of the opposing team. The league said former defensive coordinator Greg Williams created the program soon after he was hired in 2009. The NFL heard rumors of the program prior to 2012 and asked the Saints to stop all bounty-related activities. Team officials told NFL representatives they would suspend the program, but they did not, as the NFL alleges they continued issuing bounties on players. The league accused the Saints of placing bounties on Arizona Cardinals quarterback Kurt Warner and

Minnesota Vikings quarterback Brett Favre during the 2009 playoffs. The Saints defense did injure each quarterback during their respective games, shown in Figure 24²⁰; however both

Figure 24: Saints Injure Opposing Quarterbacks



Saints defenders were accused of purposely injuring both Kurt Warner (top) and Brett Favre in the 2010 NFL playoffs.

(Photograph courtesy WWLTV (top); Getty Images)

were able to continue playing. Warner retired after the loss, and Favre had off-season surgery to repair an ankle damaged in the game.

NFL officials questioned Saints coaches and players, who in turn denied the existence of a bounty program. The NFL produced audio of a pre-game speech of Williams telling players to “kill the head” of an opposing player (*The Times-Picayune*, 11, December 2012). Saints players responded saying

²⁰ “Saints injure Cardinals QB Kurt Warner.” January 16, 2010. Photograph courtesy WWLTV.com via Getty Images. <http://www.wwltv.com/sports/black-and-gold/Forecast-Bounty-Fest-will-take-down-Saints-141299893.html>

“Saints injure Vikings QB Brett Favre.” January 24, 2010. Photograph courtesy Leah Goldman via Getty Images. <<http://www.businessinsider.com/brett-favre-new-orleans-saints-bounty-2012-3>>

Williams' word choices were just locker room conjecture and not meant to be taken literally. Still, the NFL levied the strongest fines in league history, suspending head coach Sean Payton and Williams for one season each for their respective roles in the bounty program. The league suspended Saints general manager Mickey Loomis, Saints assistant coach Joe Vitt, current players Jonathan Vilma, and Will Smith, and former Saints Scott Fujita and Anthony Hargrove (*Nola.com*, 12, December, 2012). The league also fined the Saints franchise five hundred thousand dollars and stripped the team of multiple picks in 2012 and 2013 NFL Drafts.

The discourse of the *Saints Bounty Scandal* provides insights onto the differing effects the devotion created through the deepening of *Saintsmaina* into a civic religion had on its *parishioners*. One can separate the discourse into three types, two sets of opposing opinions and one set of nuanced considerations. Those who said the penalties were too severe referenced the violence inherent in football. Responses ranged from, "Hitting is a part of the game," to "Taking out opposing players is part of the deal" (Messina, Monahan and Welliver 2012, 22). Anne deVilleneuve of Metairie, LA reflected on the hypocrisies of the penalties saying,

The penalties levied upon the Saints were outrageously excessive. Professional sports can be dangerous, but those highly paid athletes know the risks. If certain hits were illegal, then players should absolutely be ejected, suspended or fined. If they were legal hits, then it is irrelevant to me whether there was a bounty placed on them. The object of professional boxing is to beat the opponent to a pulp—the ultimate outcome being to beat someone unconscious. Why should the standards differ so much from one professional sport to another? Players are not forced to play in the NFL. They are paid ridiculously high salaries to accept the inherent risks. Maybe NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell should just tell the players to take their pads and helmets off and put flags in their pockets (*The Times-Picayune*, 23, March 2012).

These sets of comments show a developed fundamentalism within a faction of *Saintsmania*. These respondents appear willing to overlook the accusations that Saints players intentionally attempted to injure opposing players. They justify this by referencing the players' salaries, the violent culture inherent in the NFL, and the inherent risks associated with a contact sport. History has shown that many acts of brutality have been justified in the name of religion or a higher authority. In what seems to be a blind devotion to *Saintsmania*, this group of fans found it appropriate to rationalize the possibility of malicious intent by blaming the culture of the game.

Some fans were disappointed that the Saints participated in a bounty program and believed the penalties were not severe enough. David Meyer Sr. of St. Bernard, LA said,

We finally get gained a bit of respect . . . and our first Super Bowl win under the current—and now obviously tainted—system. . . . If you represent me, win—but do it within the rules of the game. That's the only way in which I may continue to support you with my dignity intact. Don't cheat for me, even if other clubs are doing it. Winning a game within the rules makes the win sweeter, even if the wins are less frequent (*The Times-Picayune*, 7, March, 2012).

Denise Chetta of New Orleans expressed similar disappointment in the Saints when she wrote,

Our beloved Saints were really sinners and the black and gold [is] forever tarnished by "Bounty Gate." It will be a long time before we'll proudly wear the black and gold again. With "Bounty Gate," the Saints abdicated their throne. . . . In spite of our history of lying, cheating politicians, the post-Katrina Saints represented the dawn of a new day for Louisiana. . . . Weren't they the good guys who triumphed over our evil past (*The Times-Picayune*, 13, March, 2012)?

These comments show the other extreme of the devotion created through *Saintsmania*. When faced with disappointment, some *worshipers* choose to disassociate themselves from

the faith. This is similar to the reactions of followers of Catholicism in the wake of the child sex abuse scandals. One University of Notre Dame study claims that over two million Catholics left the Church in the United States alone (O'Leary 2013). These Saints fans faced extreme disappointment in the entity in which they put their faith in to represent the city well. The Saints falling short of this was unbearable and caused these particular fans to want harsh retribution for wrongdoers. It also damaged the image of the Saints, of which these fans did not want to be associated with at this time.

Other disappointed fans were appalled by the Saints' participation in the bounty scandal and believed "the Saints are deserving of whatever punishment the NFL chose to use as discipline, including terminations (*The Times-Picayune*, 7, March, 2012). William McHugh of Bush, LA said, "For the first time ever, I am ashamed to be a Saints fan. Everyone who was directly involved in the bounty payments, former Saints defensive coordinator Greg Williams in particular, should be banned from the NFL for life" (*The Times-Picayune*, 10, March, 2012). Several fans, including Chris Herrmann of River Ridge, LA thought Saints owner "Tom Benson should fire both [Payton and Williams] immediately" (*The Times-Picayune*, 23, March, 2012).

New Orleans resident Dorian Alexander (2012) provided a more moderate manner in which to view the *Saints Bounty Scandal*:

I am disappointed that [the Saints] would incentivize a way to hurt people. [I'm] sorry we got caught at it and accused of it, but we are not the only team that does it. It does not excuse it, but it's frustrating that our team is the only one that will be punished for it, or used as a scapegoat or [an] example. . . . If another coach or player or team comes forth and say we have players that have done the same, I'd feel like New Orleans isn't the only problem. But now the NFL is saying this is isolated and New Orleans is the bad team. It can't be the only team (5).

This was the prevailing view of Saints fans within the context of the content analyzed. They did not excuse the Saints of their culpability in the bounty scandal. The NFL told the team to stop. The team did not, and now “the same arrogance which helped propel Payton and the Saints to unprecedented heights on the field . . . helped undercut them off it” (*The Times-Picayune*, 22, March, 2012). What fans wanted to understand was why the NFL chose to single out the Saints. One Saints fan living in Tucson, Arizona wrote, “Bounty or no bounty, there are many dirty teams around the NFL” (*The Times-Picayune*, 24, March, 2012). An editorial in an Idaho newspaper echoed the same sentiments:

While the Saints deserved every penalty they received, it also seemed that the team was being used as the league’s scapegoat, served up as a cautionary tale to the NFL’s 31 other franchises. No one can reasonably believe New Orleans is or was the only team operating with a bounty system, but the NFL doesn’t appear as if it will continue its investigation and look into other franchises. It’s easier to punish the Saints, sweep it under the rug and move on, thus potentially avoiding a bigger black-eye or lawsuits and scrutiny from the criminal justice system (Moscow-Pullman Daily News, 27, March, 2012). The relentlessness of the NFL’s penalties can best be explained by briefly examining the league’s own culture. It is a culture of violence in which the Saints are a participating member. It is also a culture coming under fire for the very violence the league in recent history used as a promotional tool.

The NFL on Trial

A review of the discourse on NFL bounties finds that some players accept the practice as part of being a football player. Former NFL quarterback Donald McPherson said of his experience with bounties, “No one player was targeted. The incentive was the big play that changed the game. The hit had to be a clean and legal hit. Cheap shots, late or illegal hits were

not only disallowed, they were met with boos. The money on the back end was merely ceremonial” (2012, 1). Furthermore, players feel doling out “big hits” increases their opportunity to earn a living. “Your career exists in a short window,” said former player Matt Bowen, “one that starts closing the moment it opens. If making a play to impress a coach or win a game pushes that window up an inch before it slams back down on your fingers, then you do what has to be done” (2012, 1).

Bounties are a known entity throughout the NFL. Some players have accepted the practice, and although most do not necessarily agree with it, they take umbrage more with the whistleblowers than with those participating in the program. Pittsburgh Steelers safety and New Orleans native Ryan Clark’s statement reflects this sentiment:

Whoever is snitching on the Saints D should be ashamed of themselves. No one was talking about the ‘bounty’ when they got paid. . . . I’m not saying ‘bounties’ are ethical or right but I am saying if you participate don’t go back and tell on the people you did it with (*The Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, 5, March, 2012).

Damien Woody, an ESPN analyst and former NFL player, also commented about player whistleblowers saying,

When all this stuff came out, one of the first things I tweeted about was: Who snitched? Because as players, we look at ourselves as part of a special fraternity. We go to battle with each other every week. And there’s only 1,600 players in the NFL: that’s not a lot. Guys know each other. Guys have special bonds. It’s a close-knit community, and people expect there to be trust (*The Washington Post*, 23, March, 2012).

Clark’s and Woody’s comments speak to a locker room culture present among NFL players, one that is built on trust and unwritten rules. McPherson makes this point when describing

the bounty system as disincentivizing illegal hits. Players trust one another to be brutal, as Bowen alludes to, but not to purposely injure. Players expect privacy and that remarks made in the locker room are for their ears only, which leads to the disdain verbalized by Clark, Woody, and others at the news that one of their own may have informed the league of the Saints' activities. This is the same culture Saints players referenced when trying to explain Williams' "attack the head" comments. The bounty system was a part of a player culture built on the professionalism of violence, of which the NFL sanctions but is ardently attempting to adjust.

Players understand that football is a violent sport with a high risk of injury compared to other sports. Yet, the NFL is facing an unprecedented attack from its former players because of the game's heightened risk of injuries. More than four thousand retired NFL players and family members filed a class action lawsuit against the league citing the NFL's awareness of the harm done by concussions and its negligence in protecting players. The lawsuit came on the heels of several high profile suicides of ex-NFL players. The most notable was twenty year NFL veteran Junior Seau, who shot himself in the chest in order to preserve his brain for study. The NFL could lose billions of dollars in the lawsuits (Barrett 2013), but more importantly, it could lose its hold as America's top sport.

The NFL has built itself on the promotion of a culture of violence. Sports programming regular replay the hardest hits of the day. ESPN's *Monday Night Football* featured a segment called "Jacked Up!" where commentators reviewed big hits, yelling "He got jacked up!" upon contact by an opposing players. The NFL markets its violence in the form of DVDs and television programming promoting the league's hardest hitters. Furthermore, its most popular video game series, *Madden NFL*, once used a control setting called a "hit stick" that allowed for harder in-game hits. The NFL promoted its violent culture through many of

its media outlets; thus the harshness of NFL's penalties for the Saints seems hypocritical to a number of fans and media. The lawsuits filed by retired players, however, dictated a need for the NFL to at least appear to address the violence in its sport, in order to preserve the football culture and football economy at-large.

League officials changed rules on tackling and established stronger procedures to test for concussions all in an effort to help curb repetitive head injuries. Changes to tackling include when, where, and how players can engage one another. New rules make hitting a defenseless receiver, hitting above the chest, and using the crown of one's helmet illegal and subject to penalties, fines, and possible suspension. The league also strengthened its procedures for handling players with concussions. Players suspected of having head injuries must pass a battery of tests before they are allowed to play again. Consequences of rule changes include increased player fines, suspensions, and missed games. Still, the NFL fights against the public image of its retired players who exhibit symptoms such as dementia and depression. The specter of players intentionally injuring each other only exacerbates the public relations problems. While "big hits," head injuries, and bounties are a league-wide issue, the NFL put the Saints' locker room culture on trial to show that it does not condone this type of behavior and can manage player safety issues internally.

The league's response to the *Saints Bounty Scandal* was in part to protect the game's standing as America's most popular sport. *The Harris Poll* has surveyed sports fans since 1965 and found professional football polled as America's most popular sport. College football polled as the number three sport just behind baseball (NFL 2013). The bounty ruling served as part of Commissioner Goodell's goal to protect the image and credibility of the NFL as well as the safety of its players. Goodell said,

We know that in order to secure the future, we can and must do more to make the game safer, and in the process, we will make other sports safer as well. The league will continue to make rule changes, invest in equipment and provide our medical staffs with the tools and authorities to prevent injuries (Associated Press 2013).

The effects of head injuries could hamper the league's ability to generate revenues. Players with head injuries risk missed playing time, which affects the quality of the game in the short-term. The team with the best players usually wins more games. Players missing plays due to injury can have deleterious effects on the team's success. Long-term ramifications include parents shifting their children into safer sports with some NFL players recognizing that having school-aged kids playing football is a "scary thing" (*USAToday.com*, 23, May, 2012). The image of lawlessness, savagery, and depraved indifference to the safety of others presented by the bounty scandal coupled with the effects of repetitive head injuries led to a need to change the cultural imagery of the NFL. Survival of the league depends on its ability to restore its narrative of being a rule-governed organization based on the values of fair-play, hard work, and above all sportsmanship, which are also values scholars use to describe sports in general. The punishments doled out by the league made the culture of the NFL a priority over that of the players. Both NFL and player locker room cultures are rule-governed with rewards and punishments based on particular actions. Teams use future contracts to incentivize "big hits" and "game changing plays," as part of the big business of the game. However, when players use monetary incentives to illicit the same, they are admonished as savages and cheaters.

Bountygate threatens Saintsmania

The *Saints Bounty Scandal*, dubbed *Bountygate*, jeopardized the team's culture built since 2006 through *Saintsmania*. Saints coaches, general manager, and players suffered

irreparable losses including suspensions and the forfeiture of salary (though the players appealed their suspensions and were allowed to play until the matter was settled in court). The Saints' fall from grace proved costly to the team's image. "In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Saints had become America's team. Everyone universally loved the story of their post-storm chumps-to-champs makeover. So much for that" (*The Times-Picayune*, 3, March, 2012). Fan discourse in New Orleans reflected disappointment in the team. Karen Biuglio of Metairie said,

When the bounty was first recognized and the head of the Saints organization gave orders to stop the bounty system, it should have ended right then and there. It didn't, and now the Saints football team—one of the best things that has happened to New Orleans since red beans and rice and gumbo—will be greatly challenged to regain the lofty position it reached as a Super Bowl championship team (*The Times-Picayune*, 23, March, 2012).

Charlie French of Metairie discussed the on-field consequences of the bounty program and its effects on the Saints defense:

Notwithstanding the tarnish now on the Saints' Super Bowl win or the abysmal lapse of judgment, the real question is why the Saints couldn't see the bounty system made the defense weaker. . . . The worst thing about the bounty system is that in the attempt to showboat and make big hits instead of sure tackles, it weakened the Saints' defense and embarrassed the franchise and its fans. The statistics prove what we all know—it was a losing strategy, and defensive coordinator Gregg Williams, et al., should have recognized that and abandoned it. Not just because it was morally reprehensible, but because the strategy didn't work (*The Times-Picayune*, 7, March, 2012).

Luke Boston, an eleven year-old, fifth grader from Covington, LA summed up the feelings of the Who Dat Nation best when he wrote, "Regarding the New Orleans Saints' bounty program: I thought more of our team (*Ibid.*). The consequences of *Bountygate* were far-

reaching. It affected the team's image and its fans. More importantly, as French points out, it had far worse effects on-the-field. He blamed the bounty and the need to make "big hits" for the Saints sub-par defensive effort that led to key losses.

The *Saints Bounty Scandal* shows the human side to blind devotion. The author likens *Bountygate* to a seminal scene in the movie *The Wizard of Oz* where the protagonist Dorothy pulls back the curtain to reveal the all-powerful wizard to be just a man with no powers at all, except for the ones granted to him out of awe or fear. Behind the curtain of *Saintsmania* was a group of men and their human flaws. The disappointment faced by Saints fans is similar to that of the Catholics whose faith in the church was tested in the aftermath of child sex abuse scandals. Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) students, alumni, and supporters coped with comparable criticism in the wake of its own child sex abuse scandal which involved former football coaches and university officials.

The 2011 off-season also affected quarterback Drew Brees' exalted status as New Orleans' savior. That summer Brees and the Saints were engrossed in a contract negotiation. Brees wanted a salary increase for his services and threatened to miss games in the 2012 season. Like the bounty scandal, the discourse from Saints fans ranged from "Brees is asking for too much" to "Brees is worth his asking price." Saints fan Lyndsey Young (2012), however, gave a broader view of the issue:

He as an individual is irritating me . . . because we have too high of expectations for him too. He's Breesus. I feel like with all the talk and lip service he's given about being a part of New Orleans and never leaving, and [that] he loves us so much and he wants what's best for the team. . . . So much of the city is living in poverty that it is a little insulting that they are haggling over so much money (4).

Bountygate and the Brees contract negotiation both illustrate the fact that the NFL at its core is a business, and *Saintsmania* functions within that business. The penalties levied by the NFL are not a part of a personal vendetta against the Saints, although some in New Orleans took them personally. Young (2012) said,

I feel victimized. I'm a very loyal person so yes, I do. I do think they are picking on us for one, and I don't know what the motivation is. Maybe they are extra disappointed because we were always just the sweethearts of America in the NFL in recent years. So maybe it's the fall from grace that we're so interested in. Everyone else does it. The fact of the matter is, these aren't ballerinas. They are going to play rough anyway. They are going to try to injure each other anyway (5).

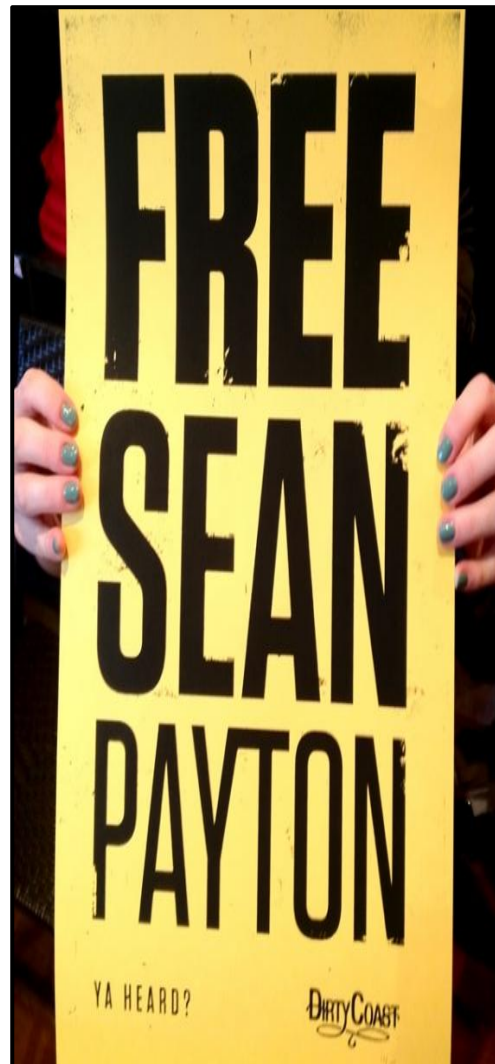
What the penalties symbolize, as much of the discourse discusses, is the importance of the league's image and the potential for revenue loss if the NFL does not protect this image. Brees' contract negotiations reflect the capitalist values inherent in professional sports; he wanted market value for his services. Richards Williams' (2012) comment about Brees underscores this attitude:

Before there was Drew Brees there were other quarterbacks. I don't think anyone in the NFL is irreplaceable. Granted, I agree, pay for performance. He needs to be compensated as such. I recognize it's a business. There is some emotional attachment but it's a business. . . . If the Saints say they won't pay him and someone else will, then he's gone. If someone says they will double my salary and they guarantee it, then I'm gone (5).

Saintsmania 2.0

The NFL eventually vacated the penalties incurred by Saints players allegedly involved in *Bountygate* after much trepidation including lawsuits, intervention by the NFL players union, and the league commissioner's recusal from any decisions related to the bounty scandal. The NFL, however, affirmed its initial findings and did not lift sanctions on Saints' coaches and staff. Still, *Bountygate* destroyed the innocence of *Saintsmania*; it challenged and undermined the fantasy created by the Saints after the storm. The scandal exposed the mortality of the movement and the flawed humanity of the people involved. After all the positivity generated through *Saintsmania* disappeared, disappointment and anger remained. A subset of fans voiced staunch criticism of the Saints organization, disillusioned by the team's allegedly unscrupulous acts. Another set of fans directed their ire at the NFL, feeling the league made an unfair example of the Saints as seen in the Free Sean Payton poster in Figure 25²¹. For Michelle Richier (2012), this anger translated into lower profits for her apparel store:

Figure 25: Free Sean Payton poster



Saints fans respond to the year-long suspension of Coach Sean Payton for his role in *Bountygate*.

(Photograph courtesy *Dirty Coast*)

²¹ "Free Sean Payton Poster." 2012. Photograph courtesy of Zach Smith via Dirty Coast. <<http://www.dirtycoast.com/store/detail/949/FREE-SEAN-PAYTON-Poster>>

The bounty played a huge role in our sales as did the delay in the Brees contract. This year (2012) the NFL shifted from Reebok to Nike for its uniforms so we had to invest in all new merchandise and jerseys. People were reluctant to buy [the] Brees [jersey] until he had a contract signed, and even more people were so angry with the NFL and Commissioner [Goodell] that they did not spend money to support the league. A sort of silent protest I suppose; but to us as a small retailer, it was devastating. Sales are down considerably, mostly in [the] Saints category in 2012 compared to 2011 (7-8).

Bountygate was a self-inflicted wound for the Saints, which produced its own status issue. New Orleans' disdain shifted to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, its energy focused on proving to the NFL and the nation that the Saints were not cheaters and that the city would once again battle through adversity. Saints punter Thomas Morstead showed this sentiment as he tweeted, "The stage is set for another [Saints] storybook season," reflecting a theme that "the franchise is using the unprecedented hammer Goodell landed on it as a motivating tool for the upcoming season" (*The Times-Picayune*, 13, April 2012). Kevin Wildes, president of Loyola University, reflected back on *Saintsmania* in 2006 and 2009, saying,

Our own Saints have done great things. They have not only won games, championships and a Super Bowl; they have helped to lead a broken city in its renewal. They have shown us that resurrection is possible. . . . They could become the patron Saints of the comeback. Keep the faith! (*The Times-Picayune*, 11, March, 2012).

The first game of the 2012 season provided excitement akin to the NFC Championship game in 2010. The pre-season talk about bounties exhausted fans, most wanting to put *Bountygate* behind them. Inside the Superdome, fans put extra emphasis behind the pre-game "Who Dat" chant, hoping to shout the Saints back to the Super Bowl. *Saintsmania* again was palpable. Then the game started and ended with a 40-32 Saints loss to the Washington

Redskins. This defeat was indicative of things to come. The Saints opened the 2012 season 0-4 and struggled to a 7-9 record, failing to reach the playoffs for the first time in four years. Moreover, the Saints finished the season with the worst statistical defense in NFL history. *Saintsmania* waned as the season progressed; the number of tailgating RVs filling nearby parking lots decreased as the number of empty seats in the Superdome increased. In 2006 and 2009, resiliency fueled *Saintsmania*; in 2012, powered by scandals and losses, *Saintsmania* sputtered early and often and eventually ran out of fuel, waiting to be recharged with the hope of a new season.

New Orleans After the Mania

Much discussion of the discourse surrounding *Saintsmania* centered on the relationship between the city of New Orleans and the Saints' franchise. City and team paralleled one another, each facing hardships during Hurricane Katrina and revivals after the storm. Both also benefited from the collective mobilization of emotions leading to *Saintsmania* in the city. *Saintsmania* strengthened collective identity in the city as it focused attention on the Saints and characteristics that unified New Orleans. As *Saintsmania* deepened further into a civic religion, it created economic benefits for the city, fortifying its economy by bringing positive publicity that showed New Orleans' cultural artifacts are again accessible to tourists. New Orleans appeared to have been transformed into a progressive city able to compete with the likes of Houston and Atlanta. The city boasted an influx of young professionals from around the country, burgeoning technology and film industries, and a new political regime. Similar to the Saints, however, when the haze of *Saintsmania* dissipated, New Orleans had not moved far from its past complexities. New Orleans' stunted progress

had been overlooked in the revelry of *Saintsmania*; this theme being the focus of this last section.

New Orleans in Progress

Through the lens of the Saints on-field success, residents viewed *Saintsmania* as indicative of a new, post-Hurricane Katrina attitude in New Orleans. Instead of the atrocity tales typical of the city, such as flooding, crime, and poor health conditions, residents were eager to share positive stories that depicted the city in a new light and that showcased personal victories. New Orleans area resident Kathleen Hodgins expresses this outlook by saying, “For so long before Katrina, we did not believe that we deserve the best; we believed we deserved what we got. But now, this team is teaching us that we deserve the best in all things, not just football” (*The Times-Picayune*, 8, December, 2009). On February 6, 2010, New Orleans took to the voting booths to show it wanted someone better in City Hall.

The day before the Super Bowl, New Orleans held city-wide elections where voters selected a new mayor. Citizens eager to choose a replacement for C. Ray Nagin, who had for most of his last term only fueled negative stereotypes of New Orleans by calling it a “Chocolate City” (*The Times-Picayune*, 18, January, 2006), elected Lieutenant Governor Mitchell (Mitch) Landrieu to fill the position. Landrieu received bi-racial support and became the city’s “first white chief executive since his father, Moon Landrieu, left the job in 1978” (*The Times-Picayune*, 6, February, 2010). While it was coincidence that Landrieu’s victory came one day before the Saints’ Super Bowl triumph, the election was more evidence of the desire among many citizens for a new era in New Orleans.

Saintsmania captured the minds of *New Dats*, or those new to Saints fandom. Though some *New Dats* are long-time residents, many of them immigrated to New Orleans following

Hurricane Katrina. During the recovery, New Orleans had attracted educated young adults who came to the city as volunteers, but stayed to become young professionals. “In 2000, 26 percent of adults 25 and older in New Orleans had a college degree. In 2010, that number jumped to 33 percent,” with Forbes magazine ranking the New Orleans metropolis as “America’s biggest ‘brain magnet’” (Good 2011). Quite a few of these young professionals created jobs through entrepreneurial opportunities, and further bolstered the New Orleans economy.

Additionally, the New Orleans economy has diversified since Hurricane Katrina, especially in adding high tech and film industries to its portfolio. “Technology companies account for 5 percent to 10 percent of new jobs in the city” (*The Times-Picayune*, 24, June, 2012), and continues to grow. Furthermore, Forbes contends that New Orleans is becoming a serious challenger to Los Angeles in the filmmaking industry. The accessibility of the city’s culture, along with the state’s willingness to provide financial inducements to film studios, draws filmmakers and post-production crews to New Orleans.

Saintsmania also reinforced the New Orleans sports’ economy. The state of Louisiana and Saints owner Tom Benson agreed to a fifteen-year lease agreement that keeps the Saints in New Orleans through the 2025 season. Benson agreed to purchase building space for what eventually became *Champions Square*, an outdoor concert venue next to the Superdome. Benson also purchased the New Orleans Hornets, the city’s professional basketball team. The previous owner had ceded control of the Hornets to the NBA, who managed the team while searching for a buyer. Benson’s purchase of the Hornets averted a potential contraction or relocation of the team. With franchise ownership settled, the NBA selected New Orleans to host its 2014 All-Star Game, a weekend long celebration of the league and its star players, and another mega-event for the city.

Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent *Saintsmania* contributed to myriad positive spin-off effects in the city. Residents expected a better city, and elected a mayor they believe could move New Orleans forward. The trauma of the storm generated a nationwide youth movement aimed at helping to restore the city, which brought thousands of educated young adults who became a core constituency in New Orleans. Through the youth movement grew a promising entrepreneurial culture that added jobs to the city's economy. Finally, New Orleans stabilized its NBA franchise and concurrently added another revenue generating mega-event to the city's busy schedule. By all appearances, New Orleans had transformed into a progressive city, set to compete with the likes of Houston and Atlanta. Beneath this illusion of progress, though, lay a host of problems which threatened the city's prosperity and growth.

New Orleans Interrupted

While New Orleans experienced growth in several new industries, the effects of a national economic downturn caught up to the city. According to the Census Bureau's 2011 *American Community Survey*, Louisiana had the third-highest poverty rate, roughly twenty percent, and the seventh-lowest median income in the nation, nearly forty-two thousand dollars. The national poverty rate, by contrast, was sixteen percent, while the median income level was fifty-one thousand dollars. New Orleans' poverty rate reached twenty-nine percent, during the same period, with the metropolitan area median income dipping to forty-four thousand, still below the national average. Officials from the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center (NOCDC) said this was the region's "first significant decline in income in recent years" (*The Times-Picayune*, 20, September, 2012). Several stimuli that followed the storm, including federal disaster recovery funds, insurance payouts, and the 2009

federal stimulus package, reinforced the New Orleans regional economy against the national recession. However, the pace of those funds had slowed, while other funding sources have stopped altogether.

New Orleans also faces legal battles with the federal government over consent decrees. A consent decree is “an agreement between two parties that is sanctioned by the court; for example, a company might agree to stop certain questionable practices without admitting guilt” (*Princeton University Wordnet*). The U.S. Department of Justice issued New Orleans three consent decrees, one each to the Sewerage and Water Board, insisting it repair the city’s failing sewerage system (*The Times-Picayune*, 27, January, 2010); the New Orleans Police Department, to overhaul its policies and procedures in an effort to weed out corruption (*WDSU.com*, 31, January, 2013); and the Orleans Parish Prison, for human rights violations (*The Times-Picayune*, 13, January, 2013). The estimated total cost of the decrees amounts to nearly three hundred million dollars over a five year period, revenues the city is hard pressed to generate. More than that, the consent decrees show signs the city has not changed so much after all.

New Orleans’ economic future appeared brighter with the growth of the film and technology industries. However, changes in national priorities led to a reduction of large scale manufacturing jobs in the New Orleans region. The federal government defunded the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and closed NASA’s Michoud Assembly Center, located in eastern New Orleans. Renowned for its construction of space shuttle external fuel tanks, the Michoud plant employed thousands living in the region. The Avondale Shipyard, a ship building facility located in a New Orleans suburb, closed its doors in 2013 after fabricating its final military ship (*The Associated Press*, 2011), leaving thousands unemployed. The city also lost its last two headquartered regional banks. Non-local banks

purchased both Hibernia Corporation and Whitney Holding Corporation and relocated the banks' main operations to other states. The city of New Orleans is in an economic holding pattern where gains in some industries are offset by losses in others.

Mayor Landrieu has attempted to change the image of New Orleans' politics, but the political climate of corruption and graft continues to attract negative attention for the city. A glut of high profile public officials have resigned, been indicted for, or been convicted because of crimes committed while in office. Former U.S. Congressman William Jefferson received a thirteen year prison sentence in 2009 for bribery, money laundering, and the use of his office as a racketeering enterprise (*The Times-Picayune*, 13, November, 2009). Former Jefferson Parish president Aaron Broussard pleads guilty to two counts of corruption in 2012, and received a forty-six month federal prison sentence (*The Times-Picayune*, 25, February, 2013). Finally, federal prosecutors indicted former New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin in 2013 with twenty-one counts of corruption, including bribery, money laundering, and wire fraud (*The Times-Picayune*, 18, January, 2013). These facts are evidence that New Orleans has yet to shed its illicit past, which further erodes public trust in its city officials.

New Orleans has progressed since Hurricane Katrina, but cannot seem to escape its history. The promise of revenues generated by new industries is equalized by the delayed effects of economic recession and federally mandated liabilities. The hope of honesty in politics is counterbalanced by a parade of indictments, a constant reminder of New Orleans' political past. Residents say they have high expectations for New Orleans, but with the contradictions of the city still present, it is a wonder if they ever will see that achieved.

Chapter Discussion

Football is as common to Southern culture as hot summer days. Thousands of fans wait with baited breath as the calendar shifts from August to September, marking the start of football season. It is a cultural obsession in the South. New Orleans boasted a strong football tradition long before Hurricane Katrina entered the scene, with storied high school and college programs, and games of national consequence. Yet, it was the New Orleans Saints who placed its cultural stamp on football and on the Crescent City. The team played a role in catapulting the status of football in New Orleans after the storm, but the people who invested in *Saintsmania* as a type of civic religion bore much of the responsibility for the game's cultural standing. The excitement of a devoted *Who Dat Nation* in New Orleans set the table for what was to come.

The devotion to the Saints and *Saintsmania* as a civic religion assisted in stabilizing the New Orleans' economy. Its narrative provided national advertising not only for the Saints, but also for New Orleans and its cultural wares. It showed the rest of the nation that the city was ready for tourists and mega-events, including the Super Bowl. It materialized in the form of upgrades to key city infrastructure, new lines of transportation, and the creation of a new civic venue for revelry. The devotion also aided small businesses and non-profits as well. The Saints' success gave fans another reason to purchase paraphernalia from shops, patronize bars and restaurants more frequently, and increase donations to local charities. *Saintsmania* intensified and brought with it a new attitude of New Orleans of striving to be the best.

The Saints had an ardent following prior to Hurricane Katrina, but the storm created the individual member's fanship also morphed from one of spectators who passively watched the team with the expectation they would lose, to what Jacobson (2003) describes as highly passionate individuals who scrutinize sports with "a great deal of emotional and value

significance” (6). The city’s strong devotion to the Saints, as the literature reflects, provided an apparatus to manage and cope with negative emotions engendered by not only Hurricane Katrina, but also the city’s inconsistencies (Partridge, Wann and Elison 2010).

Psychologically, as Guttman (2006) alludes, fans believe the team represented them and their struggles after Hurricane Katrina. Each game was not only a battle on-the-field, but also a civic contest between New Orleans and the rest of the nation. The followers created a strong identity around the Saints which created a prideful community that saw more in and expected the best for itself. The civic religion of *Saintsmania*, like any religious enterprise, is always at the mercy of human frailties.

With all religions or movements, there is a rarely seen underside that when revealed can engender anger, sadness, and disappointment. The underside of *Saintsmania* was *Bountygate* that involved the NFL’s accusations of cheating and poor sportsmanship by the Saints that threatened to dissipate the aura of *Saintsmania*. The bounty scandal shattered the image of the Saints who breathed life into a city destroyed by flood waters through hard work, personal resilience, and will power. This image was replaced with allegedly flawed men who behaved badly. The notion that the team’s best efforts might have stemmed from cheating disappointed many fans. The thought of the Saints, who represented the New Orleans community, as nothing more than the same cheaters that plague the city’s political and criminal climate engendered much anger and sorrow from a segment of the devoted. Others, however, stayed true to their devotion to the Saints, and believed this team was unjustly punished for the sins of the entire league.

The unveiling of *Saintsmania* warrants a closer analysis of the city it supports. New Orleans at first glance emerged from the storm with a resolve to become a better city; one removed from historic ailments that continually stunted its growth. A change in politics, a

gain in educated citizenry, and the addition of new industries all paint a positive picture for both the social and economic growth of the city. Yet, the canvas on which the picture is painted still has flaws. Economic downturns, layoffs by major employers, and a continual stream of incarcerated public officials show New Orleans had not changed much from its degraded status before the storm.

In December 2012, the NFL exonerated the four current and former Saints players accused of participating in the bounty program. Former NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue, asked to render a decision when current Commissioner Roger Goodell recused himself from the issue, said the evidence collected did not substantiate any wrongdoing on the part of Jonathan Vilma, Will Smith, Scott Fajita, or Anthony Hargrove (*Nola.com*, 11, December, 2012). This, however, did not ameliorate the damage done to the team's image. *Bountygate* made *Saintsmania* vulnerable to the contradictions of the concussive violence of football, which brought up once again the many contradictions embedded in New Orleans. Still, *Saintsmania* survived, albeit in a different appearance. It transformed from an engine of hope to a vehicle of vindication, as fans wanted the Saints to prove to the league that its city was not built on the backs of cheaters. The Saints finished the 2012 season with a losing record and the former mayor of New Orleans was indicted for corruption. Both city and team are back to using the old sports cliché, "Wait til next year."

Chapter VIII: The Blackout; Collective Identity and the Future of New Orleans

Introduction

Since its inception in 1967, the NFL has built the Super Bowl from a single championship game day to a week-long convention that promotes both the league and the host city. Typically, the league makes modifications to a city's existing cultural wares for

Figure 26: Super Bowl Boulevard



Barge carries lettering on the Mississippi River to Super Boulevard.

(Photograph by author)

purposes of advancing the NFL brand and that of its sponsors. This was the case when the NFL turned the Saints 2010 home opener, its first as defending Super Bowl champion, into a nationally televised mega-event. The telecast showcased Mardi-Gras styled parade floats

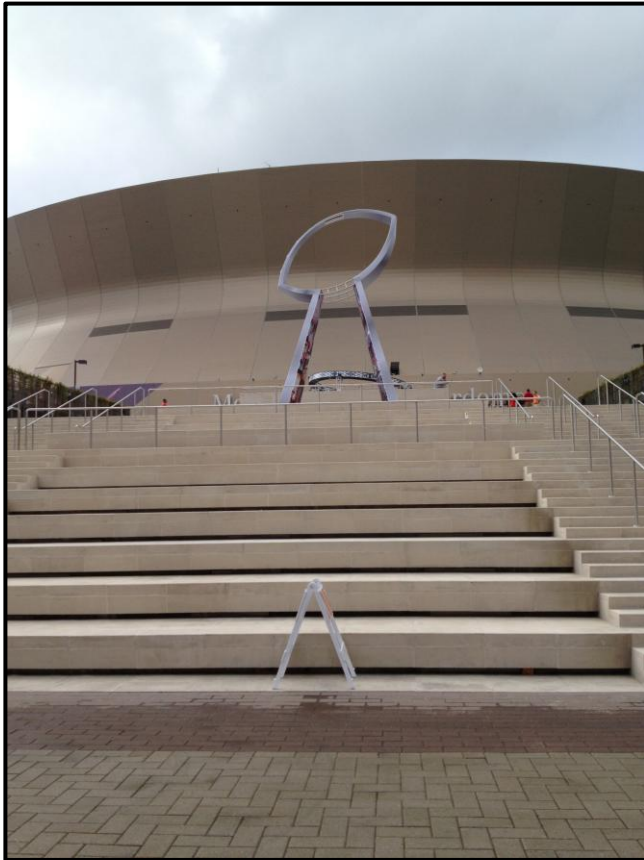
emblazoned with the logos of sponsors such as Snickers and EA Sports and performances on a Jackson Square stage framed by wrought-iron styled railings, a signature style of French Quarter balconies.

The NFL selected New Orleans to host Super Bowl XLVII, the city's tenth championship game. Super Bowl activities were woven throughout downtown and into the French Quarter. The city once again made its cultural wares available to the NFL. The league transformed Woldenberg Park, located between the banks of the Mississippi River and the French Quarter, into a site known as *Super Bowl Boulevard*, where a week-long festival of music, food, and NFL related revelry occurred as seen on page 216 in Figure 26²². The Morial Convention Center housed the *NFL Experience*, a traveling museum of historic NFL artifacts and activities. Days before the game, the Superdome hosted the NFL's *Media Day*. Underscoring the world-wide importance of the game, the NFL makes players and coaches available to thousands of journalists and other correspondents from around the world. Moreover, CBS, the 2013 Super Bowl broadcaster, as well as ESPN, and the NFL Network all broadcasted from various points within the French Quarter. Similar to the *Domecoming* game in 2006, the Super Bowl broadcast New Orleans to the world, revealing to everyone who watched that the city was far from the place it had been in 2005, of flooded streets and blue-tarped roofs as depicted in media images. The Saints resurrected New Orleans and the Super Bowl would showcase the city's return as one of the foremost tourist destinations in the country. The city hosted a successful week of NFL activities. Super Bowl XLVII shaped up to be "A Perfect 10," the theme used by the city when bidding for the mega-event (Kattengell 2013).

²² "Super Bowl Boulevard." February 2, 2013. Photograph courtesy of Brandon Haynes.

Super Bowl Sunday produced an air of excitement similar to that of *Saintsmania*. Fans were greeted at the Superdome by a statue of the NFL Championship trophy, the Lombardi Trophy seen in Figure 27²³. Part of the fans' exhilaration stemmed from their teams reaching the ultimate game of the season. Fans were delighted at attending one of the country's most

Figure 27: Lombardi Trophy statue



Lombardi Trophy stands as the symbol of the Super Bowl

(Photograph by author)

important cultural events. Fans that successfully passed through the heightened security made statements like, "I actually made it!" or yelled as they met companions, "We're at the Super Bowl!" This was not unlike the *Saintsmania* that gripped New Orleans during the Saints' Super Bowl season. The excitement of fans of this year's participants, the Baltimore Ravens and San Francisco 49ers, was contextually different from that of Saints fans during *Saintsmania*, but the effervescence was no less real.

Similar to how fervor behind

Saintsmania contributed to the cultural economy of New Orleans, the religious zeal behind football nationally lends the Super Bowl the cultural cache needed to entice cities to compete for the opportunity to say, "We are hosting the Super Bowl."

²³ "Statue of the Lombardi Trophy." February 2, 2013. Photograph courtesy of Brandon Haynes.

The game itself also acts as a tool to promote generation-defining performers and events. National recording artist Jennifer Hudson sang *America the Beautiful* with members of the Sandy Hook Elementary School choir, important because on December 14, 2012, almost two months prior to the game, a lone gunman walked into the Newtown, Connecticut school and killed twenty first graders and six adults, which set off a wave of sorrow, anger, and re-invigorated a gun debate in the country. NFL officials typically invite groups to participate in Super Bowl festivities as the game provides a platform to celebrate those culturally significant to the country such as members of the military and those affected by tragedy. R&B artist Alicia Keyes performed her rendition of the national anthem, while pop mega-star Beyonce' was the evenings halftime entertainment. The game brought out the stars to perform, but several celebrities also watched from the stands. Actors John Travolta and Channing Tatum, comedian Tracey Morgan, basketball greats Shaquille O'Neil and Gary Payton, and a host of others attended Super Bowl XLVII. The Super Bowl is a "can't miss" cultural experience for the celebrity and "everyman" alike.

The game finally kicked-off after the pomp and circumstance of pre-game festivities. The atmosphere inside the Superdome was stimulating as the opening kick set off a welcome release of tension. The anticipation was over; after a two week break the game had finally started. Both teams possessed the ball early, but each team's defense was up to the challenge. Finally, Baltimore's offense was able to move the ball leading to multiple first half touchdowns. San Francisco had opportunities for touchdowns, but could only manage two field goals by half's end. Baltimore took a 21-6 lead into the locker room at half-time. Baltimore opened the second half with a one hundred eight yard kick return by New Orleans native Jacoby Jones making the score 28-6. Undaunted, San Francisco started its opening drive of the second half by moving the ball against the Baltimore defense. The 49ers crossed

midfield and looked poised to get back into the game when a “static boom sounded from the speaker system and the [stadium] lights went out” (*The Times-Picayune*, 4, February, 2013). The power outage not only affected the game, but also altered the perception of New Orleans. The remainder of this concluding chapter discusses what media coined *The Blackout Bowl* and its effects on New Orleans’ image. It brings perspectives from city residents about not only the game but the city’s collective identity moving forward.

The Blackout Bowl

The Super Bowl power outage shut off half the stadium’s interior lights and caused a thirty-four minute game delay. The dimly lit Superdome conjured images of Hurricane

Figure 28: Superdome blackout delays game



Only half of the lights illuminated the inner bowl of the Superdome during the thirty-four minute blackout.

(Photograph courtesy Getty Images)

Katrina and the thousands that sought refuge in the building, shown on page 219 in Figure 28²⁴. CBS stopped its broadcast of the game, and covered the power outage as a breaking news story. Superdome officials scrambled throughout the building as they tried to find the cause of the power outage. Technicians eventually resolved the problem and returned full lighting to the stadium. The damage, however, had been done.

Media members harshly criticized New Orleans and the Superdome for the outage. Pat Forde, a national sportswriter, tweeted, “Hope New Orleans enjoyed this week. It won’t get another Super Bowl after this” (Kattengell 2013, 17). Stephen A. Smith, an ESPN commentator, echoed this when tweeting, “This is TERRIBLE. INEXCUSABLE. And Embarrassing. Somebody should pay for this. This is sickening. . . . I’d ban the [Super Bowl] from New Orleans for [the] next 20 [years] for this! DISGRACEFUL!” (Ibid., 17). This kind of technical difficulty in an event of this magnitude could hurt the city’s image going forward. Celeste Pierce, a Baton Rouge native and Saints fan said, “It’s unfortunate for the city, because we really needed to have a good showing, 100 percent showing for this” (*The Times-Picayune*, 4, February, 2013).

Super Bowl LIII and Beyond

New Orleans expects to make a bid to host Super Bowl LIII in 2018. The game coincides with New Orleans’ tri-centennial celebration, meaning the Super Bowl could truly be a city-wide mega-event. The Superdome blackout will give pause to any future considerations of New Orleans’ Super Bowl bids, as images of a darkened playing field linger in the minds of NFL decision makers. New Orleans received support from NFL Commissioner

²⁴ “Superdome Blackout in the Super Bowl.” February 3, 2013. Photo courtesy of Dilip Vishwanat, *Getty Images*. <<http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/lookout/fema-superdome-tweet-twitter-super-bowl-fighting-brown-183515793.html>>

Roger Goodell, who said the blackout would not affect having future Super Bowls in New Orleans. Goodell also said the league had a “fantastic week” in the city (Ibid.). The power outage has not swayed New Orleans officials from bidding for other mega-events. In a press conference the day after its *Elimination Chamber* event in the New Orleans Arena, representatives from World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) announced the selection of New Orleans as host city for *Wrestlemania 30* in 2014. The WWE considers *Wrestlemania* the “Super Bowl” of professional wrestling. The event has the potential to draw a world audience to New Orleans. The blackout was a set-back, but has not stopped New Orleans’ momentum in landing sports and entertainment’s most important events. The city remains one of the best places in the country for hosting tourists, a skill it has mastered almost to perfection.

“Everybody Blacks Out in New Orleans”

Some New Orleans residents view the Super Bowl blackout as a blemish to the city’s reputation; others view it as humorous, eliciting the joke, “Everybody blacks out in New Orleans,” which also refers to alcohol consumption in the city. The blackout event was typical of the mercurial nature of the city and football team described throughout this study in terms of one step forward and two steps back as a running narrative of New Orleans’ recent history. The Saints experienced historic success, which is then followed by an embarrassing bounty scandal. The city makes economic and cultural gains, followed by recession, crime spikes, and enough incarcerated public officials to field a basketball team. Now, New Orleans plays gracious host to the world for a week, and what ensues is a thirty-four minute blackout that threatens the perfection of the week’s events. Though some of this may be circumstance and not any one person’s doing, this equilibrium is common in New Orleans.

The Super Bowl blackout elicited various reactions from city residents, though one response stood out. Julie Lause (2013), principal at a local school, reflected on the blackout being typical of New Orleans, when she writes,

Power outage at the Super Bowl, sure. But then there's losing power for 10 days from a small hurricane; the annual boil water advisories, because the guys at the pump fell asleep or whatever. . . . I think we could stand to have higher expectations (and possibly a lower homestead exemption so we could collect more taxes) and actually demand a real city that works. After living here for 20 years, I'm no longer feeling the "third world and proud" mantra. I'm wishing that someone [cared] about blighted property, broken street lights, bad schools, or how my commute went from 10 minutes to 45 this year. If this were California, they would have already fixed this problem. Here, it's not really a problem. We have to stop being proud of how cute it is that things don't really work (1).

In what is an irony not uncommon in New Orleans, as the author pens words to page, breaking news flashes on the computer screen stating, "Boil water order issued for east bank of N.O. for at least 24 hours" (*WWLTV.com*, 3, *March*, 2013). "Things don't really work." That may be the ultimate understanding of collective identity in New Orleans. Sometimes things work, and sometimes they do not.

Chapter IX: Conclusion

Sports' Contribution to Urban Society

The purpose of this study is to understand professional sports' role and contribution to identity in an urban context. It analyzes the city of New Orleans and its collective identity centered on the New Orleans Saints after Hurricane Katrina. The research asks four specific questions:

1. *What was the collective identity in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina and how did the New Orleans Saints fit into the community?*
2. *How did collective identity change after Hurricane Katrina and how did sports affect this change?*
3. *How did collective identity deepen into a civic religion around football in New Orleans?*
4. *What were the effects of the devotion brought about by the deepening of collective identity around sports?*

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans was a city of stark contradictions. The celebration and revelry projected by civic boosters and experienced by visitors was contrasted by institutional racism, a waning economy, and an overall malaise by the city's public officials. These factors all contributed to limit the economic opportunities in the city which hindered New Orleans' competitiveness against other Southern cities. The Saints fit well into the identity of New Orleans. Civic boosters viewed the Saints as an important part of city's future. The team would make New Orleans 'big league' and put it in direct competition with other Southern cities as well as cities like Chicago and New York. The Saints, however, became an NFL folly as it stumbled through its history with more losses than wins. Still, New Orleans rallied around the team because it was theirs and was the only team in town. Many residents considered the Saints as surrogate family members, admonishing their multiple failures but

still praising the few wins. The Saints were strongly engrained in the New Orleans' contradiction of supporting a losing proposition.

Hurricane Katrina decimated New Orleans in two ways. There was the physical damage: damage from the storm that totaled into the billions, a death toll that reached over fifteen hundred, and an exodus from the city that inconvenienced thousands as residents sought shelter elsewhere. The literature in this study provides a rationale for the formation of collective identity that includes the status issues given to a group by outsiders. This is shown by the mental damage done to the city's image through a change in the discourse around New Orleans. The media conversation after Hurricane Katrina cast New Orleans in a negative light. Media imagery pushed aside the free-spirited view of New Orleans, and positioned the damaged Superdome, a scene of intense suffering, as the new representation of the city. Some outlets made claims the storm was God's retribution for the city's debaucheries. One state leader reveled in Hurricane Katrina's ability to cleanse the city of its public housing. Many around the nation questioned why anyone would rebuild in a city where it was only a matter of time before it would flood again. Hurricane Katrina physically and psychologically battered the image of New Orleans, changing its reputation from a place to party to a place to pity.

New Orleanians, however, did not pity their home city. The storm strengthened residents' resolve and determination to protect the collective identity of New Orleans. As residents returned home, the city's cultural wares, including its festivals, its restaurants, its music, and its people, increased in significance. As Castells describes in his description of collective identity, New Orleanians flocked to the reopening of restaurants, the parading of Mardi Gras, and the music of Jazz Fest. These cultural institutions that make up the city's local identity were exalted in its importance because it was nearly lost to the storm. Residents also awaited the return of the New Orleans Saints from the team's evacuation to Texas. The

city needed a focal point to rally around and the Saints acted as such in its return to the city. The Saints became a source of pride and hope after the storm. The team that had been perennial losers returned home as winners. The Saints showed New Orleans too could be a winner, lifting the city's collective spirits, a narrative that played an integral role in New Orleans' recovery. It provided a common goal for New Orleanians, as opposed to the schisms exposed by the storm. The team affected residents in their recovery, and aided the city as a whole. The Saints' comeback and subsequent Super Bowl victory changed the outward image of New Orleans to the world. The imagery of a flooded city was paired with and was eventually replaced by narratives of recovery. The city was still standing and open for business. The Saints acted as a symbolic representation of recovery, which affected its residents, image, and cultural economy.

This case study of New Orleans and the Saints after Hurricane Katrina provides an opportunity to discuss the intersection of sports, culture, and economics. Much of the literature discusses American professional sports as solely an economic proposition. Sports alone do not contribute substantially to the New Orleans economy. The depth of passion shown by residents for the Saints is a catalyst for the city's sports economy. This study touches on particular rituals and religious mechanisms that helped transform the Saints into a civic religion in New Orleans. The team strengthened its attachment to the daily culture of New Orleans as shown through the *Saintsmania* occurring outside of game days. Residents wear Saints jerseys throughout the week, sometimes to their place of employment, as "Black and Gold Fridays" have become sanctioned by several employers. Saints-related signs and paraphernalia are emblazoned on homes and on businesses. The literature on religion would describe these as totems of *Saintsmania*, which were imbued with memories of the city's past

and its current struggle to recover from Hurricane Katrina. These totems, which included the fleur-de-lis, like New Orleans culture, were exalted to a revered status due to its potential loss.

During the post-Katrina years, the Saints became a part of the daily rituals of New Orleans unlike in previous years; they were a part of the culture of New Orleans. The intertwining of sports and culture in New Orleans created the economic boom from sports seen in New Orleans. Though the Superdome was repaired, there was no guarantee the city would receive the numerous sports mega-events held in New Orleans since the storm. New Orleans as a tourist city has always been a draw for mega-events, but this research posits another reason is the attachment shown through the intertwining of sports and culture. Spending money on sports, whether on a jersey or a new venue, is not questioned, because for many, it is a part of a broader culture of the city. The intersection of sports and culture creates ubiquity in the Saints which contribute to the New Orleans economy.

The broader goal of this dissertation is to understand the implications of professional sports on urban culture. Though not the only implication, what this case study shows is sports' power to define or re-define a community. Civic boosters believe professional sports can define whether or not a city is 'big league' in comparison to others. While there are many other quality of life issues more pertinent to a city's livability, such as employment opportunities, schools, and public safety, somehow, a professional sports franchise defines one city as better than another. More practical is sports' ability to redefine a municipality. Sports are commonly used as a lynchpin for broader investments in a city's downtown or entertainment district. The Saints are a part of a broader sports and entertainment plan in New Orleans.

This case study shows the importance of sports as a type of inspirational diversion in difficult circumstances. Various maladies afflict urban locales, such as unemployment,

spiking crime rates, and reduced home values. Sports provide both a distraction and an inspiration. New Orleans used its existing familial relationship with the Saints to aid in its recovery. Similar to a relative turning to its family in a time of need, the Saints acted as a surrogate family the city could lean on during its difficult recovery period. Still, the Saints did not engender all good feelings, as the bounty scandal vanquished some of the good will and energy the team inspired in New Orleans. New Orleans, however, forgave team's indiscretions, and marveled at the good done by the team. As urban culture continues to fracture, and we continue to divide along lines of race, gender, sexual orientation, politics, etc., the need for a unifying presence is greatly needed. Sports do appear able at certain times to reach beyond demographic or social differences and allow people of all walks of life to support one goal. Sports unified New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, an event that threatened to break the city apart. The same can be said during the Olympics where the country unites behind its Olympic team against the world. Although there is only one winner, the passion behind which we support sports is enough to bring elements foreign to one another together in support of one cause. The Saints brought New Orleans back from the perceived death that many had predicted. For that reason, calling a football team named the Saints a savior seems reasonable.

A more fundamental understanding of this research and sports role in urban culture can be understood by referencing a conversation from sports talk radio. On October 8, 2012, ESPN radio personality Ryan Russillo engaged the audience in a conversation about the Kansas City Chiefs. In the midst of a losing season, Chiefs fans were accused and criticized for cheering the injury of their quarterback. After a back and forth banter with a co-host, Russillo finally said he understood why fans may have cheered about the quarterback's injury. It was not that fans want a player injured. They wanted a change for the better. Russillo then said,

“People lose all day, when they come home, they want to win” (Russillo 2012). This statement provides an overarching link to this study and the literature examined herein.

This study describes the various processes through which identity was created and strengthened. However, the need for these identity shifts is based on a want or need to win, which makes this study generalizable to a wider audience. Life’s difficulties do not discriminate by race, gender, sexual orientation, or political affiliation. Although some situations are worse than others, such as the devastation brought to New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina, everyone is faced with the complexities of life. Fans of sports, as well as other pastimes, use the games as their opportunity to win the day. Thus, when fans say they feel better on a Monday after their team’s victory, it is because they have won the Sunday. Conversely, losing on Sunday elicits disappointment and makes for a difficult Monday. Sports fans latch onto a team because in terms of Durkheim’s view on religion, the “winning” is sacred in the profane day-to-day world.

Future research

What this research presents to the reader is a case study that explores notions of collective identity in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. It shows how a football team helped bolster collective identity, by deepening it through winning and rituals, and fundamentally turning Saints’ fandom into a civic religion. The religion then generated revenues and ancillary effects for the cultural economy. It demonstrates how contradictory religion and collective identity can be, especially when organized by humans, and built upon a flawed foundation.

Though this may be the most exemplary case, given the circumstances of Hurricane Katrina, this is not the only case in which to analyze collective identity and the cultural role of

sports. The city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania has a deep history with football. In the collegiate ranks, the University of Pittsburgh once fielded a nationally successful football program that produced NFL Hall of Fame players Dan Marino and Tony Dorsett. Furthermore, its NFL team, the Pittsburgh Steelers is as much of a national icon as a civic one. Pittsburgh, though, is not considered a tourist destination like New Orleans. Continued research could broach collective identity in non-tourist cities, and seek to understand how civic religions based around sports manifest when less of the city's economy is dependent on the tourist trade. Also fodder for additional research is an analysis of collective identity in a tourist city whose sports culture has not necessarily deepened into a civic religion. In Miami, for example it is a common statement made during broadcast that Miami fans tend to be tardy for the start of games. Of interest would be how a less developed sports culture is expressed in a tourist city.

Appendices

Appendix A: Works Cited

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Appendix B: Questionnaire for Pilot Interviews at 2010 Season Opener

1. Where are you from?
2. Are you a football fan?
3. Are you a Saints fan?
4. How long have you been a Saints fan?
5. What did the Saints winning the Super Bowl mean to you personally?
6. What did the Saints winning the Super Bowl mean to the city?
7. Did the Saints help the city recover from Hurricane Katrina?
8. How did the Saints help the city recover from Hurricane Katrina?

Appendix C: Questionnaire for Pilot Conducted with Local Media

1. How is New Orleans different than other sports cities?
2. Could you explain the city's relationship with the team?
3. What were Saints fans like before Katrina?
4. Why do you believe the fans were so upset at the thought of the Saints staying in San Antonio after Katrina?
5. What do you think it meant to the residents of New Orleans that the Saints returned to New Orleans?
6. Where they different after Katrina?
7. Do you believe the fans used the Saints for purposes other than football? How?
8. If one can consider the public culture of NOLA its music, cuisine, architecture and history, would you consider the Saints to now be part of that public culture? If so why?
9. Do you think/have you seen any other cities react to a football team like New Orleans? Other sports?
10. Do you think any other city would react to winning a Super Bowl in the manner New Orleans did?
11. Is there anything you would want to know if you were conducting this research?
12. Anyone you recommend speaking with about the topic?

Appendix D: Summary of Pilot Study

The researcher conducted three separate pilot studies to gather preliminary information that would inform his later research. Below are summaries of the methodology and the results of the pilot studies.

1.2010 Season Opener: The researcher conducted a pilot survey prior to the first home game of the 2010 NFL season. This was the first time in team history the Saints entered a new season as defending league champions. Semi-structured interviews [see appendix page XX] were conducted before the game at four separate locations: the New Orleans' French Quarter; a tailgate site near the Superdome; at Champions Square, located adjacent the Superdome; and at Tracey's Bar and Restaurant in uptown New Orleans. Of the 25 people asked, 10 responded; six female and four male.

Respondents said they were lifelong Saints fans, although one said he was not a fan but looked at the Saints as members of his family. On winning the Super Bowl, respondents framed it as "perseverance paying off", "giving some faith that they could save themselves." They were happy to share the moment with other New Orleanians, saying that the nation would "look at us" and take notice. Some said it was "another reason to party." The team's success brought both "positive and negative" attention to the city. It unveiled not only an impoverished city struggling to get on its feet, but also a city that was still standing and making improvement. The Saints were a symbol of the people, and as one respondent said, "ushered in a post-Katrina renaissance in the city."

1. Media /Business Leader Interviews: The researchers conducted five semi-structured interviews with members of the media about the role of the Saints in the city's recovery after Hurricane Katrina. Two of the interviewees were local television sportscasters; three were sports writers for *The Times-Picayune*. Each of the media interviewees have lengthy careers covering the New Orleans Saints and have historical knowledge of the team and the fan base. The sixth interviewee was with the head of the Greater New Orleans Sports Foundation, an organization whose mission is to "mission is to attract and manage sporting events that have a positive economic impact on the Greater New Orleans area" (Greater New Orleans Sports Foundation 2008). This organization works hand and hand with the Saints, having inside knowledge about the organization and its decision making processes.

Respondents viewed New Orleans as a city with a small television market that "plays bigger than it is." Nativism is important, as people celebrate the indigenous artifacts of the city. For many years, the Saints were the only professional team in the city, so residents were "indoctrinated by the team from birth." This is evident in that a higher percentage of New Orleanians watch Saints games on television, than any home town watches its home football team. Interviewees believed New Orleans compares Green Bay, Wisconsin, home of the NFL's Green Bay Packers, in that the team is the focal point of the city. However, what makes the Packers different is their history of success, winning multiple league championships, including the Super Bowl 45. Other cities, such as Los Angeles, Atlanta, and New York, have multiple sports teams and other competing interests for the entertainment dollar. In New Orleans, football is an intense experience that fosters a sense of unity. People celebrate the Saints in the same manner they celebrate life and culture, with a party.

Interviewees said that New Orleanians have a deep, emotional investment in the Saints such that individual happiness is tied to the team's success. When the team wins, residents are happy; when they lose sadness ensues. However, regardless of the team's record, New Orleanians will always love the Saints. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, fans were frustrated with the direction of the team, as well as ownership. Saints owner Tom Benson constantly threatened to leave the city before Hurricane Katrina unless he received larger incentive packages from the state. That, plus years of mediocre performing teams, left fans and the business community disengaged. When Benson threatened to leave New Orleans after the storm, the residents turned provincial and protective of the city. Respondents said the Saints are a New Orleans tradition; losing the team would have devastated the community. For residents the Saints "severing membership to the community" would be akin to "losing a way of life," severely jeopardizing the city's recovery efforts.

After weeks of bitterness and ill-feelings between Tom Benson and the New Orleans community, NFL officials decided to keep the team in New Orleans in an attempt to gauge whether the city still support a professional franchise. In what some viewed as an act of defiance towards the owner, as well as a matter of civic pride, Saints fans purchased tickets for the upcoming season in large quantities, achieving the first season sell-out in team history. The New Orleans Saints as a business entity was alive, but more importantly to residents, the team as a cultural institution was coming back to the Crescent City. Interviewees said residents and fans alike became more passionate about the team. People reprioritized their behavior after the storm, viewing the Saints as part of the city's quality of life. To those regrouping after the storm, the Saints were a welcomed escape from the memories of Hurricane Katrina. Through Saints games, friends once scattered across the nation could once again gather together for tailgating and other football parties; they could reconvene with their "families" in the Superdome. People, again, had a common bond besides the storm. Furthermore, the Saints played the role of the city defender, where the team's success gave residents a chance to say "look at us" to a nation that once spoke of New Orleans as if it was the lost underwater city of Atlantis.

Like Mardi Gras, Jazz Fest, and other cultural events, interviewees stated that the Saints have always been a part of the culture of the city. To be sure, the Saints are the only NFL team to use their home city's logo, the fleur-de-lis, as the team emblem. However, the passion of the fans intensified after Hurricane Katrina. Since the storm, the Saints have become a very distinctive NFL team and a reflection of New Orleans' culture, with an explosion of music, costumes, and revelry. On the field, the team was like a "53-man fleur-de-lis. . . that symbolized hope and leadership, in a time where there was little of both."

When the team finally reached the pinnacle of NFL success, winning Super Bowl 44, Saints fans celebrated in true New Orleans fashion. There was no violence; just dancing in the streets, hugging, crying, and hand slapping. Interviewees thought of it as an emotional release for the entire city. Many residents chose to stay in New Orleans rather than go to Miami for the Super Bowl to celebrate with the city regardless of the game's outcome. Fans living outside the city chose to fly to New Orleans to watch the game. After the victory, some Who Dats flew to New Orleans to be a part of the nationally televised Lombardi Gras victory parade. "That just does not happen under normal NFL circumstances. People were not flying to Pittsburgh or Green Bay when they won the Super Bowl," but they had to be in New Orleans. Through the Saints' success, the residents of New Orleans felt as if they collectively accomplished something special.

3. *Discourse Analysis*: Using transcripts from two semi-structured interviews, and *Times Picayune* articles written during the 2009-2010 NFL season, the researcher analyzed the conversation surrounding the team. After extracting quotes from the two respondents and from the newspaper articles, statements were grouped into general themes. There were nine general themes that sources discussed:

a. Feelings about the game (NFC Championship and Super Bowl): There were a lot of emotions and subsequent actions tied to this game including anxiety, excitement, pride, jubilation, crying, hugging, etc. This can be tied to an existing literature on collective effervescence in religious ritual.

b. Places and Music: Describes where people watched the game, or game day activities; New Orleans as the place for this to happen. From Mardi Gras parades to the French Quarter, the city has the infrastructure and the institutional knowledge that makes street celebrations commonplace in New Orleans.

c. Feelings during the game: More emotions of watching the game sorrow for bad plays, excitement for good plays, and relief after victory.

d. Feelings about the 2009 season: There was a lot of usage of the word “we,” “our,” and “everybody.” This plays to the notion of a collective identity through sports. Non-local newspapers regularly mentioned the Saints.

e. Feelings about the Saints: There was much about loyalty to the Saints. People remarked about the number of years the Saints have been in New Orleans and how many losing seasons the team had. They talked about the many failures and how one respondent was “tired of defending the Saints.” People looked at the Saints victory with defiance saying that the league is going to “have to find a new whipping boy” or that the team is “no longer the league’s doormat.” People also discussed the attachment to the team and being “distracted” if the team moved.

f. About New Orleans: People spoke again in defiant terms, such as “Look, we rebuilt our house, this is where we are, we’re watching the Super Bowl five years after Katrina. We’re back. That’s a big deal.” Another said, “You don’t take us seriously and now we’re here and we’re taking this seriously.” They said New Orleans was a prideful city of natives. “If you are from here, you don’t leave here.” It was a way for people to identify with the city.

g. Collective Identity: All seemed to be gripped in a similar euphoria around the Saints. They were driven by a need to celebrate with one another. It was “awesome to know others feel what you feel.” This, as well as the “Feelings about the Saints” category could speak to the literature on the idea of the creation of a collective identity in the city.

h. Game day Schedule: Discussed the ritual of game days, including the order one puts on clothing and the particulars of the day. Game days sometime extend through the weekend. This could speak to the importance in football as a secular religion with specific rites and rituals.

i. Apparel: Discussed the particular paraphernalia worn and why. Both “Game day Schedule” and “Apparel” speak to rituals and religion in that some people believe that keeping a customary ritual will lead to successful outcomes. This is similar to ritual sacrifices for successful crop production in past cultures.

A look at the three pilots as a whole begins to formulate a narrative of the Saints role in post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans. There is a sense that the team is very important to the distinct identity of this city, which seemed to be expressed in the rituals surrounding the team. The fact that people believe that “everybody” was on board with the Saints speaks to a power found in the idea of the collective identity of the city.

The pilot studies have provided reasonable information to start reviewing literature on religion and ritual, personal and collective identity, and the economics of sport. The economics of sport was selected as another starting place in the literature, because while it was mentioned by many of the media members, none of the fans discussed it. Yet, player salaries and league incomes is always at the forefront of discussion in sports. That said there may be something about sport that transcends economics.

Appendix E: Category Definitions for Content Analysis

Local and National Grids

Cultural Importance/Collective Identity: These phrases discuss the importance of the Saints to the people and their way of life in New Orleans. It presents the Saints as an institution that locals collectively rally around.

Civic Importance: describes Saints importance to New Orleans. Describes city-wide actions such as closing public institutions, city-wide absences from school and work, or the restoration of civic confidence.

Race/Difference: passages discuss issues of difference, including race, class, or gender

Regional Pride: discusses the effects of the Saints on the Gulf South region

Distraction from Katrina: portrays the Saints as a diversion from the mental fatigue caused by Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent recovery process

Lifting Spirits/Hope: segments address how the Saints improved morale in New Orleans

Superdome: reflections on the importance of the Superdome to locals as well as a part of the civic infrastructure. Passages may also include references to the Superdome as the symbol of Hurricane Katrina

Inconsistencies: notes the contradictions within the narrative of *Saintsmania*. For example, one passage references the many White faces in the Superdome audience for the first Saints game after the storm, while those affected were primarily Black.

Long Suffering/Emotions: extracts discuss both the long-suffering of Saints fans who wanted their team to succeed and suffering caused by the hurricane

New Orleans vs. the World/Imagery: segments include the sentiments that parts of the country did not want New Orleans to be rebuilt, or that the storm was a message from God punishing New Orleans for its sins

Who Dat Phrase: articles reference the fight between the NFL and New Orleans business owners for the legal right to use the phrase "Who Dat?"

Religion/Totem/Effervescence: locals or others interviewed placing inferences of religion onto the Saints or sports in general

Economic Affects: passages talk about the economic effects of the Saints on New Orleans

Family: articles referenced the role of family in Saintsmania. These can include memories shared by those interviewed as youth or of loved ones passed away.

Bounty Grid (National Stories)

Rogue Team: segments portray the Saints organization and players in a negative light based on the bounty scandal. Some mention that the NFL was too lenient on the organization.

Unjust/Hypocrisy: vignettes show that some believe the bounty punishment was too harsh or that the NFL “sells” this behavior to the fans, yet punishes the players

“Snitch”: thoughts by fans and NFL players against whomever informed the NFL on the Saints bounty program

Feel Good Story Over: passages refer to the narrative of the Saints uplifting New Orleans as now being tainted by the bounty scandal

Bounty Grid (Local Stories)

Saints vs. NFL: articles discuss the NFL as having a grudge against the Saints organization

Cultural Importance: further discuss the Saints’ importance to the people of New Orleans and the region

Economic Importance: a thought on how the bounty scandal would affect the New Orleans economy

Drew Brees: passages refer to the contract negotiations between quarterback Drew Brees and Saints officials in the 2012 off-season

Saints’ Embarrassment: local writers’ thoughts on the bounty scandal and how it has affected the image of the Saints organization

Appendix F: Discourse Coding

Discourse Coding
Local Media Sources
2006, 2009

Cultural Importance/Collective
. . . that there is something to all this hoopla, this Saints-crazed reverie, this talk of "we" this and "we" that and everyone on the same page of the program, as (like it or not) our football team looms as the symbol of the city's pride and rebirth
Sports. Football. The Saints. It gets in you and --in NO-- it gets on you and stays on you like a ring of sweat that won't wash out of your favorite wok shirt
It's NO style baby. . . . We party no matter what. Katrina comes in, washes us out, but we still got our cold beer
(about Philadelphia) It was a point of pride for fans that the old Veterans Stadium had a satellite municipal courthouse and temporary jail set up in the bowels of the buildings for authorities to swiftly dispense with the impressive docket of municipal offenses racked up by the football faithful every other Sunday afternoon in the fall
Since the flood and all the bad stuff that washed in but not out, everything is different and up is down and cold is hot and brown is the new black and how the hell did we get to the point where it actually mattered if the Saints won or lost a game
This is January and it's something more than a game but, to tell you the truth, I don't know the name of it.
Pride? Distraction? I don't know. Just don't try to tell me it's not whether you win or lose but how you play the game. I care. You care. We all care.
My kids care: that's how ridiculous it's become. They shouldn't care and I don't want them to care, but they have pep rallies at their school and they make fleur-de-lis in art class.
This is amazing, just seeing everyone here and knowing what went on here and what is going on now, and seeing how everyone us embracing the team.
Unfortunately it took one of the great disasters in American history for the Saints to develop a different kind of following (among fans)
2.1 percent of US population mention the Saints as their favorite NFL team, making them the 13th most popular team in the league
Two years ago, 93% of those who mentioned the Saints as their favorite team resided in the South, now only 85%. . . the shift is statistically significant
The Saints have captured the hearts of fans across the country with their commitment to the community and their play on the field
(Brees) I think the single best thing I could probably do at this point to help this city is win football games, because I think that does wonders just for people's spirits and everything. It's kind of a new beginning.
There were Saints robots, Saints nuns, Saints Batman, Saints Moses, and an entire gang of Saints Elvis's

To send them to school in anything but black and gold--as the administration had urged parents to do in a show of school spirit and city unity--would have been akin to sending my children out trick-or-treating on Halloween without a costume
At the parent/teacher/student assembly. . . . the only "educational" item on the agenda was whether face-painting would be allowed that day
The many children who had arrived with fleurs-de-lis already in place on cheeks and noses would have to turn themselves in for a scrubbing before reporting to class
The music teacher asked the parents to follow his lead and chant, over and over, Saints go marching in
As meeting broke. . . . many parents and teachers and kids hugged each other before parting like it was the last day of school, like there would be some sort of transformation and personal growth before we saw each other again
I have witnessed, firsthand, the long-term health effects of being a Saints fan. It's not pretty, it's a meat grinder, truth be told
There is something about waking up in a community that is thinking the same thing, that is feeling--if only for a moment--like we all just accomplished something together
Saints success puts a collective smile on the faces of city's beleaguered residents
Saints officials were greeted by an impromptu pep rally in the parking lot outside the team facility in Metairie
When we were flying (home early Monday) I thought that surely that at 2:30 in the morning there's not going to be anyone out there. When the plane landed it seemed like there were more people out there.
That's all they've been talking about since we opened the doors at 7 o'clock. . . . It's been non-stop Saints
I think that all of us understand that we're there to report a story that is only nominally sports
Saints fans) have always been the best fans in the world, supporting a team that hasn't given them much in return. And now, after how the fans responded after Katrina, they deserve it even more
Yet the hardship of defeat has spawned an enduring love
I'm with them win or lose. . . . wore fleur-de-lis jewelry and gold sandals at Monday's pep rally. There is a feeling among the fans that this is our time in that we can go further than we have before
At a tattoo shop in Metairie, Don Lucas said there's been an increase in customers wanting to get fleur-de-lis tattoos
We love football and we love our city, and we always felt staying loyal to the Saints was good for the city.

At the end of the game. . . . players were not leaving the field and fans were not exiting the Superdome. Everyone wanted to make the incredible experience last a little longer.
A certain football team--or fans hysteria about it--has managed to work its way into nearly every aspect of life in metro NO
When we were in our darkest days, shortly after Hurricane Katrina, "we" seemed foreign to his vocabulary. Now he throws the word around as if he has reduced himself to a level of humanity equal to that of his fellow New Orleanians
We are witnessing that the NO Saints and sports are providing an experience of true community and friendship among our citizens
Sports are friendships without boundaries, beyond languages, cultures and customs. The NO Saints are bringing harmony to our great city
Culture of NO and rebuttal to Charles Barkley
I believe that it's the people who have supported the Saints for 40 years, even when they had to wear bags over their heads, who are good--very good
At the beginning of the football season the staff decided to gather for lunch each time the Saints won a home game. Since the first Superdome victory. . . . something special happened--we grew as a professional team
Perhaps through our common love and support of the Saints, we learned about each other not just as professional colleagues, but as people. We discovered connections about our hopes for our families, work and community
I want to be a Saints fan because I love Saints fans, who last week proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that they're the class of the NFL. Saints fans love football and they love NO. Nothing else matters.
They want to hold onto this good feeling and we want to make sure it lasts another week
Poem titled "Our Saints, Our City, Our Soul"
About Buddy D) He always preached to me how much football meant to this city, how it brought everybody together, how it was the common denominator. His passion for football was unsurpassed, un-measurable
They are part of us, who we are, and when you lose so much of what was you, your life it just feels good to have someone bring some part of that back to you,
When you lose so much, anything little that may be found or returned to you is a treasure
It means the joy of the return of trust to sad and disillusioned people in NO
The Saints have shown us what can be accomplished by rebuilding from the bottom up
Some may say it's only football but I say it is an example of what real leaders do and what can happen when there is hard work, commitment and dedication

The Saints winning season has brought a special unity to our area--a much needed unity in a community that has been knocked down, drowned out and hung out to dry
The SAINTS are the heartbeat, the soul of this city, the love of this town
Big Easy is a place of strength, love, and power
This team is the light that leads our way to a better day. The Saints have shown us the way. Now we can follow them and make our way to a better day.
The past several weeks, you have seen people upbeat, smiling, happy. No matter what their situation is in life, you start to talk about the Saints and their faces light up
A Saints winning season means I see smiling faces up and down Magazine St.
I think people have a greater appreciation for tailgating this year. After going through the hurricane, I didn't think we would ever be back here again.
What it possesses in quality, Saints tailgating has traditionally lacked in quantity, however.
We missed our Saints
NO has always had one of the most unfavorable tailgate setups in the NFL. But we never saw more people tailgating here than he did for the Atlanta game
It was wonderful. This is what NO needs, to get together and talk.
Tailgating is really all about the need for socialization
2009
. . . . the school's principal swept in, called Frost into the hallway and told him to change his shirt or hit the road. Frost chose the latter. The problem? While all his classmates were wearing black and gold to support the Saints as they prepared for the Super Bowl, Frost was wearing the enemy blue of the Indianapolis Colts
Every game is a home game for the Saints in their 2009 magical mystery tour
. . . . been blown away by the size of crowds, all ages, that have showed up at the airport after road games
The players and the city have embraced one another. That's what makes this moment so special for everyone.
(Sean Payton) I think that's just a sense, a feeling that exists or permeates really throughout the course of the year or throughout the course of the player's time here. That sense or that feeling of 'This is pretty important to everyone.' And the fans how great they are, they remind us daily how important it is to them
There's a lot going on right now. . . . I couldn't imagine being anywhere else in the world
Saints victory parade. . . . estimated 800,000 people braved frigid temperatures and epic traffic gridlock

Anyone who survived Hurricane Katrina can celebrate with anyone who ever wore a bag to the Superdome
The Saints have traditionally garnered large television ratings and market shares; a direct correlation to having a competitive and exciting team but also having the best and most passionate fans
(at Super Bowl). . . . It's 10-1 Saints fans out here.
. . . . and we just fell in love with the fans, their energy, the way they party
New Orleanians know all about devastating losses and the irreparable harm it can inflict on a city's collective psyche and self-esteem . There is, however, an upside to the Saints' heritage of gridiron fiasco: permanent underdog status
Saints may truly be America's Team
. . . . she logged on to Facebook only to be taken aback by the Saints hysteria that had gripped her friends across the US
In just more than a week, more than 10K fans had signed up (on Who Dat Nation FB group) shouting Who Dat from just about every state in the country as well as Germany, Canada, the Virgin Islands, Venezuela, Great Britain and Japan
People across the country appreciate the comeback story being written throughout the Gulf Coast
. . . . she logged on to Facebook only to be taken aback by the Saints hysteria that had gripped her friends across the US
The Saints have even found a following in the offices of the Times of London
She said a friend of hers from Seattle, with no connection to NO, attended the NFC championship party and sent an e-mail to friends describing the scene as "out of control awesome"
I think the spirit, hope and enthusiasm of Saints fans are absolutely contagious. Even those people who've never lived in NO or LA still recognize that something amazing is happening and they want to be part of it as well
The people here completely love this team. . . . You can't compare it to any other situation
The people here are not only Saints fans--they needed this victory, (which was) well-deserved
In the classroom, teachers are devoting considerable time to the Saints. . . . educators develop lesson plans capitalizing on the football frenzy
We believe in academic and character education. We have taken the opportunity to use the NO Saints as a model for perseverance, tenacity and faith in themselves
. . . . she wanted to be outside the airport "to be a part of this, to feel this, touch the air. It's electrifying."

<p>She said she was united in grief with her neighbors when their homes all flooded during Hurricane Katrina. But she enjoyed more celebrating with her neighbors after the SB. To be united in joy, it's a totally different experience</p>
<p>As Saints players drive by, the fans, sometimes five or six deep, stand behind barricades, some wearing costumes, waving their arms or signs and screaming. It's kind of like Mardi Gras</p>
<p>The phenomenon of being there for every game and making it an event, I've never heard of that before. . . . Returning home after a road game to crowds of fans has become a great Saints tradition, unique among NFL teams</p>
<p>The crowds have been getting larger each week</p>
<p>The NO Saints have been the rallying force behind the entire region since our 2005 recovery got under way. The impact they have had on the spirit of this area cannot be measured</p>
<p>The way this city and this team, our team, have embraced one another is unique in all the world</p>
<p>. . . . it truly borders on indescribable how much that's great can come out of this game</p>
<p>We're all in this together, good times and bad, for richer or poorer, till death do us part (though Buddy D may be disagreeing from above). Yes, we lost a battle, but we're still winning the war--and that includes more than just football</p>
<p>Look at all this. What else could we get this many folks into the streets for besides football? . . . I quickly realized that our Saints are merely a catalyst for the outpouring of that magic that the people of NO have always had.</p>
<p>Everywhere were black and gold T-shirts, flags, signs and inflatable figures, among many other kinds of sports props. Everywhere I saw people smiling and talking with each other.</p>
<p>People were spending their money and talking with their neighbors comrades in our common cause</p>
<p>This is the influence that the Saints have here. This influence sustains us, enrages us, elates us, frustrates us and ultimately fulfills us</p>
<p>Despite huge crowds, the NOPD said there were no reports of violence in the downtown area before, during or after the NO Saints won the NFC championship game Sunday</p>
<p>There also were no reports of property damage, accordingly to a new release from Superintendent Warren Riley. Eighth District police reported only minor incidents related to the crowds in the French Quarter</p>
<p>. . . . the NO Saints have totally rejuvenated me, swelling my heart with a newfound love and respect for the city</p>
<p>I am so proud to call NO home. For the first time in four years, I finally feel whole again.</p>
<p>We are joined together in the Who Dat Nation and we are one</p>

Nonetheless, home will always be in our hearts. Our flag flies black and gold, our eyes cry black and gold and our hopes and dreams are illuminated in black and gold

. . . . the Saints have given this city a special gift that will last well beyond Christmas. Friends and family make it a point to gather together to watch the games. Strangers smile and talk with one another in line while shopping.

Yes, we can all watch at home with friends, family, and co-workers, but we do that all the time. On this one night, why not let us experience this together, as a city?

Most Saints fans have been fans no matter what the outcome

The whole city is fighting for the same thing; we are all on the same side

But recently NO have metaphorically turned the tables on this rhetorical trend: "Be a New Orleanian Wherever You Are." ..here we are ascribing certain positive characteristics to the people and culture of this place and advocating that they be recognized, appreciated, and adopted in other places

. . . . consider the "Who Dat Nation." Here we have a metaphorical nationality in which citizenship depends not on borders or birthplace, but passionate love of the Saints --and right behind that, of NO

To those who dismiss sports as a trivial and illusionary distraction, consider the civic narratives at work here: Unity. Resilience. Optimism.

The appeal of these themes has expanded the Who Dat Nation beyond national borders. A colleague of mine in Paris informed me of the street celebrations erupting near Notre Dame "when the game finished around 430 am, which is the deadest time of night in Paris. . . heard people cheering and Who Dat-ing at the top of their lungs

The NO Saints have transcended football and become a vital cog in the ongoing progression to recovery, both as a group and as individuals

People who do not know a touchdown from a home run have learned how to say Who Dat

That is to say that almost everyone in parish government sported some kind of Saints gear. . . or simply an "Aints no more" button

Winning a SB would be special. But a victory over the Vikings will be one that we experience with each other, together, knowing where we've been, how far we've come

Each day volunteer divers enter the giant tanks to clean the exhibits and feed the creatures who live there, but this football season they've added Saints gear to their wetsuits to demonstrate their devotion to the home team.

The black 1998 Ford-150, covered with life size players outside and upholstered with pigskin inside, is a dazzling tribute to the Daigles' beloved NO Saints

At my Jazzercise class last week we wore our black Finish Strong t-shirts and danced to Who Dat Say Dey Gonna Beat Dem Saints, chanting Who Dat

(about Halftime) What's great about it to me is it's everything coming together. We liked it, the players liked it and the fans have embarrassed it. In a very natural and viral way, it has become our mantra, our theme song. We play it as much as possible.

It was clear that the Saints were a phenomenon, even more than just a football team, and the more I've learned about their season and the more I learned about Drew and the more I learned about the way NO has embraced this team, the more I thought this was a fantastic story that really transcends football

Clearly, you don't have to be from NO to get caught up in the Saints mania that has researched a fever pitch in recent weeks in the Crescent City

And it's prompting even out-of-town members of local movie crews--who thought they would be shooting in the relative calm between the December holidays and Mardi Gras--to gleefully embrace citizenship in the WDN

Papon's one-word response when asked if Who Dat mania has permeated the production's sets and offices: "Absolutely"

. . . . director Roger Donaldson. . . . said he'd never been a football fan until he arrived to work on the film. Since then, however, after hearing constant buzzing about the team, he became a convert

Walk down any NO street and look at the smiling faces, the Who Dat fist bumps, and you'll know this is why sports are relevant. It has the potential to touch and unite an entire community unlike anything else in our culture

What they couldn't have known is that many of these people were not just die-hard football fans or Saints season ticket holders, not just the sports junkies addicted to the game. It was many people who never cared before--and might never again

In fact, we actually saw people coming together over something as, in some respects, weirdly irrelevant as a sports team. But maybe that's what it takes, that sort of oddball thing to bring a town together.

Growing up in Cleveland, I was fortunate enough to land in a city that mirrored much of what I understood home to be. Both cities were represented by hard-working, resourceful, prideful, compassionate and passionate individuals that, above all, adored their football teams

No matter how dire the circumstances around them were, you were always greeted with a "hey baaaby" and a smile. The population understood there was extreme poverty and crime amongst them, but they never allowed themselves to be consumed by their reality as opposed to cherishing what they had

The only thing that NO felt was theirs and theirs alone was the Saints

Saints, who play in the league's second smallest market and 16th largest stadium, face the greatest annual challenge to sell out their stadium

Saints have managed to sell out 25 consecutive games, and excluding the Katrina season, have sold out all but one game during the past decade

People are having it tough down here. People are watching their dollars and they're being tighter than ever. . . . fans are taking a breather from non-essential items. In NO, Saints football is an essential item

Civic Importance
He, like so many people I have met this past year, was unaware that we (NO) are open for business
(About ATL game) several CBD offices will close early. City Hall will close at 4:30.
Officials are hailing the restoration as a pivotal moment in the city's post-Katrina recovery
Atlanta) This is NO doing things on a worldwide level. It's a steppingstone in reclaiming, in a positive way, a space and a place from the annals of horror
The reopening of the Dome has so much symbolic importance. This is another thing like Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest that will make the entire world sit up, take notice and look at NO.
(About ATL game) clearly no one went to work; either that, or the term "business casual" has taken on new meaning around here
It seems like all the adults in town just dropped off their kids. . . . because we had more important matters to attend to: rebirthing a city.
Notoriously late for games, New Orleanians on this day came early
Jones order delaying the trial was greeted with glee by a Civil Court insider, who asked not to be identified: The world is safe for Saints football! I guess that just shows what kind of power the Saints championship march has on every aspect of this city.
The Saints issued 535 press credentials to ESPN alone, nearly 500 to other journalists
A Saints playoff victory Saturday was probably the single most healing event since Carnival 2006
Political consultant to JP President Aaron Broussard said his client might hold off a week or two on announcing a possible re-election bid until the Saints matter is complete
Local residents and event organizers have spent the week in a mad scramble to avoid or accommodate the Saturday-night kickoff of the Saints playoff game against the Philadelphia Eagles in the Superdome
I think having the Saints game on at the (wedding) reception will make the occasion even more special
Local events from Mardi Gras balls to a symphony gala--long on the calendar for attendees--are being rescheduled or re-themed to accommodate Saints mania
This is all about the rebirth of the city. . . . they could be playing basketball or hockey or having a hopscotch competition. It's about getting together for three or four hours as a community, people coming together
2009
SB flu struck schools and businesses Monday

From Gretna to Goodbee, it idled offices, silenced courtrooms and kept half the students home from some schools on the day after the NO Saints victory in the NFL championship game

. . . (she) compared Monday's absenteeism to Christmas Eve or Lundi Gras

Among schools that stayed open, absences ran into the tens of thousands with children skipping class to greet the Saints homecoming at Louis Armstrong International Airport, buy championship gear or recover from the madness at home

In Jeff Parish, an average of five teachers per public school were out, and almost half of the system's 44,000 students were absent

NO beloved Saints had won their first-ever SB six days ago. A day before that, residents had elected a new mayor. Things seem to be changing for the better, and **civic confidence** has soared to an all-time high

The lifelong NO Saints fans instead will host smaller gatherings in their hospital rooms, where. . . are battling cancer, while . . . rehabs from a construction site accident that left him without the use of his legs

Several local hospitals have capitalized on the excitement with pep rallies. At West Jeff Medical Center on Friday, black and gold umbrellas, Saints flags and loud chants of Who Dats filled the main atrium. A few verses of "When the Saints Go Marching In" morphed into an impromptu second-line of wheelchairs and dancing nurses

It's been so nice to just go from floor to floor today and see everyone--patients, staff, family members--just be so happy, said West Jeff CEO

But, she said the Saints success--and in her son's case, their outreach--helps some ill fans and their families endure otherwise untenable situations

This is bigger than the Super Bowl because it's here

Look at this. . . and it's not just here. This is what's happening from the river to the lake, from the Quarter all the way up Canal Street. That's why it's so special.

There's a tradition at Jesuit High School in Tampa, FL allowing the school's president to declare a day off each year--and this year it's going to be the Super Bowl Monday in anticipation of a miracle, compliments of . . . a popular Jesuit priest who left NO two years ago

(about going to SB) it feels like I've got to be with them in that town, whether I'm at the game or not

For them, it's less about the game and more about feeling the indomitable spirit of the city behind the team

"You can give me tickets and I wouldn't go. . . we've been through so much and now it's here. I wouldn't want to be in any other place

. . . the Saints winning the SB is now the priority in the minds of voters, and the municipal races might be an afterthought for some

If you look at the local media Web sites today, you'll find they are all dominated by the coverage of the Saints to the exclusion of every other story

Since Thursday, it's been all Saints all the time, and you know what, who blames NO. It feels good. It's about time. And that helps those candidates who voters feel good about

Saints have turned NO into a city of believers this season. This year Brees and company have immersed every last acre in Saints fever

You couldn't go anywhere in town this week without experiencing some form for black and gold sensory overload. Car flags fluttered in the unseasonably warm winter wind. Yard signs and banners brandished messages of support. Doctors treated patients in Saints jerseys, and store clerks greeted customers with a smile and a Who Dat.

Deliriously welcoming back the SB champions who brought home the hardware after 43 years, adoring Saints fans packed in 15 deep along the streets of the CBD on Tuesday, braving temps cold enough that NO enacted the city's freeze plan

It was so crowded that outlying areas were empty. As the parade rolled at 5pm parts of Metairie were as empty as they'd normally be on a Sunday morning.

The parade made Tuesday a quasi-holiday in and around the city. . . . some schools reported attendance was down by nearly half

(HE) returned to his hometown from Juarez, Mexico, to watch the NFC Championship game, and then went to Miami without a ticket. Tuesday night he stood shoulder to shoulder with a thousand strangers, stacked 15 rows deep along St Charles Ave to pay homage to his Saints

Several private schools as well as Plaquemines Parish public schools are giving students the day off because of SB celebrations that might go late into the night

Nearly every SB champion team has had a hometown victory parade, but win-or-lose parades are rare.

The Saints will get their own parade win-or-lose

The local Saints-Vikings rating eclipsed the previous high for an NFC playoff game in an individual city: 63.2 average (beating a) 59.5 in Milwaukee for the 1997 NFC championship game (1 point represents 1 percent of total TV homes, or about 6,340 households in NO)

At Camp Buehring in northern Kuwait, 204th troops have converted their tactical operations center into SB central, adorned with "Finish Strong" signs and fleur-de-lis

It doesn't matter what time the game's on, we'll be here. . . . and we'll all be in black and gold. No uniforms. Just jerseys and jeans.

All over town, people seemed to have no intention of making Monday a regular day. It was not. Monday was a day full of camaraderie and good cheer

NO was undergoing a "perfect storm" of good fortune (new mayor, SB, Mardi Gras)

<p>More than 250 Saints players. . . . will be throwing beads from a dozen of the area's premier Carnival floats</p>
<p>. . . . this is the first time you'll ever see all these floats together at one time, and very well could be the last time you ever see all these floats together</p>
<p>These organizations would never put their floats out, certainly not for other parades, but they're doing it for the Saints and for the city of NO</p>
<p>I think the Saint success is teaching us that not only does our fabulous team deserves the best--deserve respect--but that we, as citizens of this great city, deserve the best as well. We deserve the best education system, the best crime prevention, the best streets, the best politicians</p>
<p>As exciting as it might be to actually attend the SB in Miami, I don't think I'd want to be anywhere else but right here in NO, watching the game with friends and family</p>
<p>On Wednesday, Orleans Parish Civil District Court Judge ordered a Feb 1 jury trial delayed in light of the Saints' historic trip to the 2010 SB</p>
<p>The court takes judicial notice that Saintsmania permeates the city of NO" Bagneris wrote in a one paragraph ruling in an asbestos lawsuit</p>
<p>Responding to concerns that St. Bernard Parish employees might be "tired" next Monday. . . . government employees will get half day on Monday and Tuesday in honor of the Saints appearance in the SB</p>
<p>. . . . enthusiasm for the Saints doesn't justify letting an inmate out of jail simply because he had tickets to the Vikings game, as Jefferson Parish Magistrate Commissioner Carol Kiff did. Magistrate Kiff released James Buisson for two day as last month so he could attend the Jan 24 NFC Championship game. That's not an exaggeration. She wrote in her Jan 19 order ". . . so he can go to the Saints-Vikings game--He has tickets."</p>
<p>On Saturday, all black and gold animals -- even those that were yellow, tan or close to gold--could be adopted for half the regular adoption fee. And anyone wearing black and gold. . . . could adopt an animal for half price</p>
<p>Those who adopted a pet and named it after a Saints player or coach got an additional 25 percent discount</p>
<p>I'm not saying the collective euphoria and goodwill toward one another erases any of the hurt that dates back to Katrina or much further. It doesn't fill any potholes or rebuild any police stations or prevent any senseless murders. . . . What it does is set a tone for the next week and a half. It establishes a mood, a feeling that we're all on this amazing ride together. This is now a city that not feels good, but feels good about feeling good.</p>
<p>. . . . so a good many churches around NO are lending a hand this weekend, cancelling or moving Sunday evening services that would conflict with the Saints first appearance in the SB</p>

An affection for all things NO Saints reached a fever pitch at the St Tammany Parish Council meeting Thursday night, with a special Saints-infused prayer to open the meeting, the dais decorated in black and gold, and nearly every elected official present, along with most department heads and staffers, wearing their pride on their sleeves

That is to say that almost everyone in parish government sported some kind of Saints gear. . . or simply an "Aints no more" button

The ultimate Saints experience--the one we've been chasing since Gilliam's runback--is this one: A championship in our house, shared by 70K cheering, singing, dancing, hugging, high-fiving, crunking and yes, crying Saints fans.

Nov 2 Monday Night Football Saints win over Atlanta Falcons scored 63.9 local overnight Nielsen rating; Nov 30 drew 66.7 rating; Nationally, Saints-Patriots game was the second most-watched cable broadcast ever

New Orleans' love affair with itself is one of the historical, parochial, unifying and sometimes cloying characteristics of this city. For instance, very few of us feel the need to append any facts, statistics or evidence to the perpetual claim that ours is: "The most interesting city in America."

The civic pride, nostalgia and general cussedness borne of that moment fueled a massive and sustained commercial output of household items, textiles, novelties, songs, books, symphonies, tchotchkes and t-shirts. . . . that identify NO

Iconography of post-storm NO--those things that, to borrow a phrase from the Hornets, represent the city's pride, passion and purpose--has become a cottage industry in this town and a none-too-trivial one

In NO we're proud of our history, of pulling ourselves up after tragedy. And it seems that everyone wants to be identified that way. Everyone wants to own a piece of this city.

I think it's tribal, I really do. People in NO love to proclaim themselves. It's the same reason people wear Saints colors on Sunday. It says: we're on the team. We love NO. We want to be part of the rebuilding.

Covering the team's success as a news story in a place where the civic mood is so tied to its performance--while meeting the fans' enthusiasm level without going over the top, it that's possible--is tricky

People don't understand what that NFC championship game meant. It was an incredible football game, an incredible battle. But it was also a renaissance, a rebirth from horrible years of suffering through being a Saints fan, to surviving a hurricane

There was a natural love affair between the team and its fan base, one that went deeper than wins and losses. The NO Saints are the source of civic pride and esteem for the citizens. It is extremely difficult for me to explain the depth of love and passion the city has for its team, but anyone who has been to the Superdome on a Sunday afternoon in the fall or to a Browns-Steelers game can surely understand this phenomenon

What has happened in NO since 2005--but especially this year--is the very best that professional team sports can be. It's not the NFL championship. It's the potential of a franchise to help an entire city experience the values that are so special to teams--the sense of belonging, of family, of commitment, of sharing joy--as well as sorrow

It's not the NO Saints who are SB champions; it's the city of NO that won the SB.

And I can't wait to get back to NO and celebrate with our people

Race/Difference
2009
Entire article on race: "Color Blind Bond-Racial harmony stands out in Who Dat Nation
This is way bigger than the SB. . . . It's the best day since--when? Since whenever, that's when. This blurs all the lines -- racial, income, social status, everything
Where-ever we went to school, whatever our ward, number, and who ever our mama is, we were all talking and smiling and enjoying the magic of our city
For several weeks. . . . all the things that we so ignorantly see as separators--race, gender, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation, to name a few--just didn't matter
All too soon, some slight -- real or imagined -- will redraw the lines that were erased as we cheered on our blessed boys (link to Patron interview)
The NO Saints represent the hopes and dreams of us all and reflect who we are. They have united white and black, rich and poor, conservative and liberals under one cause, one banner, one family
However, American history has shown us that black and white people can get along while they're being entertained. Let's not forget that rock n rollers back in the day sang to segregated crowds, but when the music took over no law could keep people (black or white) from having fun with one another
That's one of the great things about sports. It brings complete strangers together, whatever their differences.
As far as the eye could see was this rolling, rollicking sea of black and gold--and more importantly, black and white. People of all races danced the night away in one big impromptu victory party
Few things unite NO in this way: Mardi Gras, Jazz Fest and now--perhaps more than ever--the Saints
With every victory, the Saints (13-0) improve not only their record but also the city's infamous complex and oft divisive race relations
It's not that it will cure race or magically make disappear the racial tensions, which are rooted in real issues, structural problems, historic inequalities and resentment. But it does remind you that in this city people have more in common than they realize," said Dr. Lawrence Powell, who teaches. . . at Tulane. "That we can share in this special moment in the athletic history of the city should remind us that we can sit down and talk, as well as cheer and chant and have a good time."
The SAINTS have been and continue to be a tremendous unifying factor for our community. On any given Sunday afternoon, the Superdome reflects the special gumbo of people of races, culture that make NO special and represents why all of us who are privileged to live here feel this is such a great city.

Everybody was or had someone that they knew that was personally affected by Katrina. And it forced the city to work together.

We're bringing people together in the stadium to unite and cheer for one thing, no matter what their race is or no matter who's on the field. Through sports, you're able to--for four hours-- put everything else to the side and root for something bigger than yourself.

NO history of racial problems is well-documented. From the racially exclusive old-line Carnival culture to city officials ill-fated intentional flooding of St. Bernard Parish in 1927 to residents ugly treatment of Ruby Bridges during the integration of the city's public schools in 1960, the tangled roots of racial unrest run deep and are far-reaching

NO officials had to overcome the city's reputation for racial disharmony In order to land the expansion Saints. In 1965, the AFL All-Star Game was moved to Houston after 21 black players boycotted the game because of "adverse conditions and discriminatory practices experienced by the Negro players" during their stay in town the week of the game. The incident caused then-NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle to balk at awarding a franchise to NO, but the persistence and persuasive powers of Dave Dixon and other civic leaders eventually helped change his mind

What's going on this year with this team is universal and unifying. It's not just about black and white anymore. It's only black and gold.

There is no black and white, there are no rich and no poor, we're just one. To me, there is such a unifying presence that the Saints' team has brought to the city--and I think all of us from our families, our relationships, even competitions, can really take as a model of unity because when we're in the Dome, we're all unified, we're all one

Regional Pride
They come from everywhere: NO, MS, AL, everywhere in this region. It's gratifying to be able to get them fired up about their team and then everything that's going on here within this part year and a half with Katrina.
Like their brethren across the state line, MS fans are panting in anticipation of tonight's playoff game in the Superdome against the Philadelphia Eagles
You've got to support the home team--or close to a home team as we've got.
Although LA and MS were both pounded by Hurricane Katrina, the storm did not always promote fellow-feeling between them
But if recovery issues have sometimes stoked divisiveness, the Saints have acted as regional epoxy
Certainly the resurgence of the program has unified the region behind the Saints. . . . the team is called the NO Saints, but it has always been a regional venture that affects people in my community and in the state of MS. It is our team too.
As for cross-state dissension. . . . not as far as the Saints go.
It's not just Jefferson Parish or Orleans Parish. We're out now 150, 200 miles with people supporting us. Now we're all one community. It used to be NO against everybody else.
2009
It's truly amazing how Saints fever had spread. Shreveport, for example, because of its location, has been Dallas Cowboy territory.
They've been well into the thousands. For road games in Tampa and Miami, ticket sales are hitting 5,000. . . . We never had as much Saints fever as we now have in Mississippi, Alabama, Texas and the Florida panhandle. That's what winning will do. It's contagious.
NO knows parades. NO gets parades. But that SB parade on Tuesday was epic, even here
. . . . estimated 300K to 500k
. . . . more cars than usual with plates from MS, AL, AR and other states. Everybody wanted to participate in this celebration.
Tendrils of Saints fandom creep into all corners of state
In a capital city where college football is king, sidewalk vendors are selling Saints merchandise, black and gold flags are flying from SUVs. . . . and some churches have cancelled Sunday evening Mass in deference to the SB
In Lake Charles the newspaper is running a competition to see who is the biggest Saints fan

. . . anecdotal evidence suggests the magical season. . . have accomplished what the team's marketing gurus could not; Turn the Saints from a team that had belonged almost exclusively to the NO region into a statewide and regional draw

. . . pegs the team's resurgence in southwest LA to the 2006 season, and the shared experience of loss and rejuvenation that binds that region to NO

I just think the (fans) are becoming more avid than they've been in the past. I don't think we're creating new fans. People are becoming more excited and becoming more avid

While the Saints have sometimes struggled to recruit fans in parts of LA, they have long had a loyal following in coastal MS and AL

People across the country appreciate the comeback story being written throughout the Gulf Coast

Distraction from Katrina
For those three hours there will be something else to focus on, just for those three hours it can feel, dare I say it, normal
These past weeks, the Saints have delivered us from the evil reminders of our broken city as they stormed the gates of heaven (NFC playoffs). It was divine
For one night, regular people, (Saints fans) got time away from their own reality. Reality is a depressing existence in a city that has been torn apart by disaster and will take years to rebuild
I would like the Saints to know how much they helped me keep my mind off how badly I miss my family. Here in Iraq. . . . the Saints have really given me a reason to stick out my chest
I'm still inspired by the team and their determination, it must be remembered that they are merely an enjoyable diversion from the massive challenges at hand
This doesn't supersede all the real problems, but for four or five hours on a Sunday, we can find some kind of normalcy
People want to be able to come and spend five or six hours around the venue, and tailgating and music and entertainment gives you that opportunity
2009
With the city's beloved football team entertaining thoughts of an undefeated season and a first ever SB berth, getting voters to think about crime-fighting plans and blight strategies in the run-up to the Feb 6 primary may be a tough sell
And the Saints success is making it that much harder for candidates to cut through the clutter
The SB win has put Katrina on the back burner and made the future full of happiness beyond measure
The Saints have taken the minds of the people away from their misery and given them a faint glow of relief, similar to what the movies did for those during the Depression of the 30s
But the Saints' triumphant return to NO in 2006, highlighted by the reopening of the Superdome and the winning of a division title and a trip to the NFC championship game, gave the community and region a rallying point. It was the most pleasant distraction in the history of pleasant distractions for a city that absolutely needed something else to focus on for those 3 1/2 hours per week on Sunday

Lifting Spirits/Hope
It's the stuff of fiction, a story of the worst team in the league from a stricken city somehow rising to the occasion--Against all odds! Miracle at the Midway! To bring unity, magic, and light into the darkness of the postdiluvian landscape and its people.
It's been a lift to the community after, you know. We're grateful for the season.
We were just so excited. . . . the whole city needed this. We needed something to lift our spirits up, to show that NO is not a dead city, to say to people, look at our Saints, NO is coming back
Over here, the team's performance this season is that one ray of sunshine. We were always a big Saints area, but I have never seen it be the talk of so many people.
The hurricane inspired me, Reggie Bush inspired me. . . . said on her decision to become a season ticket-holder. It's something that can really lift the city tremendously if we can have a decent season.
It's absolutely a new feeling in the city right now about the Saints
It was timeless. It was ethereal. It was a lesson for the ages for all who are downtrodden and disillusioned. And it came from, until now, the unlikeliest of tutors: our beloved Saints
They bring the city hope at a time when we badly need it
Saints. . . . stands out as the one pure thing amid a landscape of almost overwhelming sadness
It is just fate that this is happening now, when everyone who has ever been connected to NO needs a lift to make them proud of their city once again
It's just what we needed, a sense of euphoria and a renewed sense of hope
The Saints have given us a ray of light amid the day-to-day depression of seeing our people and our lovely city so hurt
2009
The suffering in this city. The bags over our heads. The rebuilding. This makes it worthwhile.
The Saints have brought a new altitude of fun. . . . Everybody's sky-high
Throughout the buildup to the SB, people kept talking about "believe, believe, believe". . . . This is what keeps people rebuilding their houses; the belief that the city will come back. The Saints are a symbol of this.
I think they provided hope for more people than they envisioned. We can't thank them enough.

Hopefully the Saints win will be the beginning of a better future for us all, be it financially, emotionally, or the ending of bitter feelings towards others

A weight has been lifted. Really lifted. Lifted to the top of the Superdome, and above the CCC and away. This bruised and battered city is truly euphoric, joyful, light.

For the first time it feels like it did before

Now people who don't even like football are crying tears of joy and hugging the mailman. Entire grocery stores erupt into cheers from a lone Who Dat

. . . maybe the weight is lifted and we can finally believe the worst is over and we can move on

They have reminded us of the joy of hope. They understand working together across racial lines is critical to their success

The Saints just jump-start everyone's attitude, which is important during this time of recovery

Superdome
Atlanta). . . hoped the night would wash away some of the Katrina memories that made the Superdome an international symbol of misery.
Never in the history of stadiums in the USA has a facility been so heavily damaged and rebuilt in one year.
Amid this sea of inertia, the Dome is a totem of progress, a 27-story, 52 acre symbol of the city's resurgence
That building became the symbol of the storm and everything that went wrong. I want it to be the symbol for the recovery and everything that is right.
The Dome is refurbished, renovated, and revitalized. We took a catastrophe and made something good from it
When I drive past the Dome in years to come I'll think not only of the work that was done but of the people that put their personal lives on hold to bring the building back
he work team hopes the restoration will erase the negative images of the Dome borne from Katrina and restore the building's reputation as a construction marvel
The reopening of the Superdome represents so much more than just a football game. This is our World Trade Center.
If you want to cleanse the spirit of the Dome and bring people back in, this is a pretty damn good way to do it.
The building, this monument to our shame, our disgrace and our sorrow, will always be so, but it always has been and always will be more than that. Neither Katrina nor Tom Benson has been able to make the Superdome go away. . . . It's durability is our durability
The biggest star was the clearly the Superdome
When we left here a year ago I said there's no way they'll rebuild it. . . . But they did it. It's a total metamorphosis. It's great.
The Superdome is one of the most beloved buildings in LA. It was a place that saved a lot of lives.
The word homecoming has a real meaning in college and pro sports, but I think tonight the word "homecoming" will take on a new meaning and will forever be redefined by what is happening here in the Superdome
Monday night, I was a blessed participant in one of the most symbolically important public events in NO history: the re-opening of the LA Superdome and the homecoming of the city's beloved Saints
2009

(from Sean Payton)"This stadium used to have holes in it. . . . This stadium used to be wet. It's not wet anymore. This is for the city of NO"

article: Power of the Dome-Superdome crowd noise

Inconsistencies
Role of sports) it occupies the populations, and it keeps them from trying to get involved with things that really matter.
Spectator sports are supported to the degree they are by the dominant institutions
The things that really matter in our city--the issues of crime, rebuilding and return--are so much with us that we can't ignore them
This newfound love for the Saints, we are told, owes to national sympathy for our hurricane induced predicament
The rest of the country might need to be reminded that a successful Saints season doesn't mean the city is thriving..
I don't know anybody here who has argued that the team's success signals our recovery
We want America to recognize that no matter what happens on the football field this afternoon, there remains more rebuilding work to be done in this city than any other place in America
We--we being anyone who cheered for the Saints or greeted the Dome's reopening as a forward step in recovery--are wrong (summarizing USA Today article negative of Domecoming)
2009
As we all know, life can be hard. Just because we are smiling from ear to ear doesn't mean we are ignorant of the world around us
Your continued insistence on publishing trite, Saints fan-related stories as front-page news is nothing short of remarkable.
The TP shortage of attention to the earthquake in Haiti is despicable. Everything can't always be about us.
. . . . enthusiasm for the Saints doesn't justify letting an inmate out of jail simply because he had tickets to the Vikings game, as Jefferson Parish Magistrate Commissioner Carol Kiff did. Magistrate Kiff released James Buisson for two days last month so he could attend the Jan 24 NFC Championship game. That's not an exaggeration. She wrote in her Jan 19 order ". . . so he can go to the Saints-Vikings game--He has tickets."

Long Suffering/Emotion
It's the stuff of fiction, a story of the worst team in the league from a stricken city somehow rising to the occasion--Against all odds! Miracle at the Midway! To bring unity, magic, and light into the darkness of the postdiluvian landscape and its people.
My story is your story--our--story17 months of sorrow, regret, rage, blame and anger, looking for a channel to release and I am ready to blow.
My heart is a broken fleur-de-lis just learning how to bloom again
When asked to describe the moment. . . . "He's going to start crying"
If you could bottle this up you'd make millions.
In one shining season they transformed their national standing from woebegone extra to feel-good cameo role to full blown headliner
Man, I've suffered for so many years
The game. When they blocked the punt and scored the first touchdown, something inside of me that I didn't know was there broke loose.
We literally fell on top of each other. I have never experienced a flashpoint of sudden emotion unloosed so fast
I haven't cried about NO once since Katrina, but this was it for me. I cried like a baby when I got in here.
It's a state of mind. The Saints are winning, and people are feeling good.
No NFL franchise has been as hapless, as star-crossed and just plain bad
Over the next 40 years, while the Saints became the worst joke in pro sports
When people would find out we had season tickets since the beginning, they'd call us Dumb and Dumber
Now we're in dreamland. This year has been so special; it was worth all the heartache. You can't believe how good this feels unless you were one of the originals who stuck with it
Original Saints season ticket holder. . . . it was like admitting to being the first person in line to purchase a ticket on the Titanic, or the guy who got the Yugo franchise. These are mistakes one keeps to oneself.
By the time the Saints had moved into the Superdome in 1975, the original fans witnessed just 30 wins and 77 losses
South LA football fans are the longest-suffering people since the Jews were in the desert with Moses
They believe the Saints are going to lose for the same reason Pavlov's dogs drooled at the

sound of a bell. It's a reflex.
2009
No. 1 on my bucket list: This is it. My buddy wrote his obituary and dated it for tomorrow. He said, "I can die now."
You might call this one a stranger-hugger-grabbing the person closest to you, then the next. No one paying attention to anyone's words. No one ashamed of the tears.
Throughout the city, fireworks could be seen and heard as soon as people had time to spill from their houses and light matches
I'm a grown man, but I'm gonna cry tonight
I had to be here for the celebration
. . . . wept like a baby, eyes red from a fourth-quarter cry and tears dripping down the cheeks of her face. . . . "I can't help it". . . . "Oh my God, I am so happy
The Saints haplessness is the stuff of legends; even casual observers of the sport associate the black and gold with bags on heads
"It's a catharsis. . . . for everyone to hunker home or to go to friends' houses and say, 'Look, we rebuilt our houses, this is where we are, we're watching the SB five years after Katrina. We're back.' That's a big deal
The NFL's longtime lovable fleur-de-losers have become the sentimental favorite of America because of their ignominious history and the Katrina factor
The magnitude of the ensuing celebration was so great, with the dome thundering, fireworks exploding in the streets, horns honking and Bourbon Street instantly filling with dancing, screaming revelers, that the only comparison. . . . could think of was to the celebrations that erupted when WWII ended
(Chris Myers) It's hard to explain how much more it is than just another trophy presentation. If you've worked in NO or been in LA, or if you've felt somewhere along the way four decades -plus of Saints pain
Tears of happiness (and relief) are welling in my eyes and trickling down my cheeks
The SB is still two weeks in the future. If the Saints win that one, there will be a great celebration, but nothing will exceed the joy I am seeing tonight
Never, in my lifetime, and I am sure there are those who are older than I, have I seen such enthusiasm, such relief, such happiness from the people in NO and surrounding parishes
As I went out to buy some NO Saints t-shirts for my family for the big game I happened to notice that many of the labels on the shirts say "Made in Haiti" People in Haiti evidently made some of our celebratory clothing for this historic Saints season. . . . their efforts represent an additional tie between that suffering nation and our recovering city.

Sports talk radio callers and Saints Internet forum posters have been offering unsolicited I'm gonna cry confessions all week long

People talk about the game and some otherwise emotionally stable grown man or woman inevitably interjects, "I swear y'all if we go to the SB, I'm gonna lose it"

The truth is, if Katrina never had happened, a river of tears still would flow through the Superdome on Sunday. So what is it, then? Why do we care so much? My theory is pretty simple: It's a joy thing.

. . . . for the Who Dat Nation, nothing brings more joy than a Saints victory. . . . that the wins have been so few and far between over the succeeding 42 seasons has only served to make each victory more heartfelt

I don't know that there's a city in the country that's more emotionally invested in their football team, or a football team more emotionally invested in a community

As a kid I grew up all my life dreaming of the day when the Lions finally made the SB. . . . I know there are kids who've grown up here who feel the same way. . . . I'm from Detroit. an truly empathize with the fans having gone through that

That fever prompted grown men to cry two weeks ago when the Saints beat down of the Vikings earned the team its first SB appearance in its 43-year history. It prompted some of those same men to wear dresses a few days later to honor a pledge made by the late local broadcasting legend Buddy Diliberto

They didn't see tens of thousands of residents simultaneously rushing out of the front doors of the shotguns on North Claiborne or their State Street mansions, from homes on Piety or Third streets, on North Solomon or Octavia, on the lawns in Covington or Metairie, from apartments in Marrero or The East

It was a cathartic scream, a cheer, a dance, a hug, a high five, chest thump, fist bump, a lay-on-the-lawn and kick my hands and feet in the air in delirium. It was a community feeling not just of overwhelming joy, but the release of mountains of frustrations, disappointments and sorrows that had nothing to do with football

(from filmmakers on production) "It was one of the greatest production days of my life. . . . And I know it sounds like a cliché, right, but there were times I did have tears in my eyes, because it was hard to look at all this human happiness--four square blocks if it at one place--and not be moved, because it was so genuine

It was a city that has gone through so much and a city that means a lot to me, and it was truly a great moment--and I got caught up in it."

No city would have supported a team through so many awful, awful years. As bad as the teams were for as long as they were bad, the attendance was always up there. In other cities, the franchise would have had to move.

So sometimes--a lot of times-- going there was painful because you knew what you were going to get. But this is what (NO) cares about. And I'm really happy for the fans. So many of those fans gave so many years.

For a single moment, I would say that that punt block may never be defeated for crowd noise. People in this city had so much frustration and emotion and angst and passion. They all let it out in one single moment. You could feel the energy in the city for an entire week.

Over the years, fewer fans ever have had less reason to believe than Saints fans. Fewer have had more legitimate cause to dump a team and establish a new allegiance.

NO vs. the World/Imagery
It's the stuff of fiction, a story of the worst team in the league from a stricken city somehow rising to the occasion--Against all odds! Miracle at the Midway! To bring unity, magic, and light into the darkness of the postdiluvian landscape and its people.
No quit, no surrender. Not on the football field. And not in our battered and beautiful city.
America loves us. They think we're good. Millions of folks simply pity us and would like to see something nice happen to NO
I thought painting my face might help me stop crying. It's just so amazing to be back. I feel like the Saints are all that's here, that they're all we have.
The Saints have an added variable that we don't see with other teams: the Katrina and Seabiscuit factors. Americans like to pull together in time of need, and we like to pull for the underdog. I think the Saints embody both of these sentiments and have become a symbolic channel for them as well
They thought they were playing a football team and found themselves fighting not only a city, but an entire region.
It's our time!
Aint no Aints no more
A born, raised and gonna drown in NO lifer
From city of mold to a city of gold
We're officially sold out for the first time in the history of the Saints for the entire season. People in NY and other places can't hardly believe what the people of this whole area have done.
I think the people in what I call the Gulf South, they wanted to show the world. . . . this is their way of saying, We're here. We're alive. We're not sitting back on our butt. We're alive.
It's not just Jefferson Parish or Orleans Parish. We're out now 150, 200 miles with people supporting us. Now we're all one community. It used to be NO against everybody else.
Reports and rumors surfaced that Benson might make a permanent move to San Antonio
At ball games played in BR, fans hoisted hostile signs. One fan got into a verbal scuffle with Benson as he was walking out of Tiger Stadium. Discarded refrigerators on the streets of NO were painted with anti-Benson messages
People of this city want to love the Saints. It really took an effort on Benson's part to alienate them. He succeeded a year ago.
It was a feeling of redemption after everything the city and team went through last year

The imagery of the Superdome and the Convention Center that people have seen for a year since Hurricane Katrina has been replaced with images of screaming, happy fans inside the Superdome

At the end of the game. . . . players were not leaving the field and fans were not exiting the Superdome. Everyone wanted to make the incredible experience last a little longer. To me that spoke volumes about the situation in NO in general: We're not leaving.

No matter what Chicago or Texas may think of us, the world now knows: Neither bad weather nor bad people can break the spirit of LA.

The taunts from Chicago Bears fans went beyond statements of physical superiority or on-field dominance. The taunt reflected the extent to which many Americans resent the people of post-Katrina NO

In my section, somebody (said) "Too bad you didn't drown"

One sign. . . . promised, "What Katrina didn't finish, we will tonight."

In NO, we have seen the transformative power of sports. We have seen a successful team's ability to make our considerable problems and differences see, temporarily small. But for our nation, we are still an embarrassment. Our halting efforts at rebuilding but reflect this nation's inability or unwillingness to address the needs of its own people

When the Saints take the field today in Chicago they will carry the frustrations and hopes of all those people who have been faithful for 40 years

I am so proud of our Saints and the image of NO that they are presenting to the rest of the country right now

In a city where so much is wrong, the SAINTS are something that is so right

Peter Finney about Saints v Chicago 97) You felt you were looking at two coffins on wheels playing bumper cars

They are what make NO the best place to live--no matter the adversity, no matter the act of God, no matter the act of man

In Chicago, we feel like we are owed a winner in every major sport, and a large percentage of fans live their lives vicariously through teams like the Bears

This also helps explain the lousy treatment that some Saints fans received when they visited, which is embarrassing to those of us who want to show visitors the positive side of the town

We--we being anyone who cheered for the Saints or greeted the Dome's reopening as a forward step in recovery--are wrong (summarizing USA Today article negative of Domecoming)

But those boys in black and gold are representing NO. They are fighting to survive, just like us, and it has inspired us. They give us hope.

2009

City that has known so much pain
The kind of immeasurable pain that almost makes a mockery of the bags that once covered the heads of NO Saints fans in what is now a bygone era
It was finally time to bury the Aints paper bag. . . . a jazz funeral
It's time to get rid of the paper bags, but let's do it NO-style
NO Aints Paper Bag, born 1980 died February 7, 2010, was a resident of NO for a short time. Survived by no immediate family, but a host of devoted fans
"It's a catharsis. . . . for everyone to hunker home or to go to friends' houses and say, 'Look, we rebuilt our houses, this is where we are, we're watching the SB five years after Katrina. We're back.' That's a big deal
Coffee shop. . . . hawked T-shirts that read simply: Our Town. Our Team. Our Time
We have endured the American nightmare. It's our time to live the American dream
New Orleanians have this new identity now; We're not the underdogs. We're on top.
I am overwhelmed with pride that I come from a city that makes sure its opponents feel welcome, that honors those who were not fortunate to live long enough to see this day and that has risen from military occupation to become the mighty Who Dat Nation
For so long before Katrina, we did not believe that we deserved the best; we believed we deserved what we got. But now, this team is teaching us that we deserve the best in all things, not just football
They were there for us after Katrina, proving to us that we were not destroyed, just banged up some. This weekend all our love lifted the boys to NFL heaven
NO have adopted various metaphors to describe the adventures of the post Katrina era, while outside observers have adopted NO itself as a metaphor for troubling worldwide trends. Only recently have these "place metaphors" become positive and inspiring -- and that's where the Saints have come marching in.
. . . . vocabulary of the past five years. We used the metaphor "wiped the slate clean" to describe. . . . the effect of the floodwaters on the cityscape. The green dot map; shrinking footprint, jack-o-lantern effect
But recently NO have metaphorically turned the tables on this rhetorical trend: "Be a New Orleanian Wherever You Are." ..here we are ascribing certain positive characteristics to the people and culture of this place and advocating that they be recognized, appreciated, and adopted in other places
It's no coincidence that, while the chant "Who Dat" dates back decades, the phrase Who Dat Nation appears to be a mostly post-Katrina phenomenon. Why? Because the cheerful defiance of adversity has universal human appeal. Who Dat Nation offers an alternative to the use of NO as a metaphor for despair.

The two victories are a reflection of perseverance, faith, hard work, survival and outright stubbornness. All of us understand the Who Dat attitude in post-Katrina NO

Our City, Our Home, Finish Strong

We'll no longer think about the world as "before the storm" and "after the storm." We'll think about it as "before the Saints made it to their first SB" and "after we on it."

That's fitting because a trip to the SB is about more than just the game. This moment in time is, or at least should be, a validation and a celebration of the fans, the communities, even the entire states and regions backing the two teams that will take the field. In any SB, that is the rest of the story.

We're not just a city, said Carville, dressed in a tan NOPD hat and yellow SB 44 shirt. We're a distinct and developed culture. We have our own music, our own food, our own language, our own funerals, our own architecture. . . . Unless you are part of that culture, you can't understand it.

The Saints have seldom if ever proved more in one night of football. They proved they belong on a national stage. They proved their quarterback is a bona fide league MVP candidate. They proved their defense is not a product of a friendly schedule. And they proved they can match wits and trade blows with the bluest of the league's bluebloods

For perhaps the first time in the franchise's 43-year history, the Saints are legitimate SB contenders

It does (validate the Saints) in the public's eye, because everyone still believes in the Patriots, and they are one of the best teams in the NFL and everyone and maybe all you guys in here thought they were going to come in here and knock us off. And we took that as a challenge and motivation.

Who Dat Phrase
2009
. . . . the NFL is conceding it has no exclusive rights to the fleur-de-lis and no exclusive rights to "Who Dat" and offshoots of 'Who Dat,' and no exclusive rights to the colors black and gold
. . . . to take whatever steps are necessary to protect the Who Dat Nation from frivolous lawsuits by the NFL
If it requires litigation, then so be it. Who Dat belongs to the citizens of the Who Dat Nation--and no one else
The NFL recently ordered New Orleans retailers to stop selling merchandise that it claimed violates state and federal trademarks held by the NO Saints
We are proud of our culture. We are not going to let anybody take Who Dat or the fleur-de-lis away from us
In letters sent to Fleury Girl and Storyville the NFL ordered the retailers to stop selling a host of merchandise that it says violates state and federal trademarks held by the NO Saints
Among the long list of things the NFL says is off-limits official logo. . . . but he one that stands out is Who Dat
Personally, I don't think anyone should be able to own Who Dat. . . . It should belong to the people of the city of NO
In my opinion, I don't see how you can take something that is NO, that has been around since I can remember and call it our own
Article on the origin of Who Dat
NFL officials need to recognize that Who Dat belongs to Saints fans -- and that the Saints and the NFL benefit immensely from that feeling

Religion/Totems/Effervescence
Sports. Football. The Saints. It gets in you and --in NO-- it gets on you and stays on you like a ring of sweat that won't wash out of your favorite wok shirt
It's been spiritual. . . . the mood was near euphoric
Amid this sea of inertia, the Dome is a totem of progress, a 27-story, 52 acre symbol of the city's resurgence
It was a night that will be remembered for years to come, not only for the spectacle but also for the emotion and spirit, which at times made the gathering feel more like a church recital
I hate to say a ball team is a blessing, but I'll take God's blessing any way they come
This seems to be the classiest group of individuals we've ever had here with this team. They seem to really care about this city.
Faith in a team could restore city
We've had religious services aimed at such healing, but sports bind folks of different denominations and faiths in ways that most priests, imams and rabbis are unable to do
Our city can be fueled by SB dreams. And given how far we've come this year, even a loss wouldn't be fatal to our spirit.
Nat's connection of paraphernalia that shows his devotion to the Saints. . . . candlestick holders, afghan, hats, bookends. . . .
Buddy D articles
Who had labored for lo these many years in closer proximity to the ongoing exercise in futility and frustration that was NO Saints football?. . . Buddy D
Though there have been a lot of lean and disappointing seasons, obviously the Saints were named properly 39 years ago. Heaven knew the city would need them Monday night, and they came through
2009
NO Aints Paper Bag, born 1980 died February 7, 2010, was a resident of NO for a short time. Survived by no immediate family, but a host of devoted fans
I told them that if any of them doubted that miracles existed, I was giving them the day off so they could stay up late and see one happen for themselves
We've been wandering in the desert, but Joshua is blowing his horn; we're in the promised land
This was much more than a football game--it was a celebration of life and of who we are and who we can continue to be, with faith in ourselves and in God

But looking back at the history of our team it seems that Moses had our team in the desert for 40 years. We are finally reaching the promised land. Saints fans are diehards, but last night proved to all that faith and pride are all you need.

A Playoff Prayer for the Who Dat Nation

SB 44 should have belonged to Buddy Diliberto--and for reasons that have nothing to do with a dress

. . . . he came to be regarded as the official media representative of what we now call The Who Dat Nation

. . . . there is no such thing as a NO Saints Fans Union. . . . but if there was, he would have been president

He's the connection people have to when they were younger, watching the games with their dad or grandpa. There are all these people whose parents lived through all the bad times but died before this day finally came. Buddy connects to all of them, because he was there from the very beginning. He's the common thread.

The Prayer of the Who Dats

Article on Saints superstitions

Words of Saintly Wisdom: Jim Henderson

For a portion of 2007, items with fleur-de-lis on them accounted for exactly 50 percent of the retail and online sales at Mignon Faget, the esteemed jewelry designer. At the other end of the market, variations of the fleur-de-lis still account for more than half of the tattoos done at . . .

Why do hundreds of thousands of us --here and in exile--stamp our property, our bodies and our identities with the trappings of the city we love? People now understand that tattoos are not just for scumbags, bikers and junkies. They can be very meaningful to their owners. They help people express their feelings and their love and--in this case--their love for this city

The Fleur-de-Phenomenon is a constant, pervasive, all-encompassing chorus of unified voices, passionate advocacy and willful relevance; a loud, resounding, unmistakably defiant, crystal clear clarion call that says: Hell yes!

Hannan is perhaps the first religious leader to become a Saints fan. He gave the franchise the church's blessing when a newspaper contest picked the team's nickname. State officials wanted to ensure it would not offend the church

In Biblical times, Christians used to identify each other by drawing half of a fish in the sand. A fellow follower would complete the fish design, the two feeling stronger in the community. The same phenomena occur in Saints fandom.

In the French Quarter you're walking down the street and someone will yell 'Who Dat?' That's from the street people dressed out in name-brand clothing. That's what I love. . . . We're able to move beyond that and work toward what we have in common

There are no shortages for Saints-loving religious officials around the city. They simply are about as prevalent as fans in the general population. They have rescheduled Masses and services to avoid conflicts with Saints games, and they sprinkled in metaphors with the team's playoff run into sermons

Economic Affects
Saints merchandise sales have increased to unprecedented heights this season. The Saints rank seventh among NFL teams in sales; the club ranked 29th last season
For the city's economy to survive, the Convention Center and the Dome had to be fixed--first and fast--because they are the bread and the butter
Last February's game (SB) in Detroit, SB XL, generated a total economic impact of \$261 million, according to a study commissioned by Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau
Broadcast an unqualified success in helping to nourish tourism, the city's principal economic engine
Over the past year NO image as a brand has suffered greatly, with so many images of despair and devastation of the city. It was really critical for us to let the country know that all the places they like to visit
2009
The biggest financial boon, Romig said, is likely to be the food-and-beverage establishments located away from the French Quarter or downtown. . . . we certainly can't quantify it yet, but anecdotally I can tell you those restaurateurs are expecting a big day. . . a lot of people will see a residual effect and not just Sunday
The Saints have not only raised millions for our city but have brought the entire city together, and we can all say we are proud to live in NO
The amount of new Saints-related t-shirts and apparel flying off store shelves and out of art market stalls these days is rising in direct proportion to the team's scoreboard, and from both fans and retailers point of view: the higher the number the better
In 2008, the Saints didn't rank in the top 10 of teams with the best-selling merchandise at NFLshop.com, but this year they could be in that number
Storyville has sold as many as 50 to 100 Saints related shirts a day. Even on really slow days we're selling 5 to 10.
My fleur-di-lis business is always successful, but this year it's absolutely on fire. . . . We raised over \$200K. . . . for the Brees Foundation
For a portion of 2007, items with fleur-de-lis on them accounted for exactly 50 percent of the retail and online sales at Mignon Faget, the esteemed jewelry designer. At the other end of the market, variations of the fleur-de-lis still account for more than half of the tattoos done at . . .

Family
My brother and I had tickets to the game against the Eagles that night. . . . I said: wait a minute! We can't put dad in the ground while the Saints are still alive. He would have loved this!
And Chuck and his brother brought their dad to the game last Saturday night at the Superdome. Wood Brown III was securely tamped into a cigar tube in Chuck's shirt pocket and when times got tense during the game, he and his brother would look at each other and say: "Knock on Wood!"
Currently, what's left of Wood Brown III is on the mantle at Chuck's mom's house, resting in the cigar tube on top of the playoff ticket stubs.
for me it's a massive cocooning into my youth
An estimated 500 Saints fans and fanatics, die-hards and hard drinkers, united at Atlantic Aviation during a downpour (post-Chicago)
It's my whole life, this means everything. You have kids? Well this is like my kids. I know how stupid it sounds but it's the truth.
The Saints are family around here and you're stuck with that just like you're stuck with, well. . . . family
The Saints are our crazy uncle Frank, prone to off-color remarks and broken promises and he's certainly not the guy you send to carpool to pick up your kids when you're stuck at the doctor's office, but you have to admit: Holiday gatherings just aren't as much fun without him. . . . And every now and then he delivers a nice present when you least expect it.
Being a Saints season-ticket holder for four decades was like being stuck in a bad marriage
Legitimate grounds for divorce have been abundant: 2-12, 1-15, 3-13
My father calls the beginning of every Saints football season. . . . "the annual triumph of hope over experience"
We liked the Saints just fine, but in the way one likes a crazy uncle--out of amusement and vague obligation rather than respect
Half of the men in my family have died waiting for this and I promise you I'm going to enjoy this for them.
2009
(about traveling to the SB) Road trips are in my genes. My dad loved hitting the highway, and he loved football. Being able to combine the two was nirvana for him. . . . he would have packed the car with every imaginable necessity, stuck Saints flags to the roof and hit the road. And so are we

He's (Buddy D) the connection people have to when they were younger, watching the games with their dad or grandpa. There are all these people whose parents lived through all the bad times but died before this day finally came. Buddy connects to all of them, because he was there from the very beginning. He's the common thread.

With typical generosity of spirit, almost everybody in NO will tell you that they want the Saints to win this game for someone else, somebody to whom a SB berth would mean so much. Often for a parent who grew old watching them lose, year after year, sustained by the belief that our day would come

If you want to know what this win means to NO. . . . I just visited a cemetery, and more than one grave had today's newspaper on it

Well, after 40 plus years I will celebrate at St. Louis No. 3 Cemetery

There are few bonds more enduring than the love of a boy and his childhood sports heroes

The bond that strengthens when the child shared that love of a team with his father, as Nantz did, adding another layer of meaning to Sunday's game.

Since the last time I've called a SB, my dad has passed away, Nantz said. And he always loved the Saints, because it represented a time in our lives as a family that was very special

Suddenly we were all family again.

There has always been a clear wall between team family and patrons in the stands, yet somehow this team and these fans have bonded into one family, in a way you normally only see on a college campus or a high school gym

Departed Fans Article

I know you were watching Uncle Bill. You were my best friend and hero and it pains me that you were not here IN PERSON in the dome.

My grandmother was dying of cancer in 2004 and through her pain managed to make the statement: I guess the bugs are going to have to come and deliver the news to me that the Saints are going to the Super Bowl

My dear mother in law. . . . was a huge Saints fan. She was the first person I wished I could call as I watched the winning field goal sail through the uprights

In memory of my Paw Paw. . . . Even though I lived in Atlanta, we would talk every night and especially on Sundays about the Saints and would send me newspaper clippings every Monday in the mail

. . . . my good friends who took me to many a Tulane Stadium Saints game

. . . . to my dad who probably lost 10 years cussing during the tom fears and J D Roberts years

My daddy. He died from cancer on Super Bowl Sunday 2003

. . . . my brother's best friend. My last memory of him was coming home from church to

him passed out in my recliner while watching a Saints game
my father. . . he never lost faith, and I know that he is sitting back in his big leather recliner in Heaven, Dr. Pepper in one hand and sardines in the other, grinning that aww shucks grin he was famous for
dad. . . was a fan and the last thing that we did before he became terminally ill with cancer was attend the playoff game in 2000 against the Rams
I want to believe it is through them and all the other loyal fans who are no longer with us that help spirited the Saints victory over the Vikings
. . . my dad and I started watching Saints games. We were in Tulane stadium when John Gilliam return the opening kickoff for a touchdown
. . . all I could think about was memories of my father watching the games every season, when I was little, he always had the radio on listening to Buddy D while he had the TV volume off
My mom and I are going the day before the Super Bowl to decorate their grave site with Saints pizzazz
She was a childless widow. All the SAINTS players were her boys. She converted me from a Vikings fans to a NO SAINTS fan
. . . my grandfather. . . he took me to my first ever Saints game when I was 9 years old
Daddy, We were there for the first Saints game at Tulane Stadium. I remember sitting in the rain watching the Saints play
. . . my father. . . I can recall going to games at Tulane stadium when I was only 5 or 6 years old
. . . my dad. . . he drove the Saints players to and from the airport, I used ride with him, I meet many of the Saints players
We did not have money to go to the games, but we watched them without fail
My dad. Win or lose, in health and in sickness, with legs and without legs, walking or in a wheel chair, at home or in the hospital he was always in front the TV rooting for the Saints
My husband. . . and I enjoyed so many of the Saints games together in the Superdome
I'm so happy that we were able to take him to the Saints games in the Dome before he became too ill to attend
She would watch the Saints games even when she was at her worst. I always remember her calling me to find out what time and what channel where the Saints going to be on
She passed on a Sunday, literally 10 minutes after we defeated Carolina @ Carolina. The television was on the entire time. I know she went with a smile on her face.

<p>She loved her Saints so much that when she passed away in 2007, we put her Saints jersey in the casket with her, she loved it so much.</p>
<p>I spent many of Sundays watching my nanny curse at the TV. I think this is why it's so emotional for my family</p>
<p>Our best friend. . . . sits in an urn with Who Dat on the front & his name on the back</p>
<p>My grandmother used to come over to our house every Sunday to watch the Saints play; since she had really poor vision, she would always sit right in front of the TV</p>
<p>My dad made me promise that if the Saints ever made it to the Super BOWL, that someone would scatter his ashes on the field. I'm bringing his urn to Miami. Hope nobody notices the dust.</p>
<p>We honored him by having a saints themed funeral (all the pall bearers wore jerseys)</p>
<p>My dad died early this past month. He was 87. While in the hospital he could not remember his name, where he lived or where he was but when my brother asked him "Dad, what's the SAINTS record?" without hesitation he barked back 13-0</p>
<p>My dad is the reason that I am a Saints fan I am today. I have many memories of him screaming at the TV every Sunday when I was growing up.</p>
<p>On the way to my CBD hotel after flying in Friday afternoon I'll be stopping at Lakelawn to put black and gold fleur-de-lis on my father's crypt in the mausoleum</p>
<p>Over the years my dad, who passed away a year ago in December, would often do the play by play of the game from the TV over the phone. I will treasure and miss those three-hour carnivals forever</p>
<p>My mother in law dies on March 16th, 2009. We buried her in her Saints shirt</p>
<p>I'm going to the SB. Why would I spend that much money to go to a football game one might ask? I'm going because I'm realizing the dream of all the Who Dats that went before me. Those that are no longer here to see it, but in their lifetime, wished they could</p>
<p>My late father made me the fan I am today. From games at Tulane Stadium to games in the Dome.</p>
<p>I actually had to reschedule my wedding because it interfered with a home game, and he refused to attend if it meant missing the Saints in the Dome. So I eloped.</p>
<p>After every game when I called my mom she answered the phone Who Dat baby</p>
<p>We put Saints signs on their head stones at the cemetery</p>
<p>My mother was a diehard Saints fan. We celebrated her birthdays in black and gold. My family wore black and gold for her funeral.</p>
<p>For all the Sundays my maw maw & paw paw fried shrimp, catfish & French fries for us to have while watching the Saints games</p>

I brought yellow flowers, a Saints balloon and black and gold beads with the Saints fleur-de-lis on it, to the cemetery. I made a copy of a picture of my parents and gave it to my cousin who is going to the SB

My dad died during the 4th quarter of a SAINTS game. We knew he was passing so we turned the game on for him and let him enjoy what he loved best in his final hours.

Before my grandfather died, he snuck out of the hospital to try and get to the Saints/Atlanta game in Atlanta!

At their funerals, they had flower arrangements that read Saints and arrangements shaped like footballs. One was buried in black and gold, the other had on his Saints tie

I'm leaving Houston tomorrow and will place a Saints flag and wreath on their graves

For this game, I will have her little lounge chair sitting right in the middle of us with her fleur-de-lis flag flying high

To my grandmother and grandfather. . . . for putting up a huge antennae to watch black out games from Baton Rouge

My mother. . . . was slipping into a coma. . . . managed to squeak out "I want to see the Saints play in Japan. . . . I called up my friends and they converged on the hospital with ice chests full of beer, Popeye's fried chicken and in full Saints regalia

My father would say, "When the Saints make it to the SB, I'm going to have one of them Lucky Dogs. When he was dying of cancer in 2005, his last words were "Wish I could have had me one of them Lucky Dogs-promise me pun-kin that you will eat a lucky dog for me when they make it to the SB. Now I need people to eat a lucky dog for my father

**Discourse Coding
National Media Sources
2006, 2009**

Cultural Importance/Collective
"He said he had lost his job, been relocated, yet he bought six season tickets
"They've lost everything in Katrina but still managed to scrounge up money for season tickets"
"We're sold out for the first time in history and that half of the population isn't even back
Return of the Saints much more about football
While NO Languished, Residents clung to Saints improbable success
Sporting goods stores sold out of memorabilia
Black and gold/fleur-de-lis in regular places like tattoos, hats, and banners
Black and gold/fleur-de-lis in places where football game was a diversion like trailers in semi-abandoned neighborhoods or spray painted on vacant properties
(ATL game) Bigger than the Super Bowl
For U2 and Green Day to take the same stage, they just don't do that
Saints have been a unifying force in this community for 40 years
Monday night. . . all unified in the pursuit of a common goal and dream
I think the Saints team is a symbol of what it means for a body to work together
You can't walk away or ignore the awful things in our life. . . symbol of us really persevering and overcoming a very difficult time for all of us. . . very cathartic
We have a love affair with this team that really transcends sports; it's been such a part of us for such a long time.
NFL's most beleaguered franchise. . . America's best party town
popularity has united fans in a way that transcends class, nationality, and race
Fans rallied behind this team in ways that are hard to understand if you're not from here
The Saints are LA's team. . . we're going to make every effort to keep the NO Saints as LA's team
(Deuce) literally when you're born, you're born with that black and gold in your blood. It's part of you. . . Saints definitely part of this regions livelihood b/c they bleed the NO Saints
(Deuce) I remember having the opportunity to come back. . . families fighting for their lives and homes and the first thing they wanted to know was: Did the Saints win?
It's one of those things people can't avoid talking about . . . they'll have saints earrings on; autographed picture of the Saint from the mid-80s.
A symbolic sense of normality will return
(after Chicago game) plane touched down at 1 am. . . wading through throngs of well-wishers at the airport
2009
Because of their improbably victory, anything seems possible
From now on there is no impossible dream. . . Detroit Lions will win. . . LA Clippers will hoist trophy
Win, lose, or tie, I'm a Saints fan until I die

Not everyone comprehends what sports mean in general and what a winning team means in particular
Equal number of stories that chronicle the reconstruction of homes and neighbors and strangers who helped one another
*At the time I thought NO was finished. . . . if anything, the storm shored up the city's determination, making folks who were able to stay love NO more than ever
I never had followed football but became an instant Saints fanatic because there was no single organization that was holding together the spirit of the people in this community like the Saints
It is a unique relationship this team has with the city. It's very small, the players are very visible.
Saints return): That was one thing the city needed. That was the one thing we had. That was our team.
Fans drawn to the revival of the city ravaged by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Saints fever spreading far beyond LA
they went through this adversity in Katrina that since had bonded that team to the community
The story of the Saints is one that mirrors that revival
The win by the NO Saints underpinned yet again the importance of sport
Like a good mother, you love our children all the times; you just don't like them sometimes. But you don't desert them.
Nothing can separate the bond between her and the NO Saints
Few things have helped NO recover from the lingering despair of Katrina like the Saints success
While the details of their backgrounds may differ, they are united by a common theme; love of the Saints
I just wanted to see them in a SB before I die. There were so many others who didn't have the chance
relationship with the Saints as "love-hate"
The Saints and their city are Brad and Angelina. They have suffocated and exasperated and loved each other since 1967
It took an epochal hurricane to remind them that all they had was each other
Read there were 3000 or so at the airport when the Saints came back from Washington
Saints boast a popularity that transcends age, income, and race
Whether you're a tourist or a local, everywhere you go, everybody's talking about the Saints
The fans here are so loyal, and they've developed such a strong bond with this team
After Katrina, there was a recommitment. . . . People recommitted to the things that make NO special, whether that's riding in a Mardi Gras parade, going to Jazz Fest, spending more time in the Quarter or just seeing the Saints
Musicians have composed dozens of songs in their honor.

Priests wear Saints shirts under their vestments and give thanks to the team in their churches
People of NO showed their gratitude by buying every last season ticket for the first time in the club's history
Who Dat Nation waiting at the airport to thank them for rallying and inspiring their broken city
NO has always adored the Saints, but they now love them far more than their streetcars, jazz, and jambalayas with a passion that transcends every social divide
Just look at all the people from different walks of life brought together from this. This is huge.
She's on football fan but things the Saints success has been healing for a city often divided by race
Bringing the city together more than anything has brought this city together in 20 years
Pilot-led chorus of Who Dats on a flight bound for NO
the significance of the triumph went beyond the boundaries of sport
The majority-black city will have its first white mayor in 32 years
I've never seen a city feed off a football team the way we did for three hours on Sunday
True Saints fans have been loyal
Everybody wants to be a part of this, and everybody deserves to be a part of this
transcends sports because of (Katrina)
CNN covers Lombardi Gras parade
Saints clearly are our hometown team
We are in love with the Saints and have been for a very long time
Our roots go deeper with the pride of a winning team. We feel like we were part of the victory, like we helped.
After all this city has been through this victory provides a sense of accomplishments
It's hard to understand if you don't live in NO or have a deep connection to the city.
There has been a passion for the Saints here in recent years. Part because the club has for much of its existence been the city's only professional team
Saints are an expression of the city he loves

Civic Importance
City Hall closed early in honor of the game (Saints v Falcons)
As hard as it is to lose the game, I'd be lying if I didn't say there was a little, little piece of me that really appreciated what this game meant to the city (Falcons coach)
Catalyst for the rebirth of the city
It feels like the team and community are in it together (Fujita)
Teams being assets to the community; stadium being revitalizing structure; professional franchise can be a city's touchstone
Story of the Saints and the post-Katrina rebirth of a traumatized city are tightly bound
It looked like the team was abandoning the city. . . . would have been a hard, hard blow to the city
City abandoned by so many
NO and the Saints had something in common. . . . We're all rebuilding
True celebration of a neglected city
Team seemed inextricably linked to the city's troubles and its rebound
This means the city is coming back
story about a city, the people who have struggled through tough times and a rallying point for them all
The team and the city never shared such an intimate bond. Their story is our story, their rebirth is our rebirth.
Goal was to come out and play for the city of NO and my team and all the people that have been with me to share everything that we've gone through.
the burst of civic pride that many feel by supporting their team is admirable, but it's balanced by the gnawing sense that this night won't do a blessed thing to help
Saints have become a glowing example of what an NFL franchise can mean to a city
by winning Saints allowed city to celebrate again
(saints) they've come to symbolize a ravaged city's struggle to rebuild
2009
Team's resurgence. . . . given the city something to rally around
They've accomplished enough to bring this city back to life just by virtue of going to Super Bowl
it means a lot to the fans and to the city. . . . as they've gotten better so has the city
. . . . what a big deal the Saints are to not only NO but LA and Gulf region
Saints serve as ambassadors and symbols of a city reborn
*(Saints) reflect what already has been built-over the course of more than four long years of gritty hard work and sweat and a formidable resolve among residents to build a new and improved NO
NO buries its demons
America's biggest party city
Other teams have won championships. Our city needed this. That's what makes it

special.
Brees (about Lusher field): The sense of pride is immeasurable. It's not just a field or the school; it's the community that has rallied around it.
Saints are on a mission bigger than going to the Super Bowl. . . . it's a mission of helping rebuild this city.
Landrieu about the city: We're nowhere near where we should be
No city could have had a worse decade, and no city has a more promising future
Saints) has given an emotional life to the city
Katrina virtually wiped out the city and sucked the heart and soul from those who survived the catastrophe
Enormous morale boost for a city that is really still recovering from the horrors of Katrina
Bush) it may be the single most greatest event to ever happen in NO
don't expect anybody to go to work today in NO, or maybe for the next two weeks, considering Mardi Gras is next week
It has a lot to do without city. From being the Aints to being in the Super Bowl, that's the biggest accomplishment we could ask for
I appreciate Dallas for opening up their doors for us, but the Saints will always be my home team.
And you've got to love a city that had planned for a welcome-home parade for the team win or lose
Post-SB parade whether Saints win or lose this Sunday
I think it would surpass anything that's ever happened in this city as far as celebration. . . . it would be totally insane
The Saints in the SB would be so big the owners of Commander's Palace have said they'll close the famous restaurant on Sunday for the first time
Also celebrating what that success symbolizes-the city's own recovery from the apocalyptic destruction wrought by Katrina
Without them we would not have seen the rebirth of NO. I really believe that.
Can a football team actually breathe life into a city? Team's long climb to the SB symbolic of their city's long struggle to recover from Katrina
Restaurants closing, Mardi Gras parades rescheduled
The spirit of the Saints becoming winners indicate that we as a city can become a winner
Some residents see the win as a sign of this city's rebirth
We have suffered so much since Katrina, and most people don't realize how down this city still is.
CNN covers Lombardi Gras parade
Brees and Payton have offered more inspiring leadership than some of the city's political representatives
Signals something significant in the reconstruction of the city
rebuild, rebirth, renaissance

This is a new NO and the Saints victory makes it official
It improves the local psyche. . . demonstrates NO is not gone but more vibrant than ever
There was something about this Saints team. . . that seemed to inspire a city worn down by the rebuilding

Distraction from Katrina
The Saints are something that for 60 minutes of football (allows escape) from everything outside, everything that hurts them from the storm
This is the place, for four hours, I can sit with my kids. And I can enjoy my football team
It took all the crap off my mind
major events. . . . take your mind off of the difficult, day-to-day things
Don't want to talk about KATRINA. . . . insurance. . . . don't want to talk about anything but kicking Falcon butt
for a few hours there was joy. . . . reality returning in the sunrise
we all need something else to think about
2009
Winning season has eased the pain of losing his home and business to Katrina
This should bring a smile to a lot of people right now to take their mind off of everything

Lifting Spirits/Hope
The Saints have done their part to lift the fans spirits
You feel a sense of urgency to improve the product you give them on the weekends
It's a great morale boost.
It lifts morale; it's a sense of pride
The message went out that there was no hope. . . . there is hope here
Ray of hope on a blighted city
Many people have forgotten how important hope is
(NON-local fan): recently moved here and not a Saints fan. Could not help feel a surge of pride and hope as I saw people coming together showing their joy of life once again
Brought us joy and hope
Made us believe something good can happen
(Saints) were the only hopeful news the city's residents could latch onto
Hope that we can resurrect our lives, our homes, livelihoods pre Katrina
*(non-local fan) the spirit in their hearts made me a New Orleans fan for life. I wasn't a big fan before. But I have my Saints season tickets now. There's no spirit like I've seen the last year
Hope is tangible in the black and gold "We Believe" signs posted. . . . Saints flags that fly on the porches of the stately mansions
Given hope to the hopeless
(Brees) I feel like people put a lot of hope in us
Everyone rich or poor has been affected. . .we desperately need something to be hopeful about
as bad a situation that these people were in, they still put a lot of their hopes into us
2009
Saints/Superdome came to symbolize the indomitable hope for a city struggling to recover
They've given the city hope
They were feeding the hope of this city at a time when there were very little signs of any
Saints have helped 100% to restore our psyche
Those behind the Saints insisted on returning to the city and giving back hope to its people
This win is more than that because it reaffirms the role that sport plays in uplifting a people's spirit
the hopes, the dreams and the struggles of that community were all reflected in that football team
they all sort of lifted one another
The Saints have contributed so much. They gave everybody hope
Saints have lifted the spirits of just about everyone in NO, even those who weren't really football fans before the season

claiming of the Vince Lombardy trophy by the NO Saints was uplifting and damn near spiritual

Superdome
30,000 who took refuge in the Superdome
Former hellhole (Superdome)
Superdome: place became a symbol of chaos, despair and massive government failure
Inside the Superdome, a place the city would like to transform into a beacon of hope, NO is full of pride
The Saints and Superdome are symbols of renewal
(About the Dome) this is where people slept and had nightmares about everything that happen. Now it's where we turn everything around
(Dome) their new beacon of hope
(Dome) taking a building that is really as much a part of us as any building in LA and resurrecting it
(Dome) this particular stadium is really part of our psyche, much like Fenway Park is or Lambeau Field. It really has a life of its own.
(Dome) central meeting place for people who live in NO, St. Tammany and Jefferson and all across LA. . . . you're home again.
(Dome) cleanup work extracting 3.8 million gallons of water, replacing 22,000 seats, removing 4,000 tons of trash and debris, and 1,6 million sq. ft. carpet
(Katrina) This is our world trade center. The Dome is definitely beaten and battered by Katrina. But (tonight) it is going to rise again and take its place in history
(Dome) LA Superdome is a symbol of what happens when a natural disaster is mixed with a woeful human response
(Dome) different kind of symbol, one of the city's gritty determination and desire to recover
Return of the dome if integral to the city's recovery. It means jobs and tax revenue. . . much needed morale boost to flood weary residents who can now do the types of things taken for granted in other communities
Dome became a national symbol of despair and horror place was an absolute cesspool
(Dome) phoenix rising from the ashes helping to ease the painful memories of the city's darkest hours
2009
(Dome) House of horrors
Went to the Dome day after storm. . . . squalor and filth, group of kids pretending to be the Saints

Inconsistencies
Thousands of mostly white faces in the stands being serenaded by white rock musicians. It wasn't exactly a vision of a returning NO
(Irma Thomas) we rode through the 9th ward yesterday. . . . when I saw that, I thought, how can they spend \$185 million on the Superdome. What about all these poor people?
2009
city's recovery is more rich and nuanced than the clichés that so many misinformed sportswriters, bloggers, and TV talking heads have been peddling this week to hype the game

Long Suffering/Emotion
Long and suffering Saints
Hard luck fans known locally as the Aints
I cried a lot last year. I'm a crier. I'm sure I'm going to cry again, but it will be the best tears of my life.
Fans that followed this team have suffered through a lot. They have been loyal fans through the thick and the thin
Team has been at the bottom for most of its 40 years
*(BLOGGER) never thought saints would make it to the big game. . . . thought good Lord would never let us win. . . . NO would not handle itself with class if won. Outlook changed since Katrina. . .most appreciative fans in all of sports
Katrina turned NO into a sea of human suffering
Saints began the season as NFL's most hopeless franchise
Legacy of losing
As far as their history is concerned, they've always been a bad team
2009
They had been so bad for so long that to think they could be anything but horrible seemed impossible
Vividly remember just how pathetic the Saints were when I was growing up. . . . classmate wore a Saints t and immediately became the laughingstock of the entire school
Saints were the Aints-punchlines and punching bags
Wore brown bags, woeful seasons fraught with losing records
A team so bad fans used to wear bags on their heads came to symbolize and embraced by a battered but rebuilding community
Saints, once laughing stocks. . . . had been losers for most of their 43-year history
Many years were known not so affectionately as the New Orleans Aints
We've pretty much suffered through the worst years of Saintsdom
No matter what hardships Saints fans have endured, the week at hand salves them all
Emotionally, a SB would mean a lot to everybody here
Saints have already meant a lot emotionally to the people. . . . beneficial to the economy right now
the Aints. . . . paper bags for shame
Cathartic explosion of stranger-hugging, trumpet blaring, weepy-eyed joy
This changes everything. It's gigantic, It's mega, I don't want to leave--ever.
Mammoth celebrations across the city
This is the most alive we've been since Katrina
Tuesday's Parade: giddy wildness replaced by humble appreciation for their beloved team
She was overcome with emotion
Moments after the game ended, people hurried toward the French Quarter

Who Dat Nation going crazy
Best place to party will be back home; 30-day long party
everyone in the Dome and across the region exploded in uncontrollable joy
It was just one love. . . . everybody was just hugging and kissing and high-fiving
I couldn't just stay home. I just needed to be in that madness. And that's not me. I haven't been to Bourbon street in years.
I can't explain it. You know, you just got to know the story to, feel it all. . . . once they won, it's just, it's like if the Saints could do it, we sure could do it
at that moment on Bourbon St, we forgot about all that. We were just out celebrating us
I was boohooing for the Saints that were here like myself and the Saints that didn't make it back
Saw a man in tears of joy because his team had overcome the odds. . . . Gives regular people the day-to-day courage to go on.
Saints: star-crossed and woebegone an NFL franchise as there ever was
Saints fans crying in the stands at Sun Life Stadium, the French Quarter back in NO absorbed a flood of delirious partygoers that probably are still upright Monday morning

NO vs. the World
We're coming back and we're coming back strong
Showed nation we can rebuild
People have forgotten us. . . . they have Katrina fatigue
Opportunity to show the world the spirit that is here, not only in NO but throughout LA and the entire Gulf Coast region
NO open for business
like a national reopening of New Orleans, the city
ESPN: 15 hours of TV, 14 hours of radio, 30 on-air people; U2, GHW Bush
symbol of rebirth and a message to those all across the country
People don't know. Most people don't understand what we've been through down here.
2009
Crescent city residents have grown weary of being portrayed as helpless and sometimes hapless victims
NO. . . . witnessing the fruits of progress. . . . city residents are eager to showcase their own victories
City in ruins
NO is back and this showed the whole world
(Katrina) killing more than 1,800 people, unprecedented damage
When Brees goes on TV how much he and his wife love the city, that does wonders, because we're suffering a Katrina hangover.
people did not know if the city would come back
Katrina, team history put aside
Is there a bigger underdog than the city of NO?
a lot of people in this country are really concerned for our city after Katrina
City that care forgot
Clearly more than a game. . . . magical. . . . 106.5 million viewers
A team and a city that have been viewed as appropriate subjects for pity
Aints no more
You can knock us down but you can't knock us out
We're back. We're back for good.
New Orleans is back, This shows the whole world.
we had a whole city and maybe a whole country behind us it's destiny
People have gone through so much and still have gumption and pride
No matter what obstacles we go through, no matter what come our way, there isn't nothing we can't do if we put our mind to it.
It wasn't about the pity party, it was those boys persevered.
About Saints leaving) pretty much sent off an angry stream from the folks who live here in NO. They couldn't imagine their city without the Saints. Many considered it a slap in the face to consider moving the team in the city's darkest hour

More than super bowl, about surviving and thriving. . . shredding an image and defying stereotype that our city and our people have been branded with for decades

Katrina couldn't hurt us

That storm took everything from us but the spirit of this city keeps me here

NFL tries to crackdown on catchphrase Who Dat.

It is the rallying cry of a permanently vanquished people

It's a vital piece of Saints lore

NO said boo dat to the NFL

Who Dat Phrase
2009
Might not be a Who Dat Nation without Ron Swoboda popularizing Who Dat in 1983
Saint Aug sang Who dat say dey gonna beat St. Aug
Phrase added to Saints go marching in. . . . Team took phrase in house

Religion/Totems/Effervescence
2009
Many marquee players remind them of themselves: survivors, misfits, and castoffs
Brees is the team's pulse. Outside the Dome, he is NO pulse.
Brees is every bit the Saints as the fleur-de-lis
Archie Manning, NO icon, first family of NO, the Kennedy's of NO
Cheering against native son Peyton (Manning)
Saints win would spark an explosion of emotion
Lionel Alphonso dressed in a fleur-de-lis emblazoned pope outfit and blessed the team before kickoff
Love the Mannings and what they've done for the city, our love of the Saints trump that
Yard signs emblazoned with Who Dat
shops sell Who Dat Nation T-shirts
cakes in the shape of Saints and Colts helmets
Unique is the love affair between Brees and NO
Brees) I've embraced the community of NO just because it is a special place
In US, pro football is a religion, and in NO, the Saints are a religion of their own. See it as another step in the city's revival.
everybody suffered so much together, and now we can share the joy together
If they win, it could be total pandemonium
Oh Lord it's like a dream come true
I am a die-hard Saints fan. I cheer, I cry, I pray
Her husband said being a Saints fan was a bigger test of devotion
NO has represented the underdog for years. When (Vikings game) was over, that special feeling went from your head to your toes and straight to the heart
Glen Witherspoon sat in silence, and then the tears began. . . . Houston transplant since Katrina in 06, was having trouble keeping it together
It was quite an emotional night
The people they brought in are folks you can invest in. Brees is a godsend for the community
People are looking at the Saints as their savior
Mass crowd dressed in black and gold. . . . praying for the Saints. . . . We asked God to take care of our Saints
Entire stadium was holding hands at the time that the ball actually went through the uprights
Lifted our spirits
she's got four more rosaries lying around for this game
All the time they tell us we inspire them and they inspire us
To win this thing would be a miracle. . . . something from the hand of God

Claiming of the Vince Lombardi Trophy by the NO Saints was uplifting and damn near spiritual
The phoenix rose from the ashes, and we are rising from the mud down here
(Katrina) destroyed the economy, but it didn't kill the Big Easy spirit
NO isn't just a city. . . . it's a soul. It's something you feel inside of you and the Saints are the heartbeat of that soul
The team is the city's IV
It's a gateway for everyone to believe
The Saints were as much a part of Sundays as church. Sometimes I'd venture to say, a big game was more important than church.

Economic Affects
2009
It's not only the psyche of the city, the Saints have added true monetary value to the rebranding of NO as a winner
Hotel occupancy rose over 80% because of the Saints
It's big for the city and for all of us who work on Bourbon. . . it's going to generate a lot of business
This franchise probably wouldn't have been here any longer if Katrina hadn't been here
Windfall of visitors was a blessing for hotel owners, who have struggled
Football success has improved NO image nationally. . . potential tourists think of fun instead of flood
Saints remind people it's business as usual in NO

Family
2009
My mom's 80 years old, in a nursing home. I had to go buy her a Super Bowl jersey
Mom. . . also has delayed hip surgery. . . to be in good health to watch this game
I wasn't a football fan, but I worked with a guy and when we watched the game he went crazy every time the Saints scored. . . I love to watch the Saints win, big time.
Like a good mother, you love our children all the times; you just don't like them sometimes. But you don't desert them.
Joan Fox wears her deceased husbands 20-year-old sweatshirt when she watches games
Robert Peri remembers his mother taking him to a Saints game. . . in the midst of a painful earache. . . stayed to the end. . . wouldn't trade that memory for all of the doubloons in the world
Through thick and thin Waltman has remained true to her NO Saints. It's always been the Saints. There's just something about them that keep me going on and going on rooting for them.
Saints fans are different. They're not just a football team to us. That's our family, those are our boys.
Boker said she was born and raised to be a Saints fan. . . I've never had a desire to root for someone else. I guess it's in the blood.
We back our Saints no matter what. Never put a bag over my head. I've gotten aggravated before, but I've always had the hope
Never been ashamed of my Saints. They've always been my team
The Saints-they're like wayward sons. They do the right thing sometimes, but you keep giving them money and keep supporting them
Finally it paid off; it's like the prodigal son finally came home
My mom never made it back to NO. . . so many other people didn't make it back. . . that was for them too
almost everybody will tell you they want the Saints to win the SB for somebody else
No team has a stronger bond with its fans
Airport tailgating: return from road games, team greeted by fans at the airport. . . sort of mobile Bourbon St.
Every road game, rain, sleet or snow, they are there
I'm a NO Saints fan and have been for as long as I can remember. Before I even knew what football was I knew who the Saints were.
Every conversation my dad and I had after a game started with the word unbelievable

**Discourse Coding
Bounty Scandal
National & Local
2006, 2009**

Rogue Team-National
I was disappointed by the leniency of the punishment imposed by the NFL for the NO Saints payments for their players committing what amounts to aggravated assaults on opposing players
Absent such real punishment, NO's cheating is still being rewarded by the league
It's a given that NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell must severely punish longtime defensive coordinator Gregg Williams for operating a bounty system
It was just as hard not to worry about what awaits them if the NFL does not bring down its maximum wrath on the Saints, drawing a very bright line between the game's innate violence and the checkbook barbarism practiced in NO.
Perhaps the NFL commissioner Roger Goodell should consider a forfeit of the SB trophy for the 2009 Saints and a permanent expulsion from the NFL for Loomis and Williams.
Certainly there is a kind of perverse, dark humor in knowing a team called the Saints was involved in such thuggish, goon-like behavior
Anyone believing us to be a civilized society has to proudly trumpet the harsh yet fair penalties levied against the NO Saints by NFL commissioner
This disclosure involving the NO Saints goes to an outrageous level that none of us ever anticipated
Considering that the Yahoo tape of the Saints game with San Francisco was made just two weeks after the NFL informed the Saints their bounty program was under investigation, the Saints managers couldn't have been too alarmed about the investigation, or their reprehensible conduct
For everyone else, however, he's (Payton) secured his place in sports history as the one who took the hit he deserved when the NFL decided it was time to keep a vicious yet lucrative sport from further decaying into something that better resembles professional barbarism
. . . . the bounty program run by a NO Saints assistant coach in which players were paid to seriously injure their opponent was not something that could be anticipated. It is also something that cannot be tolerated
They're lucky that's all they got. The ROGUE bounty system operated by the NO Saints coaching staff threatened to undermine the integrity of the NFL
It was a severe and correct response, though it would hardly have gone too far had Goodell imposed lifetime suspensions
NO also is paying for a term thrown around by those with knowledge of this investigation: arrogance. Those being penalized are also paying for not cooperating, not taking warnings about bounty thing seriously--of thinking they were above it all--and covering things up
He actually put the Saints' money where his mouth was. He threw the book at the bums. He tolerated nothing, issuing suspensions, fines, rebukes--and there's more: He's going to deal with the players next, he vowed.
The Saints cheated. . . . The Saints lied about the fact they cheated.

<p>The NFL swung a sledgehammer at the NO Saints on Wednesday over bounty payments that rewarded players for vicious hits that injured opponents</p>
<p>The furor over the Saints bounties comes at a time when the league has focused on player safety by tightening its enforcement of rules that govern legal blows and, in particular, trying to reduce player concussions</p>
<p>The Saints only SB victory will be forever tainted by the dirty, underhanded tactics they used to win. There is no sportsmanship or honor in winning a game when it encourages --even-- rewards violence and injuries. The violence , if allowed to continue unchecked, eventually would alienate many fans such as myself</p>
<p>But for players to accept rewards for purposely taking someone out is barbaric in a sport that is brutal even when played fair. Weren't the players in this scheme paid enough money already?</p>
<p>The Saints bounty system in many ways is similar to what occurs in other professional worlds where pay for performance results in people placing financial gain over doing the right thing</p>
<p>How many of us work for companies that have a culture of nastiness or caveat emptor (let the buyer beware)? Has that culture corrupted you?</p>
<p>You can't have anything like this in the league. . . . The game is rough enough where you don't have to start giving out incentives to take somebody out of the game, for heaven's sake.</p>
<p>. . . . the commissioner views the Saints case as a critical opportunity to underscore the league's burgeoning emphasis on safety and need to change a culture that sometimes promotes injuries, another sign a significant penalty could be coming</p>
<p>The Saints are saying there's no integrity there. . . . I'm all about inflicting pain to the point of submission. But I'm not going out there to hurt people</p>
<p>To me those penalties and other suspensions and the \$500,000 fine levied on the franchise are more than deserved by men who made maiming the name of the game</p>
<p>How hard is it to find the line where there is just enough ferocity to succeed but not endanger?</p>

Unjust/Hypocrisy-National
The price for the Saints' bounty program was enormous. But was it just?
"Absolutely not," Bushrod says when asked if that takes away from what the Saints accomplished. "People that play this game feel the exact same way we do
Obviously what was going on wasn't great, but I feel like it was definitely blown out of proportion, Bushrod said. "At the end of the day, we're not a dirty team. A lot of teams respect us, respect what we do. We're getting a bad rap. We didn't go out with the intention to try to harm anybody at all
While the Saints deserved every penalty they received, it seems that the team is being raised as the league's scapegoat and served up as a cautionary tale to the NFL's 31 other franchises. No one can reasonably believe NO is or was the only team operating with a bounty system, but the NFL doesn't appear as if it will continue its investigation and look into other franchises. It's easier to punish the Saints, sweep it under the rug and move on, thus potentially avoiding a bigger black-eye or lawsuits and scrutiny from the criminal justice system.
Unfortunately, the attitude, even among the targets of big hits often is: So what? That's football.
The NFL again has assumed its perpetually awkward position on a high horse, this time by exposing the NO Saints for a bounty program that compromised "the integrity of our game."
And by nightfall, current and former NFL players everywhere were nearly unified in their abject ambivalence to this qualifying as news
Gregg Williams, take a bow. You've exposed a new facet of the NFL's dark side. Goodell will be spending much of this summer trying to cut down the exposure.
And the NO Saints and their fans rose up with the sweet anger of the persecuted
Darren Sharper) I think this is something that, from when I got in the league in 1997, has happened thousands of times over. It's ridiculous that someone is trying to say that we made bounties on knocking guys out, when basically all it was is that when a guy gets an interception, then he might get paid. That's something that guys do amongst themselves.
(Carlos Rogers) People make such a big deal about it. That's what I hate. I don't know really what went on with the Saints, they're talking about guys, players getting \$10,000. Naw, that's not happening, not in my years. The way people use it, when it gets to the media when it gets to ESPN, they just make it so much worse. You get former coaches, that I'm pretty sure they knew what was going on, but they get on TV and make it like it's so bad, like they didn't do it, and it makes it that much worse. I just laugh, thinking, 'Man these players were sitting in the room doing the same thing, knowing it wasn't nobody out trying to kill nobody.
Saints may not be only Sinners
. . . . NFL Media Nanny State up in arms about FB coaches espousing violent behavior. U people r clueless about the game

It's all wrong. But I don't blame the (Saints) players, because as players we are told and we are brainwashed--not in a bad way--from the time that we started playing football as kids, your coach is your leader. Listen to your coach. You can trust him.

The ongoing problem, which the NFL never can resolve despite distancing itself from "Greatest Hits" videos, bounties and helmet to helmet collisions, is that violence is what gives the league its trademark.

But, while the Saints were hit with a felony maximum punishment, the Patriots were punished for a misdemeanor, a traffic violation. That is what is not right.

The hypocrisy at the root of the NFL bounty scandal is so transparent the controversy should be sponsored by Windex

To the most die-hard followers of the NO Saints, or even to all those football fans fixated on winning and little else, Sean Payton will always be the coach of the 2010 SB champions

Snitch-National

But the NFL's punishment of the team revealed something else: a discord among current and former players not only over the bounty program and the league's response but in the manner in which they became public

When all this stuff came out, one of the first things I tweeted was: "Who snitched?" said Damien Woody, an offensive lineman for three teams over a 12-year career who now serves as an analyst for ESPN

. . . former NO safety Darren Sharper told a Philadelphia radio station that the revelation "kind of appalls and upsets me."

The Steelers' Ryan Clark. . . "Whoever is snitching on the Saints D should be ashamed of themselves. No one was talking about the bounty when they got paid. . . I'm not saying 'bounties' are ethical or right but I am saying if you participate don't go back & tell on the people u did it with!"

Feel Good Story Over-National
Now the Saints are no longer ambassadors. Neither are they victims.
That moment, that sense of utter euphoria, will never be forgotten. But the extraordinary achievement is now tarnished in light of the findings of a months-long investigation that revealed the Saints violated the rules of the game and the spirit of sportsmanship
This is the same franchise that was given sweetheart treatment for the way it won a SB, 4 years after Katrina and soothed its broken city.
(Bobby Hebert) You know how the Who Dat Nation is. . . . After Katrina, we were the feel-good story. Now it's like we're the Evil Empire
(Bobby Hebert) He wonders about the ramifications. "In two or three years. . . . we might look back on this as the beginning of the Saints downfall.
. . . . the Saints were the fee-good story of 2009 among the most sentimental of SB Champions. The civic heroes who made some of the anguish of Hurricane Katrina go away
. . . . the Saints were the rogues of 2009 among the most infamous of SB champions. The malevolent bounty hunters who profited from anguish
So that SB victory is tainted. Pride in the Saints that helped pick up a beleaguered region in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is blunted

Saints v NFL-Local
"Joe Vitt," Morstead tweeted. "The stage is set for another @Saints storybook season. #WHODAT."
Morstead's tweet reflected a theme that has emerged from the comments from Saints players since the bounty scandal engulfed the team last month: that the franchise is using the unprecedented hammer Goodell landed on it as a motivating tool for the upcoming campaign
The resolution says there is "widespread public opinion throughout the state of LA and beyond that the penalties imposed upon the Saints are too harsh and should be reconsidered."
The draconian punishments. . . . have left fans convinced the commissioner has a vendetta against Payton and the Saints, whose adherence to the NFL's rulebook and customs is sometimes cursory. In addition, Saints fans believe Goodell has drawn a false distinction between what transpired in NO from 2009 to 2011 and what has long been an accepted tradition of under the table incentives in the NFL
The Who Dat Nation collectively convulsed when the league meted out its Bountygate punishments against the franchise, coach Sean Payton. . . . The punishments far exceeded what most fans expected. . . .
(fan) I got a feeling that because the SB is here this year, the commissioner wants to make sure the Saints don't make the SB. Well I'm gonna boycott the NFL and picket the SB. And you know what? If the players can't do it no more, I'll put up \$1000 for the first one to put a QB on his ass.
"Free Payton" t-shirts
(fan) Go find the rest of them. Leave my babies alone!
(fan). . . . was more let done at Sean and those guys than he is angry at the punishment. . . . "I hate to sound like a typical NO--but it almost feels like , 'Why are they doing this now, at this point?' They heard about this years ago, and they pop this out right before the SB is in our hometown? It's like a malicious effort to punish the city.
Savoie even threatened to sell his season tickets and called on fans to not attend games as a message to the league.
Real fans are with the team when the times are tough. Not when they're winning SB--right now.
Coaches coach and players play. If the fans get behind them and give them the feeling they had in 2009, that's what they need right now.
Saints fans seem to have come to a consensus. . . . Their verdict: Absent a clear record over the last few years of dirty hits or frequent penalties for dirty play by N.O. defenders, this is a case in which the Saints are just unluckier than other teams, not dirtier.
I think it's very interesting that other NFL teams are not speaking out against the Saints, since they probably also have got their hands dirty
(I) also demand that the NFL cancel its bounty on the NO Saints and their fans

<p>This bounty-gate stuff goes on at the high school level and for sure, at the college level. You who are now so righteous about the Saints were probably yelling the loudest when we won the SB.</p>
<p>The penalties levied upon the Saints were outrageously excessive. Professional sports can be dangerous but those highly paid athletes know the risks</p>
<p>Bounty or no bounty, there are many dirty teams around the NFL. And the Saints are not one of them! Fair is fair, and this is not fair.</p>
<p>Like all Saints fans, I am saddened by the bounty scandal. However, the harshness of the punishment constitutes a profound hypocrisy on the part of the NFL.</p>
<p>. . . . football is a game of violence that ultimately appeals to the baser instincts of our nature.</p>
<p>Shame on the commissioner for his sanctimonious attitude in meting out this unprecedented punishment</p>
<p>Instead of conducting and completing an investigation throughout the league on a well-known practice of setting bounties, Goodell decided to make the Saints the scapegoat</p>
<p>I can't wait to watch our team represent our city, to watch them (and us) show the whole world that you can knock us down, but we'll always dust ourselves off and get back up.</p>
<p>I simply cannot shake befuddlement over how one individual could have the indecency to punish an entire city, an entire fan base, the team owner, for the misdeeds of a few.</p>
<p>Now it decides to kill the hopes of an entire team and community?</p>
<p>Hours after the news of his suspension for the "bounty program" hit the streets, the city went to work. People were making signs, selling t-shirts and writing letters and email messages to the NFL to express their opinion on this event</p>
<p>Look, nobody wants us to even win anymore, and we're going to win for each other, and for Coach Payton and Mickey and the guys that essentially tool this fall.</p>
<p>To a man, players who have spoken up in interviews or via Twitter have insisted that they will rise to the challenge, taking on greater leadership roles and a greater sense of unity in Payton's absence.</p>

Cultural Importance-Local
. . . . the team has provided NO and the Gulf Coast residents with "magical moments" and that taxpayers of the state have "invested millions of dollars into the success of the organization by supporting stadium improvements, practice facilities and other incentives" during the years
. . . . the team has provided NO and the Gulf Coast residents with "magical moments" and that taxpayers of the state have "invested millions of dollars into the success of the organization by supporting stadium improvements, practice facilities and other incentives" during the years
Saints fans acknowledged, though, that they see the team through rose colored glasses.
They gave me my strength during my whole two and a half years in was in Texas" after Hurricane Katrina
This is bigger than money; this is people's minds and hearts
That surplus of goodwill isn't evident elsewhere around the country
But in the view of Loyola University senior Conner LeBon: "They're still the heart of the city, no doubt about it"
Our own Saints have done great things. They have not only won games, championships and a SB; they have helped to lead a broken city in its renewal. They have shown us that resurrection is possible.
They could become the patron Saints of the comeback. Keep the faith.
However, no one can take away the incredible feeling of jubilation that started on Jan 24, 2010, and culminated with a bang on Feb 7, 2010 and went on for weeks and months following.
No other person or organization has done more to lift a bear-down city and bring people of all walks, races, classes, ages and genders together in fellowship.
Above all, though, many fans Wednesday expressed their ongoing devotion and support for the team--and that will be invaluable this season. Many fans are disappointed about the bounty scandal and the team's failures of leadership, and rightly so. But they also recognize that the Saints were a source of joy and inspiration after Hurricane Katrina.
I can't wait to watch our team represent our city, to watch them (and us) show the whole world that you can knock us down, but we'll always dust ourselves off and get back up.
Jeff Duncan wrote, "The feel-good post -Katrina narrative is gone for good. Whaaa?!?! Tell that to the million-plus fans whose lives were upended by Katrina and who were literally made to feel good by the miracle that was the Saints in those days. That "narrative" as you call it, was sometimes the only thing that lifted the daily grind post-K to a bearable level. It was the first time that many of us thought, "We might actually make it."
Let the Saints fall on the sword. Now I say this not because I think they are getting just desserts, but rather because the members of the Who Dat nation (and specifically the people of our region) are resilient.

<p>Roger Goodell may have the responsibility of keeping the integrity of the NFL intact, but he certainly cannot admonish me, an avid Saints fan. "to put the crisis in context." We Saints fans are not going to lose faith in our team</p>
<p>The bounty scandal, he added, isn't likely to "sully the way that people look at the Saints."</p>
<p>Being a Saints fan is like falling in love with someone irresistible and totally wrong for you. You know you're going to get hurt, but you can't help yourself.</p>
<p>The Saints have shown admirable pluck in the face of adversity.</p>
<p>I'm going to say the team has many fine men on it and that we can come back from this. We've been through much worse, and during those dark days after Katrina, the Saints helped us believe in something: our home and our people and ourselves, most of all. Now we can do the same for them.</p>
<p>Mayor Mitch Landrieu) We will take our licks and move on. We support our coach and look forward to his return. This team and this city are no strangers to adversity. We have overcome in the past and will overcome again.</p>
<p>As a devoted Saints fan, I'll do mine: support them and continue to appreciate their greatness</p>
<p>Being a Saints fan is like falling in love with someone irresistible and totally wrong for you. You know you're going to get hurt, but you can't help yourself.</p>
<p>I'm going to say the team has many fine men on it and that we can come back from this. We've been through much worse, and during those dark days after Katrina, the Saints helped us believe in something: our home and our people and ourselves, most of all. Now we can do the same for them.</p>
<p>The bounty scandal, he added, isn't likely to "sully the way that people look at the Saints."</p>

Economic Importance-Local

The sanctions faced by the team will likely have a negative economic impact across the Crescent City and the state as a whole," Henry's resolution said.

Drew Brees-Local
Brees outpolls Lincoln, Jesus
As long as they were surveying likely Republican primary voters, the folks at Public Policy Polling decided to throw in some questions on matters of real importance. Drew Brees of the NO Saints is the most popular figure PPP has ever asked about in a poll, with 94 percent of likely Republican primary voters rating him favorably and only 1 percent (Who Dat?) rating him unfavorably. The only near comparable figure was a national poll PPP did in November in which Abraham Lincoln had a 91 to 2 favorable rating, followed by Jesus Christ.
The Saints need something, anything, good to happen right now. . . . Every day that passes without a long-term deal adds to the anxiety of the fan base and the rancor of the franchise quarterback
. . . . most Saints fans are much more disappointed in the inability of GM Mickey Loomis to agree to a long-term deal with Drew Brees

Saints Embarrassment-Local
Fall from grace: NFL bounty scandal
But now they've led his club into an embarrassing abyss
(Duncan) The damage to the club's once-Saintly image will cost the organization millions. . . . The feel good post-Katrina narrative is gone for good
(fan) he acknowledges that the Saints cover-up was the real problem
But some fans are saying, "It's time to get the bags." They've been through so much crap, their thinking is so warped.
The same arrogance which helped propel Payton and the Saints to unprecedented heights on the field the past six years helped undercut them of it. They became corrupted by their own perceived omnipotence, and their greatest strength became their most debilitating weakness
(Duncan) In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Saints had become America's Team. Everyone universally loved the story of their post-storm chumps to champs makeover. So much for that.
(Duncan) The Saints will not rank alongside the Spygate Patriots and cocky Cowboys among the most despised teams in the NFL. This story will follow the Saints for years. It's not going away after the league hands down its punishment.
What we have here now is the face of organized savagery, plain and simple, and no amount of commercials showing happy kids cavorting with our dinged-up superstars can ameliorate any of that
It is unfortunate that this news tarnishes the whole Saints organization. The Saints are deserving of whatever punishment the NFL chooses to use as discipline
Saints fans will remember March 2 as one of the saddest days in franchise history
Saints fans will remember March 2 as one of the saddest days in franchise history
Notwithstanding the tarnish now on the Saints SB win or the abysmal lapse of judgment
If you represent me, win--but do it within the rules of the game. That's the only way I may continue to support you with my dignity intact. Don't cheat for me, even if other clubs are doing it.
For the first time ever, I am ashamed to be a Saints fan
It will be a long time before we'll proudly wear the black and gold again. . . . Maybe we should just wear paper bags and hang our heads in shame.
To hear and read people making the Saints out to be the victims of the NFL as the result of the bounty scandal is disgraceful.
Tom Benson should fire both of them immediately. A very tarnished "Who Dat"
I'm as bog a fan as any other season ticket holder, but the way I feel about the way they handled this matter, they should be fired.
(John DeShazier) Fire them all, Tom Benson. But is that worth the cloud of shame and embarrassment under which the Saints will operate for the foreseeable future?

<p>The good thing for the Saints is that they have the Lombardi Trophy, because right now--and perhaps for the foreseeable future--they will have to make do without their good name.</p>
<p>Worse, though, their inaction--allows the fleur-de-lis to take a hit.</p>
<p>And just like that, the organization's name, which has which has enjoyed such widespread popularity and acceptance and respect since Payton was hired in 2006, has been dirtied.</p>
<p>But he expressed concern with reports that bounty systems, which he called "reprehensible," exist on other NFL teams, as well.</p>
<p>The Saints conduct takes bounty systems to an "outrageous level that none of us ever anticipated"</p>
<p>(John DeShazier) Fire them all, Tom Benson. But is that worth the cloud of shame and embarrassment under which the Saints will operate for the foreseeable future?</p>
<p>The most common reaction from fans and national analysts alike was gloom and doom after the NFL handed down its bounty penalties against the Saints</p>
<p>Also growing was the sense the Saints are not some diabolical island in the league but were instead engaging in behavior far from atypical in professional football.</p>

Appendix G: Interview Questions for Main Study

Demographic Info

1. Name
2. Age
3. Racial Identification
4. Where from:
 - a. If New Orleans, what section/neighborhood

About New Orleans

1. Why do you live in New Orleans?
2. What is your sense of N.O. as a city itself? What do you think of NO?
3. What is your sense of the people of NO?
4. What is the relationship between people in NO?
 - a. How are race relations between people in NO?
 - i. Discuss race issues in past and ask how it affects relationships.

About the Saints

1. How do the Saints fit into race relations in NO?
 - a. Talk about newspaper articles focusing on blacks and whites celebrating together after Super Bowl
2. What is your relationship with the team?
 - a. Are you a fan?
 - b. How much of a fan: casual, watch every game?
3. Who would you consider to be a Who Dat or a member of the Who Dat Nation?
 - a. Are you a Who Dat?
4. How did you feel after the Saints won the Super Bowl? Did it do anything for you?
5. What did winning the Super Bowl do for the city as a whole?
 - a. Did it have an effect on people's day to day operations?
6. What do you think about the bounty accusations? Does it affect your relationship with the team?
 - a. Do you think the NFL is picking on NO?
7. Would you feel the same way about the Saints if Drew Brees were not with the team?

Additional Question

1. What does the Superdome mean to you?

Appendix H: IRB Letter of Exemption

University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research University of New Orleans

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Michelle M. Thompson
Co-Investigator: Brandon D. Hynes
Date: August 21, 2012
Protocol Title: "A Gateway for Everyone to Believe: Restoring Identity through Football in Post-Katrina New Orleans"
IRB#: 07Aug12

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 2, due to the fact that any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the Investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project.
Sincerely,



Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

Vita

Brandon D. Haynes was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. He obtained a bachelor's degree in mass communication from Louisiana State University in 2001. After receiving a Master's of Public Administration Degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2004, he worked as a performance auditor for both the City of Kansas City, Missouri and the City of Atlanta, Georgia. While residing in Atlanta, Haynes began a work on a Master's of Business Administration Degree at Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Georgia. In 2009, he enrolled in the Planning and Urban Studies program at the University of New Orleans, where he completed his M.B.A. in 2010 and his doctoral studies in 2013. Haynes considers himself to be a lifelong fan of the New Orleans Saints, whose success post-Hurricane Katrina provided the impetus for this study. Through his research, Haynes was able to combine his passion for sports with a thirst for knowledge and the understanding of culture. He plans to continue his research on sports and their effect on society and culture at an institution of learning.