AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Matthew D. Vosburg, for the degree of <u>Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies</u> in <u>Speech Communication</u>, <u>Speech Communication</u>, and <u>Business</u>
presented on <u>May 2, 2008</u>.
Title: <u>From 'Aints' to Saints: A Rhetorical Analysis of the New Orleans Saints' Fan Community.</u>

Abstract approved:

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Trischa Goodnow

The purpose of this study is to analyze the rhetoric provided by New Orleans Saints fans and residents from 2004 to 2007. During this time frame there are two particularly significant events that influence a rhetorical change within the community and a shift in the perception of the New Orleans Saints; Hurricane Katrina and the Saints' return to the Superdome. This study includes a review of previous studies relating to sports, fans, and media. Building on previous research specific to fan communication, of which there is little, Ernest Bormann's fantasy theme analysis is used to reconstruct the social reality of the community. By reconstructing the rhetorical visions created by the community's discourse, the motives, meanings and emotions of the Saints' fan community are revealed. This study concludes that the change in rhetoric and chaining of fantasy themes among communities reflected the transformation of the New Orleans team from the disappointing 'Aints' to the hope inducing Saints.

From 'Aints' to Saints:
A Rhetorical Analysis of the New Orleans Saints' Fan Community

by
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A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

Presented May 2, 2008
Commencement June 2008

<u>Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies</u> thesis of <u>Matthew D. Vosburg,</u>
presented on <u>May 2, 2008.</u>

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upon request.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

On August 28th 2005, the city of New Orleans and all of its inhabitants braced themselves for the approaching category 5 hurricane; Hurricane Katrina. By the time the storm passed and began to dissipate, the damage had already been done. Throughout the Gulf Coast, especially New Orleans, the devastating effects of Katrina could be seen. The fact that New Orleans was under sea level contributed to mass destruction and chaos when several of the state's levees collapsed causing flooding to accompany the vicious storm. Thousands of the New Orleans residents were herded to the Super Dome, home of the New Orleans Saints. Houses, buildings, and entire neighborhoods laid in ruin when the storm subsided. Many residents questioned even returning home to start anew. New Orleans and its residents needed some form of hope, inspiration, or a sign that the city could once again thrive.

September 25, 2006 the city of New Orleans was covered in black and gold with fleur-de-lis everywhere. The New Orleans Saints, the city's NFL football team, had finally returned home to their city and fans at the Superdome, which had been newly renovated after serving as an evacuation shelter. This event marked more than simply a homecoming, but reflected the transformation of the team, city, and fan community. The Saints' home opener ranked at number nineteen on ESPN magazine's list of 100 greatest moments of 2006 (ESPN, 2006). The return to the Superdome was a little over one year after the disaster, the catalyst that sparked this resurrection of city and spirit.

After the events of Hurricane Katrina much of the Gulf Coast was in ruin, the breeching of New Orleans' levees left eighty percent of the city submerged. One

organization was particularly affected by this natural disaster, now receiving a considerably increased amount of media coverage, the NFL New Orleans Saints. With the superdome severely damaged by the storm and positioned as a refuge for thousands of Louisiana residents, the Saints found themselves without a home. In many ways, the Saints represented the entire city of New Orleans, homeless, downtrodden, and uncertain of their future in the city they had called home for almost fifty years.

In the past the Saints had been mediocre, occasionally reaching the playoffs, but rarely embodying the prowess of a great organization or competitive team. This made them one of the more under publicized, less inspiring organizations in the NFL. Hurricane Katrina literally washed away this persona and from the ruin a new, improved, inspired, and hopeful team emerged. The Saints finished the 2005 season with an abysmal 3-13 record, placing them at the second spot in the NFL rookie draft and ready to begin anew.

In this thesis I will argue that, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans Saints not only served as a symbol of hope and inspiration, but reciprocated the transformation of the city itself. Regardless of an individual's degree of fandom with the Saints, fans and residents all experienced division with the New Orleans Saints and one another but eventually were powerfully united following the events of Hurricane Katrina. Individuals of all varying connections to the team found reasons not only to identify with the New Orleans Saints, but to unite as fans and community members.

This phenomenon leads to several questions about the effect of sports on fans, communities and large publics, particularly in times of crisis. Events such as the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and most recently the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, have bared witness to the power of sports following local, as well as national, crises. How does a sports team come to represent a community through more than simply proximity and name? What does the presence of a sports team provide for a community? How does the communication about a sports team, among fans and community members, affect the perception of that team? I hope to answer these questions relating to the New Orleans Saints between 2004 and 2007. Most importantly I hope to answer how the New Orleans Saints transformed from a floundering, small-market NFL franchise to a media darling, fan favorite and symbol of success in a city on the mend.

The answers to these questions may seem simple. Hurricane Katrina brought a dramatic increase in media attention, and a successful 2006 NFL season for the Saints brought in new fans, popularity and favorable national attention. These factors do play a role in the transformation of the Saints during the time frame of analysis, but my primary area of interest is in the communication among fans and community members. A dramatic shift in rhetoric among fans and residents, as well as media, can be found in relation to the New Orleans Saints during this time frame.

The method I intend to utilize to answer my questions and illustrate a change in the meanings, motives, and emotions of the New Orleans Saints community is Ernest Bormann's fantasy theme analysis. Fantasy theme analysis allows the rhetorical critic to collect the rhetoric provided by a large group of individuals or public, and

reconstruct the substance of that group's social reality. Individuals interacting within a group create shared fantasies that contain plot lines, characters, and settings. These elements of a group's narratives are called fantasy themes. Fantasy themes chain out within groups, but also spread to other groups and publics. Common plot lines and characterizations repeated within the group's fantasies are called fantasy types. When fantasy themes and types chain out among many individuals and groups, the fantasies then become rhetorical visions. From these rhetorical visions, the motives, emotions and meanings of an entire group of individuals can be attained. By revealing the rhetorical visions provided by the New Orleans Saints fan community, I will reconstruct the social reality experienced by that community.

I will begin this thesis by discussing the previous research conducted in the areas of sport journalism, fans, and communities. This research will provide a base for my analysis and present a need for my area of focus. I will then explain in detail the components and processes in conducting a fantasy theme analysis. Once I have established the method for my rhetorical analysis I will begin to analyze the rhetoric provided by the New Orleans Saints fan community. The time frame of my analysis spans from November 1, 2004 to January 17, 2007. During this time frame there are three segments separated by important events. The first time frame precedes the arrival of Hurricane Katrina to the Gulf Coast. The second time frame continues after Hurricane Katrina destroyed much of New Orleans. The third and final time frame begins as the New Orleans Saints return to the Superdome, after being gone for nearly a year.

In each of these time frames I will be analyzing the rhetoric found in the editorial section of the New Orleans Times-Picayune. The Times-Picayune was chosen as the primary source of data because it is the local newspaper of New Orleans, Louisiana. The editorial section of this newspaper provides the most data, and concentrated source of Saints fans. In the analysis of each time frame I will explain the motives, meaning and emotions found within the rhetorical visions created by the community. Following the analysis, I will conclude and explain the implications and future research potential for both sports fandom and fantasy theme analysis.

As the importance of sports grows in our society and fan communities increase in number and size, the understanding and research of sports fan communities will also increase in relevance and importance. By analyzing the rhetoric found in the New Orleans Saints' fan community, I will be able to discuss the social reality of a sports team's community during a time of crisis and need. The time frame I am observing also allows me to analyze a change in perception of a sports team both within the local community and nationally. The social reality of the community during this time frame, as well as the change in rhetoric and perceptions pertaining to the New Orleans Saints, will provide relevant implications for this analysis as well as future research.

Literature Review

There are many ways to study the effects sports have on individuals. Much of the research in this area focuses on the psychological effects of sports fandom, participation and observation. Some other areas of research include fan behavior, involvement, community and identification. While these areas help to explain the inherent qualities of sports that affect the individuals who view and attend them, little research has been conducted on the effect of communication in the realm of sports. The way fans communicate about themselves, teams, and the larger sport community has a profound effect on the way those fans perceive their sport environment. In this respect, sports media, both professional and amateur, plays a significant role in shaping the perceptions of fan communities. By analyzing the research conducted in the area of sports fandom and sports media, I will establish a background for my research as well as a need for further research in fan communication in relation to sports. There are two key areas of focus within my thesis. First is the relationship between sports and media. Second is the impact of sports and media on the individuals and communities that constitute the team fan community.

Sports and Media

Sports and mass media enjoy a very symbiotic relationship in American society. On one hand, the staggering popularity of sport is due, to no small extent, to the enormous amount of attention provided it by the mass media. On the other, the media are able to generate enormous

sales in both circulation and advertising based upon their extensive

treatment of sport (McChesney, 1989, p.49).

In order for a sports team to truly be nationally recognized, it must have media coverage. The only thing worse for a team than bad media coverage, is no media coverage. Popularity increase in sport, much like the New Orleans Saints between 2005-2007, is virtually always accompanied by a dramatic increase in media coverage (McChesney, 1989, p.49). Individuals do a majority of their sports spectating via media, thus sports are increasingly dependent upon media for survival (Jhally, 1989, p.78).

Sports journalism has had a profound effect on the American public since the early 1900's. Whether it is in everyday life or during times of national crisis, sports journalism has played a role in creating perceptions of American society and the individuals that comprise it. Journalism professionalizes the distribution of information and opinion. Editorials, on the other hand, carry the ability to bring together individuals from all facets of society by the establishment of community and identification (McChesney, 1989, p.57). Sports involve us in ways that other events in media do not. There are passions and emotions that are not found in other media messages that contribute to formations of social identity (Jhally, 1989, p.73).

Sports journalism in relation to fan communities operates in the same fashion. Gary Fine and Robert White (2002) assert that media have an effect on collective public attention, shared identification, and social cohesion, with a focus on human interest stories. They state that these human interest stories have four processes

through which they operate; media placement, identification potential, narrative arc, and discursive space (p.61).

These processes appear to operate similarly for all media coverage, including that of sports teams. For sports, media placement relates to the physical location of the team, what form of media is covering the event, and the amount of media devoted to the team publicity. Identification potential could be determined by the extent to which in-group and out-group sports fans can identify with the particular team. Narrative arc can describe the story developed around the team or the event. Discursive space, which Fine and White (2002) define as responses of the audience to the story, would be fairly similar as the response of fans to the story of the team (p.62). National human interest stories often become intertwined with the sports entertainment industry due to the significant role sports play in American society. For example, the 1980 Olympic hockey team came to signify much more than a game between two countries. In the same respect, the New Orleans Saints 2006 football season represented far more than a journey to the NFL championship game.

Sports coverage throughout American history has held importance to the individuals who view it and appears to be emphasized even when seemingly more important societal issues merit coverage (Carvalho, 2004). Sports pages, one of the largest forms of sport media, and sports have evolved together to reach the extent of coverage we have today. Throughout the 20th century, sports journalism and sports have facilitated one another both financially and publicly. In some cases, sports journalists have a greater effect than the actual event itself (Carvalho, 2004). The use of language in sports reporting, both journalistic and editorial, can have a profound

effect on the sense of community and identification a sports fan experiences in relation to a team or event.

The common trend that research and communication about fan behavior and identification tends to center around fan violence may originate from the way sports media covers events. Highly identified fans have often been characterized as hooligans, or fanatics, in the original sense of the word. Some sports media implies that there is a line between a highly identified, psychologically healthy sports fan, and excessive fan identification, which causes negative outcomes and behavioral traits (Wakefield, 2006). This research also indicates that an emphasis on team and sport identification by sport media may facilitate negative aspects within American society. Contrary to these findings, there is evidence that sport identification and involvement may be valuable contributors to the preservation of national communities in times of crisis.

Sports coverage and the continuance of sports during American crises facilitate an inherent identification within a fan community through the consistent flow of media messages linking the two. As Robert Brown (2004) states, "sport has not only continued after major American crises, but in fact have argued that it is their solemn duty to continue" (p.38). World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Kennedy assassination, the Munich Olympics, the Challenger explosion, President Reagan's shooting, the Gulf War, the 1996 Olympic Park Explosion, the Columbine shootings, and most recently the attacks of September 11th and Hurricane Katrina, all illustrate the extreme importance placed on the continuance of sports (Brown, 2004, p.37). The sense of familiarity with sports in general, as well as specific teams, allows media coverage of

sports events during American crises to provide a venue to identify with a community of like minded individuals. Rather than smaller scale, team-specific fan communities, in times of crisis, sports allow for a national identity and sense of community (Brown, 2004).

Sports media is able to produce this effect because, although popular entertainment is viewed by millions of Americans, audiences for sporting events are larger than audiences for anything else in society (Brown, 2004, p.38). A dominant audience contributes to the potential for fan identification and community within sports, but is only one of several contributing factors. The most influential element of sports media that is able to strengthen fan identification and community is the language used in media coverage. For example, when the NFL continued seasonal games on September 24, 2001, countless utterances and printings of "United We Stand" signified the event (Brown, 2004, p.40). American anthems such as "God Bless America," "America the Beautiful," and "Heroes, Hope, and Homeland" were rampant throughout the broadcasts of the game (Brown, 2004, p.40). Some scholars (Wann, Allen & Rochelle, 2004) believe that sport offers an escape from the problems of everyday life. Robert Brown (2004) argues that in order to continue as if nothing is wrong, in other venues, all references to tragedy must be avoided. Sports clearly do not follow this "business as usual" format in times of crisis. Commemorations and reminders are evident throughout the events (Brown, 2004, p.41).

Sports reporting, through its use of language, can provide a vision of both sport and world (Holt, 2000). Ron Holt (2000) provides three perspectives from which language in sport journalism can be studied; as the medium in which we interact and

ideate socially, as a tool or instrument for transacting something, and as an object of conscious study itself (p.89). Holt describes frequently occurring complexes within sport journalism, the most prevalent being violence.

Journalistic descriptions of events contribute to the perceptions of that event for the public. The language used to portray a sporting event can signify importance as well as perspective. Joseph Price (1991) used the example of the NCAA Final Four basketball championships to illustrate this function of language in journalism. Statements like, "The quest for the holy grail," and "the road to the championship game," demonstrate the perception of the importance and effort in reaching the championship game (Price, 1991). Price asserts that the establishment of the "American dream" atmosphere, where everyone can thrive, may contribute to the immense interest and ability to attract public attention (p. 54).

Implications of the language used in media can also be understood by examining the metaphoric concepts of team within American society. Much of the language used to describe sports fans by the media establishes fans as members of the "team." This concept of "team" operates metaphorically and allows the fan community to identify with the sports team. Terms like "the 12th man", referring to the football fans in attendance as the 12th member of the team on the field, creates a sense of community involvement and identification (Gribas and Downs, 2002). Spectators are then metaphorically established as an important element in the success of their football team, and subsequent fan community.

Jeffery Bineham (1991) asserts that commitment and devotion to the team, respect to the hierarchical structure, and team unity become important attitudes

contained by these metaphors. Through the use of these metaphors speakers can affect

the public's orientation to a situation. Clement So (1987) furthers this concept when

he asserts that the way in which metaphors are used can favorably frame an event.

So's research reveals the impact journalists can have on cultural beliefs and the

framing of events, simply by their choice of language.

Fans and Local Communities

The term fan is short for fanatic. Fanaticism is defined as excessive, irrational

zeal (American Heritage, 2006). Although when most people refer to an individual as

a fan they do not imply this sense of fanaticism, it appears that fandom tends to be

analyzed as an inherently negative trait. The more common sense of the term fan is

linked with an enthusiast, aficionado, and supporter. No matter how the term fan is

defined, it seems the focus of many studies and research is on the actions and

behaviors that arise from this intense enthusiasm and interest experienced by

individuals (Taylor, 1972; Jones, 1997; Wann, 1999; Guant, Sindic & Levens, 2005;

Wann, 2005; Wakefield & Wann, 2006). When studies stray from this focus of fan

action, psychological effects and internal experience, their focus still remains on the

impact of the sports event or its viewing and participation, not the communication

within or about sports and their fans (Carbaugh, 1996; Shank & Beasley, 1998;

Madrigal, 2006).

Ruth Gaunt, Dents Sindic, and JP Levens (2005) studied the emotional reaction

and subsequent behavior of sports fans based on several scenarios related to the fans

in-group, the team they identified with, as well as out-group, the rival team. Many of

the studies related to fan behavior are geared towards fan aggression and hostility towards opposing teams. Daniel Wann (2005) conducted a study on the relationship between game result and a fan's willingness to consider anonymous acts of hostile aggression towards rival fans or players. At some levels this study does attend to high-levels of identification and loyalty to a fan community, but the focus remains on negative behavioral traits of a minority of fans. Wann (1999) had previously conducted a study more closely linked to fan identification, but maintained a primary focus on aggression and willingness to injure in the presence of anonymity. Fan violence as an area of study appears to dominate most of the research conducted on fan identification. While these studies incorporate the importance of fan community and identification, they fail to examine the uniting and community building possibilities inherent in identification with a team.

One study that set out to focus on the psychological perspective of sport fandom, rather than purely behavioral, was conducted by Matthew Shank and Fred Beasley (1998). In their study, Shank and Beasley attended to the concept of sport involvement, "a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values and interests" (p.436). Again, the focus of the sport fan study was on some sort of psychological motivation to spectate. It is implied that viewing a sporting event is, in itself, its own reward. There are countless examples of experiences, events, and objects that are perceived as rewarding by an individual, but this aspect of sporting events focuses on an individual's internal experience. Sports possess qualities that draw fans and communities, external to the simple enjoyment of experiencing the event.

Another study of fan research attempted to explain why individuals become fans. Christian End and Jeff Kretschmar (2004), having researched the social implications of being a sports fan, would contend that college students associate sports fandom with popularity and social acceptance. Social acceptance and the concept of fan identity relate to the establishment of fan communities. This study, as well as others, focusing on collegiate sports involvement begins to look at the external qualities of sports, primarily community involvement and experience.

To clearly identify and discuss the research about sports fans, I will separate them into two areas; individual fans and groups of fans. One of the most studied aspects of sports fandom is the effect on the individual attending, viewing or experiencing a sporting event. Often, the focus is on what draws an individual to feel involved with a sports team or within an event. Fan identification is a largely studied topic with research in fields such as sociology and psychology. The leading scholar in the subject of team identification appears to be Daniel Wann who tends to analyze identification in relation to its psychological implications (Wann, Tucker & Schrader, 1996; Wann, 1999; Wann & Robinson, 2002; Wann, 2006). Wann links team identification to psychological well being, including the psychological or emotional benefits an individual gains from sport spectatorship and involvement.

In Wann's 2006 study of the potential causal relationship between sport team identification and psychological well-being, he begins with several predictions. One is that high levels of identification with a local sport team will lead to positive psychological health. The second is that high levels of identification with a distant sport team will not be related to psychological health. The third and final prediction is

that high levels of more sport fandom will not be related to psychological health (Wann, 2006, p.81). Wann explains that although being a fan contains the elements that can provide well being, simply being a fan does not necessarily lead to well being. While Wann's insight is useful in understanding the possible internal motivations for sport fandom and identification, my interest is in the fan community rather than individual. I also believe that his second prediction, although focused on psychological health, creates a separation between local and distant sports fandom that requires further research. For example, if a fan is displaced from their local area, does their fandom decrease, subsequently affecting their identification and involvement with their old local sport or team?

In another study conducted by Wann and T.N Robinson (2002), the relationship between sport team identification and integration into and perceptions of a related community (a university) was analyzed. This study reveals how a perception of a community as well as identification with a sports team community can influence the success and involvement of an individual. As in many fan identification and perception studies the focus is not on the communication involved in fan communities, but on psychological effects of sports fandom and their behavioral implications.

This is exemplified in another of Daniel Wann's studies with Beverly Allen and Al Rochelle (2004). The three scholars studied the use of sport fandom as an escape or relief from stress and anxiety. In the study it is surmised that fans attend to sports either from under-stimulation or over-stimulation (p.105). In other words, fans either use sports as an escape from boredom or to escape overwhelming requirements of daily life, to relax. In both these instances identification with a sports team is

associated with an internal motivation. The findings for the implications of sports

fandom fail to explain why a sports fan attends to a particular team. When an

individual decides to "escape" from their boredom or attain relaxation, the fact that

they choose to watch sports has some implications as to why they identify with a

particular team.

Robert Brown contends that while escape may take place in the realm of

sports, during times of crisis, sport viewing does not follow the typical parameters for

providing fan escape (Brown, 2004). By choosing to watch sports in general, escapist

or not, individuals are placing sports fandom in an influential position within their

daily lives. It is important to note this concept of "escape" as it relates to fans and their

experience with sports within the context of my analysis.

Several scholars have studied fan identification through the use of Social

Identity Theory (SIT). The utility of this theory brings us closer to what I am truly

researching within my thesis, in that it introduces the topic of fan identity. Christian

End (2001), in his study of online BIRGing (basking in reflected glory), describes SIT

as the theory that states individuals are driven to maintain positive self-esteem. End

(2001) states that, "the most relevant dimension for social comparison is their team's

performance, relative to their opposing team's performance" (p.164). The fan of a

victorious team is likely to achieve positive social identity. This is evidenced by the

concept of "fair weather" fans, in that more fans show up when teams are winning, yet

disappear when the team is underperforming.

Dimmock and Grove (2005) also incorporated Social Identity Theory in the

establishment of their team identification scale. Their study indicated that attachment

to sports teams is influenced by perception of sport importance as well as the preferences of family and friends (Dimmock, 2005). Dimmock and Grove collected responses to their study such as, "My favorite team's successes are my successes," and "others respect my favorite team" (p.1207). These scholars illustrate the distinct connection between cognitive attachments to sports teams and feelings of identification. However, the preceding studies on identification focus primarily on an individual's internal and psychological motivation to identify with a sports team. End, Dimmock and Grove begin to illustrate qualities of sports fandom external to the individual, but still do not explain how fans communicate their identification, feelings of success, and connection to a larger community.

Robert Madrigal (2006) attempted to differentiate the internal and external influences of sporting events that fans attend to during consumption of the event. Madrigal labeled his two higher-ordered factors of sports consumption autotelism and appreciation. Autotelism, adapted from Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1990), encompasses the aspects of consumption that have a purpose within themselves, which Madrigal describes as flow, fantasy and evaluation (Madrigal, 2006, p.270). These three dimensions relate to becoming lost in the game, feeling states external to the actual performance of the sport. On this level a fan may identify with the community atmosphere, feeling of involvement with the game or as Daniel Wann would assert an escape from daily life.

On the other hand, a spectator may value appreciation, the consumption of the artistry displayed or the characteristics of athletes (Madrigal, 2006, p.271). Characteristics of sporting events such as player attitudes, physical ability, and

showmanship contribute to appreciative consumption. This element of sporting events is another example of internal motivation for an individual to experience sport fandom. Madrigal's description of autotelism attends more similarly to the identification a sports fan may feel towards a fan community.

Thus far I have discussed the research pertaining to individual fans, but what happens when a group of fans come together? The concept of fan community is often comprised of a group of individuals with an interest in some activity or object that is not in-keeping with the status quo or popular culture. Numerous analyses have been conducted on the elements of comic book, science fiction show, and other counter culture communities. One community that is under analyzed is the sports fan community. This is an important area of research as a majority of Americans would most likely identify themselves as sports fans, the largest audiences in our society (Brown, 2004, p.38). Although fan communities for comic books differ greatly from fan communities of football, many of the basic prerequisites that constitute a community can be found in both. The term community can be understood in a very straightforward and wide-ranging definition. Simply put, community is, "a group of people who share social interaction, some common ties between themselves and other members of the group, and who share an area for at least some of the time" (Bird, 2002, p.33).

C.M Bird (2002) describes interaction, common ties and place as the three key elements for the sociological definition of community. In football fan communities, interaction can take place in many arenas, the home, at a sporting venue, in local establishments, and many others. Common ties can be found in interest in the game,

team or university membership, or relationships with other fans. Place is an important element of fan community due to the increase in technology. With the advances in internet, television and communications, it is possible to establish a community without physical presence. According to Jeffery Brown (1997), individual fans and entire fan communities develop intimate attachments to certain forms of mass produced entertainments that, for whatever reason, satisfy personal needs (p.14). Brown also describes fandom as a means of expressing one's sense of self and one's communal relation with the other within the complex society (p.15). Sports, whether in attendance at a game or at home watching on television, allow fans to experience interaction, common ties, and even the sense of place without a physical presence.

Several scholars have focused on the communication by fans, as well as among fans, particularly with relation to an event or location (Aden & Reynolds, 1993; Aden, 1994; Aden, 1995; Aden, Rahoi, & Beck, 1995; Beck, 1995; Aden, 1999). Roger Aden and Christina Reynolds (1993) discussed a speaker or a community member's ability to construct metaphorical spaces as symbolic sites where members of a community can converge and identify together. The language used to describe these places influences the individuals within the scene. Aden and Reynolds use *Sports Illustrated* as an example of how American culture articulates its relationship with sports. The metaphor of sports provides a space of play and escape.

Aden (1994) again discusses the benefits of a fan community, this time as cultural therapy. Aden analyzed the community presence and metaphoric place provided by the location for the movie *Field of Dreams*. The actual field in the movie was analyzed as the basis for a fan community external to the movie itself. Aden,

Rahoi, & Beck (1995) expanded on this concept by collecting narratives from the visitors at the "field of dreams." In their research, the authors identified the formation of an interpretive community, which shared meanings and interpretations accomplished by the group rather than the individuals. Again the concept of escape is discussed, both from and to something. Individuals at the field enjoyed a unique experience while also part of a larger community with shared meanings and interpretations.

Christina Beck (1995) begins to focus on the communication among fans rather than by individual fans in her study of the New York Giants' fan community. Beck asserted that Giants fans constituted what it meant to be a "real fan" through their communication and reactions to events on television, during games, and among other fans. The focus of fans on their community's rhetoric created a shared understanding of the nature of the community. Another example of the way fan communication affects the fan community is in Roger Aden's (1995) study of nostalgic communication among fans. Aden explained that nostalgic communication allowed fans to escape from their fears and anxieties to secure place. *When it was a game! ,* a baseball documentary, was shown to disenfranchised workers and shown to provide escape and identity formation influenced by participation in the fan community.

Roger Aden (1999) provides a link to popular culture and fan communities in his book on fan cultures and symbolic pilgrimages. Aden asserts that there are powerful places envisioned through the interaction of stories from popular culture and individual imagination. While these stories provide escape, the places escaped to are

real to the individuals and communities that share them. Individuals may envision

stories regularly, but as Aden asserts:

> they become purposeful when they are responses to unavoidable (and
>
> unresolvable) tensions we encounter in our everyday lives…Being a
>
> fan is being a member of a purposeful play community in which
>
> individual interpretations remain unique yet overlap with others'
>
> interpretations. (p.10)

Donal Carbaugh (1996) describes the playful nature of being a fan and

participant at a college basketball game. The history behind the event, the

communication among participants, and the rituals of the game itself all contribute to

the formation of a community. At the games there are certain expectations and norms

that are allowed. The communication among fans and participants guides the

interactions and perceptions of the game community. Carbaugh, as well as Aden,

illustrates the importance of being a fan and part of a fan community. However, more

specifically, being a sports fan can be particularly beneficial to an individual and their

community.

There are many ways in which sports contribute to a community. A sports

team both resides within a fan community as well as establishes a fan community

external to the location. There are many ways to explain how a fan community

develops. The usual association made is that of common interest among members.

Nicholas Dixon (2001) describes two examples of where fandom is derived. He asserts

that fans are either partisan or purist. A partisan fan is, "a loyal supporter of a team to

which she may have a personal connection or which she may have grown to support

by dint of mere familiarity," while a purist fan, "supports the team that he thinks exemplifies the highest virtues of the game, but his allegiance is flexible" (p.149). This concept of the partisan appears to be the basic level of establishment for identification. Dixon describes partisan support as occurring among fans of a local amateur team whose players may include friends and relatives of fans. The reason for fandom is a pre-existing relationship with the team's players or institution to which the players are related (Dixon, 2001). This relationship between fan and team operates on a very basic level of community, the local level. These local amateur, school, college, and regional or national teams have a substantial link between team and fan. "The basis for their support seems to be simple proximity and familiarity" (Dixon, 2001, p.150). Local fans can witness their teams live, associate the team's geographical location with their own, and connect feelings of excitement and pride with a physical nearby location.

Franchise- Fan- Community Relationship

The relationship between a fan and his or her team is an undeniable bond. As Charles Euchner (1993) explains, "Psychologists have compared the loss of a sports franchise to the trauma experienced at the death of a loved one. Popular opinion holds that teams have a responsibility to the city, that sports is as much a matter of community and culture as it is industry and commerce" (p.5). Sports teams not only provide communities with a financially beneficial entity, but they also provide a local sense of community that not all cities are fortunate enough to possess. Sports franchises bring with them facilities, attendance and jobs. These are three main

reasons why cities fight to attract and retain sports teams (Noll and Zimbalist, 1997). Because of the competitiveness between American cities to become the home of a sports franchise, many teams find themselves in a new location over the years. This relocating of a team, which is the origin of identification of an entire community, complicates the dynamics of fan communities.

Nicholas Dixon (2001) explains that support and fandom of a modern professional sports team is much more complex. The fan communities are therefore much more complex as well. "Their fans cannot, then, feel enlarged by their team's success in the same ways as fans of a school, college, since there is no obvious group to which fans and the majority of players both belong" (Dixon, 2001, p.150). Yet, these fan communities for professional sports teams do exist and carry very similar qualities to that of local teams. This identification with a team may be derived from origins other than proximity and familiarity.

Conclusion

Research has been conducted in many disciplines and in many studies on the topic of sports fans and their identification with a sports team. The primary focus in many of these studies is the behavioral and psychological implications of sports fanaticism. Scholars have set out to answer why fans behave in particular ways and what causes their fandom. Many studies have also analyzed the importance of a sport team to a community and its members. While the information provided by the numerous scholars in this review covers many facets of the potential research on sports fan communities and their identification, one major component is still left

relatively overlooked. This missing component is from the communication perspective regarding sports fan communities.

Past research has concluded that sports teams affect their respective communities, but little research has been conducted on how sports fans themselves, as well as sports media, affect a sports community. Further research on the language used in describing sports teams and events may provide valuable insight into why fans identify with a team or sports community. The study of rhetoric and language used by members of the sports media and fan community to depict national events, in relation to sports, should clarify how different levels of identification can be reached in different forms of fan communities.

Methodology

As I have established thus far in my thesis, there are few studies that focus on the communication both among sports fans and about sports teams. It is important to analyze the rhetoric used by those who communicate about teams and fans to reveal the perceptions and motives among these groups and communities. In this chapter I will explain how I intend to analyze the rhetoric provided by a fan community, as well as the justification for my method of analysis.

The best way to analyze the materials I have collected for my thesis is through the application of fantasy theme analysis. The utility of this form of analysis is found in its ability to provide the social reality and collective experience of a large group of people. The key part of fantasy theme analysis was discovered by Robert Bales in his studies on personality and interpersonal behavior; this key was the dynamic process of group fantasizing (Bormann, 1972, p.396). Bales intended to study group fantasizing in small groups and the creation of social reality for that group through the sharing of group culture, motivation, emotional style, and cohesion (Bormann, 1972, p.396). Bales asserted that groups share messages and recollections that become fantasy themes. These themes can chain out among the group providing a common culture, even if the group has a "zero-history" together (Bormann, 1972, p.397).

Fantasy Theme Analysis

While Bales' theories are useful and provide the base for my studies, Ernest Bormann expands on Bales' concepts and creates the true framework for my analysis; fantasy theme analysis. Bormann (1972) asserts that fantasy themes not only chain

among small groups, but can chain out among larger groups and publics (p.398). This particular component of fantasy theme is what allows me to study the rhetoric found in media and larger groups of fan communities. John F. Cragan and Donald C. Shields (1981) described the utility of fantasy theme analysis succinctly when they stated:

> The focus of the approach is not on the speaker, the audience, or the situation, but on the message. The method allows a critic to describe the rhetorical dramas that form a community's social reality and analyze the meanings, emotions, and motives that are contained in these rhetorical visions. (p.69)

The way in which we communicate about individuals or events, particularly in popular media, portrays the collective reality we experience. As described by Bormann (1972):

> A critic can take the social reality contained in a rhetorical vision which he has constructed from the concrete dramas developed in a body of discourse and examine the social relationships, the motives, the qualitative impact of that symbolic world as though it were the substance of social reality for those people who participated in the vision. (p.401)

Before I establish how fantasy theme analysis has been used and how it is conducted, it is important to understand the basic components of this method of criticism. The most basic component to fantasy theme analysis is the fantasy theme. Bormann (1972) describes the content of a fantasy theme as consisting of:

> …characters, real or fictitious, playing out a dramatic situation in a setting removed in time and space from the here-and-now transactions of the group…Thus a recollection of something that happened to the group in the past or a dream of what the group might do in the future could be considered a fantasy theme. (p.397)

Bormann expands on these concepts by taking the fantasy themes from small groups to larger groups. Rather than fantasy themes guiding the communication within small groups, fantasy themes chain out among larger publics and communities as a shared

rhetorical vision. This is particularly relevant considering the likelihood that the fantasy themes that chain out often reflect the group's current real life situations and relationship to their environment (p.397). Fantasy themes that attract and include large groups of people become rhetorical visions, in that they provide a large group with a shared symbolic reality (p.398).

One way fantasy themes grow among groups and contribute to rhetorical visions is through the establishment of fantasy types. Fantasy types are common plotlines, characterizations, or depictions created by a group's fantasy themes. When a group or community of individuals begins to use and recognize similar fantasy themes and types, they establish a collective consciousness or rhetorical vision.

Rhetorical visions are constructed from face-to-face interaction, speaker-audience, television broadcasts, radio programs, and many other diverse public settings (Bormann, 1972, p.398). Rhetorical visions contain typical plot lines that are easily recognizable and alluded to in many contexts, such as the "Cinderella Story" references found throughout sports media (p.398). A rhetorical vision can often be signified by a slogan or short reference that implies a conglomeration of many plotlines, characters, and scenes. The establishment of a rhetorical vision, fantasy type, or even fantasy theme begins with the sharing of drama among group members.

Shields and Preston (1985) expand on Bormann's method of analysis and highlight the key elements in a rhetorical vision: *dramatis personae*, plot line, scene, and sanctioning agent. The *dramatis personae* are "the characters given life within the drama" (p.106). The plot line is the action or scenarios that occur. The scene is the

place or time in which the action takes place. The sanctioning agent is "the source that justifies the acceptance and promulgation of a rhetorical vision" (p.108).

The drama within the groups' collective reality involves the past and present, with "heroes, villains, saints and enemies" (Bormann, 1972, p.398). Concepts such as Cinderella stories and miracle seasons illustrate the presence of shared group visions. The visions progress from small groups to larger publics. Groups with rhetorical motives to "go public" tend to chain out as fantasy themes in new groups (p.399). As smaller group fantasy themes chain out in new groups, rhetorical visions are spread to a larger public until a rhetorical movement begins, again often represented by a slogan (p.399). A New Orleans resident may have a conversation with their family, neighbor or co-worker and decide to share their reality with another group. If this individual submits an article to the Times-Picayune editorial section, that fantasy theme has the potential to grow among other groups and individuals and possibly be shared as a rhetorical vision.

The concept of individuals and groups within a community "going public" is an important component of my analysis. Saints fans and New Orleans residents likely have daily conversations about their community and local sports franchise. However, many of these conversations and shared fantasies never chain to new groups or publics. Groups and individuals that are motivated to act, in this case submitting an editorial to the New Orleans Times-Picayune, are of particular interest and consideration in my analysis.

While fantasy themes have the possibility of being shared, there is also the equal opportunity that they will be rejected. There can be multiple group fantasies

operating at one time, some shared and others rejected (Bormann et al., 1997, p.255). Bormann, Knutson and Musolf (1997) studied individuals' propensity for sharing fantasies, as well as the effect of varying levels of skill in the sharing of fantasies. Their study highlighted many characteristics of sharing fantasies that allowed individuals to escape and cope with current events in their present lives. These concepts of rhetorical skill, escape and coping will become important pieces of my analysis.

Language choice can have a profound effect on the way individuals understand and perceive meanings. For this reason, another contributor to my methodology is Kenneth Burke. While I am interested in the fantasy themes created by community members, I am also interested in the language those individuals use within their fantasy themes. Burke (1945) categorized four master tropes within language that allow the discovery and description of "the truth" (p.503).

The first trope is metaphor, which can be substituted with perspective. "Metaphor is a device for seeing something in terms of something else" (p.503). The second trope is metonymy, which can also be referenced as reduction. Burke describes the basic strategy of metonymy as, "to convey some incorporeal or intangible state in terms of the corporeal or tangible" (p.506). The third trope is synecdoche, or representation. Burke describes synecdoche as "a part for the whole, a whole for the part," representation, in which there is, "an integral relationship, a relationship of convertibility, between two terms" (p. 508). The last trope is irony, which Burke equates to dialectic. As Burke describes, "Irony arises when one tries, by the interaction of terms upon one another, to produce development which uses all the

terms…(this 'perspective of perspectives')" (p. 512). The applications of the first three tropes are of particular interest to me with regards to the language use found in my analysis.

Applications of Fantasy Theme Analysis

There are several studies that have used Fantasy theme analysis as a framework for analysis. While these studies seem to differ, their use of fantasy theme analysis is a means for a common end. By analyzing a group of individuals' communication and construction of fantasy themes, either written or spoken, the group's collective perceptions, motives and realities are found. I will provide several examples of how fantasy theme analysis has been used and how their findings will assist and support my own analysis.

The first study I consider that has utilized fantasy theme analysis is by Linda Putnam, Shirley Van Hoeven, and Connie Bullis, on the role of rituals and fantasy themes in teachers' bargaining (1991). The researchers separated their study into two district meetings they attended. At these meetings they collected data and grouped the communication into fantasy themes expressed by the group. The researchers chose fantasy theme analysis because of its ability to explain how people construct meanings together, as well as focus on motives, emotions, and consciousness of group members (p.87). Their studies revealed that through fantasy theme analysis both school districts developed symbolic convergence, an overlapping of the groups' symbolic reality, on common enemies and past negotiations. Putnam, Van Hoeven and Bullis found that by analyzing fantasy themes they could identify similar values and motives each district

brought to the bargaining process, as well as the possibility for more successful bargaining through the analysis of fantasy themes and rhetorical visions.

The next study I consider that utilized fantasy theme analysis was conducted by William Benoit, Andrew Klyukovski, John McHale and David Airne, with a focus on the Clinton-Star-Lewinsky affair's portrayal in political cartoons (2001). The data collected for this research consisted of 2,000 political cartoons relating to the investigation, impeachment and trial of President Clinton. From this data, three types of rhetorical visions were identified; Clinton's, prosecutor Kenneth Starr's and the Political Cartoonists'. The researchers then identified the motives, values and scenarios found in these rhetorical visions, illustrating the reality created by the individuals' use of rhetoric. The study offers several insights, but particularly "demonstrates how elements of two competing rhetorical visions (Clinton's and Starr's) can be recycled and incorporated into a single rhetorical vision (cartoonists)" (Benoit et al., 2001 p.391). My analysis will not be without competing rhetorical visions, but will eventually show unification of visions for a fan community.

The third study considered here is by Michael Palenchar and Robert Heath (2002) focusing on risk and safety assessment in the chemical industry. The researchers conducted in depth analysis of the rhetoric within two communities of risk through document review, interviews, focus groups, and telephone survey. While this study includes a more diverse range of data than my own analysis, it provides an example of the many mediums that provide fantasy themes and rhetorical visions within a community. After separating their data into key elements (heroes, villains,

plot lines, scenes and sanctioning agents), the researchers identified the fantasy themes found within the community and separated them into three rhetorical visions.

The rhetorical visions in Palenchar and Heath's study were separated based on the master analogues provided by Cragan and Sheilds (1995). The master analogues are three competing rhetorical visions: social (relationships between people and groups), righteous (correct, proper or moral), and pragmatic (expediency, efficiency, and practicality). Palenchar and Heath translated these into "We can do things", "Accept and move on", and "Don't want to know" visions. These master analogues help to explain the progression of fantasy themes to rhetorical visions, but differ from my research in that I am primarily interested in the relationship between community members.

Data Collection

The data collected in this analysis is provided in one of two forms, editorials and newspaper articles. The editorials are from the New Orleans Times-Picayune. There are three segments of time and media coverage that are identified by key events; Pre-Katrina, Post-Katrina, and Post-Superdome Return. Each time period follows or precedes a definitive event that affected the rhetoric and fantasy themes found in editorials and media. By studying local editorials in relation to the Saints and Hurricane Katrina I will be able to analyze the communication and rhetoric shaping the perceptions of both the Saints' fans and residents of the city of New Orleans. One of the most important things I hope to find out from this study is how a sports

franchise can become such an integral part of a community while representing so much more than just a sports organization.

Data Analysis

In Bormann's Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality (1972), he outlines the steps to follow, questions to ask, and content to search for in the application of fantasy theme analysis to a rhetorical criticism (p.401-402). The critic begins by collecting evidence related to the manifest content of communication. In the case of my thesis the evidence consists of editorials. The critic discovers the narratives and dramatic materials that have chained out for the participants in the rhetorical vision. From these dramatic materials, the critic can then begin to look for patterns of characterizations, such as setting, situations, actions, and characters. The critic must then creatively reconstruct the rhetorical vision from the fantasy chains and components identified in the materials. Bormann relates this delineation to separating different plays within a school of drama.

Once the rhetorical visions have been distinguished, a critic is able to identify fantasy themes, characters, scenes, plots and scenarios. Bormann provides a large number of questions that a rhetorical critic may employ when conducting a fantasy theme analysis, but also states, "A critic need not, of course, raise all of such questions for a given piece of criticism" (p.402). In my analysis I will primarily focus on the plot lines and *dramatis personae* (heroes and villains) found in the collected data. The scene of many of the community narratives consists of the time frames I have separated, and eventually the New Orleans Superdome. I will also introduce several

newspaper articles to reference media as the sanctioning agent for the rhetorical visions. From these elements of a rhetorical vision I will identify the motives, emotions and values expressed in the community's rhetoric. There are several questions provided by Bormann that will be of particular interest for this analysis. The first is how does the fantasy theme work to attract the unconverted, and generate a sense of community and cohesion from the insider? The second question is how artistic and skillful is the development of the fantasy theme, characterizations, and ability to arouse emotion?

For the purpose of this analysis I have narrowed my focus to entirely editorials. I have not disregarded the effect of media on individuals, communities or large publics, but am particularly interested in a select community and group of fans. The editorials from fans and community members fall into the participant category, as they are involved in the situation being analyzed. Media, particularly professional journalism, constitute a separate entity garnering analysis. For this reason I will acknowledge the presence and influence of media on community members, but will not analyze their fantasy themes or contributions to rhetorical visions.

Although involved in the situations being analyzed, media sources provide a profession based, withdrawn, observational look at a given news story. Journalists do not necessarily decide to contribute to a discussion or fantasy theme, they are paid to report on current events which may provide fantasy themes but differ from those of editorials. A journalist is also already established in the public realm, where as a community member submitting an editorial to a newspaper is making the decision to "go public." Bormann described this motivation to go public when he stated:

> The group grows excited, involved, more dramas chain out to create a common symbolic reality filled with heroes and villains. If the group's fantasy themes contain motives to 'go public' and gain converts to their position they often begin artistically to create messages for the mass media for public speeches and so forth. (p.399)

Journalists and other professionals are afforded the opportunity to express themselves publicly on a monthly, weekly, or even daily basis. Their actions may propagate the exposure to fantasy themes and rhetorical visions, but do so in a different fashion than editorials. The topic of artistry and skill becomes a point of discussion in the difference between journalistic and editorial submissions, as editorials are a form of public media.

By creating these two categories of print media I am attempting to separate fans and community members from professionals. The participant category of editorials however, requires further separation. To specify the types of fans I am analyzing, I will draw from Nicholas Dixon's concepts of partisan and purist fans. There are three types of fans that are present and united during the periods of analysis; identity fans, performance fans, and non-fans. Identity fans are loyal supporters with personal connections to the Saints, Superdome, and community aspect of sporting events, which was adapted from Dixon's partisan fan (Dixon, 2001, p.149) Performance fans are supporters that base their fandom more strongly on the success, proximity, and reputation of the team's fans, which was adapted from Dixon's purist fan (Dixon, 2001, p.149). Their fandom can be linked to the simple performance of the sport itself, as spectators of an event. There is also a third group garnering consideration, of non-fans, which neither identify with the team nor have interest in the performance of football, but may understand that the team affects their lives in

economic, social and various other ways. Each of these groups experienced division with the New Orleans Saints and one another, but eventually they were powerfully united following the events of Hurricane Katrina and the Superdome return.

Identity, performance and non-fans all found reasons to not only identify with the New Orleans Saints, but unite as fans and community. While these three types of fans are present, I can only prove through a rhetorical analysis that two of them are present. Identity fans and non-fans can be found and labeled by their responses in editorials. Performance fans are difficult to identify, as well as contribute less to my analysis. Unlike the other two types of fans, performance fans tend not to submit to or reveal themselves in editorials. For this reason I will focus primarily on identity and non-fans.

The first step I took in collecting my data involved searching a large database of editorials printed in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. I narrowed my search between the dates of January 2004 to February 2008, to fully encompass the events of interest in my research. Any editorials that referenced the Saints, Hurricane Katrina, or the Saints fans were tagged as relevant data. I also looked into Kathleen Blanco and Tom Benson as other possible topics of relevant conversation. After collecting the appropriate editorials, I read through and eliminated any editorials that did not focus on the New Orleans Saints' fans, community, organization or past and future actions.

For my final analysis I had collected thirty five editorials. Fourteen editorials were categorized as Pre-Katrina, eight categorized as Post-Katrina, and thirteen categorized as Post-Superdome return. There was also one article in the *Times-Picayune* with twelve editorial type submissions, classified as such in the Post-

Superdome Return time frame. Once the data was separated into the three time frames, I began to read through looking for similar characters, plot lines, and scenes. From this information I identified the main characters of each time frame and the common plot lines.

After compiling a list of characters and plot lines, I separated the particularly relevant and repeating plot lines to identify the fantasy types established by the community. By analyzing the fantasy themes, *dramatis personae*, and eventual fantasy types, I was able to construct the community's rhetorical vision for each time frame. Due to the fact the time frames are in chronological order, each rhetorical vision built off of the vision and fantasy themes preceding it. Once I had reconstructed the visions for the three time frames and established the ultimate rhetorical vision for the New Orleans Saints' community, I was able to analyze the social reality created by the group's rhetoric.

Conclusion

Through the application of fantasy theme analysis, I will identify the plot lines and *dramatis personae* found in the rhetorical visions of the New Orleans community. These rhetorical visions were contributed to by fans, non-fans, residents, and non-residents and helped to unite the Saints, their community, and their fans. By analyzing the rhetoric used by the individuals within this community, I will be able to identify the motives, values, and perceived social reality of the individuals participating in the rhetorical vision.

Analysis

In August 2005, United States citizens were most likely aware that there was a National Football League (NFL). Many citizens may also have been aware that the NFL had a New Orleans based team named the Saints. The arrival of Hurricane Katrina to the Gulf coast not only brought the attention of media to New Orleans, but also raised the awareness of US citizens that New Orleans had a football team, regardless of the citizen's sports fandom. In my analysis, I will show how local community members, as well as media journalists, provided rhetoric and narratives through print media that contributed to the formation of mass rhetorical visions for not only individuals in New Orleans, but individuals throughout the United States. Through the analysis of the following editorials and articles, many fantasy themes, emotions, and motives will become evident as they progress through time to one ultimate rhetorical vision.

My collection of data begins with the time frame of November 1, 2004 to August 28th 2005. I have titled this time frame "Pre-Katrina". The next time frame is "Post-Katrina". This time frame spans from August 28, 2005, when Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, to September 23, 2006, the day before the Saints returned for their first home game at the Superdome. The third and final time frame is "Post-Superdome Return". This time frame continues from September 24, 2006, when the Saints returned to their home field, until January 17th of the 2007 NFL season, the end of the Saints season. In each of these time frames I will identify the rhetorical vision or visions and then explain fantasy themes, structural elements and fantasy types that led

to the rhetorical visions found in the data I have collected. Utilizing fantasy theme analysis, from these rhetorical visions I will identify the emotions, motives, and social reality experienced by the identified community.

Pre-Katrina (November 1, 2004 – August 28, 2005)

In this first time frame, the rhetorical vision of the participating individuals can be expressed in the common saying, "shape up, or ship out." This saying is attributed to many individuals involved in the Saints organization, particularly its owner and players. There are many characters, plotlines and themes that contribute to this rhetorical vision which are important to identify before discussing the four fantasy types that ultimately create the community's rhetorical vision. The primary components of the fantasy themes found in the editorials that I will identify are the *dramatis personae* and plot lines. Each plot line provided by the editorials is generally focused on one or two of the *dramatis personae* in this time frame. For this reason, the plot lines have been separated based on the characters to which they refer.

The New Orleans Saints (the players, staff and organization in general)
    The Saints are disappointing.
    The Saints are a bad team.
    The Saints are clowns.
    The Saints are a burden to New Orleans, even if they start winning.
    New Orleans will financially benefit from losing the Saints.
    The Saints are integral to the New Orleans community.
    Chase the Saints out of town.
    The Saints are costing a poor city and state much-needed money.
    The Saints are important to the economy of the community and state.
    The Saints play better away from booing in the stands at home.
    The Saints are a mediocre, sub-par team.
    Let the Saints go.
    The Saints contribute to New Orleans economically and psychologically.

The Saints are one of 32 businesses in the world cities would love to have.
The Saints disgrace the New Orleans citizens and need to leave.

Tom Benson, owner of the Saints
Benson is lucky fans continue to purchase tickets.
Benson won't do what is necessary to field a winning team.
Benson's only interest in New Orleans is money.
The Superdome is Benson's circus tent.
Benson wants everything except a winner.
Benson is looking for handouts.
Benson should pay the state to keep the Saints.

Kathleen Blanco, Governor of New Orleans
Blanco is finally addressing the problem in New Orleans (Benson).
Blanco is putting the taxpayers ahead of a wealthy owner and team.

Saints Fans
There are a small number of Saints fans that will miss the team.
True fans should fund the Saints, or the team should be run out of town.
Fans want a winner, not an embarrassment.
Saints fans are the best in the NFL after 38 years.
After 38 years, fans need to see results.

There are several major repeated plot lines provided by the Pre-Katrina editorials that became fantasy types and chained out for the individuals participating in the rhetorical vision. Most of these narratives and themes center on the topic of the Saints' relationship to the city of New Orleans. The four major plot lines, or fantasy types, that are found in the editorials were:

- The Saints are an embarrassment to their fans and city.

- Tom Benson and the Saints are part of New Orleans' problems.

- The Saints need to change or leave New Orleans.

- The Saints are important to the economy and communities of New Orleans.

In many of the narratives found in these editorials there are conflicts between Tom Benson, the New Orleans Saints, and the city of New Orleans. The most common characters are the Saints, as either players or simply referred to as the Saints implying the team as a whole. Other characters include Saints fans, Tom Benson, and Kathleen

Blanco, Governor of Louisiana. These characters are presented in a variety of ways, which I will broadly identify in the categories of heroes and villains. There are few instances in which characters are referred to as heroes, or in a positive light, in the Pre-Katrina time frame, which should become clear as I progress through the four plot lines.

The first and most predominant plot line in the Pre-Katrina time frame is the depiction of the New Orleans Saints as an embarrassment to their fans and city that continued to support them year after year. There are no heroes found in the fantasy themes contributing to this plot line, only villains. The villains found in the Pre-Katrina time frame are the Saints, their fans, and Benson. Basically, anyone involved with the New Orleans Saints is cast as the villain in at least one of the editorials. The fantasy themes found in these narratives are full of blame, disappointment, fatigue, and displeasure. Some community members felt compelled to comment on the Saints, but simply saying the Saints were bad was too basic, causing them to become more creative.

In response to an interview where quarterback Aaron Brooks commented on the Saints' most recent loss of the 2004 season, "It's not how you drive, but how you arrive," Richard Lowe used a golf analogy in response. "Well, there's another saying in golf: If you hook your drive out of bounds, shank your wedge, and four putt, you just plain stink" (Lowe, 11/23/2004). Lowe was clearly offended and embarrassed by his quarterback's cavalier response to a loss that seems to affect the fans more than the player. This quotation helps to illustrate the distance between the Saints organization and the New Orleans community.

In an effort to garner support and link the Saints' lack of success with other teams like the Red Sox of Major League Baseball, who had recently become successful after decades of disappointment, the Saints organization created a slogan for the 2005 season. The slogan "You gotta have faith," was intended to build hope and optimism for the future. Bob Walker of Metairie clearly did not buy into the Saints new slogan when he responded, "After 38 years, you gotta have results. Faith is for Tim McGraw!" (Walker, 8/2/2005). The Saints had reached the playoffs twice since their inception in 1967, and lost both of those endeavors. Norman Romagosa, another disenchanted fan, expressed his fatigue from continuing to support a losing team when he stated, "Saints fans have supported a team with a lackluster record for 37 years. In the last few years, the team has been a major disappointment" (Romagosa, 11/23/2004).

Romagosa lightly touched on the only characterization that could be considered heroic, fan support, which became a characterization of fans in the future. Saints fans in the Pre-Katrina time frame, while labeled as negative towards their team by residents and media, were also characterized as extremely supportive and united in their pessimism and suffering. This connection, albeit negative, is evident in the references to the Saints as 'Aints' and fans wearing paper bags over their heads at home games. While residents and non-fans were embarrassed by the Saints' poor performance on the field and representation of the city of New Orleans, Saints fans had it far worse. Identity fans were embarrassed by the Saints' representation of them as individuals, fans, and the residents of New Orleans. A fan wearing Saints memorabilia could be associated with a perennial loser and embarrassment. This

association was constructed partly by on-field performance, but also by the rhetoric provided by media and residents.

The Saints contribution to the embarrassment and disappointment of the New Orleans fans and residents was taken a step further in the second major plot line of the Pre-Katrina time frame; Tom Benson and the Saints are part of New Orleans' problems. The criticism of the Saints did not simply stop with the players; it was even stronger in reference to the entire organization, particularly owner Tom Benson. Benson, perceived as the ultimate controller of the Saints organization, performance, and contribution to society, took the brunt of the blame from both identity fans and non-fans.

Non-fans were particularly distraught about the financial contribution of the New Orleans Saints, and viewed Benson as the evil, extortionist, money-hungry, villain. In 2004, Benson was pursuing a renovated Superdome, a new lease through 2020, and annual payments from the state of Louisiana. During the bargaining between the Saints and New Orleans, the person seen as the good to Benson's evil was Governor Kathleen Blanco. Blanco, although depicted as combating Benson, is not a hero. She merely contributed to the characterizations of Benson and the Saints as villains. Charles Simpson of New Orleans was happy to have someone identify the problems presented by the city's NFL franchise. He stated:

> Thank goodness! We finally have a governor who is addressing the extortionist fraud in our midst, namely the New Orleans Saints. Our economy would immediately reap a windfall from not having to pay the Saints… skipping its yearly payment to owner Tom Benson and saving on the cost of refurbishing a perfectly good stadium. Gov. Blanco should call for a statewide referendum on the fate of this ill-conceived football fiasco. (Simpson, 12/9/2004)

Simpson asserted that the Saints and Benson contribute little, if anything, to the city of New Orleans. He was not alone in his portrayal of the financial drain that was the New Orleans Saints. Chris Berthaut of New Orleans also expressed his concern for the financial burden of the Saints when he stated:

> I applaud Gov. Kathleen Blanco for putting the taxpayers ahead of adding 'to the wealth of a very profitable team.' I only wish that I could own a franchise that continually produces a mediocre product yet is guaranteed income from the Government. (Berthaut, 5/2/2005)

While the mediocrity of Benson's product was undeniable, the profitability of the Saints was open to interpretation. The Saints were reported as being the only NFL team losing money in 1999 (AP, 12/21/2004). Regardless of the potential success and profitability of the Saints, non-fans felt it was not their responsibility to fund a team that, as far as they were concerned, was not theirs. Hilmer Westergaard of New Orleans proposed a solution for fans to keep their team and relieve their city of a burdensome franchise. He suggested:

> I wouldn't like it either if someone were trying to run my favorite leisure activity out of town. But then again, I don't expect other people to pay for my favorite leisure activity. If there are 1,000 true Saints fans, then those 1,000 true fans should pay for it… these so-called 'true' fans expect me to pay for something I don't enjoy and which in reality contributes little more than minimum wage jobs. (Westergaard, 12/14/2004)

Westergaard clearly did not believe there were many "true" Saints fans, which is interesting coming from a New Orleans resident. The prospect of losing the Saints did not seem to concern him, nor did it concern Charles Simpson. Simpson considered the effect the loss of the Saints may have on fans, but assumed they could follow the team to their new destination. "Of course there will be a relatively small number of fans who will lose the comic entertainment value of this 'team,' but they can transfer their

allegiance to the Los Angeles Diablos without costing us a penny" (Simpson, 12/9/2004).

Many non-fans believed the small number of actual fans would travel, either physically or mentally, to wherever their team was moved. Carol McKee, who identified herself as "not a big Saints fan," commented on the lack of support and attendance the Saints received and proposed a way the city, team, and fans could all win:

> I have a suggestion to Tom Benson for the Saints 2005 season. Cancel the renovation of the Superdome and schedule all the Saints games away from home. The Saints seem to do much better on the road away from all of the booing in the stands and paper bags over people's heads… The true Saints fans will travel wherever the Saints are playing and cheer them on. (McKee, 1/6/2005)

Non-fans were not the only ones that thought Benson and the Saints were the cause of problems in New Orleans. However, rather than financial concerns, identity fans were troubled by an owner that seemed to have few concerns aside from fattening his wallet, and a team that misrepresented a strong community. While many fans and community members had trouble identifying with the team and Benson, some individuals felt their identification was their cause for frustration and concern. Andrew Wright Sr. explained how the Saints and Benson should repay him for his personal anguish:

> After Friday's pre-season game, I think Saints owner Tom Benson should pay the state of Louisiana to allow the Saints to stay in New Orleans. He should also mail everyone free season tickets and a large supply of paper bags to wear to Saints games. (Wright, 8/17/2005)

Wright Sr. wanted to continue to support the Saints with his fellow fans, but did not think that he should have to pay for or be associated with such an underperforming

organization. Even when Benson seemed to express the same frustration as the fans, there was an evident lack of identification and trust.

On November 21st, 2004, Tom Benson was quoted as saying the game he had just witnessed was, "the worst performance I've ever seen as an owner." He added, "They looked like high school kids" (USA Today, 11/22/2004). Perhaps Benson thought joining the Saints fans in their misery would foster some identification. This was not the case. Susan Monetelius explained why she was not convinced of his concern for the team:

> Mr. Benson's tirade at his team should not be taken at face value…It's hard to convince a state to pay a losing team to stay… Were it not for what you stand to gain monetarily, this would be just another loss for your team and it would be business as usual. (Montelius, 11/24/2005)

Benson's indifference about his team's performance was a topic of speculation by fan community members. Benson's characterizations in Pre-Katrina narratives range from "indifferent owner" to "money hungry, extortionist owner bent on abandonment." In many narratives, the Saints were portrayed as Benson's underperforming puppet show, with his run-down Superdome as the stage. Identity fans felt they deserved to be represented by a winning team and an owner who was committed to his city and community. Norman Romagosa of Metairie, a Saints fan since 1967, expressed his thoughts about Benson and the Saints during the 2004 season:

> I am incensed at the attitude of Tom Benson regarding the future of the team in New Orleans. He should feel lucky that fans will buy tickets and should not be making unreasonable demands on the state of Louisiana, the city of New Orleans and the citizens of both… We the fans have supported this team far too long to be held hostage by an owner who will not do what is necessary to get a winning team on the field. (Romagosa, 11/23/2004)

Romagosa stated what many fans and non-fans alike were thinking about the Saints and their presence in New Orleans. Something needed to change.

The third major plot line in the Pre-Katrina time frame, the Saints need to change or leave, is expressed by fans, non-fans and even owner Tom Benson. In December of 2004, Benson was quoted as saying "I don't want to move and I don't want to sell. But we have three choices – build a new stadium, enhance the Superdome, or tell us to leave" (AP, 12/21/2004). As requested by Benson, residents were doing just that, telling him to leave. The idea of the Saints leaving was already on the tips of most non-fans' tongues, especially with the perceived financial benefits the city would experience.

Charles Simpson stated, "Don't just tell them to get out of town—chase them out" (12/9/2004). Hilmer Westergaard asserted that if the "true" Saints fans didn't want to take financial responsibility for the Saints, New Orleans should, "…run them out of town, and do it today!" (12/14/2004). Sampath Parthasarathy went so far as to cite the Saints as a large contributor to the misplacement of Louisiana's priorities. Parthasarathy asserted, "Let the Saints go, put limits on parties and parades" (5/9/2005). Simpson, Westergaard, and Parthasarathy are polar opposites of identity fans, but were not alone in their stern requests for change. It is important to note that both non-fans as well as identity fans in the Pre-Katrina time frame refer to the Saints in a similar manner. Both groups use them, they, theirs, his, and Benson's, to describe the Saints. These words express division and a separation between the individual and what they describe.

Many identity fans targeted Tom Benson as the key to removing the Saints from New Orleans or enacting change. Keith Schwarz explained that although New Orleans loved the Saints, times had changed and a poor city was becoming poorer while an embarrassing team continued to take the field. Schwarz asserted:

> And I don't think the quality of life in Louisiana would improve if the Saints stayed, even if they learned how to win games…Rather than see the Saints have to continue to play in that circus tent we know as the Superdome, owner Tom Benson should take his clowns elsewhere. (Schwarz, 11/20/2004)

Norman Romagosa also expressed frustration with Benson and his perceived control over the fate of the Saints. "Mr. Benson needs to change his tune or take his sorry, disjointed, underperforming bunch of players, coaches, and front office staff out of town" (Romagosa, 11/23/2004). Andrew Wright Sr. had another suggestion if Benson didn't feel like supplying free tickets and paper bags for Saints fans. "Maybe he [Benson] should take the Saints to a remote jungle area where they could no longer disgrace us" (8/17/2005). Identity fans were caught in a love/hate relationship with the New Orleans Saints. On the one hand they had supported a team for decades regardless of wins and losses because it was their team, but on the other hand they were becoming fatigued and embarrassed from the NFL franchise that represented their city.

The fourth and final major plot line found in the Pre-Katrina time frame is that the Saints are important to the economy and communities of New Orleans. While the contributing fantasy themes for this plot line are positive, there are no heroes. The editorials seem to be intended to counteract the negative rhetoric about the New Orleans Saints. Dan Glaviano of Mandeville recognized the rare opportunity New

Orleans possessed in having an NFL franchise. "The Saints contribute significantly to New Orleans and the entire state of Louisiana, both economically and psychologically… This is about one of only 32 businesses in the world of its kind— that other cities would love to have and pay dearly to get" (Glaviano, 6/23/2004).

There are two other editorials that contribute to this plot line and are from interesting sources. One is Arnold Fielkow; VP of the New Orleans Saints. The other is Gary Ostroke; President of United Way, an NFL affiliate for community service. Participant and community member Arnold Fielkow stated:

> Clearly, the Saints are an important economic engine for our community and state, and, hopefully, these market factors will improve in coming years ...What should never, however be lost in the conversation is the greatness of Saints fans and the support they have provided the past 38 years. New Orleans Saints fans are among the very best in not only the NFL, but all of sports. (Fielkow, 3/30/2005)

Fielkow appeals to the interests of both identity fans and non-fans in his editorial submission. For identity fans he attempts to remind the fans that for 38 years their support has been based on loyalty and community, not success and performance. Fielkow casts the fans as heroes and highlights their exemplary actions that made them heroes. For non-fans he acknowledges that the economy is down, but the Saints are not the problem. Fielkow also casts the Saints as heroes to New Orleans and Louisiana's economy. The VP of the Saints obviously has a vested interest in the success and popularity of the Saints, and his presence in the editorials is a signal that there is a need for rhetoric supportive of the Saints.

Similarly, Gary Ostroke emphasized the importance of the Saints and their community service when he stated:

> As someone who works year-round with this great organization, I
> believe we need to pause and remind ourselves of the community
> service impact the Saints have on this region… Sometimes the going
> gets tough on the field, but they are always winners because of their
> level of commitment and generosity to the greater New Orleans area
> through a variety of community partnerships… Inevitably, the black
> and gold will always prevail because the Saints invest their time, talents
> and financial resources in what matters most to our community—
> children and families. (Ostroke, 11/27/2004)

Ostroke asked his audience, the Times-Picayune readers, to pause and realize the importance of the Saints. He was clearly attempting to squelch a rising lack of appreciation for the New Orleans Saints among Times-Picayune readers, which presumably includes many New Orleans residents. He appeals to both identity fans and non-fans by highlighting the Saints' off field contributions that can't always be measured in wins, losses, or money. The Saints are again depicted as heroes of their community and state.

While one might argue that Fielkow and Ostroke belong in the observer category based on my specifications, I would contest that their submissions to an editorial allows them the participant title. By submitting editorials these two individuals are actively choosing to participate and contribute to the social reality of their community. Both individuals are also not journalists. Their submissions to the *Times-Picayune* editorial section may be articulate and skillful in their presentation, but Fielkow and Ostroke are not professionals in that regard.

Journalistic contributions to rhetorical visions differ from that of editorials, in that the values and emotions within their narratives are not overtly expressed by the author. In many instances, a journalist will present their information in a seemingly withdrawn manner, allowing quotations and outside information to speak for them.

The presence of quotations in articles and the inability to presume a journalist's choice to contribute rhetoric sets them apart from those who submit editorials. This, however, does not mean that the journalists are objective or without their own bias, emotions and motives. By selecting what content reaches their audience, which is often much larger than the audience for the editorials, journalists are contributing their own fantasy themes, plot lines, and characters to the audience's rhetorical visions.

Journalistic depictions of events, people, and places often provide the context for community member discussion. Information that may otherwise be unknown to community members is made readily available in newspaper articles. This gives the journalist a great deal of power and control when crafting an article for mass circulation. Anyone who has ever been interviewed knows that what you say can be interpreted and portrayed in many different ways. A journalists' choice of words, organization and delivery can have a profound effect on their audience.

For example, Jarrett Bell of *USA Today*, wrote on November 22, 2004 about Tom Benson's reaction to a recent loss by the Saints. The quotation, "It's the worst performance I've seen in 20 years as the owner. They looked like high school kids," prompted the previously noted editorial response by Susan Montelius on November 24th. In the same article, Bell creates a sense of dissention between the fans, Benson, and his Saints. Bell asserts that, "Longtime observers insist there have been several poorer outings during Benson's tenure," and quotes a Saints players as saying, "'That's his opinion. He's writing the checks.'" Without journalists providing these quotations, community members would have less content to discuss within their fantasy themes and editorial submissions.

Dwayne Peltier, of Willmar, Minnesota, illustrates the control of journalistic narratives in his December 20, 2004 letter to the Louisiana newspaper, *The Advocate*:

I am a Saints fan who lives in Minnesota. I have discontinued any reading of any sports editorials by your newspaper as well as any news, period, because of ONE reason: The Advocate's continued bashing of the Saints… The Saints aren't just a New Orleans team; they are a Louisiana team… I have lived in New Orleans, and believe me, the fans of the Saints aren't just from New Orleans – there are fans scattered throughout the country. (Peltier, 12/20/2004)

Peltier's complaint recognizes that sports editorials and newspaper articles are selected for distribution by journalists and companies. However, he also fails to comment on or realize that editorials are provided by community members. A journalist cannot make a community member submit an editorial, they simply have the power to select which editorials are selected or rejected. Therefore, those submissions that exhibit more skill and artistry are more likely to be published.

Motives, meanings, and emotions

In the first time frame of this analysis, the identity fans and non-fans participating in the rhetorical vision, "shape up or ship out", had differing motives found in their rhetoric. Bormann asserts that groups of individuals will artistically craft a message to gain converts to their perspective. This is evident in each of the fantasy types that combine to create the community's rhetorical vision. Non-fans

were motivated to remove the Saints from their community. The primary interest of this group was to improve the economy of New Orleans, and discard a large financial drain on their community. The emotions found in their rhetoric are that of unsympathetic frustration. The removal of Benson and the Saints would immediately benefit the entire city and state, in the minds of non-fans. The non-fans of the Saints community provide several instances where the Saints, or their fans, can enact change, but are particularly interested in the "ship out" part of the community's rhetorical vision.

Identity fans share the same rhetorical vision, but have different motives and emotions that accompany their social reality. Saints fans were, and had been, hoping for a change in the Saints, Benson, and the entire franchise. However, after decades of unsuccessful seasons and an increasing dislike for Tom Benson, fans' frustrated, embarrassed, and fatigued emotions were beginning to affect their rhetoric. Many fans turned their embarrassment and frustration towards the head of their city's problem, Tom Benson. Fans demanded that Benson show commitment to his city and team, and help build a strong representation of the city of New Orleans. Identity fans were motivated by their identification with the Saints, a large representative of their city. If the Saints could not represent them well, they needed to leave.

The last individuals I would like to discuss are Arnold Fielkow and Gary Ostroke. These two affiliated men were the primary individuals striving to gain converts to their perspective. One of the reasons that their fantasy themes were not chained among other groups was because their fantasy themes created dissonance with many community members. Persuasive communication often repeats what the

audience already knows, creating the feeling that the individual providing the rhetoric is giving voice to what the audience already know, feels, or accepts (Bormann, 1972, p.399). If Fielkow and Ostroke's editorials appeared in the two later time frames, perhaps they would have chained out for a large group of community members. One example of this is provided by another editorial by Fielkow in the next time frame.

The choice use of language found in the Pre-Katrina editorials also reflects the meanings, motives and emotions of the community when analyzed using Burke's four master tropes, particularly metaphor. Metaphors such as, the Saints are "clowns," a football "fiasco," a "mediocre product," an "economic engine," the Saints fans as "hostages," and Tom Benson as an "extortionist fraud," all reflect intended meanings and motives. By describing one thing in terms of another, there is a shifting of perspectives. In other words, to see the Saints as clowns decreases or eliminates the possibility of perceiving the Saints to be positive community figures. As the metaphors pertaining to the Saints, fans, and community change, so does the perception of those community members.

In the Pre-Katrina time frame, both non-fans and identity fans are attempting to motivate change. Emotions of frustration and embarrassment are present in many editorials, as well as media. Two affiliated men, Fielkow and Ostroke, provide rhetoric and fantasy themes about the Saints that, if accepted, shift the perceptions from negative and pessimistic to positive and optimistic. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the "Aints" represented frustration, pessimism and disappointment.

Post- Katrina (August 28th, 2005 - September 24th, 2006)

On August 28th and 29th, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast and caused considerable damage to the city of New Orleans. This event also represents the second time frame of my analysis as a shift in rhetoric and fantasy themes becomes evident in the editorials. While there was an increase in media coverage of New Orleans during this time period, resulting in more newspaper articles, there was also a decrease in editorials pertaining to the Saints. This may have resulted from the displacement of many local Times-Picayune readers.

In the second time frame of this analysis, there is a new rhetorical vision that both builds on and separates from the previous rhetorical vision. This new rhetorical vision is "help rebuild or leave." The New Orleans Saints' slogan for the 2005 season, which was commented on by a Pre-Katrina editorial, was "You gotta have faith." This slogan did not have the rhetorical effect it was intended to have, but may have served as the precursor for a later successful slogan in the 2006 NFL season. In the rhetorical vision to help rebuild New Orleans, there are similar *dramatis personae* and plot lines, but also an introduction of several new characters, particularly heroes.

The New Orleans Saints (the players, staff, and organization in general)
    The Saints are Louisiana's team.
    The Saints have never been a New Orleans-only team.
    The Saints are a part of New Orleans identity.
    The Saints players and staff have been spared the effects of Hurricane Katrina.
    The Saints organization needs to follow the residents; stand up, restore order.
    The Saints are whiners.
    The Saints are princes of privilege.
    If the Saints care about New Orleans, come back and join in rebirth.
    The presence of the Saints signals it is OK to return to the city.

The Saints have been the heart and soul of the community for 38 years.
The Saints are a downer on the city.
Every loss by the Saints is a loss for the city.
The Saints should leave to San Antonio.
Just go to San Antonio [the Saints].
A new New Orleans doesn't need an embarrassing underachiever.

Tom Benson, owner of the Saints
Benson has little concern for Saints fans, only concerned with money.
If Benson keeps his mouth closed, the Superdome will sell out for years to come.
It is Benson's choice to return to New Orleans.
Saints fans
Saints fans are most loyal and passionate in all of sports.
It feels good to be a Saints fan.
Saints fans have always supported their team.
Reggie Bush, newly drafted rookie running back
Reggie Bush is a 'Saint'.
Reggie Bush is a true Saint.
Reggie Bush is helping to rebuild New Orleans.
Reggie Bush is New Orleans' number one citizen.

Many of the narratives, fantasy themes and major plot lines found in the Pre-Katrina time frame are continued or built upon in the Post-Katrina editorials, and contribute to new fantasy types for the community. However, with much of the city evacuated, flooded or destroyed, there are clear themes of anger, fear, frustration, and concern for the future. These themes are linked to the Saints in a variety of positive and negative ways throughout the Post-Katrina time frame. The four fantasy types of this time frame were:

- The Saints are misrepresenting and abandoning New Orleans.

- The Saints are part of New Orleans' and Louisiana's identity.

- The Saints will play a major role in the financial recovery of New Orleans.

- Reggie Bush is a "Saint".

The division between the Saints, Tom Benson, and the city of New Orleans is still

clearly identified in the Post-Katrina editorials, but the narratives also begin to identify

the link and common interests that unite them. In the Post-Katrina category there is an

early negativity and vilification of characters. This trend begins to soften and change

as the time period progresses.

The first plot line of the Post-Katrina time frame, the Saints are

misrepresenting and abandoning New Orleans, is present closely following the

hurricane, but begins to fade over time. With many New Orleans residents displaced,

homeless and scared, the Saints appeared to be among the more fortunate community

members. Although the Saints were displaced from the Superdome, forced to move

their operations, and unable to return to New Orleans, many non-fans felt they were

far from fellow downtrodden residents. Bill Sailers responded to a report that the

Saints felt abandoned by the NFL with his own sentiments about the Saints situation:

> The Saints need to quit whining. None of the players or staff missed a
> meal or a paycheck. They have been spared the effects of Hurricane
> Katrina felt by so many of us in New Orleans. The players have
> continued to be spoiled and have their desires catered to whenever they
> want something, yet they cry about feeling abandoned. Worse yet, the
> players are starting to sound like the lead whiner, Tom Benson joining
> his "poor, poor, pitiful me" chorus. The organization needs to do what
> the rest of us have had to do since Aug. 29: Stand up, start to get things
> back into some kind of order and make the best of a very bad situation.
> (Sailers, 11/27/2005)

Not only did Sailers separate the Saints from New Orleans residents, fans, and

community members, but he also linked them together with Tom Benson, the most

vilified man in New Orleans.

Sailers was not alone in labeling the Saints as whiners and deserters. Gary Dohanich expressed his displeasure with the Saints' claim that they fear the loss of "quality of life" by returning to New Orleans. Dohanich stated:

> Thousands of New Orleanians have lost their quality of life, but they fight on each day trying to resurrect this city. Few of the coaches and players lost their homes or their jobs, unlike so many citizens of this region. Yet all these princes of privilege whine in self-pity at the unfairness of life… If you care about New Orleans, you come back and join us in our rebirth, despite the many hard days ahead. If you care only about yourself, you find other haunts and live with your betrayal of a great American city. (Dohanich, 12/13/2005)

The Saints found themselves as the victims of frustration and anger throughout the Gulf Coast due to accusations that a drastically higher percentage of individuals of a lower economic status were affected by the hurricane. Perceptions of the wealthy Saints fleeing New Orleans and leaving behind their poor and less fortunate fans built a separation between the team and their community.

While Dohanich and Sailers were very critical of the Saints, their actions, and their attitudes following Hurricane Katrina, the two also provided a small window for the Saints to regain approval, return and help rebuild. Some fans, however, did not believe the Saints were going to return. Thomas Andre of New Orleans demanded that the Saints go forward with their true intentions as soon as possible:

> Go Saints. Just go. Get outta here. The Saints should immediately announce their intention to move to San Antonio and spare us all the waiting. A new New Orleans does not need an organization whose history can be summed up in these three words: embarrassing to underachieving… To our friends in San Antonio: Tom Benson is coming. You've been warned. (Andre, 10/19/2005)

The Saints had been practicing and playing out of the San Antonio Alamodome during their period of displacement from New Orleans. To many New Orleans community members, fans and non-fans, this was a clear sign of things to come.

Non-fans were not the only ones that felt the Saints were misrepresenting and abandoning their struggling city. Nicholas Perscich of Metairie explained why the continued presence of the Saints only worsened the hurricane recovery:

> The Saints are a downer on this city. Every loss by the team is a loss for the city of New Orleans. How are we to come back from Katrina if every week during football season we are reminded just how bad we really are… The best present this city could receive next December would be a Christmas card from the San Antonio Saints. (Perscich, 12/28/2005)

Clearly, Perscich was a highly identified Saints fan that could no longer support a team that poorly represented his city week after week, year after year. Whether or not the Saints would return to New Orleans was an ongoing question for many, but the common perception was that Benson had hidden intentions to leave, even before the hurricane arrived.

Steven Brouwer, in his editorial, "Support the Saints not Benson", asserted that Saints fandom does not need to revolve around the Superdome or financially supporting the team. He stated:

> Tom Benson has shown what little concern he has for the fans of the Saints. Let's show him what little concern we have for his bank account… Let's show the NFL that we have support for the team we dare to love, but not for the man who dares to leave. (Brouwer, 10/25/2005)

Benson's vilification reached its peak shortly after Hurricane Katrina. In many instances, the Saints were characterized along with Benson. The 2005 NFL season

ended with the Saints finishing at a 3-13 record, and never returning to play in New Orleans. The future of the Saints remained a mystery.

As time passed, and the 2006 season grew closer, fans and residents began to communicate with more optimism and hope for their future. The NFL, and even Tom Benson, appeared to be committed to returning the Saints to New Orleans for the start of the 2006 season. The threat of losing the Saints and the perception that they may actually return provided the second and third plot lines of this time frame, the Saints are part of New Orleans' and Louisiana's identity and will play a major role in recovery. The narratives beginning in January of 2006 were dominated by identity fans. As the financial and psychological importance of the Saints to New Orleans and Louisiana became more evident, many non-fans were silenced, having lost their primary topics of criticism.

Although, closely following Hurricane Katrina there was negative rhetoric regarding the Saints, there were also positive narratives provided by community members. In an editorial titled, An anchor for the future, an anonymous source described the Saints as "Louisiana's team." In response to rumors of a possible name change to gain a larger fan base, the author responded, "This has never been a New Orleans-only team and never will be, but the Saints are part of the city's identity – and we hope that doesn't change" (Anchor, 10/1/2005). To this Saints fan, a name change to the Gulf Coast Saints, Louisiana Saints, or any other name, would not gather more interest. According to Saints fans there was already a large fan base.

One identity fan, community member, and Saints supporter was, once again, Arnold Fielkow. This time Fielkow was contributing as the ex-Vice President of the

Saints. Fielkow was reportedly fired by Tom Benson over discussions about games being played in San Antonio, further concerning New Orleanians about a potential departure for the Saints (Henderson, 10/17/2005). Fielkow once again attempted to provide the voice of reason for fans, residents, and even Benson:

> Fans of the New Orleans Saints – the most loyal and passionate in all of sports – hope that the Black and Gold will be an integral part of our community both next season and for many decades to come… In the short term, and especially 2006, the Saints' presence in greater New Orleans would do wonders for a population that desperately needs positive news. Simply put, our community needs the Saints to come home, to help lead our area's renaissance financially, emotionally, and symbolically… From a financial perspective, the Saints' presence translates into significant economic impact… Even more important, the presence of the Saints players, coaches, and staff symbolically affirms that it is indeed OK for people and businesses to come home…The New Orleans Saints have been a part of the heart and soul of our community for 38 years… It is time for the Saints to truly be "Saints" and do the right thing for our community. (Fielkow, 12/16/2005)

Fielkow's statements were a decree to fans, residents, and the Saints organization to support the team and city, and to help rebuild. Part of this support Fielkow suggested involved financially contributing to the Saints, which also includes Tom Benson. Fans and residents however felt that they had already been doing their part for many years. Roy Koch of New Orleans asserted:

> The Saints fans have always supported this team, and ticket sales have never had anything to do with keeping the Saints in New Orleans. If owner Tom Benson would just keep his mouth closed in the off-season and if the team would be competitive, the Superdome would be sold out for years to come. (Koch, 5/24/2006)

The Saints fans needed some indication that the team, Benson, and the organization had New Orleans in mind. The arrival of a hero was that indication, and gave New Orleans residents a representation of the Saints' presence in the city, without being able to play any home games.

The fourth plot line of the Post-Katrina time frame is that Reggie Bush is a "Saint." Bush, a Heisman trophy winner and impressive college athlete, was presumed by many to be the number one player in the 2006 rookie draft. Somehow, he landed in New Orleans with the second overall pick in the draft. While allowing Bush to slip to the third selection would have been a terrible decision for any organization, Benson and the Saints organization were praised for selecting such a prized individual. The characterizations of Bush did not simply pertain to his on field performance, but depicted a heroic, saint healing a battered city emotionally and physically.

"Thank you… to Tom Benson for drafting Reggie Bush… Now Saint Reggie is roaming around town wearing a Renew New Orleans wristband. After the sorrow and frustration of the past eight months, it sure does feel good to be a Saints fan," an anonymous author stated in an editorial titled "Saint Reggie". Presumably, there were many Saints players, staff and fans contributing to their healing city, but Bush's simple act of wearing a wristband became a heroic gesture.

Cathy Usdin Burka commented on Bush's contribution to New Orleans recovery efforts, stating:

> Reggie Bush is a true Saint. Not only was he our No. 1 draft choice, but he has immediately become one of our No. 1 citizens. I would like to thank the Saints organization for making such a thoughtful selection and Reggie Bush for making so many thoughtful efforts to help his new home in its recovery efforts. (Burka, 6/2/2006)

Bush's heroism became so great within New Orleans that praise spread to the organization that drafted him. Rather than becoming the good to Benson's evil, Bush began to soften the villainous depictions of Benson. Reverend Tony Ricard ends his editorial, "Reggie wins our hearts," with an added thank you. "Thanks again to Mr.

Benson for coming back home!" (Ricard, 7/2/2006). Ricard's primary focus however,

is the contribution of Bush:

> But the most phenomenal asset of Reggie Bush is not his physical or
> mental abilities. His greatest asset has got to be his heart! By coming to
> New Orleans and immediately helping with various gifts and recovery
> programs, Reggie Bush has shown Crescent City that his youthful heart
> is with us. Thank you, Reggie, for all you are doing. If your on-the-
> field performance comes anywhere near what your off-the-field
> performance has been, I can't wait for the 2006 season to begin!
> (Ricard, 7/2/2006)

Rev. Ricard was not alone in his high hopes for the 2006 NFL season. The

focus on Reggie Bush, the most visible evidence that the Saints were in New Orleans,

quickly shifted towards the entire Saints organization. As it became more and more

evident that the Saints would play homes games in not only New Orleans, but a

refurbished Superdome, fan and resident optimism skyrocketed. The New Orleans

Saints first true home game and return to the Superdome marked the ultimate shift in

rhetoric and perception of the Saints.

Motives, meanings and emotions

In the Post-Katrina time frame fans and non-fans both experience division with

the Saints. In the city's time of need, it appeared that the Saints, led by Tom Benson,

would abandon their community. The perception that the Saints were spared the

suffering and personal loss that many community members had to experience, coupled

with the threat of losing their NFL franchise, affected the New Orleans community

emotionally. The early narratives of negativity towards the Saints combined with the

later narratives of positivity and optimism contributed to the rhetorical vision, "help

rebuild or leave."

Once it appeared that the Saints would not abandon the city that needed them, the community's rhetoric began to change. The rhetorical visions provided by community members such as Arnold Fielkow and Gary Ostroke either began to convert other community members to identity fans or in a time of need and optimism, more identity fans became comfortable with supporting their team publicly. Many of the editorials contained assertions that the loyal Saints fans had always been present, and the Saints were a part of New Orleans' identity. As Wann and Robinson (2002) would assert, there is a positive relationship between identification with a team and the perception of that organization. In other words, as the Saints became a socially acceptable and beneficial team to support, more community members came to identify with the team, as well as previous fans became more willing to voice their fandom.

The Post-Katrina time frame also presents several examples of Burke's master tropes, particularly metaphor and metonymy. The metaphors in this time frame primarily relate to the Saints. Most notably, they were described as, "princes of privilege." Another metaphor was the depiction of Reggie Bush as a "saint." Of course, he is actually a Saint, in reference to the team, but community members also refer to him with saintly qualities, referencing holy or religious values.

Reggie Bush also relates to the other trope found in the community's language, metonymy. In many instances, Reggie Bush was perceived as the entire Saints organization. Reggie Bush is the Saints. Reggie Bush is the city's hope. The Saints actions were also depicted as the new hope of the city, making the intangible tangible. Everything the Saints and Bush did to rebuild and return represents the hope of the entire community.

Post Superdome Return (September 24th, 2006- October 30th, 2007)

The third and final time frame of this analysis begins with a mass of rhetoric

due to the importance of the signifying event. The return of the New Orleans Saints to

the Superdome is important on many different levels. It represents a rebuilding that

many believed impossible, a return that was considered improbable, and an event that

was symbolically and emotionally crucial. The rhetorical vision found in this time

frame is actually synonymous with the New Orleans Saints' slogan of "faith" for the

2006 season. This rhetorical vision is "We Believe," a poster and slogan found

throughout the Superdome and advertising during the 2006 NFL season. The narrative

that drives this rhetorical vision centers on the idea, by supporting the Saints,

individuals are helping to rebuild and resurrect the devastated city of New Orleans.

Residents began to refer to themselves, the Saints, and all Saints fans with we, us, our

and many other inclusive and communal words.

In this final time frame and rhetorical vision, the Saints, Benson, and fans are

still present as characters, but this time they are all cast as heroes in optimistic plot

lines. The Superdome also emerges as an important element of the fantasy themes,

garnering its own categorization of plot lines.

The New Orleans Saints (the players, staff, and organization in general)
      The Saints bring hope and pride to their city.
      The Saints have transformed.
      The Saints are uniting the community and city.
      Saints games represent more than just football.
      Saints 2006 season is magical.
      The Saints can play a vital role in helping raise the spirit of the Gulf Coast.
      Saints games give a needed distraction.
Tom Benson, owner of the Saints
      Benson's commitment to the Saints gives fans hope.

Benson finally realizes what the team means to its city.
Saints fans
Fans helped resurrect the city and are good for the city.
The Superdome return
The return to the Superdome was a spiritual event.
The Superdome return was symbolic for New Orleans and to the nation.
Every game provides escape.
Home games represent the return of some normalcy.
The Superdome is back as a symbol of greatness, not a refugee camp.
We are all marching in [to the Superdome return].
People of New Orleans deserve a magical night and season.
Temporarily exiled fans can still feel like part of the community through games.

The return of the New Orleans Saints to their home at the Superdome is the final event that fosters a shift in the rhetoric found in the editorials. Due to the importance and significance of this event, there is an abundance of rhetoric pertaining specifically to the Superdome return. Before the major plot lines in the post-Superdome return are identified, it is important to focus on the Superdome return itself. One article in particular, that blurs the line between participant and observer, provides numerous plot lines from highly identified Saints fans. In the September 24th, 2006 sports section of the Times-Picayune, local and distant Saints fans were given the opportunity to submit comments about what the Superdome return meant to them. The title of the article was "Saints Homecoming: Fan's Perspectives." There is no journalistic presence in this article, simply a listing of fan submissions. For this reason, it has been classified as participant.

The return of the Saints to the Superdome became a supernatural event in the minds of many Louisiana residents. The most important change that takes place in this magical setting is the transformation of the Superdome from a devastated refuge of

misery, suffering and hopelessness to a sacred location, symbolizing hope and the

resurrection of New Orleans. Eric Karkovack of Carlisle, Pennsylvania wrote:

> The people of New Orleans deserve a magical Monday night at the
> Dome and a magical season… the Saints can play a vital role in helping
> raise the spirit of the Gulf Coast. I can't wait to come back and visit my
> favorite city and see my favorite team make us all proud. (Karkovack,
> 9/24/2006)

Mona Savaski of Slidell, New Orleans added, "I believe our boys will be proud

running out on the field Monday night… I'm looking forward to seeing the Dome

back to being a symbol of greatness and not a refugee camp." To many Saints fans,

both residents and non-residents, the Saints return represented their own struggle and

eventual return home. Liz Piker of Walhalla, South Carolina explained the returns

significance to her when she stated:

> Monday night I will be watching a miracle of persistence, love and
> great spirit… the Saints have taken on the role of "The First Step" in
> bringing back some normalcy back to New Orleans. It may sound to
> some as though this restoration of our team to their home in the Dome
> is trivial compared to the losses of life and homes, and the work that
> still needs to be done…The hope that we have now is growing, and as
> we watch our beloved Saints play where they belong and are loved the
> most will give a sense of comfort and pride and the knowledge that
> New Orleans is back and will endure despite the devastation of Katrina.
> (Piker, 9/24/2006)

Piker's assertion that the Saints return to the Superdome brings some normalcy

back to New Orleans was shared by many other residents and fans. John Moore of

Orlando, Florida explained that, "for the next four hours, [I] will feel like everything is

back to normal and right in the world." Aside from a return to normalcy, if only for

one day, many fans were just happy to have a Saints team that finally represented

them, and represented them well. Michelle Brown of Memphis, Tennessee stated:

> I am a proud New Orleans Saints fan, and I've been one for as far back
> as I can remember…At long last our beloved Saints are marching
> home…I can't wait to arrive in New Orleans, put on my black and gold
> and support the Saints and the residents of New Orleans. (9/24/2006)

Scott Norwood of Metairie added, "I think we are all marching home to the Dome. I can't wait." Many residents were still unable to return home to New Orleans. Watching the Saints play a home game provided a much needed link to a home that seemingly ceased to exist. Joe Langenderfer, displaced in Toledo, Ohio, expressed his happiness to have community involvement with his fellow New Orleans residents. "It's a blessing in so many ways for residents as well as those of us who are still 'temporarily' exiled but still feel to be part of the community." Sports provide a sense of community that few events and experiences can match. Michael Fein of Metairie summarized the event particularly well when he stated:

> Monday night is my closure to Katrina…Winning is not necessary.
> Representing is what matters. The Saints are New Orleans. Their
> rebirth is our rebirth. The Saints represent New Orleans. We the fans,
> represent the Saints. On Monday night, that is all that matters. (Fein,
> 9/24/2006)

Fein expressed a key shift in the rhetoric provided by fans and residents. The team and city became characterized as having the same interests, motives and values. Returning to New Orleans and rebuilding the city united them as one. "The Saints are New Orleans."

Lost in the excitement for many fans and non-residents was the possible discomfort for residents to return to the Superdome, an indelible image of Hurricane Katrina's devastation. Many residents were still displaced and suffering. The community atmosphere in the refurbished Superdome, however, was enough to erase

the thoughts of despair and replace them with new hope and pride. Gail Landry

expressed her change in attitude when she stated:

> I was initially one of those people who strongly objected to all of the
> hoopla surrounding the reopening of the Superdome because the lives
> of so many of our citizens still remain in a state of flux and confusion.
> However, my perspective began to change on opening day of the Dome
> as I watched the euphoria and anticipation unfold on television… It was
> an electrifying, near spiritual experience. I was overcome with the
> electricity, the passion, the determination of the team and the fans. Any
> anxieties and doubts I harbored about returning to the Dome melted in
> the sea of black and gold. And now I get it. (Landry, 10/22/2006)

It is important to note the shift in rhetoric around September 24th, particularly

because of the success the team began to achieve. Before the Saints first home game at

the Superdome, the team had only played and won two games. As the season

progressed and the team became more successful, support for the team could be

attributed to achievement rather than the chaining of fantasy themes. The

establishment of these early fantasy themes chaining into rhetorical visions supports

the claim that the rhetoric provided by community members was successful in

reaching larger audiences.

The narratives describing the return to the Superdome focus primarily on the

setting and the characters. Saints fans and the Saints were given heroic qualities in

their return to New Orleans. There were also several major plot lines present in the

post-Superdome return time frame.

- The Saints represent hope and pride for New Orleans.

- 2006 will be a magical season for the Saints.

- Saints fans are helping resurrect New Orleans.

The first plot line in this time frame, the Saints represent hope and pride for New Orleans, illustrated a large shift in characterizations and depictions when juxtaposed with editorials from the Pre-Katrina time frame. The Saints had truly become a source of pride and identification for New Orleans residents. Mandy Chocoles, of Metairie, commented on how the Saints and their return to the Superdome united players, fans and the community:

> Although I was not fortunate enough to attend Monday night's game, it was interesting hearing all the comments and interviews on TV. One that touched me greatly was the observation at the end of the game that 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 New Orleans in general: We're not leaving! (Chocheles, 9/27/2006)

Embarrassment and displeasure were replaced with pride and acceptance. Hally Ragas of Buras, New Orleans wrote, "Finally we have a team that earns its pay… an owner who has faith and is willing to take a chance. Thanks, Saints, for giving New Orleans something to be proud of and something to smile about" (Ragas, 10/1/2006). The Saints consisted of virtually the same roster as the previous season, aside from the typical free agent signing and dropping of players, and were still owned by Tom Benson. But now the Saints were characterized as heroes in a city that desperately needed them, erasing all of their previous transgressions.

Vaughn Downing illustrated the new power the Saints held over their city and fans when she wrote:

> I am not sure what possessed me to head out to a craft store last week and spend way too much on fabric and black and gold paint. However, I had plenty of time to think about why as I lay on my garage floor for several hours painting a 14-foot-long banner that reads "We Believe," embellished with two fleur de lis. There are a lot of things I'm not proud of in New Orleans right now… But I am so, so proud of our

Saints and the image of New Orleans 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…[the players, coaches and staff] They all make the Saints a great team, and they bring our city hope at a time when we badly need it. (Downing, 1/17/2007)

The Saints image and representation of New Orleans was not only a source of pride for residents, but was also a result of many fantasy themes chaining out on a national level. Fans and residents no longer had to provide their own rhetoric about the Saints, as media had begun to consistently cover the new "America's Team".

The chaining of fantasy themes could also be seen in the journalistic descriptions of the return to the Superdome. Richard Sandomir of the New York Times, reporting on the events of the Monday night game, quoted ESPN analyst Tom Jackson as saying, "The perception tonight is the city is back" (NYT, 9/26/2006). Clifton Brown, also of the New York Times, contributed his own take on the Saints' return.

While the rebuilding of New Orleans has been arduous, the rebuilding of the Saints has been breathtaking… During losing seasons – and there have been many – frustrated Saints fans used to arrive at the Superdome wearing paper bags over their heads, ashamed of their team and disenchanted about the future. But everything seems positive and exciting about the Saints these days…New Orleans is still recovering from Hurricane Katrina, but the city appreciates its team as never before. (Brown, 10/16/2006)

While many of the journalists produced articles relating to the Saints use quotations, stats, and many other seemingly objective comments, after the Superdome return many journalists also felt the need to provide their own outlook on the Saints' return. John Branch of the New York Times stated:

It seems the more blows New Orleans absorbs, the more it turns its affections toward the Saints… The struggling, half filled city, hit a little more than 16 months ago by Hurricane Katrina and now in the midst of

a spree of murders, has found an escape route. This time was toward the Superdome, not away from it… a broken city was festooned in black and gold and the walkways and sidewalks were jammed with Saints fans… On Friday afternoon, a man outside the famous bar Pat O'Brien's told another, 'Everybody in the country's a Saints fan. You will be, too, after tomorrow night. (Branch, 1/14/2007)

Even if everyone in the country wasn't a Saints fan, it seemed like only a matter of time until everyone in New Orleans would became one.

Motives, meanings and emotions

In the final time frame of my analysis, Post-Superdome Return, there is a dramatic shift to optimism and hope as the community chained their fantasy themes to the rhetorical vision, "We Believe." The Saints, Reggie Bush, and Saints fans had represented hope for a return to New Orleans and a chance at recovery. The physical return of the Saints was made tangible by their return to the Superdome. Fans and residents were able to experience the true Saints community within their own city, for the first time in over a year.

By the time of the Superdome return, there was either a large conversion of non-fans to identity fans, or the impact of the Saints in New Orleans was enough to silence their critics. The Saints were the representation of New Orleans that residents sought and the city needed. One interesting note is that Arnold Fielkow did not submit an editorial during the final time frame. Fielkow was motivated to show the residents and fans of New Orleans that the Saints were an integral part of their city. The chaining of fantasy themes and change in perception of the Saints may have left Fielkow with only one thing to say, mission accomplished.

The Post-Superdome Return time frame, similar to the two previous time frames, reflected language choices made by the New Orleans community members. The most important of the master tropes present in this time frame is synecdoche. The New Orleans Saints came to represent the whole of New Orleans. The Saints fans came to represent the entire community. The best example of this representation of Saints, fans and city is the reference to black and gold. "Put on my black and gold," "in a sea of black and gold," and purchasing "black and gold paint," all evidenced the representation that wearing Saints' colors indicates for community members. By supporting the Saints, the community, residents, and anyone outside of New Orleans is helping to resurrect the devastated city, state, and region. This is the ultimate rhetorical vision of the community and slogan, "We Believe."

Conclusion

In my analysis I have illustrated a dramatic shift in the motives, meanings and emotions elicited by the New Orleans residents and Saints fan community. The rhetorical visions provided by the editorials in this analysis provide a window into the social reality for the individuals and groups participating in the chaining of fantasy themes. This analysis shows the transformation of the New Orleans Saints, according to their fans and local community, from the embarrassing "Aints" to the new, inspiring Saints. The reality for Saints fans, new and old, is that New Orleans has an impressive team that represents the best qualities of their city and region. Their new reality was constructed by the characterizations and depictions found in their chaining of fantasy themes.

Implications

The purpose of fantasy theme analysis is to collect a mass of rhetoric from a group of individuals within a community or public and construct that group's rhetorical vision or visions. From the rhetorical visions created by group discourse, a critic can infer the motives, meanings and emotions experienced and expressed by that group. What I find particularly interesting is the discrepancy between "reality" and the community's social experience or group reality.

As experienced by the fans and residents of the New Orleans Saints community, the Saints transformed from an underachieving team and drain on society, to a key representation of the city and economic value, important to rebuilding. Only

time will tell what really happens with the Saints, but as far as fans and residents are

concerned, the Saints are integral contributors to the city of New Orleans. The concept

of a context, event or time frame's reality creates difficulty in differentiating one from

the other.

Fortunately, Bormann (1972) provides advice for a critic that finds there may

be a discrepancy between the rhetoric and the apparent "reality" of an event:

> When a critic makes a rhetorical analysis he or she should start from
> the assumption that when there is a discrepancy between the word and
> the thing the most important cultural artifact for understanding the
> events may not be the things or "reality" but the words or the symbols.
> Indeed, in many vital instances the words, that is, the rhetoric, are the
> social reality and to try to distinguish one symbolic reality from another
> is a fallacy widespread in historical and sociological scholarship which
> the rhetorical critic can do much to dispel. (401)

In other words, if an individual were to argue that the Saints simply improved as a

team and gained league support in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, which caused the

change in fan, non-fan and national perception of the Saints, they would be false. The

focus of my thesis was to analyze the rhetoric provided by a community pertaining to

the Saints. The community of Saints fans and New Orleans residents perceived a

change in the Saints, attributed to far more than performance and favorable media

coverage.

The title of my thesis succinctly explains the change in rhetoric, fantasy

themes, and visions regarding the Saints. The New Orleans Saints, Pre-Katrina, were

referred to commonly as the 'Aints' which contained inherent emotions and meanings

for the entire community. The fans were united by pessimism, frustration, and

continued disappointment with their team. To non-fans the 'Aints' represented

embarrassment and an economic drain. Regardless of the factual evidence for either of these perspectives, this was the social reality for the New Orleans Saints' community.

Community members, such as Arnold Fielkow and Gary Ostroke, supportive of the Saints were rarely vocal in editorials during the time of the 'Aints'. After Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, many fans and community members were introduced to life without the Saints. As Charles Euchner (1993) explained, the loss of a local sports team can be very damaging to an individual. The rhetoric of fans and non-fans began to change as the economic and social importance of the Saints became a focal point in recovery discussions. While popular media may have offered the concept of the Saints as the key to rebuilding, community members began to chain fantasy themes giving their community hope and inspiration.

With regards to the Superdome return and the 2006 season, success was not the only contributor to a change in rhetoric. The Saints had only won two games entering the returning home game. While this may substantiate a successful team for a hopeful New Orleans fan community, their optimism had begun before the return to the Superdome. Following Hurricane Katrina and eventually the Superdome return, "Saints" fans and New Orleans residents referred to their team with hope, pride and optimism. For now, the rhetorical vision of the hope inducing, heroic Saints lives on.

The ultimate rhetorical vision of my analysis, "We Believe," was rejected in a very similar form Pre-Katrina. The slogan, "You gotta have faith," which is virtually synonymous with "believe," was rejected as a fantasy theme and possible rhetorical vision. The acceptance of not only an optimistic slogan, but a slogan provided by the

Saints organization illustrates a shift in the perceptions of Saints fans and New Orleans

community members in relation to the Saints.

Many teams, in a variety of sports, have reversed their fortunes and team

perception. It could be a uniform change. It could be the result of a dominating team.

However, maybe the true change in perceptions of a sports team can be traced back to

the communication within their fan and local community. This was the case for the

New Orleans Saints.

Discussion

While I have established the importance of this analysis to the fan community

participating in the provided rhetorical visions, the question still remains, why this

analysis is relevant to other communities and scholars. I can begin to answer this

question by returning to the original questions introduced in my thesis.

- How does a sports team come to represent a community through more than

  simply proximity and name?

- How does the presence of a sports team affect a community?

- How does the communication about a sports team, among fans and community

  members, affect the perception of that team?

The first question, how a sports team comes to represent a community, can be

explained through my delineation of fan types and Burke's master tropes. Throughout

my analysis it should be clear that the key to a sports team representing a community

is the acceptance and internalization of fandom within the community. This is

achieved through identification. I refer to identification in the sense that an entire community identifies with the team rather than just an individual. Identity fans within my analysis were specified to illustrate the shift in community rhetoric and spread of identification within a community.

My fan types of identity, performance and non-fans, adapted from Nicholas Dixon's partisan and purist fan types, help to illustrate how more than proximity and name can affect the relationship between a team and community. Dixon (2001) asserts that most partisan support begins with an individual's familiarity, such as with a local institution, player or team (p.150). According to Dixon, professional teams are much more complex in their fan support, due to the lack of relation to players and non-local fans to the area. I argue that the fantasy themes provided by the residents and Saints fan community fostered an atmosphere similar to that of a local amateur or college team. Community members felt they knew the individuals and team based on their heroic and positive depictions, particularly in the case of Reggie Bush.

The establishment of the Saints as beneficial community members created identification with not only identity fans, but non-fans and performance fans. The fantasies provided in the editorials were successful in gaining converts from the other fan types through the chaining of fantasy themes. The Saints were not only a successful team in 2006, but were cast as the best community members in New Orleans.

The use of language within the editorials also illustrates a shift in rhetoric and motives, and explains how a sports team can become a strong representative of a community. Returning to the language tropes provided by Kenneth Burke in my

literature review, the individuals who submitted the editorials in my analysis clearly

made use of these language tools. Metaphor, the first trope, can be found throughout

my analysis. The Saints as clowns, a fiasco, a mediocre product, an economic engine,

and several other descriptions are all examples of metaphors. The use of this language

is an attempt to see something in terms of something else, a shifting of perspective

(Burke, 1945, p.504). Through portraying new perspectives in fantasy themes,

community members were attempting to change current perspectives and

characterizations within the community.

The second trope, metonymy, is also present in the Saints community's

rhetoric. In many narratives, the New Orleans Saints and the entire organization were

reduced to "the Saints." The team's performance and the perception of Tom Benson's

team and motives spurred many of the negative depictions of the New Orleans Saints.

Metonymy was also used to portray the Saints in a positive light. The Saints as the

hope and inspiration for the residents and fans made the rebuilding and resurrection of

New Orleans seem tangible for the entire community.

The third and last trope I identified in my analysis is synecdoche. In the Post-

Katrina time frame, the New Orleans Saints come to represent far more than just a

football team. The Saints represent New Orleans, a fan community, and even the Gulf

Coast hurricane revival. The representation of black and gold to fans and community

members also became an important part of fan identification with their team and

community. The concept of team colors becoming an important part of a community is

particularly relevant to the marketing of sports teams. If an organization can link the

identity of an entire region with their sports team, fan identification could become

much stronger and more loyal. Sports teams provide cities the ability to unite communities in ways some cities are not fortunate enough to possess.

This brings me to the second question of my thesis, what does the presence of a sports team provide for a community? Several times in my analysis I have commented on the importance of escape. In the most obvious sense, sports provide an activity of escape in attending an event. However, sports provide escape on several other levels. Wann et. al. (2004) asserts that individuals use sports as an escape from under-stimulation and over-stimulation; boredom and stress. For residents of New Orleans and fans of the Saints, an escape from the stress and pain of Hurricane Katrina's devastation is present, as well as overtly stated in some editorials. Football, in the form of the New Orleans Saints, provided diversion from the resident's newly stressful lives. This directly relates to the sharing of group fantasies in times of crisis. As Bormann (1972) states:

> Against the panorama of large events and seemingly unchangeable forces of society at large or of nature the individual often feels lost and hopeless. One coping mechanism is to dream an individual fantasy which provides a sense of meaning and significance for the individual and helps protect him from the pressures of natural calamity and social disaster. The rhetorical vision serves much the same coping function for those who participate in the drama and often with much more force because of the supportive warmth of like-minded companions. (p.400)

The rhetorical visions constructed about the Saints, combined with the inherent escapist elements of sport described by Wann (2004), allowed residents and community members to cope together and remain a community. The New Orleans Saints provided the link for coping among residents and fans both locally and displaced throughout the nation. References to the Saints and their fans created a bond

and sense of community that allowed for a mass of community interaction and discourse devoid of sharing a location or event.

While there are more abstract concepts of how a team contributes to a community, such as escape and psychological benefits, it is important to also discuss the financial and economic presence of sports teams, as well as the financial benefits of having a strong fan community. The New Orleans Saints' renewals for season tickets in 2006 were four times higher than the year before (AP, 3/3/2006). Jeff Duncan of the New Orleans Times-Picayune reported on April 23, 2007 that, "the Saints have a season-ticket waiting list of 25,000, a sold-out luxury suite inventory at the Superdome for the 2007 season and a ranking among the NFL leaders in merchandise sales." He added, "Katrina didn't kill pro sports in New Orleans. If anything, it rescued them." Duncan also reported that the Saints merchandise sales jumped from ranking 29th to 7th among NFL teams.

This dramatic increase in sales and popularity of the Saints motivated me to pursue an inside opinion about the sudden success of the New Orleans Saints, as a fan favorite, community hero, and economic beacon. Sean Hummel, the FMI Warehouse Manager and Event Merchandising Specialist with Saintsteamshop.com, answered several questions I had in relation to my thesis. First I asked Hummel if he felt there were more Saints fans in 2007 than previously. He responded that Hurricane Katrina provided more awareness because of exposure, but much of the support comes from "home town" pride. Hummel also asserted that the displacement of residents may have influenced new supporters. "I think that the displacement of Saints fans did result in the sharing of joy, despair, and desire Saints fandom offers," Hummel stated.

When asked if team success boosted the sales increase noted in Jeff Duncan's *Times-Picayune* article, Hummel stated, "Team success plays a big part in the role of team merchandise sales; although there are other factors…one must think about why people are wearing the product line (what does it represent?)… so many people wear Saints gear to show regional support." He added, "The 2006 season brought awareness and rebuilt fan support that was scattered after a weird 2005 season."

The most relevant statement Hummel contributed to my thesis was, "Fan support is very important, new recruits are helpful; yet nothing boosts awareness like a winning team, a catastrophic category 5 regional infrastructure destroying hurricane and optimism." Hummel notes that success, Hurricane Katrina, and optimism combined to change the perception and fan support of the Saints. Success is obvious as a contributor to fan support. Hurricane Katrina brought the spotlight to New Orleans. Optimism, however, was established through the chaining of fantasy themes among communities to reach the ultimate rhetorical vision on my analysis, "We Believe."

The third question in my analysis is how does communication about a sports team among fans and community members affect the perception of that team and their fans? The shift from pessimistic to optimistic rhetoric alone in my analysis reflects the power public depictions of teams have on the perceptions of that team. Positive and negative depictions of a team or sports organization can affect how community members perceive players, fans, coaches, and the surrounding community.

The use of language within the editorials illustrates a shift in rhetoric and motives, and explains how a sports team can become a strong representative of a community. Returning to the language tropes provided by Kenneth Burke in my

literature review, the individuals who submitted the editorials in my analysis clearly made use of these language tools. Through portraying new perspectives in fantasy themes, community members were attempting to change current perspectives and characterizations within the community.

Future research

In this study I have elaborated on a under researched topic pertaining to sports teams and fans. Individual psychological motivations, as well as community and cultural motivations, to view, spectate, and become a fan of sports are important areas of research. However, the way fans, community members, and media communicate about sports teams, fans and communities, has a profound effect on those communities and individuals. Sports continue to increase in prevalence in our society as athletes and teams blur the line between sports, entertainment, and celebrity. Fans of sports teams and communities housing sports teams are affected by these growing entities.

The scope of this study, for the purposes of time, accuracy, and concentration, is fairly narrow. Future studies have many areas to apply fantasy theme analysis to the rhetoric provided by sports fan communities. Technological and societal advances in the last few decades have led to blogs, message boards, fantasy forums and many other community spaces. Fans of all sports are able to communicate to larger publics with greater ease, access, and speed than ever before. I am particularly interested in the use of fantasy theme analysis in Fantasy Sports leagues. These leagues typically consist of smaller groups of communities, but can reach a mass public, and share fantasies with heroes, villains, plot lines and settings.

Another worthwhile endeavor would be an analysis of the New Orleans Hornets, of the National Basketball Association, during the same time frames I have categorized. The Hornets, a significantly younger team to New Orleans, have a fan base and community similar to that of the Saints. An analysis of the parallels between the two teams and sports could be an interesting study of separate fan communities and their rhetoric.

One potential area of research that links individual motivations and community rhetoric is the concept of analyzing characters within rhetorical visions. In other words, did the Saints players improve and play better as their public personas became positive and heroic? Are individuals depicted within rhetorical visions affected by those depictions? Are perennial losers unproductive and unsuccessful because they are untalented, or because they are meeting expectations and characterizations within their communities rhetorical vision?

Whether this fantasy theme analysis of a sports community is applied to the rhetoric of another sports community or a fan community of another type, the conclusions and implications within this thesis should provide a relevant example and base for future research. The terrorist attacks of 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the Virginia Tech shooting, are the most recent examples of national crises. In the future it will be interesting to see the role of sports in times of national, local, and community crisis and need.

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