ABSTRACT

THE PERFECT STORM:
A SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS OF THE APOLOGETIC RHETORIC OF HURRICANE KATRINA

by Brianna L. Abaté

This thesis analyzed the rhetoric of President George W. Bush, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco, and New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Using the rhetorical methodology of apologia, six specific artifacts of federal, state, and city/local governments were examined. Analysis suggests implications for the three levels of governments, the study of apologia, as well as future study of natural disaster rhetoric.

Key words: Hurricane Katrina, apologia, rhetoric, George Bush, Kathleen Blanco, Ray Nagin
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CHAPTER 1:
The Critical Problem

The boxes are stacked eight feet high and line the walls of the large, windowless room. Inside them are new body bags, 10,000 in all. If a big, slow-moving hurricane crossed the Gulf of Mexico on the right track, it would drive a sea surge that would drown New Orleans under 20 feet of water. “As the water recedes,” says Walter Maestri, a local emergency management director, "we expect to find a lot of dead bodies." Scientists at Louisiana State University, who have modeled hundreds of possible storm tracks on advanced computers, predict that more than 100,000 people could die. The body bags wouldn't go very far.

--Scientific American, 2001

With winds in excess of 150 miles-an-hour, Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005, flooding nearly 80 percent of New Orleans, Louisiana (Forbes.com, 2005, ¶ 1). The storm ripped through the Gulf Coast devouring a swath of land covering 93,000 square miles. At an estimated $96,000,000,000, it was the costliest natural disaster in American history (Fox Facts, 2006, ¶ 4 & 8). While Katrina was more damaging than any storm that had come before, the conversation in the days that followed turned from dismay at the overwhelming destruction to outrage at the apathy displayed by authorities; the watching world sat aghast as images of New Orleans citizens standing atop their floating roofs awaiting rescue flashed nightly across their television screens. As the body count rose, so too did the chorus of people demanding to know how a foreseen natural disaster left an entire region decimated and a government hobbled. For the first time in recent memory, this brought to the media forefront images of just how wide a gap exists between the American “haves” and “have-nots.” Six months after the storm, the Louisiana Department of Health
(Deceased Reports, 2006, Fig. 2) confirmed that the death toll had reached more than 1,400 with another 100 still missing. A year after the storm, Fox News put the death toll at more than 1,800; an estimated 80 percent of these deaths were residents of New Orleans (Fox Facts, 2006, ¶ 16). Two years later, though the clean-up effort was still underway, 75 percent of New Orleans residents had not yet returned to the city (Lessons Learned, 2006). Amidst the torrent of wind, water, and debris, one question rose to the surface: who to blame?

**The Political Landscape**

Beyond an act of nature, Hurricane Katrina became a powerful political storm. In 2008, America was witness to the still-unfolding fallout from the government’s failure to respond. Katrina’s impact is best understood by examining the American political landscape in 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007. In 2004, after narrowly defeating Massachusetts Senator John Kerry and securing for himself a second term, President George W. Bush led a nation which was bitterly divided along partisan lines.

In 2005, the United States was firmly entrenched in the War in Iraq, an effort for which the Christian Science Monitor reported nearly $186 billion dollars were spent in 2005 alone (Francis, 2005, ¶ 7). While troops were stationed at various locations around the globe, including fighting the “War on Terror” in Afghanistan, the presence of American troops in Iraq raised ire in the most vocal opponents of Bush’s handling of Katrina,

In 2001, when George Bush became president, the Federal Emergency Management Agency issued a report stating that a hurricane striking New Orleans was one
of the three most likely potential disasters—after a terrorist attack on New York City. But by 2003 the federal funding essentially dried up as it was drained into the Iraq War. (Blumenthal, 2005)

In the days and weeks immediately following the storm, criticism grew harsher as many openly asked if the US would have been better-prepared to handle Katrina if resources were refocused domestically.

Amid the admonitions of military presence in Iraq, celebrities rushed to hold a telethon for the victims of Katrina with donations benefiting the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund. In the most memorable clip of the evening’s live telecast, rapper Kanye West, who was paired with actor Mike Myers, departed from the NBC-prepared script and bluntly announced,

> I hate the way they portray us in the media. You see a black family, it says, "They're looting." You see a white family, it says, "They're looking for food." And, you know, it's been five days [waiting for federal help] because most of the people are black. [...] So anybody out there that wants to do anything that we can help -- with the way America is set up to help the poor, the black people, the less well-off, as slow as possible. I mean, the Red Cross is doing everything they can. We already realize a lot of people that could help are at war right now, fighting another way. (de Moraes, 2005, ¶ 9)

After West’s rant, a stunned Myers returned to the NBC script. After Myers finished his lines, West interjected again, “George Bush doesn’t care about black people” (de Moraes, 2005, ¶ 13). This verbal shot-heard-round-the-world was the fruition of what many had already been thinking--
little was done to prevent the Katrina catastrophe because the overwhelming majority of Katrina’s victims were poor and black. Though the telethon netted more than 50 million dollars to help Katrina victims (Musicians, 2006, ¶ 5), West’s comments overshadowed the amount raised. Further intimating the impact of West’s words, NBC nixed the racial outburst from its West Coast feed (de Moraes, 2005, ¶ 19).

Perhaps the most identifiable example of Katrina’s political aftermath came in the 2006 midterm elections. While the War in Iraq was a clear fulcrum in the American shift of opinion, the perception of the federal government’s reaction to Hurricane Katrina as cold and aloof spoke to a general sense of detachment between the government and its people. Heading into the November elections, the Republican Party held a slight lead over Democrats in both the House and Senate, as well as in gubernatorial seats nationwide. To the collective dismay of the GOP, Democrats were victorious in unseating Republicans who had controlled Congress since 1994; Democrats picked up six seats in the Senate and 28 seats in the House (Democrats Retake Congress, n.d.). In 2007, America began gearing up for the 2008 presidential election cycle. This election was unique in that it provided a rare political occurrence wherein the president was term-limited and the sitting vice president announced his decision not to run (Ryan, 2007).

Selection of Artifacts

This thesis will analyze the public remarks (speeches, press conferences, and interviews) made by agents of the three levels of government: federal, state, and city/local. Federal remarks were made by President George W. Bush (and
on his behalf, Director of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and former Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Director Mike Brown). State-level remarks were made by Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco. City/local remarks were made New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin. During the Katrina aftermath, Bush, Blanco, and Nagin were involved in a demonstrable rhetorical relationship of scape-goating, blame, and self-defense. As a response to the fallout, each level of government cloaked itself in apologetic rhetoric and attempted to redirect the spotlight of blame from its own wrongdoing and cast it instead upon the other two. This unstudied situation created an iron-clad triangle comprised of the three levels of government. In its zeal to deny wrongdoing, each government made its case to the American people by employing one or more of the apologetic tactics discussed herein. Using media as their vehicle, agents spun the triangle, and with it, daily tales of blame, obfuscation, and self-preservation, into American living rooms.

At this juncture, a discussion of the premeditated limitations of this work is necessary. I seek only to analyze the specific apologetic remarks as made by Bush, Blanco, and Nagin, and will not explore any similar remarks made by other state or city/local officials in Mississippi, Georgia, or Florida. This focus was narrowed because of the ratio of lives lost, as well as the prevalence of officials’ apologetic rhetoric. More than 1,800 people from the Gulf Coast died as a result of Hurricane Katrina, 80 percent of which were residents of New Orleans (Deceased Reports, 2006). This demonstrated that while hurricanes kill indiscriminately, governmental failings and ineptitude did not. Further, in the days immediately following
Katrina’s landfall, it was Blanco and Nagin who received the lion’s share of the media coverage, whereas officials from other states where Katrina claimed victims, namely, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, successfully avoided the media circus.

To illustrate the triangular relationship between Bush, Blanco, and Nagin, I examine two pieces of federal rhetoric: President George W. Bush’s public remarks made on September 2, 2005, from the Mobile Airport in Mobile, Alabama, and a September 13, 2005, question-and-answer session following a joint press conference from the White House. I will also analyze two state-level artifacts: an August 31, 2005, on-air gaffe by Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco, as well as the Governor’s September 14, 2005, speech to a joint session of the Louisiana State Legislature. Finally, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin’s September 1, 2005, radio interview with WWL-AM will serve as the extant artifact of city/local analysis. The sixth artifact is something of an apparition. Bush’s apology beget Blanco’s apology, and yet, at publication (Summer 2008) Nagin had yet to offer an apology for city/local failings to mirror those of his federal and state counterparts. It is this “ghost” of Nagin’s non-apology which serves as the final artifact of analysis. These six artifacts were chosen to represent the rhetorical situation as created by the agents, (Bush, Blanco, and Nagin) and convey the tenor of lesser pieces of rhetoric in the time period. By examining these remarks, I detail a clear shift in the agents’ apologetic strategies from the days immediately after landfall through the post-Katrina recovery effort in the days and weeks that followed.
Significance of Event

While the three representatives of each government, Bush, Blanco, and Nagin, were the principle agents, an analysis of the Katrina aftermath would be incomplete without discussion of the role of the media in the movement of the triangle. While the media must strive to provide unbiased information, it is important to note that this rhetorical situation would not have occurred without the media in that the media disseminated the messages as delivered by each agent. The agents’ collective conversations and faux pas would have likely remained local events had it not been for said events being broadcast. In a world of 24-hour news cycles, the chaos permeating the Gulf Coast region was not long confined to those directly affected by wind and rain. In the days immediately preceding landfall, television, print, and internet news offered ominous warnings of Katrina’s seriousness. It was that same rapid dissemination of information by which Americans learned that their various leaders were reticent, or altogether unwilling, to accept responsibility for the failings which followed. With the media as vehicle, accusations of blame were cast in all directions producing multiple agents, and thus, overwhelming confusion. Supporting documents illustrate how this triangular relationship created several pairings throughout the unfolding of the Hurricane Katrina aftermath.

New Scientist Magazine dubbed 2005 the “year of the hurricane” because of the seemingly unending season of storms endured by the North American continent. Although natural disasters have grown increasingly commonplace and political discourse happens with such frequency that most Americans cannot be bothered to watch, the collision of
these two events made for “must-see” television. While American political figures of federal, state, and city/local levels of government offer countless remarks on a daily basis, the Hurricane Katrina response created a rare opportunity for these three levels to intersect on the national stage.

In addition to the scientific and economic historicity of the storm, Katrina brought together several societal factors that have long hovered in the periphery of the American lexicon. The 2000 US Census reported New Orleans’ black population was at 67 percent. Further, 30 percent of all New Orleans residents, and 50 percent of Louisiana’s children, were living below the poverty level when Katrina hit (Faw, 2005). While these facts were unknown, or deftly ignored, by most before the storm, the daily barrage of television and print stories, replete with horrific images, brought this disparity to the forefront and bluntly asked if America was a nation of racists when it was revealed that 53 percent of Katrina’s victims, as identified by officials at the make-shift morgues set up at St. Gabriel and Carville, were black (Deceased Reports, 2006). “This natural disaster illustrate[d] what experts have known all along—disasters do not treat everyone alike. Surviving is easier for whites who have than for blacks who don’t” (Faw). Katrina shone a light on weaknesses in American government and did so in dramatic fashion. News outlets showed gripping images of people trapped in deplorable conditions, fighting for food and water, and “looting” to survive. Oddly, these images were accompanied by a striking choice in language unfamiliar to most in the United States. The terms “third world” and, more shockingly, “refugee” frequented nightly newscasts. Before Katrina hit, the terms
“third world” and “refugee” were only used in American media to describe peoples in developing nations—that which was the “other.” During the Katrina aftermath, these terms were derogatorily applied to American hurricane victims. Reporting from the Manhattan studio, Fox News’ Shepard Smith remarked, “although the US can remove the dead, repair the levees, pump out the water and move on,” America would be “forever scarred by Third World horrors unthinkable in this nation until now” (Brooks, 2005).

More horrifying than announcing that Americans were suddenly living in the “third world,” media outlets stopped referring to those affected by Katrina as “victims” in favor of calling them “refugees.” This choice of language sparked debate about the proper terminology by which to refer to those displaced by the storm and the failed disaster response. The Monday following Katrina’s landfall, Reverend Jesse Jackson spoke at the Houston, Texas, Astrodome and announced what many had already been thinking, “It is racist to call American citizens refugees” (Noveck, 2005). The larger implication of the press’ many references to the “third world” and “refugees” was the not-so-subtle reminder that an entire segment of the American population had long been relegated to the societal margins. An op-ed for the Pacific News Service remarked,

...immigrants like me have always been aware of the ‘caste system’ in America. [...] But Hurricane Katrina really brought home to me the heartbreaking fact that the poor of the world happened to be ‘untouchables’ regardless of whether they live in America or India. (Sarvate, 2005)
America, a nation which prided itself on being the “land of opportunity,” was revealed to be a mirage—a land where streets were paved with fool’s gold.

In addition to the gross misuse of language as a means of rhetorically separating poor, black, hurricane victims from “the rest of us,” there existed implications to the larger world, and more specifically, the War in Iraq. After days of watching infrastructure failings and cold, detached government press conferences, the quiet rumblings of a disgruntled America grew into a chorus of outrage. Left-leaning political pundits appeared on television broadcasts and radio talk shows and made the same argument: America was unable to take care of its own people because the nation’s defenders were needlessly in Iraq. Though many Americans had already expressed their frustration with a costly, perceptively partisan, and some say unfounded, war, the events of Hurricane Katrina offered an unique opportunity by which to criticize the US presence in Iraq while couching said comments within the context of focusing on the plight of Katrina’s victims.

The various elements of this analysis revolve around a particular series of events in the unfolding of the Katrina saga. In order to better explore the relationship between federal, state, and city/local governments, as well as a dissection of the rhetoric produced by said agents, a clear timeline of events is requisite. This detailed timeline is necessary in that it establishes the oft-debated events of Hurricane Katrina; the agents and specific actions discussed herein are revisited in the analysis. Amid the fallout, agents of federal, state, and city/local governments disputed the sequence of events to minimize their own failure to respond and maximize the blame aimed
toward the other agents. What follows is a detailed, day-by-day account of the major events of Hurricane Katrina in three distinct periods of time: pre-storm planning, landfall, and aftermath.

**Pre-storm Planning**

On Friday, August 26, 2005, three days before landfall, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) upgraded Katrina to a Category 1 hurricane which was moving across southern Florida into the Gulf of Mexico. Later that afternoon, the NOAA upgraded Katrina to a Category 2 storm with top winds of 100 mph (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 4). The National Weather Service predicted Katrina would continue to strengthen throughout the day. At 5 P.M., Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco ended a conference call with state officials and declared a state of emergency, triggering Louisiana’s emergency response and recovery system (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 5). At 11 P.M., The National Weather Service predicted Katrina’s landfall would hit just east of New Orleans. National Hurricane Center Director Max Mayfield called Walter Maestri, Chief of Emergency Management for Jefferson Parrish, with a frightening analysis, “This is the ‘Big One’[...] I’m as sure as I can be” (Chaos, 2005, ¶ 1).

Two days before landfall, on Saturday, August 27, 2005, at 4 A.M., The Advocate (2005, ¶ 9) reported that Katrina was upgraded to a Category 3 storm with winds topping out at 115 mph. Six hours later, at 10:24 A.M., Governor Blanco asked President Bush to declare a federal state of emergency for Louisiana. Bush later issued a declaration giving the Department of Homeland Security and
FEMA authority to coordinate “all disaster relief efforts” (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 12) and free up federal money for Louisiana. As a direct result of that action, the Louisiana National Guard mobilized 2,000 soldiers and airmen and sent troops to help Louisiana State Police with voluntary evacuations; many citizens chose to rebuff the assistance of local officials and stay in their homes to ride out the storm, thereby negating the best way to prevent death. Just before 1 P.M., Governor Blanco instructed Louisiana State Police to start contraflow on selected interstate highways, in effect doubling the number of lanes that could be used for evacuation (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 16). Meanwhile, Governor Blanco and Mayor Nagin went on television and urged residents, particularly those in low-lying areas such as the 9th Ward, to evacuate their homes; St. Charles and Plaquemines Parrish were issued mandatory evacuations. At 6 P.M., the National Weather Service predicted that the chances of a Category 4 or 5 storm hitting New Orleans were as high as 45 percent (Disaster Response, 2005. ¶ 19). Further, the National Hurricane Service warned FEMA that the storm surge from Katrina would likely top New Orleans’ levee system (Chaos, 2005, ¶10). At 7:25 P.M., Mayfield called Governor Blanco and personally stressed the seriousness of the storm. Moments later, Mayfield called Governor Barbour of Mississippi as well as Mayor Nagin (Chaos, 2005, ¶ 20).

At 1 A.M., Sunday, August 28, 2005, the NOAA again upgraded Hurricane Katrina, this time to a Category 4 hurricane with top winds of 145 mph (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 21). In an attempt to give last-minute shelter to those who stayed to ride out the storm, Mayor Nagin announced that the Superdome would open its doors at 8 A.M.
Ninety minutes later, Nagin ordered a mandatory evacuation of the city with the exception of prisons, hospitals, tourists, officials, and media, and imposed a 6 P.M. city-wide curfew (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 23). During that same address, Nagin reported that buses would be available to pick up residents from 12 sites throughout the city and take them to places of higher ground for refuge, including the Superdome. At 10 A.M., nine hours after the last Category upgrade, Katrina, which continued to pick up speed and strength throughout the day and night, was given Category 5 status—the highest Category for a storm (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 25). While monitoring a press conference by National Hurricane Center Director Max Mayfield, President Bush looked to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Director Mike Brown, who assured the president that FEMA was ready for the storm. At noon Eastern, FEMA sent food, water, and other supplies to various pre-position stations in Georgia and Texas. Search teams were positioned on alert in Florida, Virginia, and Maryland, and 18 emergency medical relief teams were staged in surrounding states. The Louisiana State Police ended contraflow at 5 P.M., after an estimated 500,000 vehicles had been evacuated. At 7 P.M., the National Weather Service predicted the levees would be topped due to the overwhelming storm surge that was expected. Mayfield warned, “All indications are that this is absolutely worst-case scenario” (Chaos, 2005, ¶ 18).

**Landfall**

At 6 A.M., on Monday, August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall near the mouth of the Mississippi River. Though it had weakened slightly overnight, the
Category 4 storm pounded the Gulf Coast causing major damage (Katrina Makes Landfall, 2005). Before dawn, the Army Corps of Engineers received a report from the Industrial Canal’s lockmaster that water was pouring over both sides of the waterway and into Orleans and St. Bernard parishes. Later that morning, the 17th Street Canal gave way, sending the water from Lake Pontchartrain into New Orleans; due to the overwhelming chaos, the breach would not be confirmed by City Hall until many hours later. In the early afternoon, FEMA issued a statement asking first-responders to enter New Orleans, but only if there existed proper coordination between state and local officials. Shortly thereafter, FEMA announced that it planned to send 500 commercial buses to help rescue stranded residents (Washington Monthly, 2005). At 1:45 P.M., President Bush declared Louisiana and Mississippi federal disaster areas; three hours later, Bush held a press conference to allay fears, saying, “For those of you who are concerned about whether or not we’re prepared to help, don’t be. We are. We’re in place. We’ve got equipment in place, supplies in place” (Solomon, 2005, ¶ 4). Katrina continued inland and was downgraded to a tropical storm at 7 P.M. An hour later, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco, called President Bush and asked for help, saying, “We need everything you’ve got” (Chaos, 2005, ¶ 15). At the Superdome, Katrina ripped two holes in the roof, and the National Guard received orders to search the 10,000 evacuees for weapons (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 43). This would later become important as media coverage intensified with reports of rapes and murders at the Superdome.
Aftermath

On Tuesday, August 30, 2005, one day after Katrina made landfall, flood waters continued to rise. Before subsiding, 80 percent of New Orleans was under water (Chaos, 2005, ¶ 39). Early Tuesday morning, Blanco’s office began preparing to implement the use of school buses in the relief efforts. At 3 P.M., the Army Corps of Engineers announced it would attempt to repair the breached levees, while at 6 P.M., The Advocate reported Mayor Nagin warned officials that the water levels would continue to rise and that the many pumping stations around the city would soon start to fail (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 49). After her 10 P.M. visit to the Superdome, Governor Blanco ordered the stadium evacuated, though she gave no timetable for such events. The Superdome population had grown to an overwhelming 20,000 evacuees. The situation at the Superdome, which sustained substantial damage to the roof and remained without electricity, was, in Blanco’s words, “degenerating rapidly” (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 52). Lawlessness ensued as incidents of looting were widely reported at various locations throughout the city. Meanwhile in Washington, FEMA Director Mike Brown announced that workers were to return to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, because conditions at the Superdome were too hazardous for relief workers (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 50). Brown further asked that the White House take over the storm response from FEMA and state officials, while activating the National Response Plan to fully mobilize the federal government’s resources.

Shortly before 1 A.M. on Wednesday, August 31, 2005, FEMA set in motion a plan to deploy a fleet of commercial buses to New Orleans to aid in evacuation (Disaster
Response, 2005, ¶ 53). At 6:20 A.M., Blanco again contacted President Bush asking for reinforcements. She requested 40,000 troops, rescue teams, airlifts, housing, communication, food, water, ice, and buses. Bush announced that he would “cut short” his Texas vacation and fly to Washington to work with a task force that would coordinate 14 federal agencies involved with the relief effort (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 58). President Bush ordered Army Lt. General Russell Honore to oversee military operations. Later that afternoon during a news conference from the White House, Bush announced, “FEMA has moved 25 search-and-rescue teams into the area,” and when asked to comment on the more than 20,000 evacuees stranded at the Superdome, Bush stated, “Buses are on the way to take those people from New Orleans to Houston” (President Outlines, 2005, ¶ 4). Chertoff’s office simultaneously reported that the Department of Homeland Security was “pleased with the response of the federal government” (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 61). Shortly before midnight, 200 FEMA buses were staged a few miles from the Superdome to aid in the mass evacuation, and Blanco issued an executive order which allowed for the commandeering of school buses for use in evacuation efforts. As the day drew to a close, attempts at repairing the breached levees continued to suffer setbacks, and a 200 foot hole in the collapsed 17th Street Canal levee continued to send water from Lake Pontchartrain into the already deluged city (Chaos, 2005, ¶ 46).

Thursday, September 1, 2005, at 7 A.M., President Bush appeared on national television and announced, “I don’t think anybody anticipated the breach of the levees. They did not anticipate a serious storm” (Sherwood, 2005). During a related interview later that morning, FEMA
Director Mike Brown said that he was not aware of the nearly 20,000 people stranded at the Superdome in Louisiana. He later recanted that statement during Congressional testimony, saying that FEMA knew of the stranded evacuees on Wednesday, but could not reach them until Thursday (Brown, 2006). Marsha Evans, President of the Red Cross, asked for permission to enter New Orleans with relief supplies, but was denied permission by state officials (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 66). The President asked Congress for $10.5 billion in emergency assistance for the Gulf Coast community. Thousands of National Guard troops converged on New Orleans to meet Governor Blanco’s call for “no less than 40,000 troops” (Purpura & Anderson, 2005, ¶ 1). By midday, the number reached 13,000; that number increased to 20,000 overnight. Meanwhile, federal officials promised an additional 30,000 troops, 17,000 of whom would be stationed in Louisiana (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 70). The Defense Department assembled a force of nearly 7,000 active duty soldiers, airmen, Marines, and sailors to help FEMA. Johnny Bradbury, Secretary of State Transportation for Louisiana, announced that breaches in the 17th Street Canal were expected to be fixed by Friday afternoon (Murphy, 2005). Mortuary teams assembled at various locations throughout New Orleans in order to deal with the steadily-increasing body count. Blanco and Nagin predicted the death toll could swell into the thousands (Indepth, 2005, ¶ 8).

At 8 A.M., on Friday, September 2, 2005, commercial airliners began flying rescued Katrina victims to FEMA-designated out-of-state shelters. During a morning press conference at the Mobile, Alabama, airport, President Bush praised FEMA Director Mike Brown for FEMA’s role in the
coordination of rescue efforts, joking, “Brownie, you’re doing a heck of a job” (Chaos, 2005, ¶ 54). At 10:40 A.M., the Louisiana State Police estimated that there were between 5,000 and 10,000 people awaiting evacuation at the intersection of Interstate 10 and Causeway Boulevard (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 76). Shortly after noon Eastern, Governor Blanco boarded Air Force One and met face-to-face with the president. During their meeting, Bush asked Blanco to hand over control of the more than 13,000 National Guard Troops and law enforcement officers who were working the storm response. A reticent Blanco asked for 24 hours to think the idea over (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 77). Later that night, the Bush Administration again asked Blanco to sign a memo turning over power to the federal government; Blanco refused. While speaking from the Mobile Airport, President Bush described the initial $10.5 billion aid package as “a small down payment” (President Arrives, 2005, ¶ 3) for disaster relief. Meanwhile, a distraught Nagin broke down during a phone interview with New Orleans-based radio station WWL-AM and lashed out at federal and state authorities, insisting,

They don’t have a clue what’s going on down here. Don’t tell me 40,000 people are coming here. They’re not here. It’s too doggone late. Now get off your asses and do something, and let’s fix the biggest [G]oddamn crisis in the history of this country. (Mayor to Feds, 2005, ¶ 58)

Shortly thereafter, the Red Cross renewed its request to enter New Orleans with relief supplies. State officials told the Red Cross that they would need 24 hours to prepare and provide an escort for the Red Cross’ arrival. Twenty-four hours later however, city-wide evacuation was underway
and the Red Cross was unable to enter New Orleans until October 2, 2005, more than a month after Katrina hit (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 80). That night, a star-studded national telethon in honor of Katrina victims screeched to a halt when rapper Kanye West announced during the live broadcast, “President Bush doesn’t care about black people” (de Moraes, 2005, ¶ 13).

Mid-morning on Saturday, September 3, 2005, chief FEMA coordinator, Bill Lokey, announced that federal agencies were, as many had already suspected, overwhelmed by Katrina’s scope, “It’s beyond our immediate capabilities for sure” (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 84). The president promised 7,000 more Marines and Army troops would arrive within 72 hours (Chaos, 2005, ¶ 62), and FEMA deployed all 28 of its national urban search-and-rescue teams (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 87). By day’s end, and with the assistance of the National Guard, Louisiana State Police, and federal troops, evacuation of the Superdome and Convention Center were completed (Disaster Response, 2005, ¶ 90). Sunday, September 4, 2005, nearly a week after Katrina made landfall, 80 percent of New Orleans remained under water. On Monday, September 5, 2005, the already bruised perception of the federal government took another hit when, as reported by the International Herald Tribune, former First Lady Barbara Bush toured the Houston Astrodome, and, when asked about the conditions inside, stated, “So many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them” (Barbara, 2005).

In the days that followed, the Congressional Budget Office predicted Katrina’s impact would mean the loss of 400,000 jobs in the coming months and would increase
September gasoline costs by as much as 40 percent (Katrina Could Cost, 2005, ¶ 1). On September 8, 2005, the US turned to its NATO allies for assistance for the hundreds of thousands of Americans left homeless by the storm, though many nations complained that they received no answer from the US with regard to what was needed. On September 9, 2005, as a direct result of widespread criticism of the handling of the recovery efforts, Homeland Security Director Michael Chertoff recalled FEMA Director Mike Brown to Washington and turned the relief operation over to US Coast Guard Vice Admiral Thad Allen (FEMA, 2005, ¶ 3). The following day, the Army Corps of Engineers announced that most of New Orleans could be drained within a month, though other, more-ravaged areas would take longer (Coates & Effen, 2005, ¶ 6). Embattled FEMA Director Mike Brown tendered his resignation during Bush’s return trip to the devastated Gulf Coast on September 12, 2005. The White House replaced Brown with R. David Paulison as the official Katrina death toll reached 515 confirmed fatalities. In a surprising turn of events, President Bush addressed federal responsibility for the storm and the mishandled rescue-and-recovery process on September 13, 2005, saying, “To the extent that the federal government didn’t fully do its job right, I take responsibility” (Bush, 2005, ¶ 2). This action prompted Blanco to make a similar admission the following day with regard to state failings, “At the state level, we must take a careful look at what went wrong and make sure it never happens again. The buck stops here and, as your Governor, I take full responsibility” (Blanco, 2005, ¶ 9). On September 15, 2005, just two days after he first admitted responsibility for the federal government’s failings, President Bush addressed the nation from Jackson
Square, Louisiana, and pledged one of the largest reconstruction efforts in history, insisting that the federal government would pay to rebuild the Gulf Coast at the expense of achieving a balanced budget as soon as he had hoped—a move budget analysts predicted would push the federal deficit past $400 billion dollars (Bush Pledges, 2005, ¶ 38).

Selection of Methodology

Hurricane Katrina was an historic event that juxtaposed the competing actions of three governments and their respective agents, making it an important event to study. The rhetoric which grew out of the events of the Katrina aftermath exhibited a demonstrable rhetorical relationship of blame and self-defense as created by the three representative agents. That is, to understand the rhetoric of Hurricane Katrina is to understand it as apologetic rhetoric. This is evidenced in that each agent felt the need to speak out in defense of their actions, even in the absence of formal accusation. This study adds to the body of apologetic research in that it approaches the genre of apologia from a systemic perspective. Whereas all extant apologetic literature examines a rhetorical situation with one accuser and/or one person being accused, this study applies the methodology of apologia to a situation with multiple agents and multiple accusers.

As the events of Hurricane Katrina yielded several rhetorical artifacts, and can itself be considered an artifact, it is imperative that more rhetorical study is undertaken so as to prevent future human-abetted disasters; this analysis undertakes that task. Katrina spawned a series of rhetorical relationships between speakers and
audiences. The initial set up was simple: Bush, Blanco, and Nagin were the primary speakers and the American public served as their collective audience. As the series of events began to unfurl, so too did the configuration of rhetorical relationships. Because each of the involved agents felt the need to defend their actions, and later, those remarks, it is appropriate to view said remarks through the lens of apologia.

In the days immediately following Katrina’s landfall, there existed a triangular relationship of blame between the federal, state, and city/local authorities; each level of government blamed the other two for the egregious shortcomings that played out on the nightly news. In addition to the internal pressures created (and felt) by each government, so too was there an external force which kept the triangle in motion: the media. Media pushed the agent or agents at each side of the triangle for answers while simultaneously reporting that none had done enough to evacuate citizens or bring help to those who were stranded and suffering on the Gulf Coast. This confluence of events resulted in an increasingly complex and rhetorically rich series of artifacts. So unique were these events that the term Katrina can be read as an emblem. Because of the well-documented failings in the 2005 Gulf Coast, the word “Katrina” means far more than the alphabetical name for a hurricane. Years later, “Katrina” still evokes a stirring of emotion and images which continue to underpin the Bush, Blanco, and Nagin legacies. But rather than looking at what the word itself means, this analysis seeks to understand the rhetorical weight of Hurricane Katrina. More specifically, the apologetic rhetoric of Bush, Blanco, and Nagin are analyzed within the timeframe of this event.
Overview of Thesis

In order to better understand the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina, the rhetorical discourse which followed, and the larger impact of both, this thesis is divided into five subsequent chapters. Chapter Two: Review of Literature, offers a comprehensive review of literature in the areas of both corporate and individual/political apologetic rhetoric, as well as the role of media in apologia. Chapter Three: Federal Analysis, serves as discussion and analysis of the remarks made by President George W. Bush on September 2, 2005, and September 13, 2005, as well as supporting comments by Department of Homeland Security Secretary, Michael Chertoff, and former Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Director Mike Brown. Chapter Four: State Analysis, analyzes comments made by Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco on August 31, 2005, and September 14, 2005. Chapter Five: City/Local Analysis, dissects comments made by New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin on September 2, 2005, as well as the conspicuous absence of his apology. Finally, Chapter Six: Conclusion and Implications, offers discussion on the impact of the aforementioned six artifacts on the various levels of governments and the agents involved, in addition to serving as the broader rationale for future systemic apologetic research.
CHAPTER 2:
Review of Literature

Never make a defense or an apology until you are accused.
--King Charles I

In February 2007, the Journal of Applied Communication Research published a special edition to bring together scholarly works that dealt with issues which arose during the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season, “...questions about communication, including media coverage, coordination, leadership, warnings, risk communication, accountability, and explanations, as well as many other issues” (Gouran & Seeger, 2007) were addressed. This approach is similar to the special issue called for by George Ziegelmueller in 1986, as a response to the Challenger Shuttle tragedy. Gouran and Seeger (2007) envisioned this special issue as an effort to focus scholars of applied communication toward understanding and practice of a specific event. Though there exist several applied studies of the communicative aspects of Hurricane Katrina, there are markedly fewer rhetorical studies in the same vein. As the events of Hurricane Katrina were so large and impactful as to warrant a special edition of the Journal of Applied Communication Research, so too would it follow that more rhetorical study should also be undertaken. Before an analysis of the impact of Bush, Blanco, and Nagin’s specific remarks, a rhetorical lens through which to view their words is requisite. My study will examine the events of Hurricane Katrina as apologetic rhetoric. In other words, the rhetorical situation was one of a series of demonstrable, triangular relationships of blame and self-defense. Though I rely on media coverage of Hurricane Katrina for context,
information, and exigency, I do not attempt to analyze said media coverage, but rather to analyze the apologetic discourse in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The rhetorical strategy of apologia has progressed from its Ancient inception through modern American politics, and further distinguishes sub-genres of apologetic discourse by agent, before drawing critical implications.

**Apologia as a Rhetorical Strategy**

Though the concept of apologetic speech dates back to Classical times, it is one of the more ephemeral areas of rhetorical study in that, despite a plethora of research on the topic, a commonly-accepted definition of just what comprises apologetic discourse eludes scholars. So great was this definitional paucity that Edwin Black (1965) criticized the “argumentative” genre as being too broad to adequately contain rhetoric of an apologetic nature. To that end, in their seminal piece of apologetic scholarship, *They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia*, Ware and Linkugel (1973) asserted, apologetical discourses constitute a distinct form of public address, a family of speeches with sufficient elements in common so as to warrant legitimately generic status. The recurrent theme of apology is so prevalent in our record of public address as to be, in the words of Kenneth Burke, one of those ‘situations typical and recurrent enough for men to feel the need of having a name for them.’ (pgs. 273-274)

Beyond a mere definition, Ware and Linkugel offered a framework for the categorization of apologetic discourse in that they pointed to “factors” (pg. 274) which characterize the apologetic form: denial, bolstering, differentiation,
and transcendence. Denial, they argued, is an obvious and important element of speeches of self-defense, however denial as tactic, can only be used in certain circumstances,

One may deny alleged acts, sentiments, objects, or relationships. Strategies of denial are obviously useful to the speaker only to the extent that such negations do not constitute a known distortion of reality or to the point that the conflict with other beliefs held by the audience. (pg. 275)

A second strategy, as determined by Ware and Linkugel, is bolstering; “The bolstering factor is best thought of as being the obverse of denial” (pg. 277). “Bolstering refers to any rhetorical strategy which reinforces the existence of a fact, sentiment, object, or relationship.” While bolstering does not serve to invent an identity in its entirety, it does aim to re-focus public attention to more favorable, past acts. Both factors are “vital to the apologetic form of public address” (pg. 278). Finally, denial and bolstering are “reformative in the sense that they do not alter the audience’s meaning for the cognitive elements involved” (pg. 278). This “reformative” aspect is distinct from the remaining two factors: differentiation and transcendence. Differentiation “subsumes those strategies which serve the purpose of separating some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship from some larger context within which the audience presently views that attribute” (pg. 278). Differentiation is often characterized by the request for a suspension of judgment by the accused until such time that all the facts are made known. Finally, the fourth major factor as indicated by Ware and Linkugel is transcendence; “This factor takes in any strategy which
cognitively joins some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship with some larger context within which the audience does not presently view the attribute” (pg. 280). Like differentiation, transcendence is “transformative” (pg. 280) in that there exists a manipulation of the meaning of the incident as felt by the audience. Downey (1993) argued that in order to fully understand the study of apologia, one must move beyond generic criticism and examine the “functions and not just the forms” (pg. 43) of apologia. She argued that although the genre has undergone myriad changes, it has persevered “because its function has evolved throughout history” (pg. 43).

Citing etymological distinctions, Ryan (1982) suggested kategoria and apologia be studied as a speech set, as the two types of speech are inextricably linked; “both terms should be defined broadly: kategoria as a speech of accusation and apologia as a speech in defense” (pg. 256). Ryan explained, “The Greek noun Kategoria signifies ‘an explanation, charge,’ and the Greek verb kategoreo is defined as ‘to speak against, to accuse,’ and both [...] are noted as the opposites of apologia and apologemai” (pg. 255). Building on Ware and Linkugel’s work, Ryan, in his discussion on an apology for policy, asserted that the above four “factors” are congruent with Cicero’s four stases: The apologist for policy absolves him of the fact (I did not do it), he explains the definition (I did not do what is alleged), he justifies the quality (I had laudable intentions), and he vindicates the jurisdiction (I appeal to a different audience or judge).

Rowland and Jerome (2004) argued that the study of apologia suffers from a lack of “clearly defined categories such as the eulogy” (pg. 191). This lack of cohesion, they
argued, has forced an unnatural split: the study of image repair and image maintenance. To remedy this, Rowland and Jerome suggested a “reconceputalization of organizational apologia,” (pg. 191) whereby apologetic rhetoric must use one or more of four strategies: demonstrating concern for victims, bolstering organizational values, denying intent to do harm, and preventing recurrence by pursing the “root cause” (pg. 202). Demonstrating concern for victims refers not only to those directly harmed by the incident, but also those who were emotionally or psychologically harmed. “In the case of organizational wrongdoing, even if the organization can prove that it was not responsible for the crisis, it still must demonstrate concern for those affected by the event” (pg. 200). A second strategy, bolstering, is the act of re-directing public attention from the crisis at hand to previous examples of “the organization’s commitment to whatever societal value is at stake,” that is, “bolstering the overall values, goals, and mission of the organization” (pg. 201). A third strategy that can be employed by organizations is to deny the organization’s intent to do harm. To restore a tarnished image, organizations “need to reassure the public that the organization in no way intended [...] to negatively affect the public in any way and that it had taken every possible step to avoid negative outcomes prior to the event” (pg. 202). The forth and final strategy as outlined by Rowland and Jerome is preventing recurrence by pursuing the “root cause.” Here, organizations vow to find the responsible party or parties independent of any actual wrongdoing on its part (pg. 202).

Later in their analysis, Rowland and Jerome illustrated that there exists a lack of agreement with
regard to the purpose of apologia, especially in terms of organizational apologia, in that there exists the perception that apologia need occur “only when an actor is perceived as being responsible for some level of wrongdoing” (pg. 195). This notion is echoed in other works (see Benoit, 1995; Hearit, 1995; Seeger & Ulmer, 2002). Nodding again to the work of Ware and Linkugel, Rowland and Jerome point to a common misunderstanding of the fundamental underpinnings of apologetic rhetoric,

What has not been noted is that two somewhat conflicting purposes are common in the category (especially in the organizational variant): presenting justification of action or denial of guilt in the particular case (image repair) and maintenance of an overall positive image (pg. 195).

They went on to note that there exists a shift in priorities with regard to the primacy of apologetic strategies (denial, image maintenance/repair) as each apologetic act is unique to the rhetorical situation. Bitzer (1968) asserted “the presence of rhetorical discourse obviously indicated the presence of a rhetorical situation” (pg. 1). He continued, “In short rhetoric is a [...] creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action” (pg. 3).

The Role of Agents in Apologia

Beyond the general task of identifying a framework for apologia lays the crux of this study—the use of apologetic discourse to achieve a specified goal. By looking at the different types of apologetic rhetoric as well as the ways in which apologia failed or was successful for a particular agent or agents, the events of Hurricane Katrina become

**Corporate Apologia**

Hearit and Roberson (in press) asserted, “regardless of the nature of a crisis there is a communicative dimension, one in which social actors must use apologetic discourse to respond to rhetorical exigencies and audience expectations” (pg. 4). Pointedly, Hearit (1995) identified corporate apologia as “a response to a social legitimization crisis” (pg. 3). Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (2003) offered four crisis types: crises of public perception, natural disasters, product or service crises, and industrial crises.

Roberson (2005) illustrated two broad approaches: shifting attention away from accusations and addressing accusations, as executed by several, more-tailored apologetic strategies organizations can employ. Diversion tactics include: blame-shifting, counter-attack, differentiation, transcendence, bolstering, victimage, minimization, and misrepresentation. Any organization in a crisis state has damage control as its primary goal; herein lays the utility of the attention-shifting strategies. The first strategy, blame-shifting, is the act of shifting negative attention from the organization in question to another source; this is often coupled with counter-attack in that the re-direction of blame often requires naming the
organization on which the fault rests. A second strategy, differentiation, requires the source to draw a distinction between the status quo and the unique situation for which the apology is being called. Transcendence occurs when, instead of directly addressing the accusations, an organization underscores its ethos. The use of bolstering minimizes the current crisis in that it re-directs focus onto the organization’s past virtuous acts. A fifth approach, victimage, portrays the source as martyr—the focus of unwanted and unwarranted attention, either from those doing the actual accusing or from the media. Finally, an organization may opt for minimization, an act that aims to reduce the perception of the size of the crisis. Minimization often works in tandem with misrepresentation in that an organization may portray the current issue as having been blown out of proportion by the media or a competing organization. Each of the six approaches allows the rhetor to key in on a specific aspect of their situation, thereby enabling them to fight the accusation on multiple fronts.

As an alternative to rhetorical acts which shift focus and blame away from the organization, there exist four, more direct approaches whereby an organization can address the accusations levied against it: denial, mortification, corrective action, and compensation. Denial is a direct rejection of the charges at hand (Ware and Linkugel). In direct opposition to a denial of the charges, an organization can choose instead to engage in mortification. This stands opposed to denial in that the organization must first admit its wrongdoing and ask for forgiveness in order for mortification to be complete. A third strategy in which an organization can directly address charges is corrective
action. Here, the organization in question apologizes for its role in the crisis and reassures those affected that preventative measures have been taken to avoid future crises. The final strategy, compensation, occurs when victims receive monetary remittance for the resulting damage of said crisis. Accusation-addressing strategies are best used when a corporation wants a faster, and often more definitive, end to a situation.

While Harrell, Ware, and Linkugel (1975) argued that apologetic rhetoric was in defense of an individual’s character, Ryan expanded the definition to include attacks on character as well as policy. Extending Ryan’s work, Hearit and Roberson noted,

The argument as to whether apologia is about the defense of character or policies is of direct relevance when apologia is applied to the organizational context—in that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate an organization’s actions from its organizational identity; the two are self-reflexive (pg. 5).

This distinction is important in that the rhetoric of an individual agent of the government can be no more neatly removed from the rhetorical situation than can the identity of an organization from organizational action. It is at this intersection that my work begins. As the representative voice of their particular government, Bush, Blanco, and Nagin acted not as individuals who must speak “in defense of themselves,” but rather as agents of a government in much the same way a spokesperson would on behalf of the corporation that employed them.
Individual/Political Apologia

The heuristic value in the above noted strategies is in the way that they are harnessed. In that acts of apologetic discourse, as employed by specific agents, manifest themselves differently, it is appropriate to discuss them in one of two ways: those who admitted wrongdoing (non-denial) and those who did not (denial). Beyond those two initial approaches, there can exist a shift in the tenor of apologetic strategy when an individual chooses, or is forced, to change apologetic strategy in answering the same allegation over a period of time.

Jackson (1956) in his study of the trial of Clarence Darrow noted, “all throughout the trial, Darrow referred to the fact that he was the defender of the poor and the helpless” (pg. 188). This is illustrative of the finesse required to prevent apologetic discourse from turning trite. Darrow’s ability to read his audience and choose the correct strategy was, ultimately, what led to his vindication. Jackson went on to note, “In other words, he was the defender of the underdog. When Darrow was triumphant, all who felt themselves underdogs were triumphant with him.” Darrow’s approach, that is the way he framed his rhetoric as opposed to the actual words he used, was largely responsible for his success.

In the previous case, admitting guilt, or at the very least, some measure of culpability, in the wake of accusations, the apologist was able to save face and, to a large extent, stop the controversy from escalating. Conversely, Congressman Gary Condit’s smug attitude and failure to demonstrate remorse (Len-Rios and Benoit, 2003), much less offer forthright information to authorities, in
the disappearance of, and purported extra-marital affair with, Capitol Hill intern Chandra Levy, all but sealed his fate in the eyes of the public as an uncaring, and likely guilty, participant. Condit, when interviewed by ABC News correspondent Connie Chung, awkwardly changed his answers or “outright refused to answer some questions” (pg. 100). What began as a blanket denial of wrongdoing shrank considerably during the Chung interview as “he was confronted with facts that did not permit him to sustain his broad denial” (pg. 100). Len-Rios and Benoit (2003) went on to note the weakness of Condit’s approach, “This was anything but an effective defense. It is important to note that (some of) these strategies were plausible choices: Condit’s instantiation of them in the discourse was unpersuasive” (pg. 100). The apologetic device of denial is further exemplified in Richard M. Nixon’s “My Side of the Story” speech. Nixon, who in 1952 was named Eisenhower’s vice-presidential running-mate, appeared on a live television broadcast to address charges that he had accepted $18,000 in illegal campaign contributions. Throughout the 12 minute speech, Nixon calmly and systematically addressed the charges against him and succeeded where Condit failed: he offered evidence to support his denial of wrongdoing. Most notably, Senator Nixon told Americans of the pet Spaniel, whom his daughter had named “Checkers,” that he and his family had received while campaigning. Amid the financial disclosures and political talk, this brief mention of the family dog humanized Nixon and was largely credited with saving his career (Ryan, 1982). This “denial of unethical conduct” (Rosenfield, 1968, pg. 436), coupled with the detailed disclosure of his personal finances and the counter-attack
levied against Democratic opponents, were instrumental in keeping his name on the Republican ticket and breathing new life into his political career. While both Condit and Nixon denied the charges against them, Nixon was successful in regaining voters’ trust and Condit lost his seat.

A decided lack of kategoria distinguishes the apologetic strategies of Condit and Nixon from those employed by Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy in response to the Chappaquiddick tragedy (Benoit, 1988). On July 18, 1969, Senator Kennedy attended a party on Chappaquiddick Island near Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts. After the party, as Senator Kennedy drove his secretary back to her hotel, “the car went off Dike Bridge, resulting in the death of twenty-eight-year-old Mary Jo Kopechne” (Benoit, pg. 187). Kennedy failed to report the accident until morning, some eight or nine hours later, after the car had been found and the body removed from it. With the exception of attending Kopechne’s funeral, Kennedy remained in his family home until his speech on July 26, 1969. Though there was no formal accuser in the Chappaquiddick case, the situation none-the-less called for an apologetic answer. The paucity of kategoria meant that Kennedy’s apology would have to address more than a discrete set of charges, “In this case, the ultimate ground of the accusation concerned his actions, the fatal automobile accident, and Kennedy’s subsequent inaction, his failure to report it in a timely fashion” (pg. 189). During his speech, Kennedy informed his audience that he had earlier plead guilty to the charge of leaving the scene of an accident, “While he carefully avoided explicitly accepting responsibility for Miss Kopechne’s death, his statement could be construed as an implicit admission of
responsibility” (pg. 190). His careful construction of the accident as an event caused by the unfortunate alignment of circumstances rather than human error “had the effect of arguing the quality of the act, by pointing to mitigating circumstances” (pg. 191). Kennedy’s demonstration of remorse throughout the speech, coupled with the guilty plea and his willingness to come forth and address, as yet unspoken, accusations was enough to quell the whispers and Kennedy escaped future legal woes. Kennedy also dodged a bullet politically; national polls showed his overall “favorable” rating dropped by a mere nine points, proving “Kennedy’s speech managed to maintain, or salvage, his image with about three-fourths of the public” (pg. 194).

While the majority of agents deny or admit wrongdoing only once, some instances of apologia are insufficient in their first inception. In such cases as these, rhetors are often forced to change their strategies. This can come from internal forces that drive them to cop to the looming charges, or from external forces whereby new facts or allegations arise (via the media or the person making said allegations) that compel the rhetor to again speak on his behalf. Looking at key pieces of evolutionary rhetoric is of particular import in this study, as the following chapters chronicle the shift in apologetic strategies over time in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Kramer and Olson (2002) followed the evolution in apologetic strategy in the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal which cast a pall over the White House during the late 1990s.

Led by Special Prosecutor Kenneth Starr, the Congress, the media, and the public all played multiple roles during this unfolding drama, each acting either by
turn or sometimes simultaneously as accuser, witness, judge. The tenor of accusations changed repeatedly as new evidence against Clinton gradually emerged; each fresh revelation not only complicated the President’s task of offering an adequate self-defense or “apologia,” but also called into question his previous attempts. (pg. 347)

The Clinton *kategoria* proved a challenging charge to answer in that the allegations against President Clinton grew and changed as the scandal unfurled. This progression in *kategoria* called for a progression in the responding *apologia* as well. Over the course of the scandal (1998-1999), Clinton made greater than 20 public statements about his relationship with Lewinski. These statements ranged from “denial to admissions, from assurances of cooperation to questions about the process’s legitimacy, and from calls for national unity to politically divisive counter-attacks” (Kramer & Olson, 2002, pg. 348). The authors argued that this use of a “graduated apologia strategy” (pg. 348) was responsible for Clinton’s political survival of the scandal.

Similarly, the Nixon Watergate scandal showed a progression of apologetic rhetoric in that, Nixon was concerned ‘more by the stupidity of the DNC bugging attempt than by its illegality’ and he hoped no White House people were involved ‘because it was stupid in the way it was handled; and...because I could see no reason whatever for trying to bug the national committee.’ (Smith, n.d.)

As the evidence mounted, it became clear that those arrested in the Watergate Hotel robbery had ties to some high-level staffers within the Nixon Administration. This
revelation of facts contradicted Nixon’s earlier blanket denial, “there was no White House involvement [in the break-in] whatsoever” (Smith, pg. 202). As the saga wore on, Nixon foolishly took steps to aid in the cover-up all-the-while maintaining his (and his staff’s) innocence, and further pledged that he would turn over to the Senate “all necessary and relevant” (pg. 206) documents pertaining to the Watergate break-in (Smith). On April 30, 1973, Nixon told the American public that he had learned of new information in the case and “personally ordered the investigators to get all the facts and report them to me.” Signaling a shift from a strategy of denial towards the accusation-addressing corrective action, Nixon further gave the new attorney general “absolute authority to make all decisions bearing upon the prosecution of the Watergate case” (pg. 208). This new approach undermined Nixon’s earlier denials and served only to personally entrench him in the still-developing scandal. Ultimately, the strategic shift did not serve Nixon as well as Clinton; Nixon became the only U.S. President to resign the office.

The Media and Apologia

Though this is not a media study, it does make extensive use of the media as a means of data collection. The five extant artifacts which will be studied herein were gleaned from print and broadcast media. The media are an oft-overlooked area of apologetic research in that, in most instances, the rhetorical artifacts in question never would have come to light were it not for the ubiquity of the media. Of greater import to this study, the media served not only as the primary channel for the following
apologetic messages as outlined in subsequent chapters, but also in the role of accuser.

In addition to the physical breakdown of communication channels, the Katrina recovery effort experienced a biased shift in media coverage. Waymer and Heath (2007) discussed the effect political fame had on the media coverage of the Katrina crisis by undertaking an analysis of Senators Barack Obama and Mary Landrieu’s entrance into the Katrina discussion. Waymer and Heath (2007) argued that Senator Obama and Senator Landrieu’s remarks used transcendence as a means of rallying support for the cause of Katrina. Further, they argued, this was an effective strategy in increasing media coverage which yielded more national coverage, and thus, assistance. While the bias in coverage Waymer and Heath discussed was beneficial to Katrina victims, Littlefield and Quenette (2007) chronicled the evolution of two specific newspapers as they shifted from unbiased observers to critics in “Crisis Leadership and Hurricane Katrina: The Portrayal of Authority by the Media in Natural Disasters.” By looking at media coverage from the New York Times and the Times Picayune during the first five days after Katrina made landfall (August 29, 2005, through September 3, 2005), Littlefield and Quenette (2007) discussed the shift in blame that took place and what implications such action had on American understanding of the role of the media. Whereas Waymer and Heath looked at the scope of national coverage and Littlefield and Quenette looked at the specific coverage of two newspapers, one local and one national, Procopio and Procopio (2007) focused on the role of the Internet in the Katrina aftermath in “Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans?: Internet Communication, Geographic Community, and
Social Capital in Crisis.” Because of the size and scope of Katrina, tens of thousands of people were left without access to print or broadcast media. Procopio and Procopio (2007) conducted an online poll of 1,200 New Orleans residents in hopes of determining the reason for their Internet usage. They found that the Internet served as a means of information gathering and social support for those who were displaced by the storm.

Gouran and Seeger (2007) noted the many challenges to undertaking an applied study of crisis, namely that a crisis, by its very nature, is time-sensitive, making it difficult to put into place valid instruments of data collection and have the study approved by institutional review boards before the crisis escalated further. In the days immediately following Katrina, much discussion was had about the many communication breakdowns experienced post-storm. Professionals and lay-people alike wondered aloud about the seemingly defunct series of communication networks which hampered recovery efforts. In their article “Emergency Communication Challenges in Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,” Vanderford, Nastoff, Telfer, and Bonzo (2007) looked at the means of information dissemination employed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in times of crisis. The CDC is charged with making sure that information about potential health hazards reached the affected audience so as to prevent wide-spread health issues. Vanderford et al. (2007) found that because the magnitude of the storm wiped out traditional means of mass message dissemination (landline phones, cellular phone towers, internet access, and electricity required for television) victims were unable to receive the information
they needed via the familiar channels they normally turned to in such situations.

Outline of Future Chapters

Extant literature is limited in that it only analyzes single-agent apologetic scenarios—that is, when only one person or organization is accused of wrongdoing and/or one person or organization is making said accusation. In the following chapters, I approach apologia from a systemic perspective by examining multiple-agent apologetic discourse. Bush, Blanco, and Nagin each took turns in the role of accuser and accused. This was further compounded by the accusations leveled against each government, and its representative agent, by the media. Although there exist several rhetorical lenses through which a critic might chose to view the events of Hurricane Katrina, apologia was selected because of its utility and applicability to this unique rhetorical situation. As the following chapters use apologia as a tool by which to dissect the rhetoric of Hurricane Katrina, five key points in the study of apologia should be reiterated.

Since the time of Aristotle, humans have interested themselves with speeches of blame and self-defense. Originally, these two were thought of in terms of two separate occurrences, kategoria, a speech of accusation, and apologia, a speech of self-defense. At the urging of Ryan, scholars have come to consider these two to be inextricably linked as a “speech set.” With a solid foundation for the genre of apologetic rhetoric, other work focused on the strategies employed by those who spoke “in defense of themselves.” Ware and Linkugel identified four “factors:” denial, bolstering, differentiation, and
transcendence, as the ways a rhetor could approach accusations. Though Aristotle’s discussion of apologia was specific to accused individuals, modern scholarship is keen to note that corporations also find themselves in need of apologetic rhetoric. Rowland and Jerome noted that because, unlike the eulogy, apologia lacked “clearly defined categories” (pg. 191), there exists an unnatural split between image maintenance and image repair. Though it is generally accepted that once the apologetic address has been delivered, the attention of the corporation must turn to fixing perception problems, there still exists disagreement as to the best course of action. Their “reconceptualization of organizational apologia” (pg. 191) argues apologetic rhetoric must use one or more of four strategies: demonstrating concern for victims, bolstering organizational values, denying intent to do harm, and preventing recurrence by pursuing the “root cause” (pg. 202).

Just as each individual agent, Bush, Blanco, and Nagin, spoke on their own behalf, so too did they speak on behalf of the government for which they serve as the representative voice. There exists an undeniable parallel between individual/political and corporate apologia in that each agent simultaneously served in a dual capacity. As such, it becomes clear that the areas of individual/political and corporate apologia are not as distinct from one another as has been intimated by previous research. In that the nature of apologetic discourse is more similar than dissimilar with regard to the overlap of the individual/political and corporate spheres, so too can it be seen that the image maintenance and image restoration strategies chosen by an agent (who also speaks on behalf of
a government) are congruous with those often employed by corporations. In the following chapters, I analyze the specific apologetic remarks made by Bush, Blanco, and Nagin by identifying the strategies employed by each in select artifacts. In so doing, I am able to speak to the fruitfulness of said strategies as applied to the rhetoric of Hurricane Katrina.
CHAPTER 3:
Federal Analysis

It's totally wiped out. It's devastating. It's got to be doubly devastating on the ground.
--George W. Bush

As President of the United States, George W. Bush is arguably the most recognizable and influential person in the world. Regardless of the level of agreement with the sentiment expressed, when the President speaks, people listen. Throughout the Katrina crisis, President Bush’s comments were closely monitored by both those inclined to side with him as well as those who were not. As the leader and natural figurehead for the federal government, the president is entrusted with keeping citizens abreast of important situations. This chapter follows the evolution of President Bush’s discourse throughout the Hurricane Katrina aftermath by analyzing two key artifacts through the rhetorical lens of apologia. The first occurred on September 2, 2005, in which the president praised then FEMA Director, Mike Brown for his handling of Katrina. The second artifact occurred September 13, 2005, during a question-and-answer session immediately following a speech welcoming the newly-elected President of Iraq to the White House. Though Bush’s “Jackson Square” address was the more memorable speech, his comments during the joint press conference marked the first instance in which Bush took responsibility for the failings of the federal government in the Hurricane Katrina aftermath. With a better understanding of the context of August 2005, attention can turn to analysis of specific Bush remarks. A chronological analysis of artifacts will be employed to show the shift in
Bush’s apologetic strategy. A discussion of the relevance of Bush’s apologetic remarks follows this chronological analysis.

On July 29, 2005, President Bush left Washington, D.C., for a five-week vacation at his ranch in Crawford, Texas. While a vacationing president would not typically have been a newsworthy event, the president’s trip marked “the 319th day that Bush has spent, entirely or partially, in Crawford—roughly 20 percent of his presidency to date” (VandeHei & Baker, 2005). As Bush’s summer sojourn wore on, Democratic opponents and the media needled him about taking yet another lengthy trip, particularly amid the rising death toll in the “War on Terror,” a situation which was further compounded by the presence of anti-war activist Cindy Sheehan. The mother of a fallen soldier, Sheehan protested outside Bush’s Crawford ranch whenever the president was in Texas (Stevenson, 2005). VandeHei and Baker (2005) also noted that in addition to Bush’s trip to Crawford, “weekends and holidays spent at Camp David or at his parents' compound in Kennebunkport, Maine, bump up the proportion of Bush's time away from Washington even further” (pg. A4). This poised Bush to overtake President Ronald Reagan’s vacation record of 335 days—an all-time high for a US president. However, whereas President Reagan’s 335 days were spread over the course of his eight years in office; Bush’s vacation days were accrued in the course of his first term. Although Bush drew heavy criticism for being on an extended vacation which, “appeared unseemly at a time when U.S. forces are at war in Iraq” (pg. A4), the White House repeatedly spun Bush’s Texas ranch as a lateral move in that the president would
be able to lead just as effectively from Crawford as from the Oval Office (Baker, 2005).

In addition to the sheer number of days Bush was absent from Washington, many Americans were surprised and outraged that the president chose not to end his vacation amid the many warnings of Katrina’s approach. Although the media were saturated with stories of the seriousness of the impending storm, the president remained at his ranch in Texas. On August 31, 2005, two days after Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, the president announced he would “cut short” his vacation and return to Washington—but not before flying to California and Arizona to speak at ceremonies commemorating the end of World War II (Baker, 2005). Amid the presence of anti-war protesters and the devastating storm, presidential aides were “particularly sensitive to the image of a president continuing to vacation amid the hurricane crisis” (Baker, 2005). In 1992, President George H. W. Bush suffered a perception problem when his administration was criticized for a slow response to Hurricane Andrew. Further, George W. Bush drew fire for his aides’ handling of the inherent contradictions within the perception problem. When asked if returning to Washington was a symbolic move, given his ability to work from the ranch, then White House press secretary Scott McClellan flatly denied the assertion, “but he did not explain what difference it would make for Bush to be in Washington” (Baker, 2005).

The political storm did not end once the president left Crawford. Instead of flying directly to New Orleans to survey the damage left in Katrina’s wake, President Bush did a brief “fly-over” of the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast
before returning to Washington, D.C. Commenting on the massive destruction from the comfort of Air Force One, the president quipped, "It's totally wiped out. It's devastating. It's got to be doubly devastating on the ground" (Mississippi Coast, 2005). This perception of Bush’s detachment was reified on September 2, 2005, when he finally touched down in the Gulf Coast region. In his final remarks during a speech from the Mobile Alabama airport President Bush, when talking about the extent of the devastation and his role in the recovery process, remarked, “And I'm not looking forward to this trip. I got a feel for it when I flew over before. [...] And now we're going to go try to comfort people in that part of the world” (Appendix 1, ¶ 14). By referring to his own citizens as “people in that part of the world,” Bush drew greater attention to his apparent ambivalence to the crisis.

**Denial Apologia**

Surrounded by top aides, President Bush addressed a small group of press from the Mobile Regional Airport in Mobile, Alabama, on September 2, 2005. In his four-minute address, Bush gave a brief update on the status of the rescue and recovery and clean-up efforts post-Katrina. This was also the first instance of apologetic rhetoric on the federal level in response to Hurricane Katrina. To that end, President Bush employed several apologetic tactics as discussed in Chapter Two: Review of Literature. Specifically, Bush employed both of the two general strategies identified by Roberson. The president addressed accusations by using corrective action and compensation, and shifted attention from accusations through bolstering and transcendence.
After a predictable thanking of the troops who were doing the actual work, he moved quickly to discussion of officials in the affected states, “I want to congratulate the governors for being leaders. You didn’t ask for this, when you swore in, but you’re doing a heck of a job” (Appendix 1, ¶ 2). This initially set up a rhetorical situation wherein the president applauded the efforts of state and city/local officials. This would become important in the following days as the blame-shifting between federal, state, and city/local officials began.

Bush’s remarks established a job-well-done by Gulf Coast governors. He then connected the good work of others with his own work,

And the federal government’s job is big, and it’s massive, and we’re going to do it. Where it’s not working right, we’re going to make it right. Where it is right, we’re going to duplicate it elsewhere. We have a responsibility, at the federal level, to help save life, and that’s the primary focus right now.

(Appendix 1, ¶ 2)

Here Bush engaged in what Ware and Linkugel identified as “bolstering,” (pg. 277) in that he drew attention to positive acts in the face of criticism. He continued this tack by highlighting the importance of the rescue and recovery process, “Every life is precious, and so we’re going to spend a lot of time saving lives, whether it be in New Orleans or on the coast of Mississippi” (Appendix 1, ¶ 2). This approach allowed the president to play up the good work that had been done with the promise of more to follow, a move which simultaneously boosted his personal ethos as well as that of the federal government. In addition to bolstering, Bush employed a second act of attention-
shifting: transcendence. “Out of New Orleans is going to come that great city again. That’s what’s going to happen. But now we’re in the darkest days, and so we got a lot of work to do” (Appendix 1, ¶ 7). His use of transcendence allowed him to attach himself, and, by extension, the federal government, to the pledge to rebuild the Gulf Coast.

In addition to the attention-shifting strategies employed in the first artifact, Bush also used two accusation-addressing tactics: corrective action and compensation. These two strategies were used in tandem throughout the speech, “We have a responsibility to help clean up this mess, and I want to thank the Congress for acting as quickly as you did” (Appendix 1, ¶ 3). Bush demonstrated corrective action in his clear admission that something needed to be done to fix the many problems experienced by the Gulf Coast. Bush coupled corrective action with compensation when he announced,

Step one is to appropriate $10.5 billion. But I’ve got to warn everybody, that’s just the beginning. That’s a small down payment for the cost of this effort. But to help the good folks here, we need to do it. (Appendix 1, ¶ 3)

Here Bush offered to compensate Louisiana and the Gulf Coast monetarily for what was lost in the storm. While the president’s offer to remit funds was certainly appropriate, the use of corrective action in addition to compensation was requisite to show that the federal government had accepted some responsibility for failings. Extending his remarks, Bush also pledged to correct the problems being experienced in the Gulf Coast region. In response to the charge that food, water, and other supplies were
responsible for a rash of “looting,” Bush announced, “In order to make sure there’s less violence, we’ve got to get food to people. And that’s a primary mission, is to get food to people. And there’s a lot of food moving” (Appendix 1, ¶ 6). In this statement, he acknowledged the problem and offered a solution. Finally, in his concluding remarks, Bush reiterated that steps needed to be taken to right various wrongs as perpetrated by the federal government, “Again, my attitude is, if it’s not going exactly right, we’re going to make it go exactly right. If there’s problems, we’re going to address the problems. And that’s what I’ve come down to assure people of” (Appendix 1, ¶ 13). The president’s financial pledge did not extend to Bush personally; in this capacity, he was speaking only in the role of president. Bush would not accept personal responsibility for several more days.

Non-denial Apologia

As the events of Hurricane Katrina wore on, the agents’ apologetic strategies evolved. On September 13, 2005, the president spoke from the White House in an address welcoming Iraqi President Talibani. A brief question-and-answer session followed the presidents’ planned remarks. The first question posed by a member of the White House press corps asked, “Mr. President, given what happened with Katrina, shouldn’t Americans be concerned if their government isn’t prepared to respond to another disaster or even a terrorist attack?” (Appendix 2, ¶ 42). In his answer, President Bush employed multiple apologetic strategies to underscore his point; among these were one attention-shifting strategy: bolstering, and two
accusation-addressing strategies: mortification and corrective action.

Just as in his September 2, 2005, comments, Bush used bolstering to deflect negative attention from federal failings. Uncharacteristically, Bush’s opening remarks hedged, “I’m not going to defend the process going in, but I am going to defend the people who are on the front line of saving lives” (Appendix 2, ¶ 44). This strategy foreshadowed the apologetic shift that would come. As he continued remarking on the recovery and clean-up efforts, the President commented,

Those Coast Guard kids pulling people out of the—-out of the floods are—-did heroic work. The first responders on the ground, whether they be state folks or local folks, did everything they could. There’s a lot of people that are—-have done a lot of hard work to save lives. (Appendix 2, ¶ 44)

By expounding on the brave work of the first-responders on the ground, Bush was able to point to success stories amid the overwhelming criticism. In so doing, Bush was able to minimize federal failings and attach himself with positive aspects of the storm’s aftermath. Beyond the attention-shifting strategy of bolstering, Bush also employed two accusation-addressing strategies: mortification and corrective action.

During the question-and-answer session on September 13, 2005, Bush, for the first time, addressed his role in the federal failings after Hurricane Katrina. When asked about the government’s readiness for another large-scale disaster, the president responded, “Katrina exposed serious problems in our response capability at all levels of government. And to the extent that the federal government
didn’t fully do its job right, I take responsibility” (Appendix 2, ¶ 43). This admission marked the first time President Bush personally acknowledged his role in Katrina’s failings, an action which completed the apologetic cycle via mortification. Once mortification had occurred, Bush used one final strategy: corrective action. In pledging to cure the ills of the federal government’s role in Hurricane Katrina, Bush hinted toward the conspicuous absence of sufficient answers, “I want to know what went right and what went wrong. I want to know how to better cooperate with state and local government, to be able to answer that very question that you asked” (Appendix 2, ¶ 43). Bush reiterated his zeal to bring answers to the many questions which resulted from the government’s failed handling of Hurricane Katrina and demonstrated his willingness to accept responsibility for himself and the federal government simultaneously. Further underscoring his seriousness, Bush continued, “It’s a very important question. And it’s in our national interest that we find out exactly what went on and—so that we can better respond” (Appendix 2, ¶ 43). This sentiment was stressed two days later when President Bush addressed the nation from Jackson Square, Louisiana, pledging to rebuild the Katrina-ravaged Gulf Coast.

Conclusion

As leaders of the federal government, presidents shoulder the burden of public perception and blame in the wake of disasters on the scale of Hurricane Katrina. Throughout his apologetic remarks, the president also committed several errors in rhetorical judgment—errors which all but blunted the intended positive effects of his
words. Even before the deluge of Katrina-related rhetoric began, President Bush was resolute in his stance that the federal government had taken appropriate measures to head off any problems Hurricane Katrina might cause, “For those of you who are concerned about whether or not we’re prepared to help, don’t be. We’re in place. We’ve got equipment in place, supplies in place” (Solomon, 2005, ¶ 4). However, the chorus of criticism grew as events unfolded and it became clear that the federal government was less prepared to handle a storm of Katrina’s scope than was originally announced. On September 1, 2005, President Bush announced, “I don’t think anyone anticipated the breach of the levees. They did not anticipate a serious storm” (Sherwood, 2005), even though there were several reports of Bush and the federal government being warned on several occasions well ahead of time. As a result of these rhetorical incongruities, officials were called to testify before Congress regarding the series of communicative breakdowns which occurred in the wake of Katrina. This was particularly evident in statements made by former FEMA Director Mike Brown, whose Congressional testimony contradicted earlier statements about the estimated 20,000 people stranded at the Superdome and the Convention Center. Originally, Brown said that he had not learned about the situation until Thursday, September 1, 2005, but President Bush had already responded to questions about the situation a day earlier, saying, “Buses are on their way to take those people from New Orleans to Houston” (President Outlines, 2005, ¶ 4). As this timeline disparity was widely reported, Brown was forced to recant his previous statement when he testified before Congress.
Once rescue-and-recovery was under way, and it was clearly evident that disaster-response teams were not moving quickly enough, the president publicly supported FEMA Director Mike Brown, saying, “Brownie, you’re doing a heck of a job. The FEMA director is working 24--(applause) --they’re working 24 hours a day” (Appendix 1, ¶ 12). This sound bite was replayed several times in the following days as the staggering ineptitude of Brown and FEMA came to light. (Amid FEMA’s bungling of the recovery process, the media began digging into Brown’s professional history. *Time* Magazine uncovered several false claims on Brown’s résumé (Fonda & Healy, 2005) which led many to wonder how closely the White House vetted Brown before his 2003 promotion to director.) Though unfortunate for the Bush camp, this was not the president’s only misfire in rhetorical judgment. Also in his September 2, 2005, address at the Mobile Airport, the president, when speaking of the massive clean-up effort that lay ahead, remarked,

> We’ve got a lot of rebuilding to do. First, we’re going to save lives and stabilize the situation. And then we’re going to help these communities rebuild. The good news is--and it’s hard for some to see it now--that out of this chaos is going to come a fantastic Gulf Coast, like it was before. (Appendix 1, ¶ 5)

While seemingly measured, these comments were all but nullified in the next sentence, “Out of the rubbles of Trent Lott’s house—-he’s lost his entire house—there’s going to be a fantastic house. And I’m looking forward to sitting on the porch” (Appendix 1, ¶ 5). Though this comment would have been humorous in private, it was, in context, wildly inappropriate. Given the overwhelming and
unprecedented damage of the storm, and especially the number of poverty-stricken people who were still awaiting rescue at the time of Bush’s speech, commenting on the destroyed home of a wealthy government official, the president seemed callous and out of touch.

Even Bush’s apology was not free from questionable retort. During the September 13, 2005, question-and-answer session in which the president first took responsibility for the federal government’s failings, the president again let his penchant for snark get the better of him. After answering the Katrina-related question, the press corps moved on to Preside Talibani of Iraq. Speaking in Arabic, a reporter asked, President Talibani about the escalation of pressure in Syria. President Talibani turned to President Bush and asked, “May I?” to which President Bush responded, “Please, yes. You might want to try it in English.” Amid laughter of the press corps, President Talabani responded, “Well, I say it in Iraqi because the question was in Arabic,” to which Bush replied, “Oops.” The press corps continued their laughter as President Talibani resumed answering the question. Once finished, a jocular President Bush said, “I’m not sure if I agree, or not, but…” before resuming his answer (Appendix 2, ¶ 49-54). Openly mocking the language barrier between himself and the leader of another nation (particularly one with whom the US was at war) in the same breath as apologizing for the massive failings of the federal government served only to underscore Bush’s flippant attitude toward the crisis.
CHAPTER 4:
Analysis of State Apologetic Rhetoric

At the state level we must take a careful look at what went wrong and make sure it never happens again. The buck stops here, and as your governor, I take full responsibility.
--Kathleen Blanco

Though Bush, Blanco, and Nagin were permanent television fixtures in late August and early September 2005, Blanco’s discourse lacked the sound-bite producing verbal fireworks displayed by her federal and city/local counterparts. Blanco granted several interviews wherein she calmly recounted her request for President Bush to send “everything you’ve got.” After days of denying her role in Katrina’s catastrophic aftermath, Blanco’s rhetorical strategy was forced to change when she was caught in an unguarded moment on live television. To follow the evolution of Governor Blanco’s remarks, I analyze two specific artifacts. First, an on-air gaffe from August 31, 2005, and second, a speech delivered to a joint session of the Louisiana State Legislature on September 14, 2005. A chronological analysis of artifacts has been employed to show the shift in Blanco’s apologetic strategy from denial to non-denial. Discussion of the relevance of Blanco’s apologia follows this chronological analysis.

In order to better understand the governor’s remarks, it is necessary to first have discussion of the rhetorical situation which gave rise to Blanco’s comments. In the days immediately preceding Katrina’s landfall, Governor Blanco appeared on television to keep Louisianans abreast of the situation. Blanco was in contact with Max Mayfield, Director of the National Hurricane Center, who warned the
governor of the impending danger of Katrina’s landfall. Meanwhile, Blanco and Nagin went on television warning citizens in low-lying parishes of the danger that lay ahead, and ordered mandatory evacuations for those in parishes closest to the Gulf; parishes further inland were issued voluntary evacuations. To that end, she ordered the Louisiana State Police to start contraflow on highways and further asked the president to declare a state of emergency. According to interviews given in the days following Katrina, Blanco repeatedly said she had asked the president to “send everything you’ve got.”

Denial Apologia

Since the Katrina aftermath began, Blanco maintained she had done everything in her power to ask the federal government for the help Louisiana would need to evacuate citizens and prepare for landfall. On Wednesday, August 31, 2005, Blanco contradicted herself during a series of affiliate interviews when she was caught on a live microphone speaking to her press secretary, Denise Bottcher. Between satellite feeds, Bottcher and Blanco were discussing reporters’ questions about the timeline of the governor’s calls for help, when Blanco admitted, “I really need to call for the military.” Bottcher responded, “Yes you do, yes you do,” Blanco suggested, “I really should have started that in the first call” (Appendix 3, ¶ 2-4). The governor’s accidental words were far weightier in that this admission came during an “unguarded moment” as opposed to a prepared statement. It can be concluded, therefore, that this admission was closer to the truth than the countless interviews Blanco had given in the days before. After days of denying that she was at all complicit in the
failings of infrastructure with which Louisiana seemed rife, Blanco, in an off-hand comment appeared to admit that she knew more than she had originally let on. This event irrevocably changed Blanco’s apologetic strategy because she was no longer in a position to deny that she could have done more to induce the arrival of federal resources.

Non-denial Apologia

Blanco’s on-air gaffe, coupled with the apologetic turn taken by President Bush, compelled a similar change in the governor’s rhetoric. One day after President Bush took responsibility for federal failings in the Katrina aftermath, Governor Blanco addressed a joint session of the Louisiana State Legislature. The September 14, 2005, speech was Blanco’s attempt at a premeditated admission of culpability. Like Bush, Blanco employed both accusation-addressing and attention-shifting strategies. Blanco’s second address utilized corrective action and compensation as accusation-addressing strategies, and differentiation, transcendence, and blame-shifting/counter-attack as strategies of attention-shifting.

Although the aim of this speech was to apologize for her role in the Katrina crisis, Blanco used several attention-shifting strategies in her address. Unsurprisingly, she, like President Bush, used differentiation to underscore the uniqueness of Katrina. Both were wise to use this strategy in that the scope of Katrina was undeniable. “Nearly two weeks ago, Katrina tore across Southeast Louisiana leaving a path of physical destruction and human tragedy unprecedented in our nation’s history” (Appendix 4, ¶ 4). Blanco later reiterated this point, saying,
The destruction is almost beyond comprehension: We’ve lost hundreds of our loved ones. Entire communities have been destroyed. Businesses, wiped off the map. Families separated. More than a million people displaced from their homes. But even as we continue to recover from the worst natural disaster in our nation’s history, the people of Louisiana stand tall.

(Appendix 4, ¶ 8)

In addition to echoing the historicity of the storm’s magnitude, so too did Blanco use differentiation to remark on the human toll of Katrina, “America has never confronted a housing crisis of this magnitude” (Appendix 4, ¶ 30). With the difference between Katrina and previous disasters firmly established, Blanco used transcendence to link herself and her actions with the positive aspects of the handling of the Katrina aftermath. “One thing I know, in order to rebuild this state, all levels of government must work together, as never before, with one purpose—the well-being of our people” (Appendix 4, ¶ 18). In this, Blanco co-opted the general sense of goodwill that Americans feel in times of crisis. She continued, “I ask you to join me in this endeavor. We need your courage and your energy to rebuild, restore, and reinvigorate our damaged communities and economies” (Appendix 4, ¶ 18). Beating the drum of togetherness, Blanco went on to talk about the rebuilding process, “New Orleans and the surrounding parishes may be ravaged but our spirit remains intact. To anyone who even suggests that this great city should not be rebuilt, hear this and hear it well: We will rebuild” (Appendix 4, ¶ 19). This was a clever strategy in that Blanco was able to simultaneously put her support behind the rebuilding efforts while issuing a slap at those federal officials who
wondered aloud if the Gulf Coast was worth the cost of the reconstruction effort. Further, Blanco drew parallels between previous large-scale disasters and Hurricane Katrina, saying, “Americans rebuilt Washington after the British burned it to the ground. We rebuilt Chicago after the great fire. We rebuilt San Francisco after the earthquake. And we are rebuilding New York City after 9/11” (Appendix 4, ¶ 20). This was a peculiar tact in that she had just used differentiation to draw attention to the uniqueness of Hurricane Katrina, but followed up those comments by listing catastrophes that were, at their time, also unique. “We will rebuild New Orleans and the surrounding parishes, because that is what Americans do” (Appendix 4, ¶ 20). Finally, Blanco’s last use of transcendence highlighted the lessons learned from Katrina, We must rebuild our communities. We have to build them stronger than ever before. Any good architect will tell you that you don’t restore a structure without correcting its flaws, but you restore it in a way that improves the original design while preserving its unique character and spirit. (Appendix 4, ¶ 32)

Her comments were a nod toward the mistakes made by creating a parallel between the requisite teamwork between federal, state, and city/local governments with the actual, physical work necessary to rebuild.

In her singular, pointed accusation against the other two governments, Blanco used blame-shifting/counter-attack to divert attention from failings at the state level, saying, “We all know that there were failures at every level of government: state, federal and local” (Appendix 4, ¶ 9). This statement reinforced that while Blanco made mistakes on behalf of the state of Louisiana, so too were
mistakes made by President Bush and Mayor Nagin. Highlighting these mistakes in this way lumped Blanco, and the actions of the state of Louisiana, in with the other agents represented by the triangle, thus ensuring she would not shoulder the burden of blame alone.

In addition to the attention-shifting strategies employed, Blanco also used two accusation-addressing strategies: corrective action and compensation. In that the failings of the Katrina response were well-documented by the time of Blanco’s address, it was predictable that she would use her rhetoric to suggest solutions to the problems faced by the Gulf Coast and pledge to prevent them from occurring in the future. Blanco began by announcing that she would “not rest until every Louisiana family and community is reunited” (Appendix 4, ¶ 7). She wisely chose to talk first about the people who had been affected before turning her attention to money. After laying out the magnitude of the rebuilding effort and the many millions of dollars needed to undertake it, Blanco promised fiscal responsibility in the handling of said funds, preemptively warning against potential allegations of misappropriation, saying,

I assure the Congress and every American taxpayer that every nickel will be properly spent. I will appoint an outside financial accountability advisor, someone of unquestioned character and reputation, to work with our Inspector General, Legislative Auditor, and Commissioner of Administration to safeguard this investment. (Appendix 4, ¶ 22)

The final accusation-addressing strategy employed by Blanco was compensation. Seen as an extension of corrective action, compensation goes a step further than merely laying
out the ways in which the accused plans to make amends, via a payout. Blanco noted that in order to rebuild the infrastructure and economy of Louisiana, it was necessary to get money into the state as soon as possible,

I have called upon FEMA to not only look first at Louisiana’s businesses, but to put—to pay them in a timely fashion and not force them to wait the usual six months. They will not survive without this consideration. (Appendix 4, ¶ 28)

Finally, in her pledge to rebuild levees and bridges, Blanco told the joint session, “To do this, I’ve asked the federal government to cover 100 percent of what Louisiana will spend on this disaster—just as was done after 9/11” (Appendix 4, ¶ 21). In the course of her address, Blanco twice tied the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Though seemingly unrelated, this was a wise strategy in that she was able to link the shared feeling of frailty which resulted from the two events. Such a move allowed Blanco, and the events of Hurricane Katrina, to borrow the pathetic power of 9/11.

**Conclusion**

Though her initial foray into the national limelight was markedly less dramatic than that of Mayor Nagin, Blanco may well be remembered as the scapegoat of Katrina. While the governor was less dramatic than her federal and city/local counterparts, her accidental remarks forever changed the story, and with it, the tenor of apologetic rhetoric in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Whereas Blanco was originally the least vocal agent of the triangle, once Katrina made landfall, the media speculation of Blanco’s acts of incompetence swelled into full-blown kategoria.
Further, Blanco’s hat-in-hand approach to the joint session of the Louisiana State Legislature all but sealed her political fate. Although she was only in her first term, Blanco did not seek re-election—a rare move for a politician. Blanco’s action should be read as a silent admission of guilt. By not running, she chose a preemptive, self-inflicted wrist-slap to the more public embarrassment of the ballot box.
CHAPTER 5: Analysis of Local Apologetic Rhetoric

Get off your asses and do something, let’s fix the biggest Goddamn crisis in the history of this country!
--Ray Nagin

In a nation of 50 states and countless government officials, little public attention is paid to municipal levels of government and their agents. With the exception of New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago, mayors rarely make national news, save for times of extreme circumstance or disaster. The previous two chapters examined federal and state agents as their apologetic rhetoric evolved from denial to non-denial. This chapter will analyze New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin’s September 2, 2005, phone interview with New Orleans WWL-AM. Unlike his federal and state counterparts, Nagin has yet to offer an apology for his role in the city/local level failings of the Hurricane Katrina aftermath. Even under the weight of three years of speculation, investigations, and media reports, Nagin has not completed the apologetic shift as demonstrated by Bush and Blanco. It is this decided lack of apology which will serve as the sixth and final artifact of analysis.

While President Bush was at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, and Governor Blanco was attending to state-wide issues, Mayor Nagin was on the ground in New Orleans. Like Bush and Blanco, he too was in contact with Max Mayfield, as well as various other federal and state officials. Upon receiving word from Mayfield of the seriousness of the storm, Nagin ordered a mandatory evacuation for New Orleans on August 28, 2005, the day before Katrina hit. He further made available various places of temporary shelter for
those who had not left the city, including the now-infamous Superdome. Nagin’s location during the storm made him unique in the eyes of the public. When Hurricane Katrina hit, President Bush was in Texas; Mayor Nagin was in New Orleans. Nagin’s appearance of being “in the eye of the storm” made him seem heroic where Bush, by contrast, sat safely coddled in his Secret Service-protected Crawford compound. This image disparity afforded Nagin greater license for emotional outburst than would have been tolerated from the president, as was evidenced by his expletive-laden radio interview.

**Denial Apologia**

In his September 2, 2005, phone interview with New Orleans’ WWL-AM radio, Mayor Ray Nagin lost his cool. Four days after landfall, the Gulf Coast was in chaos; scores of citizens were still awaiting rescue as the body count continued to rise. Like his federal and state counterparts, Nagin used multiple apologetic strategies. But, unlike Bush and Blanco, who alternated between harsh and softer apologetic strategies, Nagin’s comments were markedly more aggressive. He was also unique in that his comments did not make use of both accusation-addressing and attention-shifting strategies, but instead employed only accusation-shifting strategies: blame-shifting/counter-attack, victimage, and bolstering.

Nagin’s first words were of attack. The interviewer asked mayor Nagin about any contact he may have had with the president, “I told him we had an incredible crisis here and that flying over in Air Force One does not do it justice,” Nagin said of President Bush’s ill-advised fly-over (Appendix 5, ¶ 1). He continued, “And they don’t have
clue what’s going on down here. They flew down here one time two days after the doggone event was over with” (Appendix 5, ¶ 3). Right away, Nagin’s tone distinguished itself from those of Bush and Blanco. His displeasure with the president’s tactics extended beyond Bush’s fly-over; when speaking of the federal government’s decidedly sunnier outlook on the breached levee system, Nagin snapped, “I flew over that thing yesterday, and it’s in the same shape that it was after the storm hit” (Appendix 5, ¶ 28).

Referencing the federal government’s initial relief that the levee system had withstood the storm, Nagin continued his attack by pointing out apparent federal ineptitude, “There is nothing happening. And they’re feeding the public a line of bull and they’re spinning, and people are dying down here” (Appendix 5, ¶ 28). Here Nagin’s attack was two-fold: first, he argued that the federal government did not fully understand the situation, and thus, were not doing enough to help, and second, federal agents were making calculated remarks about their actions by putting a positive spin on a deleterious situation. Nagin’s final blame-shifting/counter-attack strategy openly questioned the role of government in the disaster,

And I don’t know whose problem it is. I don’t know whether it’s the governor’s problem. I don’t know if it’s the president’s problem, but somebody needs to get their ass on a plane and sit down, the two of them, [referring to Bush and Blanco] and figure this out right now. (Appendix 5, ¶ 50)

Interestingly, Nagin drew attention to federal and state responsibilities that were, in his estimation, failing, but did not mention city/local responsibilities. His comments were well-taken, however, as his words echoed the thoughts
of millions of Americans who wondered why the president was reluctant to invoke the supremacy clause and take over rescue-and-recovery operations on the ground.

After solidly attacking federal and state governments, Nagin bolstered the actions of the city/local government. Nagin’s words defended the lawlessness of the city, or, more specifically, the inability of the local government to keep control of New Orleans. Responding to questions about “looting” and violence, Nagin said,

You know the reason why the looters got out of control? Because we had most of our resources saving people, thousands of people that were stuck in attics, man, old ladies. You pull off the doggone ventilator vent and you look down there and they’re standing in there in water up to their freaking necks. (Appendix 5, ¶ 2)

This tactic emphasized the heroics of the men and women working in New Orleans, and simultaneously painted a picture of federal and local officials as lazy and inept. Finally, Nagin, in contrast with Bush and Blanco, also used victimage to shift attention. Commenting on the city which had reportedly been overrun with “looters” and “criminals,” Nagin painted New Orleans as the victim of wide-spread governmental failing, “We called for martial law when we realized that the looting was getting out of control” (Appendix 5, ¶ 33). Nagin’s words coupled with his empathic tone made him seem as if he were a man trying to hold his beloved city together with both hands. He continued, “And we redirected all our police officers back to patrolling the streets. They were dead-tired from saving people, but they worked all night because we thought this thing was going to blow wide open last night” (Appendix 5, ¶ 33).
Nagin painted the “looters” themselves as victims, saying, “They’re showing all these reports of people looting and doing all that weird stuff, and they are doing that, but people are desperate and they’re trying to find food and water the majority of them” (Appendix 5, ¶ 35). This portrayal of New Orleans citizens as ordinary people who were forced to fight for survival painted one of the most compelling narratives of the Katrina aftermath.

**Non-denial Apologia**

Thus far, this study has analyzed the shift in apologetic rhetoric in federal and state levels of government. Both began with the agent’s denial apologia, before moving on to their respective rhetorical turns. While Bush’s apologetic turn beget Blanco’s, Nagin seemed altogether unresponsive to the flood of criticism against him. Though he had appeared on television several times in the nearly three years since Katrina, Nagin has yet to answer for city/local failings. It is this conspicuous silence that speaks far louder than the five extant artifacts. Nagin’s reticence, or outright refusal, to publicly apologize for his role in Katrina served only to reinforce the ethos of Bush and Blanco. Though Nagin clearly looked more involved in trying to contain the chaos of Katrina’s aftermath than did Bush or Blanco, the obvious absence of an apology from the city/local level blunted the work he did. Had Nagin apologized for his missteps, he may well have been remembered as the heroic man who led New Orleans through crisis, but rather his apologetic paucity made him appear petulant.
Conclusion

Several complex problems beset the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Though each agent initially denied that their government was in any way responsible for the failings of Katrina, none could reasonably maintain deniability as more facts came to light. Wherein Bush and Blanco each offered public apologies for the failings of their governments, Nagin did not respond in turn, a move which made him appear ever-more guilty.
CHAPTER 6:  
Conclusion and Rhetorical Implications

An apology is a good way to have the last word.  
--Anonymous

While it is natural to get caught up in the emotion, dramatic stories, and surreal images of late August 2005, Hurricane Katrina’s larger impact is far denser than its compelling narrative. The systematic failure of three distinct, yet interrelated, governments must be explored in order to prevent future human disaster. Because of the agent-rich nature of Hurricane Katrina, it is proper to have discussion of both the short- and long-term implications for the three levels of government discussed herein. Beyond the many political implications, Hurricane Katrina shone a light on under-discussed societal factors in America. Media coverage of Hurricane Katrina was peppered with questions and allegations about glaring socio-economic and racial divisions. This chapter draws critical conclusions with regard to the three levels of governments and the media, as well as the impact on the study of apologia and areas for future research.

Amid the many elements of the storm and its aftermath lurked one central question: who to blame? The triangular rhetorical pattern of Hurricane Katrina created a media event which wore on for several weeks. The media were saturated with accusations and denials from federal, state, and city/local officials involved in the Katrina crisis. Just as the rhetoric of each government was analyzed independent of the other two, so too is it important to discuss the implications of each intricately-connected government in turn, as the effects felt were unique to the
respective governments. These effects are especially important in that America is heading into the 2008 presidential election. As the inevitable and fundamental debate between Democrats and Republicans on the ideal size and scope of the federal government rages, the role of the various levels of government in disaster preparation and relief is sure to be a campaign issue. Because the events of Hurricane Katrina were a large contributor to the Democrats’ reclaiming of Congress in the 2006 midterm elections, it is likely Democrats will again seize the opportunity and use the events of Katrina to paint Republicans as out of touch with mainstream America and altogether disinterested with the plight of its citizens.

**Political Implications**

The federal government was the most visible institution during the Katrina crisis and thus had the most to lose. Most of the early flack of the failed rescue and recovery effort fell at the feet of President Bush. Hundreds of scolding media stories outright blamed Bush and the federal government for the ensuing crisis. On September 18, 2005, *Boston Globe* columnist Aline Kaplan noted,

> In times of national crisis, the people of the United States look to the president for command, reassurance, and hope. They want to see someone who stands tall, takes charge, tells them the truth, and makes them feel like they are better people than they are. In this crisis, George W. Bush failed the perception test. (Kaplan, 2005, ¶ 3-4)

Plainly put, in his Air Force One fly-over, Bush looked like a cold, unfeeling oligarch as he continued his month-long vacation at his Crawford, Texas, ranch until it was
“cut short” on Wednesday, August 31, 2005—two days after Katrina hit New Orleans. His reticence to immediately attend to the situation in person coupled with the photos of a perceptively detached president flying over an annihilated Gulf Coast cemented Bush’s negative public image. This was in stark contrast to Bush’s handling of the series of hurricanes that hit the Floridian peninsula in 2004 during which time Bush appeared actively involved in getting help to the hard-hit region. This drew particularly harsh criticism in that President Bush’s brother, Jeb, was then Florida’s governor. Bush’s problems were further compounded by the ongoing shift in apologetic strategies which plagued the federal government as word began to spread of the myriad failings in the Katrina recovery. Federal officials’ remarks turned from blame-shifting to obvious finger-pointing as the saga wore on. Most notably, disgraced FEMA Director Brown publicly called for the resignation of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff; this came directly on the heels of Brown’s forced resignation from FEMA.

As weak executives, the actions of governors rarely make national news. Most Americans had likely not heard of Kathleen Blanco until Katrina began looming in the Gulf of Mexico. Whereas President Bush was in no danger of losing a re-election bid, Kathleen Blanco was in her first term as governor when Katrina hit in August 2005. Initially, Blanco was the least vocal agent of the apologetic triangle—-that is until it was revealed that she was more responsible for failings than was earlier believed. Her on-air gaffe created a media firestorm of questions and accusations as people openly wondered if Blanco had also mislead them on other occasions. After her mortification on September 14,
2005, Blanco made a rare choice for a politician—she declined to ask the people of Louisiana to re-elect her. Choosing not to ask for a second term should be read as a de-facto admission of guilt—a way for her to fall on the sword before having her head handed to her by the constituency. Former Republican State Representative Bobby Jindal, a vocal opponent of Blanco throughout the unfolding of the events of Hurricane Katrina, beat 11 fellow gubernatorial contenders to take Blanco’s seat on Monday, October 22, 2007. His campaign ran an “if you got a do-over, who would you choose?” strategy. Jindal, America’s first Indian-American governor, enjoyed political acclaim for his criticism of Blanco and his zeal to prevent mismanagement of funds for the rebuilding effort. So popular was Jindal in the Republican Party that he preemptively declined to be considered as a potential 2008 vice presidential running mate to Republican presidential nominee John McCain (Jindal, 2008).

Like Governor Blanco, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin was virtually unknown on the national stage when Katrina became a hurricane. Blanco and Nagin’s political lives were also analogous in that both were in their first terms when Katrina hit. Nagin won re-election quite handily, but the majority of New Orleans residents were still displaced at the time of the election and, because many had lost documents in the storm, they were unable to prove residency or voter registration. Though still in his second term (in summer 2008), Nagin faced a great many political problems in the wake of Katrina. In the early days of the Katrina saga, President Bush appeared aloof and Governor Blanco stayed out of the limelight. In contrast, Mayor Nagin drew empathy with tear-filled tirades which endeared him to
Americans as yet another victim of a destructive storm—a man who was trying against all odds to get the help he so desperately needed. The warm sentiments Nagin enjoyed during the early days of Katrina were significantly diminished during a February 2007 tribute to the late Dr. King, he referred to New Orleans as a “chocolate city.” These remarks drew significant ire given that race was a hot issue throughout the Katrina crisis. Further underscoring his declining popularity, Nagin continued to garner bad press by way of falling poll numbers. In July 2008, Nagin criticized a University of New Orleans study which reported his approval rating was a mere 31 percent. When asked to what he attributed this decline, the mayor responded,

I think the UNO needs a little more money in its budget. The sample size was pretty small, as well as, the margin of error was at 10 percent in Orleans Parish, which is unusual for somebody trying to assess the approval rating of a political leader. Nobody does that. (Hunter, 2008)

Just as he did in his Katrina-related rhetoric, Nagin chose to shift attention away from the issue through counter-attack rather than take on the charge directly.

Beyond the implications for each of the three specific governments, there are broader implications for governments of all levels. First, as the spotlight gets bigger, the stakes get higher; he who holds the highest office also has the highest pedestal from which to fall. Because more people were actively aware who the president was than his state or city/local counterparts, the president was poised to bear the brunt of blame. And second, it is important to consider that in all matters where the media are involved,
perception is reality. That is, a political leader does not have to be doing anything wrong to be portrayed as such. However, in cases where the national spotlight is firmly affixed on a political office, it is necessary to present oneself in the best light possible. This is exemplified in the disparity between the media perceptions of Bush and Nagin in the days immediately following Katrina’s landfall. Because Bush was vacationing in Texas while Nagin was literally in the eye of the storm, Bush appeared aloof and detached in contrast to Nagin who seemed passionate in his reactions. Though it is little more than symbolic, the public reacts more favorably to a leader who is on the ground and appears to be helping than to one who merely attends to the situation from a far-away command post. In that Bush, Blanco, and Nagin were, at least once during the Katrina crisis, perceived to have acted in a manner contrary with reason, good judgment, or the public’s best interest, governments should be aggressive rather than conservative in their actions.

The events of Hurricane Katrina brought together several questions with regard to the role of various levels of governments and their procedures in times of disaster. It is interesting to note that the two lower governments, state and city/local, were headed by Democrats who favor a large federal government, and the federal government was led by a conservative Republican who believes governing should occur at the lower levels unless the president is asked to intervene. This ideological disconnect was but another barrier to a quick response. In addition to the governments themselves, the many agencies involved in pre- and post-storm planning require streamlining. Coordination between the Department of Homeland Security, FEMA, and the
various branches of the military is important, but must be determined before disaster strikes. The woeful ineptitude of FEMA and the top-heavy Department of Homeland Security proves the adage ‘in a bureaucracy bad news rarely flows up.’

**Societal Implications**

The reaction to the Katrina crisis ranged from outrage to disgust. Most often though, Americans seemed put off by having their dirty laundry laid bare on television and in print. This was a two-fold embarrassment for Americans, one general and one specific: first, an overwhelming sense of disappointment with the totality of the handling of Katrina, and second, as a result of the first problem, the racial and class disparities as evidenced in the Katrina failings became front-page news. The mishandling of Katrina’s aftermath had a profound effect on Americans—regardless of the side of the triangle at which an individual laid fault; all sides failed to some extent.

Media purveyors were keen to zero in on what was missing,

> If Hollywood ever decides to make an epic disaster movie from Hurricane Katrina, screenwriters will have to perform major surgery on the plot. You see, the worst disasters require a cool-headed hero to try to save the day, but in New Orleans and all across the Gulf Coast this past week there just hasn’t been a high-profile hero to be found. (Morris, 2006)

In times of crisis, Americans are used to the brand of government official who swoops in and gets things done. Hurricane Katrina had no hero upon which Americans could pin their hopes,
Which is just another aspect of the Katrina story that makes it unfortunately and unforgettably unique in American history and culture. This is a country that doesn’t so much love its heroes as needs them. They are touchstones, and something more, defining who we are as a people: resourceful, resilient, and redemptive. (Morris, 2006)

This is illustrative of the general sense of disappointment Americans experienced with regard to the governmental failings in the Katrina aftermath.

In addition to the seemingly slow and detached approach to the crisis, media coverage of the storm and its aftermath highlighted a more specific problem—the significant racial and socio-economic disparities in America. The discussion of racial and socio-economic inequalities in America is hardly a secret, and yet, such inequalities are rarely the top story on the evening news. Amid the media coverage of the magnitude of the storm, existed a racist underpinning. In the first few days after Katrina made landfall, media showed gripping images of New Orleans citizens stranded atop roofs awaiting rescue. While images such as these are clearly newsworthy, the images which followed raised considerable controversy. Photos and videos of displaced Gulf Coast residents looking for food, water, and supplies began circulating showing white residents who were identified as “searching” for supplies, whereas black residents were said to be “looting.” Adding further insult, news outlets began using the term “refugee” to identify displaced citizens.
Media Implications

While this analysis did not undertake a media study, the events of Hurricane Katrina warrants such research. The Hurricane Katrina media coverage has forever changed the American lexicon in that we are now left with the memories of gruesome stories and haunting images from August 2005. The far-reach of media comes with the burden of responsibility. Unfortunately, as Katrina unfolded, the media were often little more than another angry voice of opposition. In this role, the media grew increasingly accusatory. News outlets and individual correspondents made explicit their collective disdain with disregard for the truth in governmental failings, and instead focused the brightest spotlight of blame on the federal government and its agents. As the story began to unfurl and the failing role of state and city/local officials became clearer, a growing number of people criticized the press’ shoot-from-the-hip approach. Even in the cases where media were scrutinized for their actions or tactics, it was other media doing the criticizing, or, at the very least, bringing word of said criticisms, an act which rendered any genuine comments toothless.

The Media and Apologia

The bulk of apologia research focuses on the role of the accuser or the accused, but often underestimates the importance of media—even in instances where the media assumes one of these roles. In this case, the media served as exigency for the rhetoric of Hurricane Katrina—but for the existence of media, Katrina would have remained a local event. The awesome impact of the media is such that without it “Katrina” would have remained a name like any other. The 24-hour news cycles and around-the-clock reporting of today
would have been unthinkable at the time of television’s initial emanation. Because of this, the media’s relationship to the study of apologia warrants discussion. Although the media are the vehicle by which most Americans get their information, they are also little more than a footnote in discussions of apologetic discourse. Although colloquially referred to as the unofficial fourth branch of government, the media played a principle role in the Katrina crisis. While assuming the role of accuser, the media’s influence was far greater than simply acting as the medium through which Americans got their information.

Implications for the Study of Apologia

While undeniably dramatic, the remarks made by each agent in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina are only part of the story. The larger issue asks, what applicability do the events of Hurricane Katrina have on the study of apologia? Scholarship on the subject deals only with those apologetic situations in which there is one accuser and/or one person or organization being accused. Hurricane Katrina occurred at the complex intersection of kategoria and apologia. As noted in Chapter Two: Review of Literature, apologia research is divided into two broad categories: individual/political and corporate. Although it is clear that the apologetic remarks made by an individual differs in nature from those remarks made on behalf of a corporation, the events of Hurricane Katrina insist the two sub-divisions are less distinct when agents represent themselves as well as an independent entity. Because of this, the discrete categories for attention-shifting and accusation-addressing fall short of giving a complete understanding of the rhetorical situation.
In that Bush, Blanco, and Nagin were defending their own actions (or inaction) while simultaneously defending the government for which they served as representative agent, the events of Hurricane Katrina showcased an apologoetical hybrid. Though rare, this occurrence is not unique to Katrina; the events which surrounded the tragic 1993 fire at the Branch Davidian Compound in Waco, Texas, was another national situation with multiple agents, at multiple levels of government, who were pushed in triangular fashion by an accusatory media. While linear apologetic study is certainly worthwhile, there exists a great need for further systemic apologia research.

Finally, rhetors must choose their apologetic strategies wisely. Simply put, denial is risky. Apologetic literature swells with examples of politicians and corporations who began with denial, but had to change their stories as more facts came to light. Unless a person or corporation is completely innocent of the accusations levied against them, denial can backfire. Any statements that initially employ denial will come under increased scrutiny if the strategy is forced to change because of new information. Beyond the perception of having “something to hide,” those who initially deny allegations and then switch apologetic strategy essentially “dare” their accuser(s) to find more salacious information.

Areas for Future Research
Though necessary and rich, the apologia and media studies suggested herein are far from the last words on Katrina. Natural disasters are hardly uncommon; this can be concluded both empirically and as gleaned from the words of the rhetors in this analysis. Natural disasters often beget
disasters of the human variety, or, at the very least, underscore governmental weaknesses when dealing with such situations. As a result, scholarship in this area deals primarily with the outcome of the events in question (i.e. communication technology failures or apologetic rhetoric of accused agents). But it is precisely because natural disasters often beget human disasters, or highlight governmental weakness, that natural disaster rhetoric should be read as its own genre of study.

Having a dedicated area of study for matters pertaining to natural disaster will behoove scholars, government officials, and the public. Those in the academy will benefit from the natural disaster genre by having a richer and more complete understanding of the intricacies of the events surrounding a particular disaster, in the same way we benefit from having multiple methodologies as a means of dissecting the same phenomena. Governmental officials will benefit in that there will exist a dais from which to do meta-analysis of any of a number of specialized areas of interest (i.e. technology failures, evacuation planning, or disaster response). Finally, and most importantly, it is the general public who will benefit most from the genre of natural disaster studies. In the face of overwhelming damage and destruction, the most costly area of natural disasters is that which is also most often overlooked—the number of lives lost. Given that a genre of research dedicated to natural disaster studies would offer scholars and governments a fuller explanation of what successes and failures occurred, so too can it be reasoned that research in this vein could be used to prevent the unnecessary loss of life.
Conclusion

Hurricane Katrina was the deadliest and most financially burdensome storm in America’s history. So great was Katrina’s magnitude that it was responsible for the single largest American migration since the Dust Bowl. In the three years that have passed since Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, America has continued to learn more details about the governmental failings that contributed to the disastrous aftermath; all three levels of government suffered a perception problem. Though some implications are specific to the individual governments and their respective agents, there are also general implications for any government that finds itself in crisis. These lessons offer important guidance both in terms of political action and the study of apologia.

Though each level of government took a perception hit, the highest office holder is more likely to shoulder the blame than those agents of lower levels of government. That realized, potential perception problems can be staved off by taking aggressive (rather than conservative) action by being “on the ground” in times of crisis. Beyond politics, so too are there conclusions for the use of apologetic strategy.

First, denial is risky. If there exists any evidence of wrong-doing, a rhetor should employ a different apologetic strategy to prevent the embarrassment and increased scrutiny that comes with having to walk back their remarks. Next, the genre of apologia benefits from systemic research. Applying apologia to multiple-agent discourse opens the field to as-yet unstudied situations. And finally, when individual/political and corporate apologia converge, they create an apologetic hybrid. This
occurrence requires a re-examination of the discrete categories by which we analyze apologetic rhetoric.
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Appendix 1: Remarks from the Mobile Regional Airport
by President George W. Bush

Mobile, Alabama, September 2, 2005

(1) THE PRESIDENT: Well, first I want to say a few things. I am incredibly proud of our Coast Guard. We have got courageous people risking their lives to save life. And I want to thank the commanders and I want to thank the troops over there for representing the best of America.

(2) I want to congratulate the governors for being leaders. You didn't ask for this, when you swore in, but you're doing a heck of a job. And the federal government's job is big, and it's massive, and we're going to do it. Where it's not working right, we're going to make it right. Where it is working right, we're going to duplicate it elsewhere. We have a responsibility, at the federal level, to help save life, and that's the primary focus right now. Every life is precious, and so we're going to spend a lot of time saving lives, whether it be in New Orleans or on the coast of Mississippi.

(3) We have a responsibility to help clean up this mess, and I want to thank the Congress for acting as quickly as you did. Step one is to appropriate $10.5 billion. But I've got to warn everybody, that's just the beginning. That's a small down payment for the cost of this effort. But to help the good folks here, we need to do it.

(4) We are going to restore order in the city of New Orleans, and we're going to help supplement the efforts of the Mississippi Guard and others to restore order in parts of Mississippi. And I want to thank you for your strong statement of zero tolerance. The people of this country expect there to be law and order, and we're going to work hard to get it. In order to make sure there's less violence, we've got to get food to people. And that's a primary mission, is to get food to people. And there's a lot of food moving. And now the -- it's one thing to get it moving to a station, it's the next thing to get it in the hands of the people, and that's where we're going to spend a lot of time focusing.

(5) We've got a lot of rebuilding to do. First, we're going to save lives and stabilize the situation. And then we're going to help these communities rebuild. The good news is -- and it's hard for some to see it now -- that out of this chaos is going to come a fantastic Gulf Coast, like it was before. Out of the rubbles of Trent Lott's house --
he's lost his entire house -- there's going to be a fantastic house. And I'm looking forward to sitting on the porch. (Laughter.)

(6) GOVERNOR RILEY: He'll be glad to have you.

(7) THE PRESIDENT: Out of New Orleans is going to come that great city again. That's what's going to happen. But now we're in the darkest days, and so we got a lot of work to do. And I'm down here to thank people. I'm down here to comfort people. I'm down here to let people know that we're going to work with the states and the local folks with a strategy to get this thing solved.

(8) Now, I also want to say something about the compassion of the people of Alabama and Mississippi and Louisiana and surrounding states. I want to thank you for your compassion. Now is the time to love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourselves.

(9) Governor Riley announced the fact that they're going to open up homes in military bases for stranded folks. And that's going to be very important and helpful.

(10) My dad and Bill Clinton are going to raise money for governors' funds. The governors of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama will have monies available to them to help deal with the long-term consequences of this storm.

(11) The faith-based groups and the community-based groups throughout this part of the world, and the country for that matter, are responding. If you want to help, give cash money to the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. That's where the first help will come. There's going to be plenty of opportunities to help later on, but right now the immediate concern is to save lives and get food and medicine to people so we can stabilize the situation.

(12) Again, I want to thank you all for -- and, Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job. The FEMA Director is working 24 -- (applause) -- they're working 24 hours a day.

(13) Again, my attitude is, if it's not going exactly right, we're going to make it go exactly right. If there's problems, we're going to address the problems. And that's what I've come down to assure people of. And again, I want to thank everybody.

(14) And I'm not looking forward to this trip. I got a feel for it when I flew over before. It -- for those who have not -- trying to conceive what we're talking about, it's as if the entire Gulf Coast were obliterated by a -- the worst kind of weapon you can imagine. And now we're
going to go try to comfort people in that part of the world.

(15) Thank you. (Applause.)
Appendix 2: President Welcomes President Talabani of Iraq
to the White House

By President George W. Bush

Remarks from the East Room of the White House, September
13, 2005

(1) PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you all. It's an honor to welcome the first democratically elected President of Iraq to the White House. I'm proud to stand with a brave leader of the Iraqi people, a friend of the United States, and a testament to the power of human freedom.

(2) Mr. President, thank you for your leadership; thank you for your courage.

(3) President Talabani has dedicated his life to the cause of liberty in Iraq. As a lawyer, a journalist, and a political leader in Northern Iraq, he stood up to a brutal dictator, because he believes that every Iraqi deserves the be free. The dictator destroyed Kurdish villages, ordered poison gas attacks on a Kurdish city, and violently repressed other religious and ethnic groups. For President Talibani and his fellow citizens, the day Saddam was removed from power was a day of deliverance. And America will always be proud that we led the armies of liberation.

(4) In the past two years, the Iraqi people have made their vision of their future clear. This past January, more than 8 million Iraqis defied the car bombers and the assassins and voted in free elections. It is an inspiring act of unity when 80 percent of the elected National Assembly chose the President, a member of Iraq's Kurdish minority, to lead the free nation.

(5) In our meeting today, I congratulated the President on his election, and I thanked him for his leadership on Iraq's draft constitution. The draft constitution is an historic milestone. It protects fundamental freedoms, including religion, assembly, conscience and expression. It calls for a federal system of government, which is essential to preserving the unity of a diverse nation like Iraq. It declares that all Iraqis are equal before the law, without regard to gender, ethnicity, and religion.

(6) The Iraqi people can be proud of the draft constitution, and when an election to ratify that constitution is held next month, they will have a chance to vote their conscience at the polls.
(7) As the Iraqi people continue on the path to democracy, the enemies of freedom remain brutal and determined. The killers in Iraq are the followers of the same ideology as those who attacked America four years ago. Their vision is for an Iraq that looks like Afghanistan under the Taliban; a society where freedom is crushed, girls are denied schooling, and terrorists have a safe haven to plot attacks on America and other free people.

(8) To impose their hateful vision, our enemies know they must drive America out of Iraq before the Iraqi people can secure their own freedom. They believe we will retreat in the face of violence, so they're committing acts of staggering brutality, murdering Iraqi children receiving candy, or hospital workers treating the wounded. We have no doubt that our enemies will continue to kill. Yet we also know they cannot achieve their aims unless we lose our resolve.

(9) Today, Mr. President, I pledge that we will not waver. And I appreciate your same pledge. Iraq will take its place among the world's democracies. The enemies of freedom will be defeated.

(10) President Talabani and I discussed our strategy for the months ahead. America will stand with the Iraqi people as they move forward with the democratic process. We're seeing hopeful developments in places like Fallujah and Ramadi and Mosul, where Iraqis are registering to vote, many for the first time -- well, obviously, for the first time.

(11) At the same time, American troops will stay on the offensive, alongside Iraqi security forces, to hunt down our common enemies. At this hour, American and Iraqi forces are conducting joint operations to rout out terrorists and insurgents in Tall Afar. Our objective is to defeat the enemies of a free Iraq, and we're working to prepare more Iraqi forces to join the fight. As Iraqis stand up, Americans will stand down. And when the mission is complete, our troops will come home, with the honor they have earned.

(12) Tomorrow, President Talabani and I will take our seats at the United Nations in New York. The session will mark the first time in a half-century that Iraq is represented by a freely elected government.

(13) Securing freedom in Iraq has required great sacrifice, Mr. President. You know that better than anybody. And there's going to be difficult days ahead. Yet I have no doubt about the impact of a democratic Iraq on
the rest of the world. As Iraq becomes a federal, unified democracy, people throughout the broader Middle East will demand their own liberty. The Middle East will become more peaceful, and America and the world become more secure.

(14) We're proud to call you, friend, Mr. President, and proud to have you as an ally in the war on terror. On behalf of the American people, I want to thank you for Iraq's generous pledge of aid to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Welcome to the United States.

(15) PRESIDENT TALABANI: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President, for your kind remarks. It is honor for me to stand here today as a representative of free Iraq. It is an honor to present the world's youngest democracy.

(16) In the name of Iraqi people, I say to you, Mr. President, and to the glorious American people, thank you, thank you. Thank you, because you liberated us from the worst kind of dictatorship. Our people suffered too much from this worst kind of dictatorship. The -- (inaudible) -- was hundred thousand of Iraqi innocent children and women, young and old men. Thank you, and thanks to the United States, there are now 15 million Muslims in Afghanistan and Iraq liberated by your courageous leadership and decision to liberate us, Mr. President.

(17) We agree with Mr. President Bush that democracy is the solution to the problems of the Middle East. Mr. President, you are a visionary, great statesman. We salute you. We are grateful to you. We will never forget what you have done for our people.

(18) PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you, sir.

(19) PRESIDENT TALABANI: We have had a good discussion with Mr. President. We are partners. We are proud to say openly and to repeat it that we are partners of the United States of America in fighting against tyranny, terrorism, and for democracy. It is something we are not shy to say and will repeat it everywhere, here and in Iraq, and the United Nations and everywhere.

(20) Iraq is America's ally in the war against terrorism. Our soldiers are now fighting side-by-side with your brave soldiers, now and every day. We have captured many senior elements of al Qaeda. We killed many of them, and we have also many of them in our prisons.

(21) With your support, we could create a society enjoying democracy for the first time, obviously. Now Iraq is a free country. We have all kinds of democracy, all kinds of freedom of expression of parties, groups, civil
society, organizations -- that we can say that our democracy is unique in the Middle East.

(22) Our strategy is solvent. We build democracy and defend democracy. We talk about how we could improve our tactics. There is progress in security in our country. The number of the -- (inaudible) -- reduced; the traces which were under the full control of the terrorists are now liberated, and they're now registering their names for the new election.

(23) In the areas which were known that there was any of al Qaeda now became the area of Iraq. And two important signals appeared in that area -- the people started to -- (inaudible) -- and to fight terrorists. Now we have Iraqi Arab tribes, Sunni tribes fighting terrorism and al Qaeda. We have also people who are in -- (inaudible) -- who are cooperating with Iraqi forces, and with American forces against terrorism. It is a good signal that our people start to understand that terrorism is the enemy of Iraqi people before becoming enemy of Americans. They are killing our civilians, or innocent children. They are destroying our mosques -- church, everywhere, regardless of what may happen to the people.

(24) And we are now progressing gradually. Last year, for example -- (inaudible) -- a year ago, Najaf was a battlefield. Najaf is a holy city of Shiites, the Vatican of the Shiites. Now Najaf is being rebuilt, is free, and ruled by the elected committee, elected government.

(25) There are still important security challenges we are neglecting. But we are fighting al Qaeda. Now our fight in Tall Afar proved that the enemy is going to be weakened and low morale. The fighting in Tall Afar was easy to defeat the terrorists and to liberate the town.

(26) The so-called jihadists want to impose oppression and dictatorship and worst kind of society on our people. For that they are not only -- so they are not only the enemy of Iraq, but they are the enemy of humanity, the enemy of real Islam, and the enemy of all Middle East peoples. Together with our American friends and partners, we will defeat them.

(27) Today, American and international presence in Iraq is vital. The American and international presence in Iraq is vital for democracy in Iraq and in the Middle East, and also for prevent foreign interference in the internal affairs of Iraq.

(28) We will set no timetable for withdrawal, Mr. President. A timetable will help the terrorists, will
encourage them that they could defeat a superpower of the world and the Iraqi people. We hope that by the end of 2006, our security forces are up to the level of taking responsibility from many American troops with complete agreement with Americans. We don't want to do anything without the agreement with the Americans because we don't want to give any signal to the terrorists that our will to defeat them is weakened, or they can defeat us.

(29) We are proud that one day will come -- as soon as possible, of course, we hope -- that American troops can proudly return home, and we tell them, thank you, dear friends, and you are faithful to friendship. Of course, we are sorry for the sacrifices of American people in Iraq, but I think a great people like America has a mission in the history -- they have sacrificed hundreds of thousands of their sons in the war -- first world war, second world war, and in liberating people in Afghanistan, Kurdistan. And the great leader, Mr. George W. Bush is continuing the same mission of the American people. We are grateful. We are grateful for American generosity, and we honor -- we honor -- sacrifices of America in Iraq -- and everywhere, not only in Iraq.

(30) We also need our neighbors, at least some of them, to stop attacking Iraqi democracy. We want them to join us in fighting against terrorism. We want our Arab brothers -- (inaudible) -- media, at least the official media, to support terrorism. We want them to stand with us against terrorism, because terrorism is the enemy of all Arab and Muslim countries in the world.

(31) But we will proceed, and we will remember those who helped us in our struggle to establish a democracy in Iraq. And you are first those people who supported us for this noble mission.

(32) There is, in Iraq, political progress. We are talking taking the gun out of Iraqi politics, for the first time. Iraqis will have -- speak in peaceful dialogue, not with arms. The majority of Iraqis are committed to political process. Iraq is a diverse country. They are mostly settling -- (inaudible) -- peacefully.

(33) We have agreed a draft constitution. Of course, it is not perfect document, but I think it is one of the best constitutions in the Middle East. Of course, we didn't solve all problems, we have some problems. We are still suffering from many problems. But we are achieving progress on all fields -- economic, trade, education, political life. And we hope that we will remain having the support of
the United States, and yourself, Mr. President, and other
friends in Arab world and in Europe.

(34) It is true we are a young democracy, but our
draft constitution has a bill of rights, ensures the
equality of all Iraqis -- regardless of their gender,
creed, religion, or ethnicity. It enshrines the separation
of powers, and involves many checks and balances on the
exercise of power. It is the best constitution in the
entire region, as we claim. We hope it will be correct.

(35) We are reaching out to some other Iraqi citizens
who were not able to participate in the election -- I mean
our Arab Sunni brothers. We tried to be involved with them
in the process. When the result of the election was
announced, the two main lists of alliance -- the Kurdistan
Alliance and the United Front of Iraq Shiite Alliance -- we
got 238 votes, and the Assembly was 275. But, nevertheless,
we tried to bring our Sunni Arabs to the government, to
participate. We elected a vice president, an Arab Sunni;
two deputy prime ministers; the Speaker of the House is a
Sunni; and six ministers, among them, two main posts, the
Minister of Defense and Minister of Industry.

(36) It means that we are anxious to have all Iraqis
united, and to solve all our problems through dialogue. We
are calling all Iraqis to come to participate in the
democratic process and to say what they want, and they are
free to decide the government -- decide the President of
Iraq, the Prime Minister, the ministers, and they are able
to say what they want through democratic process, they can
say their -- and demands.

(37) This, of course, constitution is not perfect, but
it can be amended in the future, if the Iraqi people want
this. But now, compared with others, we are proud to have
such a kind of constitution. Some of our brothers, Sunni
Arabs, are under the threat of terrorism. We will try our
best to liberate them from terrorism and from the violence.

(38) To those in America, in other countries, still
ask of war of liberation in Iraq, if it was right -- the
right decision. I say, please, please, come to Iraq, to
visit the mass graves, to see what happened to the Iraqi
people, and to see what now is going on in Iraq. To those
who talk of stability, I say, Saddam imposed the stability
of the mass graves. To the terrorists, I say, you will
never win; freedom will win in Iraq.

(39) Thank you, Mr. President. (Applause.)

(40) PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you.
A couple of questions. Two a side. Nedra.

Q Mr. President, given what happened with Katrina, shouldn't Americans be concerned if their government isn't prepared to respond to another disaster or even a terrorist attack?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Katrina exposed serious problems in our response capability at all levels of government. And to the extent that the federal government didn't fully do its job right, I take responsibility. I want to know what went right and what went wrong. I want to know how to better cooperate with state and local government, to be able to answer that very question that you asked: Are we capable of dealing with a severe attack or another severe storm. And that's a very important question. And it's in our national interest that we find out exactly what went on and -- so that we can better respond.

One thing for certain; having been down there three times and have seen how hard people are working, I'm not going to defend the process going in, but I am going to defend the people who are on the front line of saving lives. Those Coast Guard kids pulling people out of the -- out of the floods are -- did heroic work. The first responders on the ground, whether they be state folks or local folks, did everything they could. There's a lot of people that are -- have done a lot of hard work to save lives.

And so I want to know what went right and what went wrong to address those. But I also want people in America to understand how hard people are working to save lives down there in not only New Orleans, but surrounding parishes and along the Gulf Coast.

Mr. President, you want to call on somebody?

Q (Question is asked in Arabic.)

If I may, Mr. President, it's been a scathing attack from top officials of your administration on Syria yesterday for allowing foreign fighters to cross the border. We heard yesterday from Ambassador Khalilizad. Is this an escalation on the pressure that you're putting on Syria? And what more can you do when you say that all options are open?

PRESIDENT TALABANI: May I?

PRESIDENT BUSH: Please, yes. You might want to try it English. (Laughter.)
(51) PRESIDENT TALABANI: Well, I say it in Iraqi because the question was in Arabic. (Answers the question in Arabic.)

(52) PRESIDENT BUSH: Oops. (Laughter.)

(53) PRESIDENT TALABANI: (Continues answering in Arabic.)

(54) THE PRESIDENT: I'm not sure if I agree, or not, but -- (laughter.) The Ambassador did speak strongly about Syria because he understands that the Syrian government can do a lot more to prevent the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq. These people are coming from Syria into Iraq and killing a lot of innocent people. They're killing -- they're trying to kill our folks, as well. And so, of course, he's speaking strongly about that.

(55) And the Syrian leader must understand we take his lack of action seriously. And the government is going to become more and more isolated as a result of two things: one, not being cooperative with the Iraqi government, in terms of securing Iraq; and two, not being fully transparent about what they did in Lebanon.

(56) And so we're going to work with our friends. And this is a subject of conversation, of course, I'll have with allies in places like New York and other times I communicate with our allies, that Syria must be a focus of getting them to change their behavior, particularly as it regards to democracy and trying to prevent democracies from emerging.

(57) Toby.

(58) Q Mr. President, do you believe at this point that Iran will be referred to the U.N. Security Council to face possible sanctions over its nuclear program? And how will you convince reluctant members like China that this is the way forward?

(59) PRESIDENT BUSH: There is still an IAEA process to go forward. And we will work with our Ambassador at the IAEA, Ambassador Schulte, to continue to press forward with a full disclosure about Iranian intentions so that then the Security Council can make a -- determine the right policy to go forward.

(60) I will bring the subject up with leaders whom I'll be meeting with today and tomorrow and later on this week. I will be speaking candidly about Iran with the -- Hu Jintao, as well as with President Putin, for example. Just had a conversation with Tony Blair and the subject came up.
(61) It is very important for the world to understand that Iran with a nuclear weapon will be incredibly destabilizing. And, therefore, we must work together to prevent them from having the wherewithal to develop a nuclear weapon. It should be a warning to all of us that they have -- in the past, didn't fully disclose their programs, their programs aimed at helping them develop a weapon. They have insisted that they have a civilian nuclear program, and I thought a rational approach to that would be to allow them to receive enriched uranium from a third party under the guise of international inspections that will enable them to have civilian nuclear power without learning how to make a bomb.

(62) Some of us are wondering why they need civilian nuclear power anyway. They're awash with hydrocarbons. Nevertheless, it's a right of a government to want to have a civilian nuclear program. And -- but there ought to be guidelines in which they be allowed to have that civilian nuclear program. And one such guideline would be in such a way that they don't gain the expertise necessary to be able to enrich.

(63) This is a subject of grave concern, and it's something that we're spending a lot of time on in this administration. I want to applaud the Germans and the French and the British for sticking together in developing a common message to the Iranians. And now we'll see how the Iranians respond here on their visit to the United States.

(64) Final question, Mr. President.

(65) Q Mr. President, I hope you will excuse me, since you've never had Kurdish -- spoken Kurdish. I put my question in Kurdish. (Question asked in Kurdish.)

(66) PRESIDENT TALABANI: With your permission, Mr. President, he's from America and his voice, American voice in Kurdish -- I must answer in Kurdish.

(67) PRESIDENT BUSH: Yes. Answer his question -- perfect.

(68) PRESIDENT TALABANI: (Question answered in Kurdish.)

(69) THE PRESIDENT: On that cheery note, the press conference is over. (Laughter.)
Appendix 3: Governor Blanco’s Denial
By Governor Kathleen Blanco

CNN Affiliate Interview on August 31, 2005

(1) I said you know, tolerating (inaudible) asking for more military presence...but I mean (inaudible) put good people in jeopardy.

(2) I really need to call for the military.

(3) Press aide: Yes you do, yes you do.

(4) I should’ve …I should have started that in the first call.
Appendix 4: Address to a Joint Session of the Louisiana State Legislature

By Governor Kathleen Blanco

Delivered September 14, 2005

(1) Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, members of the House and Senate, clergy members, commanding officers, honored guests.

(2) Tonight I speak to the brave and resilient people of Louisiana: those of us thankful to be here at home, those in Louisiana shelters, and those temporarily dispersed across the nation in shelters from Texas to Tennessee and in homes and hotels in faraway states.

(3) I also speak for a grateful state to thank people across our nation and around the globe -- people who have uplifted Louisiana in our time of need, people whose generosity and support renews our faith in God and the human spirit.

(4) Nearly two weeks ago, Katrina tore across Southeast Louisiana leaving a path of physical destruction and human tragedy unprecedented in our nation's history.

(5) Tonight, foremost in our thoughts are the families who were literally ripped apart by the storm. Over the past few days, I have met brothers separated from sisters, mothers and fathers searching for children, and children who have seen things no child should have to witness.

(6) As a mother, a sister, and a daughter, my heart goes out to every family. And we all know that family stretches beyond blood to embrace the neighborhoods and communities that form the fabric of our lives.

(7) To the displaced people of St. Tammany, Washington, Tangipahoa, St. Charles, Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard, and Plaquemines Parishes, your loss is our loss. As your Governor, I pledge that I will not rest until every Louisiana family and community is reunited.

(8) The destruction is almost beyond comprehension: We've lost hundreds of our loved ones. Entire communities have been destroyed. Businesses, wiped off the map. Families separated. More than a million people displaced from their homes. But even as we continue to recover from the worst natural disaster in our nation's history, the people of Louisiana stand tall, and I am proud to stand with you.
(9) We all know that there were failures at every level of government: state, federal and local. At the state level, we must take a careful look at what went wrong and make sure it never happens again. The buck stops here and, as your Governor, I take full responsibility.

(10) Now, before I talk about the work ahead, I must offer thanks on behalf of a grateful state. When I called on the people of Louisiana to respond, they rallied in overwhelming numbers. First responders and ordinary citizens put aside concerns for their own safety and demonstrated a heroic courage. It is impossible to name every group involved, but tonight we have a few representatives with us and I'd like them to stand: police officers, firefighters, doctors and nurses, member of the National Guard, Coast Guardsmen, helicopter pilots and wildlife agents. These are our heroes. We thank you.

(11) They were joined by an unprecedented brigade of ordinary citizens who drove a fleet of school buses we commandeered, and they steered hundreds of private boats down flooded streets and toiled without pause to rescue at least 70,000 people. We have those people standing with us also. Would some of you please stand.

(12) I want the world know what we know:

(13) We are brave.

(14) We are resilient.

(15) And we will prevail.

(16) And there are thousands more who have come from across the nation: guardsmen and active-duty soldiers, rescue workers and police officers, doctors and nurses, Red Cross volunteers, and just plain folks who drove to Louisiana in trucks laden with food, laden with water, and especially laden with love.

(17) And finally, I offer our profound thanks to all the people and communities all around this world who have opened your homes, your hospitals, your classrooms, your wallets and your hearts to our people. So long -- So long as the Mississippi River flows to the sea, we will never forget your generosity.

(18) We all know that there are lessons to be learned from this tragedy. One thing I know, in order to rebuild this state, all levels of government must work together, as never before, with one purpose -- the well-being of our people. To the legislators here tonight -- and some of you have lost your homes -- I ask you to join me in this endeavor. We need your courage and your energy to rebuild,
restore, and reinvigorate our damaged communities and economies.

(19) Many of you, as I said, have lost your homes, and we will worry with you. Please know that together we will all transform despair into hope and show the world the true meaning of determination. Bluntly put, New Orleans and the surrounding parishes may be ravaged but our spirit remains intact. To anyone who even suggests that this great city should not be rebuilt, hear this and hear it well: We will rebuild.

(20) Americans rebuilt Washington after the British burned it to the ground. We rebuilt Chicago after the great fire. We rebuilt San Francisco after the earthquake. And we are rebuilding New York City after 9/11. We will rebuild New Orleans and the surrounding parishes, because that is what Americans do.

(21) We will drain the water from our neighborhoods. We will clean up the debris and contamination. We will rebuild our levees, roads and bridges and we will recreate our communities. To do this, I've asked the federal government to cover 100 percent of what Louisiana will spend on this disaster -- just as was done after 9/11.

(22) I want the people of Louisiana to know that we have a friend and a partner in President George W. Bush. I thank you, Mr. President, and I thank the Congress for your initial investment in our immediate recovery and relief. We can not rebuild without you. I assure the Congress and every American taxpayer that every nickel will be properly spent. I will appoint an outside financial accountability advisor, someone of unquestioned character and reputation, to work with our Inspector General, Legislative Auditor, and Commissioner of Administration to safeguard this investment.

(23) I'm also issuing an executive order directing state agencies to limit spending and allowing them to put state employees to the best possible use in this recovery. I'm confident in our unified Congressional delegation led by Senators Landrieu and Vitter. I know they will champion a significant economic package, a long-term investment to create jobs, to rebuild housing and restore communities. I am requesting that Congress finally give Louisiana our fair share of federal energy revenues so that we can properly protect ourselves with stronger levees and a restored coastline.

(24) I'm also working with our delegation to bring immediate help for our citizens, including significant
financial help to rebuild homes and return our families, tax relief and loans to keep our businesses afloat, and an extension of unemployment benefits. This package will help us reach our top goal -- bringing our people home.

(25) Katrina scattered more than one million Louisianans across our state and the nation. I am telling each and every one of you: We want you back home. To come home, our people must have jobs. We can't rebuild communities without jobs for the people in them. We want to reunite Louisiana people with their Louisiana jobs. This is why we're putting temporary housing in refinery parking lots to bring our workers back to their jobs. A breadwinner earning a paycheck can afford to bring his family home.

(26) As families return, communities will grow and the businesses that serve them will thrive once more. Until then, we must keep those businesses part of our recovery effort. These businesses have an urgent need for cash to stay afloat, pay their workers and begin down the path towards long-term stability. We must first put Louisiana people and Louisiana firms to work rebuilding Louisiana.

(27) I've told FEMA -- I've told FEMA to give priority to Louisiana companies and Louisiana workers. I want to see Louisiana's engineers designing reconstruction projects, Louisiana's bankers financing them, Louisiana's contractors building them, and Louisiana's workers on the job.

(28) I have called upon FEMA to not only look first at Louisiana's businesses, but to put -- to pay them in a timely fashion and not force them to wait the usual six months. They will not survive without this consideration. State government will train Louisiana workers for the recovery and reconstruction. I have called on the federal government to do the same.

(29) The resurrection of Southeast Louisiana is progressing: Lights are coming on in the Central Business District of New Orleans. Banks are opening in Jefferson Parish. Yesterday, Louis Armstrong International Airport reopened to passengers. This week, the Port of New Orleans received its first ship. Each of these successes is about jobs. It takes workers to load the ships, to service the planes, and to staff the banks. These workers need places to stay. New Orleans hotels are filling up with the men and women cleaning up the city and rebuilding its infrastructure. Cruise ships are here to house them. This is temporary and only a start.

(30) America has never confronted a housing crisis of this magnitude. The task may look daunting but we're
finding innovative solutions. We are creating communities in shelters, making them more than just places to sleep and eat. I look forward to visiting our first community shelter located in Monroe, a facility that includes a library, a post office, a bank, child care, and more. I asked the Red Cross and FEMA to embrace this concept for other shelters that will be opening in Louisiana and they have agreed. Further, I have directed the state Department of Labor to invest millions to employ residents to run the shelters where they live.

(31) We will create similar communities and similar opportunities for our people as they move from shelters to the temporary housing that we are building. The final step is to return our people to their rebuilt homes, to their restored communities.

(32) We must rebuild our communities. We have to build them stronger than ever before. Any good architect will tell you that you don't restore a structure without correcting its flaws, but you restore it in a way that improves the original design while preserving its unique character and its spirit.

(33) We're not going to simply recreate the schools of New Orleans the way they were. Tonight, I'm calling on all Louisianans and all Americans to join an historic effort to build a world-class, quality system of public education in New Orleans. Our children -- Our children who have weathered this storm deserve no less.

(34) We're not simply going to recreate our health care system. We're going to give people access to primary care in their neighborhoods. Mental health services will be critical because of the trauma our children and families have lived through. I'm committed to seeing that our people receive the health services they need to fully recover.

(35) We're not simply going to rebuild the same infrastructure. We will re-engineer and rebuild better and stronger levees, highways, and bridges.

(36) I hired former FEMA Director James Lee Witt to cut through the red tape and help our mayors and parish presidents get access to what their people need to recover and rebuild. I've asked James Lee to work closely with Admiral Thad Allen who is managing the federal recovery effort. I'm glad both are here tonight.

(37) Let me -- Let me ask them to stand. Would you please stand, Admiral Allen and James Lee.
(38) Let me pause here to thank local and parish leaders for their tireless work to help their own citizens and to thank those who have pitched in, from opening shelters to sending aid.

(39) It is not often that a state is faced with so many challenges -- such difficult challenges that lie before us, but we will rise to meet them. In this time of challenge, we draw strength from the wellspring of our faith, and the power of those who lift us in prayer from all corners of the earth. And the loved ones we lost will always be in our prayers, as we honor their lives by creating a better state.

(40) A passage from the Book of Job reminds us that we can and will prevail:

(41) "You will be secure, and will not fear. You will forget your misery. You will remember it as waters that have passed away. And your life will be brighter than the noonday; its darkness will be like the morning. And you will have confidence, because there is hope. You will be protected and take your rest in safety."¹

(42) Dear God, please bless the people of the state of Louisiana, and bring all of our sons and daughters safely home.

(43) Thank you.
Appendix 5: ‘Get off your asses’

By Mayor Ray Nagin

Remarks to WWL-AM, on September 2, 2005

(1) NAGIN: I told him we had an incredible crisis here and that his flying over in Air Force One does not do it justice. And that I have been all around this city, and I am very frustrated because we are not able to marshal resources and we’re outmanned in just about every respect.

(2) You know the reason why the looters got out of control? Because we had most of our resources saving people, thousands of people that were stuck in attics, man, old ladies. ... You pull off the doggone ventilator vent and you look down there and they're standing in there in water up to their freaking necks.

(3) And they don't have a clue what's going on down here. They flew down here one time two days after the doggone event was over with TV cameras, AP reporters, all kind of goddamn -- excuse my French everybody in America, but I am pissed.

(4) WWL: Did you say to the president of the United States, "I need the military in here"?

(5) NAGIN: I said, "I need everything."

(6) Now, I will tell you this -- and I give the president some credit on this -- he sent one John Wayne dude down here that can get some stuff done, and his name is [Lt.] Gen. [Russel] Honore.

(7) And he came off the doggone chopper, and he started cussing and people started moving. And he's getting some stuff done.

(8) They ought to give that guy -- if they don't want to give it to me, give him full authority to get the job done, and we can save some people.

(9) WWL: What do you need right now to get control of this situation?

(10) NAGIN: I need reinforcements, I need troops, man. I need 500 buses, man. We ain't talking about -- you know, one of the briefings we had, they were talking about getting public school bus drivers to come down here and bus people out here.

(11) I'm like, "You got to be kidding me. This is a national disaster. Get every doggone Greyhound bus line in the country and get their asses moving to New Orleans."
That's -- they're thinking small, man. And this is a major, major, major deal. And I can't emphasize it enough, man. This is crazy.

I've got 15,000 to 20,000 people over at the convention center. It's bursting at the seams. The poor people in Plaquemines Parish. ... We don't have anything, and we're sharing with our brothers in Plaquemines Parish.

It's awful down here, man.

WWL: Do you believe that the president is seeing this, holding a news conference on it but can't do anything until [Louisiana Gov.] Kathleen Blanco requested him to do it? And do you know whether or not she has made that request?

NAGIN: I have no idea what they're doing. But I will tell you this: You know, God is looking down on all this, and if they are not doing everything in their power to save people, they are going to pay the price. Because every day that we delay, people are dying and they're dying by the hundreds, I'm willing to bet you.

We're getting reports and calls that are breaking my heart, from people saying, "I've been in my attic. I can't take it anymore. The water is up to my neck. I don't think I can hold out." And that's happening as we speak.

You know what really upsets me, Garland? We told everybody the importance of the 17th Street Canal issue. We said, "Please, please take care of this. We don't care what you do. Figure it out."

WWL: Who'd you say that to?

NAGIN: Everybody: the governor, Homeland Security, FEMA. You name it, we said it.

And they allowed that pumping station next to Pumping Station 6 to go under water. Our sewage and water board people ... stayed there and endangered their lives.

And what happened when that pumping station went down, the water started flowing again in the city, and it starting getting to levels that probably killed more people.

In addition to that, we had water flowing through the pipes in the city. That's a power station over there.

So there's no water flowing anywhere on the east bank of Orleans Parish. So our critical water supply was destroyed because of lack of action.

WWL: Why couldn't they drop the 3,000-pound sandbags or the containers that they were talking about
earlier? Was it an engineering feat that just couldn't be done?

(26) NAGIN: They said it was some pulleys that they had to manufacture. But, you know, in a state of emergency, man, you are creative, you figure out ways to get stuff done.

(27) Then they told me that they went overnight, and they built 17 concrete structures and they had the pulleys on them and they were going to drop them.

(28) I flew over that thing yesterday, and it's in the same shape that it was after the storm hit. There is nothing happening. And they're feeding the public a line of bull and they're spinning, and people are dying down here.

(29) WWL: If some of the public called and they're right, that there's a law that the president, that the federal government can't do anything without local or state requests, would you request martial law?

(30) NAGIN: I've already called for martial law in the city of New Orleans. We did that a few days ago.

(31) WWL: Did the governor do that, too?

(32) NAGIN: I don't know. I don't think so.

(33) But we called for martial law when we realized that the looting was getting out of control. And we redirected all of our police officers back to patrolling the streets. They were dead-tired from saving people, but they worked all night because we thought this thing was going to blow wide open last night. And so we redirected all of our resources, and we hold it under check.

(34) I'm not sure if we can do that another night with the current resources.

(35) And I am telling you right now: They're showing all these reports of people looting and doing all that weird stuff, and they are doing that, but people are desperate and they're trying to find food and water, the majority of them.

(36) Now you got some knuckleheads out there, and they are taking advantage of this lawless -- this situation where, you know, we can't really control it, and they're doing some awful, awful things. But that's a small majority of the people. Most people are looking to try and survive.

(37) And one of the things people -- nobody's talked about this. Drugs flowed in and out of New Orleans and the surrounding metropolitan area so freely it was scary to me, and that's why we were having the escalation in murders.
People don't want to talk about this, but I'm going to talk about it.

(38) You have drug addicts that are now walking around this city looking for a fix, and that's the reason why they were breaking in hospitals and drugstores. They're looking for something to take the edge off of their jones, if you will.

(39) And right now, they don't have anything to take the edge off. And they've probably found guns. So what you're seeing is drug-starving crazy addicts, drug addicts, that are wrecking havoc. And we don't have the manpower to adequately deal with it. We can only target certain sections of the city and form a perimeter around them and hope to God that we're not overrun.

(40) WWL: Well, you and I must be in the minority. Because apparently there's a section of our citizenry out there that thinks because of a law that says the federal government can't come in unless requested by the proper people, that everything that's going on to this point has been done as good as it can possibly be.

(41) NAGIN: Really?

(42) WWL: I know you don't feel that way.

(43) NAGIN: Well, did the tsunami victims request? Did it go through a formal process to request?

(44) You know, did the Iraqi people request that we go in there? Did they ask us to go in there? What is more important?

(45) And I'll tell you, man, I'm probably going get in a whole bunch of trouble. I'm probably going to get in so much trouble it ain't even funny. You probably won't even want to deal with me after this interview is over.

(46) WWL: You and I will be in the funny place together.

(47) NAGIN: But we authorized $8 billion to go to Iraq lickety-quick. After 9/11, we gave the president unprecedented powers lickety-quick to take care of New York and other places.

(48) Now, you mean to tell me that a place where most of your oil is coming through, a place that is so unique when you mention New Orleans anywhere around the world, everybody's eyes light up -- you mean to tell me that a place where you probably have thousands of people that have died and thousands more that are dying every day, that we can't figure out a way to authorize the resources that we need? Come on, man.
(49) You know, I'm not one of those drug addicts. I am thinking very clearly.

(50) And I don't know whose problem it is. I don't know whether it's the governor's problem. I don't know whether it's the president's problem, but somebody needs to get their ass on a plane and sit down, the two of them, and figure this out right now.

(51) WWL: What can we do here?

(52) NAGIN: Keep talking about it.

(53) WWL: We'll do that. What else can we do?

(54) NAGIN: Organize people to write letters and make calls to their congressmen, to the president, to the governor. Flood their doggone offices with requests to do something. This is ridiculous.

(55) I don't want to see anybody do anymore goddamn press conferences. Put a moratorium on press conferences. Don't do another press conference until the resources are in this city. And then come down to this city and stand with us when there are military trucks and troops that we can't even count.

(56) Don't tell me 40,000 people are coming here. They're not here. It's too doggone late. Now get off your asses and do something, and let's fix the biggest goddamn crisis in the history of this country.

(57) WWL: I'll say it right now, you're the only politician that's called and called for arms like this. And if -- whatever it takes, the governor, president -- whatever law precedent it takes, whatever it takes, I bet that the people listening to you are on your side.

(58) NAGIN: Well, I hope so, Garland. I am just -- I'm at the point now where it don't matter. People are dying. They don't have homes. They don't have jobs. The city of New Orleans will never be the same in this time.

(59) WWL: We're both pretty speechless here.

(60) NAGIN: Yeah, I don't know what to say. I got to go.

(61) WWL: OK. Keep in touch. Keep in touch.